

# THE ASIAN AGE

NEW DELHI SATURDAY 8 MARCH 2025



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Shah asks Stalin to impart med and engg edu in Tamil, slams CM on language issue



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S. Korean court orders Yoon's release from jail for trial over martial law

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Actor Meenakshi Chaudhary talks about her journey, says she chooses what she wants



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Actress Sonali Bendre during an event on the eve of International Women's Day in Bengaluru on Friday. — PTI

## EC: We'll resolve duplicate voter ID issue in 3 months

**New Delhi:** Amid allegations of a cover-up over duplicate voter identity card numbers, the Election Commission (EC) on Friday said it will address the “decades-long” matter in the next three months. The Trinamul Congress flagged the issue of duplicate voter identity card numbers in different states and accused the EC of a cover-up. TMC MP Saket Gokhale said the Election Commission has finally admitted and accepted their guilt that duplicate electoral photo identity card (EPIC) numbers have been allotted to multiple people. **Full report on Page 5**

## 2 IAF aircraft crash in separate incidents

**New Delhi:** In two separate accidents on Friday involving Indian Air Force assets, a Jaguar fighter jet crashed in Ambala while an AN-32 transport aircraft crashed landed at Bagdogra in West Bengal. The Jaguar pilot managed to eject safely. An inquiry has been ordered by the IAF to ascertain the cause of the accident. **Full report on Page 4**

## Shinde's ally removed from Maha think tank

**Mumbai:** In a blow to Eknath Shinde, CM Devendra Fadnis has removed Shiv Sena leader's loyalist Ajay Asher from the board of the Maharashtra information and transformation, which is the state's version of the Niti Aayog. Mr Asher is also a prominent builder from Shinde's bastion Thane. **Full report on Page 5**

## COUNTERPOINT



I want to return my gold card visa if he gives me ₹43 crore!

## WEATHER

Max: 30°C  
Min: 13°C  
RH: 38%  
Rain: Nil

Forecast: Sunny

## ASTROGUIDE

**Krodhi:** Uttarayana  
**Tithi:** Phalguna Masam  
Shukla Navami till 8.17 am  
**Star:** Arudra till 11.30 pm  
**Varjyam:** 7.57 am to 9.32 am  
**Durmuhurtam:** 6.33 am to 8.07 am  
**Rahukalam:** 9 am to 10.30 am  
**SUNSET TODAY 6.25 PM**  
**SUNRISE TOMORROW 6.37 AM**  
**MOONRISE TOMORROW 1.48 PM**  
**MOONSET TODAY 2.38 AM**

■ Delhi presses London for action over EAM's security breach

## India rips into UK for 'licence' given to Khalistani elements

SRIDHAR KUMARASWAMI  
NEW DELHI, MARCH 7

In the wake of Thursday's security breach carried out in London by a pro-Khalistan extremist during the visit of external affairs minister S. Jaishankar, India on Friday slammed the British authorities for the “licence” given to such elements and the “indifference” shown in tackling the intimidation and threats aimed at impeding the work of Indian diplomatic missions. Taking up the matter strongly, India pressed the UK to take action against the pro-Khalistan elements involved in the breach. At his weekly briefing, ministry of external affairs spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal said, “We have conveyed our deep concern to the UK authorities about the breach of security arrangements by UK-based separatist and extremist elements dur-



External affairs minister S. Jaishankar during his visit to Trinity College in Dublin on Friday. — PTI

ing Mr Jaishankar's visit.” “There is a larger context to the incident. It brings out both the license accorded to such forces, as well as indifference to their intimidation, threats, and other actions aimed at impeding our legitimate diplomatic activities in the UK. While we have noted the statement issued by the UK foreign office on the matter, our view of its sin-

cerity would depend on the action taken against culprits on this and previous occasions,” Mr Jaiswal said. After the security breach on Thursday (IST), the British foreign office had been quoted by media reports as stating, “We strongly condemn the incident that took place outside Chatham House yesterday during Mr Jaishankar's visit to the

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## Deteriorating law & order in B'desh worrisome: Delhi

AGE CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI, MARCH 7

India on Friday said it is concerned about the deterioration of the security situation in Bangladesh, exacerbated by the release of certain “violent extremists”. New Delhi also expressed dissatisfaction over the inadequate action taken by Dhaka on attacks against Hindus and other minorities in that country. It added that both sides had also decided to “rationalise” the portfolio of Indian developmental assistance programmes since the Bangladesh security situation has “affected the pace of implementation of some of these projects”. **■ More on Page 4**

