

Voters to have unique EPIC number: ECI

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

The Election Commission of India (ECI) on Friday said that it would address the issue of duplicate EPIC cards issued to voters over the next three months. The poll panel said it will also ensure a unique Voter ID for the existing electors which are having duplicate EPIC number and for the future electors as well. This comes after detailed discussions within its technical teams and consultations with Chief Electoral Officers (CEOs) across the country, the ECI said that it has committed to ensuring that each elector has a unique national EPIC number.

“The Commission has now decided to resolve this long pending issue after detailed discussions within the technical teams and concerned CEOs in the next three months by ensuring a unique national EPIC number to the existing electors having a duplicate EPIC number and for future electors as well,” the poll board said in the statement.

According to the EC, sample enquiry of over 100 electors reveals that electors with duplicate EPIC numbers are genuine electors. Since the allotment of EPIC series in the year 2,000 to the States/UTs, some EROs did not use the correct series. The issue of allotment of duplicate numbers due to incorrect series across States/UTs could not have been detected as the States/UTs were independently managing



the electoral roll databases.

“As regards the issue of duplicate EPIC numbers, the Commission has already taken cognizance of the matter. Irrespective of an EPIC number, an elector who is linked to the electoral roll of a particular polling station can cast his vote at that polling station only and nowhere else,” it said. In a statement, the poll authority said India's electoral rolls are the biggest database of electors across the globe with over 99 crore registered voters.

The Trinamool Congress (TMC) flagged the issue of duplicate voter identity card numbers in different states and accused the EC of a cover-up. Reacting to this, TMC said the EC has finally “admitted and

accepted” their guilt as the poll panel issued a second statement over the issue of duplication of voter ID card numbers. “The ECI has finally admitted and accepted their guilt that duplicate EPIC (Electoral Photo Identity Card) numbers have been allotted to multiple people. All of this has happened because West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee nailed the lies of the ECI and exposed this scam,” TMC Rajya Sabha MP Saket Gokhale said in a post on X shortly after the poll panel released a statement saying it will address the “decades-long” matter in the next three months.

“After being in denial, the ECI now says it will ‘fix the issue’ in just three months.

It has also given a very unconvincing explanation that “this duplication of EPIC has happened since the year 2000 due to registration officers using incorrect alphanumeric series,” he said. Gokhale questioned how an “incorrect series” was allegedly used when ECI's Handbook for Electoral Registration Officers has clear guidelines, and asked about the fate of the software that was supposed to catch this. He asked if the ECI said this had been happening since 2000, why nothing was done for 25 years until Banerjee pointed it out. “Why hasn't ECI still revealed how many duplicate EPICs currently exist? This is the second eyewitness in a week being passed off as a ‘clarification’ by ECI,” he said.

The EC recently held a high-level meeting to discuss concerns about duplicate of these numbers in the voter database. Following the meeting, the commission decided to launch a focused, time-bound initiative to carefully review and remove any duplicate entries and errors in the electoral rolls.

According to EC, new instructions will soon be sent to CEOs in all states and Union Territories, asking them to identify and delete duplicate records and make necessary corrections within the next two months. This move comes shortly after the TMC accused the EC of voter list manipulation and claimed that identical EPIC numbers appear across different states. The TMC has said it plans to raise the matter in Parliament next week.

NDMC attaches properties in Khan Market over property tax

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

The New Delhi Municipal Council (NDMC) on Friday attached seven shop-cum-flat properties in the upscale Khan Market over non-payment of property tax.

A senior NDMC official stated, “We have attached seven shop-cum-flat properties in Khan Market and after attaching the properties, the civic body has given a notice of five days to the owner to pay the due property tax.”

According to the official, the outstanding dues for these properties run into crores, and the owners had failed to make payments despite multiple notices in the past.

In addition to the seven properties in Khan Market, the New Delhi Municipal Council has also partially attached a builder's property on Bhai Veer Singh Marg within its jurisdiction.

With this, the civic body has attached a total of 21 properties in the last few days as part of its intensified tax recovery efforts.

On Thursday, the New Delhi Municipal Council issued show-cause notices to 380 property tax defaulters, warning of strict measures, including property attachment and account freezing, if dues were not paid. The civic body has identified 3,200 taxpayer

ers who have defaulted for three consecutive years.

“Under NDMC regulations, a 30-day show-cause notice is issued to 380 defaulters, followed by additional reminders. If there is no response or payment, the Council may take action, including property attachment, sealing, or account freezing,” the New Delhi Municipal Council statement said.

The New Delhi Municipal Council, which oversees around 15,600 properties, has set a property tax collection target of ₹1,150 crore for the current financial year. As of mid-February, ₹807 crore had been collected.

To facilitate taxpayers, the NDMC announced that its tax collection centre at Palika Kendra and three counters in Gole Market, RK Puram, and Sansad Marg will remain open on Saturdays and Sundays in March (except gazetted holidays) beyond regular working days.

Meanwhile, the New Delhi Municipal Council has already attached 13 properties in Connaught Place and sealed several shops and restaurants over the last few days due to non-payment of property taxes.

However, the New Delhi Traders Association (NDTA) has raised concerns over what it calls excessive tax demands and business closures.



Lalit Modi surrenders Indian passport

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

Indian Premier League (IPL) founder Lalit Modi has filed an application with the Indian High Commission in London to surrender his Indian passport. The Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) confirmed this on Friday.

Modi is known to have acquired citizenship of Vanuatu, a South Pacific Island nation. He left India in 2010 and is learnt to have been living in London.

The former IPL chief is wanted by Indian law enforcement agencies in connection with allegations that he was involved in embezzlement of crores of rupees during his stint as the top boss of the IPL.

“He has made an application for surrendering his passport in the high commission of India, London,” External Affairs Ministry spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal said.

“The same will be examined in light of extant rules and procedures. We are also going to understand that he has acquired citizenship of Vanuatu. We continue to pursue the case against him as required under law,” he said.

Railway pilots waiting rooms at stations

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It was also directed to appoint of a senior officer as station director at major stations.

The ministry said the station director will be financially empowered to take on-the-spot decisions to improve the station. “The station director will be empowered to control the sale of tickets as per capacity of the station and the available trains,” the statement said.

Stalin plots delimitation counter

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Despite the gravity of this issue, the Union Government has provided neither clarity nor any concrete commitment to address concerns.

Their representatives have vaguely stated that delimitation would follow a “pro-rata” basis, without explaining the base that will be used for such pro-rata calculation. Further, the CM slammed “empty rhetoric” than no state will face a decrease in its seats.

“When the very foundation of our democracy is at stake, can we accept such vague assurances? When our states' futures hang in the balance, do we not deserve transparent dialogue?,” he asked.

Pointing to the all-party meeting held here on March 5, 2025 and its proposal to form a JAC by reaching out to all states that face the same threat, he said: “I believe this issue transcends individual State concerns - it strikes at the heart of our federal principles. Together, we must examine the constitutional, legal, and political dimensions of this challenge. We must jointly develop alternatives that preserve our current representation in percentage terms Only through a collaborative analysis and

Omar reacts to EAM’s statement on J and K



MOHIT KANDHARI ■ Jammu

Unsparring Jammu and Kashmir Chief Minister Omar Abdullah on Thursday reacted strongly to the recent statement of the foreign minister S Jaishankar on the floor of Assembly.

“The foreign minister (S Jaishankar) is saying that we will get back the part of J and K which is under the occupation of Pakistan. Who has stopped them? Have we ever said that do not get it back?” the chief minister said, winding up the discussion on motion of thanks to Lt Governor Manoj Sinha's address in the Assembly here.

Jaishankar, speaking during a session at the Chatham House think-tank in London on Wednesday, said the Kashmir dispute would be solved after the “return of the stolen part of Kashmir which is under illegal Pakistani occupation”.

Omar also maintained he would be grateful to the BJP-led government if alongside Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (PoK) it also retrieves the part of the Union Territory (UT) under illegal occupation of China.

Speaking on the motion of thanks Omar also came down heavily on the

BJP leaders for accusing the National Conference (NC) of insulting Jammu and Kashmir's last ruler Maharaja Hari Singh and challenged them to give just one instance when the ruling party or any other Kashmir-based party insulted the Dogra ruler while the BJP disintegrated and downgraded his Muslim majority state.

Referring to the speech of BJP members in the House, he said the Congress was targeted for leaving Haji Peer in the Uri sector to Pakistan.

“During the Kargil war, there was an opportunity to get back PoK because it was Pakistan which attacked us. If you were so willing, you would have brought back that part but what stopped you? When you look at the map of Jammu and Kashmir, one part is also in China but you do not talk about it,” he said.

He said when the BJP-led central government brings back PoK, they should also bring that part of J-K which is presently in China and “we will be grateful to you”.

