

THE ASIAN AGE

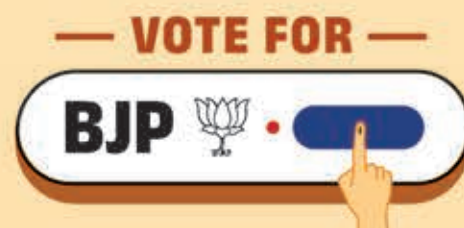
NEW DELHI WEDNESDAY 5 FEBRUARY 2025

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-  **50,000 government jobs for youth**
-  **13,000 e-buses to hit the roads, making Delhi's air cleaner**
-  **₹65,000 crore investment for development of highways around Delhi to decongest Delhi's traffic**
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-  **Landfills to be cleared in 3 years**
-  **Yamuna to be cleaned in 3 years**
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5 FEBRUARY 2025

Budget allocations have little for southern states

It is not uncommon for the state governments, especially run by Opposition parties, to cry for more after the Union finance minister presented the Budget in the Lok Sabha. But the statements of four chief ministers from the south, obviously from the INDIA bloc parties, were shriller this time around. While Tamil Nadu chief minister M.K. Stalin rued that his state's name was never mentioned in the budget, Telangana chief minister A. Revanth Reddy commented that the Budget betrayed his state. Kerala chief minister Pinarayi Vijayan objected to his state "being penalised for the progress it has made" and Karnataka chief minister Siddaramaiah regretted that all his state got in the Budget was an empty vessel. Similar statements came from chief ministers of other non-BJP ruled states, too.

What triggered the elected chief ministers' ire was not just that their states got precious nothing in terms of funding despite presenting to the Union government specific need-based demands, but the discriminatory treatment of the BJP-led government towards them vis-à-vis others. And their grief merits a hearing.

India is diverse not only in terms of its history and culture but also when it comes to its geography, demography, wealth of resources and state of economic progress. Though India that is Bharat is a union of states, the Union government has come to wield disproportionate financial power compared to the states, somewhat by constitutional design and otherwise by precedent and encroachment.

It was originally envisaged that there will be a central pool of taxes which the Union government would share with the states according to a formula. Instead of vesting the responsibility of devising the formula with the Union government, which is the custodian of the Consolidated Fund of India, the Constitution framers formed a body called the Finance Commission.

As per Article 280 of the Constitution, it shall be the duty of the Finance Commission to make recommendations to the President as to, inter alia, the distribution between the Union and the states of the net proceeds of taxes which are to be, or may be, divided between them, the allocation between the states of the respective shares of such proceeds, and the principles which should govern the grants-in-aid of the revenues of the states out of the Consolidated Fund of India. The Finance Commission's formula would factor in the ability of the states to raise their resources to meet their development needs, which vary from state to state. In short, we have a constitutional mechanism to help weaker states catch up with the rest.

The Union government's transfer of resources to the states comes in the form of Central schemes and special grants, too. The Planning Commission was an institution which acted as a resource centre to advise the Union government on such schemes and programmes.

One of the first actions of the first edition of the NDA government was to dismantle the Planning Commission and replace it with a Niti Aayog with no mandate of such advisory powers. The net result is that Union government can act completely arbitrarily when it comes to the allocation of funds to the states' programmes.

No chief minister would have an argument that weaker states should not be given a larger share of the revenue pie so that India progresses as a nation and takes everyone along. But to weaponise the financial resources and use them against states ruled by political opponents, as the present Central dispensation is being accused of doing, would be to undermine not just the federal principles of the Constitution but fairness itself. It is best avoided.

Intriguing 3-way fight for Delhi

An intriguing three-way contest for the Delhi Vidhan Sabha will be decided on Wednesday by those among the capital's 1.56 crore voters who are willing to exercise their franchise. They voted for the *aam admi* champion Arvind Kejriwal twice in the last decade, giving his AAP 67 of 70 seats in an overwhelming vote when he first dislodged the Congress in 2015 and 62 of 70 seats in 2020.

Occupying the post of chief minister in the Delhi state setup where the lieutenant governor also wields power may seem like a mixed blessing, but Mr Kejriwal appears even more determined this time. A rare hat-trick against the background of his having carried the albatross of corruption charges in a liquor licensing scandal as he faces his foes in the BJP as well as friends in the INDIA alliance in the shape of the Congress would make triumph even sweeter.

The BJP senses an opportunity to dethrone a regional chieftain who has been a pesky opponent in the cut and thrust of politics done in Indian style with all the trappings of drama thrown in. The Congress may have faced criticism from among allies for being in the fray at all. But it has always been a contestant for the prestige of ruling in the capital though its vote share was whittled down to as little as 4.26 per cent in 2020 as compared to BJP's 38.51 per cent and AAP's impressive 53.5 per cent.

No one was spared in an abrasive campaign, not even the substitute CM Atishi who stood in for Mr Kejriwal after he had invited opprobrium for trying to run the government by proxy from Tihar Jail. With Prime Minister Narendra Modi BJP's star campaigner in all polls, and former CM Kejriwal and the Gandhi siblings spending major time at the hustings, the stakes appeared to hit a higher plane though the passage of time alone might have contributed to this in India's shrill and shriller electoral politics.

The bookmakers may have plumped for Mr Kejriwal's AAP as the favourite to win a simple majority while exit polls might have different tales to tell. As they say in sport, it is still Mr Kejriwal's match to lose and the spotlight is clearly on Delhi even if there are two Assembly bypolls in Tamil Nadu and UP, the second in Milkipur slated to be an interesting contest between the BJP and the SP after mixed results had popped up in the Lok Sabha polls last year.

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Kishwar Desai
London Diary



Will Joan Collins impress as Wallis?
UK's Keir Starmer faces discontent...

Age, they say, is just a number. But it all depends on how you age. How you embrace the process as your body wears down — and if you are not careful then, whether king or commoner, growing old can be either a good part of life's journey — or terrible. Some people still possess *jolie de vivre* when they are close to a century — and others are struggling with a variety of illnesses. And how very strange when life gives a chance to a fit and fine 91-year-old actor to play another celebrity who was desperately unwell at the age of 89.

Joan Collins, 91, will be playing Wallis Simpson, 89, in a much-awaited biopic, because the Brits cannot just get enough of their royals, and especially when an American caused an abdication. (Sounds familiar?)

King Edward VIII fell in love with Mrs Simpson, who was a divorcee in 1936, and then had to abdicate the throne, as per the rules of the monarchy, in order to marry her. It was a dramatic exit that has been remembered for decades — and in a specially written film script her rather tragic end will be recreated. It will be about Wallis Simpson's last days, by which time she was living alone in Paris, as Edward had died in 1972. She had herself men-

tioned that living out a "great romance" was extremely difficult. It was made more difficult when she developed dementia and was mostly confined to bed. Her French lawyer was later accused of exploiting her — and selling off her possessions. It will be a tough role to play — but then the spunky Collins has been an admirer of the even more spunky Mrs Simpson for a long time. And at 91, she is ready to play the part! Amazing!

Meanwhile, yes, the sun is shining after a week when the storms visiting Scotland and Ireland had made gusty winds and cold weather the normal experience. Now London is enjoying the benefits of its location way down south in the British Isles. It is at times like this that you appreciate the Gulfstream. It keeps London warmer than much of the rest of the country.

But the sun does not seem to be shining for the Labour Party, which finds itself six months after a landslide victory last July even more unpopular than the Conservatives were when they were defeated. This is something of a record — though of a negative sort. Opinion polls show that Sir Keir Starmer is disliked by 42 per cent voters more than he is liked. This is much worse than Rishi

Sunak just before he called the election. Such a steep fall is unusual, but if you are in politics here you have to be thick-skinned. There are already rumours of challenges to the Prime Minister from within his party for the leadership. But after what happened during the Conservative leadership contests — and the dismal outcome — a coup is probably an inadvisable move.

My personal opinion is that Keir Starmer is what we need right now to steady the ship — as the world is very turbulent. To have an honest and hardworking Prime Minister is what the UK needs — especially when we look across the pond and see what a so-called popular leader is doing.

Meanwhile, there are some iconic figures which are unforgettable. Such as Jane Austen, the legendary writer whose 250th birth anniversary is being celebrated by the BBC, with yet another show about her. This time it is an exploration of why Cassandra, her sister, burnt all her letters. Of course this can be only a literary interpretation, as there were no reasons attributed at the time. Whether it was sibling rivalry or love — we can only guess.

Another great playwright will also be remem-

bered this year by a new play inspired by Ibsen's *The Master Builder*. Written by Lila Raicek, it promises to do very well — as already there is a huge buzz around the actors playing the parts, especially the gorgeous Elizabeth Debicki, the Australian actor who played Princess Diana in *The Crown*. She will perform the part of a former student of an architect played by Ewan McGregor. Undoubtedly there will be more tension and more dark secrets spilling out. Make your bookings now — as it will be impossible if you delay.

We have had a week of India events with the Republic Day followed by the anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi's death. The high commissioner, Vikram Doraiswami, was present at both occasions, one held in the Guildhall in the City of London and the other at the site of the Gandhi statue in Parliament Square, which was very well attended. Among others, by Lord Meghnad Desai, who is the chair of the trust that set up the statue.

Kishwar Desai is an award-winning author, playwright and columnist. She is also the Chair of the Partition Museums in Amritsar and Delhi.

Subhani



Budget 2025: A scorecard of FM's 'hits' and 'misses'



Sanjeev Ahluwalia

Finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman crafted her Union Budget 2025-26 around four key targets of accelerating growth, promoting inclusive development, enhancing private investment, uplifting household sentiments including by income-tax reform to enhance income in the pockets of middle-class consumers — those earning up to ₹1.2 million a year, who account of over 80 per cent of the total individual income-tax payers.

The biggest step towards accelerating growth was taken by scaling down the fiscal deficit from 4.8 per cent of GDP this year to 4.4 per cent of GDP in 2025-26. Sadly, no further timeline exists for reducing FD to below four per cent — a necessary step to contain inflationary pressure and enhancing the ability to borrow sustainably by creating fiscal reserves to fight future economic disruptions. Instead, there is a bland commitment that FD will be aligned to gradually reduce the Central government's public debt from about 57 per cent of GDP now (RBI statistics), to below 50 per cent by 2030-31.

The new fiscal target is a debt-to-GDP ratio of 50 per cent — significantly higher than the 40 per cent of GDP earlier for the Union government, when FD was targeted.

Whether the year-to-year flexibility inherent in the new mechanism will be used productively to keep inflationary pressure at bay while maximising output, only time will tell. It is, however, reassuring that the focus on enhancing investment outlays continues, with the revenue deficit targeted to decline from 2.6 per cent this fiscal to 1.8 per cent of GDP next year. Consistency across expenditure, tax receipts after the ₹1 trillion bonanza in income-tax and targeted FD should have been explained better to enhance credibility of the

rosy Budget projections.

The second target of "inclusive development" — at least in economic terms — has been a close favourite of the Narendra Modi government via a range of welfare measures — universal banking, using the extensive network of public sector banks, digitalisation of payments and communications at competitively determined low charges using private sector smarts, direct transfer of benefits to 180 million farmers and free cereals with a splash of cereals for 800 million people. These build on top of traditional schemes to help the poor and low skilled — assured work for 100 days per year at public construction sites, nutrition assistance for women and children.

The third target of enhancing private investment is related to the fourth of boosting household sentiment and putting more money in the pockets of consumers. Four initiatives feed into this target.

First, continuing fiscal consolidation will create the environment to contain inflation, allowing the RBI to lower interest rates, thereby boosting investment sentiment.

Once the Federal Reserve begins its rate-cutting cycle in the United States — possibly by mid-year — assuming that President Donald Trump's policy initiatives end up helping rather than harming the US — the RBI will have more room to follow with lowered interest rates.

Second, the Budget speech directs the commencement of another round of public-private partnerships. This initiative had levelled off around 2016 despite a rich research literature — the Kelkar Committee Report on PPP 2015 and earlier the India Transport Report 2014 (R. Mohan). Now each infrastructure ministry is required to develop at least three PPP proposals during the year.