## Stalin writes to 7 CMs over delimitation fight

Plans jt stir, Chennai meet March 22

G. BABU JAYAKUMAR  
AND D. SEKAR  
CHENNAI, MARCH 7

Seeking the support of chief ministers and former CMs of Kerala, Andhra, Telangana, Karnataka, West Bengal, Odisha and Punjab in his “fight for justice” in the delimitation of Lok Sabha seats that “threatens to permanently diminish their influence in shaping the nation's future”, Tamil Nadu CM M.K. Stalin invited them to the inaugural meeting of the proposed joint action committee (JAC) in Chennai on March 22. Writing to leaders of 29 parties from seven states on Friday, Mr Stalin

regretted that the Centre has neither provided clarity nor any concrete commitment to address their concerns despite the fears of states, which have successfully implemented population control measures, that they stand to lose seats in Parliament if the delimitation exercise is based on the post-2026 population. “We should not be thus penalised for effectively controlling population growth and upholding national development goals,” he said, adding that the Central government representatives had vaguely stated that delimitation will be done on a “pro-rata” basis. **■ More on Page 5**

## Top US court rejects Rana's appeal to stay his extradition

**New York, March 7:** PTI The US Supreme Court has rejected Mumbai terror attack accused Tahawwur Rana's emergency application seeking a stay of his extradition to India. The plea opposed his extradition to India claiming he will be tortured there as he is a Muslim of Pakistani origin. Rana, 64, a Canadian national of Pakistani origin, is currently lodged in the Metropolitan Detention Centre in Los Angeles. A note dated March 6 on the Supreme Court website said, “Application... denied by Justice Kagan.” According to the submission by Rana's lawyers posted on the court's website on Thursday, Rana has now renewed his “emergency application for stay pending litigation of petition for writ of habeas corpus” previously addressed to Justice Kagan and requests that the renewed application be directed to Chief Justice Roberts. — PTI



Tahawwur Rana



Devotees leave after offering namaz at the Shahi Jama Masjid during the holy month of Ramzan in Uttar Pradesh's Sambhal district on Friday. — PTI

■ I hope you negotiate, if we have to go in militarily, it'll be a terrible thing: US Prez in letter

## Trump reaches out to Khomeini, wants to negotiate nuke deal

**Dubai, March 7:** US President Donald Trump said he sent a letter to Iran's Ayatollah Ali Khomeini, something not immediately confirmed by the supreme leader. Mr Trump made the comments in an interview aired on Friday by Fox Business News, saying he wrote to Iranian leaders. “I've written them a letter saying, ‘I hope you're going to negotiate because if we have to go in militarily, it's going to be a terrible thing,’” Mr Trump said. He later added that he had sent the letter “yes-



Donald Trump



Ayatollah Ali Khomeini

terday” in the interview, which was filmed on Thursday. The White House confirmed Mr Trump's comments, saying that he sent a letter to Iran's leaders

that everybody agrees with me, but we can make a deal that would be just as good as if you won militarily,” Mr Trump added. “But the time is happening now. The time is coming up. Something's going to happen one way or the other.” Iran's state-run IRNA news agency reported on Mr Trump's comments, citing the broadcast. However, there was no immediate word from the office of the 85-year-old Khomeini, who has final say over all matters of state. — AP

## Modi reaffirms pledge to low-cost medicines, cure

Hails Jan Aushadhi Diwas, opens Silvassa NAMO hosp

AVINASH PRABHAKAR  
JHA  
NEW DELHI, MARCH 7

As Friday marked the “Jan Aushadhi Diwas”, Prime Minister Narendra Modi reaffirmed the BJP-led NDA government's commitment to providing high-quality, affordable medicines to all citizens, ensuring a healthy and fit India. During the day, the Prime Minister also inaugurated the NAMO Hospital (Phase I) at Silvassa in Dadra and Nagar Haveli and Daman and Diu. “Dadra and Nagar Haveli, Daman and Diu is not just a Union territory but a source of pride and heritage. This is why we are transforming the region into a model state known for its holistic development”, said Mr Modi, asserting that he envisions the region to be recognized for its high-tech infrastructure, modern healthcare services, world-class educational institutes, tourism, blue



Prime Minister Narendra Modi with administrator of Dadra and Nagar Haveli and Daman and Diu Praful K. Patel at the inauguration of NAMO Hospital in Silvassa on Friday. — PTI

economy, industrial progress, new opportunities for youth, and women's participation in development. The 450-bed NAMO Hospital, built at a cost of ₹460 crores, is expected to significantly strengthen healthcare services in the Union territory and will provide state-of-the-art medical care to the people in the region, especially the tribal communities. Earlier in the day, quot-

ing a post from the MyGovIndia handle on X, the Prime Minister posted, “#JanAushadhiDiwas reflects our commitment to provide top quality and affordable medicines to people, ensuring a healthy and fit India...” Echoing Mr Modi's sentiments, Union health minister J.P. Nadda said the Pradhan Mantri Bhartiya Janaushadhi Pariyojana (PMBJP) has