Countering the Leader of Opposition (LoP) in J-K Assembly and BJP leader Sunil Sharma for accusing the ruling party

of insulting the Maharaja, he dared the opposition party to give him a single instance when the last Dogra ruler was insulted by NC or for that matter by the PDP and Congress.

“You have distorted the map of Maharaja by separating Ladakh from J&K and finishing his laws, especially related to land and jobs which were meant to provide safeguards to the people,” he said.

Abdullah said the BJP is justifying the separation by saying that it was the long-pending demand of the people of Ladakh.

“Have you asked them? Have you tried to find out?”

“From day one, the people of Kargil were against this decision. The Buddhists of Ladakh who distributed sweets are today of the opinion that they were better placed with J&K. They walked from Leh to Delhi to get back their rights,” he said.

The chief minister also took a dig at the LoP for his “derogatory remarks” against the July 13, 1931 “martyrs” and said “though we have different political ideologies, they deserve respect for rising up against the autocracy and their sacrifice led

What is your lane number? Ruling MPs play Tughlaq in Capital lanes

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“Such great personalities are the ideals of this country and sentiments of the country are attached to them...So, I changed the nameplate to Swami Vivekanand Marg...” he added.

Such changes are approved by a panel of the New Delhi Municipal Council (NDMC), the civic body that has jurisdiction over roads in central Delhi. Requests are put up before the NDMC council, a 13-member body headed by the chairperson. The rules say renaming requests should take into account history, sentiment and whether a personality needs to be acknowledged in that manner. After the BJP's return to power in Delhi after 27 years, demands to rename several locations in the city have been gaining momentum. BJP leaders have proposed renaming various areas of the city, including Najafgarh to Nahargarh, Mohammadpur village to Madhavpuram, and Mustafabad to Shivpuri.

The changing of names of places, roads, and institutions is part of the ruling BJP's border ideological agenda to shed the colonial legacies to reflect India's indigenous heritage.

The party also claims that the move is

to honour historical figures, particularly those who contributed significantly in shaping Indian society.

Multiple instances of renaming have taken place under the BJP rule. In 2018, Allahabad was renamed Prayagraj to restore its ancient identity linked to the Hindu pilgrimage site, Prayag. The same year, Mughal Sarai Railway Station was renamed Deen Dayal Upadhyay Junction in honour of the BJP ideologue.

In 2015, Aurangzeb Road was renamed after former President APJ Abdul Kalam. A year later, the Race Course Road, the elite address for the Prime Minister's official residence, was changed to “Lok Kalyan Marg”.

In 2018, Faizabad District was renamed Ayodhya to emphasize its religious and cultural significance in Hinduism. In 2021, Hoshangabad in Madhya Pradesh was renamed Narmadapuram to highlight its connection to the sacred Narmada River while removing Mughal-era influences. Most recently, in 2023, Maharashtra's Aurangabad was renamed Chhatrapati Sambhajinagar, and Osmanabad became Dharashiv, shedding Mughal and Islamic references in favour of local historical and cultural identities.

Police arrest three for setting up bank accounts for cyber frauds

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Gurugram

A cyber crime police team of the police has arrested three accused including a woman for allegedly providing a bank account to cyber fraudsters in the name of customer service, police said.

The accused were identified as Nilofar and Abhishek a resident of Kanpur, Uttar Pradesh, and Harshit Shukla a resident of Unnao, Uttar Pradesh.

According to the police a complaint was received on February 13 at the Cyber Crime Police Station (South).

The complainant stated in his police complainant that he had searched and inquiry number of Indian Post on Google.

“When he contacted on that particular number, the persons on the other side cheated him of Rs 95,000 by engaging him in conversation,” the complainant told the police.

Based on his complaint, a case was registered under section 318(4), 319 at the police station.

During investigation, a police team led by Inspector Naveen Kumar, SHO of the said police station took action and with

the help of police technology arrested the trio accused on Thursday.

During police interrogation, it was found that all the accused had owned fake Aadhaar cards made on Delhi address and through that they had opened many bank accounts in their name.

“The accused used to make those bank accounts available to cyber criminals for which the accused used to get Rs. 5000 for one bank account,” Sandeep Kumar, spokesperson of the Gurugram police said.

The police team has recovered 03 mobile phones, 03 SIM cards, 03 ATM cards, 08 cheque books and 11 passbooks from the possession of the accused.

Further action is being taken in the case as per rules. Investigation of the case is underway.

Senior police officers of Gurugram claimed that the police are closely working with other agencies and organisations to counter cyber fraud.

In view of the increasing cyber crimes, Gurugram Police is taking immediate action against cyber criminals. Gurugram Police is working with full dedication to stop the increasing cybercrime and catch the criminals, Kumar said.

MEA officer dies by suicide

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

In a shocking incident, an officer of the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) died by suicide by jumping off a building in Chanakyapuri area on Friday. “The deceased has been identified as Jitendra Rawat (42). He was staying on the first floor but went to the fourth floor of the building and jumped. We have not recovered any suicide note from the spot,” the police said.

It was further informed that he was troubled for the past few days. According to the police, the officer was a director at the Overseas Employments and Protectorate General of Emigrants in the Ministry of External Affairs. Besides Belgium, he also had a posting in Myanmar.

Police said the incident occurred around 6.20 am on Friday. Neighbours alerted the authorities, and a team from the local police station rushed to the scene. The officer was taken to the hospital, where he was declared dead. According to police, he lived with his mother on the first floor of the building. No suicide note was found. The police has recovered the body and has sent it for postmortem.

According to police, Rawat was suffering from depression and was undergoing treatment. Rawat is survived by his wife and two children, all three of whom live in Dehradun in Uttarakhand. Only his mother was at home when he died. His wife lives in Dehradun and is coming to Delhi,” police said, adding that they are still ascertaining the reason behind the extreme step. The government officer lived on the first floor of a four-storey building.

Police confirmed the death and said no foul play was suspected. Authorities are currently probing the circumstances leading to the incident. The Ministry of External Affairs (MEA), in a statement said, “An officer of the Ministry of External Affairs passed away in the morning of March 07, 2025, in New Delhi. The Ministry is providing all possible assistance to the family and is in touch with the Delhi Police.”

“The Ministry stands with the family in this hour of grief and difficulty. Further details are not being released bearing in mind the need to respect the family's privacy in this time of bereavement,” MEA added. Chanakyapuri, known as the diplomatic enclave of Delhi, houses various embassies and government offices.

Rana hopes to buy time as extradition inches closer

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The Counsel also requested immediate information on any commitment the United States has obtained from India with respect to Rana's treatment.

“The government declined to provide any information in response to these requests,” the application said.

It added that given Rana's underlying health conditions and the State Department's own findings regarding the treatment of prisoners, it is very likely “Rana will not survive long enough to be tried in India.

“The issues raised by petitioner merit full and careful consideration, and the stakes are enormous for him. The very least the U.S. Courts owe the petitioner is a full chance to litigate these issues, including exercising their appel-

late rights, before he is consigned to the fate that awaits him at the hands of the Indian government,” the application said.

It added that if a stay is not entered, there will be no review at all, and the US courts will lose jurisdiction, and “petitioner will soon be dead.

“Therefore, we respectfully request that this Court enter an Order staying the extradition and surrender of petitioner pending a full and considered hearing on petitioner's claims by the district court, circuit court, and, if necessary, a writ of certiorari to and further proceedings before this Court,” it said.

US President Donald Trump, during a joint press conference with Prime Minister Modi in the White House last month announced that Rana's extradition to India has been approved.

Rekha Gupta to launch Mahila Samriddhi Yojna on Women’s Day

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

Rekha Gupta-led BJP government in Delhi is likely to roll out the implementation of Mahila Samriddhi Yojna and a scheme to provide free LPG cylinders during Holi and Diwali from Saturday, at the Mahila Diwas programme to be attended by BJP president JP Nadda in Jawaharlal Nehru stadium on the International Women's Day on Saturday. The Delhi government may also announce Ayushman Bharat Yojna and a scheme to provide free LPG cylinder during Holi and Diwali.

In its manifesto for the Assembly polls held in February earlier, the BJP promised to provide ₹2,500 per month to women from poor families under the Mahila Samridhhi Yojna when it came to power in Delhi.

Sources said the Delhi Cabinet will approve both schemes in a meeting scheduled on Saturday. Following the approval, the formal announcement will be made at Jawaharlal Nehru Stadium after 12 pm.

The Cabinet is likely to discuss the guidelines and eligibility criteria of the scheme before giving its nod, they said. The Chief Minister is scheduled to attend the Delhi BJP's Mahila Diwas programme at JLN stadium at noon on Saturday.