Third, the Budget speech

More disclosure on how the transition from FD to debt to GDP ratio as the key metric of financial stability is proposed to be managed would have been helpful in underscoring that transparency would not be compromised

is peppered with new measures to help private investment.

The partial rationalisation of customs duties to boost domestic production and lower costs, the focus on encouraging global supply chains, global capability centres and 100 per cent FDI for insurance companies, all point to the recognition that the open economy model remains best for India — which is a positive for the growth of a competitive domestic private sector.

Fourth, nuclear energy is to be scaled up with an additional 100 GW of nuclear energy proposed by 2047 with the private sector's "active partnership". The big stumbling block to private partnership — the infamous, onerous liability conditions imposed on the supplier in the event of a nuclear accident, are to be rationalised, paving the way for private participation. A Nuclear Energy Mission for research and development of small modular reactors is proposed to develop five indigenously developed SMR by 2033.

Fifth, the success of the first Fund of Funds for financing startups, in which the first Alternative Investment Fund for startups managed to pull in financing of ₹910 billion for an initial support of ₹100 billion from the government, is to be repeated in a second round. Today's startups could be future unicorns unleashing a wave of innovation and good jobs to boot.

To be sure, some policy elements which cry out for reform fell through the floor. More disclosure on how the transition from FD to debt to GDP ratio as the key metric of financial stability is proposed to be managed would have been helpful in underscoring that transparency would not be compromised. The

long-awaited push for privatisation was also ignored, which does not fit well with the need to enhance the efficiency of public investments. In the past continued support to Air India, and now to keep MTNL afloat, defies logic when private providers stand ready to provide better services.

The expansive welfare measures remain Centrally-driven, rather than transitioned to becoming a core mandate of state governments, as illustrated by a further increase in the number of major schemes (all sectors) which increased from 150 last year to 175 in this Budget. The Budget also reflects a recent and growing trend, where it allocates large sums to projects in state governments which are scheduled to go for elections. This year Bihar — which will hold Assembly polls later this year — was the recipient of such favours. This creates the misimpression that capital investments are largely political in nature and not subject to comparative ranking on the efficiency of investment via rigorous technical analysis.

The import tax for cancer medicines and several other products, including intermediate goods for renewable energy, was reduced to increase affordability, even though this contradicts the principle of domestic protection aiding "Atma Nirbharta".

The import tax reductions went unexplained and will be put down to falling in line with the browbeating stance of the United States (that accounts for 18 per cent of Indian exports) to threaten revenge taxation on imports from countries with protectionist trade barriers. Oversights and minor errors of commission notwithstanding, the 2025-26 Union Budget can be commended for what it achieves: demonstrated responsiveness, as the finance minister asserted, to the pressing needs of the domestic economy in an ocean of global uncertainty.

The writer is a former IAS officer, governance and economic regulation expert and Distinguished Fellow, Chintan Research Foundation

LETTERS

GREAT LEVELLER

Nothing unites India more than cricket. This was evident when the likes of Mukesh Ambani, Amitabh Bachchan, Narayana Murthy and other prominent figures like Rishi Sunak joined the masses in enjoying the fifth T-20 between England and India. They joined the ordinary people in wild cheering of the pyrotechnics of Abhishek Sharma. In Ranji Trophy, J&K topped their group and qualified for the knockouts, thus ensuring more interest in the game form that region. This must be used by the government to ensure greater emotional integration and foster better relations with the rest of the nation.

Anthony Henriques
Mumbai

BJP STEALS AHEAD

IT IS TRUE that the Delhi Assembly election is going to be an interesting one. Though AAP was having a strong hold till January-end, the Budget presentation by Nirmala Sitharaman has turned the tide towards BJP. The raising of the income tax exemption limit to 12 lakhs may prompt the government employees and salaried middle class to vote for BJP. Taking into account this trend, AAP leader Kejriwal has come out with a statement that BJP may try to tweak the results. Next in line may be the Congress leaders who may blame the CEC. Ironically, no party is able to digest their defeat and do come out with lame excuses. Though, the wind is in favour of BJP now, no one can predict the minds of voters. Incidentally, since there is no weighty candidate to oppose DMK in the Erode bypoll, it would be a cakewalk for DMK, as in the past.

N. Mahadevan
Chennai

LET 'EM HAVE EGGS

WITH a recent decision of the Maharashtra government to withdraw eggs from midday meals, crucial questions arise for child nutrition. How can it be that such a state acts against the wellbeing of its weakest citizens for fear of political pressure? With alarming malnutrition levels among children, is it logical to substitute one of the crucial protein sources that eggs provide with less-effective alternatives? In addition to having a negative effect on public health, this is also a deplorable direction in food policy that may yet further marginalise disadvantaged communities.

Anshu Bharti
Begusarai

SHORT TAKES

PIL in court against DFI for forging docus

New Delhi: A PIL has been moved before the Delhi high court seeking a CBI probe against the Drone Federation India for alleged manipulation of documents relating to regulatory approvals. The plea filed by Right to Information activist Tej Pratap Singh contended that the Drone Federation India, formerly known as Drone Federation of India, forged the NOC to bypass legal obstacles and change the name of the company. The petition said the alleged fraudulent document, submitted to the ministry of corporate affairs, was aimed at rebranding the organisation as "Drone Federation of India," potentially misleading the public into believing it was government-affiliated. The DFI is also accused of using lobbying tactics to unfairly influence tenders to certain select member companies, thereby suppressing competition in the UAV industry.

Court junks Tharoor defamation case

New Delhi: A Delhi court on Tuesday dismissed a criminal complaint filed by BJP leader Rajeev Chandrasekhar against Congress MP Shashi Tharoor accusing him of defamation. Additional chief judicial magistrate Paras Dalal refused to summon Mr Tharoor saying prima facie "no ingredients of defamation" was made in the complaint. Mr Chandrasekhar alleged Mr Tharoor defamed him by making false and derogatory statements on national television as he claimed the BJP leader bribed voters in the Thiruvananthapuram constituency during 2024 Lok Sabha polls. Mr Tharoor, said Chandrasekhar, made the allegations with the intent to lower his reputation and to impact the result of the last general elections.

Cyberfraud network busted, 3 arrested

New Delhi: The Delhi police has busted a cross-border cyber fraud network and arrested three people operating from Uttar Pradesh and Haryana, officials said on Tuesday. The accused were involved in large-scale digital arrest and investment frauds in collaboration with cyber criminals based in Cambodia, Thailand, Canada, and other countries, the police said. As part of the crackdown, the police also dismantled session initiation protocol (SIP) numbers and terminals used to route fraudulent calls, officials added. DCP Nidhin Valsan said the breakthrough came after a complaint was filed on the national cyber crime reporting portal (NCRP) regarding a financial fraud of ₹94,000. The SIP acts like a bridge between the phone system and the internet, allowing someone to make calls through a computer.

MOST OF OCT, NOV POLLUTION IN CITY LOCAL: STUDY

New Delhi: Delhi-NCR's pollution during October-November is largely of local origin, with stubble burning in Punjab and Haryana contributing 14 per cent to the overall PM2.5 levels in 2022, a study has suggested. Researchers, led by those at Japan's Research Institute for Humanity and Nature under the 'Aakash Project', said that changes in the national capital's air quality could be related more with the stepping up or down of the 'GRAP' anti-pollution measures. The study, published in the journal 'npj Climate and Atmospheric Science', analysed fine particulate matter (PM2.5) data, recorded during the September-November months of 2022 and 2023. For the study, 30 sensors were installed across Punjab, Haryana and Delhi-NCR. Stubble burning, a common practice for clearing land following rice harvest, is often blamed for the sharp and sustained rise in PM2.5 levels, seen in the national capital region during the October-November months. However, the analysis showed that emissions over Punjab from burning stubbles "contributed only a meagre (nearly) 14 per cent to the overall PM2.5 over Delhi-NCR during October-November 2022".

■ BJP resorting to hooliganism: CM ■ Bidhuri's relative also booked ■ 2 AAP workers obstructed officer: Police

Atishi targets EC as cops file FIR against her

AVINASH PRABHAKAR
JHA
NEW DELHI, FEB. 4

The Delhi police on Tuesday registered an FIR against chief minister Atishi, also the AAP candidate from Kalkaji, for allegedly violating the model code of conduct (MCC) and obstructing public servants on duty. The police said Ms Atishi was with AAP supporters who allegedly obstructed an officer from doing his duty at Fateh Singh Marg. Two AAP members allegedly assaulted a police constable, they said.

This was preceded by a police case against two BJP leaders — Manish Bidhuri, a relative of BJP's Kalkaji candidate Ramesh Bidhuri, and Ravi Dayama.

"We have registered an FIR against the Kalkaji AAP candidate at the Govindpuri police station under various sections and further investigation is under process," the police official said.

Ms Atishi, however, took to X to slam the Election Commission (EC) for the police case against her and claimed that Ramesh Bidhuri, her BJP rival from Kalkaji, and members of his family were openly resorting to "hooliganism" but no action has been taken, instead they



Delhi chief minister Atishi with AAP leader Manish Sisodia at a press conference in New Delhi. — PTI

have lodged a case against her.

AAP national convenor Arvind Kejriwal in a post on X said, "So now, this is the official stance of the Delhi police and the Election Commission. Their 'job' is to act as hooligans against the Aam Aadmi Party, protect BJP's hooliganism, and facilitate the distribution of alcohol, money, and goods. If anyone tries to stop them from doing this 'job,' they will be booked for obstructing police and Election Commission operations."

Speaking about the incident, the chief minister said that after election campaigning ended at 6 pm on Monday, the silence period began. However, the AAP received information in the evening that some people associated

with Mr Bidhuri were threatening slum dwellers at night.

In response, Mr Bidhuri said Ms Atishi was in panic over her imminent defeat and suggested that she should not "shred the dignity of" the constitutional post held by her.

"We reached there at night and found Dinesh Chaudhary from Sangam Vihar. We have GPS-tagged photos from February 3, showing him in Bal Mukund Khand, Giri Nagar, at 11.30 pm. I called the returning officer and the DCP, after which the police arrived and took him away. However, when we followed them, we found out that the police did not take any action and let him go," Ms Atishi claimed.

The CM further stated that while heading toward

the police station, they saw another vehicle with Mr Bidhuri's men moving around the slums of Nav Jeevan Camp and Nehru Camp.

"We have GPS-tagged photos of this as well. The person in the picture is Anuj Bidhuri, Ramesh Bidhuri's nephew, known as 'Sethi' in the area. Another person present was Lalu Bidhuri from Tughlakabad. We have GPS-tagged pictures as proof," she alleged.

Ms Atishi stated that she called the EC to the location, lodged a complaint with the returning officer, and summoned the flying squad and the police.

"Instead of taking action against the violators, southeast ACP Harsh Indora, Sarita Vihar ACP Virendra and Kalkaji ACP Rakesh Kumar, who were present, did nothing. Instead, they detained the whistleblowers for five hours," she added.

"India is known for its free and fair elections. But today, open hooliganism is happening in Delhi. BJP leaders are committing hooliganism and the police is protecting them. Instead of acting against them, the EC is lodging cases against those who report violations. Is this the state of democracy?" she questioned the EC.

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, FEB. 4

Amid allegations levelled by the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) that the Election Commission is being run by CEC Rajiv Kumar, the poll panel on Tuesday hit back saying it is a three-member body which has collectively noted "repeated deliberate pressure tactics" to malign the poll authority in Delhi polls.

In a post on X, the EC said it has decided to have constitutional restraint, absorbing such outbursts with sagacity, stoically and not to be swayed by such insinuations. It said an impression is being created that the EC is a single member body.

The AAP had accused the ruling BJP in Haryana of intentionally draining industrial waste into the Yamuna — with Mr Kejriwal alleging last

FIR against Kejriwal in Haryana for Yamuna poisoning remarks

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, FEB. 4

A day before the crucial Delhi poll, an FIR was registered against Arvind Kejriwal on Tuesday amid continued outrage over his 'Yamuna poisoning' allegations. The development came mere hours before Delhi is slated to cast its ballots for the Assembly elections.

The AAP had accused the ruling BJP in Haryana of intentionally draining industrial waste into the Yamuna — with Mr Kejriwal alleging last

week that the party was trying to kill people by "mixing poison" in the river.