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## Surge in 'Hindutva icons' visit riles Opp, calls it NDA plan Bihar polls to have Hindutva flavour

YOJNA GUSAI  
NEW DELHI, MARCH 7

The surge in visits of the “Hindutva icons” and spiritual leaders ahead of the Assembly polls in Bihar all but indicates the NDA strategy against the Opposition Mahagathbandhan. The political battle for Bihar will have Hindutva overtones. First to arrive was Bageshwar Dham sarkar Dharendra Krishna Shastri, who reached the poll-bound state to “awaken Hindus”. Then The Art of Living's Sri Sri Ravishankar visited to raise the issue of “yuva kaushal vikas” and provide skills to the youth. Besides, RSS chief Mohan Bhagwat is already on a



Bihar Chief minister Nitish Kumar, Union minister Lalan Singh and deputy CM Samrat Choudhary at an event in Patna on Friday. — PTI

five-day visit to the NDA-ruled state. While Mr Bhagwat's visits and programmes are decided several months in advance, the Opposition Mahagathbandhan is viewing the visits of the

NDA taking on the Opposition Mahagathbandhan. While JD(U) leader and chief minister Nitish Kumar will be the chief ministerial candidate of the incumbent coalition, the NDA poll strategy, sources said, will be curated by the saffron poll strategists. Hindutva, sources said, will also be part of the election strategy but issue-based. Minorities are a deciding factor in several Assembly seats, but the numerically strong EBCs are a strong support base of Mr Kumar and the NDA. The Opposition has been raising questions over the arrival of several Hindutva icons and spiritual

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## Suffering from depression, IFS officer kills self in Delhi

BHASKAR HARI SHARMA  
NEW DELHI, MARCH 7

A 42-year-old Indian Foreign Services (IFS) officer ended his life by jumping from the fourth floor of a building in the Chanakyapuri area on Friday. No foul play is suspected, the police said. According to the police, the officer was a director at the overseas employments and protectorate general of emigrants in the ministry of external affairs. Sources said the 2011-

batch officer was undergoing treatment for depression, and his 70-year-old mother was staying with him on the first floor of the MEA Residential Complex in the Chanakyapuri area. “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. **■ More on Page 2**

■ More on Page 2

## K'taka HC cancels ED summons to CM wife

M.B. GIRISH  
BENGALURU, MARCH 7

The Karnataka high court on Friday cancelled the Enforcement Directorate's summons to chief minister Siddaramaiah's wife B.M. Parvathi and minister of urban development Byrathi Suresh in connection with the Mysore Urban Development Authority (MUDA) site allotment case. Justice

M. Nagaprasanna, while ordering cancellation of summons to Ms Parvathi and Ms Suresh, said, “The ED notices had no legal standing.” It may be recalled that the high court had temporarily put on hold the summons on January 27. The Enforcement Directorate (ED) had served notices to the two and asked them to appear at its Bengaluru office in connection with the irregularities in the plot allotment case. After the notices, Ms Parvathi and Mr Suresh moved the high court seeking cancellation of the ED notices. Ms Parvathi's counsel, senior advocate Sandesh Chouta, argued that the ED was conducting a parallel probe despite the case already being probed by the Lokayukta police and a special investigation team.

## India very high tariff nation: Trump repeats April 2 threat

AGE CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI, MARCH 7

For the second time in a week, US President Donald Trump targeted India on Friday and termed it a “very high tariff nation” while reiterating enforcement of reciprocal sanctions from April 2. “And the big one will be on April 2, when recipro-

cal tariffs, so if India or China, or any of the countries that really... India is a very high tariff nation.” Mr Trump also said right now, the tariffs are “temporary” and “small ones” but “the predominant tariffs” that will be reciprocal in nature, will start from April 2 and they will be a “big game changer for our country.” **■ More on Page 4**



IN BRIEF

Man wanted in 27 cases arrested

**New Delhi:** A 28-year-old man, involved in 27 heinous crimes, was arrested after a brief exchange of fire in a village Delhi's Rohini, the police said on Friday. The accused, Sher Khan alias Sheru, was also involved in a firing incident in the Narela area on December 17, 2024, he said. "In the Narela firing incident, Khan and his brother Sohail had opened fire amid a longstanding family rivalry with Javed's family. The exchange of gunfire had gone viral on social media. Many people were injured in the firing, including a 10-year-old child," additional commissioner of police (Crime) Sanjay Kumar Sain said. Sohail was arrested and sent to judicial custody, while Sher Khan had been absconding in the matter, he said. A non-bailable warrant was issued against him, and the police intensified his search. "On March 6, intelligence led police to his whereabouts in Rohini. A trap was laid, and Khan arrested after an encounter, injuring him in right leg," the police said.

