

THE ASIAN AGE

LONDON THURSDAY 20 FEBRUARY 2025



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Bhumi: Relationships should empower you and your companions



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Virat Kohli during a practice session at Dubai International Cricket Stadium on Wednesday. India will face Bangladesh in ICC Champions Trophy opener on Thursday.

— PTI

■ Report on Page 8

Jaishankar on 2-day South Africa visit to attend G-20 meeting

New Delhi: External affairs minister S. Jaishankar will be on a two-day visit to South Africa beginning February 20 to participate in the G-20 foreign ministers' meeting, the MEA announced on Wednesday. The minister is expected to hold a few bilateral meetings on the margins of the meet. South Africa is currently the chair of the influential grouping. "Dr S. Jaishankar will be visiting Johannesburg, South Africa on 20 & 21 February 2025 to participate in the G20 foreign ministers' meeting at the invitation of the minister of international relations and cooperation of the Republic of South Africa, Ronald Lamola," the MEA said in a statement. The minister's participation in the G-20 FMM will "strengthen" India's engagement with G-20 countries and "bolster the voice of the Global South" in this important forum.

MP: 4 Naxals, including 3 women, killed in gunfight

Bhopal: Four Naxalites, including three women cadres, were killed on Wednesday in an encounter in Madhya Pradesh's Balaghat district. The Hawk Force of the state police and local police teams took part in the operation that took place in a forested area.

Full report on Page 4

Gunmen identify, kill 7 Punjabi travellers in Pak

Quetta (Pakistan): Gunmen in southwest Pakistan shot seven bus passengers, belonging to Punjab province, dead after identifying them as being from another region. Gunmen boarded the bus and demanded to see the identity cards of passengers.

— AFP

Full report on Page 6

COUNTERPOINT



Not textbooks... I am carrying cash to pay for my son's school fees!



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■ 6 ministers will be sworn in too ■ To be BJP's lone woman CM

First-time BJP MLA Rekha Gupta to be new Delhi CM, oath today

SHASHI BHUSHAN and SANJAY KAW
NEW DELHI, FEB. 19

Delhi's long wait for its new chief minister ended on Wednesday evening, with the BJP naming first-time legislator Rekha Gupta for the top post. She, along with her six Cabinet colleagues, will take the oath of office on Thursday at the historic Ramlila Ground.

Ms Gupta will succeed Aam Aadmi Party's Atishi as the BJP swerved to power in Delhi after a hiatus of over 26 years by sweeping the February 5 Assembly polls. *The Asian Age* was the first newspaper to report that Delhi will get a woman chief minister.

Ms Gupta, who will be the lone woman chief minister among the 14 states currently ruled by the BJP, had won the recent Delhi polls from the Shalimar Bagh Assembly constituency.

The choice of the chief ministerial candidate is a clear indicator that the BJP aims to hold sway over this crucial votebank in the national capital. This is also in line with the extraordinary voter turnout of women in the Delhi polls, which was higher than men since the first Assembly elections in 1993.

To woo the women voters, the BJP had pitched a monthly financial assistance of ₹2,500 against AAP's ₹2,100 in the run-up to the recent Assembly polls.

The name of Ms Gupta as the leader of the BJP's legislative party was proposed by Parvesh Verma, Vijender Gupta and Satish Upadhyay and was seconded by nine other newly elected MLAs. Interestingly, the names of Mr Verma, Mr Gupta and Mr Upadhyay were also doing the rounds for the top post.

Ms Gupta has submitted



Delhi chief minister-designate Rekha Gupta offers sweets to party leader Parvesh Verma. Below: BJP's newly-elected MLAs Mohan Singh Bisht, Vijender Gupta, Om Prakash Sharma and others during the BJP legislature party meeting at the party office in New Delhi on Wednesday.

— PTI



PAGE 2

► **Massive crowds expected at Delhi's Ramlila Maidan and traffic to be diverted**

a list of six legislators for the oath ceremony to lieutenant-governor V.K. Saxena. The L-G will send the list to the President

for approval before administering them the oath of office on Thursday.

According to sources, Mr Verma (Jat), Manjinder Singh Sirsa (Sikh-Jat), Ravinder Raj (Dalit), Kapil Mishra (Purvanchali Brahmin), Ashish Sood (Punjabi) and Pankaj Singh

■ **Turn to Page 4**

New CM joined politics at DU, practised law, has RSS links

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, FEB. 19

After much anticipation, the BJP finally ended the suspense by announcing Rekha Gupta as Delhi's new chief minister. Ms Gupta will be the fourth woman chief minister of Delhi after BJP's Sushma Swaraj, Congress' Sheila Dikshit and AAP's Atishi. Her appointment also signals the BJP's strategic move towards empowering women in leadership roles, aligning with the party's broader vision.

Born on July 19, 1974, in Haryana's Julana, Ms Gupta has had a 32-year association with the RSS and has worked extensively for women's welfare. Her political journey began in 1992 when she became involved with the Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad at Daulat Ram College, Delhi University. In 1995-96, she was the secretary of the Delhi University Students' Union and was its president in 1996-97.

Ms Gupta also earned a law degree from Chaudhary Charan Singh University, Meerut and practised as an advocate.

In 2002, Ms Gupta joined the BJP and has served as the national secretary of the party's youth wing. She has also served as the BJP's women's wing in-charge in Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh. She was later elected as a councillor from North Pitampura in 2007.

After being elected as a councillor from North Pitampura in 2007, Ms Gupta worked for the

■ **Turn to Page 4**



People look at the newly-inaugurated Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh's office "Keshava Kunj" at Jhandewalan in New Delhi on Wednesday. Union home minister Amit Shah, defence minister Rajnath Singh and other BJP leaders visited the new office to participate in a conference held in the presence of the Sangh's chief Mohan Bhagwat.

— PTI

■ Report on Page 3

SC lists pleas against CEC, ECs selection in mid-March

RAKESH K. SINGH
NEW DELHI, FEB. 19

The pleas against the appointments of the Chief Election Commissioner and election commissioners under the 2023 law, which excludes the Chief Justice of India as a member of the selection panel, are expected to be taken up by the Supreme Court after the Holi break.

Earlier in the day, TMC MP Mahua Moitra had approached the apex court in support of the existing petitions challenging the constitutional validity of the CEC and Other Election Commissioners Act 2023, which removed the CJI as a member from the selection panel for the appointment of the top poll panel officials.

A bench of Justices Surya Kant and N. Kotliwar Singh on Wednesday indicated that the matter will be listed after the Holi break due to paucity of time but did not assign a specific date for hearing the matter.

■ **More on Page 3**

Kharge cracks the whip, to hold party brass 'accountable'

Hints at more changes in party soon

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, FEB. 19

After a string of electoral debacles, starting from Haryana to Maharashtra and recently in Delhi, the Congress high command has finally decided to crack the whip. Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge on Wednesday told top party leaders that they will be held accountable for election results in the future and warned them against turncoats.

Addressing the new office-bearers at a meeting held at the Congress' headquarters in Indira Bhawan, Mr Kharge urged party leaders to work at the grassroots level and strengthen the party from the booth level and promote people who are ideologically committed to the organisation. The marathon meeting of the party's general secretaries and in-charges lasted almost seven hours at the new party office in the national capital.

"I want to talk to you



Mallikarjun Kharge

► **THE CONGRESS** chief urged party leaders to work at the grassroots level and strengthen the party from the booth level and promote people who are ideologically committed to the organisation

about the most important thing of accountability. You all will be held accountable for revamping the organisations in states and for all future election results," Mr Kharge told the office-bearers.

The Congress president said: "It is your responsibility to strengthen the organisation at the

■ **Turn to Page 4**

Govt sends team to US to bring back Rana

■ Tahawwur bid to stall extradition ■ To be handcuffed, shackled on Indian plane

VINEETA PANDEY
NEW DELHI, FEB. 19

As Tahawwur Rana, one of the co-conspirators of the 26/11 Mumbai terror attack of 2008, makes a last-ditch attempt to exhaust the legal remedies available to him to prevent his extradition to India, a special team of Indian security agencies is preparing to bring him back at the earliest. Rana is expected to be brought

on an Indian plane, handcuffed and shackled. His extradition may take effect by the end of March 2025 if his appeals are rejected by the US court.

Rana has filed a final appeal on humanitarian grounds in a US appeals forum, which has delayed his extradition. He was earlier to be brought to India in February after the Trump administration's go ahead.

The 64-year-old Rana, a



Tahawwur Rana

Pakistan-born Canadian national and a close associate of Pakistani-American terrorist and one of the main conspirators David Coleman

► **RANA HAS** filed a final appeal on humanitarian grounds in a US appeals forum, which has delayed his extradition. He was earlier to be brought to India in February.

Headley, is serving supervised detention at a metropolitan detention centre in Los Angeles after completing a 14-year sentence in 2023. Referring to him

as "one of the plotters and very evil people of the world", US President Donald Trump on February 13 announced that his administration had approved Rana's extradition to India.

Once extradited, Rana would be the third person to be put on trial in India in the 26/11 case after Ajmal Kasab and Zabiuddin Ansari, alias Abu Jundal. In November

■ **Turn to Page 4**

Trump calls Zelenskyy a 'dictator without elections', tensions rise

Miami, Feb. 19: US President Donald Trump on Wednesday called Volodymyr Zelenskyy a "dictator without elections", lashing out after the Ukrainian President said Mr Trump was being influenced by "Russian disinformation" as he moves to end the Kremlin's war against Ukraine on terms that Kyiv says are too favorable to Moscow.

"Think of it, a modestly successful comedian, Volodymyr Zelenskyy, talked the United States of America into spending \$350 billion to go into a war that couldn't be won, that never had to start, but a war that he, without the US and TRUMP, will never be able to settle,"

► **THE UKRAINIAN PREZ** accused Donald Trump earlier of living in a Russian-made 'disinformation space' as he moves to end the Kremlin's war against Ukraine on terms that Kyiv says are too favorable to Moscow

Mr Trump added in his social media post that Mr Zelenskyy is "A Dictator without Elections!"

Because of Russia's invasion in February 2022, Ukraine has delayed elections that were scheduled for April 2024.

Mr Trump earlier Wednesday of living in a Russian-made "disinformation space". Mr Trump used his post to accuse Mr Zelenskyy of misusing American aid to Ukraine for the war effort and taking advantage of the Biden administration.

The sharp back-and-forth came after senior US and Russian officials met in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, on Tuesday and agreed to negotiate a settlement to an end to the war. Ukrainian and European officials were not included despite Mr Zelenskyy's insistence that they should be part of any such discussions.

— AP

■ **More on Page 6**



People perform rituals during the celebrations on the birth anniversary of Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj in Mumbai on Wednesday.

— PTI

Siddaramaiah

► **THE SLEUTHS** of the Lokayukta, Mysuru wing, had registered an FIR against Siddaramaiah as an accused and others in connection with the plot allotments to his wife by Mada

Mysuru wing superintendent of police T.J. Udes on Wednesday asked him to file his objections before the magistrate within in seven days on receipt of the Lokayukta notice to him.

The sleuths of the Lokayukta, Mysuru wing, had registered an FIR against chief minister Siddaramaiah as an accused 1 under various provisions of Indian Penal Code, under Sections 9 and 13 of Prevention of Corruption Act, 1988, and others in connection with the plot

■ **Turn to Page 4**

In a notice to the complainant and social activist, Lokayukta

SHORT TAKES

Police recovers 305 phones worth ₹3cr

New Delhi: The crime branch of the Delhi police has recovered 305 high-end stolen mobile phones worth approximately ₹3 crore under their Operation Track Back, an official said on Wednesday. Among the 305 phones, 216 have been returned to their rightful owners after verification, a senior police officer said. During the operation, launched to curb mobile theft and protect citizens from digital fraud, arrests were made disrupting international mobile smuggling rings, the officer said. On January 10, the police teams arrested Manish Yadav from Wazirabad, recovering 195 stolen phones worth ₹2 crore. Later, on January 30, two members of an international theft syndicate — Rahul and Waheed — were arrested with 58 stolen phones, he added. On February 10, another arrest was made when Asif was nabbed with 52 stolen devices, including 40 iPhones. — *PTI*

Man gets 14-year RI for raping minor girl

New Delhi: A Delhi court has sentenced a man to 14 years rigorous imprisonment for raping and impregnating a 14-year-old girl in 2018 and rejected his plea of poverty and no previous criminal record. Additional sessions judge Rajesh Kumar heard the arguments on sentencing against the 40-year-old man who was convicted under IPC and POCSO Act. Special public prosecutor Nimmi Sisodia sought the maximum sentence for the convict saying the survivor gave birth owing to the heinous offence. The forensic report, she said, established the convict to be the child's biological father. The court handed out the 14-year sentence for rape and two years' of jail for criminally intimidating her. The survivor was compensated with ₹16.5 lakh.

Summit highlights AI's role in business

New Delhi: The entrepreneur AI summit, recently held in the national capital, imparted the instructions to entrepreneurs on how AI can manage supply chains, create powerful customer interactions, and make accurate forecasts, enabling business owners to develop their own AI integration methods. The case studies of AI implementation highlighted how MSMEs can leverage the tangible benefits of AI in their operations. Speaking on the occasion, Sanjeev Jain, founder & MD of CEOITBOX, said: "AI empowers all entrepreneurs to use this modern technology for greater operational effectiveness to reach a broader market scale. Utilisation of AI technology reaches beyond corporate giants to benefit any business owner dedicated to productive work instead of labour-intensive work."

JAMIA STUDENTS PROTEST AT JANTAR MANTAR

New Delhi: Jamia Millia Islamia students staged a protest at the Jantar Mantar here on Wednesday against the suspension of 17 students for participating in demonstrations on the campus. Left-affiliated student organisations — All India Students' Association (AISA), Students Federation of India (SFI), All India Democratic Students' Organisation (AIDSO) and others — took part in the Jantar Mantar protest. The students demanded revocation of the suspension of 17 students and also no disciplinary action for taking part in demonstrations. The issue started after the university administration suspended two PhD scholars for allegedly leading an unauthorised protest in December last year. Student activists, however, argue that the administration is attempting to suppress dissent. Some students alleged that the police contacted their parents, warning them of possible FIRs against their wards if they continued to participate in protests. The protesters demanded that no disciplinary action be taken against students for engaging in demonstrations. According to the AISA, the university administration suspended 17 students overnight, which prompted their peers from various departments to declare a boycott in solidarity.

■ Over 25K security personnel to be deployed ■ Modi, Shah to attend CM's oath

All roads leads to Ramlila Maidan

AVINASH PRABHAKAR
JHA
NEW DELHI, FEB. 19

After 27 long years, Delhi is all set to be draped in saffron on Thursday. Expecting a mammoth gathering, the Delhi police has already issued a traffic advisory for the oath ceremony of the new chief minister at Ramlila ground.

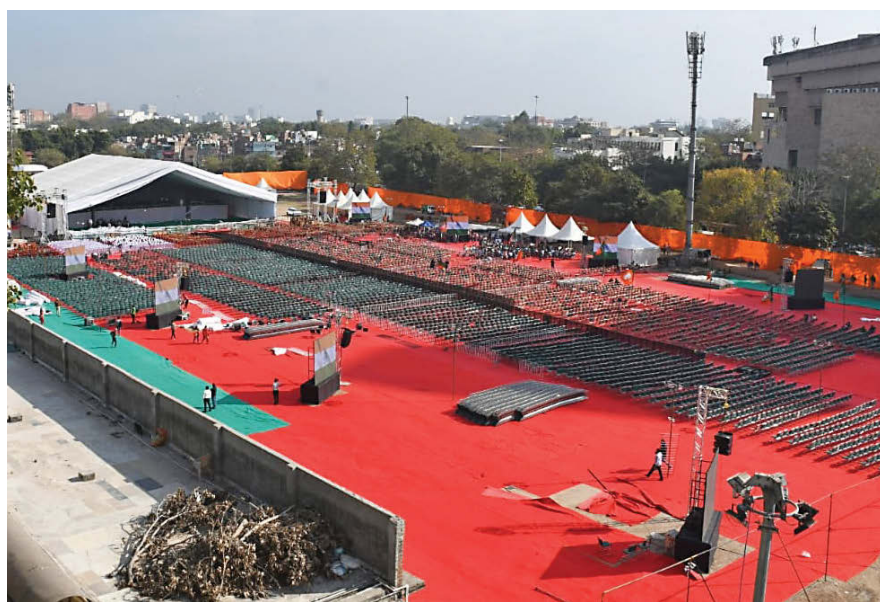
Among the prominent guests expected to attend the grand event are Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Union home minister Amit Shah along with his colleagues besides NDA chief ministers and deputy CMs from different states.