The party said in a message that several senior BJP leaders including Delhi unit co-in-charge Alka Gurjar, state president Virendra Sachdeva, Mahila Morcha national president Vanitha Srinivasan, and BJP MPs Kamaljeet Sehrawat and Bansuri Swaraj will be present in the event. “The announcement of rolling out registration for the women aid scheme will be made in the event at JLN stadium,” the sources said.

The Delhi government estimates that 15 Lakh to 20 Lakh women will qualify for the scheme.

The IT department is working on integrating databases from various departments to streamline the eligibility verification process. The Budget for the scheme will reportedly be increased in the next financial year to include all eligible beneficiaries. The Mahila Samriddhi



Delhi Chief Minister Rekha Gupta

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Scheme follows similar initiatives in other BJP-ruled states, such as the Ladli Behna Yojana in Madhya Pradesh and the

Ladki Bahin Yojana in Maharashtra. Sources said the eligibility criteria of an annual income of not more than ₹2.5

Lakh and an age group of over 18 years up to 60 years were discussed at a meeting attended by chief secretary. “The income limit for women eligible to register under the scheme will be ₹2.5 Lakh. We prepared a draft of the Mahila Samriddhi Yojana, which will be presented in the cabinet meeting for approval,” officials added.

Once the draft is approved, the registration process will begin.

The Delhi government is developing an online portal for the registration process. A dedicated software is also being designed by the IT department to help verify applications and ensure that only eligible women receive the benefits.

In its Delhi Assembly election manifesto, BJP promised to provide ₹2,500 per month to women from poor families under the Mahila Samriddhi Yojna if it came to power in the capital.

The opposition, AAP, recently criticised BJP govt for not approving the scheme in its first cabinet meeting, as promised by Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

The party held a protest at several

places, questioning BJP for not approving the scheme in its first cabinet meeting.

AAP leader Atishi on Friday wrote a letter to Delhi Chief Minister Rekha Gupta, urging her to ensure immediate transfer of ₹2,500 to women's accounts, as promised by the BJP during the Assembly polls.

“The prime minister had assured the mothers and sisters of Delhi that once the BJP's government is formed, the scheme to provide ₹2,500 per month would be approved in the first Cabinet meeting and funds would start reaching women's accounts by Women's Day,” the Leader of Opposition in the Delhi Assembly wrote.

With only a day to go for Women's Day, women across Delhi are eagerly awaiting the fulfilment of this promise, Atishi said.

“They are hoping that the first instalment will be credited to their accounts as assured by the BJP. To give the women of Delhi their due, the funds should be transferred without delay. Every woman in the city is looking towards you with hope,” she said.

I felt like the protagonist of the film Nayak, says CM

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

Delhi Chief Minister Rekha Gupta quoted a famous *shayari* by Urdu poet Rahat Indori to underline that she would be no pushover despite having no major administrative experience. Speaking at the private news channel Conclave, Chief Minister Rekha Gupta, a first-time MLA from Shalimar Bagh, said she felt like the '*naayika*' (heroine) from the Bollywood movie 'Nayak' on assuming the top post and asserted that it was not a 'lottery' but an honour for all daughters of the country.

"Shaakh se toote huwe patte nahin hain ham, aandhiyon se kaho apni auqaat mein rahe (I am not among those leaves that break from the branches, someone should tell the storm to stay within its limits)," Gupta said.

The Chief Minister said the only woman Chief Minister across BJP-ruled states, said the BJP government in Delhi will ensure the cleaning of the Yamuna in three years, starting a ferry service on it and diminishing three landfill sites up to 80-90 per cent in next two years.

The other priorities of her government were to ensure that Delhi people do not face water shortage in the summers and waterlogging during monsoon, she said. On being asked about her getting preference for the chief minister's post over several senior leaders and MLAs, Gupta said, "Let no one have any misunderstanding. This victory is due to the people of Delhi and the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi."

"This is not a post, it is a job and a responsibility. Our aim is a developed Delhi for a developed India," Gupta said.

Underlining that the women in Indian society do not get opportunities to go on the "front foot", she said her appointment as chief minister of Delhi was an honour for all daughters of the country and there was a lot of enthusiasm over it.

The appointment of a woman as chief minister was a very significant vision of the party and PM Narendra Modi and it was not just a "symbolic facelift" but a genuine effort to promote women to higher posts of decision-making, Gupta said.

It was not like a dream come true, Gupta said, adding she was moving on her own

path when she was selected to the post.

"I felt like the protagonist of the 'Nayak' movie. I won't say it was a lottery. It is an honour of all daughters in the country and Modiji has realised the vision of women-led development and women-led government," the Delhi chief minister said.

She said the Delhiites have now understood that the "double-engine" government of the BJP is the "best pathway" to make the national capital a developed city. Gupta asserted that the entire party leadership stood with her.

The people of Delhi have a lot of hopes from the new government, the chief minister said and added that she would work to strengthen the basic facilities and develop Delhi into a modern city.

She said air pollution was a major challenge for which her government would work in a time-bound manner in consultation with experts. It will work intensively to control factors contributing to air pollution, such as stubble burning and vehicular emissions, Gupta said.

She also stressed that she will live among the people and not in the "Sheesh Mahal".

WRI report: Fare-free bus travel boosts women’s access to jobs

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

A report, titled Fare-Free Bus Travel Scheme for Women: Lessons from Delhi, published by the World Resources Institute (WRI) India has claimed that the Delhi government's Fare-Free Public Transport (FFPT) scheme for women, introduced by the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) in October 2019, significantly boosted women's access to jobs, education and healthcare, while also helping them save money as they travel farther and more frequently across the capital.

The report said women's ridership in Delhi's public buses increased by 20 per cent between 2019 and 2023, ever since the Delhi government introduced the Fare-Free Public Transport (FFPT) scheme for women.

The initiative launched in Delhi which allows women to travel for free on both Delhi Transport Corporation (DTC) and cluster buses, has not only increased access to public transport but also altered travel patterns, employment opportunities, and safety perceptions.

Authored by Harshita Jamba, Aravinda Devaraj and Chaitanya Kanuri, the findings detail the impacts of the FFPT scheme on women's mobility patterns and

choices, access to opportunities, and experience of safety during bus travel in Delhi.

The researchers, based on a survey that included 28 per cent of respondents from Economically Weaker Sections (EWS) with annual household incomes below ₹3,00,000, and an additional 57 per cent from households earning under ₹6,00,000, found that the share of female ridership rose from 33 per cent to 42 per cent from 2019-20 to 2022-23, going by the state's planning department data.

Among the 2010 women bus users surveyed across 15 spatially distributed locations in Delhi, 95 per cent were captive users who lacked access to a private vehicle and relied on buses due to economic constraints. The fare waiver has effectively made women less dependent on male family members, enabling them to travel alone or cover transport costs for other family members, the authors added. The study highlighted that insufficient and inefficient bus services, which result in overcrowding and harassment, continue to affect women's access to safe and reliable bus services. The survey found that 59 per cent of women expressed concerns about safety due to hostile behaviour from staff. The report said some have welcomed

the scheme as a step in the right direction to improve women's mobility, but some bus users and on-ground transport staff have bristled at it. The backlash has come in the form of discriminatory remarks and exclusionary actions from bus crew members and male co-passengers. Ridership trends show a steady increase in women's share of the daily bus ridership from 33 per cent in 2019-20 to 42 per cent in 2022-23

According to the report, over 90 per cent of these women use buses on a weekly basis for work, education, care giving, and discretionary activities. As many as 95 per cent of the women in our sample lack access to a private vehicle and rely on buses due to economic constraints. They reported that the FFPT scheme saved up to eight per cent of their household income per month. The fare waiver has also made women less dependent on male family members, enabling them to travel alone or pay transport costs for other family members.

Fare-free public transport (FFPT), also known as "free public transport," allows passengers to use public transport services, such as buses or trains, within a defined geographical area or during specific periods without paying fares or purchasing tickets.

High-resolution cameras to be installed across Delhi

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

Waving in front of a surveillance camera may soon help save a woman's life, as the Delhi Police prepares to launch a one-of-a-kind project in the coming months.

The 'Safe City' project, currently in pipeline, aims to install high-resolution cameras across Delhi, with live feeds beamed at local police stations, the offices of Deputy Commissioners of Police (DCPs) and the Police Headquarters. "This will be the first such initiative in the country," the officer said.

The project will involve the use of facial recognition technology, alerting police immediately if a woman in distress waves her hand in front of these cameras.

Initially, there were discussions about integrating panic buttons into the camera poles, but the idea was dropped amid concerns of misuse and unnecessary resource deployment, said the officer involved in the project.

"If any incident of crime against women occurs on the streets of Delhi, police will be immediately alerted and can intervene before the situation escalates. This will be a significant step in crime prevention," he added.

The project is still under development,

with weekly review meetings every Tuesday, attended by the heads of various departments.