Laundering probe: ED raids multiple sites

**New Delhi:** The Enforcement Directorate on Friday conducted multi-city raids on Friday as part of a money laundering investigation linked to alleged illegal remittances worth crores of rupees from India to some foreign shores using shell companies. The raids are being conducted in Jaipur, Udaipur and Ajmer, Mumbai, Surat and Noida, the official sources said. The case stems from a customs department complaint against certain persons operating from Jaipur in Rajasthan. The premises of some businessmen and linked persons are being searched as part of an investigation into alleged illegal remittances worth crores of rupees using shell or bogus companies, they said.

HEROIN MAKING UNIT BUSTED, 4 ARRESTED

**New Delhi:** A heroin manufacturing unit was busted in outer north Delhi's Samaypur Badli and four drug smugglers were arrested, the police said on Friday. On March 3, a raid was conducted at a drug manufacturing unit, leading to seizure of drugs and chemicals used in making heroin, DCP (outer north) Nidhin Valsan said. Nadeem Khan was arrested during the raid and 508 grams of heroin, 4 kg of sodium, 5 kg of acetic anhydride and other incriminating items were seized, he said. "This was the culmination of a detailed forward-backward investigation that traced the drug supply chain. On April 2, 2024, Rajender alias Yusuf (43) was arrested along with 520 grams of heroin and ₹5 lakh cash," the DCP said. "Two days later on April 4, further investigation led to the arrest of Bhure (30) from whom 100 grams of heroin was recovered and on April 5, Nawab Salam (40) was nabbed in another raid and 108 grams of heroin was seized from his possession," he said. A detailed forward-backward probe into the seizures led the police to a heroin manufacturing unit where Nadeem Khan was arrested, the police said. Yusuf is previously involved in two NDPS Act cases.

Gang making fake passports for gangsters busted

**AGE CORRESPONDENT**  
NEW DELHI, MARCH 7

The crime branch of the Delhi police has busted a fake passport syndicate allegedly involved in assisting gangsters and criminals flee abroad using forged identities, an official said on Friday.

The operation led to the arrest of the syndicate's mastermind, Nishant Kumar Saxena, along with six other associates, including a member of the Neeraj Bawana gang, he said.

"The crime branch had

Realtor held in ₹3,000-cr fraud case

**AGE CORRESPONDENT**  
NEW DELHI, MARCH 7

The ED has arrested the promoter of the Delhi-NCR-based realty group WTC Ashish Bhalla in a money laundering case linked to homebuyers' funds.

He was taken into custody under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act on Thursday and a special court in Gurgaon sent him to ED custody for six days, the official sources said here on Friday.

The Central financial probe agency alleged that after promising assured returns in exchange for investment against plots or commercial spaces, WTC "diverted" the funds of depositors and these were "siphoned off" to several shell companies to acquire lands at various

locations.

Hundreds of crores of rupees were also diverted to suspicious entities in Singapore whose beneficial ownership is with Bhalla's family members, the agency alleged.

During the probe, it was revealed that the WTC group collected more than ₹3,000 crore from various investors across several states, such as Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, Chandigarh, Ahmedabad and Punjab.

The ED action comes after the agency raided multiple premises of the WTC Group and Bhalla apart from that of the Bhutani Group and its promoter Ashish Bhutani on February 27.

It was alleged that Bhalla remained "absconding" during the raids and "induced" key

**■ HUNDREDS OF** crores of rupees were also diverted to suspicious entities in Singapore whose beneficial ownership is with Bhalla's family members, the agency alleged

persons against cooperating with the investigation.

He is a "key beneficiary" and the "mastermind" of the fraudulent activities of the group and has made unlawful gains through the scheme, the agency has alleged.

Bhutani Infra said in a statement last week that it severed all ties with the WTC Group earlier this month and "is now fully cooperating with the ED in its investigation".

This case arose from dozens of FIRs filed by

the economic offences wing of the Delhi and Faridabad police against the WTC group and its promoters including Ashish Bhalla, Suparna Bhalla, Abhijeet Bhalla, Bhutani Infra and others for cheating, criminal breach of trust and fraud against hundreds of homebuyers by the accused companies and persons, the ED said in an earlier statement.

These police cases were booked on the basis of complaints from "hundreds" of homebuyers and investors.

The ED said the police FIRs alleged that WTC Faridabad Infrastructure Private Limited and its promoters "lured" the general public to invest in their project in Sector 111-114 for the allotment of residential plots.