The BJP is said to have extended invitations to gig workers, cab and auto drivers, farmers, as well as slum dwellers.

Women beneficiaries of the BJP-led Central government's welfare schemes are also being invited to the event.

Ahead of the grand ceremony, BJP national general secretary Tarun Chugh reviewed the ongoing final preparations for the oath ceremony on Wednesday.

He mocked the AAP for their defeat in the Assembly elections and said that the people of Delhi had punished a "tyrannical ruler for his



Preparations underway for the oath ceremony of the New Delhi government at the Ramlila Maidan in New Delhi on Wednesday.

— G.N. JHA

lies, deceit, and fraud."

Mr Chug said, "The people of Delhi have given their blessings to PM Narendra Modi. These abundant blessings have transformed into a mandate. Tomorrow, a historic event will take place in Delhi. I believe this will be the most historic event to be held at Ramlila Maidan. The people of Delhi have punished a tyrannical ruler for his lies, deceit, and fraud."

The oath ceremony

venue holds immense political significance as AAP chief Arvind Kejriwal had used the same place to take oath as the Delhi chief minister in 2013 and subsequent terms after decimating the Congress, which ruled the city for 15 consecutive years.

The venue is also a pointer to the rise and fall of the Aam Aadmi Party, which was born out of the Anna Hazare-led anti-corruption movement chan-

nelised from the same historic ground.

Ahead of the oath-taking ceremony, the Delhi police tightened the security around the venue.

More than 25,000 security personnel are being deployed in the central, north, and New Delhi areas of the city for the event.

Lieutenant-governor V.K. Saxena will administer the oath of office to the CM-designate and the Cabinet at about 12.30 pm

Delhi pollution body presents action plan to PMO for Yamuna

New Delhi, Feb. 19: With the change in government in the national capital, an action plan to rejuvenate the Yamuna river has been submitted to the Prime Minister's Office (PMO), focusing on boosting sewage treatment capacity and other critical measures, officials said on Wednesday. The Delhi pollution control committee (DPCC) under the department of environment presented a document to the PMO last week regarding the cleaning and rejuvenation of the Yamuna.

The plan also outlines key measures, including tapping of major drains, setting up new sewage treatment plants (STPs), connecting drainage system in JJ clusters, trapping all drains, upgrading common effluent treatment plants (CETPs), removing encroachments from floodplains and beautifying the riverfront.

Cleaning of the Yamuna was at the centre of politics in the run-up to the Delhi Assembly polls with the BJP slamming

the then ruling AAP for failing to rejuvenate the river during its 10-year rule.

The BJP, which has come to power winning 48 out of the 70 Assembly seats in the recent polls, has said cleaning of the Yamuna will be among the top priorities of its government in Delhi.

According to the document sent to PMO last week, the DPCC has highlighted that the 48-km stretch of the Yamuna from Palla to Asgarpur village in the city has been classified as a "Priority-1" (top priority) polluted stretch.

A key concern raised in the document is the high biochemical oxygen demand (BOD) levels, which remain far above the desired standard of 3 mg/l. To improve water quality, the document has emphasised the need for a minimum environmental flow (E-flow) of 23 cumecs (437 MGD).

However, due to existing water shortages, the current flow into Delhi is nearly nil. — *PTI*

Auto-lifter gang using state-of-art tech busted

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, FEB. 19

A gang of car thieves that employed high-end tech to disable security systems and create duplicate keys of cars was dismantled, a police official said on Wednesday. The police recovered four stolen vehicles — Maruti Brezza, Maruti Swift Dzire, Maruti Eeco and Maruti Alto K-10 — all with fake number plates and tampered chassis numbers.

"Additionally, the team seized an Autel key programming machine, various car theft tools, engine control modules (ECMs), body control modules (BCMs), lock sets, grinders and drilling machines," DCP (outer north) Nidhin Valsan said.

The gang, led by Mehtab (30), operated across Delhi, Uttar Pradesh, and Haryana, stealing cars and selling them with tampered identification numbers, the DCP said.

On January 29, a special staff team arrested two key members of the gang — Mehtab and Faisal — in the Narela Industrial Area. The duo was found in possession of two country-made pistols and live cartridges.

2 rob bizman of ₹97L at gunpoint in north Delhi

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, FEB. 19

Two unidentified men on a scooter allegedly robbed a businessman of ₹97 lakh at gunpoint in Brijpuri of Delhi's northeast, an official said on Wednesday. The incident took place when the victim, Anees Ansari (45), a copper scrap trader from Karawal Nagar, was returning to his office in Mustafabad after collecting cash from Old Delhi, he said.

According to the police, the robbers intercepted Ansari, pointed gun at him

▶ **ACCORDING TO the police, robbers intercepted Ansari, pointed gun at him and fled with bag and fled with his bag of cash.**

A complaint was lodged at the Dayalpur police station on February 16 following which a case was registered.

The police has formed teams to track down the suspects and recover the stolen money.

Investigators are analysing CCTV footage from the area to identify the accused.

Need to be kind for adolescent love: HC

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, FEB. 19

The Delhi high court has advocated for a compassionate approach prioritising "understanding" over "punishment" in criminal cases involving adolescent love, saying the law should evolve to acknowledge such relationships that are consensual and free from coercion.

Affirming that consensual and respectful adolescent love is a natural part of human development, justice Jasmeet Singh said adolescents should be allowed to express their feelings and engage in relation-

ships without fear of criminalisation.

The high court said the focus of the law should be on preventing exploitation and abuse rather than punishing love.

It therefore upheld a trial court judgement acquitting a man for the alleged offence of penetrative sexual assault under the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (PoCSO) Act.

In December 2014, a complaint was lodged with the police by the girl's father that his minor daughter had not returned home from tuition. An apprehension was raised against the man since he was also

Limit platform tickets' sale: HC to rlys

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, FEB. 19

The Delhi high court on Wednesday asked the Railways to examine the fixing of maximum passengers and sale of platform tickets — issues raised in a PIL over the recent stampede at the New Delhi Railway station.

A bench of Chief Justice D.K. Upadhyaya and Justice Tushar Rao Gedela asked the authorities concerned to state in its affidavit the details of measures on the issues.

"Let the issues raised in the petition be examined, as suggested by the solicitor general, at the highest level at the Railway board and thereafter an affidavit be filed by the respondent giving details of the decisions which might be taken by the Railway board," the court ordered.

Solicitor-general Tushar Mehta said the matter was not taken in an adversarial manner and the Railways was bound to follow the law.

He said there was an "unprecedented" situation and assured the court that the issues raised in the PIL would be considered at the highest level.

The court said the PIL was not confined to the

at the sprawling ground.

Special commissioner of police (law and order) Ravindra Yadav said that the Delhi police has been preparing for the event for the last two days.

He said managing traffic and parking around the venue would be challenging due to the high number of vehicles expected to reach there.

"Delhi commissioner of police Sanjay Arora visited the venue this morning. He personally reviewed the preparations. We are sure that we will manage the event smoothly," Mr Yadav said.

Another senior officer said the Delhi police is in touch with other security forces.

"Only authorised people will be allowed near the venue. We have also chalked out a traffic plan," he said.

The police said along with other emergency response teams, there will be multiple layers of barricades to ensure the safety and security of the dignitaries.

According to the police, commandos, quick reaction teams, PCR vans, anti-sabotage checks, and SWAT teams will be deployed at strategic locations while snipers will be positioned at high-rise buildings nearby.

After a debacle in the Delhi Assembly polls, AAP Delhi convener Gopal Rai on Wednesday convened a high-level meeting with the party's office-bearers to assess its electoral strategy. The party's all 70 Assembly presidents will submit a review report on the role and responsibilities of all declared office bearers in the election to the party's state office within the next ten days.

After the meeting, Mr Rai said: "In the meeting, each member presented an oral report of their respective constituency. The experiences of all participants in this election, along with their suggestions for the future, were discussed."

The AAP leader has directed the Assembly presidents to submit a detailed review report on the role of all officials in the Delhi elections. The findings will be discussed with AAP's chief Arvind Kejriwal, following which the top performers will be assigned

tasks and corrective action will be taken against those found lacking.

"It has been decided that before initiating the restructuring process of the organisation, a review report on the role and responsibilities of all declared office bearers in the election will be submitted by all the Assembly presidents to the party's state office within the next ten days," said Mr Rai.

Mr Rai said, "This is part of the restructuring process of the organisation. In the first phase, a review report will be collected from every constituency at the mandal level regarding office bearers and workers. Discussions will be held with Mr Kejriwal based on this report. In the next phase, responsibilities will be assigned to those who have demonstrated positive contributions."

As per the BJP's manifesto, under MMSY, all pregnant women will receive financial assistance of ₹21,000 along with six nutritional kits. — *PTI*

cial assistance of ₹50,000 to poor families for their daughters' marriages.

"Earlier, only widows received financial assistance of ₹30,000 under the Widow-Daughter Marriage Scheme to marry off their daughters. However, under the newly proposed MMKY scheme, girls from underprivileged backgrounds will also receive ₹50,000,"

the official explained. Additionally, the department is working on nutritional charts to prepare kits for pregnant women under the Mukhya Mantri Matritva Suraksha Yojana (MMSY).

As per the BJP's manifesto, under MMSY, all pregnant women will receive financial assistance of ₹21,000 along with six nutritional kits. — *PTI*

Gurgaon: Girl, 13, raped, beaten up by her neighbour

Gurgaon, Feb. 19: A 13-year-old girl was brutally raped and beaten up by her neighbour in Sector 29 area here, the police said on Wednesday. The girl's mother, in her complaint, alleged that at around 3 pm on Tuesday her daughter left home to meet her maternal grandmother. After sometime, she gets to know that her daughter did not reached there and they start searching for her.

"After two hours, I found my daughter in bad condition in the gallery near my rented room. She told me that their neighbour, Aryan, took her to his room and raped her," she alleged.

After raping the girl, he badly thrashed her and also threatened to kill her if she told anyone about the incident, the mother alleged, adding, "Soon after, the health of my daughter started deteriorating and she was rushed to hospital where she is undergoing treatment."

An FIR was registered at the Sector 29 police station on Tuesday and the accused was arrested today, a senior police officer said.

2 rape woman after making her friend on Insta

Gurgaon, Feb. 19: A woman was allegedly raped by two men here after they befriended her on Instagram, the police said on Wednesday. An FIR has been registered at the Sector 29 police station based on a complaint lodged by the woman, officials said.

The woman, a resident of Delhi, in her complaint alleged that she befriended Gajendra and Vikas around 25 days ago on Instagram, the police said.

During the conversation, the two behaved politely and gained her trust, they added.

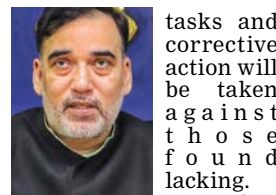
The woman's husband died due to Covid-19 and after befriending the accused she used to share her problems with them, the police said citing the complaint.

Taking advantage of her situation, the two lured her to Gurgaon and raped her. — *PTI*

The accused has confessed to the crime, the officer said. — *PTI*

After Delhi loss, AAP reviews poll strategy

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, FEB. 19



Gopal Rai

After a debacle in the Delhi Assembly polls, AAP Delhi convener Gopal Rai on Wednesday convened a high-level meeting with the party's office-bearers to assess its electoral strategy. The party's all 70 Assembly presidents will submit a review report on the role and responsibilities of all declared office bearers in the election to the party's state office within the next ten days.

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▶ **A PIL was also filed in the Supreme Court on February 17 — two days after the tragic incident that claimed 18 lives — and sought immediate action to prevent such disasters in the future**

recent incident of stampede as it sought implementation of the existing legal provisions with respect to the maximum number of passengers in a compartment and sale of platform tickets.

If the legal provisions were perhaps implemented adequately, such incidents of stampede could

be avoided, it added. The matter would come up on March 26.

A PIL was also filed in the Supreme Court on February 17 — two days after the tragic incident that claimed 18 lives — and sought immediate action to prevent such disasters in the future.

Filed by advocate Vishal Tiwari, the PIL sought direction to the Centre and other authorities for implementation and consideration of a 2014 report of the National Disaster Management Authority on "Managing Crowd at Events and Venues of Mass Gathering."

Six jump from 2nd floor to escape house fire in Nangloi

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, FEB. 19

In a bid to escape a fire, six people jumped from the second floor of a house in Nangloi's Janata Market area, an official of the Delhi fire services (DFS) said on Wednesday. The blaze, which broke out at 9:45 pm in domestic articles on the first and second floors, prompted a swift response from the firefighters, the DFS said in a statement.

According to fire officials, the distress call was received at 9:45 pm from Y-655, Mobile Market, Janata Market, under Jwala Puri jurisdiction, it read.

Three fire tenders were rushed to the scene and the fire was brought under control by 11 pm, it further stated.

However, six residents trapped on the second floor had no option but to jump to save their lives before the firefighters arrived.

The injured were identified as Pranjal (19), Preeti (40), Pankaj (40), Panav (18), Vaibhav (13) and Sweta (20), it further read. All were rushed to Pushpanjali Hospital for treatment. The incident took place on the night of February 17.

A video of the incident went viral on social media.

SHORT TAKES

SI held for beating WB medics and cops

Berhampore: A cop was arrested along with five others for allegedly beating doctors, nurses and policemen at a government hospital in West Bengal's Murshidabad. The accused, sub-inspector (SI) Ashrafur Sheikh, is a native of Dewansarai village in Laigola. In November 2024, he was shunted to the Birbhum district police headquarters and was subjected to a departmental inquiry after his removal as officer-in-charge (OC) of the Kirmahar police station for illegally confining a youth in the lockup and extorting ₹1 lakh from him. The action followed a complaint by the youth to chief minister Mamata Banerjee. On Tuesday night, Mr Sheikh admitted his ailing mother to Krishnapur Grameen Hospital in Laigola. He, however, attacked some on-duty doctors and nursing staff, accusing them of negligence in his mother's treatment.

Woman gets divorce from alcoholic hubby

Raipur: The Chhattisgarh high court on Wednesday granted divorce to a woman ending her 34-year-long marriage on the ground of her husband's excessive drinking habit and illicit relationship with other women. A division bench comprising Justice Rajani Dubey and Justice Narendra Kumar Vyas, while granting divorce to the woman, observed that 'The man indulged in excessive drinking and had illicit relationships with other women. He is not doing any work to support his family. Such irresponsible conduct of the respondent (the husband) is causing social infamy to the family. The HC overturned the family court's verdict and granted divorce to the woman.'

Student dies after scuffle in WB school

Kolkata: A class 10 student died after a scuffle with his classmate at a high school in West Bengal's Hooghly district on Wednesday, a senior police officer said. Abhinav Jalan (15) of Champdani Arya Vidyapith was declared dead by doctors of ESI Hospital where he was rushed, the officer added. Eyewitnesses claimed Jalan was punched on the chest by his classmate during the scuffle, following which he fainted and slumped to the ground. Former councillor of the local civic board Bikram Gupta said, "On hearing the commotion, we, along with school authorities, took the child to the hospital. But he could not be revived despite constant CPR (cardiopulmonary resuscitation) efforts and was declared dead." The boy's father, Ganesh Jalan, demanded action against the school authorities for their "failure to prevent the brawl among students which took away the life of his child." — PTI

'SHARAD & AJIT OPPOSED SHINDE AS CM IN 2019'

AGE CORRESPONDENT MUMBAI, FEB. 19

Senior Shiv Sena (UBT) leader Sanjay Raut on Wednesday claimed that Eknath Shinde was not made the chief minister in 2019 because of the objections from the NCP leaders Sharad Pawar and Ajit Pawar. Shiv Sena (then undivided) party chief Uddhav Thackeray had planned to make Eknath Shinde the chief minister of Maharashtra after the 2019 polls. But Sharad Pawar and his nephew Ajit Pawar had put a condition that senior leaders of their party would not work under Mr Shinde, after which Mr Thackeray had to take oath as the CM, Mr Raut said. His comments came against the backdrop of Mr Pawar felicitating Mr Shinde last week. Mr Shinde had also claimed that he rebelled against Mr Thackeray to free the Shiv Sena from the clutches of the Congress. However, Mr Raut countered his claims by saying that top leaders of the Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) refused to work under Mr Shinde as he was junior to them. "Sharad Pawar, who felicitated Shinde, had opposed his name for the CM post," Mr Raut said.