According to reports, the FIR has been registered against the AAP national convenor and unknown members of the party. The case was filed at the Shahabad police station in the Kurukshetra area of Haryana under various sections of BNS.

The FIR was filed in connection with his comments on the Yamuna river water and his subsequent allegations against the Haryana government.

Delhi goes to polls on Wednesday where AAP seeks to retain power and BJP trying to form the next government. Top AAP leaders, including its convenor Arvind Karjwal, have claimed that the EC has been ignoring the BJP's alleged violations of poll code.

'24 picks with criminal cases fielded without justification'

ADR flags non-compliance; serious charges against 71

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, FEB. 4

Of the 118 candidates with criminal records contesting the Delhi Assembly polls slated for Wednesday, 24 candidates (20 per cent) did not have their records disclosed or justified by their respective parties. A total of 699 candidates are in the fray for the polls in Delhi.

Poll rights body Association for Democratic Reforms (ADR) released a detailed analysis of the Delhi Assembly elections 2025. The report, based on Format C7 data, revealed that many political parties failed to disclose reasons for selecting candidates with pending criminal cases as directed by the Supreme Court.

Among the candidates with the highest number of criminal cases are Amanatullah Khan (AAP), with 19 cases, Arvind Kejriwal (AAP) with 15 cases, and Mohd. Tahir Hussain (AIMIM) with 11 cases, including 38 serious charges.

Out of 699 candidates contesting the elections, 118 have declared criminal cases against themselves and among them, 71 candidates face serious criminal charges, including corruption, rioting and violent offences.



Polling officials carrying electronic voting machines for the Delhi Assembly elections on Tuesday. — G.N.JHA

While 94 candidates' criminal records were published as mandated, 24 candidates (20%) did not have their records disclosed or justified by their respective parties. The Supreme Court had mandated that political parties provide valid reasons for fielding such candidates beyond just their "winnability" at the polls.

However, most parties continue to offer vague or repetitive justifications. The analysis covered 22 political parties that fielded candidates with criminal cases.

The major parties such as the AAP, Congress and the BJP published Format C7 for most of their candidates. However, the smaller parties, including the Peoples Party of India

(Democratic) and the Bhartiya Rashtrawadi Party, failed to comply.

Some parties engaged in questionable practices such as providing identical justifications for multiple candidates or claiming cases were "politically motivated" without substantial evidence. The AIMIM and the National Loktantrik Party also copied responses across different candidates, the ADR said.

The political parties justified their selection by citing their political experience, popularity and claims that cases against them were filed due to political vendetta. However, these explanations often lacked substantive reasoning on why cleaner candidates were not considered, the ADR said.

To boost turnout, shops, salons to offer spl discounts to voters

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, FEB. 4

With the Delhi Assembly elections just a day away, the Chamber of Trades and Industries (CTI) has announced that salons and beauty parlours across the city will offer discounts ranging from 20 to 50 per cent to people who cast their vote.

Apart from salons, various businesses, including shops, restaurants, hotels, malls, coffee shops, and dhabas, will also offer discounts between 10 per cent

and 50 per cent to customers who vote.

In a statement on Tuesday, the CTI stated that around 500 salons and beauty parlours will provide these discounts on February 6, the day after voting. "The initiative aims to boost voter turnout in Delhi, where elections for 70 Assembly seats are scheduled for February 5," it added.

CTI chairman Brijesh Goyal emphasised that this effort is meant to ensure a high voting percentage. "This initiative

► VOTERS WHO avail of beauty services such as facials, shaves, haircuts, massages, and de-tan treatments on February 6 will receive an additional discount of 20 to 50 per cent

will encourage more people to cast their vote on February 5 and the voting percentage will increase," said Mr Goyal. He said that more than 500 salon owners and makeup artists associated with the CTI have joined the initiative.

“Voters who avail of beauty services such as facials, shaves, haircuts, massages, and de-tan treatments on February 6 will receive an additional discount of 20 to 50 per cent. The offer is open to both men and women who show the voting ink on their finger as proof of having cast their vote,” he added.

The 70-member Delhi Assembly is scheduled to go to polls on Wednesday, with the results set to be declared on February 8.



Preparations underway on the eve of the Delhi Assembly elections in New Delhi on Tuesday. — PTI

Cops to seize 380 FIITJEE bank accounts

Noida (UP), Feb. 4 The police has written a letter to banks to stop transactions in 380 accounts related to FIITJEE, which has abruptly shut all its coaching centres in Noida and Ghaziabad, officials said on Tuesday. FIITJEE founder D.K. Goyal and 11 other people have been booked after the closure of its coaching centres last month.

Three separate cases have been lodged in Noida, Greater Noida and Ghaziabad and FIITJEE chief financial officer

(CFO) Rajiv Babbar, chief operating officer (COO) Manish Anand and its Greater Noida branch head Ramesh Batlesh have been named in the FIRs.

The Noida police has identified 380 bank accounts of FIITJEE in three private banks. Five accounts in one private bank have ₹60 lakh, deputy commissioner of police (Noida) Rambadan Singh said.

"In last 10 days, we identified as many as 384 bank accounts associated

with FIITJEE in which parents were transferring fees. These bank accounts are mainly opened at three private banks and are operated by all centres. We have written a letter to the bank to seize these bank accounts. Few of them are seized and the process is underway to seize all," said the DCP.

"Letters have been sent to the banks to stop transactions in all the accounts," he said.

Mr Singh said information on money stored in

other accounts is being collected.

The DCP said the police sent notice to nine people, including FIITJEE founder D.K. Goyal but no one came to record their statement, except a former employee of the coaching centre.

Last month, many centres of the institute that provide coaching for competitive exams in Delhi-NCR were suddenly closed and many teachers resigned for not getting their salaries for months. — PTI

SHORT TAKES

Kumbh stampede not a big incident: Malini

New Delhi: The Maha Kumbh stampede was not a “big incident” and is being “exaggerated”, BJP MP Hema Malini said on Tuesday asserting the congregation is being managed very well. The stampede took place on January 29, the occasion of Mauni Amavasya. According to official figures released by the Uttar Pradesh government, at least 30 people lost their lives and 60 were injured in the pre-dawn stampede at the Sangam area in Prayagraj. “We had gone to Kumbh... We had a nice bath... Everything was well managed. It is right that the incident (stampede) took place ... *Itna kuch bada nai hua tha* (it was not a very big incident). I don’t know how big it was. It is being exaggerated... It was very well-managed, and everything was done very well... So many people are coming, it is very difficult to manage but we are doing our best...” she told reporters. — *PTI*

Kerala survives with Centre’s help: Kurian

Thiruvananthapuram/New Delhi: Days after sparking controversy with his “backward” remark about the state, Union minister George Kurian said on Tuesday that Kerala “survives” only with the assistance of the Centre and that there is not a single project the state can claim as its own. He alleged that the ruling LDF and the Opposition UDF are constantly accusing the Union government of neglecting the state as part of their “joint narrative” to hide their own failures. Their attempt is to cover up what Prime Minister Narendra Modi is doing, and that is why both the LDF and the UDF are jointly making such a narrative that the Centre was giving nothing to the state, the minister of state for fisheries and minority affairs alleged. — *PTI*

JD-U MP seeks Bharat Ratna for Modi, Nitish

New Delhi: Janata Dal (United) MP Lovely Anand on Tuesday demanded that Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Bihar chief minister Nitish Kumar be conferred the Bharat Ratna for their contributions to governance and development. The MP from Bihar’s Sheohar praised the leadership of Mr Modi and Mr Kumar, and claimed that their works have transformed the country and the eastern state. “The mantra of ‘*Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikas, Sabka Prayas*’ is being fully realised,” she said. Recalling the law and order situation in Bihar under former CM Lalu Prasad Yadav’s government, Ms Anand claimed people feared for their safety then. “Under Laluji’s rule, there was no guarantee that if a person left home in the morning, he/she will return safely by the evening,” the JD(U) MP said. — *PTI*

GOVT TO UNVEIL AI SOLUTIONS TO CURB FAKE NEWS

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, FEB. 4

The information and broadcasting ministry is all set to unveil AI-powered solutions for combating misinformation in live broadcasting by various platforms at the World Audio Visual and Entertainment Summit (Waves) 2025 to be held later this year. The ministry has announced the “TruthTell Hackathon” challenge in collaboration with the India Cellular & Electronics Association. The hackathon is part of the season 1 of “Create in India Challenge” (CIC) of the inaugural Waves 2025. The challenge is a pioneering initiative aimed at developing AI-powered solutions to combat misinformation in live broadcasting, the ministry said. “In today’s fast-paced media environment, misinformation spreads rapidly, especially during live broadcasts. The challenge of detecting false information in real time is critical for broadcasters, journalists, and viewers alike,” it said. With a prize pool of ₹10 lakhs, the hackathon exhorted the developers, data scientists, and media professionals to create AI-driven tools for real-time misinformation detection and fact verification.

BJP moves privilege notice against Rahul over China remarks

‘Shamelessly distorted historical facts’

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, FEB. 4

BJP MP Nishikant Dubey on Tuesday moved a notice against Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi for alleged breach of privilege by “ridiculing” the country and “lowering the prestige of our Republic”.

Mr Dubey wrote to Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla, requesting him to initiate privilege proceedings against the Congress leader.

Mr Gandhi while participating in debate on the Motion of Thanks on the President’s address had on Monday alleged that China was “sitting inside” Indian territory because Make-in-India had “failed.” He had also alleged that foreign affairs minister S. Jaishankar was sent to Washington to secure an invite for Prime Minister Narendra Modi for Trump’s inauguration ceremony.

“Rahul Gandhi not only shamelessly distorted the historical and substantive facts but also made an attempt to ridicule our country and lowering the



Nishikant Dubey

prestige of our Republic,” wrote the BJP MP.

“I request your good self to initiate privilege proceedings against him on an urgent basis. I also wish to emphasise that since the parliament records and proceedings are the testimony to his incessant callous/irresponsible attitude,” he wrote.

As Mr Gandhi raised six issues in his Parliament speech on Monday, including China capturing vast land in the Eastern Regions of India and appointment of Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) and other Election Commissioners, Mr Dubey alleged that the LOP was distorting the historical and substantive facts.

Nation facing governance deficit under NDA: TMC MP

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, FEB. 4

Trinamul Congress Rajya Sabha member Sagarika Ghose on Tuesday alleged that India is facing an acute governance deficit under the BJP-led NDA government, which she claimed was disconnected from reality and believed in the policy of “minimum government maximum publicity”.

Speaking in the debate on the Motion of Thanks to the President’s address, she asked why the government was reluctant to share the number of deaths in the stampede at the Maha Kumbh while stating that the government does not know how to tackle the catastrophe of unemployment, the crisis of price rise and the challenge of security in Manipur.

Alleging that it was not guided by a national motto or the dictum of “Satyameva Jayate”, Ms Ghose said, “This government lives in an imagined reality. All it wants is media publicity and to set up a media narrative. This is precisely why India today faces an acute governance deficit.”

Modi takes ‘urban naxal’ jibe at Rahul, tears into AAP in LS

Some parties are like ‘AAP-da’ for future of youth: PM

New Delhi, Feb. 4: In a scathing attack on Leader of the Opposition Rahul Gandhi, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Tuesday said some people are openly speaking the language of urban naxals and asserted that those who “declare a war” against the Indian state can neither understand the Constitution nor about the country’s unity. He also took a dig at Arvind Kejriwal and the AAP a day before the Delhi Assembly polls, saying “some parties are like ‘AAP-da’ for the future of the youth”.

Mr Modi asserted that while his government’s schemes saved lot of money, it was not used to build “sheesh mahal”.

Replying to the debate on the Motion of Thanks to the President’s address in the Lok Sabha, he made several veiled attacks at former Congress chief, saying those who enter-



Prime Minister Narendra Modi with his Cabinet colleagues Rajnath Singh, Amit Shah and J.P. Nadda in Lok Sabha in New Delhi on Tuesday.

— *PTI*

tain themselves by getting photo sessions done in huts of the poor will find the talk about the poor in Parliament boring.

“Those who walk around with pockets in Constitution, do they know how they forced Muslim women to live in hardship. We brought in the triple talaq law to give right to them,” Mr Modi said.

