



ASSAM WELCOMES

PRIME MINISTER

SHRI NARENDRA MODI

ESTEEMED FOREIGN DELEGATES
AND GLOBAL INVESTORS



INAUGURATION

24 February 2025 | 1900hrs

VETERINARY COLLEGE FIELD,
KHANAPARA, GUWAHATI

PARTNER COUNTRIES



Australia Bhutan Germany Indonesia Japan Malaysia Singapore Thailand United Kingdom

In August Presence of

Shri Lakshman Prasad Acharya
Governor, Assam

Dr Himanta Biswa Sarma
Chief Minister, Assam

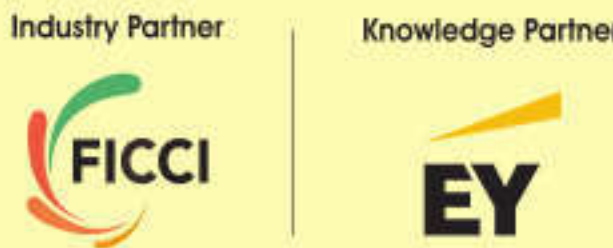
Shri Bimal Borah
Minister of Industries, Commerce & Public Enterprises
and Cultural Affairs Department, Assam

Programme Highlights

Inauguration | Ministerial Sessions | Thematic Sessions | B2B, B2G meetings | Exhibition | Valedictory Session



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TOPOF THE WORLD



Chief Advisor Muhammad Yunus, File

BANGLADESH Yunus invites Musk for visit, launch Starlink internet services

Dhaka: Bangladesh interim government's Chief Adviser Muhammad Yunus has invited top US businessman and Chief Executive Officer of SpaceX Elon Musk to visit the country and launch Starlink satellite internet service in the country. In a letter on February 19, Yunus told Musk that his visit to Bangladesh would allow him to meet young Bangladeshi men and women who would be among the main beneficiaries of this leading technology. Yunus also asked his High Representative, Khalilur Rahman, to coordinate closely with SpaceX team to ensure completion of the necessary work to make Starlink ready for launch in Bangladesh. PTI

SUDAN

RSF, allies sign deal for parallel government

Nairobi: Sudan's paramilitary Rapid Support Forces and allies Sunday signed a charter that paved the way for the establishment of a parallel government, as Sudan's army made advances recently against the rival groups. The signing was held behind closed doors in Kenya's Nairobi, after a meeting last week in a building owned by Kenyan government was condemned by the Foreign Ministry in Khartoum. The war in Sudan has killed over 24,000 people and driven over 14 million people — about 30% of the population — as per the UN. AP

CHINA

Beijing says Aus 'hyping' Chinese naval drills

Shenzhen: China defence ministry spokesperson Wu Qian said on Sunday that Australian complaints over recent Chinese live-fire naval drills in international waters between Australia and New Zealand were "hyped up" and "inconsistent with the facts". Australia Defence Minister Richard Marles said on Saturday that Beijing had failed to give satisfactory reasons for what he called inadequate notice for live-fire drills. Chinese defence ministry said that its actions complied with international law and did not affect flight safety. REUTERS

FRONTRUNNER MERZ LACKS MAJORITY, COALITION TALKS TO BE TRICKY

Germany votes; exit polls predict victory for conservatives, gains for far-right AfD

SARAH MARSH & MATTHIAS WILLIAMS BERLIN, FEBRUARY 23

GERMANY'S OPPOSITION conservatives won the national election on Sunday, putting leader Friedrich Merz on track to be the next chancellor while the far-right Alternative for Germany came in second, its best ever result, exit polls showed.

Following a campaign roiled by a series of violent attacks, and interventions by U.S. President Donald Trump's administration, the conservative CDU/CSU bloc won 29% of the vote, followed by the AfD with 19.5%, an exit poll published by ZDF public broadcaster showed. Merz, 69, has no previous government experience but has promised to provide greater leadership than Chancellor Olaf Scholz and to liaise more with allies, restoring Germany to the heart of Europe.

A brash economic liberal who has shifted the conservatives to the right, he is considered the antithesis of former conservative Chancellor Angela Merkel, who led Germany for 16 years.

Short of a majority in an increasingly fragmented political landscape, however, his conservatives will have to sound out partners to form a coalition.

Those negotiations are certain to be tricky after a campaign which exposed sharp divisions over migration and how to deal with the AfD in a country where



Markus Soeder, leader of CSU and Minister-President of Bavaria, with Friedrich Merz, center, the Chancellor candidate of Christian Democratic Union party; and (right) Co-leaders of Germanys far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD) party Alice Weidel and Tino Chrupalla after the first exit polls were published, in Berlin on Sunday. Reuters

far-right politics carry a particularly strong stigma due to its Nazi past. That could leave Scholz in a caretaker role for months, delaying urgently needed policies to revive Europe's largest economy after two consecutive years of contraction and as companies struggle against global rivals.

It would also create a leadership vacuum as Europe deals with a host of challenges including US President Donald Trump threatening a trade war and attempting to hasten a truce deal for Ukraine without Europe's involvement. Germans are more pessimistic

about their living standards now than at any time since the financial crisis in 2008. Attitudes towards migration have also hardened, a profound shift in German public sentiment since its "Refugees Welcome" culture during Europe's migrant crisis in 2015.

Sunday's election came after the collapse last November of Scholz's coalition of his Social Democrats (SPD), the Greens and pro-market Free Democrats (FDP) in a row over budget spending.

EU allies are cautiously hopeful the elections might deliver a more coherent government able



to help drive forward policy at home and in the bloc.

Some also hope Merz will reform the "debt brake", a constitutional mechanism to limit government borrowing that critics say has strangled new investment. The most expected outcome is a tie-up of Merz's conservative bloc of Christian Democrats (CDU) and Christian Social Union (CSU) with the SPD in an uneasy "grand coalition." Another three-way bloc may be necessary if several small parties end up crossing the 5% threshold to enter parliament, complicating talks. REUTERS

WHAT THE NUMBER SAY

PARTY	PCT.	2021
CDU/CSU	29%	24.1%
AfD	19.5%	10.3%
SPD	16%	25.7%
Greens	13.5%	14.8%
Die Linke	8.5%	4.9%
FDP	4.9%	11.5%

Source: Infratest dimap/ARD

Pope is conscious, receiving oxygen following respiratory crisis, says Vatican

Francis, 88, received blood transfusion, tests show low platelet counts: Doctors

NICOLE WINFIELD ROME, FEBRUARY 23

POPE FRANCIS was conscious but still receiving high flows of supplemental oxygen Sunday following a respiratory crisis and blood transfusions, as he remains in critical condition with a complex lung infection, the Vatican said.

"The night passed quietly, the pope rested," Vatican spokesman Matteo Bruni said in an early statement. Further clinical tests were being performed on the 88-year-old pope, who had part of one lung removed as a young man, and a more detailed medical update was expected later Sunday.

On Saturday, Francis suffered a prolonged asthmatic respiratory crisis that required "high flows" of oxygen to help him breathe through a nasal tube. He also received blood transfusions after tests showed low counts of platelets, which are needed for clotting, the Vatican said.

Doctors said Saturday his prognosis was "reserved."

Doctors have said Francis' condition is touch-and-go, given his age, fragility and pre-existing lung disease. His condition has revived speculation about what might happen if he becomes unconscious or otherwise incapac-



Doctors say Pope Francis's condition is touch-and-go, given his age and fragility. File

itated, and whether he might resign. Francis was supposed to have celebrated Mass on Sunday morning in St Peter's Basilica as part of the Vatican's yearlong Holy Year commemoration.

The organizer of the Holy Year, Archbishop Rino Fisichella, celebrated the Mass in his place and offered a special prayer for Francis from the altar before delivering the homily the pope had prepared. "Even though he is in a hospital bed, we feel Pope Francis close to us, we feel him present among us," Fisichella said.

Doctors have warned that the main threat facing Francis would be the onset of sepsis, a serious infection of the blood that can occur as a complication of pneumonia. AP

Submit weekly reports or lose jobs, Musk tells federal workers

VALERIE VOLCOVICI WASHINGTON, FEB 23

THE TRUMP administration sent emails on Saturday evening to U.S. federal government employees telling them to detail their work accomplishments from the previous week by Monday night or risk losing their jobs.

The emails came shortly after Elon Musk, the billionaire head of the Trump administration's Department of Government Efficiency, posted on Musk's social media site X that not responding to the email request would be viewed as a resignation.

"All federal employees will shortly receive an email requesting to understand what they got done last week," Musk posted on X. "Failure to respond will be taken as a resignation."



Elon Musk at a Conservative meet in Washington, earlier this week. AP file

Musk's post came just hours after President Donald Trump posted on his own social media network, Truth Social, that DOGE should get more aggressive in its attempts to downsize and reshape the federal workforce. The email, which was sent

Can Musk fire federal workers?

IT IS unclear what legal basis Musk has to terminate federal workers if they fail to respond to his request and what would happen to employees that cannot detail confidential work. The AFGE, the union representing federal employees, said it will challenge any "unlawful terminations."

from a human resources address from the Office of Personnel Management, gives employees until 11:59 p.m. EST on Monday to respond.

A spokesperson for DOGE did not immediately respond to a request for comment. REUTERS

Zelenskyy says he is willing to give up post if it means peace in Ukraine

REUTERS KYIV, FEBRUARY 23

UKRAINE'S PRESIDENT Volodymyr Zelenskyy said on Sunday he was willing to give up his position if it meant peace in Ukraine, quipping that he could exchange his departure for Ukraine's entry into NATO.

"If (it means) peace for Ukraine, if you really need me to leave my post, I am ready," an irritated-looking Zelenskyy said



Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy

when asked during a press conference whether he was ready to leave his post if it meant securing peace. "I can exchange this for NATO (membership), if that condition is there, immediately," the president added. U.S. President Donald Trump

has pushed for elections to take place in Ukraine, having branded Zelenskyy a "dictator", an apparent reference to the Zelenskyy's official five-year term that had ended in 2024.

Trump's criticism of Zelenskyy came as relations between the two leaders deteriorated sharply in recent weeks.

Zelenskyy has opposed the idea of elections during a full-scale war, a position supported by his major domestic political opponents.



MEANWHILE IN LEBANON: A trailer carrying the coffins of former Hezbollah leaders Hassan Nasrallah and Hashem Safieddine at a funeral procession in Beirut on Sunday. AP

Israel postpones release of over 600 Palestinians

Cites Hamas's hostage-handover ceremonies, calls them 'humiliating'

JAMES MACKENZIE & MAAYAN LUBELL JERUSALEM, FEB 23

ISRAEL SAID on Sunday it was delaying the release of hundreds of Palestinian prisoners it had planned to free the day before until militant group Hamas met its conditions, underscoring the fragility of the Gaza truce accord.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's office released a statement in the early hours of Sunday saying that Israel was waiting to deliver the 620 Palestinian prisoners and detainees "until the release of the next hostages has been assured, and without the humiliating ceremonies."

Hamas has made hostages appear on stage in front of crowds and sometimes speak before they were handed over. Coffins with hostage remains have also been carried through crowds. UN officials have said these went against international law because they were not respectful.

Israel's announcement came after Hamas on Saturday handed over six hostages from Gaza.

Hamas spokesperson Abdul Latif Al-Qanou earlier accused



Israeli tanks at the West Bank border in Muqeible, Sunday

ISRAELI MILITARY TO EXTEND WEST BANK OPS

Ramallah: Israel has ordered its military to prepare for an "extended stay" in parts of the occupied West Bank as it steps up operations against Palestinian militant groups, the Israeli defence minister said on Sunday. Defence Minister Israel Katz said Sunday he had ordered military forces to expand operations in the Palestinian refugee camps of Jenin, Tulkarem and Nur al-Shams. REUTERS

Israel of violating the ceasefire as Saturday elapsed without the release of the Palestinians prisoners as planned. REUTERS

Pakistan, Bangladesh resume direct trade for 1st time since '71

Dhaka set to import 50,000 tonnes of rice as per latest deal with Islamabad

SAJJAD HUSSAIN ISLAMABAD, FEBRUARY 23

PAKISTAN AND Bangladesh have resumed direct trade for the first time since the 1971 separation, with the first government-approved cargo departing from Port Qasim, according to a newspaper report.

The agreement was finalised in early February when Bangladesh agreed to purchase 50,000 tonnes of Pakistani rice through the Trading Corporation of Pakistan (TCP). The shipment will be completed in two phases, with the remaining 25,000 tonnes to be dispatched in early March.

The development is seen as a positive step in fostering economic cooperation and reopening trade channels that remained dormant for decades. PTI

trade relations," The Express Tribune newspaper reported.

East Pakistan separated from Pakistan in 1971 to form the independent state of Bangladesh. The transportation of the goods marked the first instance of official trade relations being restored since 1971.

Under a deal finalised in early February, Bangladesh is set to import 50,000 tonnes of rice from Pakistan through the Trading Corporation of Pakistan (TCP). The shipment will be completed in two phases, with the remaining 25,000 tonnes to be dispatched in early March.

The development is seen as a positive step in fostering economic cooperation and reopening trade channels that remained dormant for decades. PTI

CHINESE-FUNDED GWADAR AIRPORT WAS BUILT TO TRANSFORM BALOCHISTAN BUT THERE IS LITTLE CHANGE SEEN, LEAVING PEOPLE FRAZZLED

No passengers, no planes, no benefits — Pakistan's newest airport is bit of a mystery

RIAZAT BUTT GWADAR, FEBRUARY 23

WITH NO passengers and no planes, Pakistan's newest and most expensive airport is a bit of a mystery. Entirely financed by China to the tune of USD 240 million, it's anyone's guess when New Gwadar International Airport will open for business.

Located in the coastal city of Gwadar and completed in October 2024, the airport is a stark contrast to the impoverished, restive southwestern Balochistan province around it. For the past decade, China has

poured money into Balochistan and Gwadar as part of a multibillion dollar project that connects its western Xinjiang province with the Arabian Sea, called the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor or CPEC.

Authorities have hailed it as transformational but there's scant evidence of change in Gwadar. The city isn't connected to the national grid — electricity comes from neighboring Iran or solar panels — and there isn't enough clean water.

An airport with a 400,000 passenger capacity isn't a priority for the city's 90,000 people. "This airport is not for

Pakistan or Gwadar," said Azeem Khalid, an international relations expert who specializes in Pakistan-China ties. "It is for China, so they can have secure access for their citizens to Gwadar and Balochistan." Caught between militants and the military

CPEC has catalysed a decades-long insurgency in resource-rich and strategically located Balochistan. Separatists, aggrieved by what they say is state exploitation at the expense of locals, are fighting for independence — targeting both Pakistani troops and Chinese workers in the province and elsewhere. Members of Pakistan's eth-



This photo provided by Pakistan Airports Authority on Friday shows the newly constructed Gwadar airport. AP

nic Baloch minority say they face discrimination by the government and are denied opportunities available elsewhere in the country, charges the government denies. Pakistan, keen to protect China's investments, has stepped up its military footprint in Gwadar to combat dissent.

Intelligence officers monitor journalists visiting Gwadar. The city's fish market is deemed too sensitive for coverage.

Many local residents are frazzled. "Nobody used to ask where we are going, what we are doing, and what is your name," said 76-year-old Gwadar native Khuda Bakhsh Hashim. "We used to en-

joy all-night picnics in the mountains or rural areas." "We are asked to prove our identity, who we are, where we have come from," he added. "We are residents. Those who ask should identify themselves as to who they are." Hashim recalled memories, warm like the winter sunshine, of when Gwadar was part of Oman, not Pakistan, and was a stop for passenger ships heading to Mumbai. People didn't go to bed hungry and men found work easily, he said. There was always something to eat and no shortage of drinking water.

Hashim wants CPEC to succeed so that locals, especially young people, find jobs, hope

and purpose. But that hasn't happened.

"When someone has something to eat, then why would he choose to go on the wrong path," he said. "It is not a good thing to upset people."

Security concerns delayed the inauguration of the international airport. There were fears the area's mountains — and their proximity to the airport — could be the ideal launchpad for an attack.

Instead, Pakistani Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif and his Chinese counterpart Li Qiang hosted a virtual ceremony. The inaugural flight was off limits to the media and public. AP



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Dr. Mohan Yadav, Chief Minister



Narendra Modi, Prime Minister

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Inauguration of
**Global Investors
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By
Prime Minister
Narendra Modi

August Presence

Mangubhai Patel
Governor, Madhya Pradesh

Dr. Mohan Yadav
Chief Minister, Madhya Pradesh



24 February, 2025 | 10:00 AM
Indira Gandhi Rashtriya Manav Sangrahalaya, Bhopal



LIVE STREAMING

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**Udyog evam Rojgaar
Varsh - 2025**

Program Schedule

24FEB 2025

07:30 AM Onwards Registration

Departmental Summits

11:45 AM-06:30 PM Tech Invest - Summit Hall 1
11:45 AM-02:00 PM Renewed Madhya Pradesh - Summit Hall 2
03:15 PM-07:00 PM Feeder Solarization Summit: Prebid of 2000 MW Kusum C-Summit Hall 2

Partner Country Sessions

11:45 AM-12:45 PM Session on Global South - Conference Hall
12:45 PM-01:45 PM Session on Investment Strategies for Germany & MP- Country Session Hall
03:30 PM-04:30 PM Session on Economic Collaboration between Japan & MP - Country Session Hall

Thematic Sessions

11:45 AM-12:45 PM Molecule to Machine (Pharma & Medical Devices) - Session Hall 1
01:15 PM-02:15 PM Investing in Human Capital (Skill Development) - Session Hall 1
04:30 PM-05:30 PM Accelerating Road Infrastructure : Investment, Innovation & Prospects - Session Hall 3

CII Meetings

02:00 PM-03:00 PM CII IWN Session on Networking Opportunities for Women Entrepreneurs & Start-Ups - Conference Hall
03:00 PM-04:00 PM CII National Committee on Textiles and Apparel-Conference Hall
04:00 PM-05:00 PM Meeting of CII National MSME Council - Conference Hall
05:00 PM-07:00 PM The Viksit Bharat Young Leaders Dialogue - Conference Hall
03:30 PM-04:00 PM MOU Session - Session Hall 3

25FEB 2025

Departmental Summits

09:30 AM-11:15 AM Pravasi Madhya Pradesh Summit - Summit Hall 2
10:30 AM-12:30 PM Tourism Summit - Summit Hall 1
11:30 AM-01:30 PM Mining Summit - Summit Hall 2
02:00 PM-04:00 PM MSME and Startup summit - Main Hall
02:00 PM-04:00 PM Urban Development summit - Summit Hall 1

Pre-bid Sessions

10:00 AM-11:30 AM Morena Solar with BESS Project - Session Hall 1
11:30 AM-12:00 PM Morena UP-MP Complementarity Project Session Hall 1
12:00 PM-02:00 PM RESCO for Rooftop Solar - Session Hall 1

Partner Country Sessions

10:30 AM-11:30 AM Canada Round Table - Conference Hall
12:00 PM-01:00 PM Multination Investment Session - Country Session Hall
02:30 PM-03:30 PM Country Session Poland - Country Session Hall

Thematic Sessions

10:30 AM-11:30 AM Weaving a New Era (Textiles & Apparel) - Session Hall 2
11:00 AM-12:30 PM Future Frontiers-MP Startup Pitching Session - Session Hall 3
12:00 PM-01:00 PM Seed to Shelf (Food Processing and Horticulture) - Session Hall 2
12:30 PM-01:30 PM Thematic Session (Co-operative) - Session Hall 3
02:30 PM-03:30 PM Session on Green Hydrogen - Session Hall 1
02:00 PM-03:00 PM Logistics: Connecting MP to the World - Session Hall 2

Valedictory Session of Invest Madhya Pradesh

04:30 PM-06:00 PM Global Investors Summit - Main Hall

FOCUS SECTORS



AGRICULTURE,
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EVENT HIGHLIGHTS



MP Mobility Expo



Central India Fabric
& Fashion Expo



ODOP Village



Country
Sessions



MP
Pavillion



Exhibitions
& Expos



MP Business Executive
Meets (B2B Meetings)



MP Government & Business
Meets (B2G Meetings)

BUSINESS AS USUAL

By UNNY



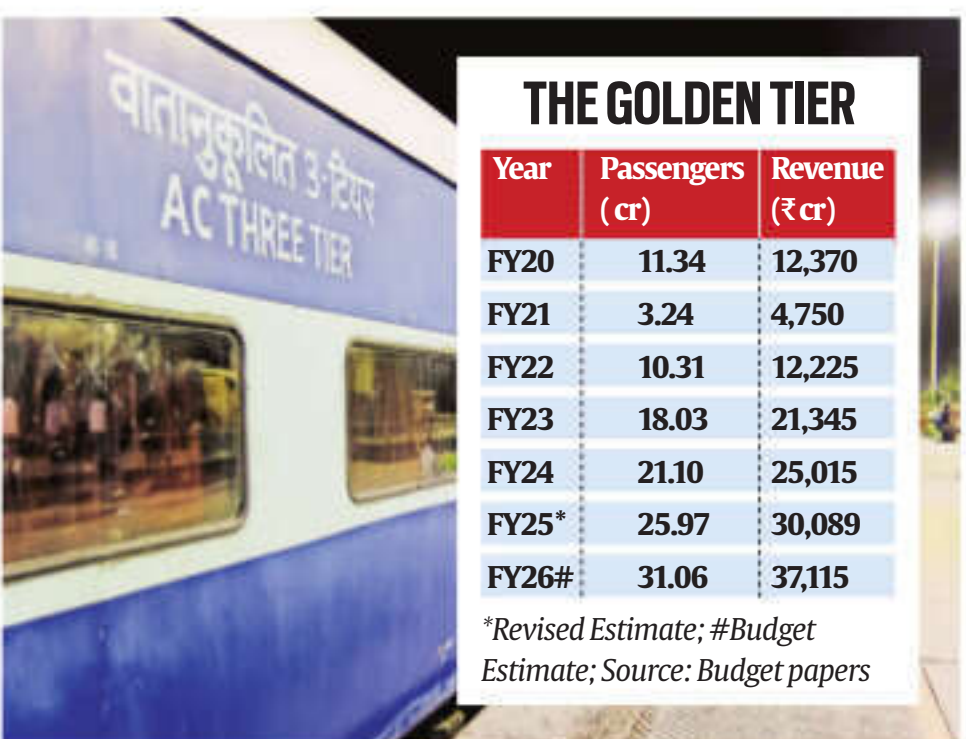
IDEA EXCHANGE
‘What happened to us in 2019 can’t be the yardstick to approach relations between J&K and the Union govt’
OMAR ABDULLAH
J&K CHIEF MINISTER,
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EXPRESS NETWORK

12 DEPORTED FROM U.S. TO PANAMA REACH DELHI
[PAGE 13](#)

Post-pandemic rail: 3rd AC gains speed, brings over a third of passenger revenues

Number of AC 3-tier passengers up from 11 crore to 26 crore in 5 years



DHEERAJ MISHRA
NEW DELHI, FEBRUARY 23

IN THE FIVE years since Covid-19, where Indian Railways gets its passenger revenues from, has seen a fundamental transformation. The number of passengers travelling AC 3-tier is just 26 crore, or 3.5 per cent of the total 727 crore passengers (including suburban), but generates Rs 30,089 crore or 38 per cent of the Rs 80,000 crore total passenger revenues estimated in 2024-25. The high revenues from AC 3-tier reflects in some sense ‘upward

mobility’ — more people aspiring to travel well. Besides Railways’ better pricing power, the 19.5 per cent compounded annual growth rate (CAGR) in AC 3-tier revenues over five years can be attributed largely to an increase in the number of passengers willing to spend more money.

From 11 crore AC 3-tier passengers in 2019-20 (1.4 per cent

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

TOMORROW

WHAT HAPPENED IN 2ND CLASS?

grenade attacks by suspected militants since December 2024.

With most attacks having taken place after sunset in Amritsar and Gurdaspur districts, entry gates to most police stations and checkpoints here are closed by 10 pm now, while approach roads at some others have been barricaded, affecting public access and movement.

Since December 20 last year, 12 grenades have been thrown at police stations, police posts and even the residence of a man related to a police officer in these two districts. Although no injuries have been reported so far, operatives of two banned outfits — the

Babbar Khalsa International (BKI) and Khalistan Zindabad Force (KZF) — have claimed responsibility for these attacks.

To a question on the police intelligence wing’s failure to preempt these attacks, DGP Gaurav Yadav said at a recent press conference in Chandigarh, “Pakistan’s nefarious designs in Punjab have to be defeated resolutely. We are sitting on the border with a neighbouring country (Pakistan) whose intelligence agency (ISI) considers Punjab a fertile ground (for terror activities). They want to bleed India by a thousand cuts.”

Claiming that these grenade



VENKATA KRISHNA B
DUBAI, FEBRUARY 23

THESE ARE nights made for Virat Kohli. The gaze of the cricketing world fixed on Dubai, the most

Virat Kohli’s day in Dubai night

His 51st ODI hundred powers him to fastest 14,000 — and a win over Pakistan

EXPRESS AT CHAMPIONS TROPHY

feverish cricketing rivalry playing out in front of packed stands, live streams buffering to manage the viewership load, a million hands folded in prayer, hearts beating in wild anxiety — the myth and legend of Kohli comes alive and branches out into an altogether different world. It’s on nights like these that Kohli leaves his stamp on mind and memories, blurring allegiances and differences.

In the end, it was a routine

cruise for India, overhauling the 244-run target Pakistan had set in 42.3 overs with six wickets in hand and effectively progressing to the knockouts. There were co-architects in this victory, most notably Kuldeep Yadav and Hardik Pandya. But only Kohli, as it is on nights when he hits the high gears of batting, mattered.

Anticipation brimmed much before the match started. For a 1 pm start on what was Dubai’s

warmest day of the season, several thousand fans had begun to queue up as early as 10 am. On the 2-km stretch to the stadium, where the blue jerseys clearly outnumbered the green, it was hard to spot one without “Virat” or “Kohli” on the back. The most famous No. 18 in the game. From the moment he stepped out in training gear half an hour before the toss — with the team bus

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

Virat Kohli and Axar Patel with Pakistan’s Babar Azam and Imam-ul-Haq after India won their Champions Trophy league match by six wickets at Dubai International Cricket Stadium on Sunday. *AP*

RELATED REPORTS, [PAGES 17, 18](#)

MAHA KUMBH IS KUMBH OF UNITY: MODI

Those of slave mentality mock our religion, often with foreign support: PM

Warns against bid to ‘weaken’ nation, faith, ‘divide society’

ANAND MOHAN J
BHOPAL, FEBRUARY 23

TARGETING THE Opposition parties, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday said a section of leaders with “slave mentality” are engaged in mocking religion and dividing people, often with the “support of foreign powers”, to weaken the nation and its faith.

Modi made the comments after laying the foundation stone of the Bageshwar Dham Medical and Science Research Institute in Madhya Pradesh’s Chhatarpur district on Sunday. His remarks come amid criticism from the Opposition over the stampede at the Maha Kumbh in Prayagraj last month.

“*Aajkal hum dekhte hai ki netao ka ek wargaisa hai, jo dharm ka makhaul udata hai, upahaas udata hai, logon ko todne mein juta hai. Bahut baar, videshi taakate bhi in logon ka saath dekar desh aur dharm ko kamzor karne ki koshish karti dikhati hai* (Nowadays, we see that there is a section of leaders who mock religion, ridicule it, and are engaged in dividing people. Many times, foreign powers are also seen to be supporting these individuals

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2



PM Narendra Modi with MP CM Mohan Yadav (right) and Bageshwar Dham chief priest Dharendra Shastri, Sunday. *PTI*

Meloni slams Left: When Trump, Modi, I talk, we’re called threat to democracy

‘We love our nations... fight against Wokeism, stand for common sense’

SHUBHAJIT ROY
NEW DELHI, FEBRUARY 23

BRACKETING PRIME Minister Narendra Modi with US President Donald Trump, Argentina President Javier Milei and herself, Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni slammed the Left for what she called their “hysteria” and hypocrisy over painting spectacles about the global rise of conservative leaders.

Addressing the Conservative

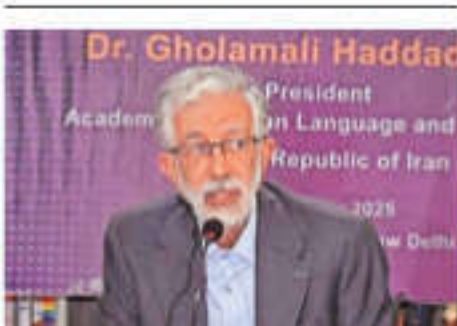


People don’t believe Left’s lies: Italy PM

Political Action Conference in the US via video link Meloni said: “When Bill Clinton and Tony Blair created the global leftist liberal network in the 90s, they were called statesmen.”

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

GOVT & POLITICS



IRAN EX-SPEAKER: WANT IMPROVED TRADE TIES WITH ALL, INCLUDING INDIA

J&K: JAMAAT FACTION THAT FOUGHT POLLS TO LAUNCH OUTFIT
[PAGE 6](#)

SHIFTING VERSIONS

Trump’s latest: ‘\$18 mn to India for polls... they take advantage of us’



President Donald Trump and First Lady Melania Trump at the White House on Saturday evening. *AP*

SHUBHAJIT ROY
NEW DELHI, FEBRUARY 23

IN his fifth public statement in a week on the issue, US President Donald Trump claimed Saturday that the Biden administration allocated \$18 million in funding to India to help with its elections.

His remarks came at the Conservative Political Action Conference (CPAC) after he has attacked the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) for what his Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE) listed as \$21

million in funding to India for “voter turnout” channelled via the Consortium for Elections and Political Process Strengthening (CEPPS), a group based in Washington, DC.

On February 20, *The Indian Express* had reported that USAID never funded CEPPS for any project in India and that a \$21 million USAID-CEPPS grant was sanctioned for a voter program in Bangladesh. Of this, \$13.4 million was disbursed, ostensibly for “political and civic engagement” among Bangladesh students in the run-up to the January 2024 elections and projects that put a

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

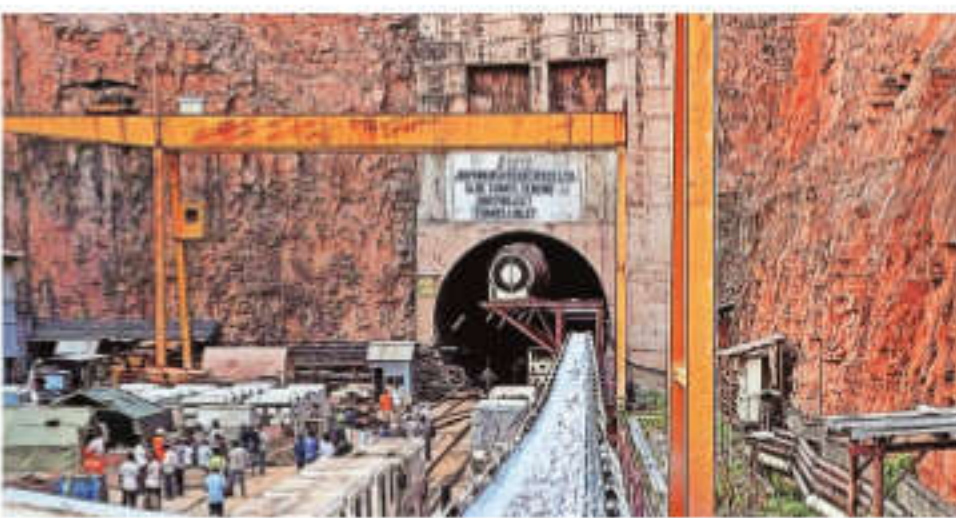
DAY AFTER TELANGANA TUNNEL COLLAPSE, RESCUE OPS STILL ON

8 trapped, others recall narrow escape: ‘Were told there is leakage, happened several times’

SREENIVAS JANYALA & NIKHILA HENRY
DOMALAPENTA, HYDERABAD, FEBRUARY 23

THE MOOD is gloomy at the tunnel workers’ colony in Domalapenta in Telangana’s Nagarkurnool district.