Sanjay Raut

'Will not tolerate disrespect to Kumbh, Sanatan Dharma'

Maha Kumbh symbol of India's cultural, spiritual heritage, says Yogi

Lucknow, Feb. 19: Uttar Pradesh chief minister Yogi Adityanath on Wednesday lambasted Opposition parties for their critical statements on the Maha Kumbh, saying their attempts to "malign" the event with false narratives and disrespect Sanatan Dharma will not be tolerated.

Speaking in the state Assembly, he said the Maha Kumbh was not just a religious event but a symbol of India's cultural and spiritual heritage, but the Opposition has been spreading "false propaganda", disregarding its significance.

Mr Adityanath assured full support to the devotees affected by the January 29 Maha Kumbh stampede and related road accidents in Prayagraj, while accusing Opposition parties, particularly the Samajwadi Party (SP) of politicising the tragedy. "They are trying to 'mislead people', but the state's BJP government is committed to making the event historic and grand, he said.



An aerial view of devotees at the Sangam in Prayagraj on Wednesday.

"Sanatan Dharma is the soul of India, and it is our duty to uphold its dignity. The Opposition's attempts to malign the Maha Kumbh with false narratives will not be tolerated," he said on the second day of the Budget Session.

Responding to statements made by Opposition leaders in the Assembly, he said they are trying to disrupt the sacred event with baseless allegations. He accused parties like the Samajwadi Party of attempting to create a confusion among the masses. Right since the beginning of Maha Kumbh, he said, the Opposition has been against it and is spreading baseless rumours. "They are distorting facts and calling the event a waste of money. Instead of discussing issues related to the event in the Assembly, they chose to disrupt the session," he said.

Citing social media posts made by Opposition leaders, he said their statements reflect their mindset and values. No civilised society could accept such language, he said. — PTI

52 Punjab cops dismissed from service for graft

Chandigarh, Feb. 19: Fifty-two Punjab police officials booked for corrupt practices have been dismissed from service in a week, director general of police Gaurav Yadav said on Wednesday.

The state top cop said the dismissed police personnel included those from the rank of constables to inspectors. "The message is very clear that black sheep in the police force will not be tolerated, and strict action will be taken against them," the state police chief said, adding the force is committed to the zero tolerance policy on corruption. Addressing the media here, Mr Yadav said the action is being taken in accordance with the instructions of the Punjab government issued on February 13, emphasising transparency, accountability and integrity in public service delivery. — PTI

Fadnavis: 12 Shivaji forts will be world heritage sites soon

Maha CM lauds Chhaava made on life of Maratha hero

AGE CORRESPONDENT MUMBAI, FEB. 19

Maharashtra chief minister Devendra Fadnavis on Wednesday announced that the state and Central governments are trying to get 12 forts associated with the life and times of Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj to figure in the list of Unesco world heritage sites.

Responding to public demand for tax exemption for Vicky Kaushal's film *Chhaava*, Mr Fadnavis pointed out that the state has abolished entertainment duty in 2017 itself. Praising *Chhaava* for not distorting history, Mr Fadnavis said the state government will consider other ways to help the film.

"Twelve forts associated with Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj will soon become world heritage sites," Mr Fadnavis said. The twelve



Devendra Fadnavis

forts include Salher Fort, Shivneri Fort, Lohgad Fort, Khanderi Fort, Raigad Fort, Rajgad Fort, Pratapgad Fort, Suvarnadurg Fort, Panhala Fort, Vijaydurg Fort, Sindhudurg Fort in Maharashtra and Gingee Fort in Tamil Nadu.

Mr Fadnavis and deputy chief ministers Eknath Shinde and Ajit Pawar attended various programmes to mark Shivaji Maharaj's birth anniversary, including the "cradle ceremony" at the Shivneri Fort.

MP CM targets Didi over Mrityu Kumbh remark

AGE CORRESPONDENT BHOPAL, FEB. 19

Madhya Pradesh chief minister Mohan Yadav on Wednesday slammed his West Bengal counterpart Mamata Banerjee for her "Mrityu Kumbh" remark, calling it "very low-grade language used for a sacred event like Maha Kumbh".

Seeking an apology from her for her remarks on Maha Kumbh Mr Yadav regretted that Ms Banerjee had used "low-grade language" to highlight the unfortunate incidents involving the festival.

"Using the term 'Mrityu Kumbh' to describe unfortunate incidents during Maha Kumbh amounts to insulting Hindu religion," he said, adding that it was a reflection of the West Bengal chief minister's mindset. The Holi break is from

■ Holi break March 10-15, SC to convene March 17

'Paucity of time': SC will hear pleas on CEC, ECs after Holi

RAKESH K. SINGH NEW DELHI, FEB. 19

The pleas against the appointments of Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) and election commissioner (EC) under the 2023 law that excludes the Chief Justice of India (CJI) as a member of the selection panel is expected to be taken up by the Supreme Court after the Holi break.

Earlier in the day, TMC MP Mahua Moitra had approached the apex court in support of the existing petitions challenging the constitutional validity of the CEC and Other Election Commissioners Act, 2023, which removed the CJI as a member from the selection panel for appointment of the top poll panel officials.

A bench of Justices Surya Kant and N. Kotiswar Singh on Wednesday indicated that the matter would be listed after the break of Holi festival, due to paucity of time, but did not assign a specific date for hearing the matter. The Holi break is from



New Chief Election Commissioner Gyanesh Kumar flanked by election commissioners Sukhbir Singh Sandhu (left) and Vivek Joshi while assuming office at Nirvachan Sadan in New Delhi on Wednesday. — PTI

March 10 to 15, and the SC will convene on Monday, March 17.

Appearing for petitioner NGO Association for Democratic Reforms, advocate Prashant Bhushan said it was an important issue that required an urgent consideration.

The matter involved a short legal question, as to whether the 2023 Constitution Bench verdict should be followed for the appointment of the CEC and ECs through a panel involving Prime

Minister, Leader of the Opposition and the Chief Justice of India or the 2023 law, which excludes the CJI from the panel, Mr Bhushan contended.

Justice Surya Kant told the counsel that he would be sitting in a special bench and the court had numerous matters listed before the Holi break.

Mr Bhushan urged the bench to list the matter on any day in the coming week and assured the petitioners would not take more than an hour to advance submissions.

PM will launch Soul conclave in Guj tomorrow

New Delhi, Feb. 19: Prime Minister Narendra Modi will inaugurate the first edition of the School of Ultimate Leadership (Soul) conclave here on February 21.

The PMO said he will also address the gathering, while Bhutan's Prime Minister Bhutan Dasho Tshering Tobgay will deliver the keynote address as the guest of honour.

"The two-day conclave will serve as a premier platform where leaders from diverse domains like politics, sports, arts and media, the spiritual world, public policy, business and the social sector will share their inspiring life journeys and discuss aspects relating to leadership," it said, adding the conclave will foster an ecosystem of collaboration and thought leadership, facilitating learning from both failures and successes. — PTI

Bittu's security, Chd cops come to blows

Chandigarh, Feb. 19: Heated arguments and a scuffle broke out on Wednesday between Union minister Ravneet Singh Bittu's security personnel and some Chandigarh policemen upon his return from near the official residence of Punjab chief minister Bhagwant Mann here.

Mr Bittu, Union minister of state for food processing industries and railways, reached close to the residence of Mr Mann here to meet him in connection with the cases registered against two of his supporters but he was not allowed to meet.

He was referring to the registration of FIRs against his close aide Rajiv Raja in an extortion case and his Patiala-based supporter Rajiv Attari under the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act.

Heated arguments broke out between Mr Bittu's security officials and the



Ravneet Singh Bittu

Chandigarh policemen, with the former accusing cops of blocking their vehicle's way.

It was alleged that a Chandigarh policeman attempted to pull out one of Mr Bittu's security staff from the vehicle he was driving. The security staff driving the vehicle shot back at the Chandigarh cop and said, "If anything untoward happens to the VIP, you will be responsible."

The Centre has given him the security and we have been sent by the MHA (ministry of home affairs)."

Later, some Chandigarh police officials were seen telling the Union minister that he was in public, his security was their responsibility and they were there only to ensure all security protocols were followed. — PTI

■ Does anyone offer *shraddhanjali* on jayanti? asks descendent

Rahul's Shivaji tribute post sparks row

BHAGWAN PARAB MUMBAI, FEB. 19

Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha and Congress leader Rahul Gandhi's tribute to Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj has sparked a major controversy. The BJP and other parties criticised Mr Gandhi for offering *shraddhanjali* to the legendary Maratha king on his birth anniversary.

The 395th birth anniversary of Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj was celebrated with great enthusiasm across the country, with people from all walks of life, including politicians and celebrities, extending their tributes to



Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge and party leaders Rahul Gandhi and K.C. Venugopal arrives for a party meeting in New Delhi on Wednesday. — PTI

the founder of the Maratha kingdom. However, Mr Gandhi found himself in controversy with his comments

on this occasion. In his tribute on social media, the Congress MP offered his *shraddhanjali* (homage) to Chhatrapati

Shivaji Maharaj instead of using the term *adaranajali* (respectful tribute), which is typically used on such occasions.

In his X post, Mr Gandhi said, "On the occasion of Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj's birth anniversary, I salute him and pay my humble *shraddhanjali*. With his courage and bravery, he inspired us to raise our voices with fearlessness and total dedication. His life will always be a source of inspiration for all of us."

The word *shraddhanjali* evoked criticism, with the BJP accusing Leader of the Opposition of showing disrespect to the Maratha king.

Will he oblige US SEC? Cong targets Modi in Adani case

AGE CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, FEB. 19

The Congress on Wednesday said Prime Minister Narendra Modi has already declared the Adani issue to be a personal matter and asked whether he would oblige the US Securities and Exchange Commission's (SEC) request in the ongoing probe against the business group.

The Opposition party's assertion comes after the SEC told a federal judge in New York that its efforts to serve its complaint on Gautam Adani and Sagar Adani in the alleged bribery scheme are "ongoing". This included a request for assistance from the Indian authorities.

The Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi, in a post on X, said, "If you ask questions in the country, there is silence. If you ask abroad, it is a personal matter! Even in America, Modi covered up Adani's corruption!"

"When filling a friend's pocket is 'nation building' for Modi, then bribery and looting the country's wealth becomes a 'personal matter'," he added.

Congress general secretary in-charge communications Jairam Ramesh said the SEC has just informed a New York district court that it has sought the assistance of the Modi government to serve complaints on the violations of US laws by Gautam Adani and some of his colleagues.

India, Malaysia to ramp up def ties, talk regional issues

AGE CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, FEB. 19

Defence secretary Rajesh Kumar Singh on Wednesday co-chaired the Malaysia-India Defence Cooperation Committee (MIDCOM) meeting in Kuala Lumpur to deepen existing collaboration, particularly in the defence industry, and maritime security between the two countries.

Secretary general of the ministry of defence Lokman Hakim Bin Ali represented the Malaysian side.

India and Malaysia exchanged the finalised terms of reference (ToR) on the establishment of a strategic affairs working group. This forum will act

as a consultative mechanism intermediate between the MIDCOM and the two sub-committees to progress all aspects of bilateral defence cooperation.

They also exchanged the finalised ToR on the establishment of the Su-30 forum as an outcome of MIDCOM. The Su-30 forum will enable closer cooperation between the two Air Forces in exchanging expertise and best practices in Su-30 maintenance.

Both sides expressed happiness at the growing bilateral defence cooperation with regular engagements between the two armed forces in recent years. The two sides held wide-

ranging discussions on effective and practical initiatives to expand bilateral defence engagements and regional and global issues. Both chairs identified steps to enhance cooperation in emerging areas such as cyber security and AI. They identified ways to deepen existing collaboration, particularly in the defence industry, maritime security, and multi-lateral engagements. They agreed to form a joint focus group to address non-traditional maritime security threats.

Both sides reaffirmed their commitment to fully implement the new initiatives under the defence pillar of comprehensive strategic partnership.

Student from J&K ragged in K'taka, 5 held

AGE CORRESPONDENT VIJAYAPURA, FEB. 19

A second-year MBBS student from Jammu and Kashmir studying at Al-Ameen Medical College in Karnataka's Vijayapura district was allegedly subjected to ragging and assault by five senior students, leading to their arrest.

Based on the victim's complaint, a case was registered at Vijayapura Rural Police Station under various sections of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS), including 115(2), 329(4), 352, 351(2), 189(2), 191(2), and 190, along with Section 116 of the Karnataka Education Act, 1983. The incident took place on the evening of February 18.

Shah, Nadda, Rajnath visit grand RSS office

New Delhi, Feb. 19: Home minister Amit Shah, defence minister Rajnath Singh and other BJP leaders, including party chief J.P. Nadda, visited the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh's new office here on Wednesday to participate in a conference held in the presence of the organisation's chief Mohan Bhagwat.

RSS national general secretary Dattatreya Hosabale was also present at the "karyakarta sammelan" at the office in Jhandewalan along with other senior functionaries of the organisation as well as office-bearers and volunteers, including those representing RSS affiliates.

The newly constructed high-rise complex, Keshav Kunj, has been

built over eight years at a cost of nearly ₹150 crore. According to sources, the three 13-storey towers with around 300 rooms and offices were built with contributions from over 75,000 people sympathetic to RSS ideology and its work.

The RSS' Delhi office along with that of some organisations associated with it have gradually shifted to the new high-rise complex over the past few months.

The RSS had been carrying out its activities out of rented premises since 2016 when the rebuilding and renovation exercise started at the place from where it had been working since 1962.

The new premises are a vast change from the earlier building. — PTI

SHORT TAKES

Class 8 student kills self in Bhopal hostel

Bhopal: A Class eight student allegedly committed suicide by hanging himself from the window of his hostel room here with the help of a towel, police said on Wednesday. The incident took place on Tuesday night. As per police, 14-year-old Vams Kushwaha, a student of an English medium school here, returned to his hostel room after his yoga class. His roommates found him hanging from the window with the help of a towel when they returned to the room from dinner on Tuesday and alerted the hostel warden about the incident, police said. The hostel warden then reported the matter to the police. The student committed suicide by hanging himself from the window of his hostel room and his body was sent for postmortem on Wednesday day, inspector in-charge of Parbalia police station Rohit Singh Nagar said. Police reportedly recovered a suicide note written in English which suggested some betrayal by someone, sources said.

3 more arrested in ISI espionage case

New Delhi: The NIA has arrested three more men for sharing sensitive information to Pakistan's intelligence operatives about Indian defence establishments at Karwar Naval Base and Kochi Naval Base. The arrests were made on Tuesday with the assistance of the local police in the Pakistani ISI-linked Visakhapatnam espionage case involving sensitive and classified Naval defence information, the central anti-terror probe agency said. While Vethan Laxman Tandell and Akshay Ravi Naik were picked up from Uttara Kannada district in Karnataka, Abhilash P.A. was arrested from Kochi in Kerala and with these, the total arrests in the case have gone up to eight.

NIA raids 3 states in Bihar FICN seizure

New Delhi: The National Investigation Agency on Wednesday raided multiple locations in three states in connection with a 2024 case of seizure of high-quality Fake Indian Currency Notes (FICNs) in Bihar. Extensive searches were conducted at five locations in Bihar and one each in J&K and Telangana as part of the NIA investigations into a fake currency racket operated by accused and suspects from Nepal by using crypto currency. "NIA teams conducted searches at the premises of accused and suspects in Patna, Bhagalpur, Bhojpur and Motihari districts of Bihar, Anantnag district of J&K, and in Hyderabad in Telang-ana and cash amounting to ₹1,49,400, along with digital devices including pen drives, mobile phones, SIM cards was seized during the searches. The team also recovered several incriminating documents," Central agency said.