“Today some people are openly speaking the lan-

guage of urban naxals. The things that urban naxals say (are being said). These people who speak the language of urban naxals, who declare war against the Indian state, can neither understand the Constitution nor about the country’s unity,” Mr Modi said.

Though Mr Modi did not name anyone, his remarks were an apparent reference to Mr Gandhi’s com-

ments last month that “we are now fighting the BJP, the RSS and the Indian state itself”.

In a veiled jibe at AAP convenor Mr Kejriwal, Mr Modi said some leaders focus on jacuzzi and stylish showers while his government’s focus of providing water to every household. He also said that “some parties are like AAP-da for the future of the youth” as they promise various kinds of doles at the type of elections but never fulfil them.

“Some government schemes saved lot of money, but we did not use it to build ‘sheesh mahal’,” Mr Modi said.

The PM took a swipe at Mr Gandhi for his reaction on the President’s address, saying those who entertain themselves by getting photo sessions done in huts of the poor will find the talk about the poor in Parliament boring. — *PTI*

Raut claims ‘2K killed’ at Maha Kumbh

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, FEB. 4

Shiv Sena (UBT) MP Sanjay Raut on Tuesday triggered an uproar in the Rajya Sabha by stating that “2,000 people died” in the January 29 Maha Kumbh stampede, prompting deputy chairman Hariwansh to ask him to authenticate the figure. Participating in the discussion on the Motion of Thanks to the President’s address, Mr Raut questioned the official death toll of 30 in the stampede.

Quoting the Hindu philosopher Shankaracharya, he said: “If the government denies a rumour, it means it has happened.” Lamenting the deaths in the stampede at the Maha Kumbh, Mr Raut asked, “Why are you hiding the deaths?”

The Uddhav Thackeray camp leader blamed “poor management” for the tragedy, terming the Kumbh a “political event for political marketing”.

■ ‘Sanatan-opposing elements spreading falsehoods’ Yogi says Kharge, Akhilesh wanted bigger mishap to unfold at Kumbh

Prayagraj, Feb. 4: Uttar Pradesh chief minister Yogi Adityanath on Tuesday launched a sharp attack on Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge and Samajwadi Party chief Akhilesh Yadav, alleging that they and some “Sanatan-opposing elements” wanted a larger disaster to unfold at the Maha Kumbh stampede.

The stampede happened on January 29, the occasion of Mauni Amavasya, one of the most auspicious days of the Hindu calendar. According to official figures released by the UP government, at least 30 people lost their lives and 60 were injured in the pre-dawn stampede at the Sangam area in Prayagraj.

The CM’s remarks came in response to statements made by Mr Kharge and Mr Yadav in the Lok Sabha over the stampede.

Speaking to reporters in Prayagraj, Mr Adityanath said: “While the entire nation and the world are witnessing this grand Sanatan Dharma event



Foreign devotees arrive to visit the “Akharas” during the ongoing Maha Kumbh in Prayagraj on Tuesday. — *PTI*

with pride, there are some elements conspiring against it, spreading falsehoods and setting new standards of deception.”

Mr Adityanath accused both the leaders of attempting to defame the Maha Kumbh Mela from the beginning. “Their statements not only reveal their anti-Sanatan stance but also expose their vulture-like vision. From day one, they have been spreading misinformation against Maha Kumbh,” he alleged.

Slamming Mr Kharge for his claim in Parliament that “thousands died on Mauni Amavasya at the Prayagraj Kumbh,” Mr Adityanath said, “Such a senior leader who heads the country’s oldest party is expected to make responsible statements. Instead, he has resorted to outright lies and misleading remarks in Parliament.”

Targeting the SP leader, Mr Adityanath said there seems to be a “competition between the two parties over who can make the most anti-Sanatan statements.” — *PTI*

‘Irresponsible politics’: Rajnath counters Rahul’s China charge

‘Words attributed by Cong neta never spoken by Army Chief’

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, FEB. 4

Defence minister Rajnath Singh on Tuesday hit out at Leader of the Opposition in Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi for “making false allegations” in the House and indulging in irresponsible politics on matters of national interest. Mr Singh was reacting to a statement made by Mr Gandhi on Monday in the Lok Sabha, in which he had claimed that the Chief of Army Staff had said that the Chinese are inside Indian territory.

“Shri Rahul Gandhi, in his speech in Parliament on 03 February 2025, made false allegations about the statement of the Army



Rajnath Singh

Chief on the situation on the India-China border,” the defence minister said.

The Army Chief’s remarks referred only to the disturbance of traditional patrolling by both sides, said Mr Singh. “He (Army Chief) also mentioned that these practices have been restored to their traditional pattern as part of the recent disengagement. The government has shared these

details in Parliament,” Mr Singh said.

“The words attributed to the Army Chief by Shri Rahul Gandhi were never spoken by him at any point of time. It is a matter of deep regret that Shri Rahul Gandhi is indulged in irresponsible politics on matters of national interest,” the defence minister added.

The defence minister said that if at all, there is Indian territory into which China has come, this is 38,000 sq. km in Aksai Chin as a result of the 1962 conflict and 5,180 sq. km. illegally ceded by Pakistan to China in 1963. “Shri Rahul Gandhi may consider introspecting about this phase of our history,” Mr Singh said.

■ Over 2 lakh patients receive free treatment in 6 yrs PMJAY boon for cancer patients in Guj

SHASHI BHUSHAN
NEW DELHI, FEB. 4

The Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (PMJAY), launched by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, has proven to be an invaluable boon for the poor and middle class in Gujarat, as over two lakh cancer patients received free treatment in the last six years, with the state government marking a pre-approved fund of over ₹2,855 crores for it.

On “World Cancer Day” on Tuesday, a Gujarat government official said that the PMJAY has emerged as a lifeline for patients in need of treatment and diagnosis for serious diseases like cancer.

The official said that a significant stride has been

made by the state in providing treatment and diagnosis for cancer patients through the PMJAY-MA scheme. “Over the past six years, more than two lakh cancer patients in the state have received free treatment, with the state government approving over ₹2,855 crores to pre-approved funds for their care. This initiative underscores the state’s commitment to making world-class cancer treatment accessible to all,” he said.

The official noted that the Gujarat Cancer Research Institute (GCRI), a collaborative effort between the Gujarat government and the Gujarat Cancer Society, has become a cornerstone of cancer treatment and care in the state.

“Equipped with state-of-

▶ **THE GUJARAT** govt marking a pre-approved fund of over ₹2,855 crores for cancer patients treatment

the-art medical facilities, GCRI is fully committed to offering world-class treatment to cancer patients. In 2024, the GCRI registered a total of 25,956 cancer cases, and of these, 17,107 were from Gujarat, 8,843 were from other states, including 4,331 from Madhya Pradesh, 2,726 from Rajasthan, 1,043 from Uttar Pradesh, and the rest from various other states,” he said, adding that additionally, six international patients sought treatment at GCRI.

The official pointed out that these statistics reflect

the trust and credibility the GCRI has earned as a leading provider of specialised cancer care.

He stated that in a sensitive effort towards cancer treatment and diagnosis for the state’s patients, the Gujarat government has adopted a decentralised approach to cancer care, and 35 district day care chemotherapy centres have been established in all districts of the state. These centres provide essential chemotherapy treatment to cancer patients undergoing care at district hospitals.

“As of December 2024, over 71,000 cancer patients had availed themselves of more than 2,03,000 chemotherapy sessions (cycles) at these centres,” he said.

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, JAN 4

A day after a terror attack in south Kashmir’s Kulgam district resulted in the killing of an ex-Armyman, Union home minister Amit Shah on Tuesday reviewed the security situation in Jammu and Kashmir.

J&K lieutenant-governor Manoj Sinha, DGP Nalin Prabhat, Army Chief Gen. Upendra Dwivedi and other top Army, police and civil officials attended the meeting. The home minister is also likely to chair another security review meeting with top officials of the paramilitary forces on Wednesday.

During the meeting, officials of the Army, J&K police and paramilitary

forces briefed Mr Shah about the prevailing situation in the Union territory and ongoing operations against the terrorists, the sources said.

In the terror attack in south Kashmir’s Kulgam district on Monday, ex-serviceman Manzoor Ahmad Wagay was killed and his wife and niece were injured.

During the last review meeting on December 19, 2024, Mr Shah directed all security agencies to continue working in a coordinated manner to eliminate terrorism in J&K.

The government has maintained that there is a significant decline in terrorist incidents, infiltration, and recruitment of youth in terrorist organisations.

‘Mumbai Eye’: BMC plans Ferris wheel on the lines of London Eye

BHAGWAN PARAB
MUMBAI, FEB. 4

Mumbai may soon have a major tourist attraction — “Mumbai Eye”, a giant Ferris wheel, modelled on the lines of the famous London Eye. The project, which has been envisaged in the 2025-26 budget of the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC), will be developed under the public-private partnership (PPP) model at a suitable location in the city.

According to BMC officials, the Mumbai Eye will be modelled after the London Eye, which is also known as the Millennium Wheel, a 135-metre Ferris wheel located on the banks of the Thames river. The

▶ **THE BMC** is the richest municipal corporation in the country and its annual budget is higher than even small states like Kerala, Goa and Northeastern states

Mumbai Eye will feature air-conditioned, sealed passenger capsules, each capable of holding 25 people.

While the BMC has proposed the construction of the ‘Mumbai Eye’ project as a part of its budget, several similar attempts have failed to bear fruits earlier. The project has been in the pipeline for several years but has faced multiple hurdles.

The concept of the Mumbai Eye was first introduced in 2008 by Shiv

Sena leader Ravindra Waikar. Later, it was envisioned by the Maharashtra State Road Development Corporation back in 2011. However, the project never materialised.

In 2023, the Mumbai Metropolitan Region Development Authority (MMRDA) revived the idea, proposing a location at the Bandra Reclamation promenade. In May 2023, the agency even invited bids for a project management consultant and began preparations for a technical feasibility report and the tendering process. However, the proposal faced strong opposition from Bandra Reclamation residents, citing concerns over traffic congestion.

NORTHERN RAILWAY		
NOTICE FOR E-AUCTION		
Senior Divisional Commercial Manager/Freight, Delhi Division, Northern Railway, in terms of Railway Board letter no. 2022/TC(PM)/10/04 dated 13.06.2022, invites bids through e-Auction (www.ireps.gov.in) for leasing of parcel space of SLR compartments and Parcel Vans (on round trip basis) for a period of two years as per detail and schedule given below:-		
S. No.	Date & time of e-Auction	Assets to be auctioned
1.	06.02.2025 at 10:30 am	15060 (F1, R1), 12459 (F1), 14089 (F1, F2, R1), 14087 (F1, F2, R1), 15035 (F2), 22472 (F1, F2, R1), 12016 (F1), 14316 (F2), 12050 (F1), 04304 (F1, F2, R1).
2.	07.02.2025 at 10:30 am	12265 (F1), 12463 (F1), 12584 (F1), 12754 (F1), 14035 (F1, F2, R1), 14053 (R1), 14152 (F1), 14164 (F1), 14521 (F1, F2, R1), 14681 (F1), 20473 (F1, R1), 22188 (F1, F2), 22401 (F1).
3.	12.02.2025 at 10:30 am	14041 (R1) (Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday and Saturday), 14041 (R1) (Sunday), 14507 (F1, F2 & R1), 15035 (F1 & R1), 12918 (F1), 20946 (F1), 22425 (F1), 12457 (F1, F2 & R1), 20914 (F1), 12963 (F1) (Monday, Tuesday and Friday), 12963 (F1) (Wednesday, Thursday, Saturday and Sunday), 12191 (F1 & F2), 22463 (F1), 19338 (F1).
4.	13.02.2025 at 10:30 am	01 LVPH (24 tonnes) on round trip basis in each train - 12226/12225, 12236/12235, 12264/12263, 12284/12283, 12425/12426, 12432/12431, 12442/12441, 12445/12446, 12454/12453, 12488/12487 (Monday, Tuesday and Thursday), 20408/20407, 22420/22419, 22428/22427, 22429/22430, 22434/22433, 22450/22459 & 01 VP (23 tonnes) on round trip basis in train number: 22418/22417
5.	14.02.2025 at 10:30 am	12005 (F1), 12038 (F1), 12055 (F1), 12057 (F1), 12060 (F1) (Monday and Tuesday), 12191 (R1), 14014 (F1), 14331 (F1, F2 & R1), 14714 (F1), 22168 (R1), 22421 (F2 & R1), 22986 (F1)
6.	18.02.2025 at 10:30 am	12455 (F1), 12284 (F1), 22454 (F2), 12428 (F1) (Monday), 14041 (F1), 12148 (F1), 14053 (F2), 12148 (F2), 12011 (F1), 12448 (F1), 12017 (F1), 12040 (F1), 22454 (R1 & F1), 12031 (F1), 12034 (F1), 14305 (F1), 12045 (F1), 14305 (R1 & F2), 12013 (F1), 14303 (F1), 14212 (F1), 12066 (F1), 12029 (F1), 14303 (R1 & F2).
Important notes: 1. For more information, requirement and various aspects regarding these e-Auctions, interested bidders are advised to visit www.ireps.gov.in/html/helpdesk/leasing_centre.html . (e-Auction/leasing section). 2. Earnest Money Deposit (EMD): 5% of the total contractual bid value to be deposited online during the auction. EMD of the successful bidder will be retained as Security Deposit. 3. Following assets are again being floated on "Revised" Reserve Price (RP): a. 04304 (F1, F2 & R1), b. 12265 (F1), c. 22401 (F1), d. 14041 (F1, R1), e. 12918 (F1), f. 22454 (F1, F2, R1). 4. Railway Administration reserves the full and absolute rights to short terminate these contracts at any point of time and/or for taking any decision regarding the discontinuation/continuation of these contracts with modified/additional terms and conditions depending upon the continuation/discontinuation of these trains or commencement of new train services.		
383/2025		
SERVING CUSTOMERS WITH A SMILE		