The multi-crore initiative is expected to be launched this year by the Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Union Home Minister Amit Shah.

Lower-level officers have been instructed to identify high-crime areas or "black spots" where there is a greater need for surveillance.

"Station House Officers (SHOs) have been asked to compile a list of locations where crime rates are high, as it is not feasible to install cameras at every corner of the city," a police source said. Moreover, the software used in the system is programmed to identify known and wanted criminals.

"The police database has been integrated into the system, allowing it to recognise suspects even if their photos are a decade old. The AI-driven software can analyse changes in appearance over time and match them to existing records," the officer added.

If a known criminal is detected in a specific area, an alert will immediately appear on the monitoring screens, the person said. The project has already been started on a pilot basis at select police stations.

Janaushadhi Kendras to benefit weaker sections

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

Delhi Chief Minister Rekha Gupta, on Friday, said that the Delhi government will open Janaushadhi Kendras across the national Capital, which would provide people of Delhi with medicines at lowest prices, as well as sanitary napkins to women at just ₹1.

Congratulating people on the occasion of the seventh Janaushadhi Diwas, Gupta said, "The governments before us did not implement the Pradhan Mantri Bhartiya Janaushadhi Pariyojana. Maybe because the word 'Pradhan Mantri' in the scheme. We will open Janaushadhi Kendras everywhere. We will follow the decision of the High Court, which says that there should be a Janaushadhi Kendra within 500 meters of every hospital."

Gupta also visited the Janaushadhi Kendra in Ashok Vihar early morning. She emphasised that "this scheme will particularly benefit economically weaker sections, as it provides medicines for serious illnesses like cancer and diabetes at much lower prices". Additionally, sanitary napkins for women will be available at just ₹1, promoting hygiene and better health for women.

The Chief Minister further announced that, in compliance with Delhi High Court directives, the Delhi government will ensure that at least one Jan Aushadhi



Delhi CM Rekha Gupta during her visit to an Janaushadhi Kendra

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Kendra is established within a 500-meter radius of every government hospital. This Jan Aushadhi Kendra provides WHO certified medicines and medical items to the public at 50-70 per cent lower price compared to branded medicines. A lot of medicines are available at a lower price up to 90 per cent.

In addition, these Jan Aushadhi Kendras will assist government hospitals by facilitating local medicine purchases in case of emergencies.

New Delhi BJP MP Bansuri Swaraj also lauded the 'Jan Aushadhi' initiative

as a visionary project that was given a major impetus under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi. The BJP MP emphasised that the 'Jan Aushadhi Kendras' have not only significantly reduced the cost of medicines for the common people but have also played a crucial role in boosting employment opportunities across the country, particularly through their franchise model. Swaraj was speaking from a 'Jan Aushadhi Kendra' in Karol Bagh, where she highlighted the impressive savings that customers experience.

"For example, medicines for chronic conditions like diabetes and hypertension. Here, the medicines are available at up to 91 per cent lower prices compared to conventional chemists. Even multivitamins and calcium supplements, which are essential for everyone, are 94 per cent cheaper. The 'Jan Aushadhi Kendra' offers more than 2,000 affordable medicines, as well as over 300 surgical products," she said.

Meanwhile, BJP MP Ramvir Singh Bidhuri also spent Jan Aushadhi Diwas among the people who came to Jan Aushadhi Kendra on Friday. He talked to the people who came to these centers. Everyone appeared satisfied with the cheap and quality medicines available at these centers. Bidhuri went to the Jan Aushadhi Kendra located in the AIIMS campus and met the people there. Generic medicines for almost all diseases are available at Jan Aushadhi Kendras. People described this scheme of Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi as very beneficial for the general public.

Every year, March 7 is celebrated as 'Jan Aushadhi Diwas', a day dedicated to raising awareness about the 'Pradhan Mantri Bhartiya Jan Aushadhi Pariyojana' and promoting the use of generic medicines. The celebrations are part of a week-long campaign that runs from March 1 to 7, with various events organised across the country.

LG inaugurates Amrut Biodiversity park, prioritises greener city

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

Delhi Lieutenant Governor Vinai Kumar Saxena inaugurated the Amrut Biodiversity Park on Friday and said that providing a greener and cleaner city to the people will be his priority.

After inaugurating the park, he said that around a year-and-a-half ago, the place was in a terrible state, full of dirt and neglect. "It was cleaned up, and today it has been transformed into a beautiful park."

"We aim to provide the people of Delhi with a clean and refreshing environment while also increasing green spaces in the city. We are also considering setting up a small café in the park where joggers and visitors can take a break and relax," Saxena said.

Developed as part of the Yamuna floodplain restoration scheme by Delhi Development Authority (DDA), Amrut Biodiversity Park spans over 90 hectares on the eastern bank of the Yamuna River.

This previously underdeveloped area, which was used for agriculture, nurseries, and settlements, had experienced prolonged depletion of its natural floodplain, soil texture and native plant communities. The site has a flat topography with an overall slope away from the Yamuna River, forming small catchment zones that collected water from annual inundation, which also resulted in the formation of gullies within the site.

Given the site's susceptibility to flooding, the park's landscape features have been strategically designed to manage stormwater, reduce flood risks, and improve the local water table through natural filtration. The six water bodies have capacity to hold 225 million litres of water.

Slopes have been reinforced with jute, and grass have been planted to stabilise these slopes, as the area is prone to inundation during high floods. *Kachha* pathways have also been developed for walking and jogging amidst the natural plantation.

As part of the efforts to restore biodi-



Amrut Biodiversity Park

PIONEER PHOTO

versity, approximately 14,500 trees of various species, including Neem, Kachnar, Cluster Fig, Peepal, Pilkhan, Chilbil, Senegalia catechu, Champaca, Mango, Mahua, Spanish Cherry, Kaim, White Mulberry, Kadamba, Jangal Jalebi, KanakChampa, Amla, Karanj,

Elaeocarpusganitrus, Ashoka Tree, Jamun, Trumpet Tree, Imli, Tamarix, Teak, Arjuna, Baheda, Siris, Kala Siris, Star Fruit, and Madagascar Almond, have been planted here by National Botanical Research Institute. Additionally, about 18,000 shrubs and approximately 3.21 Lakh riverine

grasses have been planted, establishing robust riverine grass communities.

To foster public engagement with nature, two public interfaces have been established along NH-24, near the CWG Village. These areas offer amenities that connect visitors with the natural environment, even during flood-induced inundation periods.

By integrating nature into the heart of the city and along the major highways, Amrut Biodiversity Park will contribute to cleaner air, cooler urban temperatures, and a healthier environment, addressing the challenges posed by rapid urbanisation. This park will not only offer respite to the city's residents but also restore the local ecosystem, promote water conservation.

Following Prime Minister Narendra Modi's vision of a cleaner and greener Delhi, "We are working hard towards this goal with several new projects already in progress," he said.

"To help with water conservation and attract birds, we have created several depression areas within the park to store

rain and floodwater. Additionally, around 20,000 different plants have been planted, which will further enhance the beauty of the park in the coming years."

Speaking about the cleaning of the Yamuna, the LG said it was progressing at full speed. Chief Minister Rekha Gupta and other ministers are continuously monitoring the work being carried out in mission mode, he added. The inauguration of this park represents a significant achievement in the efforts to rejuvenate the Yamuna floodplain area and highlight the importance of sustainable urban development.

DDA has extensively work on the Rejuvenation of River Yamuna and many projects are being developed on its bank including Asita, which was once an encroached land and now converted into green beautiful landscape. Besides, it has developed Baansera-Bamboo park-which was once a C&D waste area.

On the western bank of Yamuna, Vasudev Ghat was developed, where Yamuna aarti is held twice every week.

country may be suffering from obesity by 2050 if the findings of the report turns out to be true. Modi warned obesity will prove dangerous for people's health and everyone must start trying to overcome this situation.

Editor's TAKE

Women's Day: Not an episodic event but an ongoing epic saga

The future belongs to those who dare to demolish barriers and Indian women are quick learners

International Women's Day is not an annual event, to be reduced to yet another date routinely done and dusted in the yearly calendar. It is a potent reminder of the struggles women have endured through history and the milestones yet to be achieved. Indian women, in particular, have battled intense socio-economic and cultural challenges. What sets them apart on the global stage, however, is their unique gift of grit and determination to shatter stereotypes and leave their indelible ink on countless pages of narratives historically dominated and scripted by men, and admittedly some women, for an inherently patriarchal society. Today, as we celebrate these achievements, we must remember that true emancipation for the Indian woman is still a work in progress, indeed an ongoing journey. En route to the final destination lies a path strewn with constrictive societal norms and gender biases that must be negotiated with. The Indian woman shall, and will.