“Like us, they chose this job despite knowing it is dangerous work because the income helps their families survive. We have often talked about minor water seepage incidents. *Par majboori*



Rescue ops at the site in Nagarkurnool district. *Sreenivas Janyala*

hai, kaam toh karna padta hai (but we have to work, there’s no avoiding it),” said Sanjay Sah, a welder, about the eight people trapped inside the Srisaillam Left Bank Canal (SLBC) tunnel after a part of it collapsed Saturday.

Sah was among 50 people who went into the tunnel at 7 am on Saturday. Sometime later, a portion of the tunnel’s roof collapsed 13.5 km inside. Sah and 41 others ran to safety, but it was only after they exited the tunnel that they realised eight had not

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

Barbed wires, armoured tractors: Punjab fortifies border police stations

PAGE 1 ANCHOR

MAN AMAN SINGH CHHINA, KAMALDEEP SINGH BRAR & RAAKHI JAGGA
DERA BABA NANAK, AMRITSAR, FEBRUARY 23

CORRUGATED METAL sheets, barbed wires, nets along the boundary walls, armoured tractors, new sentry posts and checkpoints — police stations along Punjab’s two border districts are leaving nothing to chance in the face of multiple

grenade attacks by suspected militants since December 2024.

With most attacks having taken place after sunset in Amritsar and Gurdaspur districts, entry gates to most police stations and checkpoints here are closed by 10 pm now, while approach roads at some others have been barricaded, affecting public access and movement.

Since December 20 last year, 12 grenades have been thrown at police stations, police posts and even the residence of a man related to a police officer in these two districts. Although no injuries have been reported so far, operatives of two banned outfits — the

Babbar Khalsa International (BKI) and Khalistan Zindabad Force (KZF) — have claimed responsibility for these attacks.

To a question on the police intelligence wing’s failure to preempt these attacks, DGP Gaurav Yadav said at a recent press conference in Chandigarh, “Pakistan’s nefarious designs in Punjab have to be defeated resolutely. We are sitting on the border with a neighbouring country (Pakistan) whose intelligence agency (ISI) considers Punjab a fertile ground (for terror activities). They want to bleed India by a thousand cuts.”

Claiming that these grenade



A police station fortified with blue corrugated metal sheets in Gurdaspur district. *Man Aman Singh Chhina*

attacks were being carried out to “spread the narrative that Punjab was unsafe”, the DGP said, “We are determined to crush this narrative and want to emphasise that Punjab is safe.”

Stating that those behind the grenade attacks have been “traced in a very scientific manner using CCTV footage and mobile tower call detail dumps”, Yadav said, “I don’t want to give the masterminds any importance by taking their names publicly. The masterminds sitting abroad and managing these activities belong to these two (border) districts. The foot soldiers used to carry out these attacks

mostly live within a 25-km radius of the spots targeted.”

The first attack was reported around 9.30 pm on December 20, 2024, when unidentified persons lobbed a grenade at the Wadala Bangar police post in Gurdaspur district. On February 3 this year, unidentified persons threw a grenade at the Fatehgarh Churian police post in Amritsar district, marking the 10th such attack on police facilities in the state in 70 days.

However, these attacks were not limited to just police posts. On February 17, police received information about a low-intensity explosion at the residence of

Sukhdev Singh in Dera Baba Nanak’s Raimal village, located around 7 km from the border. Police believe the intended target was Sukhdev’s relative Jatinder, a policeman stationed at Ramdas police station.

In Dera Baba Nanak, a small town in Gurdaspur district, an armoured tractor or a “bunker tractor” stands guard outside the police station. Locals say it has revived memories of the late 1980s, when KPS Gill took charge as the DGP when militancy was at its peak in the border state.

Visible behind the “bunker tractor” is a tall layer of red bricks

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

J&K: Para moves Bill for proprietary rights to residents on public land

BASHAARAT MASOOD
SRINAGAR, FEBRUARY 23

PEOPLES DEMOCRATIC Party (PDP) MLA Waheed Para has submitted a Private Member's Bill seeking regularisation and recognition of property rights of residents in public land as a one-time special measure.

The proposed legislation, which Para described as an "anti-bulldozer" Bill, comes two years after the Lt Governor administration launched a massive demolition drive against alleged encroachment, triggering massive public outcry both in Kashmir and Jammu regions.

The Bill seeks to provide special provisions for the residents of the UT for recognising the proprietary rights of houses "constructed on State land, Kacharia land, Common land and Shamilat land (section 4 of J&K Agrarian Reforms Act, 1976)..." in the interest of right to shelter as guaranteed by Article 21 of Constitution of India..."

"...the need of the hour is to take a compassionate decision in regularizing the said construction

of residential houses across Jammu and Kashmir in the interest of public welfare," the Bill reads.

Para, who is also the PDP youth president, said the proposed legislation will save homes and shelters and "reduce fear of eviction". "Some people are given land in landless schemes but people who are living in their own constructed homes are evicted repeatedly."

The Bill says that the civilian courts shouldn't have the jurisdiction to "entertain any suit or proceedings" in such cases, "the cognizance of which can be taken and disposed of by any authority empowered by this Act or the policy made thereunder."

"Any criminal or civil case or suit or any proceeding which is pending adjudication before a criminal or civil court or before any law enforcement agency, on or before 1st March, 2025 in relation to any action taken by authority qua the use or construction on a Public Land as defined under this Act, shall be deemed to have been withdrawn..." the Bill reads.

The Budget Session of the Assembly will start in March in Jammu.

● Virat Kohli's day in Dubai night

getting stuck in the traffic — mobile phones tracked every moment of his. And he filled their hearts as the stands with euphoria.

The modern-day batting great, arguably the greatest in this 50-over format, scripted his 51st hundred and crossed 14,000 runs in ODIs. But numbers are only embellishments in celebrating a glorious hundred, filled with strokes that matched the grandness of the night. Fittingly, he completed his century off the last ball of the game, gliding down the track and clubbing Khushdil Shah over extra cover for a four in what ended up as the last ball of the game.

The stroke was in tune with his majestic stroke-play of the night. He has etched far greater knocks, in difficult situations against bowlers of more hostility and craft. But this knock will be celebrated for those daring strokes. There was something vintage about Kohli here, in his buoyant body language, in his intensity, and in how authoritatively he bossed a quality bowling attack.

Classicism shone through, especially when he drove the ball. Aptly, he marked his 14,000th ODI run with an imperious cover drive. Strokes of more authority followed. Like when he swiped Shaheen Shah Afridi down the ground with a flamingo flourish off the back leg. Or when he smeared Naseem Shah over extra cover. It was as though the thrill and joy that overflowed in the gallery had intoxicated him enough to produce one smashing shot after the other.

Kohli, however, would downplay all that during the chat with the host broadcasters. "I have a decent understanding of my game. It is about keeping the outside noise away, staying in my space and taking care of my energy levels and thoughts. Very easy to get pulled into expectations. My job is to stay in the present and do a job for the team," he said.

This hundred, his fourth against Pakistan, came at the right time for India and Kohli. Since the season's start, there has been no

end to his struggles, with even his lone hundred in the Perth Test coming in relatively battling-friendly conditions. But here, Kohli overcame the slow conditions that he has struggled with in recent times. On a pitch where it was hard to be fluent, one had to rely on singles and twos. It tested his fitness levels, but he still pushed his body to the limits — this 111-ball knock had only seven boundaries but it had 46 singles and 13 doubles. More importantly, he got them at a strike-rate of 90.09. But even those singles had an intense aesthetic about them; ODI cricket will remember Kohli as the batsman who put art into running between the wickets.

This was also a game where it was not just about Kohli's batting. Before he strode out to bat, Kohli had lifted India's intensity on the field when the bowlers were struggling to make inroads. Stationed inside the ring for most part of the innings, he ensured Pakistan batsmen wouldn't get any easy singles past him. He dived around, charged in to stop close singles, slid to stop singles from tumbling into twos. Each time he touched the ball, the capacity crowd, which included fans from Pakistan, cleared their throats.

No bowler posed any resistance, later. Afridi was blunted, Naseem Shah punctured, mystery spinner Abrar Ahmed clinically dissected and Haris Rauf nullified without much ado. "My job was to control the middle overs against the spinners without taking too many risks. Towards the end, Shreyas accelerated and I got a few boundaries as well. It allowed me to play my usual ODI game," he said. For once, though, even Kohli admitted he was exhausted, emotionally as well as physically. "Will put my feet up for a few days as it takes a lot out of me to put that kind of effort into every game," he said, with an eye on India's next game on March 2 against New Zealand.

Sunday night, meanwhile, will never perish in the mind of the viewers. For, these are the nights made for Kohli.

● Punjab

used to raise the height of the existing boundary wall, which was already nearly 8 feet high. The resultant gap over the existing entry gate has been covered with blue corrugated sheets to prevent anything from being thrown inside.

In the adjoining Qila Lal Singh village, barbed wires have been used to barricade the approach road to the police station.

In Amritsar city, tall green nets have been installed around the boundary walls of police establishments to "make it more difficult for someone to throw anything from outside into the police buildings".

Stating that all previous attacks in his district had been solved, Batala Senior Superintendent of Police P Suhail Qasim Mir said he expects the perpetrators of the February 17 incident to be identified soon. "We have initiated the process for the issue of red corner notices so we can get gangsters based abroad extradited to India," he said.

Dismissing criticism of the recent security upgrades, Mir said, "Police establishments were not attacked. We cannot sit back and do nothing. In fact, hardening of security at police stations, raising the

height of walls, etc., is mandated by Bureau of Police Research and Development (set up in 1970 to identify the needs of the police)."

Security measures have been beefed up at police stations visited by *The Indian Express* across Amritsar and Gurdaspur districts.

While a tall net was already in place at a police checkpoint on Amritsar's Airport Road when it was attacked on January 9, to "protect" the city's Vijay Nagar checkpoint, located near a flyover, view cutters have been installed on the bridge. Provoking the ire of the locals, who say it "poses an accident risk", a police car has also been permanently stationed on the flyover to keep a watch on the checkpoint.

In the posh Ranjit Avenue area, traffic has been diverted at the main chowk to limit access to the police station, besides the installation of barriers. At Gharinda police station under Amritsar Rural Police, extra floodlights have been installed and deployment increased.

Even as senior Punjab Police officers say the extra security measures reflect a broader strategy to counter rising threats and to ensure the safety of police personnel and infrastructure, Satpal Singh, Station House Officer, Dera Baba Nanak Police Station, denied their link to the grenade incidents.

FROM PAGE ONE

FULL REPORTSON
WWW.INDIANEXPRESS.COM

Those of slave mentality attacking our religion with foreign support: PM

in the attempt to weaken the nation and its faith)," Modi said.

"People who harbor hatred toward Hindu beliefs have existed for centuries in one guise or another. These people with slave mentality (*gulami ki mansikata*) attack our beliefs, temples, saintly culture and principles. They insult our festivals, traditions and customs. They dare to sling mud at a religion and culture that is inherently progressive. Their agenda is to divide our society and break its unity," he said.

"These days, we are seeing discussions about the Maha Kumbh everywhere," Modi said. Underlining the religious significance of the Maha Kumbh, he

praised sanitation workers and police personnel who "won the hearts of the people".

"This is the great Kumbh of unity where thousands of doctors and volunteers work with dedication and the spirit of service. People visiting the great Kumbh of unity appreciate these efforts," he said.

"In this very Maha Kumbh, numerous social service projects are being carried out. It's hard for the media to pay attention to them, and they haven't garnered much discussion either. But I'd like to highlight one — in this Maha Kumbh of unity, a Netra Maha Kumbh (Eye Maha Kumbh) is taking place. In this

Netra Maha Kumbh, pilgrims from every corner of the country, especially people from poor families, are getting their eyes tested for free," he said.

Modi said that while over 2 lakh have had their eyes examined so far, about "one-and-a-half lakh people have received free medicines and spectacles".

The Bageshwar Dham Medical and Science Research Institute, to be built across 10 acres at an estimated cost of over Rs 200 crore, will be equipped with 100 beds, offering free treatment to underprivileged cancer patients. Bageshwar Dham chief priest Dharendra Shastri was among those present at the event.

Addressing him, Modi said: "In this environment, my younger brother, Dharendra Shastri ji, has been awakening people across the country with the mantra of unity for quite some time. Now, he has taken yet another resolve in the interest of society and humanity... He has decided to build this cancer institute. This means that here at Bageshwar Dham, you will now receive the blessings of devotion, sustenance and a healthy life."

Highlighting efforts made by his government in fighting cancer, Modi said cancer daycare centres would be opened across all districts in the next three years.

● Trump's latest: '\$18 mn to India for polls... they take advantage of us'

question mark on the integrity of these elections — seven months before the ouster of Sheikh Hasina.

Two functionaries involved in the Nagorik project confirmed the use of USAID-CEPPS funds for the project — one of them directly to The Indian Express.

On February 22, The Washington Post reported that there was no record of a CEPPS program matching DOGE's description in India, citing people familiar with the organization's work. CEPPS did have a \$21 million USAID contract — not for India, but for neighbouring Bangladesh, the Post reported. It quoted a US official "with knowledge of the aid programs," as saying: "It seems that they are conflating numbers from other programs."

"We don't know anything about elections in India because we have never been involved," a person familiar with CEPPS's work told The Post. "We were all shocked to see that claim from DOGE."

However, this funding-for-elections-in-India continues as a Trump refrain, its framing changing with every statement. "18 million dollars for helping India with

its elections. Why the hell? Why don't we just go to old paper ballots, and let them help us with their elections, right? Voter ID. Wouldn't that be nice? We're giving money to India for elections. They don't need money," he said February 23.

"They take advantage of us pretty good. One of the highest tariff nations in the world... We have a 200 per cent (tariffs) there and then we're giving them a lot of money to help them with their election," Trump said.

He has even referred to the alleged funding as trying to "get somebody else elected"; a "kickback" scheme; and even going to "my friend Prime Minister Modi in India" for voter turnout.

Consider these:

■ **Feb 19:** Trump questioned providing \$21 million to India for "voter turnout" as he reiterated that the US "can hardly get in there" because of high Indian tariffs. He added that he has a "lot of respect for India. I have a lot of respect for the Prime Minister," and noted that PM Narendra Modi had visited the White House the previous week.

■ **Feb 20:** At a summit in Miami, Trump said: "...Why do we need to spend \$21 million for

voter turnout in India? Wow, I guess they (the Biden administration) were trying to get somebody else elected. We have got to tell the Indian Government."

■ **Feb 21:** Trump, speaking at the Republican Governors Association meeting in Washington DC, said, "\$21 million for voter turnout in India. Why are we caring about India's turnout? We have got enough problems. We want our own turnout... I would say in many cases, many of these cases, anytime you have no idea what we're talking about, that means there's a kickback because nobody has any idea what's going on there."

■ **Feb 22:** Trump, speaking at a 'Governors Working Session,' said: "\$21 million going to my friend Prime Minister Modi in India for voter turnout. We're giving 21 million for voter turnout in India. What about us? I want voter turnout too."

The MEA on February 21 said the revelations about USAID funding for certain activities in the country are "deeply troubling" and have led to concerns about foreign interference in its internal affairs.

MEA spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal said: "Relevant depart-

ments and agencies are looking into this matter. It would be premature to make a public comment at this stage, so relevant authorities are looking into it and hopefully, we can come up with an update on that subsequently."

The next day, External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar echoed this saying the information put out by Trump administration people is "concerning" and that the government is looking into it.

During an interaction at Delhi University, he also said USAID was allowed in India "in good faith, to do good faith activities", and suggestions are being made in US that "there are activities which are in bad faith".

"So, it surely warrants a look. And, if there is something to it, I think the country should know who are the people involved in the bad faith activities," Jaishankar said. "As a government, we are looking into it, because such organisations have an obligation to report. And, my sense is, the facts will come out," Jaishankar said.

The controversy started on February 16, when DOGE, led by billionaire Elon Musk, announced a series of expenditure cuts, listing \$21 million allocated for "voter turnout in India."

● 8 trapped, other recall narrow escape: 'Were told there's some leakage'

made it out.

"The night shift workers had informed us about water leaking into the tunnel. But this has happened several times, and we went in exercising caution," he said. They walked over 13 km into the tunnel, which took about an hour, according to Sah.

"After 15-20 minutes of us getting there, chunks of mud started falling. I was just 20 metres away (from where the collapse happened). The shift in charge told us to move and the alarm was sounded. We ran. Within a few minutes, there was a loud sound, and a portion of the tunnel collapsed. It was only when we came out and checked the attendance register that we realised eight had not made it out," Sah said.

A massive rescue operation is underway to bring the trapped men out. It involves around 300 trained personnel, including 128 from the National Disaster Response Force (NDRF), 120 from the State Disaster Response Force (SDRF), 23 from Singareni Collieries and 24 from the Army. While rescuers have reached over 13 km inside the tunnel, the water and slush in the next few hundred metres have prevented the rescuers from getting to the trapped men.

On Sunday evening, NDRF commandant Prasanna Kumar, who is supervising the rescue efforts, told *The Indian Express* that they had dewatered the area.

"Now, we are removing the slush and trying to reach the other side. Progress is slow as the team moves in a zig-zag pattern due to the heavy slush and the risks involved. They have gone over the slush and mud, and there is still about 100 metres left to cover. Hopefully, they will cover it tonight and reach the place where we believe the eight persons are trapped. Our team is making sounds and calling out to the trapped men," he said.

Earlier in the day, Telangana Irrigation Minister Uttam Kumar Reddy said, "We are considering three options — drilling from above, drilling from the side, or desilting the area to extract the survivors."

Army personnel who inspected the tunnel said that "a section of the roof, approximately three metres in length of the under-construction SLBC tunnel, collapsed and swift rescue operations are ongoing". An Army statement said that "Telangana and Andhra Sub Area teams of the Army are coordinating the rescue operation. The Engineer Task Force of the Bison

Division from Secunderabad has also been deployed.

The trapped workers have been identified as Manoj Kumar and Sri Niwas from Uttar Pradesh; Sandeep Sahu, Jagta Xess, Santosh Sahu and Anuj Sahu from Jharkhand; Sunny Singh from Jammu and Kashmir; and Gureepreet Singh from Punjab.

Anuj's cousin Sanjiv Sahu was also inside the tunnel when the collapse happened but was among those who managed to get out safely. "We live in the same room in the workers' colony and went inside together on Saturday morning. He went ahead of the tunnelling machine to look for something and that is when the entire thing collapsed. In the melee, I didn't realise that he got left behind," said Sanjiv, breaking down. "He is related to me, but I couldn't gather the courage to call my *chacha*."

Anuj is the eldest of three brothers and the sole breadwinner of his family, Sanjiv said.

Some of the trapped workers' families are calling their coworkers for news. "But we don't have any information. Officials don't share anything with us. What do we tell the families?" asked G Govind, a tunnel worker.

Govind, who also went inside

the tunnel Saturday morning, said the experience would haunt him. "Some of us have not eaten since Saturday afternoon. The shout by the supervisors to run and the chaos after that as the tunnel went dark due to power supply disruption still haunts us. We are lucky we got out safely, but the thought of our brothers' fate is eating away at us," he said.

Sanjiv spoke of the anger that some of the workers felt. "We risk our lives daily, but some of us have not been paid for three months. The company only recruits senior staff, like engineers. Workers like us are recruited through a private contractor... who has not paid us. The tunnel is shut now, and we don't think work will start soon. How will we go home? We have no money."

Raj Kumar, who has been working on the project since 2019, said the workers' colony, usually bustling with activity, was quiet on Sunday.

"Usually, we greet each other, ask how the day was and what happened inside the tunnel. Workers returning from the shift call their family members, prepare food, sit around and talk just like family. Today, it is gloomy, we haven't left our rooms all day," he said.

● Meloni slams Left: When Trump, Modi, I talk, we're called threat to democracy

"Today, when (US President Donald) Trump, Meloni, (Argentina President Javier) Milei or maybe (Prime Minister Narendra) Modi talk, they are called a threat to democracy. This is the Left's double standard, but we are used to it, and the good news is people no longer believe in their lies, despite all the mud they throw at us. Citizens keep voting for us," she said.

Meloni said that "conservatives keep on growing, are becoming more and more influential in European politics, and that is why the Left is nervous and with Trump's victory, their irritation has turned into hysteria, not only because conservatives are winning, but because conservatives are now collaborating globally".

She said people vote for them as "we defend freedom, we love our nations, we want secure borders, we preserve businesses and citizens from the green Leftist insanity and we defend family life... We fight against wokeism... and we stand for common sense."

People are not as naive as the Left considers them, she said.

Meloni said that the United States and Europe would remain close under Trump, despite soaring tensions between the allies, including over Ukraine.

"Our adversaries hope that President Trump will move away from us (Europe)," Meloni said. But, "knowing him as a strong and effective leader, I bet that those who hope for divisions will be proven wrong," she said.

Her statements reflected the articulation by the Global Right, that had gathered at the annual congregation of the Conservatives in the US.

Meloni's framing of India, led by Modi, as part of the coalition of the global conservatives is significant given the strains in the current Europe-US trans-Atlantic relationship and the

new warmth between Trump and Russian President Vladimir Putin.

Modi and Meloni have a strong rapport as both leaders have worked to turnaround the atrophy in the ties that had been adversely impacted over the issue of Italian marines and the corruption allegations in the defence sector.

The two have met regularly on the sidelines of the multilateral meetings — Meloni had visited India in March 2023 and then had come for the G20 summit in September 2023.

Meloni invited PM Modi for the G7 leaders' summit in Italy in June 2024, after the Lok Sabha elections last year. This chemistry has been the cause of many viral tweets and memes, with the hashtag "Melodi".

After a decade of setbacks, Indian and Italian diplomats feel that the public opinion on both sides have evolved into a positive framework, and there is acceptability of the improved nature of the ties.

Addressing the conference at National Harbor in Maryland, just outside Washington DC, Trump said, "We're going to forge a new and lasting political majority that will drive American politics for generations to come."

On the sidelines of the conference, Trump met with conservative Polish President Andrzej Duda amid rising tensions in Europe over Russia's war in Ukraine and the Russia-US partnership towards defusing the conflict with Ukraine and Europe not at the table.

After he took the stage, Trump saluted Duda and Milei. Trump called Duda "a fantastic man and a great friend of mine" and said "you must be doing something right, hanging out with Trump." He noted that Milei was "a MAGA guy, too, Make Argentina Great Again."

(WITHPTI)

● 3rd AC gains speed, brings over a third of passenger revenues to Rlys

of total passengers), the number of AC 3-tier passengers registered a CAGR of almost 19 per cent to 26 crore in 2024-25. The revenues from AC 3-tier jumped to Rs 30,089 crore this year from Rs 12,370 crore in 2019-20.

In the pre-pandemic year, i.e., 2019-20, passengers travelling Second Class Sleeper (Second Class ticket with a berth to sleep) were the highest contributor to the total passenger revenues. They contributed Rs 13,641 crore (more than one-fourth or 27 per cent of total revenues of Rs 50,669 crore), but were just 37 crore or 4.6 per cent of total 809 crore passengers who travelled by rail that year.

But this year, i.e., 2024-25, the number of passengers travelling Sleeper Class, generated Rs 15,603 crore or 19.5 per cent of total revenues. They were still 38 crore passengers or just 5.25 per cent of the total number of passengers who travelled by the Railways during the year.

A closer look at Railways' passenger data from 2019-20 to 2024-25 reveals that while the AC 3-tier fares have gone up over the last five years, the average percentage increase is lower compared with AC First Class, AC

2-tier and AC Chair Car, and also the Sleeper Class.

For AC 3-tier, the fare per passenger increased 7.4 per cent to Rs 1,171 in 2024-25 from Rs 1,090 in 2019-20; for AC First Class 25.38 per cent, AC Chair Car (23.24 per cent) and then AC 2-tier (18.22 per cent) in the last five years.

In the case of AC First Class and AC Chair Car premium coaches, the fare per passenger increased by Rs 458 and Rs 119, respectively, over the last five years. For AC 2-tier, it increased to Rs 1,498 in 2024-25 from Rs 1,267 in 2019-20. The Sleeper Class witnessed an increase of 10.64 per cent in fares in the last five years.

What has also changed is the mix of rail travellers viz., those travelling AC (AC 1 Class, AC 2-tier, AC 3-tier and AC Chair Car) and non-AC (Second Class Sleeper, Second Class Mail & Express, Second Class Ordinary and Suburban) classes. In 2019-20, the number of AC passengers were 18 crore, and this more than doubled to 38 crore in 2024-25. The number of non-AC class passengers, however, dropped from 790 crore in 2019-20 to 688 crore in 2024-25.

● Fadnavis Govt flags procurement 'payoffs', MSP under ex-CM Shinde

BJP's Jaykumar Rawal to form a six-member committee comes in the wake of complaints of alleged irregularities and "demand for money" by procurement agencies that were approved by the previous government for agricultural produce under the Centre's Pradhan Mantri Annadata Aay Sanrakshan Abhiyan (PM-AASHA) scheme.

"While purchasing agricultural produce at the guaranteed price under the Minimum Support Scheme, some state-level nodal agencies have been found to be demanding money from various farm producers' companies, which come under their jurisdiction, to start procurement centers," the latest order stated.

Besides, it said, these agencies were "demanding money for the procurement process at the centers and illegally deducting money" from them. The order also listed another alleged irregularity, stating that "the board of directors of some nodal institutions includes more than one person from the same family".

"Considering all these factors, the state government found it necessary to adopt a comprehensive criteria/working method for determining the state-level nodal

institutions for implementing the said scheme in the state," the order stated.

According to state officials, the order raises questions on decisions taken under the previous government when Shiv Sena leader Abdul Satar was heading the Marketing Ministry. At the time, they said, several proposals were sent to NAFED to appoint more agencies from the state and allegations of "demand for money" later surfaced against many of them. Satar did not respond to requests for comment from *The Indian Express*.

Speaking about the order, minister Rawal said "most of these state level agencies (SLAs) do not have any background of such purchases and there have been instances of some irregularities".

"Initially, there were only two SLAs in the state and during the MVA government's tenure, six new SLAs were given permission. In the previous government, more SLAs were given permission and now the number has reached 47, which is the highest in any state. Some of the agencies have been given permission despite not fitting the set criteria. Some traders and politicians have also been given permission to become SLAs.

Hence, we have formed this committee to look into what should be the criteria for allowing someone to become an SLA," he said.

Rawal said action "will definitely be taken" against agencies that are found to have committed irregularities. "SLAs get around 2 per cent brokerage for the purchase and this year alone, there were purchases of over 11 lakh tonnes of soybean, which is huge... now everyone wants to become a SLA," he said.

Officials said there will be "stricter scrutiny as to who can do procurement of soybean and onion among other crops under MSP". The new committee will be headed by the managing director of Maharashtra State Cooperative Marketing Federation, and will include the managing director of NAFED in Mumbai, the state marketing director in Pune, the chief marketing officer of the state agricultural marketing board in Pune, and former joint director of Department of Co-Operation, Marketing & Textiles, Maharashtra.

According to the order, the committee will study and formulate a comprehensive policy on functioning and procedure to implement MSP schemes under PM-

AASHA and selection of SLAs.

"The committee will submit a detailed report within one month, including suggestions and recommendations for the government on selection of state level nodal agencies and implementing the MSP schemes across the state," states the order signed by the Additional Secretary, Department of Co-Operation, Marketing & Textiles, Maharashtra.

Officials said the Union Ministry of Agriculture had issued guidelines in October 2018 regarding procurement under the PM-AASHA scheme.

According to these guidelines, they said, the Centre guarantees purchase of up to 25 per cent of the total production of essential agricultural commodities at MSP. "This process is carried out by NAFED as the nodal agency with state-level nodal institutions responsible for facilitating the purchase," an official said.

On the political front, the latest decision by the Fadnavis government points to a growing divide between the leadership of alliance partners BJP and Shinde's Shiv Sena.

Last week, the Chief Minister's Office ordered an inquiry into a stalled Rs 900-crore housing proj-

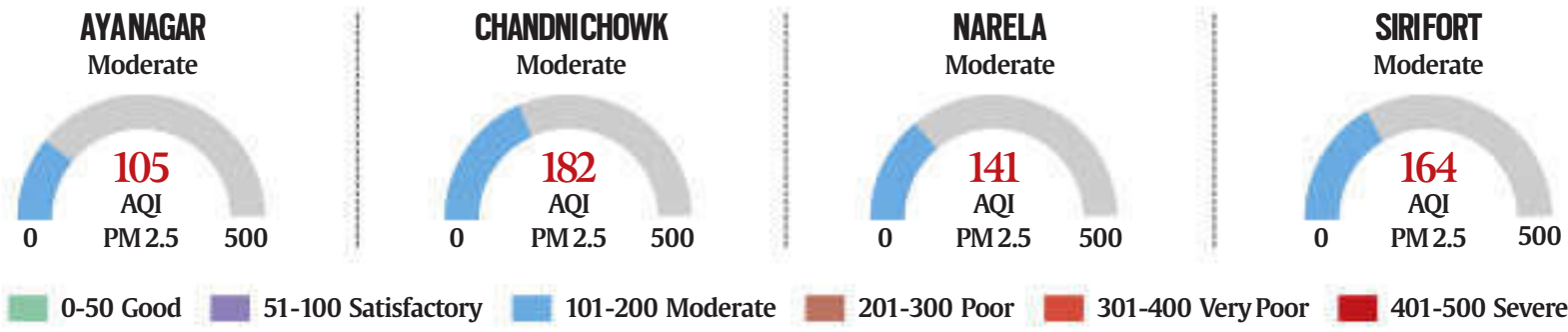
ect in Jalna that was approved for revival in 2023 by then Chief Minister Shinde. Earlier this month, the state scrapped a BMC tender worth Rs 1,400 crore for solid waste collection, slum passage cleaning and drainage and toilet maintenance, which was floated during Shinde's tenure as CM.

The Shiv Sena is also upset that Fadnavis did not concede their demands for the posts of Guardian Minister of Nashik and Raigad districts.

On the other hand, Shinde's party has set up a Deputy Chief Minister's Medical Relief Aid Cell at the Maharashtra secretariat on the lines of the Chief Minister's Relief Fund. Similarly, the Shinde-led Sena has started its own project coordination cell, apart from the CM's war room.

For a few weeks now, Shinde has been staying away from government meetings and holding separate sessions of his own. He did not attend a CM's war room meeting two weeks ago, and review meetings of metropolitan region development authorities chaired by Fadnavis last week — although these authorities fall under Shinde's own Urban Development Department.

3 THE CITY



S K Y W A T C H

FORECAST: February 24
Mainly clear sky.
Mist likely in the morning

MAX: 26-28 | **MIN: 10-12**
2.5 °C above normal | .2° C above normal

FOCUS ON PROMISES, NOT EXCUSES: AAP

Govt coffers left empty by previous regime: CM

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, FEBRUARY 23

CITING A review of the financial status of Delhi undertaken in the last four days since she assumed charge, Chief Minister Rekha Gupta on Sunday stepped up the attack on the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) and accused it of leaving an empty “public exchequer” when it was in power in the Capital before the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) took over. The AAP, however, shot back and claimed that Delhi’s budget grew from Rs 30,000 crore to Rs 77,000 crore in the 10 years of Arvind Kejriwal’s leadership. “We have handed over a fiscally strong and growing government to the BJP,” said former CM and AAP leader Atishi. The BJP must focus on delivering on their promises instead of making “excuses,” she said.

The latest political sparring came a day before the start of the new Assembly session. On Sunday, Gupta was addressing a press conference when she said that the government held several meetings in the last four days. “In the last four days, we held several meetings. We sat with the officials and reviewed the current financial status...all government coffers have been left empty.”

Gupta made the remarks while replying to a question related to the monthly assistance of Rs 2,500 to women. She assured that the scheme — a key poll promise of the party — would be rolled out following a thorough planning. “This is an important scheme for women in Delhi and we will implement it with detailed planning,” she said. However, the AAP rejected the CM’s claims. “Now, with a fiscally strong government handed over to the BJP, excuses won’t cut it. The people of Delhi expect delivery, not delays,” the party said in a statement.