SHORT TAKES

3 jawans injured in anti-Naxal operations

Raipur: Three jawans were on Tuesday injured in the Maoist improvised explosive device (IED) blast and spike hole trap during an anti-Naxal operation in Gangaloor area under Bijapur district in south Bastar of Chhattisgarh, police said. A jawan stepped on an IED planted by Maoists during the operation, triggering the blast leading to injuries to him and another cop. The two injured jawans are from CRPF battalion 231 and district reserve guard (DRG), the tribal counterinsurgency wing of the Chhattisgarh police. In a separate incident during the operation, another jawan of DRG was injured when he got trapped in the spike hole trap laid by the Maoists, police said. "All the three jawans were for medical treatment. All of them were out of danger", Bastar range IG of police P Sunderraj said.

Cheetah gives birth to 2 cubs in Kuno

Bhopal: Female cheetah Veera on Tuesday gave birth to two cubs in the Kuno National Park (KNP) in Madhya Pradesh's Sheopur district. With this, the number of cheetahs in the KNP has increased to 26 including 14 cubs. Madhya Pradesh chief minister Mohan Yadav shared the information in a post on X, saying "Two cheetah cubs mark the entry of Madhya Pradesh's 'Jungle Book'". The KNP is once again reverberated with the sounds of two cheetah cubs. I am very happy to share the information that the population of cheetahs is growing constantly in Madhya Pradesh. Today, female cheetah Veera gave birth to two cubs", he said. Mr Yadav said that the increasing cheetah population has boosted tourism in the area significantly.

Live-firing exercise along LAC by Army

New Delhi: The Army has carried out high-intensity firepower exercise in high-altitude areas in the eastern sector near the LAC with China to sharpen its battle readiness, rapid deployment, and precision strike capabilities. The Army's Trishakti Corps conducted live fire drills as it remains operationally ready to take on any threat. The units were specifically preparing for battle in the high-altitude mountains of Sikkim, enhancing their adaptability and readiness for diverse operational environments. Through coordinated firepower and precision engagement, the units demonstrated their preparedness for a variety of challenges, including those posed by high-altitude warfare. "This exercise underscores the Army's commitment to maintaining high standards of efficiency, agility, and mission readiness, regardless of the terrain," said senior officials.

Relations with EU are more important than ever: EAM

New Delhi, Feb. 4: External affairs minister S. Jaishankar on Tuesday said a stronger India-EU relationship can be an "important stabilising factor" in a world that promises to be "so volatile and uncertain".

Mr Jaishankar also asserted that the relationship between the two sides is more important now than ever before.

Addressing the inaugural session of an annual seminar of IIC-Bruegel here, the EAM, without naming any country, said that "in our continent, international law has been disregarded with significant consequences".

"Even on a question like democracy and military rule, different standards have been applied to our neighbours in the East and our neighbour in the West," he said.

"It is not my case that principles are dispensable or that we must be utterly into realpolitik. But the



S. Jaishankar

agenda can no longer be set by some, only to be observed by the rest. This applies to passing judgement on and interfering in the domestic politics of others as well," Mr Jaishankar said.

The EAM further said, "We can all feel intuitively that the world is on the cusp of a big change." "Politics is only the tip of the iceberg. Whether it is energy or connectivity, mobility or technology, major shifts await us," Mr Jaishankar added. Referring to the India-

EU free trade agreement (FTA) talks, the EAM said, "I think it is time we get along with it."

He also said that in recent years, there has been a "more intensive engagement" with the European Commission.

"We expect that to be even more in the coming days, in fact very soon," the EAM said, adding that a deeper India-EU collaboration is in mutual benefits for the two sides.

Former foreign secretary Shyam Saran, and various diplomats and foreign policy experts, among others, attended the event.

"The world is currently witnessing two major conflicts, and these are often presented as matters of principle. We are told that the very future of the world order is at stake. Yet, record shows how selectively and unevenly these principles have been applied," Mr Jaishankar said. —PTI

Proceed with appointment of 158 judges, K'taka HC told

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, FEB. 4

The Supreme Court on Tuesday directed the Karnataka high court to proceed with the selection process of recruiting 158 civil judges notwithstanding the state government's circular withholding direct recruitments to the subordinate judiciary.

A bench of Chief Justice of India Sanjiv Khanna and Justices Sanjay Kumar and K.V. Viswanathan was informed that the state government through its November 15, 2024 circular stopped the direct recruitment process by amending the Karnataka Judicial Service (Recruitment) Rules 2024.

In its order, the bench said, "Issue notice, and as an interim measure we direct that the process of direct recruitment of 158 civil judges in Karnataka shall continue notwithstanding the circular dated 15.11.24 issued by the state government. This order is subject to the final outcome/decision on the application."

The CJJ said the total sanctioned strength of judges in subordinate judiciary had risen from 21,000 to 29,000 in the country and the states, where the numbers rose significantly, would have to bear more expenses and increase the spending to meet the demand.

■ 'Move aims to divert attention from issues before local polls' Guj forms panel to implement UCC

Gandhinagar, Feb. 4: The BJP government in Gujarat on Tuesday formed a committee headed by a retired Supreme Court judge to assess the need for the Uniform Civil Code (UCC) in the state, and also draft a bill for the same.

While the Opposition said the decision was aimed at diverting attention from pressing issues ahead of the upcoming local body polls, the government claimed rights of the tribal communities will be protected if the UCC is implemented.

The five-member committee, to be headed by

Justice (ret'd) Ranjana Desai, will submit its report within 45 days, following which a decision about the implementation of the UCC will be taken, chief minister Bhupendra Patel said here.

The committee will meet religious leaders, including those from the Muslim community, for consultations. "To assess the need for UCC and to prepare a draft bill, we have decided to form a committee under a former judge of the Supreme Court," Mr Patel said.

Other members of the committee are retired IAS officer C.L. Meena, advo-

cate R.C. Kodekar, former vice-chancellor of Veer Narmad South Gujarat University Dakhshesh Thakar and social worker Gita Shroff.

Notably, the BJP-ruled Uttarakhand has already implemented the UCC.

Mr Patel said his government is committed to fulfil Prime Minister Narendra Modi's resolve to implement the UCC across the country.

The panel will examine various aspects of it and take views of people from different walks of life, and an "appropriate decision" will then be taken, the CM said.

Odisha youth buys books for poor kids after selling paddy

AKSHAYA KUMAR SAHOO
PHULBANI (ODISHA), FEB. 4

In the heart of Kandhamal district, a remarkable story of selflessness and dedication has emerged. Rajesh Kumar Bagarti, a tribal youth from the remote village of Gatamaha in Ghumusua Udayagiri block, has given a new meaning to sacrifice. With the money earned from selling his recently harvested paddy, Rajesh has bought books for underprivileged students in his village. His act not only highlights his love for education, but also reflects his profound sense of responsibility towards his community.

Rajesh, a postgraduate in history, is currently



Rajesh Bagarti stands with paddy sacks at mandi, preparing to sell his harvest.

—ASHOK KUMAR MOHANTY

pursuing a Ph.D. in the same subject at Ravenshaw University, Cuttack. Despite his academic pursuits, Rajesh has never forgotten the place he has grown up — the village that nurtured him.

Every year, Rajesh cultivates four acres of land and harvests paddy, a vital

crop for his livelihood. This year, after selling his produce at the local market, he used the money to purchase textbooks and educational materials. His mission was to make education accessible to his village's poor and talented kids that struggle to afford basic study materials.

Delhi polls today: BJP may have edge

■ Continued from Page 1

₹2,500 it will be a staggering ₹11,400 crores. Of the ₹88,200-crore Delhi Budget, there is only ₹16,404 crores under non-Plan funds. After a long hiatus, the BJP, which claims to have seen a light at the end of the tunnel, launched an aggressive campaign to blend development, corruption and religion. To make inroads, the BJP launched an aggressive foray into the AAP's core vote bank — the JJ clusters comprising 10 per cent of total votes. The BJP is also expecting to benefit from the slew of tax reliefs for the middle class prescribed in the Union Budget.

The BJP has also dangled the carrot of "Jaha jhuggi wahi makan" promise to lure voters in slum clusters. The BJP has promised to give ownership rights to residents of 1,700 unauthorised colonies. The move could have an impact in at least 41 constituencies.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi himself sought to allay the apprehensions of the unauthorised colonies' residents saying that "none of such structures will be demolished". The BJP also organised "Ratri Pravasi" (night stays) on every Sunday at JJ clusters across the city as part of its outreach programme.

The BJP has also been working to consolidate its

core vote bank — the Vaish-Punjabi and Brahman communities, which form the party's core bases. The saffron brigade also zeroed in on Sikhs, who have been favouring the AAP for the past decade. The Sikhs have a dominating presence in several seats.

While the AAP focused on its development projects in the last two terms, it was also banking on the considerable chunk of Muslims voters, comprising nearly 12 per cent of voters. But Mr Kejriwal's attempt to target the BJP by accusing the Haryana government of "poisoning" the Yamuna river seems to have backfired, especially in the Outer Delhi region, comprising a significant 21 constituencies.

The fight between AAP, BJP and Congress is also over Dalits, OBCs and Muslims, which account for 17, 20 and 12 per cent of the vote share respectively. The Congress, which had failed to open its account during the last Assembly polls, is expecting to win at least five seats. Congress leaders Rahul Gandhi and Prianka Gandhi Vadra led the charge for the party. However, the Congress seemed to be lagging behind the race also due to the division in the INDIA bloc. Both the Samajwadi Party and the TMC have backed the AAP.

However, the Congress,

which has fielded some of its top leaders, including Devender Yadav, Sandeep Dikshit and Alka Lamba, was expecting them to pull their weight. The AAP may also be in trouble as votes gained by the Congress would damage Mr Kejriwal's prospect to return to power.

As Delhi goes to the polls, all eyes will also be on the rural constituencies called "Delhi Dehat". A majority of Delhi Dehat voters were upset with both the AAP and the Congress for ignoring the core issue of what they call "Kuan Puja" (worshipping of wells). The Delhi Dehat, which comprises 360 villages, has also been complaining about lack of amenities ranging from clean water, electricity, healthcare to quality education. A significant chunk of "Delhi Dehat" has declared their support for the BJP.

As for poll statistics, nearly 1.56 crore voters are eligible to cast their ballots at 13,766 polling stations. Among them, 83.76 lakh are men, 72.36 lakh are women, and 1,267 are third-gender voters. To ensure accessibility, 733 polling stations have been designated for persons with disabilities.