Historically shackled to the home and hearth with limited access to education and career opportunities, the Indian woman has not had it easy. Today, despite the gradual bridging of time-worn gender faultlines, the modern Indian woman still confronts lack of representation in leadership roles. Safety concerns, particularly gender-based violence and harassment, remain pressing issues that not only require a systemic change but a decisive obliteration of decadent mindsets. Cultural expectations are an encumbrance that every woman must fight, her individual battles, her attempts to strike a picture-perfect balance between professional aspirations and family needs. This dual responsibility has often compelled our women to compromises, many stepping back from their place of work due to lack of institutional support, such as maternity benefits and flexible work environments.

Despite these hurdles, Indian women have carved a niche for themselves with their unique resilience. For instance, the Armed Forces, once an exclusive preserve of our young men, now proudly showcases our women as fighter pilots, commanding officers, and front-line warriors. Leaders like Kiran Mazumdar-Shaw in biotechnology, Falguni Nayar in entrepreneurship, Rani Rampal in sports, all have redefined success, inspiring millions. Women journalists, scientists, and engineers have risen to prominence, from Gagandeep Kang in virology to Tessy Thomas, India's 'Missile Woman.' The Indian judiciary, today has an enviable gallery of women judges championing gender justice, with a lady perhaps poised to become the country's first female Chief Justice.

However, true gender equality must reflect in increased representation of women in politics and corporate boardrooms. Laws do exist to protect their rights, but enforcement is often weak. Education and financial independence are key to furthering women's empowerment and must form the bedrock of fundamental rights. Policy reforms must ensure equal pay, safer workplaces, and equal career growth opportunities. Societal mindsets need to shift, with men playing an active role in supporting gender equality. Schools must instill values of inclusivity from an early age, ensuring that each coming generation is sensitised to the need for a more equitable perspective.

Today serves as a reminder that while progress has been made, the journey toward true empowerment is far from over. It is not just about celebrating achievements but about continuing the fight against gender inequality. India stands at a crossroads where women's participation in every sphere can redefine the nation's future. With a concerted and synchronised effort — from policymakers, businesses, society, to individuals — women's emancipation can move beyond discourse to become an everyday reality. The road ahead is long, and there are promises to keep. Today's Indian woman is not a silent spectator to this change. She is the change.

Miles to go before she sleeps

International Women's Day underscores the need to remember that gender justice should be an integral part of policy-making and governance, beyond symbolic gestures and rhetorical lectures

As a woman in politics and an advocate for women's voices nationally and internationally, I extend my warmest wishes on this International Women's Day. This occasion serves not just as a celebration but also as a moment of reflection on the progress we have made and the long road ahead in achieving true gender equality.

This year's Women's Day comes a short month after the Delhi elections, marking a historic moment with the appointment of the city's fourth female Chief Minister and first-ever female Leader of Opposition. We also witnessed an unprecedented voter turnout, with women surpassing men—60.9 per cent against 60.2 per cent—in exercising their democratic rights. Delhi also saw the highest number of women contesting the election this time, making up 14 per cent of the total candidates. However, the same did not translate into elected representatives, with only 7 per cent of the seats going to women, the lowest in a decade.

Before we see these figures as a sign of progress towards women's equal representation in the democratic process, I must remind you of the Women's Reservation Act passed in 2023 to ensure 33 per cent representation of women in the Lok Sabha and State Assemblies. Despite getting full support across party lines, this Act remains in limbo, awaiting the completion of the census and delimitation exercises before getting implemented.

The census was postponed from 2020 and has been indefinitely delayed since the 2024 Lok Sabha elections. As a result, the aspiration of 33 per cent representation remains a distant dream, while the reality continues to hover around 10-14 per cent. This pattern is visible across states that recently held their elections—women comprised 9 per cent of candidates and 8 per cent of elected representatives in Maharashtra, 10 per cent of candidates and 14 per cent winners in Haryana, and 11 per cent of candidates with 15 per cent representation in Jharkhand.

Even as we fight for greater representation in politics, the discourse around women remains regressive, with many politicians making misogynistic comments about how women should dress, behave and conduct themselves. Women continue to be blamed for their harassment, while structural issues of gender-based violence remain unaddressed. India still lacks a marital rape law, and progressive legislation such as Maharashtra's proposed Shakti Bill—designed to curb crimes against women and children—was returned without the Centre's assent. A society where women's safety and



PRIYANKA CHATURVEDI

dignity are up for debate cannot claim to be on the path to equality. The gender gap in representation extends beyond politics into the corporate world. Even after tokenistic efforts to mandate having at least one woman on company boards, the progress on parity has been slow.

Women held just 18 per cent of board seats in India in 2023, lagging the global average of 23 per cent. Of this, the number of women chairing company boards stands low at 4 per cent. The situation is even worse at the highest executive levels—only 6 per cent of CEOs globally are women, with India standing at a meagre 5 per cent. Middle management, the crucial pipeline for future leadership, has also declined, with women's representation falling from 18-19 per cent in 2019 to 14-16 per cent post-pandemic.

India's total share of female employees in senior and middle management is only 12.7 per cent, significantly lower than neighbouring countries like Sri Lanka (24.6 per cent) and Thailand (34.7 per cent). The situation is no better for women entrepreneurs. India ranks 75th out of 65 on the Index of Women Entrepreneurs, and only 20 per cent of businesses are led by women. The funding gap is particularly stark — just 0.3 per cent of India's venture capital funding went to women-led startups in 2021.

This funding disparity is not just an Indian problem; globally, women-led startups receive only a fraction of venture capital. In the US, despite women owning almost 40 per cent of businesses, they receive only 2 per

cent of VC funding. Europe presents a similar picture, with male-led startups consistently securing the lion's share of investments. Gender bias in the investment process is well-established. Experiments have shown that identical startup pitches are more likely to receive funding when delivered by a male voice than a female one.

Investors ask male founders about growth potential, while female entrepreneurs are questioned about personal commitments—marital status, children and whether their business is merely a "lifestyle venture."

These biases are deeply ingrained and systemic, stalling women's progress at every level. It is, therefore, not surprising that our artificial intelligence systems, the technology of the future, turn out to be gender-biased as well. AI is only as unbiased as the data it is trained on. The gender disparities in our society are mirrored in AI decision-making, reinforcing rather than challenging existing inequalities.

If we want a more equitable future, we need to change our thinking at the fundamental level—ensuring women's inclusion is not just a tokenistic effort but a structural, sustained commitment across politics, business and governance and shift towards women-led development and change.

In the wake of these sobering realities, we must also recognise the steps that can drive real change.

The Government must ensure the timely implementation of the Women's Reservation Act. Companies need to go beyond filling quotas and focus on mentoring and promoting women in leadership roles. Investors and venture capitalists must address their biases and provide fair funding opportunities to women entrepreneurs. Education and skill-building programmes must empower young women to take on leadership roles in various sectors.

Moreover, it is necessary that we, as a society, foster an environment where women feel safe and supported in the workplace, in politics, and public spaces. Sexual harassment and workplace discrimination must be addressed with stronger legal protections and zero-tolerance policies, and public representatives should reflect these values.

Women's issues must not be sidelined or treated as secondary concerns but should be an integral part of policy-making and governance. On this Women's Day, let us go beyond symbolic gestures. The numbers tell a sobering story, but they also offer a clear roadmap for change. It is time to turn these statistics into tangible action and move beyond rhetoric to create a world where women are equal stakeholders in every sphere of life.

(The writer is a politician and member of Rajya Sabha; views expressed are personal)

Do not besmirch legacy with obscenity

SECOND Opinion



NITU CHANDRA

As a proud Bihari, a Hollywood actress and a global inspirational figure, I feel an urgent need to address a critical issue that has long tarnished our cultural heritage and posed a serious threat to women's dignity and safety. The growing obscenity in Bhojpuri music is not merely a matter of artistic expression; it is a reflection of deeply ingrained patriarchal attitudes that devalue women, normalise objectification and perpetuate a culture of disrespect and violence. This degradation of our musical tradition has had far-reaching consequences and we must take decisive action to restore its lost dignity. For generations, Bhojpuri music has been a vibrant medium of cultural expression, deeply rooted in our traditions and values.

It has narrated stories of love, devotion and social issues, resonating with the soul of our people. However, in recent years, this once-respected art form has been reduced to a vehicle for vulgarity and misogyny. The lyrics of many modern Bhojpuri songs objectify women, reduce them to mere objects of desire, and promote harmful stereotypes that erode their self-worth. This rampant objectification not only diminishes women's confidence but also fosters an environment where gender-based violence is normalised. When music—one of the most powerful tools of influence—portrays women in a degrading manner, it reinforces the notion that they are inferior and unde-

serving of respect. Beyond its impact on women, the obscenity in Bhojpuri music is also corroding the cultural fabric of Bihar and other Bhojpuri-speaking regions. What was once a genre celebrated for its poetic richness and emotional depth has now become synonymous with crudeness and disrespect. The commercialisation of vulgarity in Bhojpuri songs has not only tarnished the reputation of our music but has also created a rift between generations—alienating those who grew up cherishing its traditional essence.