Former CM Atishi while responding to the Chief Minister’s latest remarks said, “I had expected that from the moment



CM Rekha Gupta and Delhi BJP chief Virendra Sachdeva held a press conference in New Delhi on Sunday. Amit Mehra

the BJP government was formed, it would start making excuses to avoid fulfilling its so-called guarantees and promises to the people of Delhi. That is why, even before the new Chief Minister took oath, I had placed the financial figures of the Delhi government before the public and the nation. “One of the key indicators of a government’s financial strength is its debt-to-GDP ratio — how much debt a government carries as a percentage of its GDP. When AAP took charge, Delhi’s debt-to-GDP ratio was over 6%. In ten years, we reduced it to just 3%, probably the lowest in the country. Additionally, the 2022 CAG report clearly states that Delhi is the only state in India that has been running in profit since 2015,” the AAP leader was quoted as saying in the statement.

The war of words came after the CM attended a BJP legislative party meeting earlier in the day. The three-day Assembly session, Gupta asserted after the meeting, will “focus on discussions about development projects, with no room for negativity.”

The CM said that the BJP-led Delhi government will table the pending CAG (Comptroller and Auditor General of India) reports during the session and “the previous AAP government will have to answer for every rupee coming from the blood and sweat of

the people of Delhi.” The CAG reports, which allegedly raise questions over the AAP’s governance, have been a point of contention between the BJP and AAP leaders. Meanwhile, CM Gupta also held a meeting with the officials of the Finance Department on Saturday to review finances and budgetary position of Delhi. “More meetings will take place in the coming days as the Budget will also be presented next month for the next fiscal year. The CM reviewed the current financial status..The department is also preparing a white paper on the financial status of Delhi,” a senior official said.

Last year, when the AAP government came up with its scheme of financial assistance of Rs 1,000 to women in the city, the Finance Department raised several objections and highlighted in the Cabinet note that the implementation of the scheme would create a huge fiscal burden and put the government into a revenue deficit.

At present, 15% of Delhi’s total budget is spent on subsidies. Further, the Delhi government last year requested a loan of Rs 10,000 crore from the Central government under the National Small Savings Fund (NSSF). Sources say the approval from the “Centre is yet to come”.



The ‘Composite School R&R Site’ in Jewar. Gajendra Yadav

Broken benches, dirty toilets and playground littered with garbage: A Jewar school struggles

The Noida International Airport in Jewar is set to begin ops this year. Eight km away, a school in RR Colony, set up for the children of 6 villages affected by the project, still struggles for basic facilities

NEETIKA JHA
NOIDA, FEBRUARY 23

AT FIRST glance, this 16-room pale yellow structure resembles a derelict building. There are several broken benches, the toilets are filthy, reeking of stool and urine, there is garbage scattered in the compound, which also contains pieces of glass and liquor bottles, and the water hand pump — the only source of water for the children — is clogged with dirt and plastic wrappers.

This, however, is the only government-run primary school for the children of those displaced during the first phase of land acquisition for the upcoming Noida International Airport at Jewar in western Uttar Pradesh.

Located in the Rehabilitation and Resettlement (RR) colony in Jewar, the school — ‘Composite School R&R Site’ — was built by the Yamuna Expressway Industrial Development Authority (YEIDA); officials said it was handed over to the district administration in 2021.

During the first phase of land acquisition in 2018, the land in six villages — Rohi, Nagla Chitr, Nagla Ganeshi, Nagla Sareefkha, Nagla Phoolkha and Dayanapur Kheda — was acquired. This also included the land of the three primary schools in Rohi, Nagla Sareefkha and Nagla Ganeshi.

Post the acquisition, schools of all six villages were merged into one to hold classes till Grade 8. Even as the airport is set to begin domestic and international flight operations soon, those displaced are still awaiting a “proper” school promised to them seven years ago.

When *The Indian Express* visited the school on February 17, located 8.3 km away from the airport, only 8 of the 16 rooms in the building, which included an office, a library and a staff room, were functional. Of the 626 children who officials claimed were enrolled in the school, only 150 were present — most without uniforms. With most of the benches broken, children in a few classes were seen sitting on a plastic mat.

According to the villagers, the composite school is not close to anything that was promised to them by YEIDA. “This school is for



The toilet is in a derelict state; (left) inside a classroom. Gajendra Yadav/Neetika Jha



six villages. They had told us that the school that we would get would be better than those in Delhi and Noida, but look at its condition,” said Shiv Kumar (40), a farmer from Dayanapur Kheda.

His three daughters go to the nearby Jewar Public School. “*Hum log zyada padhe likhe nahi hai, par itna pata hai ki padhne se zindagi badal jata hai. Nahi toh fir yahi pe gaai bhains aur gobar karna padega isliye private school bhejte hai* (We are not highly educated but we know that education can change lives or else the children would have to work with the animals here),” he said.

Babita Devi (35), a resident of Rohi, said: “I am not educated but I thought my children would be. But now it feels that their lives would also be like mine, sweeping the road.”

Babita is a mother of three. Her elder daughter, aged 14, completed Class 8 from the composite school last year. “She doesn’t speak much, I am scared that if I send her to another school to study further, she will be teased

or assaulted. Her safety is more important,” said Babita.

Would she send her daughter to the composite school if it taught students beyond Class 8? “Of course,” she answered.

When contacted, Shailendra Bhatia, YEIDA Officer on Special Duty, told *The Indian Express*: “We had a master plan for the school. To ensure that the school gets ample space, we have reduced the size of the adjacent areas.”

Maintaining that the school was well-planned, he added, “It is our priority so that the children do not suffer.”

At Nagla Chitr, Nagla Ganeshi and Nagla Sareefkha, most girls don’t join another school after Class VIII. Instead, they help with household chores. A few bright students join the boys to travel a kilometer-and-a-half to Jain Inter College in Jewar to study further.

In Rohi and Dayanapur Kheda, residents who are relatively well-off send their children to private schools about 5 km from the RR colony. “This school has no facilities. Had there been

proper facilities, I would never have sent my daughter that far,” said Mona (24), a resident of Rohi. Mona said she pays Rs 500 as bus fees and Rs 550 as school fees every month. “We are not very rich. But I do not want a life like mine for my daughter. We will work hard for her.”

Nangla Ganeshi resident Nandini’s (28) son studies in Class 5 at the composite school. “Nobody is there to keep an eye on the children... There is neither cleanliness nor discipline at the school. The playground is full of bricks and stones, there is no tap for drinking water. Construction work has been going on for two years,” she said.

At Nangla Sareefkha, Mohammad Iqbal asked his son, a student of Class 5, to recite the table of 2 but he could not. “This is the quality of education. All he does is play marbles. We have complained to the teachers but they blame us,” he said.

Teachers blamed the situation on the lack of facilities. “The playground is full of stones and pebbles. Construction is going on. What activity can be carried out for children on a ground like this?” asked one of them.

Maintaining that the school doesn’t even have a proper boundary, the teacher claimed: “From the park, which is behind the school, anyone can jump and

enter the campus. Wine bottles are lying everywhere... people party here once we leave.”

The teacher further said it was only last December when the school informed the Basic Shiksha Adhikari (BSA) about the requirement for more benches as well as the general condition of the school. “We get a Google form every month, where we mention our requirements. But nothing happens.”

Teachers further said the situation is worse during monsoon. “The school gets flooded. Last season, a worker fell while distributing mid-day meals and d injured her leg,” said another teacher.

She added that there is no water in the washrooms. “There was a submersible pump, but someone broke it. Most of the time, the girls go home to relieve themselves.”

What happens when they menstruate? “They don’t attend classes on those days. There are no proper doors in the wash-room. Girls cannot use them and so we send them home,” the teacher said.

When contacted, Gautam Buddh Nagar BSA Rahul Panwar said, “We will inspect the school at the earliest and ensure that the infrastructure is developed within a month.”

“There are 636 students registered with the school. The school also has 15 teachers, including two shiksha mitras. On most days, almost 70% of the students attend classes,” Panwar claimed.

He added that it is not possible to maintain the school without the support of the villagers.

Senior YEIDA official blamed the BSA and the district administration for the situation. “The school was developed and handed over to the administration. It is the responsibility of the BSA and the district administration to look after it. However, if the administration feels they need financial allocation, we will provide all assistance.”

Gautam Buddha Nagar District Magistrate Manish Kumar Verma said an inspection will soon be carried out at the school. “YEIDA had constructed the school and handed it over to us, but if the condition is such, we will ensure that it is checked.

FIRST WOMAN TO HOLD THE POST

Atishi set to lead Opposition charge in Delhi Assembly

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, FEBRUARY 23

FORMER DELHI chief minister and Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) leader Atishi is set to lead the Opposition charge in the Assembly after AAP MLAs picked her as their legislative party leader on Sunday at a meeting.

Atishi, who is among the 22 AAP MLAs who won during the February 5 polls, will be the first woman to hold the position of the Leader of the Opposition (LoP) in the Delhi Assembly.

The first session of the new Assembly begins on Monday.

AAP Delhi convener Gopal Rai, also among the 22 MLAs, announced in a press conference on Sunday that Atishi’s name for the role was proposed by Burari MLA Sanjeev Jha and seconded by Kondli MLA Kuldeep Kumar and Tilak Nagar MLA Jarnail Singh. “Atishi was elected unopposed,” Rai said at the press conference.

AAP Rajya Sabha MP and the party’s national general secretary (organisation) Sandeep Pathak was the observer at the meeting, which was also attended by Arvind Kejriwal, the party’s national convener.

Three-time MLA Kejriwal lost to the BJP’s Parvesh Sahib Singh Verma from the New Delhi constituency.

Speaking at the press conference, Atishi said, “I thank Kejriwal and the MLAs for reposing faith in me. The people of Delhi have decided we will sit in the Opposition this time. There are two main things we will focus on. First is to ensure the promises made by the BJP are fulfilled, especially its promise to give Rs 2,500 per month to the women of Delhi...”

“The second is to ensure that



Atishi addresses a press conference in New Delhi on Sunday. Amit Mehra

the work that the AAP government did is not stopped or discontinued. Only a few days ago, the new Health Minister said that the Mohalla Clinics will be shut... We will make sure that the people of Delhi do not suffer and we will fight for them,” she said.

Delhi Health Minister Dr Pankaj Kumar Singh said two days ago that a review of the mohalla clinics will be taken up and that any irregularities will be reported.

The BJP-led Delhi government, which passed the adoption of the Centre’s Ayushman Bharat insurance scheme in its first cabinet meeting, has also cleared the decision to rename mohalla clinics as Arogya Mandirs.

Asked about the BJP’s Cabinet decision to table 14 pending CAG reports in the first Assembly session, Atishi said, “As the Chief Minister, I sent the CAG reports to the Speaker before the elections in a sealed envelope. They would have been presented in the first session of the new House in any case. The BJP is trying to spread misinformation.”

The reports will be tabled on Tuesday, the second day of the Assembly session.

PLAN A FARCE: BJP

AAP: MCD to regularise 12K workers tomorrow

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, FEBRUARY 23

THE MUNICIPAL Corporation of Delhi (MCD) will regularise 12,000 contractual workers in its House meeting on Tuesday, the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) said on Sunday.

The MCD is led by Mayor and AAP leader Mahesh Khichi and Deputy Mayor Ravinder Bhardwaj, who is also from the AAP. The party’s numbers in the House, however, have been dwindling, with many councillors switching to the BJP.

At a press conference on Sunday, AAP’s Atishi said, “In the last two years, we have made 4,500 (contractual) workers permanent. Now, in the MCD House meeting on Tuesday, we are set to regularise 12,000 more employees across all departments, including sanitation workers, junior engineers, and senior engineers, gardeners.” Leader of Opposition Sardar Raja Iqbal Singh, and Delhi BJP spokesperson Praveen Shankar Kapoor, meanwhile, accused the AAP of betraying the MCD employees.

“Atishi announced a preamble proposal to regularise 12,000 employees. This is nothing but a deception... especially for the sanitation workers. She served as a minister and chief minister in the Delhi government and is well aware that before preparing the employee regularisation preamble, the approval of the Municipal Commissioner and the Finance Department is mandatory and no such approval had been sought until Sunday. This entire matter is a farce,” said Singh.

He alleged AAP was bringing a “gimmicky” proposal to counter the CAG reports that are to be presented in the Assembly the same day.

Ministry of Culture
Government of India

**Centre for Contemporary Studies
Prime Ministers Museum and Library**

cordially invites you to a Talk
on
**Educational Hindi Books for Women in
Nineteenth-Century India**
by
Dr. Smita Gandotra
Fellow, PMML
25 February 2025 at 3:00pm
Venue:
Seminar Room, Library Building
Prime Ministers Museum and Library
Teen Murti House, New Delhi
All are Welcome.

Those wishing to have their names added to the email list
may please email us at:- ccs2nmml@gmail.com

CBC- 09142/12/0035/2425

Development Commissioner (Handlooms)
Ministry of Textiles, Govt. of India

बस्तर मंत्रालय
MINISTRY OF TEXTILES
Govt. of India

India Handloom

National Design Centre

बुनाई गाथा : The Story of Handloom

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**Handloom Expo by
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**Handloom Haat, Janpath
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QR Code

Illustration of a woman weaving on a handloom.

PWD CHALKS OUT LIST OF KEY PROJECTS

Pragati Maidan underpass, Barapullah Ph-3 to get a push under 100-day plan

GAYATHRI MANI
NEW DELHI, FEBRUARY 23

COMPLETING THE Pragati Maidan underpass on Bhairon Marg, the Barapullah Flyover, comprehensive maintenance and strengthening of 100 km of road stretches, flyovers and underpasses — these are some of the top projects on the Public Works Department's 25-point action plan, which it will focus on in the next three months.

The department has submitted its plan to the General Administrative Department (GAD) along with the target and timeline of completion.

BHAIRON MARG UNDERPASS

Under the Integrated Pragati Maidan Corridor Redevelopment Project, a tunnel and five underpasses were opened to the public in 2022. But opening of the 110-metre-long Bhairon Marg underpass has been delayed by nearly two years due to “design issues and technical hurdles”. In March last year, the PWD opened a 90-metre section that goes from Ring Road to Bhairon Marg.

Construction work on this underpass has been particularly challenging as it passes beneath an active railway line. The project then hit a major roadblock after the ‘box-pushing’ device got stuck. The ‘box pushing’ method involves pre-casting concrete boxes and then pushing them into place under live rail lines using hydraulic jacks, allowing construction with minimal disruption to train traffic.

The PWD then found a solution to this problem — the ‘cut and cover’ method. Officials said this involves cutting the railway track above, removing it to construct the tunnel, levelling the surface and re-laying the track.

“Approval is needed from the

What’s on the agenda



■ Completing Barapullah flyover Phase III (seeking approval to transplant trees)



■ Restarting repairs on 100 km of road stretches, display of model stretches



■ Finalising a policy to utilise spaces below flyovers



■ Resolution of underpass 5 of Pragati Maidan



■ Finalising a drainage master plan for Najafgarh basin, submitting data to stakeholders on Trans-Yamuna and Barapullah drains

comprehensive tender for maintenance of roads, drains

■ Cabinet proposal for roads under central road fund, urban development fund or those transferred to NHAI

■ Constructing a high-security jail in Narela

■ Comprehensive tenders for civil and electrical

maintenance work at 24 hospitals

■ Reviewing existing services in all govt offices, buildings, MSO, Vikas Bhawan

■ Renovation of Lampur complex and handing it over to the FRRO for a detention centre

Centre as it funds the project. The department, in the first 15 days, will coordinate with the MoHUA for approval,” said officials.

BARAPULLAH FLYOVER PHASE III

This project was supposed to be completed in 2017 but has hit several roadblocks — first due to

land acquisition and then permission for removal of trees. Last year, the land matter was cleared.

“In the next three months, the department will coordinate with authorities concerned for transplantation of trees. Once this is done, pending work will be completed,” said officials.

ROAD & DRAIN REPAIR

According to a senior PWD official, the focus in the next three months will be to repair roads and stormwater drains.

“Repairing roads, flyovers and underpasses are some of the projects that can be completed in the next three months. But for other key projects, we have set

timelines to complete preliminary work, seek approval from the departments concerned, draft policies and cabinets notes etc...,” said officials.

On Saturday, Chief Minister Rekha Gupta held a meeting with PWD officials regarding the condition of broken roads and drains. “Necessary improvements were discussed,” she said.

OTHER PLANS

■ Finalising tenders for comprehensive maintenance and repair/refurbishment of 15 foot overbridges, six subways and five underpasses.

■ Display ‘model stretches’ — this includes standardised footpaths, streetlights, road markings, signages and greenery — and complete the work in 15 days.

■ Strengthening 100 km of roads — including lane markings, installation of road signages, cleaning/repair of footpaths and drains, painting the central verge and grilles — is also on the cards. The target is to complete 15 km in 30 days and the rest in 100 days.

■ The PWD plans to draft a ‘notice inviting tender’ for new road works with defect liability of five years. “Under this plan, the contractor constructing a new road will have to maintain the stretch for five years,” said officials.

■ A new policy to use spaces below major flyovers is in the works. Officials said in the next 100 days, the PWD will coordinate with different departments and private firms to create services such as libraries or shops, draft a policy for space utilisation and get it approved.

■ The department is planning to carry out electrical and civil maintenance at 24 government hospital buildings and review existing services in all government offices. For this, it will float comprehensive tenders.

Police look at setting up booths in JJ clusters; boost night patrolling in Capital

Delhi Police chief Sanjay Arora sets mid-March deadline

ALOK SINGH
NEW DELHI, FEBRUARY 23

THE DELHI Police is looking to set up police posts or booths in jhuggi jhopri (JJ) clusters across the city “with an objective of providing optimal policing to these vulnerable inhabitants”, following directions issued by Commissioner Sanjay Arora, *The Indian Express* has learnt.

There are 675 slums and 1,700 jhuggi-jhopri (JJ) clusters, or unauthorised colonies, in the city comprising almost 3 lakh households.

The police chief has also called for a “tactical” action plan for “effective” night patrolling on the Capital’s streets, sources said. In the past few months, Delhi has witnessed several heinous crimes during late night hours, including the murder of a constable in Southeast Delhi’s Govindpuri area last November.

Sources said District DCPs and Joint Commissioners, who are working on both plans, have a deadline of mid-March.

According to a source, the



There are 675 slums and 1,700 JJ clusters in the city.

Commissioner in a note said the action plan for police posts in JJ clusters should identify all major and significant clusters. The note read, “The plan should focus on the distance of the cluster from the respective territorial jurisdictional police stations; availability of PCR vans in the area; and nature and patterns of crimes being reported from the area. Accordingly, a holistic view should be taken for considering whether policing needs will be best served by setting up notified police posts, integrated police booths or other minor interventions like outposts etc.”

According to a source, in another note, the Commissioner sought a “tactical action plan for manpower augmentation and internal duty readjustment to ensure optimal 24x7 night patrolling” across all police stations. He also said the plan should have a “holistic infrastructural update” so night patrolling could be done effectively, the source said.

In this note, according to the source, the Commissioner stated that there should be infrastructure for additional patrol halting points while upgraded night patrolling kits must be available 365 days a year. He also pointed out that the plan should be adjustable based on the weather conditions (hot summers and cold winters)

The Commissioner stated that the plans should be made after consulting both Law Order Zones, the source said.

The Delhi Police is divided into two separate law and orders — Zone I and Zone II — looked after by the Special Commissioner-rank officers.

SCALING NEW HEIGHTS

The Delhi Metro has achieved a new record with the construction of its highest-ever point near Haiderpur Badli Mor, surpassing the previous mark at Dhaula Kuan.



The steel span was constructed over the operational Yellow Line, ensuring minimal disruption to Metro services and live railway line. Credit: Express

LOCATION: Near Haiderpur Badli Mor Metro station on Magenta Line Ext (Janakpuri West – RK Ashram Marg) corridor

■ 490-m section near Outer Ring Road crosses over Haiderpur Badli Mor Metro station of Yellow Line (Samaypur Badli – Millennium City Centre Gurgaon) at a rail-level height of 28.362 metres

■ Steel span built over existing Yellow Line

■ Narrow space exists between the Metro viaduct and live railway tracks

■ Construction planned at non-op hours at night



■ Alternative support system using Macalloy bars — high strength steel bars — designed instead of traditional ground-based support



■ Second-highest elevated stretch also completed: Steel span at the railway crossing near Haiderpur Badli Mor Metro station, 27.610 metres tall on Phase-IV Magenta Line extension

■ Previous record is 23.6 metres in Dhaula Kuan in Phase-III Pink Line

Motorcyclist dies after falling off flyover

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, FEBRUARY 23

A 35-YEAR-OLD man, who was riding a motorcycle with his nephew, died after the two-wheeler fell off a flyover near Geeta Colony, said police.

Sonu and his 27-year-old nephew were heading to Sarita Vihar from Bhagirathi Vihar, said police.

At 3 pm, a PCR call reported that a motorcycle had fallen off the flyover near Geeta Colony. According to police, the injured were taken to Dr Hedgewar Arogya Sansthan Hospital by a man present at the spot. Sonu was pronounced dead while his nephew was said to be unconscious. A case has been registered against unknown persons under relevant sections, police said.

Woman’s body found in jute bag: Police rely on CCTV footage, tattoos to crack case

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, FEBRUARY 23

WHEN A passerby spotted a leg protruding out of a jute bag in a public toilet in Northwest Delhi’s Ashok Vihar on Saturday and called the police control room (PCR), officers had only a few details to crack the murder case.

The body recovered from the bag was that of a 30-year-old woman. Within a day, however, investigating officers connected the dots to uncover the alleged motive behind the killing.

Using footage from CCTV cameras at the scene, tattoos found on the forearm of the woman, and details of a phone call, police nabbed the accused, said officers.

Bhisham Singh, Deputy

Using footage from CCTV cameras at the scene, tattoos found on the forearm of the woman, and details of a phone call, police nabbed the accused, said officers

Commissioner of Police (DCP), Northwest district, said, “Someone spotted a leg protruding out of a sack and called the police. After checking CCTV footage, a man could be seen placing the jute bag at the location. The woman was later identified as Nandani alias Kallo, a resident of Gur Mandi in Model Town.”

Officers came across some names tattooed on the woman’s forearm — six in total — and one of them turned out to be of her former husband. He was made to join the investigation.

Police then found that the woman had married again; she had contacted her current husband on Friday night, asking for money. He too was made to join the probe.

When police questioned the woman’s husband, he said his wife called him from an unknown number.

Police then set about tracing this number; it belonged to a man identified as Keshav Prasad (50) who worked as a labourer at Azadpur Mandi. His phone’s location matched where the body was found, said officers.

Police arrested Prasad when he was trying to escape to

Vijayawada in Andhra Pradesh in search of a safe hideout.

During questioning, officers said, he admitted to killing Nandani.

On Friday night, the accused told police, he was heading home from work when he met the woman near the Azadpur flyover.

They both came to his jhuggi and had a meal together.

Police said he then allegedly tried to get intimate with the woman when she asked for Rs 10,000.

The two then got into an argument, police said. Prasad strangled Nandani, said officers, adding that he then put the body in a jute bag and threw it in a public toilet.

A case of murder and destruction of evidence has been registered, said police.

‘Manicured New Delhi & higgledy-piggledy Old Delhi — it’s a city of contrasts’



My Delhi

Ambassadors on this city - their home

KEVIN KELLY
IRISH AMBASSADOR

NIRBHAY THAKUR
NEW DELHI, FEBRUARY 23

A CITY of contrasts, whose people are full of life and hold rituals in great regard — that’s how Kevin Kelly, Ambassador of Ireland to India, describes the Capital, where every day is different.

When Kelly arrived in the Capital in September 2023, his first impression was how green and beautiful the city was. “It’s a “shame about the pollution”, he says. “Otherwise, Delhi would, in my view, be one of the most beautiful and livable cities in the world.”

Before being appointed to his current role as Ambassador to India, Bangladesh, Nepal, Sri Lanka and the Maldives, Kelly served as Head of Press and Communications for the Irish Department (Ministry) of

Foreign Affairs, Dublin, Ireland. (2021-2023). Prior to that, he served as Ambassador of Ireland to the Netherlands and Special Envoy of the Government of Ireland to Africa for Ireland’s campaign for election to the UN Security Council. (2016 – 2021).

He is married to Pamela Uwakwe and has two children, Maya and Noah.

Kelly spoke to *The Indian Express* as part of a series of interviews with Ambassadors about Delhi — their home.

Excerpts:

One place in the city that you love visiting often.

My favourite place in New Delhi has to be Lodhi Garden and Nehru Park. And I love Nehru Park particularly because it has a very nice running track - very professional and nice and flat. You can do two rounds of that and it’s a 5-km run. So, whenever the weather allows and the pollution allows, I go to Nehru Park. But Lodhi Garden is also spectacular because of the structures and the buildings inside as well.

Three things that stood out for you during your stay?

I think the number one thing is the people, how full of life they are... I hadn’t realised how impor-

tant rituals are... and celebrating all the key moments in life. So I really love the fact that there are so many national holidays, family events that people celebrate. In our embassy, we have a relatively small team of about 50 people, but in any week we could have, you know, somebody coming around with samosas to celebrate some kind of personal event, so that’s very very special.

The other thing is just how surprisingly green and beautiful New Delhi is... you think of this big crowded, messy place with, you know, not a lot of greenery. And then when you arrive, it’s so beautiful... one of the greenest cities in the world in terms of the parks and the trees. It’s such a shame about the pollution for those months of the year, otherwise, Delhi would, in my view, be one of the most beautiful and livable cities in the world.

The third thing would be the diversity. India is not just a country, it’s like a continent. If you’re down in Kerala, it’s a completely different vibe, and if you’re in Rajasthan or Mumbai or Chennai, every single place is so uniquely different... I come from a very small country... but it’s also quite diverse in terms of culture and language and dialects... but nothing compared to India.



Kevin Kelly, Ambassador of Ireland to India, stands beside a new electric tuk-tuk the Embassy uses to get around the neighbourhood. Express

The only problem I face here is the pollution. Sadly it’s longer than three months now... if you think it starts in Diwali, so that’s October, November, December, January. We even had pollution at the start of February. So it’s a real problem. I hope that it’s something that can be fixed over time.

How do you personally deal with pollution?

I’m lucky because I live in a

nice house here in Delhi and we have air purifiers. And when the pollution is very bad, I wear a mask outside. But I genuinely worry for other people who don’t have those things... who can’t necessarily afford the electricity for an air purifier in their house... and effectively it’s shortening their lives.

If you look at some other big cities in the world that face severe pollution, they have managed to fix that. I remember

when I was in university in Dublin in the late 80s and early 90s, we had terrible pollution... That’s gone completely. We have zero pollution now in our city.

It is something that affects everybody... So there should be a real incentive to try to fix it.

What about the traffic? How do you deal with that?

Dublin is not great for traffic either. We are one of the most congested cities in Europe partly because our road infrastructure isn’t as good as it should be and there are a lot of narrow streets... of course it’s nothing like Delhi.

Traffic is just something that you have to live with... traffic and pollution are two big negatives but other things in this wonderful city make up for it in many ways.

What I have found is that maybe I’ve become a Delhiite myself. Honestly, I think it’s better here than in many other cities like Bengaluru and Mumbai. The traffic there is crazy.

In the Embassy, we’ve bought a new electric tuk-tuk... with the green colours of Ireland, so we’re very proud of that. We use the tuk-tuk to get us around in a quicker way in the neighbourhood...

Memories or encounters that you’ll never forget?

Oh, there are so many. I’ll just give you two. One would be when I presented my credentials to Her Excellency, the President. That was the most beautiful event, very nicely done by the Indian government in the majestic Rashtrapati Bhavan. It’s something that I’ll never forget.

Then every day, there are small encounters. Last Friday was Valentine’s Day and I think it was also a Hindu holiday... we went walking at lunchtime with the staff out to see the tulips on Shanti Path and we came across a group of the most beautifully dressed women, about 15, who were all poets... they were all out for lunch to look at the tulips and presumably talk poetry to each other... we took a little video together which I put up on Instagram... I can’t imagine if I was walking down the street in London, I’d come across a group of 15 women who are all poets... and talking about Irish as well as Indian poetry...

Favourite food in the city?

I’m a vegetarian. So, my favourite food is *palak paneer*. And I like it when the paneer is a little bit toasted, not too soft and fleshy.

How is Delhi different from other cities you’ve stayed in?

It’s so huge, my god. I know

London and New York are big cities but Delhi just feels so huge. Just this Sunday, we were invited to an event on a farm in Gurgaon and it took almost as long to get there as it would to go to another county from Ireland.

Something that’s also very different is the contrast. You have the very manicured New Delhi juxtaposed with Old Delhi which is higgledy-piggledy with cows on the streets and tuk-tuks. You don’t necessarily get this variety in other cities.

One thing that you’ll miss the most when you leave?

I’ll just miss that vibrancy, I suppose... every day is different in New Delhi... I will miss the fact that every single day, if you’re open to a new experience you can have one in New Delhi. People will talk to you... they won’t think you’re a crazy person if you stop and ask them a question...

Very often in some European cities, people walk with their heads in their phones... some walk with their heads up in the air... but in Delhi, if you’re open to experiences and talking to people, you could spend the whole day chatting to different people.

FULL INTERVIEW ON www.indianexpress.com



Somnath Festival: A Unique Blend of Devotion and Arts

SOMNATH FESTIVAL WILL FEATURE MESMERISING PERFORMANCES BY RENOWNED INDIAN ARTISTS.

The holy town of Somnath will host the grand 'Somnath Festival' from February 24 to 26, in celebration of Maha Shivratri. This unique festival, blending devotion and artistic excellence, will feature a mesmerising confluence of dance and music performed by renowned Indian artists honoured with Padma Shri, Padma Bhushan and Padma Vibhushan awards. This is the first time such a large-scale three-day festival of classical dance and music is being organised in Gujarat.

Honourable Chief Minister Shri Bhupendrabhai Patel will inaugurate the Somnath Festival on the evening of February 24 in the presence of State Tourism Minister and Chief Guest Shri Mulubhai Bera, and other esteemed guests. The festival will witness an array of performances, including Veena recitals, bhajans, folk dances and other divine cultural expressions that embody the spiritual ambience of the revered Somnath Temple.



THE LEGACY OF SOMNATH



Situated at the confluence of the holy rivers Kapila, Hiran and Saraswati, it is an ancient pilgrimage site known for its spiritual vibrancy. The Somnath Temple, the first of the 12 Jyotirlingas, holds deep significance in Shaivism, embodying ancient Agama traditions. In this sacred space, music and dance transcend mere artistic forms and become an integral part of worship, bridging the earthly and the divine. Lord Shiva, revered as Nataraja, is depicted as the cosmic dancer whose 'Tandava' symbolises the rhythm and order of the universe. His celestial drum, the Damaru, is believed to have given birth to the fundamental sounds of Indian classical music.

The temple has long been a centre for artistic devotion, where Natya (dance) and Gana (music) are seen as means of spiritual elevation. Its Natya Mandap has borne witness to centuries of artistic offerings made in reverence to Lord Shiva. Keeping this tradition alive, the Somnath Festival will offer a splendid display of India's cultural heritage through performances by some of the most celebrated names in music and dance.

A GRAND CELEBRATION OF ARTS



The festival, organised by the State Tourism Department in collaboration with the Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts, Vadodara, will feature soulful musical renditions and spellbinding dance performances. An exhibition titled 'Vadyam: Naadasya Yatra' will also be showcased, highlighting 'Sacred Sound: The Journey of Instruments'. The exhibition will delve into the evolution of musical instruments, their role in divine storytelling, and their depiction in sculptures and visual arts.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS OF THE FESTIVAL

During the festival, a special 'Sangam Aarti' with 108 lamps will take place every evening at the Triveni Ghat. On the mornings of February 24 and 25, a seminar titled 'Somnath: Temple, Tirtha and Tradition' on the historical and religious significance of Somnath, will take place in Shri Somnath Sanskrit Mahavidyalaya.