The EC has also introduced the Queue Management System (QMS) app, allowing voters to monitor crowd levels in real-time at polling stations.

205 Indians deported on US military plane

■ Continued from Page 1

has reportedly estimated that 14.5 lakhs illegal immigrants are slated for deportation from the US, among which 18,000 are allegedly Indians. Mr Trump has already signalled that the US will get much tougher now on illegal immigration. Even under the previous Biden administration, the American authorities had said last year that the US had deported more than 1,100 Indian nationals back over the past year through charter removal flights and also through commercial flights.

Meanwhile, global news agency reports cited a White House official as saying that Mr Trump had invited Mr Modi to the White House next week. As per earlier reports, the Prime Minister is set to fly to the US on February 12 for a two-day visit immediately after he completes his three-day visit to France from February 10 to 12. New Delhi has so far not officially announced the dates of the visit.

Last week, the US President had announced the Prime Minister would visit the US in February. On American concerns over Indian illegal immigrants in the US, Mr Trump was also quoted as saying that India will do "what is right".

Last month, external affairs minister S. Jaishankar had held a bilateral meeting with new American secretary of state Marco Rubio. After that meeting, the US had said, "Mr Rubio also emphasised the Trump administration's desire to work with India to advance economic ties and address concerns related to irregular migration."

On American concerns about illegal immigration, Mr Jaishankar, after the meeting with Mr Rubio, had said that India had always been open to a legitimate return of Indian illegal immigrants but had cautioned that New Delhi will need to "validate and verify" the Indian identity of each and every one of these persons before they return.

In response to a query on a reported American list that has 18,000 illegal Indian immigrants in the US for deportation, the foreign minister had advised caution on numbers, saying that numbers become "operative" only if their identities as Indians are verified. Mr Jaishankar had further reiterated that India does not support illegal immigration and supports only lawful migration through Migration and Mobility Agreements (inked earlier with several countries).

'Waiting for a muhurat'? SC raps Assam over detentions

'Their addresses mustn't be a concern; can't detain foreigners indefinitely'

RAKESH K. SINGH
NEW DELHI, FEB. 4

Taking a dim view of the practice of keeping persons declared foreigners in detention centres indefinitely and not deporting them, the Supreme Court on Tuesday asked the Assam government, "Are you waiting for some muhurat?"

A bench of Justices Abhay S. Oka and Ujjal Bhuyan said, "You have refused to start deportation saying their addresses are not known. Why should it be our concern? You deport them to their foreign country. Are you waiting for some muhurat (auspicious time)?"

Observing Assam was suppressing facts, the apex court said, "Once you declare a person a foreigner, then you have to take

Can't be court of 'first instance': SC refers UAPA issue to Delhi HC

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, FEB. 4

Observing it could not be a court of "first instance", the Supreme Court on Tuesday refused to hear pleas against the amendments in UAPA provisions empowering the state to designate individuals as terrorists and seize properties.

the next logical step. You cannot detain them till eternity. Article 21 of the Constitution is there. There are many detention centres in Assam. How many have you deported?"

The top court expressed dismay at the Assam government's explanation

A bench comprising Chief Justice of India Sanjiv Khanna and Justices Sanjay Kumar and K.V. Viswanathan said, "We cannot be the court of first instance. A lot of problems arise, sometimes issues are left by your side (petitioner), sometimes by their side (Union), and then we have to refer to a larger bench."

that it was not sending nationality verification forms to the ministry of external affairs as detainees' addresses in the foreign country were unknown.

The bench directed the Assam government to initiate the deportation

process of 63 declared foreign nationals, whose nationality was known, and file a status report in two weeks.

"We direct the state to file a proper affidavit reporting compliance with this order. If the state government finds that nationality verification forms have been sent two months back, the state will immediately issue a reminder to the ministry of external affairs. As soon as such a reminder is received by the ministry, effective action shall be taken by the ministry on the basis of nationality status verification," it said.

The bench grilled Assam chief secretary Ravi Kota, who was directed to appear through video-conferencing, for the delay in deporting detainees to their respective countries.

Khandelwal may be next MP BJP chief

RABINDRA NATH
CHOUDHURY
BHOPLA, FEB. 4



Hemant Khandelwal

Speculations are rife in the ruling BJP circles here that two-time MLA Hemant Khandelwal, considered to be a light weight party leader, may emerge as the dark horse in the race for the post of president of the party's Madhya Pradesh unit.

With election to the post likely this week, Mr Khandelwal's name has suddenly propped up as the front runner among the prospective candidates for the party position.

"Mr Khandelwal is considered close to a senior Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) leader, and he may be the choice of the Sangh for the post, as he is not only a non-controversial politician, but may also be acceptable to all the veterans in the

party in the state including chief minister Mohan Yadav", a senior BJP functionary told this newspaper

on Tuesday, unwilling to be quoted. He hails from general category and will replace Vishu Dutt Sharma (a Brahmin), the incumbent president of state party if he is appointed to the post.

Mr Khandelwal was also a former MP.

Other prospective candidates for the post are deputy CM Rajendra Shukla, Union minister Virendra Khatik, former minister Narottam Mishra, MLA Rameshwar Sharma and former minister Arvind Bhadoria.

IIM-Sambalpur ties with US firm to boost AI-based edu

AGE CORRESPONDENT
BHUBANESWAR, FEB. 4

Following the Union Budget's announcement of a ₹500 crore investment in AI centers of excellence, IIM, Sambalpur has partnered with Breakout Learning Inc., USA, to introduce AI-driven digital case study solutions, revolutionising management education in India.

According to IIM Sambalpur, this collaboration aims to position India as a global leader in

technology-driven management learning.

The institute will integrate breakout learning's advanced AI-enabled case platform across its MBA, Executive MBA, and Ph.D. programmes, setting a new benchmark for digital learning. Students and faculty will gain exclusive access to premium case studies from globally renowned institutions such as Harvard and Ivey, bringing international academic excellence into Indian classrooms.

'Yogi govt hiding Kumbh toll'

■ Continued from Page 1

should be presented in Parliament," he said.

Mr Yadav further stated that when the stampede broke out, the government asked the seers to postpone the "shahi snan", which is performed at the unique alignment of planets.

"The government ordered seers to put off their shahi snan and broke with the traditions of the Sanatan Dharma. When there was a hue and cry, the government ordered them to recommence the shahi

snan, forgetting that the holy bath has to be taken at a specific time or mahurat," he said and alleged that the government used JCB machines and tractor trolleys to clear the bodies lying around after the stampede.

Mr Yadav claimed that people came to earn punya (blessings) but had to leave with the bodies of near and dear ones. He said that the government found bodies but is refusing to accept the numbers. "The government showered petals from helicopters when bodies were lying in the mortuary. What kind of sanatan (timeless) traditions are these? The bodies were lying around, footwear and clothes were strewn all over. JCB machines and tractor trolleys were used to throw them away. When this led to a hue and cry, the government rushed to cover it up," he said.

Mr Yadav further claimed the chief minister of Uttar Pradesh even refrained from expressing grief over the incident.

Modi attacks Rahul, Kejriwal

■ Continued from Page 1

anything, but also when people are frustrated and disappointed, they say a lot of things."

The Prime Minister further said since 2014, when the BJP-led NDA government came to power at the Centre, poor people have got 4-crore houses. "The one who has lived that kind of life knows what it means to have a house with a proper roof. Pain of the poor and the troubles of the common man cannot be understood just like that; it requires passion and some just don't have it," he said in a sarcastic remark aimed at the Opposition leaders.

Taking on Mr Gandhi over his comments on India's foreign policy and

the Chinese activity along the LAC, Mr Modi, without naming him, said those really interested in foreign policy must read JFK's Forgotten Crisis.

"This book was written by a foreign policy scholar. In it there is a mention of India's first PM (Jawaharlal Nehru), who also held the foreign affairs portfolio. It had his conversation with John F. Kennedy (JFK) when the country was dealing with a crisis situation... The book details what games were played in the name of foreign policy."

On Mr Gandhi's "bandage for bullet wound" comments on the Union Budget, Mr Modi said before 2014 such bombs

were hurled at people and bullets were fired that they affected the lives of people. "But we have gradually healed those wounds and moved forward," he said while talking about the income-tax exemption limit increase.

Reacting to the PM's address in Lok Sabha, Congress MP Shashi Tharoor said, "...You (the PM) have already spoken repeatedly on dynasty politics, now you should be speaking regarding the President's speech, and he should speak on the criticism made by the Opposition regarding it... he did not answer anything. It was an election speech... he spoke keeping in mind the Delhi polls."

SHORT TAKES

FIRE AT IRAN'S PETRO REFINERY CONTAINED

Dubai, Feb. 4: A fire at the waste warehouse of the Marun Petrochemical Refinery in south-west Iran on Tuesday has been put out, *IRNA* news agency reported, adding that six people suffered minor injuries from the incident.

Marun Petrochemical Refinery, located in Bandar-e-Mahshahr, has an annual production capacity of 1.1 million metric tons of polyethylene. "The fire at the open-air hydrocarbon waste warehouse was completely put down by the local fire department within one hour."

EX-NATO CHIEF NAMED NORWAY FINANCE MIN.

Oslo, Feb. 4: Former Nato chief Jens Stoltenberg was on Tuesday named Norway's new finance minister, taking on the key role as the Labour government lags in the polls and a possible transatlantic trade war looms on the horizon.

Stoltenberg, 65, was PM between 2000 and 2001 and again from 2005 to 2013 before serving as Nato secretary general between 2014 and 2024, when he developed good ties with US President Donald Trump.

His appointment as finance minister comes after the collapse of Norway's coalition government last week.

FOR ECONOMIC FREEDOM, UNITE: LANKA PRESIDENT

Colombo, Feb. 4: President Anura Kumara Dissanayake on Tuesday said that Sri Lanka must work in unison to achieve economic freedom rather than yield to vulnerabilities within the global economic system at the 77th Independence Day celebrations of the island nation.

China imposes limited tariffs for US levies

China starts anti-monopoly investigation into Google; Trump pauses tariff on Canada for one month

Washington, Beijing, Feb. 4: China on Tuesday imposed targeted tariffson American imports and put several US companies, including Google, on notice for possible sanctions, in a measured response to the sweeping duties on Chinese imports imposed by President Donald Trump.

Beijing's limited counter to Trump's imposition of a 10% tariff on all Chinese imports underscored the attempt by Chinese policymakers to engage Trump in talks that could avert an outright trade war between the world's two largest economies.

Capital Economics, a UK-based research firm, estimated that China's additional tariffs would apply to about \$20 billion of annual imports, compared with the \$450 billion worth of Chinese goods subject to the Trump tariff that took effect at 12:01 a.m. ET on Tuesday (0501 GMT).

"The measures are fairly modest, at least relative to US moves, and have been calibrated to send a message to the US," Julian Evans-Pritchard, the firm's head of China Economics said in a note.

Trump on Monday suspended his threat of 25% tariffs on Mexico and Canada at the last minute, agreeing to a 30-day pause in return for concessions on border and crime enforcement. Trump plans to speak to Chinese President Xi Jinping later in the week, a White House spokesperson said.

China's new measures, announced as the Trump tariff took effect, include a 15% levy on United States coal and LNG and 10% for crude oil, farm equipment and a small number of trucks as well as big-engine sedans shipped to China from the United States.



The crowd marches during a rally demanding that NYU Langone commit to providing gender-affirming care for transgender youth following an executive order by US President Donald Trump aimed at cutting federal funding, in New York, on Monday. — AP



China said it was starting an anti-monopoly investigation into Alphabet Inc's Google. It put both PVH Corp the holding company for brands including Calvin Klein, and US biotechnology company Illumina on a list for potential sanctions. China said it was imposing export controls on some metals, including tungsten, that are critical for electronics, military equipment and solar panels.