Gen. Dwivedi: Pak presence near Chicken's Neck worrying

AGE CORRESPONDENT with agency inputs NEW DELHI, FEB. 20

The Army Chief Gen. Upendra Dwivedi on Wednesday expressed his concern over the reports about the presence of Pakistan Army and ISI officials in Bangladesh areas close to India's Chicken's Neck area. Expressing reservations over engaging the defence forces in a political slugfest, Gen. Dwivedi said that the Army should not be involved in politics. He was reacting to recent statement by Leader of Opposition Rahul Gandhi's in Parliament that the Chief of Army Staff has already stated that China has done incursion into Indian territory. Gen. Dwivedi said that Pakistan's agenda is not limited to Kashmir only. "I had used the word epicentre of terrorism for a particular country (Pakistan). Now those countrymen, if they go to any other place and they happen to be our neighbor, as far as I am concerned, I should be concerned about it. That they should not be able to use that soil to send terrorists to India," Gen. Dwivedi said. He said that India's military relationship is very strong with Bangladesh. "So, as far as they (Pakistan) are concerned, the idea of India is their major criticality. It's not limited to Kashmir only. So to keep Pakistan together, you have to have one common agenda which can keep you together. Is the language the same? Are the people the same? What is the same? Only anti-India stance. So therefore, Kashmir, they will keep hysing up at every point of time," he said.



Descendents of Maratha "Sardars" take part in celebrations on the birth anniversary of Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj in Pune on Wednesday.

U'khand govt clears stringent land laws

Fully committed to protect interests of people: Dhami

PRITHVIRAJ SINGH with agency inputs DEHRADUN, FEB. 19

The Uttarakhand Cabinet on Wednesday cleared the much-talked-about stringent land law to prevent non-state natives from buying large areas and agricultural lands in the hills of Uttarakhand. The people of the state had long been demanding the imposition of limits on individuals buying land in the state, officials said. Although the Pushkar Singh Dhami government did not share the details, officials informed that harsh provisions have been incorporated into the proposed land law to "maintain" the state's original identity and "protect" its resources. However, the law will be applicable in 11 districts of the state and has been kept out of the purview of Haridwar and Udham Singh Nagar districts. "Fully respecting the longstanding demand of

House goes digital, MLAs face issues

Dehradun: The Uttarakhand Assembly's move to go digital has not gone down well with legislators as they could not use their tablets beyond logging in. The Speaker had to organise a special training session for them to operate the tablets. The state Assembly went paperless for the first time on Tuesday when it launched "e-Vidhan Sabha" as part of the National e-Vidhan (e-NeVA) drive at the start of the Budget Session.

the people of the state and their sentiments, today, the Cabinet has approved a strict land law. This historic step will protect the resources of the state, cultural heritage and the rights of the citizens, as well as play an important role in maintaining the original identity of the

state," Mr Dhami said in a post on X soon after the Cabinet's decision.

"Our government is fully committed to protect the interests of the people and we will never let their trust get broken. This decision makes it clear that we will make every possible effort to protect our state and culture," the chief minister said.

An important provision in the law will be to create a portal for keeping records of purchasers from outside the state. The portal will have complete details of all the land purchases made by non-Uttarakhand natives.

Besides these provisions, under the new law, likely to be tabled in the House in the next two days, strict action will be taken against land buyers if they do not use the land purchased for the intended purpose. In addition, permission will not be granted for the purchase of more than 12.5 acres of land in the state.

3 others of same family tried to end life due to financial crisis 3 of family found dead in Kolkata home

RAJIB CHOWDHURI KOLKATA, FEB. 19

Two women and a teenaged girl of a family were found dead with their wrists slit under mysterious circumstances at their multi-storeyed house in Tangra of the city on Wednesday. The three deaths however came to light only after three male members of the family were injured when their car, in which they were travelling, dashed a pillar on EM Bypass near Ruby Crossing at dawn. The injured — Pranay Dey, his brother Prasun and his 10-year-old nephew Pratip — were admitted to a nearby private hospital while their car, a sedan, was impounded by the

police. Cops questioned them at the hospital later and stumbled upon shocking details.

Pranay and Prasun, who are middle aged, have a leather business. They told the police that they along with Pratip had tried to end their lives by rash driving that led to the road accident.

They also blamed poor financial conditions in their business behind their drastic step.

Further questioning revealed another horror at their home. Pranay and Prasun claimed to police that they had Payes (pudding) with sleeping pills at dinner with their wives and children on Tuesday. Later three female mem-

Armed forces recover automatic weapons 3 women among 4 Naxals killed in encounter in MP

RABINDRA NATH CHOUDHURY BHOPAL, FEB. 19.

Four Maoists including three women were on Wednesday gunned down in a forest in Madhya Pradesh's Balaghat district, bordering Chhattisgarh and Maharashtra, police said.

The encounter took place near the Raunda camp of Supkhar forest area when a joint search party comprising personnel of Hawk force, a counterinsurgency wing of Madhya Pradesh police, Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) and Combat Battalion for Resolute Action (CoBRA) came under attack by a group of armed Maoists camping in the jungle this morning, the police said.

"Acting on specific intelligence inputs on the presence of a group of armed Maoists in the forest area,

OVER TWO dozen senior Maoists have been killed in the separate anti-Naxal operations in Balaghat district in the last five years.

CM MOHAN YADAV hailed the security forces for the successful counterinsurgency operation

a joint search operation was launched by the security forces. An exchange of fire took place between them when the security forces came under attack by Maoists", Balaghat district additional superintendent of police Vijay Darbar said.

The joint team later recovered bodies of four Naxals including three women along with an INSAS rifle, one self-loaded rifle (SLR) and a .303 rifle at the encounter site, he added. Search operation was still on in

the area, police said.

The slain Naxals were yet to be identified. However, recovery of two automatic weapons suggests that at least two of the three deceased ultras might be senior Maoists, the police further mentioned.

The Maoists have of late started building bases in Balaghat jungles following pressures mounted on them in Bastar in Chhattisgarh and Gadchiroli in Maharashtra.

Over two dozen senior Maoists have been killed in the separate anti-Naxal operations in Balaghat district in the last five years.

Madhya Pradesh chief minister Mohan Yadav hailed the security forces for the successful counterinsurgency operation and vowed that the state would not allow Naxalism to grow on the soil of Madhya Pradesh.

Govt gives ₹1,554.99cr disaster aid for 5 states

AGE CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, FEB. 19

A high level committee chaired by Union home minister Amit Shah has approved ₹1,554.99 crores of additional Central assistance under the National Disaster Response Fund (NDRF) to five states which were affected by floods, flash floods, landslides and cyclonic storms during 2024.

Out of the total amount of ₹1,554.99 crores, ₹608.08 crores has been approved for Andhra Pradesh, ₹170.99 crores for Nagaland, ₹255.24 crores for Odisha, ₹231.75 crores for Telangana and ₹288.93 crores for Tripura, the home ministry said in a statement.

"The Modi government stands like a rock in support of the disaster-affected people. Today, the MHA approved an additional Central assistance of ₹1,554.99 crores to Andhra Pradesh, Nagaland, Odisha, Telangana, and Tripura under the NDR fund. This is in addition to the ₹18,322.80 crores released by the Centre to 27 states under the SDR fund," Mr Shah said in a post on X.

The high level committee approved Central assistance of ₹1,554.99 crores to five states from the NDRF, subject to an adjustment of 50 per cent of the opening balance for the year available in the SDRF, the ministry said.

Centre sends team to US to bring back Rana

Continued From Page 1 2012, Kasab, the lone surviving Pakistan terrorist, was hanged to death in Pune's Yerawada Jail, while Jundal is serving a life sentence. Rana too faces the death penalty in India.

Being a high-value catch, Rana's detention location in India will remain secret even though the case against him has been registered in Delhi.

A team of National Investigation Agency (NIA) will go to the United States along with other personnel drawn from various security agencies for the extradition.

The Indian mission in the United States will also be involved in the process.

Soon after the constitution of NIA in 2008 to investigate the Mumbai massacre, a team of officials had gone to the US to question Rana but was not given access by the New Jersey administration.

On the contrary, Kasab was given access several times to multiple US agencies.

Once in India, Rana's interrogation will be done by multiple agencies, led by the NIA, followed by his trial.

Kharge cracks the whip

Continued From Page 1

grassroots level from the booth to headquarters. You must bring in people who are ideologically committed and who have stood behind the party like a rock during difficult times." He also hinted at some more changes in the organisation, saying some changes have already taken place and some more are in the offing. Mr Kharge called for promoting people who are committed to the ideology of the Congress and "stand with us like a rock even in adverse circumstances". "Sometimes while attempting to strengthen an organisation, such people are brought in haste who run away in difficult times. We must stay away from such people," he told the party leaders.

In his inaugural address at the meeting, Mr Kharge said Delhi voted for change and lauded the efforts of the state leadership in putting up a good fight despite lack of resources.

At the meeting, the Congress presidents also flagged the issue of alleged "voter list manipulation" and claimed that it is happening on a large scale in elections. He noted that former Congress president Rahul Gandhi had also raised the issue in the Lok Sabha.

"All of you will realise that these days the names of our supporters are deleted from the voters list. Or the name is removed and added to the adjacent booth. New names are added by the BJP just before the election. This rigging has to be stopped at all costs," the Congress chief asserted. Mr Kharge pointed out that earlier the Chief Justice of India was also included in the selection committee of the Chief Election Commission (CEC) by the order of the Supreme Court, but the CJI was removed from the panel by the Modi government.

The Congress chief said the party leaders must raise issues of public interest in the next five years and strive to make the organisation emerge as the principal Opposition party in Delhi.

Hitting out at the BJP-led government, he said the Prime Minister failed to stop the insult of Indians deported from the USA. "Despite Modi JJ's visit, America is sending back Indian citizens handcuffed as before. Vegetarians were given non-vegetarian food. Our government also failed to protest this insult properly," Mr Kharge alleged.

"America is also hurting us deeply in economic matters. They imposed a reverse tariff on us, but the Prime Minister did not even protest against it. They are forcibly imposing a loss-making deal on us, which our government is silently accepting. This is clearly an insult to India and the people of India," the Congress chief claimed.

After the meeting, Congress general secretary Jairam Ramesh said that the party discussed organisational matters and also matters related to the Election Commission. He further added that the AICC session will be held in Gujarat in the first week of April.

"We will launch the Samvidhan Bachao Yatra in every state, district and block... We also had a discussion on the strengthening of the DCCs... We have already announced that 2025 is the year of organisational reforms," Mr Ramesh said. On the EC, the Congress general secretary said, "We believe that the gravest threat to Indian democracy comes now from the manner in which the EC is functioning. The manner in which the EC has been taken over by the PM and the Union home minister. All INDIA bloc parties are together on this. We will collectively articulate our position once the parliament reconvenes."

Relief to Sidda in Muda scam

Continued From Page 1

allotments to his wife by Muda. It may be recalled here along with social activists T.J. Abraham and Pradeep Kumar, Snehamayi Krishna, a resident of Mysuru city, petitioned governor Thaawarchand Gehlot seeking prosecution of the chief minister over 14 plots allotments made by Muda to his wife B.M. Parvathi. Muda officials allotted 14 compensatory plots to B.M. Parvathi in a posh locality in Mysuru in lieu of her losing 3.16 acres in Kesare in Mysuru taluk to Muda, which had developed the land without her consent. The 14 plots allotted to Ms Parvathi cost about ₹56 crores, which is more than the value of land lost by her. It was alleged that Mr Siddaramaiah had used his political influence to get his wife 14 plots in a posh locality.

After the special court exclusively to deal with sitting MPs/MLAs, Bengaluru, asked Lokayukta Mysuru sleuths to investigate the plot allotments to the CM's wife, Snehamayi Krishna moved the high court to transfer of investigation from the Lokayukta to the CBI, expressing doubts over the Lokayukta since it functions under the state government. However, the HC dismissed the petition to transfer the investigation to the CBI. Snehamayi Krishna stated he will not appeal in the Supreme Court on dismissal of his petition by the high court.

After Lokayukta sleuths registered an FIR against the CM and his family members, officials of the Directorate of Enforcement, Bengaluru, registered an Enforcement Case Information Report (ECIR) on charge of money laundering in the Muda plot allotments. Thereafter, B.M. Paravathi surrendered 14 plots allotted to her back to Muda. She said the decision to surrender 14 plots was her "voluntary" decision. Investigations by ED officials are under way.

Rekha Gupta Delhi's new CM

Continued From Page 1

(Purvanchali Thakur) are all set to take the oath as Cabinet ministers.

Expressing gratitude to the BJP leadership, Ms Gupta posted on X, "I extend my gratitude to the BJP top leadership and the legislative party for appointing me as the Chief Minister of Delhi. I am fully prepared to take on this responsibility and work towards the development of Delhi."

A seasoned BJP leader, Ms Gupta has had a long political career, starting from her leadership in student politics. Currently serving as the national vice-president of the BJP's women's wing, the 50-year-old leader won the Shalimar Bagh (North-West) seat in the just concluded Delhi Assembly elections, securing 68,200 votes.

A lawyer by profession, Ms Gupta's political journey began as the president of the Delhi University Students' Union from 1996 to 1997. She later turned to municipal politics, winning the Delhi municipal elections from Uttari Pitampura (Ward 54) in 2007 and successfully securing re-election in 2012 and 2022. The first-time MLA has also served as the chairperson of the education committee of the municipal corporation, further strengthening

her administrative credentials.

The BJP will now be having its second woman CM in Delhi exactly 9,578 days after Sushma Swaraj had resigned from the post in 1998. Ms Swaraj served as Delhi CM for just 52 days. She was brought in to replace then chief minister Sahib Singh Verma before the state polls as Delhi had been rocked by the skyrocketing prices of onions. In fact, Mr Verma too had replaced then chief minister Madan Lal Khurana, who had resigned less than 30 months after assuming power following allegations of corruption against him in the Jain hawala case.

The meeting of the freshly elected BJP legislators at the party's Delhi headquarters at 14 Pt Pant Marg was held in the presence of the BJP's central observers — Lok Sabha MP Ravi Shankar Prasad and national secretary Om Prakash Dhankar.

The central observers first held separate meetings with some of the newly elected MLAs before the legislative party elected Ms Gupta as its leader. Besides the new MLAs, the party's local MPs — Manoj Tiwari, Bansuri Swaraj and Ramvir Singh Bhiduri — were also present in the meeting.

New CM joined politics at DU, has RSS links

Continued From Page 1

welfare of women and children. She launched initiatives like the Sumedha Yojana, which supported economically weaker female students in pursuing higher education.

The 50-year-old legislator was elected councillor thrice — 2007-2012, 2012-17 and in 2022-2025 from Shalimar Bagh. As the head of the Women Welfare and Child Development Committee of the civic

body, she led empowerment campaigns for women. Mr Gupta also served as mayor of the South Delhi Municipal Corporation. She will be the fourth BJP CM in Delhi after Madan Lal Khurana, Sahib Singh Verma and Sushma Swaraj.

Following her swearing-in, Ms Gupta will be the only woman chief minister in any of the states currently ruled by the BJP.

THE ASIAN AGE

20 FEBRUARY 2025

Trump's 1st month as Prez marked by global anarchy

In a month into his second term in office, US President Donald Trump has done more towards disrupting the world order than many leaders may have in a lifetime. Along the way he has also made it appear as if he can make a couple of wars go away though his motives are suspect in why he wants Ukraine to agree to a peace deal because his eye may be on that nation's natural resources in rare metals.

In a flurry of executive orders that came at the speed of light, Trump rained distortion on global trade, showed utter disdain for expert opinions, appointed his favourites to carry out tasks in dealing with groups of people like federal workers, illegal immigrants and transgenders, and demonstrated hatred for a clutch of ideas like diversity, equity and inclusivity while not hiding his dislike for countries he thinks has been putting one over the US.

In sprinkling tariffs on friends and foes alike he may invite the very inflation on rising levels of which he vaulted to power. But, in his autocratic style, he has shown a willingness to overturn conventional wisdom on economics and politics to present his and his team's own version of an alternate reality. If the present appears to be a dangerous moment for the world, so be it.

Trump has also done the unconventional in trying to bury the hatchet with Russia and Vladimir Putin while caring a lot less for the traditional allies of the US like the UK, the EU and fellow countries in US-led Nato. Seeing enemies in anyone and anything he considers antithetical to his point of view, Trump has pulled the US out of global institutions like WHO and reneged on the Paris accord and on the need to combat climate change.