A grand Palkhi Yatra will be organised in Somnath Temple on the morning of February 26, marking the auspicious occasion of Maha Shivratri. The same day, a grand Parthiveshwar Mahapoojan will be performed at Maruti Beach.



The Somnath Festival promises to be a profound experience, merging the divine with artistic splendour. The Tourism Corporation of Gujarat invites all devotees and art lovers to be part of this magnificent celebration at the sacred abode of Lord Shiva.

FESTIVAL SCHEDULE

Day 1: February 24

- 10:00 am onwards:**
- Seminar on Somnath: Temple, Pilgrimage, and Traditions at Shri Somnath Sanskrit Mahavidyalaya
- 7:30 pm onwards:** Inauguration of Somnath Festival
- Natya Katha – Har Har Mahadev by Padma Vibhushan Dr Sonal Mansingh
 - Shiv Bhajans by Surya Gayatri
 - Nimagna dance performance by Vidushi Rama Vaidyanathan
 - Jugalbandi by Pandit Sivamani (drums) and Padma Shri Pandit Ronu Majumdar (flute)

Shri Narendra Modi
Hon'ble Prime Minister

Shri Bhupendrabhai Patel
Hon'ble Chief Minister, Gujarat

Day 2: February 25

- 10:00 am onwards:**
- Seminar on Somnath: Temple, Pilgrimage and Traditions at Shri Somnath Sanskrit Mahavidyalaya
- 7:00 pm onwards:**
- Shadow Puppetry by Padma Shri Ramchandra Pulavar
 - Vocal music performance by Vidushi Sudha Raghuraman
 - Classical dance presentation by Padma Vibhushan Kumudini Lakhia and Kadamb Group
 - Bhajan recital by Shri Atul Purohit

Day 3: February 26

- 8:00 am onwards:** Parthiveshwar Mahapoojan at Maruti Beach
- 8:00 pm onwards:**
- Singari Melam performance by Baroda Kerala Samaj and Gujarati folk dance by Nilesh Parmar
 - Traditional Dayro storytelling by Yogesh Gadhvi
 - Classical dance performance by Rajashree Warrior and team
 - Violin ensemble by Mysore Manjunath
 - Shiv Mahima – a presentation of eight classical dance forms by Sparsh Studio for Performing Arts
 - Desert Slides by Padma Bhushan Pandit Vishwa Mohan Bhatt and Pandit Salil Bhatt
 - Flute recital by Pandit Shashank Subramanyam
 - Rhythmscape by maestro Bickram Ghosh

HOW TO REACH THERE:

Nearest Airport : Keshod 65 km, Diu 85 km, Porbandar 134 km, Rajkot 200 km.
Nearest Railway Station : Veraval 8 km, Junagadh 94 km.
Nearest Bus Station : Somnath 2 km, Junagadh 94 km.

Madhavpur Festival: A Celebration of India's Cultural Unity

Madhavpur Festival is a grand annual cultural event celebrated in the village of Madhavpur Ghed in Gujarat's Porbandar district. This festival commemorates the sacred marriage of Lord Krishna and Rukmini, which is believed to have taken place at Madhavpur. It provides an excellent opportunity for visitors to immerse themselves in the rich cultural heritage of Gujarat while also experiencing a blend of traditions from the northeastern regions of India.



One of the most fascinating aspects of the Madhavpur Festival is its deep-rooted connection with the Mishmi Tribe of Arunachal Pradesh. According to ancient legends, the Mishmi Tribe traces its lineage to King Bhishmaka, the father of Rukmini. The festival symbolises the journey of Rukmini from Arunachal Pradesh to Gujarat with Lord Krishna, making it an event of significant historical and cultural importance.

The Madhavpur Festival uniquely brings together the cultural elements of both Northeast and Western India. Diverse performances, including music, dance, and theatre are presented by artists from these regions. While the Northeastern states showcase their traditional music with instruments such as the dhol, pepa and flute, the western region presents lively folk dance forms like Garba, Dandiya and Raas. Additionally, visitors can explore handicrafts and traditional cuisines from both regions, making the festival a remarkable fusion of cultures.

Beyond the cultural festivities, the natural beauty of Madhavpur adds to the allure of the festival. The village,

situated along the coast, offers picturesque landscapes and is close to other historically significant sites in the Porbandar and Gir Somnath districts. A visit to the Madhavpur Festival is also an opportunity for tourists to explore the scenic beaches, historical landmarks and religious destinations in the region, making their trip an enriching experience.



The Madhavpur Festival extends over five days and commences on the auspicious occasion of Ram Navami. This year, the festival will begin on April 6. The highlight of the celebrations is a grand procession featuring a beautifully decorated chariot carrying an idol of Lord Krishna, paraded through the village streets amidst an atmosphere of devotion and joy. During the festival, people engage in traditional rituals, throw colours at each other, and participate in an array of cultural events.



Some of the main attractions of the festival include spectacular cultural performances, featuring folk artists from Gujarat, Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur and other Northeastern states, stalls exhibiting tourism, regional cuisines and crafts from different parts of the country, and artistic exhibitions and visual storytelling depicting the divine love of Lord Krishna and Rukmini.

The other key attractions include a grand multimedia show presenting the cultural significance of the festival, a sand sculpture exhibition showcasing intricate artworks related to the theme of the festival, and a theme pavilion offering an immersive experience into the traditions and history surrounding the celebration.

HOW TO REACH

By Air: The nearest airport is Rajkot International Airport, which is approximately 200 km away.
By Train: The nearest railway station is Porbandar railway station, located 60 km away.



The Madhavpur Festival blends traditional and religious significance with a contemporary celebration of cultural diversity and serves as a platform for promoting unity and strengthening bonds between different regions of India. The festival is not only a celebration of history and mythology but also an avenue for artistic expression and interregional collaboration. Visitors attending the festival can witness a spectacular fusion of art, dance, music, poetry, storytelling and folk drama, making it a must-visit event in Gujarat's cultural calendar.

Festival Date : 6th -10th April 2025

Photo Courtesy : TCGL



epaper.indianexpress.com

Doing the right thing

Embracing a bipartisan and neutral collegium-based appointment system, drawing from global best practices, would fortify the Election Commission of India's autonomy



S Y QURAISHI

AS THE WORLD'S largest democracy, India has long prided itself on conducting free and fair elections. The Election Commission of India (ECI) has been the cornerstone of this democratic process, ensuring electoral integrity. However, the appointment process of election commissioners (ECs) has been questioned for years, raising serious concerns about the autonomy and impartiality of this vital institution.

In India, several civil society organisations (CSOs), besides the BJP's senior leader L K Advani, have been advocating for a transparent and bipartisan appointment process to the Election Commission to ensure its independence and impartiality. Notable among these organisations are: Association for Democratic Reforms, Internet Freedom Foundation, Common Cause, Lok Satta Movement, and India Rejuvenation Initiative, among others.

The Association for Democratic Reforms (ADR) has been at the forefront of this demand. However, despite multiple legal challenges, the Supreme Court has not demonstrated the urgency required to address this critical issue that is directly related to India's democratic process and the perception of the ECI in the public mind.

The ADR's first petition for this reform was filed in 2015 when it challenged the exclusive executive control over appointing election commissioners, arguing that it compromised the independence of the ECI. After a long wait, it was referred to a Constitution Bench in 2018, but despite the critical nature of the case, the Supreme Court did not expedite hearings, allowing, in the meanwhile, multiple EC appointments under the existing framework.

On March 2, 2023, the Supreme Court, in the case of *Anoop Baramwal vs Union of India*, observed that despite the constitutional provision under Article 324(2), which expected that Parliament would enact a law detailing the appointment procedure for these positions, no such legislation had been passed in over seven decades. The Court directed that until Parliament enacted a relevant law, the appointment of the CEC and ECs should be made by the President based on the recommendations of a committee comprising the Prime Minister, the Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha, and the Chief Justice of India.

In December 2023, Parliament passed the Chief Election Commissioner and Other Election Commissioners (Appointment, Conditions of Service, and Term of Office) Act, 2023, excluding the CJI from the selection panel (although it was included in the first Bill which was later withdrawn) and instead vested the power with a committee consisting of the Prime Minister, a Union cabinet minister (nominated by the PM), and the Leader of the Opposition.

In effect, the executive overturned the spirit of the SC ruling through the 2023 Act, effectively creating/perpetuating a partisan collegium with the PM and a cabinet



C R Sasikumar

minister (instead of the CJI) making the third member — the LoP — irrelevant. To say the least, it's bad optics.

The ADR, along with other petitioners, challenged the constitutionality of the Act in January 2024, arguing that it effectively killed the transparent and bipartisan process that was the spirit of the order and allowed the ruling party to dominate the selection process. The government took advantage of the fact that the Court had prescribed the collegium, which was to include the CJI, only till the law was passed.

The Supreme Court refused to grant an interim stay on the Act, allowing the executive to proceed with fresh appointments under the new law. In March 2024, the government appointed two ECs under the new selection process, despite the case being under judicial review, presenting a *fait accompli*. The Court did not act.

The ADR and other petitioners sought urgent intervention to prevent appointments under the contested law, as the incumbent CEC was scheduled to retire on February 18, 2025, but the Supreme Court scheduled the next hearing for February 19, 2025. The SC refused to advance the hearing by just a couple of days, before the retirement of the current CEC. The government went ahead with the appointment by a midnight order.

On February 19, 2025, the new CEC and an EC joined the Commission who, by the way, are brilliant officers with excellent records. But that is beside the point. The hearing initially scheduled for February 19 was adjourned without a new date, prolonging the uncertainty surrounding the legitimacy of the current appointment process. It will be interesting to see any "consequences", as the court had promised.

I have often said that the most powerful

On February 19, 2025, the new CEC and an EC joined the Commission who, by the way, are brilliant officers with excellent records. But that is beside the point. The hearing initially scheduled for February 19 was adjourned without a new date, prolonging the uncertainty surrounding the legitimacy of the current appointment process.

Election Commission in the world has the most flawed system of appointment. All democracies have a transparent and bipartisan appointment process. Let's have a look at some.

In the US, commissioners are appointed by the president with the advice and consent of the Senate. In South Africa, they are appointed by the president on the recommendation of the National Assembly. In Brazil, they are appointed by the Federal Supreme Court. In the UK, the appointment is made by the Speaker's Committee on the Electoral Commission with cross-party membership. In France, the appointment is done jointly by the president, legislature and judiciary. In Nepal, the president appoints the CEC and ECs on the recommendation of the constitutional council followed by a parliamentary hearing.

The integrity of India's electoral process hinges on the independence and impartiality of the Election Commission, real and visible. Optics are important for public perception. The recent appointments, made under a contentious legal framework and amidst pending judicial review, have left the issue unresolved. Embracing a bipartisan and neutral collegium-based appointment system, drawing from global best practices, would not only fortify the ECI's autonomy but also bolster public confidence in the democratic process.

If the government just brings the CJI back into the collegium, the litigation would collapse. We need to wait and see whether the executive has the will to do the right thing.

The writer is former chief election commissioner of India and the author of India's Experiment with Democracy — the Life of a Nation through its Elections

WHAT THE OTHERS SAY

"With hostages still held, and with conditions in Gaza remaining so dire, the priority must be to maintain the ceasefire. Whether or not it can be the foundation of a long-term response to this crisis, it is still essential to save lives now."

— THE GUARDIAN

Throwing Ukraine under the bus

In reaching out to Russia, Trump has abandoned Europe. In it lies a lesson for India to not neglect core military capabilities



C UDAY BHASKAR

WHEN RUSSIA INVADED Ukraine on February 24, 2022, one of the tenets of post-World War II European security lay in tatters. The 1975 Helsinki agreement had led to a certitude that national borders were now inviolable and that force, much less war, would not be an option to alter them in any manner. This shibboleth was shredded when President Vladimir Putin launched his special operation and Russian tanks rolled into Ukraine. Conventional war in Europe was unthinkable, but the taboo was broken and then US President Joe Biden labelled his Russian counterpart a "war criminal".

The US and Europe rallied around a dazed Ukraine and the war began in earnest with a clear political objective. Russian aggression had to be resisted and this war was framed as being critical for the US and the Western alliance to defend freedom and sovereignty as symbolised by a resolute Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy. As the war dragged on, in March 2023, the International Criminal Court (ICC) issued an arrest warrant for President Putin accusing him of war crimes. Russia was placed under US led sanctions and its assets were frozen. Moscow was shunned by the US and its allies while war-related death and destruction mounted.

Three years later, in the aftermath of the unexpected US-Russia rapprochement over ending the war in Ukraine and the preliminary talks in Riyadh, another tenet of European security looks frayed and muddled. The US-led alliance with western Europe was nurtured after World War II ended. It was later formalised in 1949 under the NATO banner as a collective security system and was deemed to be cast in stone and almost permanent. It has now been neutered by US President Donald Trump, who in his first month in office has nonchalantly diluted the sanctity of the transatlantic alliance.

Europe and Ukraine have been thrown under the bus even as a Trump-Putin "deal" is being negotiated to end the war. It may be recalled that candidate Trump had asserted in his 2024 campaign that if elected, he would end the war in Ukraine quickly, and it is evident that he is moving with visible determination towards that objective. Even before formal talks with Moscow had begun, the Trump team had declared that Ukraine aspiring to join NATO was no longer an option and that it would be unrealistic to expect Russia to give up the territory it had seized. Critics of the US President have slammed this appeasement approach and claimed that "Putin is playing Trump like a fiddle" to ensure that all Russian demands are met.

There is speculation that a Trump-Putin meeting to finalise the ceasefire may take place in February, even though the terms and conditions of this potential closure are not clear. Will Trump, who considers himself the ultimate deal-maker, be able to ar-

rive at an equitable and sustainable agreement with Putin that will be in the abiding interests of Ukraine and Russia and, by extension, that of Europe and the US? Or will this be a short-term transactional deal to end the war as quickly as possible and place a triumphant President Trump in line for a Nobel Peace Prize?

Ending any war is a highly desirable objective and President Trump is to be commended for his commitment to peace. He has denounced war as being an avoidable and destructive option and even suggested that the US ought to reduce its defence spending. But given his mercurial and contradictory public pronouncements, it is difficult to deduce any underlying principles or grand strategic vision, barring the MAGA (Make America Great Again) clarion call.

In reaching out to Russia by empathising with Putin, what Trump has done is to effectively jettison the Biden policy of pushing back against Moscow's aggression. There are many voices of dissent within the Trump team and the Republican Party who see this as an imprudent initiative. Whether Trump is seeking to undo the damage done by his predecessors, going back to Bill Clinton in the early 1990s, who broke solemn promises made to Moscow that NATO would not expand eastwards and stoke Russian insecurities, remains moot.

If a consensual, long-term US-Russia *modus vivendi* can be arrived at as part of the current Trump-Putin engagement, it would be akin to realising the seminal geopolitical holy grail that eluded former presidents Ronald Reagan and Mikhail Gorbachev during the Cold War.

However, the very nature of major power contestation in the global strategic framework inhibits any such US-Russia normative consensus, and an uneasy status quo will prevail for as long as Moscow remains a nuclear power. A potential US-Russia rapprochement will have definitive implications for Europe that would feel vulnerable sans the American umbrella. Concurrently, both China and India will have to review their relations with a stable US-Russia dyad. For Beijing, the deeper anxiety will be that of a Washington-Moscow compact thereby allowing the US to compel China towards compliance with the kinetic Trump diktat.

The best-case scenario for Beijing would be a Yalta 2.0 where Trump-Putin and Xi Jinping agree to a new world order with spheres of influence, harking back to what Roosevelt-Stalin-Churchill had chalked out in 1945. But this would be fanciful. Given President Trump's consistent track record of inconsistency, it would not be surprising if there is a total reversal of US policy and Russia goes back to being an adversary and the palpable European insecurity is again assuaged by the US.

In the current flux, there is one lesson that India can derive from the European strategic discomfiture: Do not neglect core military capabilities and ensure that defence spending is appropriate given perceived threats and challenges. *Ekla chalo* (walk alone, to borrow from Rabindranath Tagore) in honing military muscle has to be internalised by Delhi with much greater resolve and integrity than has been the case till now.

The writer is director, Society for Policy Studies



SAIKAT MAJUMDAR

In campus deaths, a warning

Residential education can be empowering, but its risks need hard reckoning

Of all the outraged comments that have exploded across media following last week's tragedy of a student suicide and protests by Nepali students at Kalinga Institute of Industrial Technology (KIIT) in Odisha, this one on Facebook, made by an Odia person, stood out for me: "The most pathetic situation is that Nepal has a century-old tradition with Lord Jagannath and so any student from Nepal should be treated with utmost care if we have faith in Lord Jagannath."

Should hospitality depend on religious faith? Even if we stretch ourselves to identify religious kinship as a crucial bond between cultures, what place does it have in the structures of international education, that too in fields that are far removed from theology, religious study, and philosophy? For an institute that not only marks itself as a venue of engineering education but is keen to situate that education as "industrial", the bond of religion as a criterion of international hospitality seems to uphold the kind of irony that has increasingly come to define the Indian Subcontinent.

I think the sentiment is noble, as religious virtue, in its original capacity, often tends to be. But leaving aside the problem of making such sentiment the basis of hospitality, it's important to attend to the glaring cultures of hierarchy, exploitation and discriminatory hostility that both the tragedy of the student suicide and the vicious institutional riposte against student protests have revealed to us.

Hostility between cultures and communities has long stigmatised the Indian subcontinent, and religious sentiments have hidden these hostilities just as often as they have mobilised them. The alleged harassment of the dead Nepali female student by a student from Uttar Pradesh shows gendered and sexualised exploitation as a natural component of such cultures of discrimination.

"The Indian psyche is full of suppressed violence," the terrifying supercop of Khalistan-era Punjab, K P S Gill, told the poet Dom Moraes, whose book, *Out of God's Oven* (co-authored with Sarayu Srivatsa), is a heartrending account of inequity that passes in the name of diversity in the postcolonial experiment of a nation. As recent events all around us — particularly to the east — have reminded us, this is the culture of the entire Subcontinent. India's place in this culture, as the largest and most powerful nation, has scarcely shaped the responsible leadership its size and economic weight calls for.

"Nepali students should be grateful for the free and subsidised meals and education sponsored by the generous founder of the great institute. That the amount spent on them exceeds the national budget of Nepal!" The shameful language used by some of the faculty and administration members while addressing the protesting Nepali students is the condescension-turned-violent exploitation that mainstream India has often revealed

for its more marginalised neighbours. I cannot help but see echoes of the kind of discrimination and bullying that even students from India's Northeast have long weathered in the higher education institutions of Delhi. The invocation of religious solidarity with Nepal through a shared devotion to Lord Jagannath is almost a parodic invocation of our government's purported policy towards Hindus in the neighbouring states, which it sees as an ocean of hostility against Hindus — something to which the recent incidents in Bangladesh have offered some sad verisimilitude.

These are trying times for residential higher education in India, which has only known the largely male hostel population across engineering colleges unified by more or less homogenous career goals. Student mental health across engineering colleges, with its violent culture of bullying, discrimination, and competitiveness, has spawned nightmares of its own over the decades, with poor and caste-oppressed students paying the heaviest prices. As residential higher education expands beyond the technical and the professional, moving to more holistic models of liberal arts and sciences that draw a greater share of women, it makes up a student body with more variegated career goals. The challenges of residential education, integral to a liberal arts education, rise to new planes. Almost around the same time the Nepali student took her own life at KIIT, tragedy struck

the campus of Ashoka University in the National Capital Region, taking the lives of two students in an accident and a suicide. And there have been many others in recent years.

Residential education, while a wonderful and empowering thing, providing an experience the commuter student can never get, is still a relatively new experience in modern India, where it once thrived in institutions like Nalanda and Takshashila, attracting large groups of students from neighbouring countries. While modern residential higher education is common and customary in a country like the US, in modern India, leaving one's home, family, and town to go and give up four years of tender, crucial life to the trust of an institution is still a nascent phenomenon. Both the excitement and risks this new life brings forth need a long and hard reckoning.

Keeping communal discrimination and sexual exploitation out of the already challenging experience of residential education would be a good place to start. If done well, this model of higher education is certain to auger empowered beginnings to the independent careers of youth across our Subcontinent. But to betray these entrusted lives can mean snuffing them out even before they are properly lit.

Majumdar is the writer, most recently, of, The Amateur: Self-Making and the Humanities in the Postcolony

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

USAID ROW

THIS REFERS TO the report, 'Team Musk flags, Trump waves, but a fact-check: \$21 million did not go to India for "voter-turnout", was for Bangladesh' (IE, February 21). Elon Musk, who is in charge of the Donald Trump administration's Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE) declared that USAID's \$21 million was used for voter turnout in India, a claim reinforced by Trump. He also suggested that this could have been used to get somebody else (other than PM Narendra Modi) elected. The BJP, which has expressed disdain for foreign opinions in the past, seems to have taken this claim at face value. It is even trying to corner Congress, accusing it of a conspiracy to destabilise India.

L R Murmu, New Delhi

BALANCE NEEDED

THIS REFERS TO the article, 'Delhi's welfare dilemma' (IE, February 21). On its way to wresting Delhi from AAP, the BJP made several ambitious commitments to voters. The principle ones that will further stretch the balance sheet are the promises of "Modi's guarantees". Freebies have a detrimental impact on the economy. The burden on the state exchequer cannot be overstated. What is needed is a balance between welfare and development.

SS Paul, Nadia

THE TASK IN DELHI

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'Capital Calling' (IE, February 21). The recent election of Rekha Gupta as chief minister of Delhi brings to the fore questions regarding her strategy to address the city's civic concerns. Will she prioritise the needs of marginalised communities? What about air pollution? As citizens voice concerns regarding water quality and road conditions, can Gupta turn these issues into opportunities for inclusive governance?

Anshu Bharti, Begusarai

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'Capital Calling' (IE, February 21). Rekha Gupta will have the Centre and the Lieutenant Governor's support. She may not find it as tough to get work done as her predecessors, Aatishi and Arvind Kejriwal. The people will have high expectations of her. The Delhi Metro is a lifeline for the people of the national capital but last-mile connectivity has left much to be desired. Overflowing drains make even a splash of rain look like a flood in parts of Delhi. Since she has served in the MCD as a councillor, that experience should serve Gupta well. As the BJP gears up to govern Delhi after nearly three decades, all eyes will be on them.

Bal Govind, Noida

10 ECONOMY

US PLANS TO INTRODUCE RECIPROCAL TARIFFS IN APRIL

India to face US pressure to reduce tariffs on agri products in trade deal negotiations

RAVI DUTTA MISHRA
NEW DELHI, FEBRUARY 23

WHILE NEW Delhi is considering a range of items for tariff reductions on US products, Washington, DC is particularly keen on exporting more agricultural goods to India and is seeking a reduction in tariffs in this traditionally high-protection sector, *The Indian Express* has learnt.

Discussions on agricultural tariffs are set to arise during negotiations for the India-US bilateral trade agreement. Early indications suggest that agricultural exports are an “offensive interest” of the new Donald Trump administration, which is looking to boost US exports, a person aware of the development said.

The American farming community in mid-Western states has been a key voter base for Trump since 2016. In the recent election, he managed to increase his support among farming-dependent counties, with more than 100 of agri-focused counties backing him with at least 80 per cent of their vote, according to an Investigate Midwest report.

Even as India lowered its basic customs duty on a range of items in the Union Budget, a White House statement on reciprocal tariffs earlier this month pointed out that Indian tariffs on agricultural goods remain significantly higher than those imposed by the US on Indian products.

“The US average applied Most Favoured Nation (MFN)

TRADITIONALLY HIGH-PROTECTION SECTOR

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EXPLAINED **E** **Agri goods have largely remained out of trade pacts**

AGRICULTURAL GOODS receive high protection in India and have largely remained outside trade agreements, even with countries that traditionally insist on market access for agriculture, such as Australia.

tariff on agricultural goods is 5 per cent, while India’s average applied MFN tariff is 39 per cent,” the White House said.

However, government officials hope that lowering tariffs on agricultural goods will increase overall trade in agricultural products and could help Indian agricultural exports gain better market access in the US. India primarily exports basmati rice, spices, cereals, dairy, and poultry products to the US.

“Both sides are exploring ways in which trade in agricultural items can grow. India exports around \$4 million worth of agricultural products to the US every year, and there will be opportunities for growth in Indian agricultural exports as well,” an official said.

Agricultural goods receive high protection in India and have largely remained outside trade agreements, even with countries that traditionally insist on market access for agriculture, such as Australia.

Trade experts noted that due to high tariffs on Indian agricul-

tural goods, the sector is also vulnerable to reciprocal tariffs that the US plans to introduce in April.

Agri items: High protection, high risk

Global Trade Research Initiative (GTRI), in a note on Friday, stated that the hardest-hit sector due to US reciprocal tariffs will be fish, meat, and processed seafood, with \$2.58 billion in exports facing a 27.83 per cent tariff differential.

In trade parlance, tariff differential refers to the difference in tariff rates applied to Indian exports compared to other countries or product categories.

“Shrimp, a major export, will become significantly less competitive. Processed food, sugar, and cocoa exports worth \$1.03 billion will also struggle with a 24.99 per cent tariff increase, making Indian snacks and confectionery pricier in the US,” GTRI said.

“Edible oils, with \$199.75 million in exports, face a 10.67 per cent tariff, increasing costs for coconut and mustard oil.

Alcohol, wines, and spirits face the highest tariff hike at 122.10 per cent, though exports are only \$19.20 million,” the note said.

Live animals and animal products face a 27.75 per cent tariff differential on \$10.31 million in exports. Tobacco and cigarettes, valued at \$94.62 million, will remain unaffected, as the US already imposes 201.15 per cent tariffs, creating a negative tariff differential (-168.15 per cent), it added.

Trump revised NAFTA deal for agri exports

The United States–Mexico–Canada Agreement (USMCA), signed during Donald Trump’s first term, replaced the earlier North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) to improve market access for US agricultural products.

According to the US Department of Agriculture (USDA), the new deal expanded opportunities for US dairy producers by granting increased access to the Canadian market.

“Canada agreed to eliminate its Class 6 and 7 milk pricing programmes, which had previously allowed Canadian producers to undercut US dairy prices,” the USDA said. The department further stated that USMCA addressed issues related to wheat trade by requiring Canada to terminate its discriminatory wheat grading system. This change enables US wheat growers, especially those near the border, to compete more effectively in the Canadian market, the USDA said.

Agricultural focus in the US-China deal

The US-China trade deal, signed during Trump’s first term, included provisions aimed at boosting US agricultural exports to China. A US Trade Representative (USTR) statement on the deal indicated that, during the two-year period from January 1, 2020 to December 31, 2021, China was required to import certain US agricultural products worth: “at least \$12.5 billion above the corresponding 2017 baseline amount in calendar year 2020” and “no less than \$19.5 billion above the corresponding 2017 baseline amount in calendar year 2021”.

The deal also required China to remove certain non-tariff barriers that had previously blocked US exports, such as eliminating “cattle age” requirements for US beef imports, according to the USTR statement.

A query emailed to the Ministry of Commerce and Industry remained unanswered at the time of publication.

MARKET WATCH

MCAP OF 8 OF TOP-10 VALUED COS DROPS

The combined market valuation of eight of the top-10 most valued firms eroded Rs 1,65,784.9 crore last week, with TCS taking the biggest hit. Last week, the BSE benchmark declined 628.15 points, or 0.82 per cent, while the Nifty went lower 133.35 points, or 0.58 per cent. **PTI**

‘Kerala is a leader in services, with the best startup ecosystem. Committed to strengthening that position’

AS KERALA looks to shun its older image of being an unfriendly destination for big investments, the state is undertaking initiatives like land pooling, building industrial townships, and setting up grievance redressal mechanisms, **CHIEF MINISTER PINARAYI VIJAYAN** said in a written interview to SOUMYARENDRA BARIK. He also spoke about the competition with other southern states like Tamil Nadu and Karnataka, and how the state was looking at attracting manufacturing activities. Edited excerpts:

What’s the overarching vision for boosting trade and investments in Kerala, and what’s the state government’s role in it?

Kerala aims to position itself as a knowledge-based economy and a hub for high-tech manufacturing and service industries. The state government acts as an enabler and is committed to facilitating and supporting investors through proactive policies and infrastructure development. We have already made Kerala’s Ease of Doing Business atmosphere the best in the country.

Kerala has expanded its industrial infrastructure with the development of techno parks, food parks, EV parks, industrial estates, and the Palakkad corridor. Kerala is leveraging its strategic location to enhance its logistics connectivity with projects such as the Vizhinjam Port.

Our Export and Logistics Park Policy and Industrial Policy focus on strengthening trade infrastructure, boosting exports, and attracting investments.

The entire physical infrastructure will supplement Kerala’s integrated industrial ecosystem. The government is implementing land pooling initiatives and developing industrial townships to create a seamless trade and investment environment all across the state.

Investor facilitation is the key to our success. K-SWIFT, Kerala’s single window interface for fast and transparent clearances ensure efficient business approvals. Digital governance reforms and a structured grievance redressal system have been put into place to ensure investor-friendly processes.



Express File



At a time when Kerala’s neighbours Tamil Nadu and Karnataka have established themselves as big manufacturing bases, how does Kerala fit into the picture?

Kerala does not compete with our neighbouring states. In fact, we complement them. While Tamil Nadu has an advantage in land-intensive large-scale manufacturing due to its sheer size, Kerala focuses on technology-driven, high-value, low-volume industries. Kerala is focusing on industries that rely on innovation, technology, and skilled manpower rather than vast land tracts.

One of our key strengths is our highly skilled workforce. A leading human development index and a talent-rich ecosystem make Kerala ideal for knowledge-intensive industries. Another strength is that we have a strategic industrial focus. Kerala prioritises sectors such as medical devices, aerospace and defence, food processing, IT, and GCC based industries.

On top of all of this, Vizhinjam Port and the seamless multimodal connectivity available in the state strengthen Kerala’s position as a global trade gateway and logistics hub.

Is the tech services sector an area that the state is keen on attracting?

Yes, Kerala is already a leader in the services sector and is committed to further strengthening it.

We have the best startup ecosystem in the country. Kerala has emerged as a leader in innovation and entrepreneurship. As I have already mentioned, we have the best Ease of Doing Business atmosphere in the country.

Kerala continues to be a pioneer in tourism, IT, and digital innovation. Our future growth plans include expanding digital and fintech ecosystems, strengthening tourism infrastructure and medical tourism initiatives and enhancing IT parks, AI, and emerging tech-driven industries.

Are there any plans to boost electronics manufacturing in the state?

Kerala already hosts key electronics companies. We have identified electronics and hi-tech manufacturing and ESDM (Electronics System Design & Manufacturing) as priority sectors under our Industrial Policy. We are actively attracting new investments in the semiconductor, PCB manufacturing, and embedded systems sectors.

We are setting up dedicated industrial clusters for the focused development of electronics manufacturing hubs. We are strengthening R&D in electronics. Keltron (Kerala State Electronics Development Corporation) is spearheading advancements in R&D and innovation.

BRIEFLY

BoM cuts interest rate on retail loan by 25 bps

New Delhi: State-owned Bank of Maharashtra (BoM) has cut interest rate by 25 basis points on retail loans, including home and car loans in line with reduction in repo rate by RBI. After a gap of 5 years, RBI reduced the repo rate, the rate at which banks borrow from the central bank, by 25 basis points to 6.25 per cent on February 7. Following this, the benchmark rate for home loan has been reduced to 8.10 per cent, one of the lowest in the banking industry, BoM said in a statement on Sunday. At the same time, it said, car loan came down to 8.45 per cent per annum. Similarly, education and other loans linked with Repo Linked Lending Rate (RLLR) has also been reduced by 25 basis points. **PTI**

Taiwan-based Delta Electronics to invest \$500 mn

New Delhi: Taiwan-based Delta Electronics is investing \$500 million, announced in 2015, under the government’s Make in India initiative to expand its presence in the domestic market, a top company official said. The company, through its Indian arm has made significant investments since its entry into the domestic market in 2003, Benjamin Lin, president of Delta Electronics India said in a press conference at “Elecrama 2025”, organised by IEEMA in Greater Noida. **PTI**

Rural market at inflection point: Marico MD & CEO

Mumbai: The “aspirational” rural market is at an “inflection point”, which offers significant opportunities and long-term potential to the FMCG companies with price point packs, said Marico M D & CEO Saugata Gupta. The hinterland, with its large population base and rising disposable income offers ‘headroom for growth’ for FMCG as people there now aspire for the same brands of products as other markets Gupta said. **PTI**

TRUMP TARIFFS TO IMPART URGENCY TO DEAL

India, UK proposed FTA talks set to resume today after 8 months

MUKESH JAGOTA
NEW DELHI, FEBRUARY 23

AFTER A gap of eight months, India and the UK will resume negotiations on a free trade agreement (FTA) on Monday under the shadow of Trump tariffs that have plunged the world into uncertainty.