The 10%-duty China announced on electric trucks imported from the United States could apply to Elon Musk's Cybertruck, a niche offering Tesla has been promoting in China. Tesla had no immediate comment. China's new tariffs will not take effect until February 10, giving Washington and Beijing some time to try and reach a deal that Chinese policymakers have indicated they hope to strike with Trump at a time when China's domestic demand has been sputtering. — Reuters

Trump, Bibi talk; US says 'no Gaza peace guarantee'

Washington, Feb. 4: President Donald Trump and Benjamin Netanyahu are set to meet on Tuesday as the Israeli Prime Minister faces competing pressure from his right-wing coalition to end a temporary truce against Hamas militants in Gaza and from weary Israelis who want the remaining hostages home and the 15-month conflict to end.

Trump is guarded about the long-term prospects for the truce, even as he takes credit for pressuring Hamas and Israel into the hostage and ceasefire agreement that went into effect the day before he returned to office last month.

"I have no guarantees that the peace is going to hold," Trump told reporters on Monday. The leaders' talks are expected to touch on a

long-sought Israel-Saudi Arabia normalisation deal and concerns about Iran's nuclear programme, but hammering out the second phase of the hostage deal will be at the top of the agenda.

Netanyahu's arrival in Washington for the first foreign leader visit of Trump's second term comes as the Prime Minister's popular support is lagging. Netanyahu is in the middle of weekslong testimony in an ongoing corruption trial that centres on allegations he exchanged favours with media moguls and wealthy associates. He has decried the accusations and said he is the victim of a "witch hunt."

Being seen with Trump, who is popular in Israel, could help distract the public from the trial and boost Netanyahu's stand-

ing in the country.

It's Netanyahu's first travel outside Israel since the International Criminal Court issued arrest warrants in November for him, his former defence minister and Hamas's slain military chief, accusing them of crimes against humanity during the war in Gaza.

The US does not recognise the ICC's authority over its citizens or territory. Netanyahu and Trump's Mideast envoy Steve Witkoff on Monday began the daunting work of brokering the next phase of a ceasefire agreement. Netanyahu said in statement that the meeting with Witkoff and US national security adviser Michael Waltz was "positive and friendly." The leader said he would send a delegation to Qatar. — AP

Suit as Musk takes reins of US treasury payments

Washington, Feb. 4: Elon Musk and his aides have taken control of the US treasury department's payments system, triggering a lawsuit charging he is illegally getting access to private data of millions of Americans.

Musk, the world's richest person, is leading President Donald Trump's federal cost-cutting efforts under the so-called depart-

ment of government efficiency (DOGE).

The suit calls on a federal judge to declare it illegal for Musk or others from DOGE to get personal information about taxpayers and to block the treasury department from letting that happen.

"People who must share information with the federal government should not be forced to share in-

formation with Elon Musk or his 'DOGE'," read a lawsuit filed in Washington by labour unions and a grassroots advocacy group.

"And federal law says they do not have to," Musk said that the "only way to stop fraud and waste of taxpayer money is to follow the payment flows and pause suspicious transactions for review." — AFP

FINANCIAL Chronicle

NEW DELHI | WEDNESDAY | 5 FEBRUARY 2025

quick BITES

INDICATORS	%
Sensex	78,583.81 1.81
Nifty 50	23,739.25 1.62
S&P 500*	6,001.92 0.12
Dollar (₹)	87.07 -0.14
Pound Sterling (₹)	108.18 0.94
Euro (₹)	90.02 0.93
Gold (10gm)* (₹)	83,649.325 0.39
Brent crude (\$/bbl)*	76.01 0.07
IN 10-Yr bond yield	6.672 0.002
US 10-Yr T-bill yield*	4.581 0.038

* As of 8:30 PM IST

GMR Airports signs up with UNGC on SDGs

GMR Airports Ltd (GAL) announced its membership in United Nations Global Compact (UNGC), a corporate sustainability initiative. GMR Airports has pledged to align its strategies and operations with the ten principles of the UNGC. "This commitment reinforces our responsibility to create resilient airports that connect communities and also protect our planet," said Kiran Kumar Grandhi, CEO and MD, GAL.

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Gold hits new high of ₹85,800 per 10 grams

New Delhi, Feb. 4: Gold prices extended the rally for the fifth straight session and rose ₹500 to hit a fresh peak of ₹85,800 per 10 grams in the national capital on Tuesday amid robust demand from jewellers and retailers, according to the All India Sarafa Association.

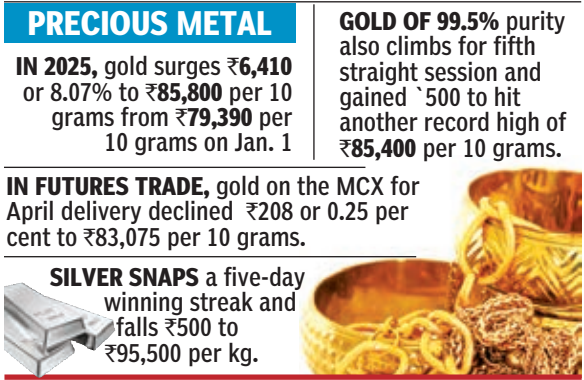
The precious metal of 99.9 per cent purity closed at ₹85,300 per 10 grams in the previous session.

In this year, gold has surged ₹6,410 or 8.07 per cent to ₹85,800 per 10 grams from ₹79,390 per 10 grams on January 1.

Gold of 99.5 per cent purity also climbed for the fifth straight session and gained ₹500 to hit another record high of ₹85,400 per 10 grams on Tuesday.

Silver prices, however, snapped a five-day winning streak and fell ₹500 to ₹95,500 per kg against Monday's closing level of ₹96,000 per kg.

In futures trade, gold on the MCX for April delivery declined Rs 208 or 0.25



per cent to ₹83,075 per 10 grams. "Gold's positive rally took a slight pause as MCX gold traded near ₹83,000 with a minor ₹200 dip. This weakness came as tariff discussions between the US, Canada, and Mexico gained traction," Jateen Trivedi, VP research analyst - Commodity and Currency at LKP Securities, said.

Silver futures for March delivery also slipped ₹35 to ₹94,222 per kg on the Multi Commodity

Exchange (MCX). According to Abans Holdings' chief executive officer Chintan Mehta, gold hit record highs on Monday amid fears of a global trade war, driving investors toward the safe-haven metal at high premiums. "Geopolitical uncertainty continues to rise as Trump's tariffs on Canada and Mexico are paused for a month following negotiations on stricter border enforcement," Mehta said. — PTI

Cuts in I-T rates to boost growth

FC BANKING BUREAU MUMBAI, FEB. 4

Moody's Ratings on Tuesday said that the income tax cuts announced in the Union Budget 2025 will boost middle-class spending and benefit corporates and the financial sector but warned that the lost revenue could slow fiscal consolidation despite a decline in spending as a share of GDP.

The announced tax measures account for the bulk of the government's support for the economy. In particular, the government has effectively elimi-

nated direct tax liabilities for workers earning less than ₹12 lakh (about \$13,860) per year to catalyse household consumption. The previous threshold was ₹7 lakh (about \$8,100).

Although the government has estimated consequent foregone revenue at around ₹1 lakh crore (0.3 per cent of GDP), it has continued to project a 14.4 per cent rise in income taxes, contributing to an 11 per cent rise in total tax receipts that is more rapid than the assumed 10 per cent rise in nominal GDP. As a result, the material-

isation of downside risks to income tax collection, which the government has budgeted to account for about one-third of gross tax revenue, would belie the government's view of revenue buoyancy that hinges on improved compliance and the return of robust economic growth, said Moody's.

India's latest budget signals a slowing pace of fiscal consolidation, as the union government seeks to provide firmer support for economic growth amid a dampened macroeconomic backdrop compared to recent years, it said.

Fewer slabs with lower GST rates on anvil: FM

No proposal to shut down old tax regime, clarifies Nirmala Sitharaman

New Delhi, Feb. 4: The GST Council will soon take a decision on having fewer and lower rates as the review work is almost complete, finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman said on Tuesday.

Currently, goods and services Tax (GST) is a four-tier tax structure with slabs at 5, 12, 18 and 28 per cent. Luxury and demerit goods are taxed at highest bracket of 28 per cent, while packed food and essential items are in the lowest 5 per cent slab.

The Council, chaired by Sitharaman and comprising her state counterparts, has set up a group of ministers (GoM) to suggest changes in GST rates as well as reduce slabs.

"To be fair to the GST and the ministers who are all in the council, the work on rationalising and simplifying GST rates has already commenced. In fact, it had commenced nearly three years ago," she said at a post Budget round table.

Sitharaman said later the scope was widened and now the work is almost complete.

Mentioning that she told

MONEY MATTERS

SHE TOLD MINISTERS IN THE COUNCIL TO HAVE A MORE IN-DEPTH LOOK AT THE RATES SINCE THEY RELATE TO EVERYDAY ITEMS CONSUME.

LUXURY GOODS taxed in highest bracket at 28%, while essential items are in lowest 5% slab.

BUDGET PEGS a fiscal deficit of 4.4% of GDP for FY26.



WE CAN BRING down the number of rates, which is also the original intent that we wanted fewer rates and lower rates. So work has got to happen on that, and I hope the GST Council will decide on it soon. — NIRMALA SITHARAMAN, Finance minister

ministers in the Council to have a more in-depth look at the rates since they relate to everyday items consumed by common people, the minister said.

"For me, it was also important that we don't lose an opportunity, that we can even bring down the number of rates, which is also the original intent that we wanted fewer rates

and lower rates. So work has got to happen on that, and I hope the GST Council will decide on it soon," Sitharaman said.

Days after presenting the Union Budget 2025-26 that also provides significant income tax relief to the middle class, the minister asserted the country's economic fundamentals are strong and there is no

structural slowdown.

The finance minister also told the gathering that there is no proposal to shut down old tax regime.

The finance minister further said the capital expenditure has not come down, in fact it has increased to ₹11.21 lakh crore which is 4.3 per cent of the gross domestic product GDP. — PTI

India to assess US exit from global tax deal

MADHUSUDAN SAHOO NEW DELHI, FEB. 4

Revenue secretary Tuhin Kanta Pandey on Tuesday said that India would assess the implications of the United States' decision to withdraw from the global tax deal. The comment from the government com-

es after US President Donald Trump's statement in the Presidential memorandum on January 20.

As per the Trump's statement, the 'global tax deal' has no force or effect within the United States, thus nullifying the progress made so far by the Organisation for Economic

Cooperation and Development (OECD) to bring 140 countries on the same platform to levy a minimum 15 per cent tax on profits of multinational corporates.

Pandey, who was interacting with in a post-Budget session of industry body Assocham, said

that the tax deal is a multilateral approach where the US is much integrally needed.

"The US exit has added a lot of uncertainty and if the United States is not joining it then such a pact doesn't work out," the top official of the finance ministry said.

SHORT TAKES

Surya, Shivam in Mumbai squad

Mumbai: India's T20 captain Suryakumar Yadav and Shivam Dube have been included in Mumbai's 18-member squad for their Ranji Trophy quarterfinal clash against Haryana, starting from February 8.

Both Suryakumar and Dube, who took part in the recently-concluded India-England five-match T20I series which the hosts won 4-1, have played one game each in Mumbai's title defence of the Ranji Trophy this season.

Mumbai qualified for the quarterfinals after their crushing victory by an innings and 456 runs against Meghalaya, while Jammu and Kashmir is the other team to make it to the knockouts from Elite Group A. Suryakumar was a part of the Mumbai side in their clash against Maharashtra in October, whereas Dube was a member of the star-studded hosts' side that included India Test and ODI skipper Rohit Sharma as well as Yashasvi Jaiswal, and which lost to J&K at home last month. The 42-time winners Mumbai will travel to Rohtak where they will take on Haryana, who had finished at the top of Group 'C'. — PTI

SL's Karunaratne all set to retire

Galle, Sri Lanka: Former Sri Lanka captain Dimuth Karunaratne is set to retire from international cricket after playing his 100th Test, which will be the second and final match against Australia starting here on Thursday.

The 36-year-old, one of the most prolific batters for Sri Lanka, has scored 7,172 runs at an average of just under 40, with 16 centuries and 34 half-centuries in 99 Tests over nearly 14 years. He has also featured in 50 ODIs, scoring 1,316 runs with one century and 11 fifties.