The urgency of this issue demands a comprehensive approach to restore respectability to Bhojpuri music while simultaneously ensuring women's dignity and safety. Laws must be enforced to curb the production and dissemination of obscene content in Bhojpuri music. While artistic freedom is important, it should not come at the cost of degrading an entire gender or dismantling cultural values. Stronger regulations should be implemented to hold singers, lyricists, producers, and distributors accountable for their content. The government should establish a monitoring body to review music content before its release, and strict penalties should be imposed on those who promote vulgarity in the name of entertainment. Awareness campaigns should be launched to educate them about their rights and the harmful effects of such content.

This can be achieved by promoting artists who create respectful, meaningful, and uplifting content. Music labels should be encouraged to invest in artists who uphold the

integrity of Bhojpuri music. Awards and incentives should be introduced to honour musicians who create songs that celebrate women and cultural values. Schools and cultural institutions should integrate traditional Bhojpuri music into their curriculum to revive its authentic charm. Restoring dignity to Bhojpuri music requires collective action from society. The degradation of Bhojpuri music into a platform for obscenity is an issue that affects not just women but the very soul of our cultural identity.

We must act now to reclaim the dignity of our music, ensure women's safety, and uphold the values that define us as a society. The fight against obscenity in Bhojpuri music is not about restricting artistic expression but about fostering a culture where art uplifts rather than degrades. It is time for us to unite and take a stand. Let us demand accountability from those who produce and promote obscene content. Let us empower women to challenge these harmful narratives. Let us support artists who honour our traditions and values. Above all, let us work together to build a future where Bhojpuri music is once again a source of pride, inspiration, and cultural enrichment. The time for change is now—let us be the voice that restores honour to Bhojpuri music and creates a world where women are valued, respected, and celebrated. Together, we can bring back the true essence of Bhojpuri music and ensure that it remains a symbol of our rich cultural legacy for generations to come.

(The writer is an actress, producer and an advocate for cultural reforms; views are personal)

Leaderspeak

“

Today is Women's Day. In Navsari, I will participate in a programme. On the occasion of Women's Day, I am going to hand over my social media account to some such inspiring sisters and daughters. The son of a poor mother decided that Modi will give guarantee to the poor. Modi took guarantee for the poor and started MUDRA Yojana. Today, ₹32 lakh crore has been given to the poor without any guarantee — and those who abuse us, those who have the 'zero seat', will not understand this, will not even be able to tell how many zeros are there in ₹32 lakh crore...

”



VINOD JOHRI

VINOD JOHRI | DELHI

DMK plays language politics

Madam— The ruling DMK has started the language rhetoric- 'anti-Hindi imposition' in the state—is a signal that the elections are round the corner. Now that actor Vijay, who also shares the Dravidian ideology, is likely to split the DMK's vote and the party having to fight the anti-incumbency and serious corruption charges by several cabinet colleagues, the delimitation issue has come in handy as the language issue seems to have not caught on well so far.

Delimitation, once completed, seeks to decide on the number of parliament seats based on the population of the state, which, when completed and implemented, Tamil Nadu and southern states are likely to lose in number of states, while the northern states like Bihar, UP, Jharkhand, Meghalaya, etc., are likely to gain. Tamil Nadu's plea is that the southern states are not to be penalised for having followed the population control policy directives issued post-1971 census while the northern states, which have failed, are getting more representation. The argument, though valid, is one that needs discussion, keeping the fairness of democratic principles in mind, which entails that all the voters need to be represented equally. DMK's MK Stalin also would not find supporters for his theory from his own INDI alliance partners.

GOPALASWAMY J | CHENNAI

Countries retaliate to US tariffs

Madam—Apropos of the editorial 'Beginning of a Trade War' (March 6, 2025), no doubt, President Trump has shaken the world with his policy announcements and being criticised for his trade and tariff war. But in many respects, Trump is right in doing whatever is in the best of America's interest. Since World War II, America has been exploited by the world in many ways. Europe, Latin America and developing countries took maximum benefits by exploiting the US. Illegal immigration to America from developing countries hurt America badly. No doubt in the present we are criticising Trump, but history may prove that many of his actions set things right in international relations and made a level playing field for international trade.

National interests determine the relations of every nation with other countries, America being no exception. The world should not create a hue and cry when Trump makes policies in the interest of America. All targeted countries, China, Canada, Mexico, etc., immediately retaliated with equally high tariffs. Whereas America tolerated their unfair and high tariffs for decades and even helped and supported these countries in many other ways. The onus for this trade war is on China, Canada, Mexico, South Korea, India, etc., who heavily taxed imports from the US. Instead of criticising Trump, we should wait and watch for a just and fair international trade.

VINAY KR MALHOTRA | AMBALA CANTT

HEALTHCARE NEEDS IMPROVEMENT

The article about healthcare in non-metro areas (March 6, 2025) presents good reading material. The scope and necessity to develop healthcare facilities in small cities and even in rural areas are much more than what they are today. But the task of developing healthcare in cities is left to the private players in the field for whom healthcare is undoubtedly a commodity to mint profit rather than a service. Healthcare seekers come to cities mostly from rural areas and go to metros when specialised treatment is required. Very few of them are fortunate enough to avail themselves of such specialised treatment in public sector healthcare institutions, and others either seek the intervention of insurance providers or meet the high cost by disposing of assets.

If the healthcare institutions and system of educating the public on preventive aspects and providing periodic check-ups even in the absence of any visible symptoms are ensured in the rural areas and towns, the rush in the cities could be considerably reduced. Most of the hospitals are functioning with gross deficiencies in

terms of professional infrastructure or materials, including medicines. A government hospital in Anantapur treats an average of 1500 inpatients a day. Its bed strength is 750 on paper, but the budget provided is for a 500-bed capacity. The height of it is that it has a super speciality hospital attached to manage its fund requirements.

We find an analyse machine that costs a few lakhs but is not put in use for want of an A/C to maintain temperature. This state of affairs is quoted to mention it as an example. Another issue is the quality of medical education. Many teaching institutions suffer due to a want of experienced and efficient teachers. Still, they pump out graduates and post-graduates.

In India, falling sick is taxable. Medicines, medical devices, and ICU-level care are taxed. All these woes are the fall-out of the apathy of the government that doesn't prioritise the healthcare of the people but aims at making India the global destination for healthcare. We still have a long way to go.

AG RAJMOHAN | ANANTAPUR

**Today is a day beyond
celebrations; it is a clarion
call for gender justice**

For us, Women's Day is more than just a celebration; it is a call to recognise the immense potential that remains untapped due to deep-seated biases. At Gedik Holding and Gedik University, we take pride in fostering an environment where over 250 women are breaking barriers in fields as diverse as aerospace technology and welding. Our commitment to the growth and empowerment of women and girls has spanned over six decades, and today, we witness the transformative results of these efforts.

The gendering of professions has always been fluid. Welding, a field often perceived as male-dominated, is now seeing thousands of women actively shaping the manufacturing of cutting-edge technology. Similarly, computing, once largely led by men, is again being pioneered by women. Industries that have historically excluded women must reevaluate their biases. Women have long played a dominant role in sectors such as computing and manufacturing, and there is no reason why they cannot thrive in today's high-paying fields like engineering, finance, and technology. The cost of exclusion is not merely social—it is economic.

Both India and Turkey face challenges when it comes to women's participation in the workforce. While the majority of employable men are already working, female labour force participation remains significantly lower. According to the World Economic Forum, India's female labour force participation rate is around 24 per cent, while Turkey stands at approximately 35 per cent. This underutilisation of women in the workforce is one of the greatest economic inefficiencies of our time. Prioritising female education is crucial for both nations. India's female literacy rate is currently at 70 per cent, while Turkey's is at 95 per cent. While India is making rapid progress, particularly in rural areas, there is still much to be done. Investing in women's education presents an opportunity for India and Turkey to collaborate and drive economic growth together.

Economic partnerships offer a powerful avenue to enhance women's participation in business. Textiles and tourism are two industries where India and Turkey have developed growing cooperation. India is one of the largest exporters of yarn to Turkey, where manufacturers transform these raw materials into high-end fashion garments for global markets. Women play a pivotal role in both economies-whether as artisans in India weaving traditional textiles or as designers and business leaders in Turkey's fashion industry.

Indian wedding tourism in Turkey is flourishing, and Turkish women have been instrumental in shaping this transformation.