Prior to the opening of the 15th round of negotiations, UK Secretary of State for Business and Trade Jonathan Reynolds will hold a bilateral meeting with Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal. Reynolds’ visit to India comes amid the personal storm he faces at home over allegedly falsifying his legal career.

The FTA negotiations were paused in May 2024 because of the general elections in both India and the UK. “The Trump tariffs can impart some urgency to the negotiations though it will have to be seen,” trade expert Abhijit Das said. The subject of tariffs that the US is talking of imposing on the countries with which it has a trade deficit could be a part of discussions in the bilateral meeting between Goyal and Reynolds, he added.

Since the last round of talks, India has on its own brought down import duties on cars, motorcycles and even select bourbon whiskey, which is produced in the US. A proposal has also been moved in Parliament to increase the foreign direct investment (FDI) limit in insurance to 100 per cent. Lower duties on cars and insurance liberalisation address some of the key demands of the UK, but India may still not offer to write down the latest import duties or



File

sions in the bilateral meeting between Goyal and Reynolds, he added.

The UK is the 16th-biggest trading partner of India. “The changes have been done autonomously and can be reversed but if they become part of FTAs then companies in the UK will continue to enjoy the concession,” founder of Global Trade Research Initiative Ajay Srivastava said.

Both Das and Srivastava were of the view that India should seek clarity on how the carbon tax that the UK will collect from January

2027 will be neutralised after the FTA. “If CBAM comes even after the FTA then the agreement does not make sense,” Das said.

The UK’s Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM) is similar to that of the European Union (EU). However, it will be tax-based and not based on the price of excess carbon emission during the production of a product. The UK will start by imposing a tax on imports of iron, steel, aluminium, cement and hydrogen. Later, it will go on to cover all products.

Srivastava said that because there has been a big gap between the two rounds of negotiations, India should not agree to reopening the chapters or policy areas where agreement has been reached. Sometimes countries do request reopening of discussions on areas already agreed upon.

The negotiations on the India-UK FTA started in January 2022 and it deals with 26 chapters or policy areas. Majority of chapters have been closed or are in an advanced stage of negotiations, officials say. **FE**

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Sebi looks to expand investors pool for angel funds

New Delhi: The Securities and Exchange Board of India is looking to expand the definition of qualified institutional buyers (QIB) and remove the 200-investor cap, allowing angel funds to access a broader pool of accredited investors. This move will enable more wealthy investors to participate, boosting funding for startups. It ensures that only financially strong investors take on high-risk investments, helping angel funds raise more capital and support early-stage companies.

Angel funds, a type of venture capital fund, mobilise money from investors to support startups.

However, concerns have been raised about inadequate verification of investors’ risk appetite, the onboarding of numerous investors without strong financial backing, and potential conflicts with private placement regulations under the Companies Act, 2013. **PTI**

FPIs withdraw ₹23,710 crore from equities in Feb so far

New Delhi: Foreign investors have pulled out over Rs 23,710 crore from the Indian equity markets so far this month, pushing total outflows past Rs 1 lakh crore in 2025 amid rising global trade tensions.

Going forward, V K Vijayakumar, chief investment strategist, Geojit Financial Services, believes that revival of FPI investment in India will happen when economic growth and corporate earnings revive. Indications of that are likely to happen in two to three months.

According to the data with the depositories, foreign portfolio investors (FPIs) offloaded shares worth Rs 23,710 crore from Indian equities so far this month (till February 21). This came following a net outflow of Rs 78,027 crore in January. With these, the total outflow by FPIs has reached Rs 1,01,737 crore in 2025 so far, data with the depositories showed. This massive selling has resulted in the Nifty yielding negative returns of 4 per cent year-to-date.



File

Market concerns heightened following reports that US President Donald Trump was considering imposing new tariffs on steel and aluminum imports, along with reciprocal tariffs on several countries. Himanshu Srivastava, associate director-manager research, Morningstar Investment Research India, said.

These developments reignited fears of a potential global trade war, prompting FPIs to re-evaluate their exposure to emerging markets, including India, he added.

On the domestic front, lackluster

corporate earnings and persistent depreciation of the Indian rupee, which breached multi-year lows, further diminished the appeal of Indian assets, Srivastava said. After Trump’s victory in US presidential elections, the US market has been attracting huge capital inflows from the rest of the world. But recently, China has emerged as a major destination of portfolio flows, Geojit Financial Services’ Vijayakumar said.

The Chinese president’s new initiatives with their leading businessmen have kindled hopes of a growth recovery in China. **PTI**



MAHAKUMBH 2025

A SPIRITUAL JOURNEY UNITING MILLIONS ACROSS THE WORLD



Heartiest greetings to all the revered saints, religious leaders, Kalpvasis and devotees who have come for the holy bath at the sacred Triveni in Mahakumbh -2025, Prayagraj. May everyone's life be filled with happiness, prosperity and good fortune by the grace of Lord Shri Hari, may Maa Ganga, Maa Yamuna and Maa Saraswati fulfill everyone's wishes.

— Yogi Adityanath
Chief Minister, Uttar Pradesh

Mahakumbh 2025 marks the grandest spiritual gathering history, bringing together millions in a sacred celebration of faith, tradition, and cultural heritage. Over 62 crore devotees attended the event so far, marking it as the largest religious gathering, generating Rs 3 lakh crore in business. With impeccable arrangements, a strong emphasis on cleanliness and profound devotion, to manage the influx of devotees during the final phase of Mahakumbh. The state govt. has deployed 1,200 extra buses. Foreign visitors praised the event's world-class healthcare facilities, with over 7.5 lakh treated at temporary hospitals. A Nashik delegation studied Mahakumbh -2025 management for the preparation of 2027 Kumbh.

Mahakumbh is a living identity representing our legacy of the divine festival of our faith, spirituality and culture, every time, the mega event symbolises the divine gathering of religion, knowledge, devotion and art.

—Narendra Modi
Prime Minister

62.25+ CRORE PILGRIMS took holy dip till date
UPCOMING HOLY DIP DAY
26th February 2025, Maha Shivaratri

1,200 additional buses deployed for final phase of Mahakumbh 2025



To manage the influx of devotees during the final phase of Mahakumbh 2025, the Yogi government has deployed 1,200 additional buses, focusing on crowd management. These buses will operate from various regions, particularly from Western Uttar Pradesh, including Saharanpur, Meerut, and Aligarh to Prayagraj. The buses are dedicated to the Mahashivratri bathing period (Feb 20-28), complementing the 750 shuttle buses already working in the Sangam area. The Transport Minister has directed officials to ensure efficient bus operations and allocation. Buses from regions like Varanasi, Ayodhya, and Azamgarh will be limited to 300 km for quick deployment, aiding in the swift transport of pilgrims to the fairgrounds.

Nashik team studies Prayagraj's Mahakumbh management for 2027



A delegation of 20 persons from Nashik visited Mahakumbh 2025 to study the event management strategies in preparation for the Nashik Kumbh 2027. The team, led by

Divisional Commissioner Dr. Praveen Gedam, inspected key sites like ghats and akhadas, observing crowd control, traffic management, sanitation, and emergency response systems. They visited the Integrated Command Control Center (ICCC), which monitors the city using over 2,700 CCTV cameras, and learned about the digital initiatives that enhance the pilgrim experience, including the 'Digital Maha Kumbh.' The Nashik team also attended a detailed presentation on the event's organization, including traffic regulation, security, and healthcare provisions. The insights gained are expected to help Nashik refine its preparations for the 2027 Kumbh, ensuring a smooth, well-coordinated event. The study tour highlighted the importance of seamless coordination across departments, which played a vital role in Mahakumbh's success.

Over 50 lakh Nepali devotees take holy dip & witnesses grand Mahakumbh celebrations



Over 50 lakh Nepalese devotees participated in the Mahakumbh celebrations at Prayagraj's Triveni Sangam, showcasing growing devotion to Ayodhya, Kashi, and Prayagraj. Devotees brought sacred offerings like holy rice (Akshat) from Janakpur for Bade Hanuman Ji and took back Ganga water and Sangam soil as spiritual heritage. Many applied the sacred water on their foreheads as part of their rituals. Along with the holy dip, Nepalese pilgrims also visited the Bade Hanuman Temple and Akshay Vat. Gifts from Maa Janaki's homeland, including clothes and jewelry, were brought to enrich the religious experience. The efforts of Uttar Pradesh CM

Yogi Adityanath in organizing the event have earned widespread appreciation, strengthening the spiritual connection between India and Nepal.

50% of India's Sanatanis bathe in Sangam



Mahakumbh 2025 has made history with over 62 crore devotees taking a holy dip in the Triveni Sangam, making it the largest religious event in human history. Half of India's 110 crore Sanatan followers have participated, with the total expected to surpass 65 crore by February 26. On a global scale, over 45% of the world's Sanatan followers, estimated at 120 crore, have joined the sacred gathering. This massive turnout reflects the exceptional arrangements made by the Yogi Adityanath-led Uttar Pradesh government. The event has seen record participation, with nearly 8 crore devotees on Mauni Amavasya and over 3 crore during Amrit Snan. With ongoing rituals, Mahakumbh 2025 is not only a spiritual milestone but also a testament to India's rich cultural heritage and the power of faith.

Mahakumbh to generate business worth Rs 3 lakh crore



The Mahakumbh-2025 Prayagraj, is one of the

largest economic events in India, generating an estimated Rs 3 lakh crore in business through goods and services. The festival, taking place from January 13 to February 26, has attracted millions of devotees, with the number now expected to reach 65 crore. This surge in attendance has created a massive economic impact, strengthening the connection between faith and economy.

Local trade has seen a boost, with an increase in demand for Mahakumbh - themed products. Various sectors, including hospitality, food, transport, religious attire, puja samagri, handicrafts, textiles, healthcare, media, telecom, and technology, have all experienced substantial economic activity.



Additionally, cities within a 150 km radius, including Ayodhya and Varanasi, have witnessed an uptick in pilgrim visits, further fueling economic growth.

The Uttar Pradesh government has invested Rs 7500 crore in infrastructure improvements in Prayagraj, including flyovers, roads, and beautifications, with Rs 1500 crore specifically allocated for Mahakumbh arrangements. This investment has not only enhanced the festival experience but also contributed to the region's economic development, providing new business opportunities and strengthening local economies.



It's the greatest event on the planet. This is the only place, the only civilization, where these many people aspire for 'mukti,' for liberation... They should inspire the whole world in this direction.

Sadhguru Jaggi Vasudev, Spiritual Leader



The central government and the Uttar Pradesh administration for their efforts in ensuring a smooth experience for the millions of devotees participating in the religious event.

Sri Sri Ravi Shankar, Spiritual Leader



India's religion, faith, and heritage are strong. In this country, we have been getting good values in a traditional way for centuries. Maha Kumbh is in front of the world as a reflection of Ek Bharat, Shreshtha Bharat.

Piyush Goyal, Union Minister

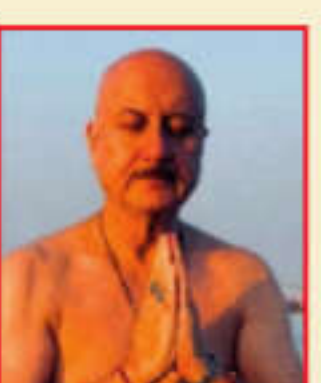
The grand Kumbh Mela in Prayagraj showcases the essence of Sanatan culture... For thousands of years, this sacred gathering has reflected human civilization and culture. Devotees from different castes, languages, and sects come together at the Kumbh Mela, making it a true symbol of social unity.

Devendra Fadnavis
Chief Minister, Maharashtra



Every time there was a Kumbh it used to come to mind, but it never happened. But, this time I was determined without knowing such constellation comes after 144 years. My stay was fixed at Swami Avdheshanand Giri's place and spending time with him was a great learning.

Anupam Kher, Actor



I have come to Maha Kumbh today and taken a bath. Everyone knows that everyone should come to the fair area and have darshan of the saints. In the same sequence, I have come here today and am very happy to have darshan of the saints.

Ashutosh Rana, Actor



MAHAKUMBH

1920
Mahakumbh
Mela Helpline

112
Emergency
Service

1010
Food and Civil
Supplies Helpline

102,108
Ambulance
Service

18004199139
Railway
Helpline

HEPLINES

US flight to New Delhi diverted to Rome after crew report ‘security issue’: FAA

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW YORK, FEBRUARY 23

AN AMERICAN Airlines flight from New York to New Delhi was diverted to Rome after the crew reported a "security issue", the Federal Aviation Administration said. "American Airlines Flight 292 landed safely at Leonardo da Vinci International Airport in Rome around 5:30 p.m. local time on Sunday, February 23, after the crew reported a security issue," the FAA said in a statement to PTI.

Flight AA292 departed from John F Kennedy International Airport in New York and was travelling to Indira Gandhi International Airport in New Delhi, India, it said.

In a statement, the airlines said, "Safety and security are our top priorities and we thank our customers for their understanding." Visuals on social media showed the Boeing 787-9 aircraft being escorted by the Italian Air Force before landing in Rome.

AP reported that Francesco Garibaldi, a spokesman with the Leonardo da Vinci International Airport said security checks would be performed as soon as the 199 passengers on board, plus the crew, leave the plane. Reuters reported that law enforcement in Rome inspected and cleared the aircraft to re-depart, it said. The flight will stay overnight in Rome to allow for required crew rest before continuing to Delhi on Monday, the company said.

What a government study reveals about the state of our panchayats

Karnataka, TN, Kerala, tops 2024 Panchayat Devolution Index

ANJISHNU DAS
NEW DELHI, FEBRUARY 23

SET IN the fictional village of Phulera, the story of the popular web series *Panchayat* unfolds as the protagonist, born and brought up in the city, heads there to run the panchayat and faces the hurdles that come with it.

Panchayat captures, with humour, life in a north Indian village and the difficulties of running a local government body, almost like the ones that crop up in reality. A government report published this month reveals the challenges confronting panchayats in India and analyses how each state has performed when it comes to the devolution of powers and responsibilities to these bodies.

The 2024 index that the Union Ministry of Panchayati Raj has published based on a study by the Indian Institute of Public Administration (IIPA) has seen Karnataka, Kerala, and Tamil Nadu topping the index and Uttar Pradesh and Bihar recording the biggest improvement.

The IIPA studied 172 panchayats in 68 districts across India to measure the performance of the panchayat system on six parameters: framework, functions, finances, functionaries, capacity building, and accountability. Using these, the

PANCHAYAT DEVOLUTION INDEX: PARAMETERS

FRAMEWORK: Whether the basic provisions mentioned in the Constitution are adhered to by states

FUNCTION: Measures how panchayats fulfilled civic responsibilities, from sanitation and waste management to health and education.

FINANCES: The efficiency in the devolution of funds to panchayats and the sources of their funding, whether their own revenues, borrowings, or

state and Central grants.

FUNCTIONARIES: Assessed the strength and performance of panchayat officials and infrastructure available to them

CAPACITY BUILDING: How the knowledge and skills of panchayat officials were being expanded to fulfil and take on more responsibilities.

ACCOUNTABILITY: The framework in place to audit and monitor the functioning of panchayats

IIPA developed the Panchayat Devolution Index (PDI) that scored states on a scale of 0 to 100. The index was last published in 2014 and, over the past decade, the national average score rose from 39.92 to 43.89.

In 2013-14, Maharashtra, Kerala, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu and Chhattisgarh got the top scores. Since then, 18 states and Union Territories improved their scores while 11 recorded declines. In the latest index, Manipur, Arunachal Pradesh, and Jharkhand are the lowest-scoring states, while Manipur, Arunachal and Haryana have seen the biggest declines in the past decade. Among the top 10 states, only Maharashtra saw a decline despite ranking fourth overall.

The representation question As of 2024, there are 2.62 lakh panchayats in India, up from

2.48 lakh in 2013-14. In 2013-14 and 2024, Uttar Pradesh, Maharashtra, and Madhya Pradesh recorded the most panchayats.

But in terms of average rural population per panchayat, while the national average in 2024 was 4,669 (up from 3,087 in 2013-14), West Bengal, Assam and Bihar had the most densely populated panchayats. In 2013-14, Kerala had the most densely populated panchayats in the country.

While panchayats in most states have a 50% quota for women, there are seven states and UTs that fall below their respective reservation threshold. Among them are Madhya Pradesh, Haryana, Punjab, and Tripura. However, 21 states and UTs are at or above the reservation threshold. Odisha has the highest proportion of women among panchayat representatives at 61.51%,

FORMER MALKHANA INCHARGE BOOKED

₹41 lakh missing from Kanpur police station

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
LUCKNOW, FEBRUARY 23

CASH AMOUNTING to Rs 41 lakh recovered during raids, mostly related to gambling, has been found to be missing from the malkhana of the Govindnagar police station in Kanpur city, police said. An FIR has been registered on charges of criminal breach of trust against former malkhana in-charge Dinesh Chand Tiwari, said Kanpur Additional DCP Mahesh Kumar.

The malkhana is a designated room in a police station where seized articles, known as case property, are stored. The missing cash is related to 21 cases registered at the police station between 2021 and 2022, it is learnt.

Since the cases are still pending in court, the cash was kept in the malkhana as case property.

The matter came to light when the newly appointed malkhana in-charge, also known as the head moharir, reviewed records before taking over from Dinesh Tiwari, a head constable, who was transferred to Lucknow. Following his transfer, he was repeatedly asked to hand over charge to the newly appointed head moharir. A few days ago, when he came to Kanpur for the handover, a record check revealed that the Rs 41 lakh was missing from the malkhana.

When he failed to provide a satisfactory explanation, the police filed the case against him. If he fails to provide a satisfactory explanation, steps will be taken to recover the money from him.

followed by Himachal Pradesh at 57.5%, and Tamil Nadu at 57.32%. Among the states, UP has the lowest proportion of women representatives at 33.33% but the state's rules provide for only one-third reservation for women.

The national average proportion of women representatives is 46.44%, marginally up from 45.9% in 2013-14. While there were 11 states in 2013-14 with 50% or more women representatives, there were 16 such states in 2024.

The IIPA study said that while there is no stipulated reservation for Scheduled Castes (SCs), Scheduled Tribes (STs), and Other Backward Classes (OBCs), Punjab had the highest proportion of SC representatives in panchayats at 36.34%, Chhattisgarh had the highest share of STs at 41.04%, and Bihar the highest OBC representation at 39.02%. The national average representation for these groups stands at 18.03% for SCs, 16.22% for STs and 19.15% for OBCs.

In 2013-14 too, Punjab had the most SC representation at 32.02%. On OBC representation, Andhra Pradesh topped in 2013-14 with 34%. While Arunachal did not report its figures for 2024, all of its panchayat representatives were STs in 2013-14.

Independent studies have found that consistent funding and infrastructure are among the biggest challenges facing panchayats.

In 2023-24, state governments allocated Rs 47,018 crore to panchayats, according to the study, but only Rs 10,761 crore was released as of November 2023. In 2022-21, states allocated Rs 46,513 crore, of which Rs 43,233 crore was released.

77.5% voting recorded in Chhattisgarh panchayat polls

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
RAIPUR, FEBRUARY 23

AN AVERAGE voter turnout of 77.54 per cent was recorded in the third and last phase of panchayat elections held in 50 development blocks in Chhattisgarh on Sunday, an official said.

However, the figure is provisional and it might go up as figures from several booths are yet to arrive, the poll official added. The voting process, which involved ballot papers, was by and large peaceful, he said.

Chief Minister Vishnu Deo Sai, his mother, wife and other family members cast their votes at a polling booth in their native Bagia village in Jashpur district.

The CM said the BJP would emerge victorious just like it did in the recent urban body polls and the first and second phases of the three-tier panchayat elections as the party has fulfilled its promises. The polling time in Bastar division, comprising 7 districts, was from 6.45am to 2pm because of the Naxal threat, while it was 7am to 3pm elsewhere, the official said.

The panchayat or local self-government elections in the state take place at three levels — Gram Panchayat (village), Janpad Panchayat (block) and Zila Panchayat (district).

"Altogether, 53,28,371 voters, including 26,37,306 men, 26,91,000 women and 65 belonging to the third-grade category, exercised their franchise in the last phase to elect 30,990 ward panchs, 3,802 sarpanchs, 1,122 janpad panchayat members and 145 posts of Zila panchayat members," the official said.

BJP: All must back NRC to get rid of infiltrators; TMC hits back

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
KOLKATA, FEBRUARY 23

LEADER OF Opposition in West Bengal Assembly Suwendu Adhikari on Sunday said that National Register of Citizens (NRC) should be implemented in West Bengal and all political parties should support its implementation in the state to effectively combat issues like infiltration and "ghost" voters.

"All political parties should support NRC. Once BJP comes to power in the 2026 Assembly polls, we will implement NRC in Bengal," he said.

Adhikari said that the BJP-ruled states are in favour of implementation of the NRC and alleged that the refusal of the Trinamool Congress (TMC) government in West Bengal shows their lack of concern to check in "States like Uttarakhand and Gujarat are implementing it, Maharashtra has started. NRC is going on in NDA ruled states," the BJP leader said while speaking with mediapersons in Kolkata.

He said that the implementation of NRC is the only way to weed out "infiltrators".

"Bengal is a bordering state. Next to us are Bangladesh-Nepal-Bhutan. We need to identify who is an Indian citizen and who is not by NRC. There are illegal voters in this state, there are

Rohingyas. The Election Commission has no role here," the BJP leader said.

Alleging that there are illegal voters in West Bengal, who have infiltrated from other countries, the BJP leader said, "How did a 'militant' like Shad Radi, also known as Shab Sheikh cast his vote? He is part of Bangladeshi terrorist outfits like Ansarullah Bangla. What are the police and state administration doing? They are looking the other way."

Additionally, former Congress MP Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury on Sunday told mediapersons, "At least 35 to 40 lakh fake voters are in the control of the Trinamool Congress, we all know how easy it is to get enlisted in the voter list."

Meanwhile, TMC spokesperson Kunal Ghosh told mediapersons that "They (BJP) should not do anything that affects the society negatively."

"Our party's work under the leadership of our Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee is to provide "Roti, kapra aur makan" that we do. And BJP as they cannot compete with us and they are enemies of Bengal so they are trying to create division amongst religion. People have rejected this," Ghosh said.

Recently, Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee had raised concerns, accusing the BJP of "trying to replicate its Delhi Model in Bengal and manipulate the voter lists for electoral gains".

In Mumbai police station, Karachi man awaits deportation after serving 6 months in prison



Nadir Karim Khan. Express

SAGAR RAJPUT
MUMBAI, FEBRUARY 23

AT THE ever-busy MRA Marg police station, near Mumbai's Crawford Market, an elderly man wearing a pahadi topi and a pathani kurta is a familiar sight. At times, he wanders about or gets called to serve tea to police officers and visitors. However, more often than not, he sits alone, staring endlessly at the chaotic traffic outside the police station. At night, he sleeps in one of the vacant office spaces in the station. "I can't sleep, though. I keep thinking about home," he says.

Nadir Karim Khan, 65, a Pakistani national who has served a prison sentence of six months for illegally crossing over, is now awaiting deportation.

In November 2021, Khan, a cloth merchant in Karachi, left

that while he was following up on his complaint with the Nepal police, in September 2023, the vendors against whom he had moved allegedly assaulted him and stole his passport and other documents. By then the Nepal authorities had imposed a fine of "around \$1,000" on him for overstaying in the country.

With no documents, Khan decided to cross over into India through the Sonauli land port in Uttar Pradesh. From Sonauli, he took a train to Gorakhpur and then continued to New Delhi, where, he said, he approached the Pakistan High Commission. At the High Commission, however, Khan said he was not given a hearing, following which he decided to go to Mumbai. In November 2023, he arrived at the Dadar Railway station, from where a taxi took him to the Deputy Commissioner of Police

(Zone 1) office near CST station.

Over the following months, Khan was detained at the MRA Marg police station, where he was questioned by various authorities, including Intelligence Bureau and RA&W.

On April 11, 2024, the MRA Marg police arrested him for illegal entry into India. A chargesheet was filed against Khan and, on October 8, 2024, the Esplanade Court sentenced him to six months in prison and imposed a fine of Rs 500.

On October 11, 2024, Khan was released from Arthur Road Jail and, as the authorities debated where to place him, the special branch of the police transferred him to the MRA Marg police station. Police also placed a "restriction order" on Khan that said he would not leave the premises of the police station until his deportation.

KIT founder to BJD stint to the centre of Nepal student death storm: Who is Achyuta Samanta

SUJIT BISOI
BHUBANESWAR, FEBRUARY 23

WHAT HE started from just two rented rooms in 1992-93, involving an initial investment of Rs 5,000, with merely 12 students and two employees, has grown into an engineering university spread over 36 sqkm in Bhubaneswar, which is currently at the centre of a raging row over the suicide of a student from Nepal. The KIT's founder Achyuta Samanta, 61, is in the line of fire over this controversy, with leaders cutting across party lines demanding action against him.

Kathmandu-resident Prakriti Lamsal was found dead in her hostel room on February 16. Police said she died by suicide. A 21-year-old student from Lucknow, Advik Srivastava, has been arrested on charges of abetment. The situation escalated after the university asked the students from Nepal to vacate hostels, with the authorities also allegedly assaulting some of them physically.

The incident, which set off a diplomatic crisis between two countries, has dented Samanta's image of a social entrepreneur, who claims to have helped thousands of tribal kids by giving them access to free education.

Samanta was only 25 when he set up an Industrial Training Institute (ITI) and named it KIT because of his "fascination" with the letter "K", which he considers



KIT founder Achyuta Samanta

his "lucky charm", according to his close associates. Samanta, who did his Master's in chemistry from Utkal University, was a junior lecturer in a government-aided college in Bhubaneswar.

Samanta's varsity classmate Rabi Behera said he was a "very hardworking and bright student". "₹5,000 with the help of which he started KIT was also a bank loan. But he was very determined to do things and his mother was his inspiration," Behera, who now heads the SP's Odisha unit, told *The Indian Express*.

For someone, who lost his father at the age of four, Samanta not only turned the KIT into a success story but also set up its twin institution, Kalinga Institute of Social Sciences (KISS), in 1993. Former MP Pradyumna Bal, a prominent Odisha journalist, helped Samanta in establishing the KIT.

Samanta claims to have provided free residential education to over 20,000 poor tribal chil-

dren from various parts of Odisha through KISS, which earned him the image of being a "social reformer". According to veteran journalist Pradosh Patnaik, who is known to be close to Samanta, the KISS helps Samanta to get national and international funding for his institutions.

KIT became a full-fledged engineering college in 1997. Samanta then started expanding its campus by taking a patch of land from the state government.

One of the observers who has seen Samanta's rise says, "Samanta knows the art of managing everything and everyone."

There are also allegations against him of hiring for the KIT the relatives of influential people to facilitate his business dealings.

Clad in a white shirt and blue trousers, his trademark outfit, Samanta had maintained distance from active politics until 2018, when he joined the Naveen Patnaik-led BJD, then ruling party in Odisha, which nominated him to Rajya Sabha.

In 2019 LS polls, the BJD fielded Samanta from Kandhamal, a region from where he has enrolled most of the tribal students of KISS. He won the seat. But, in the 2024 polls, he lost his seat, following which he announced retirement from politics. BJP's Ekamra-Bhubaneswar MLA Babu Singh said Samanta managed to expand his empire because of his "influence" with the previous BJD government, demanding action against him.

24 February 1946

CRPF's legacy of serving the nation predates Independence. Constable Soda Ram, posted with the 1st Battalion of the Crown Representative's Police, was deployed in Balasinore (Baroda Agency) and Kishangarh to combat dacoity. On 24 February 1946, acting on a tip-off about escaped dacoits in Kishangarh, his company launched an operation. A fierce encounter ensued, leading to the recovery of a large cache of arms and the neutralization of several dacoits. In this battle, Ct Soda Ram made the supreme sacrifice. For his valor, presence of mind, and unwavering commitment to duty, he was posthumously awarded the Indian Police Medal for Gallantry in 1948.

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CT SANJAY BHAMRE
02.06.1970 – 24.02.1995

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BORDER SECURITY FORCE
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07.05.1948 – 24.02.2000

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Container Corporation of India Ltd.
(प्रायतः सरकारी का उद्योग) (A Govt. of India Undertaking)

Tender No. **CONIA-IUCVIL/AMC/IT-2025 (NOTICE INVITING E-TENDER)**

CONCOR invites E-Tender in Single Packet System of tendering for the following work:-

Name of Work	Repair and Maintenance Of Civil Work Of Corporate Office at C-3, Mathura Road, NSIC-MDBP Building (2nd & 3rd Floor), CONCOR Offices Flats at Defence Colony, Jungpura, Khelgaon, San Martin Marg, Chanakypuri, Technical Office at US Complex (Room No. 6,7,12 & 19), 27 Tilak Bridge Railway Colony New Delhi & Operational Office at Gurgaon.
Estimated Cost	Rs. 357.70 Lakhs inclusive all taxes
Completion Period	24 (Twenty Four) Months
Earnest Money Deposit	Rs. 3,28,900 /- (through e-payment)
Cost of Tender Document	NIL
Tender Processing Fee (Non-refundable)	Rs. 3,540/- (inclusive all taxes & duties through e-payment)
Date of sale of Tender (online)	24.02.2025 (11:00 hrs) to 17.03.2025 (upto 17:00 hrs)
Date & Time of Submission of Tender	18.03.2025 upto 17:00 hrs
Date & Time of Opening of Tender	19.03.2025 at 15:00 hrs

For financial eligibility criteria, experience with respect to similar nature of work, etc, please refer to detailed tender notice available on website www.concorindia.com, but the complete tender document can be downloaded from website www.tenderwizard.com/CCL, only Further, Corrigendum / Addendum to this Tender, if any, will be published on website www.concorindia.co.in, www.tenderwizard.com/CCL, and Central Procurement Portal (CIPP) only. Newspaper press advertisement shall not be issued for the same.

Executive Director (Projects) Phone No.: 011-41222500

UTTARAKHAND POWER CORPORATION LIMITED
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Corporate Identity No. UA49109UP20015GCG25867, E-mail: cgmpucl@yahoo.com
Website : www.upcl.org, Telephone No. 0135-2762444, Fax No. 0135-2763839

Uttarakhand Power Corporation Limited invites e-tenders (www.mstcecommerce.com) for purchase of 500 MW RTC power (Delivery Point shall be Uttarakhand State Periphery) for the period of four years under medium term as per Ministry of Power, Government of India guidelines dated 10-02-2014 and its amendment from time to time against Tender Specification **No. 22/CE(COMM)/UPCL-22/MTPP/2025-:** The timelines procurement of power/bid process and activities thereafter are as under:-

S.No.	Event Description	Date and Time
1.	Date and time of Start of e-Tender Stage	24-02-2025
2.	Last date and time for receiving queries on RFQ and RFP	06-03-2025
3.	Pre-Bid Meeting	17-03-2025
4.	Utility response to queries latest by	28-03-2025
5.	Last date and time of submission of Application and Bids (including Section A and Section B)- Bid Due Date	15-04-2025
6.	Opening of Application	15-04-2025
7.	Intimation to Qualified Bidders for opening of their Bids	22-04-2025
8.	Opening of Bids of those Qualified Bidders.	30-04-2025
9.	Start of e-Reverse Auction	[120 minutes after Opening of Bids]
10.	Close of e-Reverse Auction	[120 minutes from the start of e-reverse Auction subject to Auto Extension of 10 minutes]
11.	L-1 Matching	If needed at the close of the e-Reverse Auction Stage, there will be an L-1 Matching Round for 30 mins.
12.	Letter of Award (LOA)	Shall be issued after approval of Hon'ble UERC.
13.	Validity of Bids	120 days of Bid Due Date
14.	Signing of APP	Within 10 days of award of LOA

All other terms and conditions shall remain as per bid document of **Tender No. 22/CE(COMM)/UPCL-22/MTPP/2025.** UPCL reserve the right to unilaterally reject the bid at any stage of the processing of the tender if any declaration submitted by the bidder is found false/incorrect/misrepresented. The documents will be issued to the bidders only through e-tender i.e. (www.mstcecommerce.com). E-tenders will be received and opened on the dates as mentioned above. In case the above date is holiday, the tenders will be received & opened on the next working day at same time. The undersigned reserves the right to refuse to issue the tender documents to any applicant and also to reject any or all tenders without assigning any reason thereof and no claim on this account shall be acceptable. **The tenders received after the date & time mentioned above shall not be considered.** Bid will be submitted on (www.mstcecommerce.com) only and hard copy of technical bid will also be submitted to the office of SE (Commercial), UPCL. All other details and terms & conditions are available in tender document. For any assistance on E-tendering, please contact on telephone number 011-23217850.