In sprinkling tariffs on friends and foes alike he may invite the very inflation on rising levels of which he vaulted to power. But he has also shown a willingness to overturn conventional wisdom on economics and politics.

A new order of things may have already been developing in a bipolar world in which China aspires to compete with the US, but what the US President is trying to impose is a Trump world order. This is reflected in his atavistic throwback to imperialism in his bluster for territory like Greenland and Canada and his zeal to take back control of the Panama Canal while eyeing the waterfront of the Gaza Strip like the real estate mogul from which avatar he metamorphosed into the leader of the free world.

In his engagements with the world, Trump has made it clear that the US would no longer fulfil treaties and commitments, including those that can be said to be in American interest, if he does not get the deals he is looking for, regardless of how deferential or dependent the other nation may have been in its dealings with the US.

At home, Trump is allowing wealthy private interests to influence, even run government policy, tearing asunder many institutions on the grounds of saving the government needless expenditure. America's checks and balances and its set of rights and individual freedoms and promise of equal justice are clearly under threat. While that is a problem for the US, what a previously favoured trading nation like India must do is to find ways to get around this transactional president's tactical moves in reciprocal trade matters.

A month under Trump 2.0 has seemed more like a year of cataclysmic events as he has turned Washington upside down and tries to redo the existing world order while inflicting pain on many old allies and strategic partners. Learning to live with Trump is going to be the biggest challenge, no matter that he is regarded as a maverick or an "America First" leader. And interesting times are just starting.

Move carefully on Qatar FTA

The decision of India and Qatar to deepen economic ties between them will be mutually beneficial and augurs well for regional security in both West Asia and South Asia. While closer ties with Qatar, the largest supplier of liquefied natural gas (LNG) and liquefied petroleum gas (LPG), offer energy security to India, unrestricted access to the Indian market will allow Qatar to benefit from the economic rise of the world's fifth largest economy.

Qatar is expected to invest \$10 billion in India, after it remained a low participant in the country's economic success as it had invested a partly sum of \$1.5 billion in the last 24 years. Bilateral trade has also declined to \$14 billion in 2023-24 from \$18.77 billion in 2022-23 and the countries aim to double the trade to \$28 billion.

During the talks between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Qatar's Emir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani, both countries have agreed on signing an agreement to avoid double taxation. Both the countries have also decided to explore the possibility of entering into a Free Trade Agreement (FTA). India has already established strategic partnerships with the UAE, Saudi Arabia, Oman and Kuwait.

However, India should tread carefully on the free trade proposal with Qatar as the Gulf nation is strong in the petrochemical sector as it could impact the Indian petrochemical industry adversely. As Qatar has free trade deals with other countries like China, among others, officials should ensure that the Chinese importers do not use Qatar as a conduit to export their products into India.

It is obvious that every country wants to trade with the fifth largest market in the world. However, India must not give in to their demands without extracting concrete promises to invest in the upgradation of the Indian industries.

THE ASIAN AGE

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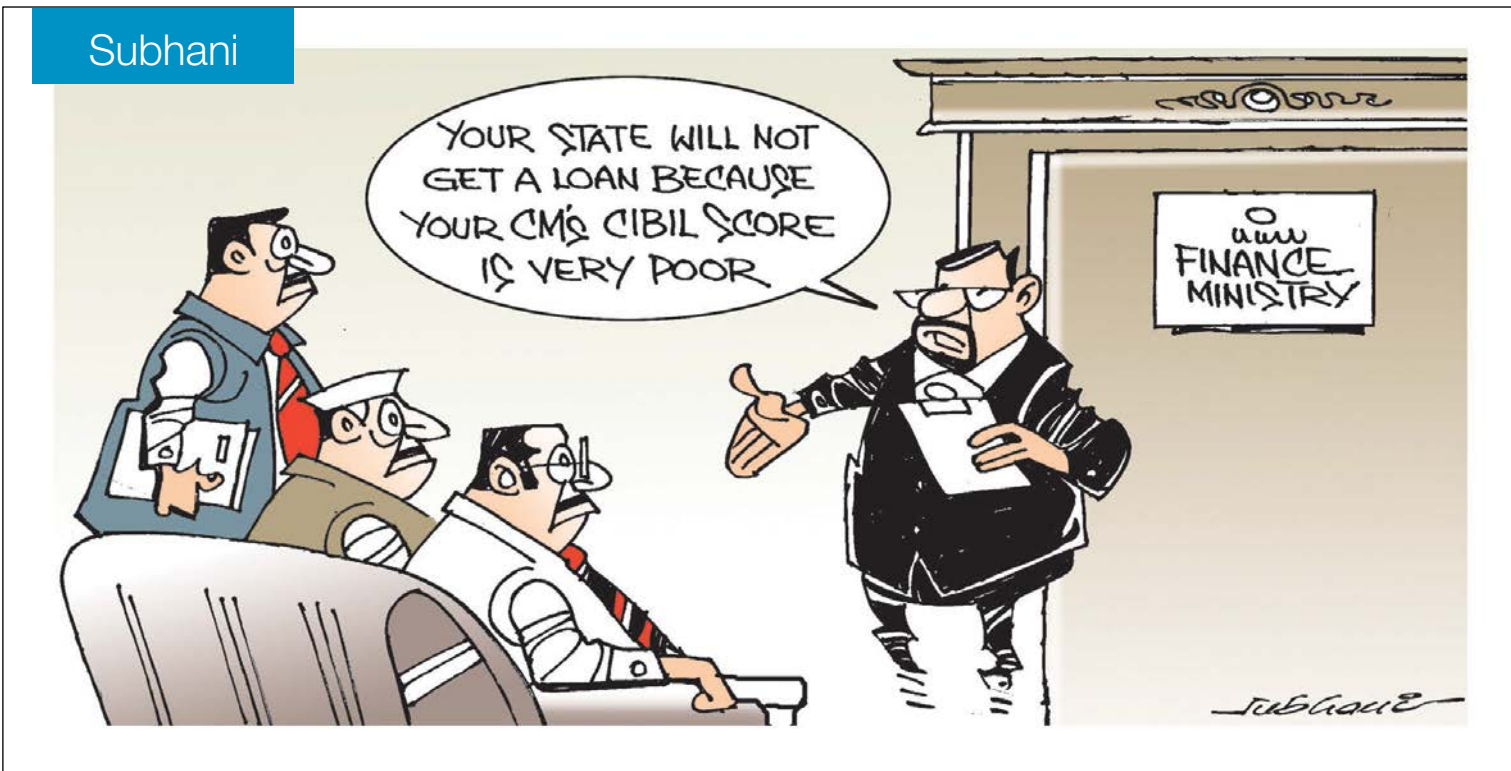
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Subhani



J&K to B'desh: India needs to watch its hybrid threats



Syed Ata Hasnain

With much happening in the strategic security environment from the moment of the imminence of the arrival of Trump 2.0, there have been worldwide efforts towards finding the sweet spots which will deliver security and stability in the new Donald Trump era. Fortunately, India is one of those nations which has continuity in government with a history of good relationship with US President Donald Trump. It is thus simpler to come to terms with the emerging readjustment and not be perturbed by anything outlandish. Yet, as the world re-adjusts and large conflicts and standoffs start to cool and heat, many bubbles below the surface could also get re-energised. That is why it's important for India to keep reviewing its older conflicts, now perceived as smaller conflicts, which may seemingly have stabilised but need only a few sparks to bring to life.

I usually have an eye focused on the map of Jammu and Kashmir and what I see today does not make me happy except the relative lack of political turbulence, which is good for the Union territory's social and economic well-being. I am equally concerned about recent developments in Bangladesh. There is no concrete evidence to prove it, but when Bangladesh engulfed itself in flames on August 5 last year, our attention for long had been on the Jammu region of J&K. Many of us had then felt that with Pakistan's economy teetering and its state of politics none too stable either, there was hardly a possibility that it could risk crossing the Rubicon by initiating something outrageous — a big terrorist action, for example. Pakistan, instead followed a smart strategy of

small contact operations involving hit-and-run strikes by well-trained terrorists with purportedly a mix of regulars, in a terrain of its choice where several deployment voids of our security forces existed. That kept things going for Pakistan, the bleeding process drawing ire in India, some redeployment and considerable heartburning. It was all a part of the infamous "thousand cuts" strategy of Gen. Zia-ul Haq, who had sworn retribution against India for the loss of Bangladesh. Was it coincidence then, that on India's other flank, Bangladesh came into meltdown shortly thereafter, creating India's potential third front — a gleeful development for the "Deep State" in Pakistan and perhaps "Deep State" elements in the Biden administration in the United States, none too happy with India's rise. The then US establishment perhaps chose to use the Pakistan proxy to overthrow Sheikh Hasina and risk emplacement of a stopgap Islamist rule. It was the age-old strategy; the whole Jammu affair stank of being a Pakistani ruse to divert attention to achieve something strategic elsewhere: Bangladesh.

When things start to happen and are of a nature quite similar to those that happened in the Jammu region in 2024, hackles in India should go up. In this month itself my hackles are already touching the collar as I observe first a series of pinprick-like contacts in Kashmir — a former soldier kidnapped and killed, attempts to deliberately provoke the security forces, ceasefire violations, unexplained breaches of the Line of Control, a defeated action of a "border action team" in sync with the ominous landmark of February 5 and the planting of IEDs close to the LoC fence, with mine casualties occurring on our side. Six

How does this latest Pakistani strategy work? Its intent is to keep the Indian intel & security establishment on tenterhooks through activation of J&K with small acts while keeping India's attention focussed on Bangladesh...

to eight months ago the Jammu region was on fire, then with a group of suspected Pakistani regulars operating with impunity; and then all went quiet. The recurrence of a foiled BAT incident, again with some Pakistani regulars, reflects the intent of upping the ante. We should examine these events in the light of other developments in Pakistan and Bangladesh. Pakistan's relationship with Afghanistan is worsening, with both the Durand Line and the western tracts all under tension. Internally the political scene is once again inching towards potential chaos, with Imran Khan's incarceration and the deep political fragmentation. The Pakistani "Deep State" is perceptibly losing confidence with the predicament it finds itself in, but it's also gaining confidence with the developments in Bangladesh, where the seeds of turbulence and anti-India sentiments were sown by it, to be reaped at an opportune moment. That moment is now.

Noticeably, the six-month anniversary of the August 5 Dhaka meltdown coincided with this year's Kashmir Solidarity Day. On February 5, protesters in Dhaka attacked and demolished the residence of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the nation's founding leader and father of ousted Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina. There was no trigger for a renewed effort at bringing the streets to boil but yet violence began and a number of urban hubs once again saw the targeting of minorities. That remains a sensitive issue which touches a raw nerve in India, where the majority remains peeved by the lackadaisical approach towards the safety of

minorities. Instigated by pro-Pakistan radical elements, this appears to form a part of a larger strategy to create antipathy and pressure on the Indian government. The interim government in Bangladesh does not have the capability to curb this effectively through Operation Devil Hunt, which has been launched by the security elements.

How does this latest Pakistani strategy work? Its intent is to keep the Indian intelligence and security establishment on tenterhooks through activation of J&K with small acts while keeping India's attention rooted towards Bangladesh with inimical acts and gestures from time to time. The hybrid conflict that Pakistan has been fighting against India has just expanded with "touch points" identified which would have ramifications on the Indian security psyche; the visit of the ISI delegation to Rangpur, close to the Siliguri Corridor, is a case in point. This hybrid strategy is yet in the experimental phase with small actions with intent of studying response. Geographical expansion of the strategy from J&K to Bangladesh is bound to also witness an enhancement of the level of pressure through bolder acts with an unpredictable nature.

While Prime Minister Narendra Modi correctly touched upon Bangladesh in his talks with President Donald Trump, the intricate connections of hybrid war in the subcontinent are extremely difficult to explain and appreciate. Diplomatic efforts at putting pressure on Pakistan through US linked leverage must continue with vigor. However, most importantly, this emerging strategy of Pakistan must be waged at the strategic level and counters and leverages found to neutralise these efforts which aim to tie down India in a web of non-issues and divert our aim from the larger aim of nation-building.

The writer, a retired lieutenant-general, is a former GOC of the Srinagar-based 15 ("Chinar") Corps

LETTERS

MISLEADING OPTIMISM

A new study report shed light on the realities of employment generation in India. Niti Aayog defines gig workers as those who labour outside of the traditional employer-employee structure, and their number has surpassed one crore. This figure is expected to reach two crores and 35 lakhs by 2030. Now 97.6 per cent of such workers earn less than five lakh rupees per year. In fact, 77.6 per cent make less than ₹2.5 lakh. There are barely 2.6 per cent earning between ₹5 lakhs and ₹7.5 lakhs annually and they are employed in gig-based software development. At least 21 per cent work over 12 hours every day. None of them are eligible for any form of social security.

Amrapali Roy
Jamshedpur

U.S., RUSSIA BHAI BHAI

US PRESIDENT Donald Trump's recent shift on Ukraine has shocked President Volodymyr Zelenskyy and European leaders, as he criticised Ukraine's negotiation efforts and implied they should have made concessions to Russia before the 2022 invasion. This marks a major departure from the previous US policy of isolating Russia, raising concerns about Ukraine's sovereignty and the broader peace process. In response, European allies are rethinking their security strategies, while Zelenskyy has firmly stated that Ukraine will not accept any peace negotiations such as the one being planned in Saudi Arabia that exclude it.

Amarjeet Kumar
Hazariabagh

'NO-FLY' AIRPORT

IT IS UNUSUAL to find survivors in an air crash. Therefore, it is nothing less than a miracle to find all 80 passengers on a Delta Airlines survive with just minor injuries when it turned turtle at Toronto airport. There are reports of passengers hanging like bats when the plane turned upside down. There has been very few instances in aviation history where a plane has landed on its roof and this happens only when one wing of the plane is missing. Weather conditions may have not been conducive to flying but surely planes have been designed to withstand nature's elements. Let us join those in the plane and their families in thanking the Fates for this miraculous deliverance.

Anthony Henriques
Mumbai

Dilip Cherian
Dilli Ka Babu



Will change of guard lead to a new dawn for Delhi's babus?

With the AAP's dramatic downfall and the BJP's resounding victory, Delhi's civil servants finally seem to be breathing easy. Having a 'double-engine' government — one that aligns both the Centre and Delhi — provides clarity in both means and objectives. Over the past decade, since AAP took charge in Delhi while the BJP held sway at the Centre, bureaucrats often found themselves in an uncomfortable limbo. Navigating the tense political dynamics between the two powerhouses wasn't exactly a cakewalk.

Now, with the ministry of home affairs (MHA) controlling the AGMUT cadre officers, along with DANICS and DANIPS officers, bureaucrats have a more streamlined command structure. No more second-guessing which way the political winds are blowing. The Delhi government, likely to function as an extended arm of the Centre, may not have the autonomy it once claimed, but at least the bureaucrats can go about their work without walking a political tightrope. And with a fresh pay commission and income tax relief in the bag, there's a tangible silver lining.

Meanwhile, Delhi chief secretary Dharmendra has wasted no time in setting the ball rolling for a bureaucratic house cleaning. Even before the new government formally takes charge, all department heads have been ordered to compile a list of AAP-

era appointments — specifically those who were allegedly handpicked party members and ministerial aides given cushy non-official posts in possible violation of rules.

With a consolidated government in place, the message is clear: The days of political ambiguity for Delhi's civil servants are over. Whether this ushers in an era of smoother governance or just another round of political manoeuvring remains to be seen.

B.V.R. SUBRAHMANYAM STAYS ON AT NITI AAYOG

The appointments committee of Cabinet (ACC) has decided to stick with experience, extending B.V.R. Subrahmanyam's tenure as CEO of Niti Aayog for another year beyond February 2025. A veteran bureaucrat with a track record spanning governance, trade, and strategic policymaking, Mr Subrahmanyam's extension signals continuity at India's top policy think tank. But is continuity always a good thing?

On the one hand, his leadership ensures stability. Having handled complex policy challenges, from Jammu & Kashmir's administration to India's commerce strategy, he brings deep institutional knowledge. His supporters argue that in a rapidly evolving economic landscape, a steady hand at Niti Aayog is essential.

On the other hand, some question whether this move stifles fresh thinking. India's policy ecosystem thrives on innovation, and a shake-up at the top sometimes brings in new energy. Critics argue that a more dynamic approach — perhaps someone from outside the bureaucratic machinery — could push Niti Aayog into new territory.