Felt like 'Nayak' after being picked as Delhi CM: Gupta

**New Delhi, March 7:** Delhi chief minister Rekha Gupta on Friday said she felt like the protagonist of the Hindi movie 'Nayak' after being selected for the post and asserted that it was not a "lottery" but an honour for all daughters of the country.

Addressing an event, CM Gupta, 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 the next two years.

The other priorities of her government are to ensure that Delhi people do not face water shortage in the summers and waterlogging during monsoon, she said.

On being asked about getting preference for the chief minister's post over several senior leaders and MLAs, CM 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.



Delhi chief minister Rekha Gupta during her visit to n Jan Aushadhi Kendra in New Delhi on Friday.

Our aim is a developed Delhi for a developed India," she said.

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

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

She further said that

Delhiites have now understood that the "double-engine" government of the BJP is the "best pathway" to make the national capital a developed city.

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 is a major challenge for which her government would work in a time-bound manner in consultation with experts.

— PTI

■ Jumps from Chanakyapuri official residence

Battling depression, IFS officer ends life

**BHASKAR HARI SHARMA**  
NEW DELHI, MARCH 7

A 42-year-old Indian Foreign Services (IFS) officer ended his life by jumping from the fourth floor of a building in the Chanakyapuri area here on Friday and no foul play is suspected.

According to the police, the officer was a director at the overseas employment and protectorate general of emigrants in the ministry of external affairs.

Sources said the officer was undergoing treatment for depression and his 70-year-old mother was staying with him on the first floor of the MEA Residential Complex in the Chanakyapuri area.

"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 officer said.

According to police, the officer is survived by his wife, two sons, aged eight and 13 years, mother and father.

The ministry of external affairs (MEA) said one of its officers, who was work-



A view of the MEA residential complex after an IFS officer ended his life allegedly by jumping from a building in Chanakyapuri on Friday.

— PTI

ing at its headquarters in Delhi, "passed away" on Friday morning but did not reveal his name.

The ministry said it was providing all possible assistance to the deceased's family and is in touch with the Delhi police.

The police received a PCR call about the incident at 6.20 am from the security guard of the residential complex.

The officer was taken to a hospital, where he was declared dead.

"His wife and children are staying in Dehradun. They have been informed about the incident and the family members are on their way to Delhi," said

the source, adding that the family was living in Dehradun because his children were studying there.

"The officer had no family dispute and had been battling depression since he came back from his posting in Belgium 10 months ago. Rawat has been living in Delhi for 10 months," a police source said.

Besides Belgium, the officer also had a posting in Myanmar.

A witness said that he was outside the complex when he heard a noise.

"We rushed inside the building and saw the officer's body lying on the ground," he said.

2 men held in hit and run case that killed DU student

**AGE CORRESPONDENT**  
NEW DELHI, MARCH 7

The Delhi police has apprehended two persons in a hit-and-run case that killed a Delhi University student who was working as a newspaper hawk, an official said on Friday.

The incident occurred on March 1 near KN Katju Marg, following which a case was registered and further investigation was taken up, the police said.

"With the help of CCTV footage, the police identified the offending vehicle, a blue Hyundai Venue. The driver, Saurabh Gupta (26), and passenger, Pankaj Gupta (41), from

Rohini's Sector 16, were taken into custody," the Delhi police said in statement.

The two admitted to the crime, and said that they were returning from Hanuman Temple in Yamuna Bazaar when they rammed into the student at the T-point and fled the scene, it added. They later got the car repaired in an attempt to cover up, the police said. The accused operate a children's play zone outlet in Paschim Vihar and are related as maternal uncle and nephew. Further investigation is underway, the police added.

Jain slams BJP plan to shut 22 mohalla clinics

**AGE CORRESPONDENT**  
NEW DELHI, MARCH 7

Senior AAP leader Satyendar Jain on Friday strongly criticised the reported plan of the BJP government in Delhi to shut down 250 mohalla clinics, calling it a move that would paralyse the city's healthcare infrastructure.

Addressing a press conference here, Mr Jain requested the government to increase rather than reduce the number of the neighbourhood clinics, which were introduced by the previous AAP government to provide accessible primary healthcare to Delhi's residents.

He emphasised that the mohalla clinics offer basic medical facilities, including doctor consultations and 365 types of free diagnostic tests. The initiative was designed to ensure that people do not have to travel long distances to hospitals and could instead receive medical care close to their homes, he said.

Mr Jain said that the total number of mohalla clinics currently stands at 550 and shutting those down would be a grave mistake that would harm the people of Delhi.

CCTVs to send SOS by women soon

**New Delhi, March 7:** 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, an officer said on Friday.

The 'Safe City' project, currently in the pipeline, aims to install high-resolution cameras across Delhi with live feeds beamed at local police stations, the offices of 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, the

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 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.