No. : 85/EE/CW/UPCL/A-2, Dt. 22.02.2025 **Superintending Engineer (Commercial)**
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Classifieds

PERSONAL

I, Sachin Sharma S/o Janak Raj Sharma R/o Flat no. 506 tower 9 Sushant Estate Sector 52 Gurgaon Haryana-122003, have changed my name to Sachinn Sharma, for all future purposes.

0040776396-1

I, Nidhi D/o Ashok Kumar R/o RZD 17/A, Mahavir Vihar, Palam, Palam Village, Delhi-110045 have changed my name to Nidhi Saini

0070952942-1

I, SYED MOHAMAD SAUD S/o MOHD ASIF R/o H.NO <http://h.no/>. 344/45, GALI GULAR WALI, KUCHA PANDIT, DELHI-110006, CHANGED MY NAME AS "SYED MOHAMMAD SAUD"

0130049609-1

I, Chander Shekhar S/o Mr. Gulab Chand, R/o 617, PKT.-2, Paschim Puri, New Delhi-110063, I have change my name in Passport (No- R7520493) Chander Shakher to Chander Shekhar for all future purpose.

0040776413-1

I, Amarjit Kaur W/o Tarlochan Singh R/o G-128, WZ 234, G-Block, Gali No. 2, Hari Nagar, Delhi-110058 have changed my name to Amarjeet Kaur

0070952936-1

I, Nakul Anand S/o Mr. Dewan Jagat Anand R/o 231, House of Parree Mail Road, Vasant Kunj, New Delhi-110070, hereby declare that I recently have been awarded the degree of Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.) by G. D. Goenka University, Gurugram, Haryana (India) and therefore, changed my name from Nakul Anand to Dr. Nakul Anand for all future purposes.

0040775972-1

BRIEFLY

BIHAR

Three children found dead inside well

Samastipur: The bodies of three children of a family, who had reportedly gone missing, were recovered from a well in Bihar's Samastipur district Sunday, police said. The deceased were identified as Tarun Kumar (6), Tanya Kumari (4.5) and Tanishq (2.5). "Chandan Mahattha had lodged a missing complaint on Saturday. The bodies were recovered from a well close to their house," police said. The children were thrown into the well and family dispute is likely the reason, police said. **PTI**

WEST BENGAL

Police unearth illegal firearms factory

Kolkata: The STF of the Kolkata police along with the Jharkhand Police unearthed a local firearms manufacturing unit in the neighbouring state Sunday and arrested six persons, an officer said. A joint police team of the two states busted the unit operating in Giridih, he said. "Five workers and the owner of the factory were arrested during the raid," the officer said. Ten pieces of semi-finished improvised firearms were seized, he said. **PTI**

GUJARAT

5 tourists killed, 5 injured in road accident

Surendranagar: Five tourists from West Bengal were killed and five others injured in a road accident in Gujarat's Surendranagar Sunday, police said. The accident occurred on a national highway around 4.30 pm, police said. A group of tourists from Bengal were travelling in a tempo when it crashed into a dumper. Two women and three men died on the spot and five others were rushed to a hospital. **PTI**

Attacked several times, Pune Dalit family walks to Mumbai to meet CM: 'Fear for our lives'

SHUBHAM TIGGA
PUNE, FEBRUARY 23

WITH ONLY ₹70 in hand and a desperate plea for justice, Ratan Navgire (35), her two sisters, and two young children have walked over 150 km from Pune to Mumbai. They started their journey on February 7 and arrived at Azad Maidan on February 13, seeking a meeting with Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis.

But 10 days later, they are still waiting for justice. Their story is one of alleged caste-based violence and institutional neglect. Residents of Thergaon in Pimpri-Chinchwad, Ratan Navgire and her family, who sell flowers for a livelihood, belong to the Matang (Mang), a community under the Scheduled Castes. Their ordeal began two years ago when Ratan's 14-year-old son, Karan, was allegedly attacked by upper-caste people. "My nephew was told, 'Why do you show your face, you Mangis, so early in the morning?'" said Reshma Chauhan, 32, Ratan's sister. "They pick fights for no reason, and now we fear for our lives." The family's troubles only deepened when local authorities "failed to act". Despite multiple complaints to the Pimpri-Chinchwad Municipal Corporation (PCMC) and the police, no FIR was filed. "Instead, our water connection was cut six months ago without any prior notice. Forced to fetch water from a public tank near Bapuji Bua Temple, we faced further humiliation—local resi-



DANCERS AIM A RECORD

Artistes perform during a rehearsal for 'Jhumoir Binadini', a cultural event that will attempt to set a record for the largest participation in the Assamese folk dance, in Guwahati on Sunday. Prime Minister Narendra Modi is set to attend the event on Monday. **PTI**

Kashi Tamil Sangamam: Jaishankar and 45 envoys meet with Tamil delegates at BHU

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
VARANASI, FEBRUARY 23

UNION EXTERNAL Affairs Minister S Jaishankar and 45 ambassadors from different countries Sunday interacted with Tamil delegates who are on a visit here during the third edition of Kashi Tamil Sangamam. The session gave international representatives a unique opportunity to witness the connection between the two great cultures of Kashi and Kanchipuram and gain a deeper understanding of India beyond Delhi. Jaishankar described Kashi as India's cultural heart, deeply linked to people in the country. "Tamil Nadu has a special bond with Kashi, and Kashi Tamil Sangamam celebrates this unique connection. India is a land of diversity and despite its many languages, traditions and beliefs, the country remains united. This unity keeps India together as a nation," he said. The EAM said celebrating India's rich heritage helps pass it on to future generations and introduce the world to India's glorious past and traditions. He said cultures lives through celebra-



tions and the Indian government supports such efforts. He spoke about how traditions contribute to technology. He said Indian universities are conducting advanced research in areas like drone and space technology. "More such notable developments will be seen in the coming future." Tamil delegate Rajesh Kumar highlighted India's growing global role and asked how ambassadors perceive India's diversity. In response, the Somalia Ambassador said uniformity is not a solution to challenges. India, with over a billion people

of diverse thoughts, is a great example of coexistence, he said. A diplomat from Eritrea recalled how his Indian teachers had shared their knowledge about India's culture, acknowledging that the people of India keep the country united. The Deputy High Commissioner of Rwanda said the world can learn from India's social harmony. The Ambassador of Iceland said India's strength lies in its diversity, which is reflected in its shared culture and values. The High Commissioner of



External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar at the Kashi Tamil Sangamam in Varanasi on Sunday, (left) Foreign tourists take part in a havan. **ANI/PTI**

Jamaica said this year marks the 108th anniversary of the arrival of Indians in Jamaica. He also proposed setting up a centre for Caribbean Studies in India. "The presence of top diplomats from various countries reflects India's global outreach and its long-standing cultural..." said Sanjay Kumar, Banaras Hindu University's acting V-C. Organised by the Ministry of Education in collaboration with the UP government and other ministries, the annual exchange aims to strengthen the bond between Tamil Nadu and Kashi.

MAHARASHTRA MINISTER CONVICTION

NCP-SP leader writes to Speaker, demands Kokate's disqualification

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
MUMBAI, FEBRUARY 23

EVEN AS the Opposition is mounting pressure on Speaker Rahul Narwekar to disqualify State Agriculture Minister Manikrao Kokate following his conviction in a housing scam, NCP (SP) leader Jitendra Awhad on Sunday wrote a letter to the Speaker demanding the same. In the letter, in which he attached a copy of the court order, Awhad said, "Since the court has ordered two years imprisonment for Kokate for housing fraud, he should be immediately disqualified as member state legislative

assembly... In the past when former Congress minister Sunil Kedar was convicted in Nagpur District Central Bank scam, the Speaker issued the disqualification notice immediately." Questioning Speaker's inordinate delay in taking a decision on Kokate, Awhad said, "There cannot be two separate norms for those in ruling and opposition... rules are same for every MLA." Expressing disappointment over Speaker's "partial conduct", Shiv Sena UBT leader Sanjay Raut said, "We have seen how this Speaker conducts for the past three years. We have seen it when he upheld Eknath Shinde faction and Ajit Pawar faction as

real Shiv Sena and NCP respectively. On merit, he should have disqualified Shinde's 40 MLAs for defection. But he legitimised them as a original party, violating the legislative norms..." On February 20, the Nashik district and sessions court convicted Manikrao Kokate and his brother Vijay Kokate for alleged fraud in acquiring houses under CM's discretionary 10 per cent quota for low income groups. The minister was given a two-year jail term. He has decided to appeal in higher court against the order. Narwekar said, "We will take a decision after studying the court order. I have not received the court order yet."

With KCR back in action, BRS plans its comeback

NIKHILA HENRY
HYDERABAD, FEBRUARY 23

THE BHARAT Rashtira Samithi (BRS) that has appeared to struggle since its drubbing in the 2023 Assembly polls and last year's Lok Sabha elections received a shot in the arm last week after its chief K Chandrashekar Rao, in a rare public appearance, addressed party leaders at the BRS executive meeting in Hyderabad. Rao, popularly known as KCR, had been away from the public eye since his party's defeats and had even been giving Assembly proceedings a miss. His "reappearance" comes at a time when the Revanth Reddy-led Congress government is facing flak over the alleged undercounting of Backward Classes in the caste survey.

KCR's announcement of holding statewide agitations throughout the year to mark the silver jubilee of his party (which came into existence as the Telangana Rashtira Samithi in 2001) to "safeguard the rights of the people of the state" has enthused his party colleagues. "KCR has been active behind the scenes and now has come out to challenge the Congress government. His address as well as the points he made on February 19 have surely lifted the morale of the cadre and leaders. It has also sent out a message that the BRS is here to stay," said a BRS district office-bearer in Nagarkurnool district. In his address, the former Chief Minister urged his BRS colleagues to build the party from the grassroots and promised the people of Telangana that the "BRS



Bharat Rashtira Samithi chief K Chandrashekar Rao

would stand by them as they suffer under the Congress regime". Addressing the media, BRS working president KT Rama Rao, popularly known as KTR, said a clear roadmap had emerged from the five-hour meeting. "We have seen farmers, students, autorickshaw drivers and even realtors have died by suicide due to

12 Indians land in Delhi after being sent to Panama by US

ENS & PTI
NEW DELHI, JALANDHAR
FEBRUARY 23

TWELVE INDIAN nationals, who were deported to Panama by the US, returned to India from the Latin American nation on Sunday evening, officials said. The deportees arrived at the Indira Gandhi International Airport in New Delhi, marking the first batch of Indians returning from Panama following their deportation by the US. The 12 Indians are learnt to be part of 299 undocumented migrants deported to Panama by the US a few days back. The Trump administration has begun a mass deportation programme of foreign nationals living illegally in the US. Over 300 Indians have already been deported to India by the US in three different flights this month. The group, which was detained in a hotel in Panama after being sent back from the US, was transported by a commercial flight to Delhi, with four of the deported individuals from Punjab later being sent to Amritsar via a domestic flight. The four people from Punjab have been identified as Maninder Dutt (23) from Jalandhar, Jatinder Singh (34)

from Patiala, and Jugraj Singh (33) and Harpreet Singh (30), both from Gurdaspur. According to preliminary reports from Indian authorities, the four men had entered South America through European countries, including the Netherlands and Spain. Three of them then entered Surinam, Guyana in South America and then went to Columbia from where they entered Panama while one went to El Salvador directly from Spain. Confirming their arrival, Amritsar Deputy Commissioner Sakshi Sawhney said they arrived at Sri Guru Ram Das Ji International Airport here from Delhi via a commercial flight. She added that they all had paid huge amounts to illegal travel agents to facilitate their 'dunki travel'. Earlier, three batches of illegal Indian immigrants were brought back from the US in a military aircraft on February 5, 15 and 16. The landing of US military aircraft carrying illegal Indian immigrants at the Amritsar airport had triggered sharp reactions from several political leaders in Punjab. CM Bhagwant Mann had questioned the Centre's move to land planes bringing deportees at Amritsar airport, accusing it of trying to defame Punjab under a conspiracy.

TISS begins inquiry against asst prof who quit after complaint of sexual harassment

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
MUMBAI, FEBRUARY 23

THE TATA Institute of Social Sciences (TISS) has initiated an inquiry into allegations of sexual harassment and bullying made by a student against an assistant professor, who has resigned amid the controversy. The complainant, in a written anonymous complaint submitted to TISS chancellor professor D P Singh and Union Minister of Education Dharmendra Pradhan, alleged that the professor created a toxic environment on campus through unwarranted personal advances and made threatening remarks to intimidate her. Confirming the complaint, a TISS official said an inquiry has been initiated. "The administration received the complaint on February 20. The Internal Complaint Committee (ICC) immediately acknowledged the complaint and initiated the inquiry, which will include hearings for both parties. The ICC operates as an independent body, and its findings and recommendations will determine further action." The TISS official confirmed that the assistant professor resigned on February 21. While the ICC can recom-

mend termination in such cases, the official said resignation does not shield the professor from further action. "Resignation does not exempt the professor from any necessary action. The institute will follow the ICC's recommendations after the inquiry." In her complaint, the student said how the professor, who initially appeared supportive, began asking personal questions such as, "Are you single?" "I clearly explained my discomfort in discussing my personal life, but he kept asking and then he repeatedly made inappropriate remarks towards me and other female students. Some of his comments include: 'Friends with benefits' — a clear attempt at sexual coercion," states the complaint letter, which also alleged that the professor forced the student to take him to her apartment, despite refusal. "He made threatening comments, saying, 'I will make you disappear if you file a complaint, I have connections in the ministry'," the complaint read. The complaint demanded strict action against the professor and called for an anonymous grievance redressal system, allowing students to report harassment without fear of retaliation. It advocates for mental health support for victims of such incidents.

the Congress's bad governance." KTR, the son of the former CM, said the BRS would hold a big event in Hyderabad in April to launch the party's "forward-looking" plan. Senior party leader and KCR's nephew T Harish Rao has been tasked with organising the public meeting. The party's decision to reserve 53 seats for women after delimitation and one protest a month on key issues are signs that the BRS is keen to take on the Congress government. "If you see, a lot of decisions taken did not dwell on the past. They showed the BRS's intent to take on the Congress government, which has been spreading false propaganda that the BRS is down and out. The meeting is a fresh starting point for the BRS," a senior party leader said. Targeting the Congress gov-

ernment for "failing to get anything for Telangana from the Centre", KTR said the BJP and the Congress has eight MPs each from the state but all of them "failed to represent the state's interests". He also accused Revanth Reddy of "misleading the people". With the father-son duo back at the centre stage, BRS leaders are convinced of "good times" ahead. "There is a certain command that KCR has over the people and him guiding the party is invaluable," said a party leader. A section of BRS leaders, however, believes that KTR and party MLCK Kavitha being at the forefront of attacking the Congress government was a sign that KCR had always been in action. "He (KCR) has always been the guiding light for the party even though he had not appeared in public," a leader said.



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Why Microsoft’s claims of quantum computing breakthrough matter

AMITABH SINHA
NEW DELHI, FEBRUARY 23

MICROSOFT LAST week claimed a breakthrough in quantum computing, an eagerly-awaited technology much like artificial intelligence (AI), that holds the promise of performing tasks beyond the capabilities of current technologies. The company said it had been successful in creating a new chip that would fast-track the development of a meaningful quantum computer from decades to a few years.

Essentially, Microsoft has claimed to have found a novel way to create qubits (short for quantum bits), the basic unit of data that is stored and processed in a quantum computer. The company has also claimed that this novel way produces qubits that are more stable than those produced by existing methods.

EXPLAINED HEALTH

HOW HIV SELF-TESTING CAN BECOME A GAME-CHANGER FOR MIZORAM

ANURADHA MASCARENHAS
PUNE, FEBRUARY 23

A STUDY by Pune-based Indian Council of Medical Research-National Institute of Translational Virology and AIDS Research (formerly NARI) and Mizoram University has highlighted how HIV self-testing has helped many young people in Mizoram get tested for the first time. The state has the highest HIV prevalence in the country.

“This innovative approach empowers vulnerable youth by providing a private, convenient, and stigma-free way to know their status,” study co-author Dr Samiran Panda, former Additional Director General, Indian Council of Medical Research, told *The Indian Express*.

Human immunodeficiency virus or HIV attacks the body’s immune system. If left untreated, HIV can lead to AIDS, a deadly disease. However, modern anti-retroviral therapy (ART) regimens can help people with HIV live long and healthy lives.

The virus is transmitted via contact with infected body fluids, often through sexual contact or contaminated needles.

HIV burden in Mizoram

An estimated 25.44 lakh people live with HIV in India. Among all states, Mizoram has the highest prevalence of HIV in the adult population. According to *Sankalak* (2024), the flagship publication of the National AIDS Control Programme, 2.73% of all adults in the state are infected with HIV — 13 times the national average.

According to the National AIDS Control Organisation’s ‘HIV Sentinel Surveillance Technical Brief 2016-17’, 19.8% of individuals in Mizoram who inject drugs were infected with HIV, as were 24.7% of female sex workers — also highest in India.

The study & HIV self-testing

Mizoram witnessed an uptick in an-

The claim, if it stands, could become a major milestone not just in quantum computing, but also in physics. That is because the process of creating these qubits involves working with a physical state that is long known to be theoretically possible but has never been attained. This is the reason why there has been a little scepticism around this announcement as of now.

Quantum computing

Quantum computers are not just the next generation of superfast computers. These are very different in the way they work, the way they handle and process information, and even in the way they look. They are designed to utilise the very special properties that tiny particles, smaller than an atom, exhibit.

One such property is superposition, or the ability of a quantum particle to exist in multiple states at the same time. This prop-

erty is used in a quantum computer to supercharge calculations in a way that traditional computers are incapable of doing. In traditional computers, data are stored and processed through billions of small transistors that can each handle only one bit of information (0 or 1) at a time. Quantum computers use electrons or other similar particles to process data. Superposition allows these particles, or qubits, to be in both 0 and 1 state at the same time. In fact, they can exist in every combination of 0 and 1 simultaneously.

Interaction with other qubits allows for a kind of parallel processing that is not possible in a normal computer where data processing happens one step at a time, even though at lightning speeds.

However, quantum computing faces big challenges. The quantum behaviour of a par-

ticle collapses into normal behaviour the moment the system is observed or measured. This is because any act of measurement, or observation, is not possible without disturbing these extremely tiny systems. Any other external disturbance, such as deviations in temperature or pressure, also collapses the system. Maintaining the stability of qubits is a huge issue.

The other challenge pertains to the integrity of the outcome. The multiple states of a qubit lead to multiple outcomes, only one of which is desirable. Getting the quantum computer to throw this correct outcome, instead of millions of other possibilities, is also a challenge. Disturbances caused in any qubit can result in errors in calculations, and algorithms need to correct for these, which, in turn, require many more qubits. The more stable the qubits are, the fewer the errors.

EXPLAINED TECH

Three years of war in Ukraine

Three years since the war began, Russia is weakened, Ukraine is devastated, but a resolution is in sight. Donald Trump has taken it upon himself to end the war Vladimir Putin started

EXPERT EXPLAINS

AJAY BISARIA

THREE YEARS ago, Russia launched a fratricidal ‘special military operation’ against Ukraine, triggering the bloodiest European war since 1945. Planned as a swift reminder of Russia’s red lines, the conflict turned into a grinding war of attrition. Ukraine, resilient and armed with Western support, stalled Russia’s advances. A thousand days later, no clear winners have emerged — Ukraine is devastated, Russia weakened, Europe fragmented, the US frustrated, and global economies are suffering.

Russia is now gaining on the battlefield, holding a fifth of Ukraine’s territory, with its nuclear arsenal looming as a threat. Even as hundreds of thousands perished in the heart of Europe, what was surprising was the absence of serious peace efforts. European leaders failed to activate the Minsk accords of 2014-15, which could have facilitated peace with German and French guarantees.

Other initiatives—from Switzerland, Turkey, China, and India—were limited in ambition or scope. The geopolitical reality was that weakening Russia through a proxy war suited the West, and any workable peace deal required US will, apart from Russian buy-in.

The art of the hurried deal

But the contours of a peace framework are now emerging. If the endgame has a name, call it Donald Trump. Since assuming office on January 20, Trump 2.0 has upended the global order and reversed US foreign policy. If his administration represents a far-right disruption within the US, it embodies an impulse to reshape the global order with economic coercion accompanied by shock-and-awe diplomacy. Trump sought to withdraw from Afghanistan during his first term but had to leave the endgame to his successor. That experience drives him to settle Ukraine’s war on his own timeline, perhaps spurred also by the prospect of a Nobel Peace Prize.

Though Trump’s campaign promise to resolve Ukraine’s war in 24 hours was bluster, his administration has shown delight in overriding entrenched positions. His aversion to military entanglements is matched by his enthusiasm for weaponising tariffs. But for all the chaos his presidency unleashes, Trump could spell an end to the



US Secretary of State Marco Rubio (second from left) held talks over ending the war with Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov (extreme right) at Diriyah Palace, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, on February 18. No Ukrainian leader was present. X/@SecRubio

shooting wars.

Trump’s team acknowledges that the war is a consequence of America’s post-Cold War push for NATO expansion, pursued in a heady unipolar moment of unchecked US dominance. The West ignored Russia’s push-back in Georgia (2008) and Crimea (2014). Ukraine became a proxy in this big power contest, and now, geopolitical expediency dictates its fate.

Trump understands the deal must be struck directly between the US and Russia—between him and Putin, strongman to strongman. Including other stakeholders in peace talks would delay deals. Putin, dominant on the battlefield, has waited to negotiate with Trump, who will operate in a realist framework rather than invoke a rules-based order. The likely outcome is a ceasefire followed by a peace deal resembling Versailles after WWI or Yalta after WWII—where major powers carved out spheres of influence.

The terms of peace

Even before formal talks began, US terms were evident. Defence Secretary Pete Hegseth signalled that Washington would not push maximalist demands, instead conceding two of Putin’s key conditions: Ukraine would not join NATO, and its pre-2014 borders would not be restored. So Crimea’s annexation would stand, while Russia’s control over four eastern oblasts (map) would be subject to negotiation. In return, sanctions



The NYT

against Russia would be lifted, and Moscow would not object to Western Ukraine joining the EU or demand regime change in Kyiv.

The trickiest issue is security guarantees for Ukraine. Russia rejects peacekeeping troops, even under non-NATO flags. While Washington’s Ukraine policy appears inconsistent, its goal is clear: end the war. The early deal will require compromises—not necessarily a ‘just and sustainable’ peace, but an expedient one.

Talks began on February 18 in Riyadh, a deliberate move away from traditional European venues like Geneva. The ‘Riyadh reset’ signifies Trump’s clever prioritisation of Saudi Arabia as a geopolitical mediator, not just in Ukraine but also for Gaza.

Putin’s envoys were at the table with Trump’s team—Ukrainian and European leaders were not. A Trump-Putin summit in Riyadh will likely finalise the deal, start-

ing with a ceasefire before a formal peace agreement is reached.

He said the scepticism around the announcement was also understandable.

“What Microsoft is claiming to have achieved is very big and significant. It is also very difficult. Scientists have been trying to create this new physical state for a long time but have not succeeded. Any big breakthrough does invite greater scrutiny, and that is what seems to be happening. There is nothing surprising about this,” he said.

Europe in disarray

Trump’s moves have left Europe reeling. At the Munich Security Conference, US Vice President JD Vance spoke bluntly of Europe’s decline. Two emergency summits in Paris reflected the panic: Europe faces a ‘two-front situation,’ with Russian aggression on one side and American hostility on the other. France’s Emmanuel Macron and Britain’s Keir Starmer will soon travel to Washington to plead their case, while Germany’s new chancellor could follow as soon as the dust settles on a bruising election.

In Ukraine, Zelensky faces battlefield losses and Trump’s trolling. The US president sent his special envoy, Keith Kellogg, to Kyiv to humour the “modestly successful comedian” before dismissing Zelensky as a “dictator.” Even before Zelensky suggested Trump was swayed by Russian disinformation, he had effectively lost any influence over negotiations.

Adding to Ukraine’s woes, Trump wants repayment for the \$350 billion the US has allegedly spent on the war. Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent was tasked with negotiating access to Ukraine’s strategic mineral reserves in return for American support. This aligns with Trump’s vision of geopolitics as real estate transactions, like his ideas to buy Greenland or control the Panama Canal or Gaza or even Canada.

A global realignment

The Ukraine settlement will be part of a broader strategic realignment. The US must recalibrate its relationship with Russia as it faces a greater challenge: China’s belligerent rise. The war has pushed Moscow closer to Beijing, but a resolution could create an opportunity to loosen that bond. Trump’s approach may mirror Nixon’s Cold War diplomacy, which sought to prise China from the Soviet Union—though this time, the roles are reversed.

For much of the world, an end to the war would bring economic relief. Sanctions have disrupted global markets, food supplies, and energy security. A resolution would stabilise energy flows, restore grain exports, and ease inflationary pressures. Trump’s presidency has undoubtedly introduced volatility, but it may also deliver peace in Ukraine. Whether this resolution proves lasting—or merely leads to another frozen conflict—will be decided by two strongmen in Riyadh.

Ajay Bisaria is a former diplomat who was India’s ambassador to Pakistan, Canada, Poland, and Lithuania. He is a Distinguished Fellow, Observer Research Foundation

Melting glaciers caused 2 cm sea level rise this century: the likely impact

ALIND CHAUHAN
NEW DELHI, FEBRUARY 23

MELTING ICE from glaciers worldwide has led to almost 2 cm of sea level rise in this century alone, a study published in the journal *Nature* on February 19 has found.

While seemingly insignificant, this can have disastrous consequences.

“Every centimetre of sea level rise exposes another 2 million people to annual flooding somewhere on our planet,” Andrew Shepherd, head of the department of geography and environmental science at the UK’s Northumbria University, told *The Guardian*.

Why sea level is rising

Sea level rise is essentially the increase in the average height of the ocean’s surface, measured from the centre of Earth.

There are two primary reasons why sea levels are currently rising.

FIRST is the global warming-driven melting of glaciers (accumulation of ice and snow that slowly flows over land) and ice sheets (glaciers that cover more than

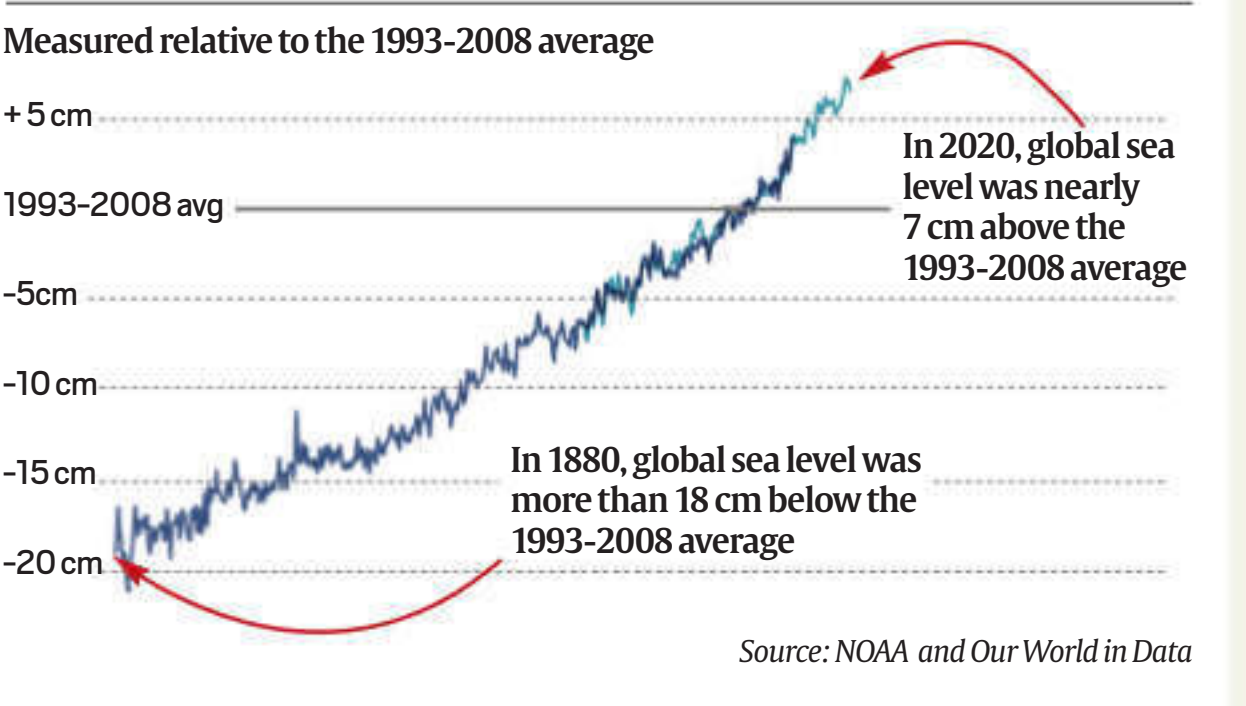
50,000 square km of land).

According to the latest study, since 2000, glaciers have lost between 2% and 39% of their ice regionally, and about 5% globally. This is equivalent to losing 273 billion tonnes of ice each year — 30 times the annual water consumption of Earth’s entire population — for the last 25 years.

Overall, glacier mass loss is about 18% larger than the loss from the Greenland Ice Sheet, and more than twice that from the Antarctic Ice Sheet in the same period, the study said. While the Greenland ice sheet has been melting at an average rate of about 150 billion tonnes per year, the Antarctic ice sheet has been losing about 270 billion tonnes per year since 2002, according to the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA).

SECOND is the thermal expansion of seawater, a process by which water expands as it warms up. With global temperatures rising, oceans are becoming warmer, and as a result, the volume of water is increasing as well. Thermal expansion of seawater is responsible for one-third to half of global sea level rise, NASA said.

GLOBAL SEA LEVEL HAS RISEN BY AROUND 25 CM SINCE 1880



The rise, in numbers

The global sea level has risen by 21-25 cm since 1880, when records were first kept, according to the US agency National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. However, in recent years, this rise has accelerated dramatically. It has more than

doubled from 0.18 cm per year in 1993 to the current rate of 0.42 cm per year. Global sea levels have risen by more than 10 cm between 1993 and 2024, according to NASA, a rate which is unprecedented over the past 2,500-plus years.

The sea level is not rising uniformly the

world over. For instance, the southwestern Indian Ocean region is seeing the sea level rise at a rate of 2.5 mm per year, faster than the global average, according to a 2022 World Meteorological Organization report. In other parts of the Indian Ocean region, the rate is between 0 and 2.5 mm per year.

The uneven rise is because “regional patterns of sea-level change are dominated by local changes in ocean heat content and salinity,” the report said.