Ultimately, the extension suggests the government is prioritising experience over experimentation. Whether that's a masterstroke or a missed opportunity will unfold over the next year. The real test? Whether Niti Aayog can continue shaping policies that keep pace with India's aspirations — or simply maintain the status quo.

THE AC OFFICE SYNDROME

Telangana CM A. Revanth Reddy stirred the pot recently with his candid remarks about the state of the administration. Addressing a gathering at the IAS Officers' Institute in Begumpet, he lamented that some district collectors today seem reluctant to step out of their air-conditioned offices and engage with the people they serve. It's an unfortunate reality and one that raises serious concerns about the evolving role of civil servants.

Gone are the days, Mr Reddy pointed out, when IAS officers would thoroughly brief political leaders on the pros and cons of policy decisions. Instead, he suggested, many bureaucrats now pri-

oritise pleasing their political bosses, sometimes even encouraging them down misguided paths. That's not governance — it's groupthink with a dangerous ripple effect.

This shift begs the question: Have we institutionalised a culture where career progression trumps public service? Bureaucrats of an earlier era, like retired officer M. Gopalakrishna (in whose honour the book launch was held), were known for their hands-on approach. They spent time in the field, understood ground realities, and served as the bridge between the government and the governed. Today, many officers seem more at home with PowerPoint presentations than public grievances.

Of course, not all babus fit this mould. There are still those who walk the extra mile, defying the "file-pushing" stereotype. But Mr Reddy's remarks are meant to serve as a wake-up call. Governance isn't about paperwork alone, it's about people. And if the system rewards deference over diligence, then we have a bigger problem on our hands than just a few officers preferring their AC cabins over the summer heat.

Love them, hate them ignore them at national peril, is the babu guarantee and Dilip's belief. Share significant babu escapades dilipcherian@hotmail.com.

SHORT TAKES

KISHIDA ATTACKER
SENTENCED TO 10
YEARS IN JAIL

Tokyo, Feb. 19: A Japanese court on Wednesday convicted a man who threw a homemade pipe bomb at Japan's former Prime Minister Fumio Kishida at a 2023 campaign event, sentencing him to 10 years in prison, court officials said.

Ryuji Kimura, 25, was found guilty of attempted murder in the April 15, 2023 attack on Kishida, that happened at a small fishing port in the western city of Wakayama.

He was also guilty of four other crimes, including violations of laws on explosives and other weapons.

DRUG KINGPIN
SHOT DEAD IN
LANKA COURT

Colombo, Feb. 19: A noted underworld figure died after he was shot on Wednesday morning within the court premises sending shock waves through the judicial district of Hulftsdorp, a suburb of Colombo.

Noted criminal suspect Ganemulle Sanjiwa died after admission to the hospital, Dr Rukshan Bellana, director of the National Hospital said.

Sanjiwa was brought for a hearing to the main magistrate's court from the prison at the southern town of Boossa when he was shot at by a gunman, who was present at the hearing disguised as a lawyer.

PHILIPPINES' V-P
CHALLENGES
IMPEACHMENT

Manila, Feb. 19: Philippine Vice-President Sara Duterte has asked the Supreme Court to nullify an impeachment complaint against her, making her first legal move to fight the case that could lead to her removal and lead to a lifetime ban from public office.

The lower house impeached Duterte on February 5 on accusations such as budget anomalies, amassing unusual wealth and an alleged threat to the lives of Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos Jr.

Duterte is seen as a strong candidate for the 2028 presidential election.

IRAN LAWMAKERS
MOVE TO SACK
ECONOMY MIN.

Tehran, Feb. 19: Iran's Parliament on Wednesday received a motion from lawmakers seeking to dismiss economy minister Abdolnaser Hemmati amid a sharp decline of the rial.

Under Iranian law, Hemmati must appear before the legislature within 10 days to defend his record in a session that could result in his removal.

Ahmad Naderi, a Tehran MP and member of the Parliament's presiding board, said 91 lawmakers had signed the motion. It follows closed-door talks between President Masoud Pezeshkian and Hemmati with MPs over the plunging rial.

150 STUDENTS
INJURED AFTER
B'DESH CLASHES

Dhaka, Feb. 19: More than 150 students have been injured in Bangladesh during clashes at a university campus, a sign of serious discord between groups instrumental in fomenting a national revolution last year.

Tuesday afternoon's clashes began after the youth wing of the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) sought to recruit students at the Khulna University of Engineering and Technology in the country's southwest.

That sparked a confrontation with members of Students Against Discrimination who led the uprising that ousted ex-premier Sheikh Hasina.

BOUNTY OFFERED
FOR MOSQUITOS
— DEAD OR ALIVE

Manila, Feb. 19: A village in the densely populated Philippine capital region launched a battle against dengue on Wednesday by offering a token bounty to residents for captured mosquitos — dead or alive.

The unusual strategy adopted by the Addition Hills village in Mandaluyong City reflects growing concern after the nearby city of Quezon declared an outbreak of the mosquito-borne illness over the weekend. Eight more areas reported an upsurge in cases of the potentially deadly viral infection.

Musk is enforcer-in-chief, says Trump

Hails tech billionaire's zeal in implementing executive orders he has issued since returning to office

Washington, Feb. 19: US President Donald Trump painted Elon Musk as his enforcer-in-chief on Tuesday, hailing the tech billionaire's zeal in implementing the blizzard of executive orders the president has issued since returning to office.

In a joint interview broadcast on Fox News, the two men spent substantial time singing the other's praises and dismissing concerns that Trump is overstepping his executive powers. Trump has signed scores of executive directives in the past three weeks, many of which have been challenged in the courts as potentially unconstitutional.

Billionaire Musk, who was Trump's top donor during his 2024 presidential campaign, was tasked with leading the newly-created department of government efficiency (DOGE), with the declared goal of rooting out "waste, fraud and abuse" in federal spending.

"One of the biggest functions of the DOGE team is just making sure that the presidential executive orders are actually carried out," Musk told Fox News.

In the interview, Trump insisted his policies — including a wholesale onslaught on federal institutions — should be implemented without delay and said Musk was instrumental in pushing them forward.

"You write an executive order and you think it's done, you send it out, it doesn't get done. It doesn't get implemented," Trump said. He added that Musk and DOGE team have now become an enforcement mechanism within the federal bureaucracy to enact his administration's agenda without anyone standing in their way. — AFP



Palestinians who fled the Israeli military operation in the Nur Shams refugee camp arrive at a temporary shelter for displaced people in the West Bank town of Anabta, near Tulkarem. — AP

Hamas says ready
to free all hostages

Gaza City, Jerusalem, Feb. 19: Hamas signalled on Wednesday that it was willing to free all remaining hostages held in Gaza in a single swap during the next phase of the ceasefire agreement.

An Israeli official said that PM Benjamin Netanyahu has appointed a close confidant to lead negotiations for the second stage of the ceasefire with Hamas. The US-born Ron Dermer is a Cabinet minister who's widely seen as Netanyahu's closest adviser.

Israel and Hamas are currently in the process of implementing phase one of the fragile Gaza

truce, which has held since taking effect on January 19 despite accusations of violations on both sides.

Israel's foreign minister said on Tuesday that talks would begin "this week" on the second phase, which is expected to lay out a more permanent end to the war.

"We have informed the mediators that Hamas is ready to release all hostages in one batch during the second phase of the agreement, rather than in stages, as in the current first phase," senior Hamas official Taher al-Numu said while speaking to AFP. — AFP

7 Punjabis gunned
down in Pakistan

Quetta, Feb. 19: Gunmen in volatile southwest Pakistan shot seven bus passengers dead after identifying them as being from another region, officials said on Wednesday.

Security forces have been battling sectarian, ethnic and separatist violence for decades in impoverished but mineral-rich Balochistan, which borders Afghanistan and Iran.

Attacks on security forces and ethnic groups have sharply increased in the past few years, especially against labourers from Punjab, the country's most populous and prosperous province and also a major recruitment base for the military.

Attackers late on Tuesday burst the tyres of a bus that was travelling through Balochistan close to the border with Punjab,

IMRAN OFFERED
DISQUALIFICATION
OVERTURN DEAL

Islamabad, Feb. 19: A key ally of Imran Khan has said that an offer was being made to the jailed former prime minister for the nullification of his disqualification, amid reports of the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf seeking backdoor talks with the establishment. Sahibzada Hamid Raza, the chief of Sunni Ittehad Council (SIC), made the claim during Geo News' programme "Capital Talk", on Tuesday. — PTI

Saadat Hussain, a senior government official in the area, said. — AFP



US President Donald Trump delivers remarks at his Mar-a-Lago resort in Palm Beach, Florida, on Tuesday. — AFP

FIRED BY MISTAKE, NOW RE-HIRED

● THE DEPARTMENT of agriculture is trying to re-hire several employees it accidentally fired at the weekend who were working on the US response to bird flu, local media reported.

● THE SENATE confirmed wealthy financier Howard Lutnick as commerce secretary on Tuesday, putting in place a staunch supporter of President Donald Trump's hardline trade policies.

THE TRUMP administration is giving America's schools and universities two weeks to eliminate diversity initiatives or risk losing federal money, raising the stakes in the President's fight against "wokeness".

Why give \$21 mn to India: Trump

New York, Florida, Feb. 19: President Donald Trump questioned the purpose of providing \$21 million to India for voter turnout as he reiterated that the US "can hardly get in there" because of high Indian tariffs.

Trump also said "India is one of the highest taxing countries in the world".

He made these remarks after Elon Musk-led DOGE's (department of government efficiency) disclo-

sed that USAID contributed \$ 21 million to Election Commission for boosting voter turnout.

On February 16, DOGE, led by billionaire SpaceX CEO Musk, listed items on which the US taxpayer dollars were going to be spent and the list included \$21M for voter turnout in India.

DOGE noted that all of the items have been cancelled. The list also included \$29 million to "strengthening political landscape

in Bangladesh, \$20 million for "fiscal federalism" and \$19 million for "biodiversity conversation" in Nepal as well as \$47 million for "improving learning outcomes in Asia."

While signing executive orders on Tuesday, Trump said, "...And \$21 million for voter turnout in India. Why are we giving \$21 million to India? They got a lot of money there. One of the highest taxing countries in the world in terms of

300 deportees from US
detained in Panama hotel

Panama City, Feb. 19: Panama is detaining in a hotel nearly 300 people from various countries deported under US President Donald Trump, not allowing them to leave while waiting for international authorities to organise a return to their countries.

More than 40 per cent of the migrants, authorities say, won't voluntarily return to their homeland. Migrants in the hotel rooms held messages to the windows reading "Help" and "We are not save (sic) in our country."

The migrants hail from 10 Asian countries, including Iran, India, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Pakistan, Afghanistan, China and others. The US has difficulty deporting directly to some of those countries so Panama is being used as a stopover. Costa Rica was expected to receive a similar flight of



Two out of 300 people from various countries deported under US President Donald Trump are seen detained in a Panama hotel. — AP

third-country deportees on Wednesday.

Panama's security minister Frank Abrego said on Tuesday the migrants are receiving medical attention and food. Panama has agreed to serve as a "bridge" or transit country for deportees, while the US bears all the costs. The

deal was announced earlier this month after US secretary of state Marco Rubio's visit. Panamanian President Jose Raul Mulino, who faces pressure over Trump's threats of retaking control of the Panama Canal, announced the arrival of the first of the deportation flights. — AP

U.S. TO FIRE BIDEN-ERA ATTORNEYS

Washington, Feb. 19: President Donald Trump said on Tuesday that he has ordered the firing of all remaining US attorneys nominated by his predecessor Joe Biden.

A federal judge declined on Tuesday to immediately block billionaire Elon Musk and the department of government efficiency from accessing government data systems or participating in worker layoffs.

"Over the past four years, the department of justice has been politicised

like never before," Trump posted on his Truth Social platform. "Therefore, I have instructed the termination of ALL remaining 'Biden Era' US Attorneys," he said.

"We must 'clean house' IMMEDIATELY, and restore confidence," Trump added. "America's Golden Age must have a fair Justice System — THAT BEGINS TODAY!" It is standard practice for an incoming president to replace the federal prosecutors. — Agencies

Zelenskyy says US Prez living
in Russian disinformation space

Kyiv, Feb. 19: Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy on Wednesday said Donald Trump was living in a Russian "disinformation space", responding to scathing comments by the US President that Zelenskyy's popularity rating is four per cent.

"Unfortunately, President Trump, who we have great respect for as leader of the American people ... lives in this disinformation space," Zelensky told reporters in Kyiv, accusing Moscow of misleading Trump. Calling for presidential elections in Ukraine, which are banned under martial law, Trump said Tuesday of Zelenskyy: "He's down at four per cent approval rating".

Zelensky said the figure "comes from Russia".

Zelenskyy also said he wanted to get solid security guarantees from Kyiv's Western partners that would enable the war with Russia to end in 2025.

"We want security guarantees this year, because

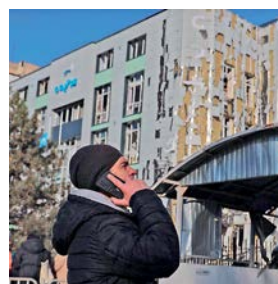
we want to end the war this year," he said during a press conference in Kyiv.

A telephone poll of 1,000 people by the respected Kyiv International Institute of Sociology, published on Wednesday, found that 57 per cent of respondents trusted Zelenskyy, while 37 per cent did not and the rest were undecided.

Trump's comments came after the US and Russian foreign ministers held talks in Saudi Arabia — their first since Russia invaded Ukraine in February 2022 — on resetting relations and finding a way to end the conflict.

Kyiv and its European allies have become alarmed at being cut out of the process with Russia to end the conflict.

Keith Kellogg, the US special envoy for Ukraine and Russia, arrived in Kyiv on Wednesday for talks with Zelenskyy and military commanders, as the US shifted its policy away from years of efforts to isolate Putin.



A man stands near a damaged hospital after a Russian drone strike in Odesa, on Wednesday. — AFP

European Union (EU) countries on Wednesday agreed a new round of sanctions on Russia, diplomats said, as the bloc looks to keep up pressure in the face of US talks with Russia. The wide-ranging package — which includes a ban on imports of Russian aluminium — will be formally adopted by EU foreign ministers on Monday which marks the third anniversary of Kremlin's invasion of Ukraine. — Agencies

TRUMP PRAISED
FOR SAYING NATO
WAS WAR CAUSE

Moscow, Feb. 19: Russia's foreign minister Sergei Lavrov on Wednesday praised US President Donald Trump for blaming the Ukraine conflict on moves to admit Kyiv into the Nato military alliance.

Trump has repeatedly blamed the conflict on his predecessor, Joe Biden, and has said the nearly three years of fighting would "never have started" had he been President in 2022.

"He is the first, and so far, in my opinion, the only Western leader who has publicly and loudly said that one of the root causes of the Ukrainian situation was the previous administration's pushy line of dragging Ukraine into Nato," Lavrov said of Trump in a question-and-answer session. — AFP

POPE HAS
PNEUMONIA IN
BOTH LUNGS

Rome, Feb. 19: Pope Francis has developed pneumonia in both lungs, the Vatican said on Tuesday, after new tests showed a further complication in the condition of the 88-year-old pope. The Vatican said Francis' respiratory infection also involves asthmatic bronchitis, which requires the use of cortisone antibiotic treatment.

"Laboratory tests, chest X-ray, and the Holy Father's clinical condition continue to present a complex picture," the Vatican said.

Nevertheless the pope is in good spirits and is grateful for the prayers for his recovery, Vatican spokesman Matteo Brunni said in a late update. — AP

Google pays 326 mn euros to settle Italy tax row

Rome, Feb. 19: Tech giant Google has paid 326 million euros to Italy following an investigation into alleged unpaid taxes, Milan prosecutors said on Wednesday, as they recommended criminal proceedings be dropped.

Italian authorities had accused Google Ireland Limited of failing to declare and pay taxes on income generated in the country between 2015 and 2019, with the probe focusing particularly on revenues obtained through selling

advertising space.

Under an agreement reached with Google, "the company proceeded to payment of... 326 million euros in taxes, fines and interest, to resolve the outstanding matter with the Italian tax authorities",

Milan prosecutors said.

As a result, the prosecutors said they have submitted to a judge a request to dismiss criminal proceedings in the case.