If a known criminal is detected in a specific area, an alert will immediately appear on the monitoring screens, he said. — PTI

Ex-PM Manmohan's family nod to memorial at Rashtriya Smriti Sthal

**AGE CORRESPONDENT**  
NEW DELHI, MARCH 7

The family of former Prime Minister Dr Manmohan Singh has given a nod for the creation of his memorial to the proposed site at the Rashtriya Smriti Sthal.

Sources close to the former Prime Minister's family said that it has written to the ministry of housing

and urban development, approving the site proposed and sending a letter of acceptance.

It has been learned that the three daughters of Dr Singh, also a former Union finance minister, and their husbands had earlier visited the proposed memorial site.

The memorial site, measuring around 900 square metres, is at the

Rashtriya Smriti Sthal, where the memorials of many former Prime Ministers and Presidents have been set up.

The memorial of former president Pranab Mukherjee is adjacent to the site proposed for Dr Singh. The next in the process would be the transfer of land in the name of a trust to be set up in memory of the former Prime Minister.

**New Okhla Industrial Development Authority**  
Administrative Building, Sector-6, Noida, (U.P.)  
website: [www.noidaauthorityonline.in](http://www.noidaauthorityonline.in)

**E-TENDER NOTICE**

E-Tenders are invited from firms/contractors registered with UPLC Lucknow for the following jobs against which bids can be uploaded and same shall be opened /downloaded as per schedule mentioned. The details and conditions of all tenders are available on Noida Authority's official website: [www.noidaauthorityonline.in](http://www.noidaauthorityonline.in) & <https://etender.up.nic.in>. Please ensure to see these websites for any changes/amendments/ corrigendum etc.


- 08/ Manager System Kyocera Mita-Toner/2024-25**, Procurement of Kyocera Mita Toner/Drum. Cost Rs. 15.67 Lacs. Inclusive of GST@18%
- 05/ Manager System/ Status Update Via WhatsApp and Email/2024-2025**, Status Update Via WhatsApp and Email Cost Rs. 9.88 Lacs. Inclusive of GST@18%

Which can be uploaded by date **14/03/2025 upto 5.00 PM**. Pre-qualification shall be opened/downloaded on date **17/03/2025 at 11.00 AM**.

**Manager (System)**

**CLEAN, GREEN, SAFE & SECURE NOIDA**

NORTHERN RAILWAY	
E-TENDER NOTICE	
No. ELS-SRE-T-53 dtd. 07/03/2025	
Open tender through E-tendering are invited by Sr. Divisional Electrical Engineer/TRS, Electric Loco Shed, Khanalpura Yard, Northern Railway, Saharanpur (Ambala Division) for and on behalf of the President of India from the registered tenderer on web site <a href="http://www.ireps.gov.in">www.ireps.gov.in</a> for the following work upto 11:00 hrs on the date of closing shown against the work and will be opened thereafter :-	
Open Tender No.	ELS-SRE-T-53
Name of work	Overhauling of E-70 brake system due for IOH schedule of WAG-9 locomotives.
Date of Closing/ Opening	01.04.2025
Approx. Cost.	Rs. 43,58,112/-
Earnest Money	Rs. 87,200/-
Completion period	06 Months
Validity period	60 days
Cost of tender form	"Free of cost" for downloading from IREPS & ₹ 3000/- for obtaining from Sr.DEE/TRS/SRE office.
1. Tenderer(s) should have Class-III Digital Signature Certificate to participate in E-Tendering of Works Tenders.	
2. Tenderer are required to upload self-attested scanned copies of all related eligibility documents as per conditions.	
3. Taxes & Charges will be applicable as per extant rule.	
4. For details, please log on IREPS website <a href="http://www.ireps.gov.in">www.ireps.gov.in</a>	
742/2025	
SERVING CUSTOMERS WITH A SMILE	

NORTHERN RAILWAY				
INVITATION OF TENDERS THROUGH				
E-PROCUREMENT SYSTEM				
Tender Notice No. 104/2024-2025			Date : 07.03.2025	
Principal Chief Materials Manager, Northern Railway, New Delhi-110001, for and on behalf of the President of India, invites e-tenders through e-procurement system for supply of the following items:-				
S. Tender N. No.	Brief Description	Qty.	Closing Date	
01/072400096	PIN (ELECTROPLATED) FOR ICF BOGIE	106948 NOS	27.03.25	
02/18241251A	THERMAL TICKET ROLLS OF 500 EACH	228245 ROLLS	01.04.25	
03/09252284	SLIDING DOOR ARRANGEMENT	322 NOS	07.04.25	
04/09252285	SLIDING DOOR ARRANGEMENT	816 NOS	07.04.25	
05/09252539	NEW DOORWAY STIFFENING CROSS BAR	6058 NOS	09.04.25	
NOTE -1. Vendors may visit the IREPS website i.e. <a href="http://www.ireps.gov.in">www.ireps.gov.in</a> for details. 2. No Manual offer will be entertained.				
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SERVING CUSTOMERS WITH A SMILE				
				