"It is difficult for a Test player to keep himself motivated to play 4 Tests for a year and maintain his form," Karunaratne was quoted as saying by 'Daily FT'. "In the last two-three years after the WTC (World Test Championship) was introduced, we have been having very little bilateral series. My current form is another reason; completing my 100 Tests, the end of the WTC cycle (2023-25), I thought is the right time to retire." — PTI

Konstas to return for Shield games

Galle, Sri Lanka: Young opening batter Sam Konstas is leaving Australia's tour of Sri Lanka and flying back home to play in New South Wales' next Sheffield Shield game against Queensland at the Gabba.

The Australian media have reported that the decision to send back Konstas was taken after it became clear that the 19-year-old batter would not be considered for selection in the second Test against Sri Lanka. Konstas, who made headlines with his unorthodox shots on debut against a Jasprit Bumrah-led Indian pace bowling attack in Melbourne last December, returned to hotel after Australia's training session on Tuesday and started packing his bag for his flight back home.

According to *Sydney Morning Herald*, the Australian selectors "have chosen to send Konstas home early so he can play" in the first round of Shield games after the Big Bash League, as he has never played a first-class match in Brisbane before.

The game between NSW and Queensland starts on Saturday. "That's the plan. Hopefully, I can be back for the first game," Konstas was quoted as saying by the leading daily. — PTI

Ramanathan and Mukund bow out

Chennai: Third seed Duje Ajdukovic and the trio of Indian players, including Ramkumar Ramanathan and Mukund Sasikumar, were knocked out in the men's singles opening round of the Chennai Open ATP Challenger here on Tuesday. However, the tournament's top seeds Billy Harris and Lloyd Harris started their campaigns on a winning note.

Ajdukovic, ranked No. 158 in the world, was defeated in three sets 2-6, 7-6, 2-6 by Sweden's Elias Ymer, ranked No. 332 in the world. — PTI

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WARUN GAME

Mystery spinner included in ODI series squad

Nagpur, Feb. 4: In-form mystery spinner Varun Chakravarthy was on Tuesday included in the Indian ODI squad after his heroics in the just-concluded T20I series against England as the team management wants the KKR mystery spinner to "keep up the momentum".

There is a fair chance that Chakravarthy might just replace one of the four specialist spinners in the Champions Trophy squad. It could be one among Kuldeep Yadav or Washington Sundar, who could be axed to accommodate Chakravarthy before the final squad is announced. A lot will depend on how he fares in the ODIs.

Chakravarthy, who got 14 wickets in five T20Is against England and was adjudged the 'Player of The Series', wasn't initially picked for the three ODIs against England and the Champions Trophy later this month.

Chakravarthy was seen training and bowling in the nets on Tuesday.

"Yes, Varun Chakravarthy is part of the squad," India vice-captain Shubman Gill confirmed in a media interaction after the team's training. Later in the evening, the BCCI too said the in-form spinner has been added to the squad.

"The Men's Selection Committee has added Varun Chakravarthy to India's squad for the upcoming three-match ODI series against England," the BCCI said in a statement.

It is understood that head coach Gautam Gambhir wants Chakravarthy to remain in rhythm and bowl to the likes of Virat Kohli, Rohit Sharma, and Rishabh Pant.

With the deadline for squad changes for the Champions Trophy set for February 12, he remains a strong candidate for selection. However, it is unlikely that he will be added to the CT squad without playing a single ODI.

India have got three finger spinners — two left-armers (Ravindra Jadeja and Axar Patel) and one right-arm off-spinner in Washington Sundar. Kuldeep Yadav, who is returning to the Indian team after undergoing a sports hernia surgery in October 2024. — PTI



Varun Chakravarthy

Rohit, Virat keys at CT

New Delhi, Feb. 4: They may have struggled in recent times but the form of skipper Rohit Sharma and his longtime colleague Virat Kohli will be key to India's success in the upcoming ICC Champions Trophy, reckoned former batter Suresh Raina on Tuesday.

The Champions Trophy starts in Pakistan from February 19 and will conclude on March 9 but India will play all their matches in Dubai as per the hybrid model agreement signed by the concerned parties.

Speaking to broadcaster *Star Sports*, Raina said, "Rohit Sharma's strike rate has improved significantly after the ODI World Cup in 2023. Since then, he has scored runs at a strike rate of 119-120, making him one of India's best ODI batsmen.

"For Rohit and Virat, I would say that when you have a strong record of past performances, it gives you a lot of confidence. They complement each other well, and both have the skill to score big runs. If they perform well, India's Champions Trophy

campaign will benefit immensely," he added.

India have been clubbed with arch-rivals Pakistan, New Zealand and Bangladesh in the group stage of the tournament.

Speaking about the spin department and team combination, Raina said, "I think (Ravindra) Jadeja will definitely play because of his effectiveness in ODIs. Kuldeep (Yadav) has not played a match since his injury, but we also have Axar Patel, who has been consistently performing well.

— PTI

GILL DEFENDS RECENT LOSS AWAY TO OZ

Nagpur, Feb. 4: India's vice-captain Shubman Gill on Tuesday defended their performance in the Test rubber loss in Australia, saying that one poor series does not define a team and that it is unfair to criticise a side after a rare bad outing.

India suffered a 1-3 defeat in the five-match series in Australia, bringing to an end their decade-long dominance in the Border-Gavaskar Trophy.

Key players such as Rohit Sharma, Virat Kohli, K. L. Rahul, Rishabh Pant, and Gill himself are now set to return for the three-match ODI series against England before heading to Dubai for the all-important ICC Champions Trophy.

"One series does not define the form of the whole team. There are a lot of players who, in the past, have performed consistently in a lot of series and tournaments," Gill told reporters here ahead of the first ODI against England.

"Definitely, we did not play as per our expectations in the Australian series, but still we played some good cricket. We were unfortunate not to have (Jasprit) Bumrah on the last day and we would have won the match and the series would have been a draw and this talk wouldn't have happened.

"One match and one day doesn't define us, we won there twice before and earlier won a World Cup and then reached the final of a World Cup, so we should keep all those things in mind," he added.

GAME CHANGER CAPTAIN ROHIT

The spotlight is firmly on senior players Rohit and Kohli, who have struggled with the bat in recent times.

However, Gill was quick to highlight the skipper's sensational form in white-ball cricket, which played a pivotal role in India reaching the 2023 ODI World Cup final.

— PTI



Grandmaster R. Praggnanandhaa poses with the Tata Steel Chess trophy on his arrival at the Chennai airport on Tuesday.

— PTI

Pragg home to warm welcome

Chennai, Feb. 4: Newly-crowned Tata Steel Chess winner R. Praggnanandhaa was given a warm reception upon his return home, as hundreds of fans, along with officials from the Tamil Nadu government and the national federation gathered to receive him at the airport here on Tuesday.

The 19-year-old from Chennai on Sunday defeated reigning World Champion and compatriot D. Gukesh to claim his maiden Tata Steel Chess tournament crown, marking the biggest win of his career so far.

"I feel very happy to win this tournament, and it is very nice to see that two Indians, two Tamil Nadu people played in the tie-break in the end. We both played well. Huge congrats to him (D. Gukesh) as well, he played really well," he said.

Both Praggnanandhaa and Gukesh finished with 8.5 points after losing

their 13th-round games, but Praggnanandhaa showed remarkable mental resilience to triumph 2-1 in the tie-breaker during the 87th edition of the prestigious event in Wijk Aan Zee.

Praggnanandhaa became the first Indian after Viswanathan Anand to win the Tata Steel Chess title.

Anand, a three-time winner (2003, 2004, and 2006) when the event was known as the Corus Chess Tournament, had also shared the honours twice (1989 and 1998) during its earlier form as the Hoogovens Tournament.

Praggnanandhaa described the final day as "crazy and long" after he battled exhaustion and nerves to outwit Gukesh in a thrilling tie-breaker.

As a draw seemed imminent in sudden death, Gukesh lost control, and Praggnanandhaa capitalised on the mistake to clinch his maiden title.

— PTI

SA | 20



The George's Park Stadium in Gqeberha, South Africa, presents a pleasant picture.

The 'Old Lady' has new charm

DEEPIKA DAS
GQEBERHA (SOUTH AFRICA), FEB. 4

It's like a big party in a sleepy coastal town of picturesque Port Elizabeth, recently rechristened Gqeberha, where all traffic is heading to the St George's Park Stadium, which is hosting the first Qualifier of the SA20 League between MI Cape Town and Paarl Royals. It is the home of the Port Elizabeth Cricket Club (one of the oldest clubs in South Africa), the Eastern Province Club and Sunrisers Eastern Cape but the SA20 League had brought a major lift to the 'Old Lady', which was established in early 1800.

"The league has brought a huge difference to the stadium. Cricket is no longer the game that it was 10 years ago and SA20 has made a huge impact in upgrading the stadiums and St George's Park has been very much part of that process. We have a larger crowd coming here for the SA20 matches and witness renewed enthusiasm," said Mark William, CEO of Eastern Province Cricket.

St George's Park staged the first Test to be played outside England or Australia in 1888-89 and in 1969-70 hosted the final Test before South Africa's 21-year isolation. It also staged South Africa's first rugby international, against England, in 1891. It also hosted the first

ODI between India and South Africa in 1992.

"This is an old lady. She has been here for a long time and so we called her our 'Old Lady'. It used to be a rugby field but we no longer host rugby matches. Now we are just focusing on organising cricket tournaments. We have had a full house every single time this season during SA20. Hoping there will be more cricket tournaments coming in future," he added.

'BROKEN GLASS WILL BE FIXED SOON'

Mark also informed Rinku Singh's six that smashed the media box glass panel of the stadium in 2023 will be fixed as soon as the season ends.

"We are waiting to get this season over then we will change the glass. It's a big glass and will need big tools to change it and when you allow big and special equipment like big cranes entering the stadium... there are chances it will damage the ground. Once the season finishes we will start prepping up for the next one. We have a four-month window, then we will upgrade, change and fix the stuff," Mark said.

The stadium also has the pavilion named after South Africa legend Graeme Pollock — uncle of former Proteas star Shaun Pollock. Graeme is widely regarded as one of South Africa's greatest ever cricketers and one of the greatest batters in the history of the game.

Telangana women basketball champs

Dehradun, Feb. 4: Madhya Pradesh and Telangana won the men's and women's basketball 3x3 gold medals after beating Kerala in the finals of both the sections at the National Games here on Tuesday.

Madhya Pradesh won 22-20 in a hard-fought men's summit clash against Kerala, while Tamil Nadu beat Telangana 21-16 to win the bronze.

In the women's final, Telangana triumphed 21-11 over Kerala with a commanding performance.

Telangana defended their title which they had won in the 2023 National Games in Goa.

Madhya Pradesh took the bronze after beating Tamil Nadu 14-12 in the third-place match. Earlier in the men's semifinals, Madhya Pradesh had secured 18-14 victory over Telangana, while Kerala narrowly edged past Tamil Nadu 16-15. In the women's semifinals, Telangana had defeated Tamil Nadu 18-11 while Kerala won 13-10 victory over Madhya Pradesh.

SHUTTLE ANMOL WINS GOLD AT NAT GAMES

Rising shuttle Anmol Kharb continued her impressive run, defeating top seed Anupama Upadhyaya in straight games in the women's singles final to claim the gold medal at the 38th National Games here on Tuesday.

The 18-year-old from Haryana, a member of the gold medal-winning Indian team at the Asia Team Championships, showcased her skill and determination by outclassing

world number 43 Anupama 21-16, 22-20 to secure the top prize.

The gold medal marked another milestone in Anmol's rising career; following her runner-up finish at the Guwahati Masters Super 100 tournament last December and her victories at the Belgian and Polish Internationals last year.

In other events, Satish Kumar Karunakaran & Aadya Variyath battled hard to overcome Deep Rambhiya and Akshaya Warang 21-11, 20-22, 21-8 in

the mixed doubles final and win the gold medal.

In men's doubles, Nithin HV and Prakash Raj S defeated Vaibhav and Ashith Surya 21-16, 21-14 in a one-sided final to take home the coveted gold.

Later in the day, top seed Sathish Kumar Karunakaran will face Suryaksh Rawat in the men's singles final. Star shuttler and home state favourite Lakshya Sen, ranked world number 10, withdrew from the competition at the last moment on Monday. — PTI