Among Indian cities, Mumbai is the worst-impacted, having witnessed a sea level rise of 4.44 cm between 1987 and 2021, according to a 2024 report by Bengaluru-based Center for Study of Science, Technology and Policy. For context, the island city has an average elevation of around 10 m above sea level. West Bengal’s Haldia has witnessed a sea-level rise of 2.73 cm, Andhra Pradesh’s Visakhapatnam 2.381 cm, and Kerala’s Kochi 2.213 cm, the report said.

Matter of concern

An increase in sea level can severely impact both human and natural systems. It leads to more frequent and intense coastal flooding, which exacerbates coastal erosion, and ultimately displaces populations living

close to the coast. For instance, between 1990 and 2016, the West Bengal coast alone lost almost 99 sq km of land, according to a 2018 report by the National Centre for Coastal Research (NCCR). Sea level rise is a major contributor to this.

A 2024 study in the journal *Scientific Reports* found that 29% of the global population lived within 50 kilometers of the shore in 2018, while 15% lived merely 10 km away from water.

Sea level rise also results in more intense storm surges, allowing more water inland during tropical storms. This in turn can impact coastal ecosystems such as mangroves, coral reefs and salt marshes, and also contaminate the soil and fresh water supplies.

And the rise is not likely to stop if the world fails to curb the emission of heat-trapping greenhouse gases. As Nadya Vinogradova Shiffer, director of the NASA sea level change team, said in 2024: “Current rates of acceleration mean that we are on track to add another 20 cm of global mean sea level by 2050, doubling the amount of change in the next three decades compared to the previous 100 years and increasing the frequency and impacts of floods across the world.”

15

IDEA EXCHANGE

NEWSMAKERS IN THE NEWSROOM

ON STATEHOOD

Given my conversations at the levels I’ve had with the Central government, I’m expecting statehood to be restored in less than a year... With statehood, we hope to be able to achieve some of the things that were lost to us

MUZAMIL JALEEL: One sees a very different Omar Abdullah today: one who is conciliatory compared to the one in 2019. Is this the way you wanted to go ahead? What is the road map?

It has always been my nature to carry everyone with me as far as possible. The only reason this wasn’t more apparent in my first term was because it was a UPA government and we were allies with the Congress. But when that government transitioned to PM Modi’s first government, it is not as if the knives came out and suddenly my approach to Centre-State relations changed. I still continue to have the same attitude in terms of my approach.

What happened to us in 2019, it can’t become the defining yardstick by which I approach the relations between J&K and the Union government. We vehemently disagree with things that the BJP has done, continues to do. We oppose the BJP politically, have done, will continue. We are members of the INDIA bloc. But this is about the government of J&K working with the government of India for the betterment of the people of J&K. And that is what I owe the people of J&K. If people feel that my approach is wrong, they will get the time to pass a verdict. And if they would rather J&K is at loggerheads with the Union government and you end up with a more Kejriwal-like situation, then you have to be prepared for Kejriwal-type results too.

MUZAMIL JALEEL: You won a massive mandate in an election held after a decade. You promised that the honour and dignity of the people would be restored, special status would be restored.

Yes, the dignity of the people of J&K is paramount. We have said we will continue to keep the issue alive, which we have done. We did it in the Assembly and we have done it in statements and speeches: that will continue. But at no point did we ever mislead the people by telling them that they’re going to elect a government that is going to immediately get the special status restored. To expect the people who took it away from us to give it back to us, just because we’re asking for it, is pointless. The struggle for the removal of J&K’s special status was long. The BJP didn’t achieve it overnight. Whatever we have to do for its restoration will also be long. With statehood, we hope to be able to achieve some of the things that were lost to us when August 2019 took place, particularly preserving our jobs and land.

MUZAMIL JALEEL: You’ve been the CM of J&K when it was a full state. How is it being the CM of the UT?

Are we able to do everything we want to? Not true. Are we in a position where we are able to do nothing? Also, not true. You have to find areas where you can achieve some sort of success while also recognising that there are areas where you will face a certain amount of frustration. Restoration of statehood is not just about governance. It’s about fulfilling the idea of democracy. The people of J&K were promised full statehood for being part of the national mainstream and active participation in elections. But at the back of everyone’s mind was the continuous commitment from the government of India that statehood, would be restored. And that is the first battle.

India should have essentially two models and I’m leaving Delhi out of it. Having now been the CM of a state and of a UT with an Assembly, these UTs with assemblies are flawed models. You can’t have a hybrid democracy. You are either a democracy or you are not. You can’t give people the power to choose their government and then tie the hands of the government by empowering the lieutenant governor to supersede a number of things that the elected government wants to do. It’s dishonest and this model should be done away with.

MUZAMIL JALEEL: Do you think you have been in a reconciliation mode with the central leadership since you took over?

It’s not a question of being conciliatory. Things that the government of India is doing, we oppose. But if the Union government is being supportive of what we’re doing in J&K, if they’re not going out of their way to be difficult or deny us funds, I’d be foolish to pick a fight where a fight isn’t necessary. If their attitude changes tomorrow, then we’ll have to revisit ours. Given my conversations at the levels I’ve had with the Central government, I’m expecting statehood to be restored in less than a year.

DEEPTIMAN TIWARY: Since the abrogation, the ruling party has talked about bringing the law and order situation in J&K under control but this semblance of normalcy has been brought through coercive action – incarceration and liberal use of PSA



WHY OMAR ABDULLAH

Omar Abdullah is the first elected CM of Jammu and Kashmir after the abrogation of its special status and downgrade into a UT. In an election that took place after 10 years, his party, National Conference, won a massive mandate. His biggest challenge is to achieve his party’s primary goal to ensure

the restoration of J&K’s statehood and the demand of restoration of its special status at a time when its direct ideological rival BJP is in power at the Centre. The way Abdullah manoeuvres around one of his toughest political journeys will determine the future of J&K, his party and him as a political leader



ON RESTORATION OF SPECIAL STATUS

The struggle for the removal of J&K’s special status was long. The BJP didn’t achieve it overnight. Whatever we have to do for its restoration will also be long

‘What happened to us in 2019 can’t be the yardstick to approach relations between J&K and the Union govt’

Omar Abdullah, Chief Minister, Jammu & Kashmir, on difficulties of working in a hybrid democracy, restoration of statehood and special status for the region and lessons INDIA bloc can learn from the BJP. The session was anchored by Muzamil Jaleel, Deputy Editor, *The Indian Express*



Omar Abdullah, Chief Minister, Jammu & Kashmir, in a conversation with Muzamil Jaleel, Deputy Editor, *The Indian Express* Renuka Puri

(Public Safety Act). Can it endure? Also, in the recent security review meetings, the elected government has not been represented at all. How do you see this?

Whatever has been achieved so far through coercive means, there is a finite limit to how far that will succeed. Unless people actively participate, you can’t continue to do it down the barrel of a gun. As for security review meetings, their understanding of it is flawed. That said, I am not begging for a seat at the table. I want the security and law and order to be the responsibility of the elected government. But currently they are not. If you believe you can handle the security of J&K in a vacuum, you can’t. Not everything can be done through the CID, IB, the Army and the police. At some point, you’re going to need the cooperation of the people. It’s fine if you don’t include us in the security meetings. But then you also can’t look for us when the situation is going bad. Because if we’re not part of your matrix when you’re deciding what the security forces should do, we certainly shouldn’t be part of it when you have a problem.

DEEPTIMAN TIWARY: If there is a regime change, is there a possibility of Article 370 being restored?

Umeed pe duniya kayam hai. Previous court judgments found in favour of 370, this one found against. Circumstances change.

RAKESH SINHA: In your early days, in your dealings with the Centre, have there been areas of convergence?

Would the Central government have preferred a different outcome? I’m sure they would much rather be dealing with a BJP CM in J&K. That said, at least in all my conversations with them, they have made it clear that the people have spoken and the mandate of the people is to be respected.

MANOJ CG: Whose responsibility is it to keep the INDIA bloc together. Is there any need for a leadership change?

It’s a collective responsibility. We need more clarity as to what was the purpose of our coming together. I keep hearing different points of view. We were just for Parliament. We’re just for this, we’re just for that. We need to sit down and decide. Yes, the PDP and the National Conference didn’t fight together, but we didn’t leave the INDIA bloc. The National Conference and the Congress fought together, in spite of the fact that we perhaps surrendered more seats than we should have. But we took that hit.

Others will also have to decide. Is there any other political party other than the Congress that has a pan-India presence? Therefore, the natural leadership role belongs to the largest party with the biggest presence. But then they also have to play a leadership role.

We’re unsure of where we’re going. I don’t know what is next for us. This communication with each other is something I’d like to see.

LIZ MATHEW: What according to you has gone wrong with Arvind Kejriwal?

Obviously there are a couple of things that the BJP picked up on and used to their advantage, not the least of which was the house that he constructed. Rightly or wrongly, the BJP latched onto that and it seems to have become an issue. The other thing I kept hearing was that the people got fed up with hearing ‘they’re not letting us work’. Because the common refrain was that if they’re not letting them work, then let’s find somebody who will work. That narrative backfired. What they, perhaps, needed was to talk about the work they had done. Also, the numbers suggest that an alliance would have done better.

COOMI KAPOOR: What is the state of the INDIA alliance? On or off?

On. Sometimes on life support, but on. We didn’t win the Lok Sabha elections but it was a fairly successful in terms of the numbers. You reduce Modi government to a minority government, forcing him to take on allies. Unfortunately, state elections, barring J&K and Jharkhand, have been a setback. We need one or two successes for momentum behind the INDIA bloc.



AAKASH JOSHI: What are your thoughts on the state of minorities in India?

It is a concern. It has been one for the last few years, and it continues to remain one. So this concerted effort as if Muslim sentiment doesn’t matter: the Waqf Bill is a clear example of that. If you are making it about charitable properties or religious properties, then do it for everybody. When you do it for only one particular religion, then it looks like you are singling out that religion. The BJP has this view that the Congress in the past has appeased Muslims or minorities. But to prove that they are not appeasing, targeting is unfair.

MALLICA JOSHI: What is your relationship with the bureaucracy in J&K?

It’s a mixed bag. Most of the offices have been good, some have found this UT system a good way to escape accountability or delay decisions. If a secretary-level officer doesn’t want to do something, I can’t move them because they’re directly the responsibility of Raj Bhavan. So I have all the work and I have to work with the team that I don’t get to choose. But I’m not going to use that as an excuse. We’ll make it work.

MUZAMIL JALEEL: You have been CM for four months, and we don’t even have business rules.

We have business rules. They are just not the ones that we believe are the right ones. So those business rules, under the J&K Reorganization Act, are under preparation.

HARIKISHAN SHARMA: When the

ON BEING THE CM OF A UT

You can’t give people the power to choose their govt and then tie the hands of the govt by empowering the governor to supersede things that the elected govt wants to do

Centre revoked Article 370, various claims were made about investment and people buying properties. Has that happened?

I don’t have the numbers. I have heard that there’s been a lot of investment, job creation and stuff like that, but I haven’t seen very much of it.

VIKAS PATHAK: Recently Lalu Prasad Yadav said ‘faltu hai’ for Mahakumbh. Mr Kharge said, “Dubki lagane se pet bhar jayega kya?” Do these things bolster the agenda of the BJP?

Who am I to question anybody’s faith? Different religions manifest differently. I went for Umrah (pilgrimage to Mecca) a few months ago and some people can say why should it matter? My faith dictates that I go, I went. Now, if somebody’s faith dictates that they take a holy bath at Mahakumbh, why should we poke holes? Why give the BJP a chance to say that these people are against Hindus?

MUZAMIL JALEEL: The Central government says that separatism, militancy, and protests are a story of the past. How is the ground situation?

They are not a thing of the past. Their frequency is less, the intensity is less, but the sentiment hasn’t completely dried up. If it had completely dried up, you wouldn’t have to close Jama Masjid at regular intervals and confine Mirwaiz Umar Farooq (Hurriyat Chairman) to his house.

P VAIDYANATHAN IYER: Do you have anything in mind in terms of getting Kashmiri Pandit migrants back?

I’m acutely aware of the fact that Kashmiri Pandits left because they lost their sense of security. It was snatched away from them. You can’t force them to go back. And I don’t want to suggest they go back to townships or ghettos. We have to create a climate of security in the Valley where they are free to come back and then settle where they choose to. Are we there yet? No. But if the current trajectory of improving the ground situation continues, then hopefully that day will come where they’ll be able to come back of their own accord, not because the government is dangling a job.

RAJ KAMAL JHA: As an elected leader exploring the middle ground, how do you see social media, polarisation in politics?

(Social media) is a factor for the good,

but it’s also a factor that can be very problematic. How do you separate truth from lies? You have to guard against the possibility that social media will create problems. It’s a reality, but you can’t wish it away.

RAJ KAMAL JHA: Is there a technology answer or a political answer or a mix of both?

No, the answer will have to be political because the technology is there for everybody. The answer is not in technology, sort of censoring it. The answer is ensuring that you get your message across at least as forcefully as the other one is. If you have the facts that are able to counter whatever it is that is causing a problem, then get out there and put those facts out. I’m one of those who believes that it’s better to get ahead of the story. Put your point of view out before you’re responding to a crisis. Try and control the narrative rather than respond to a narrative that has already been set up. That’s not always as easy to do in politics because sometimes the instinct is to just hunker down and let the storm pass, but that’s not always the best instinct either.

MUZAMIL JALEEL: In your first speech in the Assembly, you said there was silence but people have started talking again

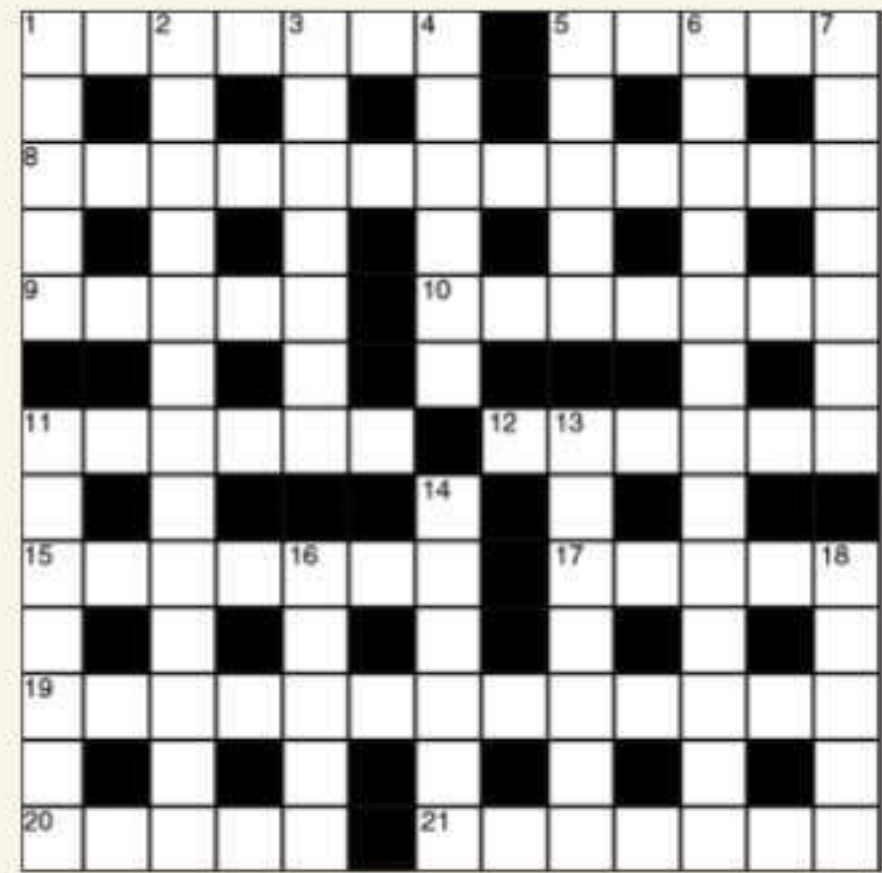
When was the last time before this you actually saw newspaper columns in J&K criticising the government? I have had more cartoons in the last four months than the lieutenant governor’s government has had since 2019. People who wouldn’t dare say anything about the government prior to October last year, are happy to wax eloquent about everything that’s going wrong. That’s part of democracy. People have to have the right to express an opinion.

MUZAMIL JALEEL: During your campaign, you took off your cap and said, ‘iski laj rakhna’. Since then, you have not taken off your cap. How big is this burden?

To call it a burden would be unfair. It’s a responsibility. It’s an opportunity that we fought to get. A burden is something that is dumped on you. We actively campaigned to be put in a position where we could govern J&K. I asked people to put me here. And it’s now my job to live up to the promises and the expectations that people have. My job is to minimise the extent of disappointment that people will feel.

For full text go to indianexpress.com

CROSSWORD 5608



- ACROSS
- DOWN
- 1 Trade movement (7)

5 Fun with the birds? (5)

8 A proverbial labour-saver (1,6,2,4)

9 Count old money (5)

10 Alphabetical lists used in mathematics (7)

11 Actors playing some people in foreign parts (6)

12 Small ruler from Borneo (6)

15 Short paragraph fit for a moral tale (7)

17 Religious advice to be soundly followed (5)

19 No record is more jealously guarded than this (3-6,4)

20 Maybe early egg producer (5)

21 It can be arranged for ministers (7)
- 1 Aim to teach (5)

2 A car's logbook? (13)

3 Examine after an attack, expected to survive (7)

4 He can't succeed by himself (6)

5 Ruled though plainly no longer young (5)

6 A new start in life? (13)

7 Apparently boards the wife's offspring (7)

11 Major city investment (7)

13 A home fixture for English city but not certain (7)

14 Decimal used in some tricky calculation (6)

16 Indistinct note to a king (5)

18 It's delightful if anyone can stand it (5)

Solutions Crossword 5607 Across: 1 Radli, 8 Chancery, 9 Pumps, 10 Adoption, 11 Admit, 12 Owe, 16 Untold, 17 Genial, 18 Erg, 23 Ached, 24 Alliance, 25 Kinds, 26 In favour, 27 Snare Down: 2 Abundant, 3 Imprison, 4 Shadow, 5 Snipe, 6 Denis, 7 Dying, 12 Ode, 13 Egg, 14 Inaction, 15 Lavender, 19 Recoup, 20 Fagin, 21 Aloft, 22 Naive

OVER THE HEDGE by Michael Fry & T Lewis



CALVIN & HOBBS by Bill Watterson



MARVIN by Tom Armstrong



JUMBLED WORDS

Given below are four jumbled words. Solve the jumbles to make proper words and move them to the respective squares below. Select the letters in the shaded squares and jumble them to get the answer for the given quip.

Any manager can do well in an ___ market. - W. Edwards Deming (9)

GSAEI

IOONN

SOUPED

AINTXG

Solution: Any manager can do well in an expanding market. - W. Edwards Deming

SUDOKU 5876

Difficulty Level 1s Instructions To solve a Sudoku puzzle, every digit from 1 to 9 must appear in each of the nine vertical columns, in each of the nine horizontal rows and in each of the nine boxes.

Difficulty Level 1s = Very easy; 2s = Easy; 3s = Medium; 4s = Hard; 5s = Very Hard; 6s = Genius

SOLUTION SUDOKU 5875

3	4	7	8	5	9	6	1	2
9	1	6	2	3	4	8	7	5
8	5	2	1	7	6	3	4	9
4	8	9	6	1	7	5	2	3
5	6	1	3	2	8	4	9	7
7	2	3	4	9	5	1	8	6
1	3	8	7	6	2	9	5	4
6	7	5	9	4	1	2	3	8
2	9	4	5	8	3	7	6	1

JAMMU AND KASHMIR POLICE

DISTRICT POLICE HEADQUARTERS JAMMU

0191-2561578 (O), 0191-254780 (F),email-sspjammu@jkpolice.gov.in

LOOK OUT NOTICE

SP Rural, Jammu intimated that one Rohini Sharma D/O Sikander Kumar R/O village Barole Tehsil Akhnoor District Jammu kidnapped by one Mohd Imran S/O Gh. Rasool R/O Tanda Ganderwan, Akhnoor, Jammu. Accordingly, a case FIR No. 232/2024 U/S 87 BNS has been registered with P/S Amia and investigation thereof started. Despite thorough search her whereabouts are still unknown

As such photograph of above named missing is being published for the information of Police establishments/public in general and if anybody having any clue related to his whereabouts / present location, kindly communicate the same on the below mentioned contact/Telephone numbers.

Description Roll :-

Name : Rohini Sharma

D/O : Sikander Kumar

Address : Village Barole Tehsil Akhnoor District Jammu

Age : 19 years

Height : 5'3"

Complexion : Wheatish

Face : Oval

Contacts/Telephone Numbers:-

1. DPO, Jammu : 0191-2547807, 0191-2561578

2. SSP Jammu Mail I.D : sspjammu@jkpolice.gov.in

3. PCR Jammu : 0191-2542000

4. SP Rural Jammu : 0191-2605949

5. SDPO Akhnoor : 01924-252244

6. SHO P/S Akhnoor : 01924-252225

Sr. Superintendent of Police Jammu

AAVAS FINANCIERS LIMITED

(CIN:L65922RJ2011PLC034297) Regd. & Corp. Office: 201-202, 2nd Floor, South End Square, Mansarovar Industrial Area, Jaipur. 302020

POSSESSION NOTICE

Whereas, The undersigned being the Authorised Officer of AAVAS FINANCIERS LIMITED under the Securitisation and Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002 and in exercise of powers conferred upon me under section 13(12) read with Rule 9 of the Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules 2002, issued a Demand Notice calling upon the borrowers mentioned herein below to repay the amount mentioned in the respective notice within 60 days from the date of receipt of the said notice. The borrowers having failed to repay the amount, undersigned has taken possession of the properties described herein below in exercise of powers conferred on me under Section 13(4) of the said Act read with Rule 9 of the said rules on the dates mentioned as below. The borrower and Guarantor in particular and the public in general is hereby cautioned not to deal with the properties and any dealings with the property will be subject to the charge of the AAVAS FINANCIERS LIMITED for an amount mentioned as below and further interest thereon.

Name of the Borrower	Date & Amount of Demand Notice	Description of Property	Date & Type of Possession
NARENDRA SINGH RAWAT, MRS. MANJU RAWAT GUARANTOR : MR. BHUPENDRA BHATTNAGAR (A/C NO.) LNKAS088220-210148338	5 JAN 23 Rs. 676400/- 4 JAN 23	RESIDENTIAL PROPERTY SITUATED AT KHARSA NO. 294/4 MIN, MOJA KACHNAL GAJI TEH. KASHIPUR DIST U.S. NAGAR, UTTARAKHAND ADM. 1320 SQ. FT.	SYMBOLIC POSSESSION TAKEN ON 18 FEB 2025
MANOJ KUMAR, REENU REENU (A/C NO.) LNKAS00622-230257015 & LNKAS17623-240328317	8 DEC 24 Rs. 679949/- & Rs. 302699/- 5 DEC 24	NAGAR NIGAM HOUSE NO.277/28/2, NEAR NAG NATH MANDIR, MOHALLA PAKKAKOT, WARD NO 18, KASHIPUR UDHAM SINGH NAGAR,UTTARAKHAND, 244713 ADMEASURING 325 SQ. FT.	SYMBOLIC POSSESSION TAKEN ON 18 FEB 2025

Place : Jaipur Date: 24-02-2025 Authorised Officer Aavas Financiers Limited

NAME CHANGE

I, Amit Bar, S/O- Late Ranajit Bar, R/O- Vill:- Dongal, P.O.- Gaharkundu, P.S.- Arambagh, Dist.- Hooghly, Pin- 712617. As per my Aadhar & Pan Card my actual name is Amit Bar, date of birth is 01/09/1984. But in my Driving License my name has been recorded as Amit Kumar Bar, date of birth 09/01/1979 & also recorded address as B1/22, Lajpat Nagar Part- 1, New Delhi- 110024 & shall henceforth be known as Amit Bar as declared Sealdah court, Dist.- West Bengal Vide affidavit dated 21/02/2025 Amit Kumar Bar and Amit Bar both are same & identical person.

Executive Engineer PD. P.W.D. Bulandshahr E- Procurement short term Tender Notice

Dated: 21.02.2025

Letter No. 1030/1A

On behalf of Governor of Uttar Pradesh, Executive Engineer, Provincial Division, U.P.P.W.D., Bulandshahr invites following percentage rate short term bids online through <http://etender.up.nic.in> from the eligible and approved Contractors registered with P.W.D. class as per column no. 10 below Road Signage/Road work Category as applied from Date 25.02.2025 to 03.03.2025 upto 12:00 Noon as per the prescribed T-1 of Govt. of U.P. The technical bid will be opened online on dated 03.03.2025 at 12:30 P.M. If the office happens to be closed on the date of opening of the bid as specified, the bid will be opened online on the next working day, at the same time any validity of bid will be considered from the original date. The date and time of opening of the financial bid shall be notified on the website.

Sl. No.	Name of Work	Estimated cost (Rs. In Lac)	Bid Security (Rs. In Lac)	Time of Completion work including rainy season	Tender Cost (In Rs.)	Address of Executive Engineer	Address of Superintending Engineer	Address of Chief Engineer	Category
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1.	Culvert repair and road protection work on various road under Assistant Engineer III in Bulandshahr. district.	5.00	0.50	02 Months	150+500+18% GST 117.00 = Rs.767.00	Executive Engineer P.D. P.W.D., Bulandshahr	Superintending Engineer BSR Circle, P.W.D., Bulandshahr	Chief Engineer, Meerut Zone, P.W.D., Meerut	A (Road Signage)
In anticipation of Sanction									
	Under the Ganna special repair scheme in the financial year 2024-25								
2.	Special repair work of Anoopshahr-Shikarpur road to Jarazpur road.	11.30	1.13	03 Months	225+500+18% GST 131.00 = Rs.856.00	Executive Engineer P.D. P.W.D., Bulandshahr	Superintending Engineer BSR Circle, P.W.D., Bulandshahr	Chief Engineer, Meerut Zone, P.W.D., Meerut	A, B, C, D (Road Wrok)
3.	Special repair work of Anoopshahr road Garhera Ametha road.	13.00	1.30	03 Months	225 + 500 + 18% GST 131.00 = Rs.856.00	Executive Engineer P.D. P.W.D., Bulandshahr	Superintending Engineer BSR Circle, P.W.D., Bulandshahr	Chief Engineer, Meerut Zone, P.W.D., Meerut	A, B, C, D (Road Wrok)
4.	Special repair work of Rajpur Rora to Malakpur road.	14.00	1.40	03 Months	225 + 500 + 18% GST 131.00 = Rs.856.00	Executive Engineer P.D. P.W.D., Bulandshahr	Superintending Engineer BSR Circle, P.W.D., Bulandshahr	Chief Engineer, Meerut Zone, P.W.D., Meerut	A, B, C, D (Road Wrok)
5.	Special repair work of Shivali Manglor road to Salemgarh link road.	12.40	1.24	03 Months	225 + 500 + 18% GST 131.00 = Rs.856.00	Executive Engineer P.D. P.W.D., Bulandshahr	Superintending Engineer BSR Circle, P.W.D., Bulandshahr	Chief Engineer, Meerut Zone, P.W.D., Meerut	A, B, C, D (Road Wrok)
6.	Special repair work of Khasiya Manglor road to Todi Nagla link road.	14.20	1.42	03 Months	225 + 500 + 18% GST 131.00 = Rs.856.00	Executive Engineer P.D. P.W.D., Bulandshahr	Superintending Engineer BSR Circle, P.W.D., Bulandshahr	Chief Engineer, Meerut Zone, P.W.D., Meerut	A, B, C, D (Road Wrok)
7.	Special repair work of Bulandshahr-Maman road to Chajui Garhi link road.	9.70	0.97	03 Months	225 + 500 + 18% GST 131.00 = Rs.856.00	Executive Engineer P.D. P.W.D., Bulandshahr	Superintending Engineer BSR Circle, P.W.D., Bulandshahr	Chief Engineer, Meerut Zone, P.W.D., Meerut	A, B, C, D (Road Wrok)
8.	Special repair work of Nisurkha Patri to Madona road first part link road.	12.90	1.29	03 Months	225 + 500 + 18% GST 131.00 = Rs.856.00	Executive Engineer P.D. P.W.D., Bulandshahr	Superintending Engineer BSR Circle, P.W.D., Bulandshahr	Chief Engineer, Meerut Zone, P.W.D., Meerut	A, B, C, D (Road Wrok)
9.	Special repair work of Nisurkha Patri to Madona road second part link road.	4.30	0.43	03 Months	150 + 500 + 18% GST 117.00 = Rs.767.00	Executive Engineer P.D. P.W.D., Bulandshahr	Superintending Engineer BSR Circle, P.W.D., Bulandshahr	Chief Engineer, Meerut Zone, P.W.D., Meerut	A, B, C, D (Road Wrok)

1. Time allowed for completion of Whole work in column No. 5, including rainy season.

2. The Tender Document Fee must be deposited through Internet Banking only.

3. For work marked at serial no. 1, it is mandatory for the contractor to be registered in road signage work.

4. For the work marked on serial no. 2 to 9, it is mandatory for the contractor to be registered in the road work.

5. It is mandatory to carry out maintenance work Sl. No.-2 to 9 for five years from the date of completion of the work.

6. All registered contractors have to upload turnover certified by C.A. of last 5 years and details of maximum cost of work satisfactorily completed in last 5 years on Chanakya Software before submission of tender. Details of e-tender uploaded on <http://etender.up.nic.in> shall also be uploaded on upwd Chanakya Software before last date & time of submission of bid.

7. Terms & Conditions related to bids are available on <http://etender.up.nic.in>

8. During execution of work contractor should ensure the all safety Measures for COVID-19 issued by the Uttar Pradesh government.

9. In PWD technical evaluation of tenders is to be done by Prahari Software URL for Prahari is <http://wms.upwd.gov.in/Prahari/>.

Assistant Engineer PD., P.W.D., Bulandshahr

Ro No. 229819

(Er. Rahul Sharma) Executive Engineer PD., P.W.D., Bulandshahr

UTTARAKHAND POWER CORPORATION LTD.

(A Govt. of Uttarakhand Undertaking)

Victoria Cross Vijayla Gabar Singh Unja Bhawan, Kanwall Road, Dehradun-248001 Corporate Identity No. U40109UR2001SGC025867 Tel No. 0135-2763672-75, Ext. 264, 260; E-mail ID : it@upcl.org

Notice Inviting e-Tender (Tender Identification No. 02/RAPDRP-A/2024-25 dated 22-02-2025)

For "Appointment of an IT Agency for Facility Management Services, Technical Support Services & AMC of Call Centre Software and provision of hardware & software for operation of DC Dehradun, DRC Haldwani & Field offices of UPCL for a period of 01 year".

Uttarakhand Power Corporation Limited, Dehradun invites tender from eligible bidders for "Appointment of an IT agency for Facility Management Services, Technical Support Services & AMC of Call Centre Software and provision of hardware & software for operation of DC, Dehradun, DRC, Haldwani & field offices of UPCL for a period of 01 year"

The references for the tender are given below :-

Tender Identification No.	02/RAPDRP-A/2024-25 dated 22-02-2025
Estimate Cost (In Rs. Crores)	Rs. 18.30 Crore
Cost of Tender Document (Tender Fee)	Rs. 29500.00 (25000.00+4500.00) inclusive of GST@18%
Earnest Money Deposit/Bid Security	Rs. 37 Lakh
Date & Time of Pre-bid conference	03rd March 2025 at 11:30 Hrs.
Last Date and Time of Submission of Bid (online & offline mode)	11th March 2025 up to 17:00 Hrs.
Due Date of Opening of Technical Bid	12th March 2025 at 16:30 Hrs.
Due Date of Opening of Financial Bid	To be notified later

Detailed document, eligibility criteria and prescribed format for submission of bids will be available on website <https://uktenders.gov.in> and <https://www.upcl.org>. In case any of the above date, is a holiday, the due date shall be the next working day at the same time. Any amendment/corrigendum in the future against the above mentioned tender shall be uploaded at <https://uktenders.gov.in> and <https://www.upcl.org> only.