## In the last 11 Years...

- ♀ Sex ratio at birth increased from 918 to 933
- ♀ Nearly half of the admissions in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) are of women
- ♀ Sainik Schools and NDA opened for girls
- ♀ Permanent Commissioning of women in Armed Forces
- ♀ More than 48% of the Startups have atleast one woman director
- ♀ Around 70% beneficiaries of Mudra Yojana are women
- ♀ More than 10 crore rural women mobilised through Self-Help Groups
- ♀ Maternity leave increased from 12 weeks to 26 weeks
- ♀ 3.7 crore beneficiaries provided with ₹ 16,500 crore under PM Matru Vandana Yojana
- ♀ 74% PM Awas homes are owned by women
- ♀ More than 10 crore kitchens have Ujjwala gas connections
- ♀ More than 15 crore homes have Nal se Jal connections
- ♀ About 12 crore Toilets constructed
- ♀ Abolition of Triple Talaq
- ♀ Muslim women can go alone for Haj

**She Empowers,  
She Leads,  
She Inspires**

**Celebrating  
Women's  
Day,  
Today  
and  
Every Day!**



**Happy International Women's Day**

SHORT TAKES

Naxals target miners, 1 killed, another hurt

**Raipur:** A worker was killed and another injured in the IED explosion, triggered by Maoists, in an iron ore mine in Narayanpur district under south Bastar in Chhattisgarh, police said. This was the first time Maoists targeted miners in Bastar. As per the police, the Maoists had planted an IED in the rest shed built for the labourers working the mine in Amdai under Chote Dangar police station. Two mine workers were injured when the IED detonated, police said. The two injured miners were rushed to the district hospital in Narayanpur. While one of the injured mine workers Dilip Kumar Baghel succumbed to his injuries in the hospital, the other injured worker Harendra Nag was recuperating in the hospital. Maoists had targeted the security camp established near the mines in the past. In another development, 11 Maoists cumulatively carrying a bounty of ₹40 lakh on Friday surrendered before police in Narayanpur.

3 workers killed as coal mine caves in

**Bhopal:** Three workers were killed and several others feared trapped as the roof of a coal mine in Betul district in Madhya Pradesh caved in. The incident occurred in the Western Coalfield Limited (WCL)'s Pathakhhera area in the district late on Thursday, police said. Betul district superintendent of police Nischal Jharia confirmed the death of three workers in the incident. As per the police, a portion of the roof in the coalmine collapsed when several miners were working in particular area. However, the local SDM Abhijit Singh said that there were only three casualties in the incident. The three deceased have been identified as Govind Kasaria, Ram Prasad Chauhan, and Ramdeo Pondole (49). Postmortem of the bodies were done on Friday, police said.

CBI files fresh case against ex-FCI GM

**New Delhi:** The CBI has filed a fresh FIR against Banoth Prem Singh, an ex-general manager of Food Corporation of India arrested in a bribery case, after the unearthing of an illicit sum of over ₹3 crore, allegedly belonging to him, from a businessman. The information about the illicit money surfaced during the analysis of his WhatsApp exchanges by CBI sleuths who were probing him in an alleged bribery case, the officials said Friday. "The scrutiny of whatsapp chats, statement of bank account etc. Has established that the illegal money of Banoth Prem Singh to the tune of ₹3.47 crore were parked with G. Satyanarayan (a businessman) from time to time as mentioned in the handwritten notes shared by him out of which ₹2.47 crore were transferred to different accounts or given to different persons for different purposes," the CBI FIR said.

India rips into UK for 'licence' given to Khalistani extremists

■ **Continued From Page 1** UK. While the UK upholds the right to peaceful protest, any attempts to intimidate, threaten or disrupt public events are completely unacceptable." India had earlier on Thursday too condemned the breach of security during the visit of the foreign minister to Britain after a pro-Khalistani protester managed to get close to his car in London to desecrate the Indian flag despite the presence of so many British police officers. In a stern message, New Delhi had asked the British government to "fully live up to its diplomatic obligations" of ensuring proper security during such visits. New

Delhi had stated: "We have seen the footage of a breach of security during the visit of the foreign minister to the UK. We condemn the provocative activities of this small group of separatists and extremists. We deplore the misuse of democratic freedoms by such elements. We expect the host government in such cases to fully live up to their diplomatic obligations." Mr Jaishankar was participating in a discussion at Chatham House in London past midnight on Thursday (IST), outside of which pro-Khalistan extremists were chanting anti-India slogans through blaring loudspeakers, according to media

reports. These reports stated that after the foreign minister completed the Chatham House programme and was leaving the venue, one of the extremists managed to get near his car. India had in January this year also asked Britain to take strong action against anti-India elements indulging in violence and intimidation and who were obstructing the screening in the UK of the (well-known actress and BJP MP Kangana Ranaut's) film Emergency, adding then that such elements must be held accountable and that "freedom of speech and expression cannot be applied selectively".