The tech firm did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

The EU has had little success in getting tech companies to pay more taxes in Europe, where they are accused of funneling profits into low-tax economies like Ireland and Luxembourg. — AFP

STRESSED CREATURES False killer whales named for orca-like shape of skull
90 stranded dolphins to be euthanised

Sydney, Feb. 19: Wildlife rangers will on Wednesday begin shooting 90 dolphins stranded on a remote Australian beach, saying the stressed creatures would be euthanised after attempts to refloat them failed.

A pod of 157 dolphins from a poorly understood deep-sea species was found stranded on Tuesday evening on an isolated beach in Australia's southern island of Tasmania.

Tasmania's environment department said only 90 survived by Wednesday

afternoon, growing increasingly "stressed" the longer they were exposed to beaming sun and lashing winds. "Following expert veterinary assessment we have made the decision to euthanise the animals," incident controller Shelley Graham said.

"That's likely to be the course of action for all 90." They appeared to be members of a large dolphin species known as false killer whales, officials said, named for the orca-like shape of their skull. Efforts to refloat the dol-

phins — which can weigh upwards of one tonne — had fallen short and were unlikely to succeed, said biologist Kris Carlyon.

"This is possibly the trickiest location I've seen in 16 years of doing this in Tasmania. It is extremely remote, extremely difficult to get access. We've given it a good crack this morning, but we are running out of options for a successful refloat."

Dozens of sleek, dark-skinned dolphins were pictured Tuesday wallowing in wet sand. — AFP



Officials work on dolphins stranded on a beach near Arthur River on the west coast of Tasmania. — AFP

quick BITES

INDICATORS		%
Sensex	75,939.18	-0.04
Nifty 50	22,932.90	-0.05
S&P 500*	6,113.87	-0.26
Dollar (₹)	86.95	0.08
Pound Sterling (₹)	109.70	0.06
Euro (₹)	90.98	0.00
Gold (10gm)* (₹)	86,200▲87	0.10
Brent crude (\$/bbl)*	76.63	1.04
IN 10-Yr bond yield	6.682	-0.01
US 10-Yr T-bill yield*	4.478	-0.047

* As of 8:30 PM IST

Govt to boost underground coal block auctions

The coal ministry is planning additional incentives to boost underground (UG) commercial coal block auctions in India, a government official said. The push for UG mining aligns with India's drive for sustainable coal production. The proposed incentives are in an advanced stage of discussions and are expected to be announced soon, coal secretary Vikram Dev Dutt said at a roadshow for coal mine auctions.



Ola renegotiates with agencies for cost reduction

Ola Electric Mobility's shares hit fresh 52 week low of ₹58.5 on company's intimation to the stock exchanges that vehicle registration on Vahan portal in February will be impacted due to renegotiations going on with its registration agencies for better efficiency and cost reduction. "We are renegotiating the terms of agreement with our agencies to reduce cost and enhance registration process efficiencies," it said.

Mahindra Group inks pact with Anduril Industries

The Mahindra Group has tied up with US defence technology firm Anduril Industries to co-develop and produce autonomous maritime systems to counter drone threats, providing enhanced protection against unmanned aerial systems. The partners also plan to jointly come up with advanced AI-enabled counter unmanned aerial system technologies and innovative command and control software.



STPI set up to promote IT, ITes exports: Minister

Software Technology Parks of India (STPI) set up with the mandate to promote IT and ITes exports, will help the country keep pace with changing technology in the world, Union minister Jitin Prasada said on Wednesday. Inaugrating an STPI incubation facility centre at Kolkata, Prasada said the government will provide opportunities by giving access to cheaper space, handholding and financial help to start-ups.

No exception for India: Trump

US Prez says he rejected Modi's requests to spare India from reciprocal tariffs

Washington, Feb. 19: Making his resolve to impose reciprocal tariff on every country clear, US President Donald Trump said that he made it clear to Prime Minister Narendra Modi that India will not be spared from Washington's reciprocal tariffs.

In an interview that Trump gave to Fox News along with Elon Musk, the US President said that he told Modi that the US will levy on Indian imports whatever duty India charges US products.

"I told Prime Minister Modi yesterday; he was here; I said, 'Here's what we're going to do: reciprocal. Whatever you charge, I'm charging,'" Trump said.

"He (Modi) goes, 'No, no, I don't like that,'" said Trump, recalling Modi's objection to the reciprocal tariffs.

However, Trump said that he responded to Modi reiterating, "No, no, whatever you charge, I'm going to charge. I'm doing that with every country."

"Nobody can argue with me," Trump insisted. "If I said 25 per cent, they'd say, 'Oh, that's terrible.' I don't say that anymore... because I say, 'Whatever they charge, we'll charge.' And you know what? They stop."

On February 13, hours before Modi's bilateral meeting with Trump in the White House, the US President announced reciprocal tariffs.

Under the plan, the Trump administration will counter non-reciprocal trading arrangements with trading partners by determining the equivalent of a reciprocal tariff with respect to each foreign trading partner.

Trump further said that India has very strong tariffs on certain imports from the US. Like in the automobile sector, India charges 100 per cent.

Chipping in, Musk said, "It's 100 per cent — auto

TOUGH STANCE

- The US will levy on Indian imports the same duty that India charges on American products.
- On Feb. 13, hours before Modi's bilateral meeting with Trump, the US President announced reciprocal tariffs.
- Trump will counter non-reciprocal trading arrangements with trading partners by fixing reciprocal tariff.
- Trump didn't specify whether the measures would target specific countries.



India has been just about the highest-tariffed nation. They've been very strong on tariffs, and I don't blame them necessarily, but it's a different way of doing business.

— DONALD TRUMP, US President

BORE THE BRUNT

- Dr Reddy's (-2.77%)
- Zydus (-2.39%)
- Aurobindo (-2.38%)
- Lupin (-1.79%)
- Sun Pharma (-1.38%)
- Cipla (-1.22%)
- M & M (-1.12%)
- Maruti (-0.84%)
- Tata Motors (-0.11%)

25% tariffs on automobile, semiconductor, and pharmaceutical imports from April 2.

Industry experts, lobby groups, and executives warn that steep new tariffs on the industry would have broad ripple effects, including higher prices for consumers.

New tariffs by US on auto, chips, pharma from April 2

New York, Feb. 19: US President Donald Trump said he would likely impose tariffs on automobile, semiconductor and pharmaceutical imports of around 25 per cent, with an announcement coming as soon as April 2 in a move that would represent a dramatic widening of the president's trade war.

Trump has previously announced 25 per cent tariffs on steel and aluminum that are set to take effect in March. The latest comments are his most detailed yet in specifying other sectors to be hit with fresh barriers if implemented.

Asked about similar levies on pharmaceutical drugs and semiconductor chips, the president said:

imports are 100 per cent."

While responding to a question on reciprocal tariffs on India, Trump said, "India has been just about

"It'll be 25 per cent and higher, and it'll go very substantially higher over the course of a year." Trump said he wanted to give companies "time to come in" before announcing new import taxes.

"When they come into the United States and they have their plant or factory here there is no tariff, so we want to give them a little bit of chance," he said.

Trump didn't specify whether the measures would target specific countries or apply to all vehicles imported to the US.

Industry experts, lobby groups and executives have warned that steep new tariffs on the industry would have broad ripple effects, including higher prices for consumers

the highest tariffed nation. They've been very strong on tariffs, and I don't blame them, necessarily, but it's a different

and steep new costs for the industry.

Other countries have promised swift retaliation once Trump's tariffs are applied and said they'd target politically sensitive goods that are made in Republican states.

Trump, however, has signaled there's not much any one country can do to get out from the tariffs if he views the trading relationship as unbalanced.

"It seems like no one is really getting through this unscathed," said Katrina Eli, head of Asia Pacific economies, Moody's Analytics. "Hope they're using them as negotiating tool.

What we know from past is that these tariffs don't work as Trump wants them to work." — Bloomberg

way of doing business. It's very hard to sell to India because they have trade barriers and very strong tariffs." — PTI

Salaries likely to rise by 9.2% in '25

SANGEETHA G. CHENNAI, FEB. 19

Salaries are set to rise by 9.2 per cent across sectors in 2025, continuing a declining trend amidst global uncertainty and softening growth. Attrition rates are also showing a downward trend, indicating stability in talent availability.

In 2024, salaries witnessed a slightly higher rise of 9.3 per cent compared to the hike expected in 2025. This reflects a trend of declining salary increments since 2022, when companies provided a 10.6 per cent salary increase, according to Aon.

Engineering design serv-

- In 2024, salaries witnessed a slightly higher rise of 9.3% compared to the hike expected in 2025.
- Engineering design services, auto sectors expected to offer highest salary increase of 10.2%.
- Retail sector is expected to see a 9.8% salary increase.
- Attrition rates declined to 17.7% in 2024 from a high of 18.7% in 2023.

ices and the auto sector are expected to offer the highest salary increase of 10.2 per cent, followed by NBFCs at 10 per cent.

The retail sector is also expected to see a 9.8 per cent salary increase, followed by global capability centres, engineering and manufacturing, and real

estate and infrastructure, at 9.7 per cent.

"Despite external uncertainties, India's economic prospects remain stable, with rural demand

improving and private consumption maintaining momentum. The downward trend in projected salary increases could be

UPI dominates digital payments

FC BANKING BUREAU MUMBAI, FEB. 19

India's digital payments landscape is undergoing an unprecedented transformation, with unified payments interface (UPI) emerging as the dominant force driving financial inclusion, merchant adoption, and cross-border transactions.

According to report by

The Digital Fifth, UPI now drives 84 per cent of digital transactions in India.

The report underscores UPI's transformative impact on businesses and consumers while highlighting the critical infrastructure innovations needed to sustain this momentum as India progresses toward a cashless future.

According to the report, UPI transactions surged

4.4 times from 2021 to 2024, reaching 172 billion transactions annually. It now dominates digital payments, outpacing card-based and wallet transactions.

With 30 million merchants, merchant-to-consumer segment is growing at 67 per cent YoY, outpacing peer-to-peer transactions and signaling UPI's transition as primary retail payment system.

MASS | APPEAL

US mobile firm plans to capture mid-range smartphone market

Apple launches new low-cost iPhone

San Francisco, Feb. 19: Apple launched its latest low-cost model, dubbed the iPhone 16e, on Wednesday as it looks to grab a bigger share of the mid-range smartphone market and fend off rivals such as Samsung and China's Huawei.

The new phone, which leaves behind the SE naming convention for Apple's budget series, will take on popular Android smartphones at a time when consumer electronics

makers are looking to add artificial intelligence tools to their devices.

The 16e will cost \$599, a price tag that raises the entry barrier for new iPhone customers, but its features are closer to Apple's flagships such as a powerful chip to run Apple Intelligence, a set of features with access to ChatGPT.

Apple late last month forecast strong sales growth signaling that it will recover from a dip in

FEATURES

- iPhone 16e will cost \$599, which raises entry barrier for the low-end model.
- The model will have features close to Apple's flagship phones and will be powered powerful chip.
- The new model will be available only in two colours — black and white.

iPhone sales as it rolls out artificial intelligence features to more regions and languages.

However, analysts have

PHARMA, AUTO SHARES SLIDE ON U.S. THREAT

RAVI RANJAN PRASAD MUMBAI, FEB. 19

Shares of Indian pharmaceutical exporters to the US, such as Dr Reddy's Laboratories, Lupin, Cipla, Zydus Lifesciences, Sun Pharmaceutical, and Aurobindo Pharma, declined after US President Donald Trump on Tuesday spoke about imposing a 25 per cent import tariff on pharmaceutical, automobile, and semiconductor manufacturers exporting to the US.

Passenger vehicle and tractor manufacturer Mahindra & Mahindra's shares also fell due to the anticipated impact on its US exports.

In the FY24, India's pharmaceutical exports to the US stood at \$8.73 billion, according to the Pharmaceuticals Export Promotion Council of India (Pharmexcil).

The Nifty Pharma Index was down 0.71 per cent, while the BSE healthcare index closed 0.31 per cent lower at the end of the trading session.

Pharmaceutical stocks recovered after a sharp intraday decline but ended lower on the BSE.

Select automobile stocks also declined due to the dual impact of US tariffs and US electric car maker Tesla's plans to enter the Indian market.

"US markets gained on Tuesday, with the S&P 500 closing at a record high, while Asian markets ended lower after US President new traiffs announcement. This move could hamper international trade and dampen global market sentiment," said Siddhartha Khemka, head of Research at Motilal Oswal Financial Services.

Term insurance covers in demand

FALAKNAAZ SYED MUMBAI, FEB. 19

Rising consumer awareness, affluence, and insurers' focus on protecting their profit margins after the revised surrender value norms took effect last October have led to an uptick in the demand for term insurance covers.

Riders remain an integral part of term insurance plans for affluent buyers, with critical illness cover, accidental death benefit, and waiver of premium being the most popular options.

Private life insurers saw a surge in retail sum assured by 41 per cent year-on-year (YoY) from April to December 2025, compared to 30 per cent during same period in FY24. This growth outpaced the retail new business premium growth of 17 per cent (7 per cent in FY2024).

The retail sum assured per policy for private insurers rose to ₹24 lakh in FY2024 from ₹13 lakh in FY2018. However, for LIC, the retail sum assured per policy has remained stable at ₹3 lakh.

The group sum assured also saw significant growth, driven by the expansion of credit life insurance, which has been bolstered by robust credit growth in the retail segment (a compound annual growth rate of 18 per cent from FY2021 to FY2024), particularly in unsecured loans (CAGR of 21 per cent), where credit life penetration remains higher. Credit life insurance is a type of life insurance

IRDAI SETS UP PANEL FOR INSURANCE ACT

FC BANKING BUREAU MUMBAI, FEB. 19

The Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority of India (Irdai) has set up a seven-member committee headed by former chairman of SBI Dinesh Khara to look into the aspects of Insurance Act, 1938, review previous amendment proposals while incorporating new suggestions.

This means that the much-anticipated Insurance Act Amendment Bill, which was expected to be introduced in second leg of Budget session, is to be delayed.

(Full report on DeccanChronicle.com)

policy that pays off a loan if policyholder dies before settling the debt.

Nilesh Sathe, former member (life) of the Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority of India (Irdai), explains: "Term insurance is a profitable business for life insurers, as the risk is largely passed on to reinsurers. Secondly, the rising middle class is becoming more financially aware, recognising that term insurance is necessary for risk coverage. Last but not least, the new revised surrender value norms do not apply to term insurance and ULIPs, which is why insurance companies are promoting them more."

India's GDP to grow at 6.3% in FY25: SBI

FALAKNAAZ SYED MUMBAI, FEB. 19

SBI Research in a report has estimated India's GDP growth to come in at 6.3 per cent in 2024-2025 assuming that the National Statistical Office (NSO) does not make major revisions to the erstwhile first and second quarter estimates.

The SBI's estimate is 10 basis points (bps) lower than the NSO's forecast of 6.4 per cent growth for the current fiscal year.

The report said that leveraging 36 high-frequency indicators, the estimated gross domestic product (GDP) growth for the third quarter of the current financial year should be between 6.2 per cent and 6.3 per cent.

"Despite upheavals in global geo-politics, and trade/supply chains being susceptible to winds of re-

globalization, the Indian economy has been leaning against the winds," said Soumya Kanti Ghosh, group chief economic adviser, SBI.

The slowdown in the current household inflation expectations encourages higher discretionary spending and drives demand-led growth, the report said.

The percentage of indicators showing acceleration has increased to 74 per cent in Q3 FY25 from 71 per cent in Q2 FY25.

Continuing the momentum, a healthy rural economy is further reinforcing stability and sustains momentum in other sectors even as rural agriculture wage growth is consistent.

Capex is showing improvement in Q3 FY25 with majority of states' capex, as percentage of Budget estimate.



HYUNDAI INDIA AIMS TO BE MFG HUB FOR EXPORTS

New Delhi, Feb. 19: Hyundai Motor India is looking to position itself as a manufacturing hub for exports for emerging markets like Africa and neighbouring nations, according to a top company executive.

The company, which is looking to diversify its export markets as it continues to face challenges regarding shipments to regions like the Middle East due to Red Sea and other geopolitical issues.

"We are positioning the company as a production hub for emerging markets. We are manufacturing and exporting our cost-optimised vehicle to the emerging markets," Hyundai Motor India MD Unsoo Kim said.