From event planning to hospitality, luxury services, and cultural adaptation, they bridge the gap between Indian traditions and Turkish hospitality to create seamless, grand wedding experiences. Many Turkish women have specialised in organising elaborate Indian weddings in luxury destinations such as Antalya, Bodrum, and Istanbul. Hotels and resorts have trained female staff to provide authentic Indian wedding hospitality, while Turkish women in the culinary industry have honed their skills to master Indian cuisine. Their expertise extends to styling, entertainment, and venue management, making Turkey one of the most sought-after destinations for Indian weddings.

Beyond trade, fostering women entrepreneurs can further strengthen economic ties between India and Turkey. Business networks, trade fairs, and mentorship programs connecting Indian and Turkish women professionals could lead to new opportunities and innovations.

Women-led startups in both countries would benefit from cultural exchange programs, digital marketplaces, and co-working initiatives that promote cross-border entrepreneurship.

Cultural ties between India and Turkey extend beyond business, with over 300,000 Indian tourists visiting Turkey annually. From the bustling bazaars of Istanbul to the vibrant markets of Delhi, both nations share a love for dynamic street food cultures, rich history, and warm hospitality.

One fascinating cultural parallel is their tea traditions. In Turkey, tea is known as çay, while in India, masala chai is a daily staple. More than just beverages, tea symbolises hospitality, conversation, and community. Whether served in a tulip-shaped glass in Istanbul or a clay cup on the streets of Kolkata, tea fosters social connections and business discussions alike.

There is also an increasing appreciation for cultural exchange in the creative economy, including art, cinema, and music. Turkish television dramas have gained immense popularity in India, while Bollywood films enjoy a dedicated audience in Turkey. This mutual admiration provides a platform to highlight women's contributions in creative industries, from filmmaking to fashion.

Gender equality is not just a moral imperative; it is an economic necessity. The cost of sexism is evident in lost productivity, missed opportunities, and lower economic growth. By prioritising women's education, integrating them into various industries, and fostering international collaborations-such as those between India and Turkey-businesses and economies can unlock unprecedented potential. Women's Day serves as a reminder that true empowerment does not stem from symbolic gestures but from meaningful structural change. It is time for policymakers, business leaders, and communities to invest in women-not just for the sake of equality, but for the economic prosperity of all.



on empowering women in traditionally male-dominated industries. The amendments in mining laws to allow women in underground mines were just the beginning. Today, multiple government policies are actively fostering gender inclusion.

Several Public Sector Undertakings (PSUs) under the Coal and Mines Ministries, such as (CIL) and Hindustan

The future of women in mining is not confined to coal alone. As India expands its focus on renewable energy and sustainable resource management, new opportunities are emerging in sectors such as solar energy, thermal projects, and mineral exploration. Women are increasingly stepping into these roles, contributing to technological advancements and strategic decision-making. As we celebrate International Women's Day, it is essential to recognise the pioneering women who have shattered barriers in mining and those who continue to push the boundaries. Their achievements are not just personal victories but milestones in India's journey toward gender-inclusive economic growth. The once male-dominated world of mining is evolving into a field where merit, not gender, determines success.

The story of women in mining is one of determination, transformation, and triumph. From fighting legal battles to working deep underground, from leading corporate teams to redefining industry norms, they are proving that no profession is beyond their reach. Their strength, resilience, and ambition are not only shaping the mines of today but also paving the way for the miners of tomorrow.

(The writer is Union Minister of State for Coal and Mines, Government of India; views are personal)

(The writer is Chairperson, Gedik Holding, Türkiye & Chairperson, Board of Trustees, Istanbul Gedik University; views are personal)

The fight against sexual violence in India is far from over. Every woman in our country has a fundamental right to safety, dignity and justice. Yet, incidents of sexual violence continue to surface, exposing the deep-rooted challenges in our societal structures. We must take decisive and solution-oriented steps to prevent such crimes and build a future where women and children are truly safe.

As the founder of PARI Foundation, I have dedicated my life to advocating for survivors of rape and sexual violence. On December 16, 2024, PARI took a significant step forward by convening the First-Ever National Convention on the Prevention of Violence Against Women and Children. This landmark event marked a turning point in our efforts to combat sexual violence, bringing together policymakers, legal experts, civil society organisations, educators and survivors to discuss concrete measures for prevention, response and rehabilitation. At the heart of this initiative was the launch of "Agaz", a programme focused on a comprehensive, solution-driven approach to addressing gender-based violence.

One of the most pressing areas of reform is education. Schools and universities must play a proactive role in fostering gender sensitivity. Mandatory workshops and seminars should be conducted regularly for students, teachers and parents to create awareness about gender equality, consent and bystander intervention. Prevention of Sexual Harassment (POSH) training must be compulsory

for all school and college staff to ensure compliance with the law, while Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) training should be a requirement for all teachers and administrators, equipping them with the knowledge to protect children effectively.

Beyond just policies, schools should incorporate gender studies and emotional intelligence training into their curriculum, helping young minds develop respectful and healthy perspectives on relationships. Digital safety education is also critical, ensuring students understand the risks of cyberstalking, online harassment, and digital consent.

Understanding criminal psychology and the media's influence is crucial to combating sexual violence. Research must be expanded to examine the motivations, triggers and behavioural patterns of sexual offenders, helping develop targeted prevention strategies. The media's portrayal of gender dynamics must also be critically evaluated, with efforts to promote responsible storytelling that challenges toxic masculinity and harmful stereotypes.

Additionally, news reporting of sexual violence needs to be reformed. Sensationalised or insensitive coverage often leads to re-victimisation of survivors and reinforces rape culture. The media should follow ethical guidelines in reporting cases with dignity, ensuring that survivors' identities and rights are protected.

legal justice—they need holistic support to rebuild their lives. Rape Crisis Centers (RCCs) should be established in every city, town, and village, providing medical, legal, financial and psychological assistance to survivors. Vocational training and educational support should be offered to help them regain independence and stability.

A national movement must be initiated to eradicate victim-blaming, shifting societal attitudes toward supporting and empowering survivors. Public campaigns should be launched to challenge myths surrounding rape, educate communities on the importance of believing survivors, and encourage bystander intervention to prevent violence.

YOGITA BHAYANA

mortems, and forensic investigations. Special Investigation Units (SIUs) should be created within police departments, comprising forensic experts, counsellors and legal advisors specifically trained to handle sexual violence cases. Mandatory gender sensitisation training for all police personnel must be conducted during induction and as annual refresher courses.

The workplace should be a space of safety and dignity for all, yet harassment and violence persist. POSH training and audits must be strictly enforced across all organisations, ensuring compliance with anti-harassment policies. Internal Committees (ICs) should undergo annual audits to assess their effectiveness in handling sexual harassment complaints.

Special protections should be introduced for women labourers and construction workers, ensuring access to safe working conditions, legal recourse, and healthcare facilities. Shelter homes for homeless women and children must be set up across urban and rural areas, providing them with a secure environment. Workplaces must offer safe and affordable childcare facilities to support working mothers.

The media and digital platforms wield immense power in shaping perceptions and behaviours. A nationwide ban on pornography must be considered, given its proven link to increased sexual violence. Research suggests that a significant percentage of sexual violence perpetrators have been influenced by pornographic content. OTT platforms must be sub-



ers from reports
numbers show

(The writer is rape victim activist & founder PARI Foundation;
views are personal)

Doctors on Thursday reported that Francis was in stable condition, with no new respiratory crises or fever. He continued his respiratory and other physical therapy. Thursday, worked, rested and prayed from the 10th floor papal suite at Rome's Gemelli hospital.

(The author is the Promoter Director, Apollo Hospitals Enterprise Limited, Executive Chairperson, Apollo Health Co Limited)

Gaurav Shisodia, Vice President of Payoneer India, said the payment solutions provider is looking to provide expert guidance, locally hosted workshops, and tools to women entrepreneurs under a programme SheExports.

On International Women's Day she said her message to Indian women will be "it is always important to dream big to achieve them one day".

The world is HER stage

In a world that often asks women to be quiet, they turn their music into a roar, says SAKSHI PRIYA

She walks with a tune in her heart. Sometimes it's soft, a quiet comfort. Other times, it's bold, full of fire. But it's always there, her own story. A woman's voice should be heard and felt. It's in the music she creates, the words she writes, the art she shapes. It's in every step she takes towards something bigger than herself.

Women have always been at the heart of creativity, yet their stories haven't always been told the way they ought to be. They have broken barriers, redefined spaces and filled the world with art that speaks louder than words ever could.

This International Women's Day, we celebrate two remarkable artists, Saskia Rao

de Haas and Chinmayi Tripathi, who have each carved their own path in music. Saskia introduced the Indian cello to the world, blending cultures through sound, while Chinmayi has breathed new life into poetry through song, keeping old traditions alive in a way that feels fresh and urgent.