No.: 84/EE(CM)/UPCL/A-2 Dated : 22.02.2025

Superintending Engineer (R-APDRP Part-A)

"SAVE ELECTRICITY IN THE INTEREST OF THE NATION. Use LED Bulb, Save Electricity. (Toll Free No. 1912) Pay Electricity Bill Online 24x7 from www.upcl.org. (For information on Electricity theft, informer may report to Toll Free No. 1800 180 4185/Fax No. 0135-2760911)

PLAYING TODAY

ICC CHAMPIONS TROPHY
New Zealand vs Bangladesh, 2.30 pm,
WOMEN'S PREMIER LEAGUE
RCB vs UPW; 7.30 pm
Live on: Jio Hotstar & Star Sports Network

DOT BALLS, SLOPPY FIELDNG, LOOSE BOWLING: GULF IN CLASS BETWEEN INDIA AND PAKISTAN

Grand old rivalry no longer a close contest; Pakistan had just two magic deliveries while the Indian bowling unit stepped up despite Shami not being at his best

TOO DEFENSIVE

Pakistan were off to a decent start, but lost two wickets just before the end of the first Powerplay. Mohammad Rizwan and Saud Shakeel immediately went into a shell. On the other hand, India, despite losing Rohit Sharma relatively early, didn't hit the brakes too hard. Between overs 11-20, Pakistan scored just 27 runs and faced 36 dots (60%) while India scored 45 runs and played 25 dots (41.7%)

CRUCIAL COLLAPSE

While Pakistan were able to gradually build in the middle overs, India triggered a collapse soon after. Set batters Rizwan and Shakeel were dismissed in back-to-back overs, just after the second drinks break. Pakistan went from 151/2 in the 34th over to 200/7 in the 43rd over. India, after Rohit's cameo, had two match-defining partnerships that never allowed Pakistan a footing in the game.

HAVING A FIELD DAY

Axar Patel's direct hit to dismiss Imam-ul-haq was the highlight of India's solid fielding effort. There were a couple of tough chances dropped but those didn't prove costly, and India's catching and ground fielding was in general of a high standard. Pakistan, however, dropped Shubman Gill and Shreyas Iyer, and their athleticism on the field was questioned even by former captain Wasim Akram on air.

MIDDLE-ORDER ENFORCER

Iyer struggled at the start of his innings. Usually strong against spin, he had difficulty putting Abrar Ahmed away. At one stage, he was on 16 off 32 balls. But this was another area of difference. His start wasn't dissimilar to Rizwan's but Iyer showed he had gears to move through, as he raced through to a half-century. While Rizwan finished with a strike rate of 59.74, Shreyas ended on 83.58.

WELL-ROUNDED ATTACK

While India's spearhead Mohammed Shami had an off day, the rest of the bowling unit collectively stepped up – all five of the other bowlers picked up wickets, with Kuldeep Yadav and Hardik Pandya being especially effective. For Pakistan, after one magic delivery from Shaheen Afridi to get Rohit, it was just Abrar who fought a lone battle. The spinner rightly received congratulations from Kohli for figures of 1/28.

Chase-master, 14k mark, 51 ODI hundreds... ticking the Pakistan box again



EXPRESS AT
CHAMPIONS
TROPHY

VENKATA KRISHNA B
DUBAI, FEBRUARY 23

HOW MUCH did Pakistan miss a batsman of Virat Kohli's caliber in the middle-order? How much did they wish they had openers like Rohit Sharma and Shubman Gill who showed the urgency to kill the game in the first powerplay? Where are they going to unearth spinners who could collectively choke the opposition in the middle overs? Will their fast-bowling trio, often compared to those in the 90s, ever show there is more to them than numbers that pop on speed gun? When will they realise that unless their fitness parameters improve, they will continue to remain an ordinary fielding outfit that drops catches that could win them matches? If Pakistan do some soul searching, which they are likely to do once the confirmation arrives with regards to the elimination from the Champions Trophy, they need not look beyond India. Since winning the Champions Trophy final against India at the Oval in 2017, this was their sixth straight defeat in completed matches against their arch-rivals. At least till the rivalry retains its hype, it is pertinent Pakistan turns a corner sooner or later.

"I think we could have won a bit earlier, could have been a convincing win based on how the wicket was playing," Shreyas Iyer, who scored a handy 56, said. "It was initially coming on pretty well with the new ball and after that it was difficult to score runs when the ball got a bit old. But if we had played more aggressively we would have won a bit earlier I felt."

As has been the case in recent times in matches involving these two teams, India showed how much they have traveled as a white-ball group. Pakistan, on the other hand, with their timid approach in the afternoon and listless bowling plans in the evening, showed they are stuck in a different era and lag far behind modern teams. That their captain Mohammad Rizwan called routine wins by New Zealand and India as brave showed they are in denial.

And more than anything else, it is their batting that needs new heroes. Despite getting the chance to bat first on a pitch that was getting slower as the night progressed, it was India who out-batted them.

On such pitches, teams seek runs against the new ball before they begin to accumulate in the middle overs in the hope of shifting gears in the later stages.

But when Imam-ul-Haq and Babar Azam

As has been the case in recent times in matches involving these two teams, India showed how much they have traveled as a white-ball group. Pakistan showed they are stuck in a different era...

walked in, there was no such urgency. Of course, they scored more than they did so against the Kiwis in the opener, but 52/2 in the powerplay could have been better as India scored 64/1 in the same phase.

As Rizwan said later, if they were indeed looking for a total of 270-plus, their middle order seldom came close to providing that momentum. Instead, alongside Saud Shakeel, Rizwan stitched a 104-run stand in 145 deliveries for the third wicket, which meant once India were well in the game once they removed the set batters. And Pakistan's worst fears came true, when they lost three wickets in the space of four overs, and their No 9 Naseem Shah was out in the middle by the 43rd over.

And who did the damage for India? It was their three all-rounders and a wily wrist-spinner – resources that Pakistan had during their heydays in the 90s. Against an Indian batting line-up that boasts of depth till No 9, a total of 241 was well below par.

In the second half, it was the turn for India's batsmen to deliver some brutal lessons.

Despite having the disadvantage of batting second, it was admirable how India overcame the conditions, with the help of Pakistan's attack. In the first match, Bangladesh attacked while defending 228, by taking pace off the ball and troubled India in the middle overs. But Pakistan, with just one specialist spinner, had to rely extensively on their pace trio in search of wickets that were hard to come by.

It took a special delivery from Shaheen Shah Afridi to uproot Rohit Sharma's stumps. And it took another unplayable one from Abrar Ahmed to dismiss Shubman Gill who looked set for another good score after being dropped by Kushdil Shah earlier. But beyond those two deliveries, not once they came close to troubling the likes of Kohli and Shreyas Iyer.

When Iyer joined Kohli with 100 on board, Abrar was in the middle of a good spell. But at no time did they enter into a shell, like Pakistan's No. 3 and 4 did.

They used their feet and expanded their range to pick singles through the large gaps, and never let a bad ball go unpunished. As they picked pace, the writing was very much on the wall for Pakistan before Kohli nailed it with a boundary that also brought up his century.

a lot earlier than they expected – by the seventh over when Shami hobbled off the field holding his calf. Pandya didn't have any time to loosen up in the middle with Babar Azam starting to press on the gas. When he got the ball in hand, he predominantly struck to the off-stump line even when Babar creamed him for a couple of boundaries. But off the eighth ball he bowled, Pandya dragged back the length – the ideal one to bowl on this pitch, and had Babar nicking one to KL Rahul.

On a pitch where spinners were supposed to keep Pakistan's batting quiet, it was Pandya who did it all in his next four overs after the run-out of Imam-ul-Haq, which saw Pakistan end the first Powerplay at 52/2.

Despite all the noise over their lack of intent in their openers in Karachi, during the hastily-arranged training session, former head coach Mudassar Nazar had reminded Pakistan how their old-school approach would come in handy in the conditions in Dubai. On a pitch where a total of 260 looked par, with two power-hitters, Salman Agha and Kushdil Shah, slotted to bat at the death, keeping wickets in hand seemed a sensible play. It is what their captain Muhammad Rizwan and Saud Shakeel would go about



SCORECARD	
INDIA vs PAKISTAN	
DUBAI INTERNATIONAL STADIUM	
Toss: Pakistan, elected to bat	
PAKISTAN	
I Ul-Haq run out (Patel)	10 (26b)
B Azam c †Rahul b Pandya	23 (26b, 5x4)
S Shakeel c Patel b Pandya	62 (76b, 5x4)
M Rizwan (c) †b Patel	46 (77b, 3x4)
S Agha c Jadeja b Kuldeep	19 (24b)
T Tahir b Jadeja	4 (6b)
K Shah c Kohli b Rana	38 (39b, 2x6)
S Afridi lbw b Kuldeep	0 (1b)
N Shah c Kohli b Kuldeep	14 (16b, 1x4)
H Rauf run out (Patel/ †Rahul)	8 (7b, 1x6)
A Ahmed not out	0 (0b)
■ Extras (lb 8, w 9)	17
■ Total (49.4 Ov; RR: 4.85)	241
■ FoW: 1-41 (Babar Azam, 8.2 ov), 2-47 (Imam-ul-Haq, 9.2 ov), 3-151 (Mohammad Rizwan, 33.2 ov), 4-159 (Saud Shakeel, 34.5 ov), 5-165 (Tayyab Tahir, 36.1 ov), 6-200 (Salman Agha, 42.4 ov), 7-200 (Shaheen Shah Afridi, 42.5 ov), 8-222 (Naseem Shah, 46.4 ov), 9-241 (Haris Rauf, 48.6 ov), 10-241 (Khushdil Shah, 49.4 ov)	
■ Bowling: Mohammed Shami 8-0-43-0, Harshit Rana 7.4-0-30-1, Hardik Pandya 8-0-31-2, Axar Patel 10-0-49-1, Kuldeep Yadav 9-0-40-3, Ravindra Jadeja 7-0-40-1.	
INDIA	
R Sharma (c) b Afridi	20 (15b, 3x4, 1x6)
S Gill b Ahmed	46 (52b, 7x4)
V Kohli not out	100 (111b, 7x4)
S Iyer c Ul-Haq b Khushdil	56 (67b, 5x4, 1x6)
H Pandya c Rizwan b Afridi	8 (6b, 1x4)
A Patel not out	3 (4b)
■ Extras (w 11)	3
■ Total (42.3 Ov; RR: 5.74)	244.4
■ FoW: 1-31 (Rohit Sharma, 4.6 ov), 2-100 (Shubman Gill, 17.3 ov), 3-214 (Shreyas Iyer, 38.5 ov), 4-223 (Hardik Pandya, 39.6 ov)	
■ Bowling: Shaheen Shah Afridi 8-0-74-2, Naseem Shah 8-0-37-0, Haris Rauf 7-0-52-0, Abrar Ahmed 10-0-28-1, Khushdil Shah 7.3-0-43-1, Salman Agha 2-0-10-0.	

287
The number of innings Virat Kohli took to reach 14,000 runs. The previous fastest was Sachin Tendulkar (350 innings).

158
Number of catches Kohli has taken in the outfield, the most for India going past Mohammad Azharuddin's 156. Kohli is also third overall in catches by outfielders after Mahela Jayawardene (218) and Ricky Ponting (160).

3
Kohli (14,070) became the 3rd ever batsman to cross 14,000 after Kumar Sangakkara (14,234) and Tendulkar (18,426).

GOING PAST PONTING
Virat Kohli crossed Ricky Ponting (27,483 runs) to become the third-highest run scorer in all formats with 27,503 runs. He is behind Sangakkara (28,016 runs) and Tendulkar (34,357 runs).

Virat Kohli hit his 82nd international century, and extended his record to 51 ODI tons with his unbeaten 100 against Pakistan on Sunday.

Pics: PTI

Pakistan no longer fighters or innovators

SANDEEP DWIVEDI

THE GALAXY of greats in the commentary box want Shaheen Shah Afridi to bowl a bouncer. He had got Rohit Sharma with a stunning yorker, but Shubman Gill was to soon hit a gorgeously-correct straight drive, looking fabulous in his front-foot play. Dale Steyn says bowlers need to experiment when things aren't going their way. A surprise short ball can see a confident 'straight-driving' batsman gloving the ball to the keeper, he says. Afridi runs in hard, but it isn't a short ball. It's full again and Gill steps down the ground and hits it over the bowler's head.

This would be one of the many moments in Sunday's game when Pakistan looked inadequate and outdated. They looked meek, they didn't innovate. This looked like a team that wasn't in touch with the changes the white-ball game has seen over the years. India's one-sided win virtually knocked them out of the tournament. This early exit was symbolic - Pakistan no longer seemed to have the class to be among the game's elite. This was the Champions Trophy and Pakistan, by no stretch of imagination, looks like a champion side.

There was hurt and pain in the voices of former Pakistan cricketers in the box. Mohammad Rizwan's team was a shadow of the teams of the past. Back in the day, Pakistan was known for its fearless cricket, street-smart tactics and famous for cricketers who thought out of the box. They have made generous contributions to the world cricket narrative, and are responsible for enriching the game. They have thrown up inspirational captains, speed maniacs, sultans of swing, the doosra and reverse swing. On Sunday, that famous Pakistan enterprise and adventure was missing. Be it the old-timers Babar Azam and Rizwan or youngsters Salman Agha and Tayyab Tahir – there was a lack of intensity and courage. Like Rohit and Gill, there was no one to put pressure on the bowlers with their aggression. They didn't push the envelope or take calculated risks. There was no one to disturb the discipline of bowlers, like Shreyas Iyer did later. When the spinners tried to challenge him to cut by keeping the point boundary vacant, he would reverse-sweep. Pakistan batsmen didn't evn sweep much.

Imam-ul-Haq couldn't steal a single from mid-off even after stepping down the track to drive the ball – he was slow and Axar Patel was sharp and committed. It was a virtue none of the Pakistan fielders had. Virat Kohli would keep taking his ones and twos between the boundaries - as he knew the art of ODI batting. He could drive between gaps and even defend the ball by opening the face of the bat. It was said that Pakistan gives its best when the world writes them off. These days they give their worst when pushed to a corner.

SEAMER WITH CONTROL

In a spin-heavy attack, Pandya steps up on big day to restrict Pakistan

VENKATA KRISHNA B
DUBAI, FEBRUARY 23

AS SAUD Shakeel holed out in the deep, Hardik Pandya's jubilation knew no bounds. In his career, he has done it all – bowling the last over in T20 thrillers, providing key breakthroughs every now and then. During the 2023 World Cup, his injury showed how much it alters the balance of the side, even if it allowed Mohammed Shami to have a tournament to remember.

On Sunday, against Pakistan, Pandya showed that when fit and firing, he is as good as any frontline bowler.

Coming into the ICC Champions Trophy, Pandya knew he would have a huge role to play with the ball, particularly given India were leaning towards a three-spinner strategy. With Jasprit Bumrah unavailable, and given Shami's ordinary returns in the middle overs and Harshit Rana's inexperience, for India's spinners to be effective, they needed Pandya more than ever with the ball.

A seamer who could provide control when spinners went about their business at the other end would be valuable.

On Sunday, India had to turn to Pandya



India turned to Hardik Pandya a lot earlier than expected on Sunday, and he delivered with two wickets.

Reuters

ensuring.

Having consumed 42 dot balls in the first Powerplay, despite having a spread-out field, Rizwan and Shakeel would eat up 38 in the next 10 overs.

Every now and then, he would surprise the batsmen with cutters as Pakistan scored just 27 runs between overs 11 and 20, with only seven coming off Pandya's four overs

Out of those, 16 would be delivered by Pandya, who would not give Rizwan and Shakeel any chance to free their arms. Constantly hitting the back of a good length, he would keep landing it around the off-stump channel, getting the ball to seam in and out slightly.

Every now and then, he would surprise the batsmen with cutters as Pakistan scored just 27 runs between overs 11 and 20, with only seven coming off Pandya's four overs. His first spell read 6-0-18-1 out of which 26 were dot balls.

Captain's options

Given Pandya's influence, Rohit would use Shami and Rana for their second spells. It was a cat-and-mouse game now with the

two Pakistan batsmen showing admirable resistance. With the over rate to look at, Rohit would turn to his three spinners thereafter, but with just minimal turn on offer, Rizwan and Shakeel – who has a good game against spinners, thanks to his long grind in domestic cricket – would play with minimum risk.

After the game, Rohit referred to Hardik's "crucial wickets" and added "the experience of these three spinners comes into play, not to forget the way Hardik, Harshit, and Shami bowled."

For a brief period in the middle between 24.2 and 26.1 overs, Rizwan and Shakeel would show urgency hitting two boundaries each, but Rohit would rely on his exceptional fielders to put the pressure back on Pakistan.

With the left-right combination strong square of the wicket and targeting the huge pockets to rotate strike, India would place their best fielders – Shreyas Iyer, Ravindra Jadeja and Axar Patel manning the boundaries on either side of the square. The Pakistan pair would make India spend every ounce of their energy in the heat with fielders charging in to cut the angles and turn twos into ones.

With Rizwan not prepared to go for

lofted shots straight down the ground and using the sweep as an option, Rohit would position a fielder each at deep square-leg and deep mid-wicket. Runs had to come only at a premium.

Someone had to blink and it was Rizwan who did, which led to Pakistan losing three wickets in the space of 19 deliveries. With mid-on up, he would step out against Axar, only to miss the line completely as India got their first wicket in the middle overs in the tournament, having gone wicketless against Bangladesh.

In the next over, Pandya, now in his second spell, would get rid of Shakeel. Unlike his first spell, with a relatively softer ball, he was prepared to take pace off it and was rewarded by Shakeel who was early on the pull and mistimed it to Axar at deep square-leg. Pandya would leap in joy. So did the Indian fans in the stands.

He may have had just two wickets to show for his efforts, but those 31 dot balls were like gold. An over later, when Jadeja broke through the defence of Tayyab Tahir, India had Pakistan at 165/5. They had lost their way in the middle overs again, only this time without Bumrah causing them any trouble.

BRIEFLY

Bagan create history, defend ISL shield

Kolkata: Mohun Bagan Super Giant on Sunday became the first team in Indian Super League (ISL) history to defend the title with a 1-0 win over Odisha FC here. By virtue of clinching the ISL Shield, MBSG also booked a berth in the AFC Champions League 2, the continent's second tier club competition. After the win in their 22nd league game, Mohun Bagan Super Giant secured 52 points and emerged Shield Winners with two matches to spare. Their nearest rivals, FC Goa, have collected 42 points from 21 matches, and they cannot catch MBSG even if they win all their remaining three matches. MBSG had won the 2023-24 season League Shield with 50 points. The Jose Molina-coached team has notched 16 victories and four draws, and suffered only two losses **PTI**

Real beat Girona to go level with Barca

Madrid: A blistering first-half volley by Luka Modric and a late Vinicius Jr strike helped Real Madrid to a 2-0 home victory over Girona on Sunday, snapping a three-game winless run and moving the champions up to second place in LaLiga behind Barcelona. Real took a while to settle into the match but gradually began to exert control before a clearance from a corner fell to Modric, whose sublime long-range volley arrowed into the top corner in the 41st minute. The hosts' attackers kept the Girona defence busy throughout the game and combined for the second goal in the 83rd when Kylian Mbappe played through Vinicius, who poked his shot under Girona goalkeeper Paulo Gazzaniga. Real's win lifted them to 54 points after 25 games, level with Barca, who beat Las Palmas 2-0 away on Saturday, but trailing on the head-to-head count. **REUTERS**

Services clinch men's kabaddi c'ship

Cuttack: Services emerged victorious in a nail-biting summit clash against Railways to claim the 71st Senior National Men's Kabaddi Championship title at the Jawaharlal Nehru Indoor Stadium here on Sunday. The star-studded Services team prevailed 30-30 (6-4) in a tie-breaker, showcasing remarkable composure when it mattered the most as the final match could have gone either way. Led by Pro Kabaddi League star Naveen Kumar, Services demonstrated exceptional skill throughout the tournament. The final was a star-studded affair featuring some of India's top talents, including Railways' dynamic raider Pankaj Mohite and defensive stalwart Parvesh Bhainswal. **PTI**

Svrcina wins singles title in Maha Open

Pune: Czech Republic's Dalibor Svrcina beat USA's Brandon Holt to win the men's singles title in the Maha Open ATP Challenger 100 men's tennis championship here on Sunday. The 22-year-old Svrcina beat Holt 7-6 (3), 6-1 in the summit clash which lasted for an hour and 29 minutes to continue his good run. Svrcina had to work hard for a win in the first set but he found better rhythm in the second to break Holt's impressive run in the competition. Svrcina pocketed 100 ATP ranking points and USD 22,730 while Holt got 60 ATP points and \$13,350. **PTI**

6-SECOND RULE

MIHIR VASAVDA
BHUBANESWAR, FEBRUARY 23

THE CALM waters of Kannur was an unlikely place to launch the road to Los Angeles. But last July, when the Indian men's hockey team were preparing to open their Paris Olympics campaign — which ended with a second-successive bronze medal — the women found themselves in Kerala's coastal town. Still reeling from the Olympic qualifier debacle, the players did not know what they were doing there. And as coach Harendra Singh admits, 'they perhaps did not even want to be there'. "There was a lot of resilience and scepticism. They wondered, 'what are we even doing here?'" Harendra says. Within a few hours of landing there, they discovered it wasn't a pleasure tour. The country's best players spent almost a week at the Indian Naval Academy doing things they never imagined. "They had to run while carrying giant barrels on their backs, spend sleepless nights in the jungle, live in a tent while it was raining hard, mosquitoes all over..." The idea was in minimum facilities, they had to show the determination to do well," Harendra says. The week-long camp was to set the base —

EMOTIONAL ROLLERCOASTER

Hot heads, calm minds and everything in between at the game

Shubman delights, Abrar makes magic, Hardik entraps Shakeel

Rauf luck with sloppy fielders

Ten overs down and the required run rate just under seven, Pakistan decided to bring in Haris Rauf. The pacer may leak runs but the first powerplay was done with and Rizwan needed his best wicket-taker to remove that pesky Virat Kohli-Shubman Gill duo. And it took him just three balls to start asking questions from India. Kohli, looking to pull the third ball of the over, realised the shot wasn't on and top-edged the ball. But Naseem Shah, much to Rauf's chagrin, didn't attack the ball for a catch. Immediately after it was Gill's turn to give and take away hope from Rauf. It was a delivery that rose to the hip, one that was swatted away by a Gill pull but didn't gain or lose height and went straight to Khushdil, who dropped the fast-moving ball. **-SHASHANK NAIR**

Magic from leggie
The way Shubman Gill was going, something special was needed if Pakistan had to get back into the game. Abrar Ahmed provided that bit of magic with a delivery he will be telling his grandkids about. He is classified as a leg-spinner, but flicked one from the front of his hand which drifted towards leg-stump, prompting Gill to shape up for a nudge onto the outside. It was more like the carrom-ball made famous by Ravichandran Ashwin. But imagine his horror as it spun across his body and bounced to hit the top of middle-stump. The opener stared at the spot from where the ball performed its mischief for a long time before starting his walk back to the pavilion, unnecessarily shown the way by the bowler. Even Virat Kohli was impressed by the ball that broke the partnership that had put India in the box seat. India-Pakistan matches make indelible memories and heroes. Abrar may be able to dine on that magic ball for the rest of his days. That his team lost the match is a different matter. **-TUSHAR BHADURI**



Showman Shubman sizzles

First, over 6.4. Shaheen Shah Afridi would have still been feeling the adrenaline rush after bowling a sensational inswinging yorker to dismiss Rohit Sharma in his previous over. But when he bowled a full length delivery to Shubman Gill, the in-form Indian opener pushed it past the

him, and so he used it to pierce the gap through the off side. And just as he did in the previous over, Shubman held the pose. Two gorgeous pieces of timing from a player in the middle of a purple patch.

-VINAYAKK MOHANARANGAN

Babar's wasted start

Babar Azam made a watchful start on Sunday. After his slow 64 in the previous game, the knives were out for Pakistan's best batsman of this generation. Babar left alone a couple of balls, then used the straight face of the bat to cut out risk. Both Mohammed Shami and Harshit Rana gave him some time to settle down by bowling wides. He didn't seem able to get the ball off the square till he worked the ball to the leg side for a couple against Rana. But in the fourth over, bowled by Rana, he got going. He used his wrists to guide the incoming ball to the mid-wicket fence. Two balls later, he unfurled a lovely



cover drive to a delivery outside off stump. Then a pitched up delivery by Hardik Pandya, called into service early because Shami had a niggles, was driven through the covers. The real shot of intent came a little later. Babar stepped down the track and launched Axar Patel over mid-on and to the boundary. But Hardik had the last laugh. Driven again for four, he got Babar to drive the next ball only for him to nick it to KL Rahul. The slight away movement did Babar in. 23 off 26 with 5 fours. Another Babar innings gone down the drain. Naysayers will find their voice again saying Babar Azam is not a patch on Kohli. **-NIHAL KOSHIE**

Amanjot relishes match-winning turnaround for MI

VINAYAKK MOHANARANGAN
FEBRUARY 23

WITH 24 needed off 17 balls in the cauldron that was the M Chinnaswamy Stadium, Mumbai Indians lost the wicket of Harmanpreet Kaur. A run-chase that seemed well within MI's grasp was suddenly starting to slip away as the lower order was left to finish the job. The Royal Challengers Bengaluru fans were roaring once more. On her way back, the MI captain took a minute to chat briefly with her partner, Amanjot Kaur. "Harman di just told me, 'If you stay out there, you'll be able to do it easily'. And I told her, 'I'll do it for you, don't worry'," the younger Kaur revealed later. And so, with 22 runs needed off 12 balls, Amanjot smashed two sixes in the 19th over that dragged MI back into the match and eventually, across the finish line as 16-year-old G Kamalini held her nerve in the last over. It was the day Amanjot had been waiting for a long time — to be a match-winner for Mumbai Indians with both bat and ball. She did just that against RCB with her 3/22 that included wickets of Richa Ghosh and Ellyse Perry and 34* off 27. It came after a testing

2024 due to injuries that have seen her slide out of India's squad after making a bright start to her international career. "Those six to eight months were very crucial for me. Blessed and grateful for that phase to have come in my life," Amanjot said after the match. "Two people must have cried today, tears of happiness, I mean. Nagesh sir and Tanuja ma'am (personal coach and trainer). They were with me throughout those 6-8 months. They were just waiting for me to get back on the field. Nagesh sir hadn't seen me bowl for a while. It must have been a big day for him too. They'll have a good night's sleep today." Actually, Nagesh Gupta couldn't catch a wink. "It felt so great watching Amanjot Kaur win the match for Mumbai Indians with the bat and all. So happy that I couldn't sleep last night," coach Nagesh Gupta told The Indian Express. "I listened to the press conference and she said we would have slept well, par hum so nahi paaye ji, excitement itna raha." (I couldn't sleep, the excitement was too much.) To get to this point hasn't been easy for Amanjot. The story goes that her cricketing journey began when her father Bhupinder Singh, literally, decided to take things into his



Amanjot Kaur played a crucial role with both bat and ball for MI. **BCCI**

own hands. When she was excluded from a game of gully cricket by a group of boys with the excuse that she didn't have her own bat, she told her father about it. Bhupinder, a carpenter by trade, went to his shop later in the evening, carved her a bat, and left it on her bed.

And just when things were looking up, destiny had other plans. In January 2023, things were looking rosy for Amanjot. On the back of strong domestic displays, she made her T20I debut in South Africa and in her first outing for India, won the player of the match award. She made her ODI debut later that year too. **Tough phase**
But in 2024, she missed large chunks of the season due to a back stress fracture and a hand ligament injury. Initially, it was tough to come to terms with. A feeling of 'why did this happen to me' because, as Nagesh said, Amanjot is a naturally gifted athlete who had always been proud of her fitness. "I have never taken fitness lightly. I am not a foodie, so I don't like eating out. I really like to go to the gym. So, I never expected that I would get injuries like these, so I troubled my coach and trainer a lot for the first two weeks," Amanjot said, recalling the initial stress. Nagesh concurred. "She felt like 'every-one else is playing and I am not playing. And that too because of injury.' The biggest challenge is how to remain motivated. During that time, I talked to her daily, exchanging messages. The first two weeks were difficult

but after that, she realised she had the time focus on other areas. Rather than crying about injuries, we should take this as a challenge. The things that we can add, we can learn. On a daily basis, I used to tell her to try to learn a life skill or a cricket skill. That way you will grow as a human being and as a player when you come back from an injury." Amanjot said conversing with other Indian players playing in the NCA during rehab also helped her. "There were a lot of cricketers at the NCA, so speaking to them helped. Guys like Riyan Parag, Khaleel Ahmed, and Surya bhai was here as well. I would watch their discussions and that helped me a lot." Nagesh said, "She has been with me since 2016. To be honest, I haven't seen a more eager and hardworking student than her. Always first to come and last to leave training. She learned a lot in the period she was injured. As she herself said, she has come closer to god, she prays a lot, and she has learned about humility. These qualities are also very important to become a good player. To become a good person." Indeed, at the end of her post-match chat, Amanjot looked up. "God's plans are always greater than ours."

How Indian women are borrowing a football principle to hassle opponents

fitness and mentality-wise — for a profound change Harendra wanted to see in the way the team played. During the European leg of the FIH Pro League in May last year, he had noticed that India's players were oftentimes too slow to react when they lost possession in a match. This belief got firm when he saw the players during the Asian Champions Trophy in September. **Six-second rule**
"We won that tournament in Rajgir but as the team's coach, I was not happy. It made me realise we had a lot of ground still left to cover," Harendra admits. Especially when India lost the ball in the middle of the field, or in the opponent's half. India's turnover rate remains high because the players are 'too eager to go vertical each time rather than passing horizontally, playing cool and making the opponent chase you'. By trying to force their way into the opponent's 'D', the possession is cheaply surrendered. The midfielders and the forwards were too slow to win back the ball, handing over the advantage to their opponents. "I looked at the play and thought, 'Why is the opponent having more than six seconds (on the ball)?' I want to have the privilege to have the ball within six



Coach Harendra Singh has often looked at football for tactical inspiration. *HI*

seconds from the opponents. So, we began work on that," Harendra says. The six-second rule has been deployed by football coaches for more than a decade. Harendra, who has often looked at football for tactical inspiration during his two-decade-long career as hockey coach, wanted his players to

increase their work rate in getting the ball back whenever they lose it. t starts with the forwards as the first line of defence. The idea is to close down the opponent the moment when a player loses the ball, giving them little time to settle and regain possession. If the ball isn't recovered within six

India's turnover rate remains high because the players are 'too eager to go vertical each time rather than passing horizontally, playing cool and making the opponent chase you'.

seconds, then the players retreat and defend their spaces to stop a counter-attack. As much as fitness, it requires a strong mentality to implement this style. "When you lose the ball, you instantly feel bad about it," says former India captain Savita Punia. "But the game nowadays has become so fast that you can't even pause for a millisecond to think about your mistake. So, from a player's point of view, rather than thinking about the mistake, it is important to stay in the moment and regain possession within six seconds so you don't cede the advantage. Mentally, physically you have to be very fit." At all times, this demands that the players remain 'switched on'. And to gauge how tough that is — for a team that is still in progress —

one just needs to look at the two matches against Germany in the Pro League. On Fridays, every time India's midfielders and forwards lost the ball, they barely reacted. "For instance, in the third quarter, we were all over Germany but every time we made a small mistake, we went into our shell," Harendra says. They 'showed too much respect' to Germany and gave them the time, space to get comfortable on the ball. India lost that match 0-4. Harendra insisted after that match that India were fitter than Germany but didn't show the hunger to win. Twenty-four hours later, the two teams faced off again. This time, India won the midfield battles, the second balls and efficiently closed down the Germans each time they had the ball. The match ended with a clean sheet and India's first regulation-time win over the 2022 World Cup semifinalists in a decade. It's crucial for India to not read too much into the win, for Germany are here with an experimental squad under a new coach. The challenge will be to make this a habit and repeat the performance in a high-stakes environment. But as Harendra says, "...at least it's a reassurance that we haven't deviated from the path taken during the trip to Kannur."