He noted that the automaker has a balanced mix of domestic and export volume. — PTI

SHORT TAKES

Gill No.1 batter in ODI rankings

Dubai: India vice-captain Shubman Gill on Wednesday dethroned Babar Azam of Pakistan from the No. 1 spot in the ICC ODI Rankings for batters on the back of his strong show against England in the recent home series. The ICC issued the latest rankings just ahead of the start of the eight-team Champions Trophy in Karachi with the match between Pakistan and New Zealand. "India right-hander Shubman Gill overtakes former Pakistan captain Babar Azam to become the top ranked ODI batter in the world," the ICC said. Gill, who scored two fifties and a century in the recent three-match ODI series against England at home which India won 3-0, jumped one place to the No. 1 spot. He now has 796 rating points compared to Babar's 773. India skipper Rohit Sharma is placed at the third spot with 761 points followed by South Africa's Heinrich Klaasen and New Zealand's Daryl Mitchell at fourth and fifth respectively. — PTI

Kohli, Nadal are team owners

Mumbai: Star India batter Virat Kohli, tennis legend Rafael Nadal, and basketball icon LeBron James are among the prominent team owners of the UIM E1 World Championship, the world's first all-electric powerboating competition. The event will feature a star-studded lineup of team owners from across sports, music, and entertainment, including Kohli, whose Team Blue Rising will compete in the global series. Besides Kohli, the championship boasts of high-profile team owners such as basketball legend James (Team AIUla), music producer and DJ Steve Aoki (Aoki Racing Team), and NFL great Tom Brady (Team Brady). Other teams include Team Drogba, owned by football Chelsea star Didier Drogba, Team Miami powered by Magnus, owned by Latin music star Marc Anthony, and Team Rafa, backed by tennis icon Nadal. Additionally, Hollywood actor Will Smith leads Westbrook Racing, while Marcelo Claure helms Team Brazil by Claire Group. — PTI

Bayern reach CL Last 16, Milan out

Paris: Bayern Munich needed a stoppage-time goal to see off Celtic and secure a place in the last 16 of the Champions League on Tuesday, while AC Milan were dumped out by Feyenoord and both Club Brugge and Benfica also advanced. In Germany, Bayern were defending a 2-1 lead over Celtic in their play-off tie from last week's first leg but the Bundesliga leaders were unable to put the tie to bed, with Harry Kane hitting the bar before half-time. Earlier, seven-time European Cup winners Milan were eliminated by Feyenoord, a 1-1 draw at San Siro taking the Dutch club through 2-1 on aggregate. Santiago Gimenez, playing against the club he left just last month, had put Milan ahead on the night from close range in the first minute to level the tie on aggregate. In Lisbon, Benfica drew 3-3 at home with Monaco to win their play-off tie 4-3 on aggregate and go through to play either Barcelona or Liverpool next. — AFP

Gopi, Ashwini set to defend title

New Delhi: Defending men's and women's champions Gopi Thonakal and Ashwini Madan Jadhav will headline in the 10th edition of Apollo Tyres New Delhi Marathon scheduled to take place here on February 23. Recognised by Athletics Federation of India (AFI) as a national event, the marathon will also see participation from the country's top runners including Anish Thapa, Belliyappa, Man Singh, Akshay Saini and Vikram Bangriya the men's section. The likes of Laxmi KM, Nirmaben Thakor Bharatjee and Disket Dolma will feature in the women's field. The event, which is also recognised by World Athletics, is a qualifying race for International Amateur races. Runners will compete across four categories — full marathon, half marathon, 10K and 5K. Former Indian cricket team captain Ajinkya Rahane and head badminton coach Pullela Gopichand will flag off the marathon. — PTI

TIME TO BLUEM

India look to rise above challenges in CT opener

Dubai, Feb. 19: A turbulent recent cricketing past has made a resonant effort mandatory for India in the Champions Trophy, and their opening match against a tricky Bangladesh here on Thursday will be the first point in assuaging a set of existential questions surrounding this team. These questions are worrying even for a pre-tournament favourite like India. Can this Indian bowling unit tide over the absence of injured pace talisman Jasprit Bumrah? Can Virat Kohli and Rohit Sharma summon their glory days back? Can young names like Shubman Gill ace the pressure of a multi-nation competition to deliver consistently?

In that context, the ICC showpiece is a godsend because ODI is the comfort zone of those icons and young tyros in this Indian line-up, and they will be genuinely eyeing a strong outing here. It would not be an exaggeration to say that Kohli, Rohit and even head coach Gautam Gambhir, although only six months into his tenure, are living on borrowed time because the shockwaves created by the setbacks against New Zealand and Australia have not subsided yet.

Some bright signs are there though. Skipper Rohit made a century a few days back against England and Kohli a fifty, while Gambhir masterminded the dominant 4-1 and 3-0 victories in T20Is and ODIs respectively. Gill was exceptional while emerging as the player of the series, cracking two fifties and a hundred in three ODIs against England. But the challenge India face in the Champions Trophy is vastly different from a rather cosy home series.

Although India are playing a strong brand of 50-over cricket of late, they have some selection riddles to solve before they face Bangladesh. It starts with KL Rahul's batting position. Will he bat at No. 5, his most productive slot, or at No. 6 with Axar Patel coming one place above him? The wicketkeeper batter had batted at No. 6 in the first two matches against England before going back to No. 5 in the final one-dayer. In all likelihood, the team management could remain fluid and take a call as per the game situation here. — PTI



India's Virat Kohli during a training session in Dubai on Tuesday.

— BCCI

Bangla skipper believes his team can beat anyone at CT

Dubai, Feb. 19: Heading into their Champions Trophy opener against formidable neighbours India, Bangladesh skipper Najmul Hossain Shanto was filled with optimism. He was particularly emboldened by the rise of pace sensation Nahid Rana, who has added a new dimension to their bowling attack. The 22-year-old Rana holds the record for the fastest ball (152kph) bowled by a Bangladesh cricketer, hits 150kph on occasion, and averages 145kph for most of his spells.

Besides the presence of Rana and experienced pace colleague like Taskin Ahmed, the team also has few useful all-rounders and spinners, and some good batters. "Obviously, all-rounders always balance the team and we have got some good all-rounders. I hope they will perform tomorrow," Shanto said in the pre-match press conference here on Wednesday.

"If you look in this format, our team is quite balanced and we believe we can beat any team in this tournament. All teams are capable of winning this trophy but I am someone who is not thinking about the opponents much. If we execute our plan properly we can beat any team in any day," Shanto added. After years of struggle, Bangladesh are now in a position to boast a good pace-bowling attack, feels Shanto.

— PTI



Bangladesh players during a practice session on the eve of Champions Trophy match against India, in Dubai, on Wednesday.

— PTI

WE HAVE PICKED TWO SPECIALIST SPINNERS: ROHIT

Dubai, Feb. 19: The inclusion of five spinners in India's Champions Trophy squad has attracted plenty of attention but captain Rohit Sharma on Wednesday defended the selectors' call, saying three of them are all-rounders who add a lot of value to the team. Varun Chakravarthy and Kuldeep Yadav are the two specialist spinners while the other options in that department are Ravindra Jadeja, Axar Patel and Washington Sundar, who all are very capable batters.

The spin-heavy side has three fast-bowling options in the form of Mohammed Shami, Arshdeep Singh and Harshit Rana with Hardik Pandya being the sole pace all-rounder. "There are two spinners, and the other three are all-rounders, so I am not looking at them as five spinners, those three guys can bat and can bowl also.

"In the rest of the teams, the fast bowlers are all-rounders, so they say that they have taken six fast bowlers, which is good, but we play to our strength (spin)," Rohit said when asked about the spin heavy composition of the side. The injured Jasprit Bumrah's absence has put additional responsibility on Mohammed Shami, who is yet to regain his full rhythm following a comeback from injury. India prefer to bat deep and that explains the presence of three spin all-rounders in the side. — PTI

VIRAT IS A FAN OF CHAMPIONS TROPHY FORMAT

Dubai, Feb. 19: Indian superstar Virat Kohli has always liked the format of Champions Trophy as it demands the eight participating teams to be at their best from the get go. The Champions Trophy is taking place for the first time since 2017 when India lost the final to Pakistan.

"The tournament is happening after a long time. I have always liked this tournament. It represents consistency as you have to be in the top 8 of the rankings (to qualify). The level of competition is always good," Kohli told Star Sports.

Kohli, who has played three editions of the 50-over event in 2009, 2013 (when India won) and 2017, likened the tournament to the fast-paced T20 World Cup. "In ODI format, it creates the pressure of a T20 World Cup. There also you have three or four games in the league stage. If you don't start well, you are under pressure. The pressure is from the first game itself and that is why I like it, you have to be at your best from game one," said the former India captain. — PTI

CHAMPIONS | TROPHY



New Zealand's Tom Latham celebrates his century against Pakistan during their Champions Trophy match in Karachi, Pakistan, on Wednesday.

— AP

Sublime Kiwis demolish Pak

Karachi, Feb. 19: Will Young and Tom Latham struck fine hundreds as New Zealand maintained their recent dominance over hosts Pakistan with an emphatic 60-run win in the Champions Trophy opener here on Wednesday. Young compiled an important innings of 107 off 113 balls, while Latham remained unbeaten on 118 off 104 balls to steer the Black Caps to 320 for five after Pakistan put them in to bat.

Glenn Phillips' 39-ball 61 also went a long way in the Kiwis getting past the 300-run mark as New Zealand overcame a shaky start. The Pakistan top-order comprising Babar Azam (64 off 90), Mohammed Rizwan (3 off 14) and Saud Shakeel (6 off 19) were a tad too conservative in their approach. That ultimately cost the home team as it ended with 260 all out in 47.2 overs.

Fakhar Zaman (24 off 41) batted at number four after being off the field for a major part of the New Zealand innings due to an injury scare.

It was New Zealand's third win over Pakistan in less than two weeks, the Kiwis having beaten the Rizwan-led side twice in the preceding tri-series.

The sole positive for defending champions Pakistan ahead of their clash against India was the performance of the lower-order with Khushdil Shah smashing 69 off 49 balls. Salman Agha also showed plenty of intent in his 42 off 28 balls but that urgency was missing in the approach of the top-order. New Zealand pacers as well as spinners bowled with accuracy, not allowing the opposition batters to get away. The efforts of

SCORECARD

New Zealand: Will Young c sub (Faheem Ashraf) b Naseem Shah 107, Devon Conway b Abrar Ahmed 10, Kane Williamson c Mohammed Rizwan b Naseem Shah 1, Daryl Mitchell c Shaheen Shah Afridi b Haris Rauf 10, Tom Latham not out 118, Glenn Phillips c Fakhar Zaman b Haris Rauf 61, Michael Bracewell not out 0. Extras (lb-4, w-9) 13. **Total (For 5 wickets in 50 overs) 320.**

Fall of Wickets: 1-39, 2-40, 3-73, 4-191, 5-316. **Bowling:** Shaheen Shah Afridi 10-0-68-0, Naseem Shah 10-0-63-2, Abrar Ahmed 10-0-47-1, Haris Rauf 10-0-83-2, Khushdil Shah 7-0-40-0, Salman Agha 3-0-15-0. **Pakistan:** Saud Shakeel c Matt Henry b William O'Rourke 6, Babar Azam c Williamson b Santner 64, Mohammad Rizwan c Glenn Phillips b William O'Rourke 3, Fakhar Zaman b Michael Bracewell 24, Salman Agha c Michael Bracewell b Nathan Smith 42, Tayyab Tahir c Williamson b Santner 1, Khushdil Shah c Michael Bracewell b William O'Rourke 69, Shaheen Afridi c Latham b Matt Henry 14, Naseem Shah b Matt Henry 13, Haris Rauf c Daryl Mitchell b Santner 19, Abrar Ahmed not out 0. Extras (lb-1, w-4) 5. **Total (all out in 47.2 overs) 260.**

Fall of wickets: 1-8, 2-22, 3-69, 4-127, 5-128, 6-153, 7-200, 8-229, 9-260. **Bowling:** Matt Henry 7.2-1-25-2, William O'Rourke 9-0-47-3, Michael Bracewell 10-1-38-1, Glenn Phillips 9-0-63-0, Mitchell Santner 10-0-66-3, Nathan Smith 2-0-20-1.

pacer William O'Rourke (3/47) and Mitchell Santer (3/66) stood out with the ball. Earlier, Young struck 12 fours and a six, while Latham batted through the innings to strike 10 boundaries and three maximums as New Zealand posted a challenging total. — PTI

LANNING & SUTHERLAND HAND CAPITALS BIG WIN

Vadodara, Feb. 19: Skipper Meg Lanning struck 69 off 49 balls as Delhi Capitals produced a solid batting effort to beat UP Warriorz by seven wickets and register their second win in the Women's Premier League here on Wednesday. Sent into bat, UP Warriorz rode on opener Kiran Navgire's quick-fire half-century to post 166 for seven. But the total was not enough as besides Lanning, Annabel Sutherland played a crucial 35-ball 41-run knock and was ably supported by Marizanne Kapp (19 not off 17) and opener Shafali Verma (16 off 16). Delhi completed the chase with a ball to spare.

Delhi were off to a brisk start with Shafali and Lanning sharing 65 runs in just 41 balls for the opening stand. Shafali was going great guns before she was caught by Chinelle Henry off Deepti Sharma in the seventh over. Earlier, Navgire (51 off 27 balls) and Dinesh Vridha (16 off 15) shared 66 runs in 5.5 overs to give a great start to UP Warriorz innings. Thereafter, UP Warriorz lost five wickets for 52 runs. — PTI

Brief Scores: UP Warriorz 166/7 in 20 overs (Kiran Navgire 51, Shweta Sherawat 37, Annabel Sutherland 2/26) lost to Delhi Capitals 167/3 in 19.5 overs (Meg Lanning 69, Annabel Sutherland 41 not out).

Ton-up Panchal anchors Gujarat's reply

Ahmedabad, Feb. 19: Gujarat's seasoned batter Priyank Panchal played a solid knock, remaining unbeaten on 117, as the former champions reached 222 for 1 at stumps on Day 3 of their Ranji Trophy semifinal against Kerala, here on Wednesday. Trailing by just 235 runs with two full days remaining, Gujarat's batting unit showed resilience and intent on a placid Motera surface, where it seemed Kerala found themselves 100 runs short, having scored at snail's pace. Resuming their first

innings at 418/7, Kerala added 39 more runs before being bowled out for 457 just 10 overs into the morning session. Mohammed Azharuddeen remained stranded on a magnificent 177 off 341 balls, his career-best knock featuring 20 fours and a solitary six. His innings provided the backbone to Kerala's total as wickets tumbled around him. Gujarat skipper Chintan Gaja provided the first breakthrough of the day, dismissing Aditya

BRIEF SCORES

■ Vidarbha 383 & 147 in 53 overs (Yash Rathod 59 not out, Shams Mulani 2/50) vs Mumbai 270 in 92 overs (Akash Anand 106, Parth Rekha 4/55). ■ Kerala 457 in 187 overs (Mohammed Azharuddeen 177 not out, Sachin Baby 69, Salman Nizar 52, Chintan Gaja 2/75) vs Gujarat 222/1 in 71 overs (Priyank Panchal 117 batting, Aarya Desai 73, Manan Hingraja 30 batting).

RATHOD EXTENDS VIDARBHA'S LEAD

In Nagpur, Yash Rathod and Akshay Wadkar

Sarwate managed just one run before becoming Gaja's 200th first-class victim in his 59th match. Sensing the urgency to add quick runs, Azharuddeen took Kerala past 450 with a boundary off Arzan Nagwaswalla. In response, Gujarat began their innings with a positive intent as openers Panchal and Aarya Desai put together a solid 131-run stand in 36.4 overs.

shared an unbroken 91-run partnership as Vidarbha recovered from a mini collapse to lead by 260 runs against Mumbai at stumps on day three of their semifinal. After Vidarbha dismissed Mumbai for 270 to take a first-innings lead of 113 runs, the hosts found themselves in trouble after being reduced to 56 for four; thanks to Shams Mulani's (2/50) two-wicket burst. However, Rathod (59) and Wadkar (31) steadied the ship, guiding Vidarbha to 147 for four in 53 overs. — PTI