Their journeys are different, but the heart of what they do is the same. They create with purpose, challenge expectations, and bring something beautiful into the world. Here, in their own words, they share what it means to be a woman in music, the struggles they have faced and the moments that make it all worthwhile. Their music is a reflection of their strength, their stories and their passion.

CELEBRATING THE STRENGTH, RESILIENCE AND BRILLIANCE

On this International Women's Day, we extend our warmest wishes to all our readers. We deeply appreciate the invaluable contributions of women to society, those who inspire, lead and shape the world with their strength and determination. Today, we celebrate your achievements, honour your dedication and acknowledge the profound impact you make in every sphere of life.

To our esteemed readers of the Pioneer, may this day serve as a reminder of the importance of equality, respect and empowerment. Together, let's continue encouraging a future where every woman's potential knows no limits.

Wishing you a day filled with joy, recognition and the appreciation you truly deserve! Happy Women's Day!

Chinmayi Tripathi: Reviving Poetry through Music

Singer-songwriter Chinmayi Tripathi is redefining contemporary Indian music by blending poetry with melodies, giving new life to the works of renowned poets. She is also one of the few musicians playing the *dotara*, a Bengali folk instrument, bringing its unique sound to modern audiences. Through her music, she challenges gender stereotypes in the industry and creates a space for poetic storytelling.

Music and poetry have long been tools of resistance and self-expression for women. How has your journey as a female artist shaped your perspective on gender and creativity?

It has made me much more sensitive to the fact that it is not easy for anyone out here! Every one is constantly dealing with a lot of insecurities, trying to hustle, stay sane and stay creative at the same time — both men and women. However, being a woman there are other issues you have to deal with. For example, women in music are often not taken seriously as composers or lyricists. It is assumed that if a woman is a musician, she must be a singer, not a composer or songwriter. There is also immense pressure to look glamorous on stage and in videos. These outdated notions force women to fit into rigid roles. But the world is changing. The key is to embrace your individuality, own it fearlessly and stay true to your art. That's all that matters.

Your work revives the words of renowned poets through music. Is there a particular poem that speaks to the experience of womanhood?

Kaifi Azmi's *Aurat* always comes to mind:

उठ मेरी जान, मेरे साथ ही चलना है तुझे
लड़खड़ाती कहाँ तक कि संभालना है तुझे

Beyond this, contemporary poets like Anamika, Jacinta Kerketta and Babusha Kohli, as well as the poetry of Vinod Kumar Shukla, speak to universal human experiences beyond class, creed and gender. Their words shake your soul and change the way you see the world.

Can you share a moment when you saw the true impact of your music?

I am humbled by the emotional responses from my audience. One moment that stands out is when an elderly man in Maihar, who had heard all the greats, touched his head to my hands in tears and said, "Who says Saraswati is only Indian?" Another was at IIM Shillong, where we held a Silence Concert. We had students switch off their phones, refrain from applause and experience music from silence to silence. Many had never heard classical music before, yet they were deeply connected with it. These moments remind me that music is not just a performance but a transformative experience.

If you could change one thing for women in classical music, what would it be?

Despite the progress made by female classical musicians, we still operate in a patriarchal structure. I wish for women not to feel pressured to play roles but to focus on their personal journey. From childhood, women are taught that prioritising themselves is selfish. But when we play roles instead of being our true selves, we lose ourselves. Today, we have strong female role models in Indian classical music who inspire young artists to embrace their true selves.

AS A WOMAN, YOU CAN BE SILLY, VULNERABLE, STRONG AND JOYFUL ALL AT ONCE. RESILIENCE IS EMBRACING EVERY EXPERIENCE FULLY.

SARIKA'S JOURNEY WITH THE CELLO

Saskia Rao is a musician who speaks through the strings of her cello, bringing Indian and Western classical music together in a way that feels both natural and groundbreaking. With deep emotion and a quiet determination, she has redefined how the cello is heard in India, making it sing with the soul of a *sitar* and the depth of a *sarod*.

As a woman playing the cello in Indian classical music, which is not very common, when did you realise this was your path?

Was it an instant connection or a gradual process? I realised my path in music when I was around 12 years old. I loved playing the cello and knew this was what I wanted to do for life. My connection to Indian classical music came later when I studied music and encountered a class on it. I was especially drawn to the Dhrupad style. The combination of strict structure and complete freedom of expression in Indian classical music fascinated me. Over the next ten years, I immersed myself in this world, earning the freedom to express through rigorous practice. The connection was instant, but my decision to pursue it professionally over Western classical music came gradually.

Did you face resistance or doubt while pursuing something unconventional?

As an artist, doubt is necessary; it pushes you to work harder. However, as a woman and a non-Indian in this field, I had to learn not to make people's prejudices make me doubt myself. My growth comes from my Gurus, peers and audience, not from societal bias. Over 35 years, I've been grateful for all experiences, as they shape me both as a person and an artist. Instead of ignoring doubt, I try to understand the lesson behind it before releasing it.

The dotara is not a widely played instrument, especially by women. What does it mean to you to reclaim and redefine its space in contemporary music?

A lot of Indian music instruments are becoming extinct, as live music in general is getting replaced by electronic music very rapidly. However, you cannot exactly replace a live instrument as it is a living creature, it breathes, it has its own moods, emotions and soul. Dotara is not just an instrument for me, it is something like an extension to my body when I sing and therefore inseparable from my music.

On this Women's Day, what message would you like to give to young women struggling to find their voice, whether in music, poetry or life in general?

There are much more avenues today to display/distribute your work. On the Internet, it's very easy to get likes or views now to but still difficult to create a sustainable revenue stream out of it. So I would just say that whatever art you pursue, avoid shortcuts in it to get famous or achieve success quickly-invest in yourself, in your training and practising your art even if it takes years and then go all out to explore technology and all the other avenues to pursue your goals.

The Power in Their Gaze

A powerful tribute to modern Indian women through evocative silk portraits, embracing tradition and strength, writes SAKSHI PRIYA

Draped in silk, caught in quiet yet powerful moments, the women in Olympe Ramakrishna's portraits do not merely gaze back, they demand to be seen. Each expression, each stance, carries a story of strength, ambition and grace, woven into the fabric of contemporary India. This International Women's Day, the Franco-Indian artist brings her deeply personal series *Women of Urban India* curated by Shankar Tripathi, a tribute to the modern Indian woman, capturing her essence with every brushstroke. There is something deeply intimate about her work. The twelve por-

traits, printed on panels of raw silk, seem to float in the air, shifting gently as if breathing. Suspended like *saris* drying under the sun, they are not confined by frames or barriers, they exist in their own space, free and fluid, much like the lives they reflect.

A Journey Through Two Worlds

Olympe Ramakrishna was born in Normandy, France, but her art has always felt at home in India. Her journey began in the ateliers of Paris, studying the human form under the influence of Jean Auguste Dominique Ingres, Henri Rousseau and Paul Gauguin. The classical precision of European portraiture meets the rich vibrancy of Indian tradition in her work, creating a language that is uniquely hers. She studied at the Beaux-Arts in Paris, the Académie de la Grande Chaumière and the Atelier Artmedium, before moving to London's Battersea Art Centre. But it was in India that she found her muse, where the deep reds, earthy browns and golden ochres gave new life to her canvases.

For Olympe, silk is fabric that carries history, memory, identity. By choosing to print her portraits on silk, she transforms the *sari* from something worn into something that holds stories, wrapping itself around the spirit of the women she paints.

Women Who Speak Without Words

Her muses are women she has met, women whose stories she carries within her. Among them are *Shushika*, *Roopashree*, *Charisma*, *Lux* and *Romi*, each one captured in a moment of quiet power. *Shushika*, draped in deep red, holds

herself with the grace of a dancer, every line of her body telling a story of discipline and devotion. *Roopashree's* gaze is steady, her presence filling the space around her. *Charisma* leans slightly forward, caught in thought, while *Lux* stands tall, shoulders back, look-

ing out towards something unseen. *Romi*, her expression soft but knowing, seems to hold a secret within her eyes.

Art That Moves With You

Walking through the exhibition is like stepping into a world where time slows down. The silk panels shift with the slightest movement, making the portraits feel alive. The women in her art are constantly moving, much like the women they represent, navigating a world that is always changing, always demanding.

A CELEBRATION OF PRESENCE

For Olympe, this exhibition is deeply personal. It is a love letter to the women she has met, the stories they have shared and the resilience they carry. It is about women who do not need permission to take up space, who shape their own paths, who exist in the present while carrying the weight of history on their shoulders. The exhibition invites you to step closer, to feel the energy of the women who live within these portraits. They are here, vivid, unyielding, their stories work into every brushstroke.

Exhibitions open from 8 March to 18 March 2025

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