Bihar polls to have Hindutva flavour

■ **Continued From Page 1** leaders in Bihar ahead of the Assembly polls. The main Opposition party, the RJD, has accused the NDA of trying to disturb the communal harmony but claimed that such visits by religious leaders will have no impact on the polls and that the Mahagathbandhan will oust the NDA government. During his sermons in Bihar, Dharendra Krishna

Shastri has been talking about how he has come to "awaken the Hindus of this country" and that he is "not fighting a personal battle but a battle for 150 crore Hindus across the world". Hailing Bihar as the "land of knowledge and the sacred land of Maa Janaki," Shastri has been talking about his "deep, ancient connection" with the place. Similarly, Sri Sri

Ravishankar, upon reaching Patna, met BJP leader and Bihar deputy chief minister Samrat Chaudhary and said that he felt as if he had returned home after a long time. Several senior BJP leaders, including Patna Sahib MP Ravi Shankar Prasad, former union minister Ram Kripal Yadav and former minister Shahnawaz Hussain, met him.

'India very high tariff nation': Trump repeats April 2 threat

SRIDHAR KUMARASWAMI NEW DELHI, MARCH 7

For the second time in a week, United States President Donald Trump targeted India on Friday and termed it a "very high tariff nation", while reiterating enforcement of reciprocal sanctions on various countries including India from April 2. The US President had accused India earlier this week of levying more than 100 per cent tariffs on American-made automobiles and had also targeted India on tariffs during the visit of Prime Minister Narendra Modi to Washington last month. Asked about the latest salvo, a cautious India on Friday said both nations

"are in the process of advancing discussions on a multi-sector bilateral trade agreement" that was announced last month during PM Modi's visit. Mr Trump was quoted as saying, "And the big one will be on April 2, when reciprocal tariffs, so if India or China, or any of the countries that really... India is a very high tariff nation." Asked about it at his weekly media briefing on Friday in the national capital, MEA spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal said, "During the PM's visit to the US in February 2025, both sides announced plans to negotiate a mutually beneficial, multi-sector bilateral trade agreement (BTA). Commerce and Industries Minister (Piyush Goyal) was in the

■ **OUR OBJECTIVE** via BTA is to strengthen and deepen India-US two-way trade across the goods and services sector, increase market access, reduce tariff US and met his counterparts." "The two governments are in the process of advancing discussions on a multi-sector bilateral trade agreement." Our objective through the BTA is to strengthen and deepen India-US two-way trade across the goods and services sector, increase market access, reduce tariff and non-tariff barriers, and deepen supply chain integration between the two countries." This comes about three

weeks after Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to the US where the two nations had agreed to negotiate a free trade pact by Autumn this year. In his address to the US Congress earlier on Wednesday, the US President also alleged unfair trade practices by the European Union, China, Brazil, Mexico and Canada, besides India. President Trump had told the US Congress, "If you don't make your product in America; however, under the Trump administration, you will pay a tariff, and in some cases, a rather large one. Other countries have used tariffs against us for decades, and now it's our turn to start using them against those countries."

Violent extremists' release worrying: MEA India flags concerns for Hindus' safety in B'desh

SRIDHAR KUMARASWAMI NEW DELHI, MARCH 7

India on Friday said it is "concerned about deterioration of the security situation in Bangladesh exacerbated by release of violent extremists" and expressed dissatisfaction over the inadequate action taken by Dhaka on attacks against Hindus and other minorities in that country. New Delhi also said both sides had also decided to "rationally" the portfolio of Indian developmental assistance programmes since the Bangladesh security situation has "affected the pace of implementation of some of these projects". Pressing for execution of projects in a "time bound

manner". New Delhi said it plans "to take these projects forward subject to obtaining the committed support and pending clearances from the Bangladesh side". It may be recalled that there have been strains in bilateral ties between the two neighbours ever since Sheikh Hasina was ousted as Bangladesh PM last year that was followed by installation of an anti-India and pro-Pakistan interim government in Dhaka led by Nobel laureate Muhammad Yunus that was backed by the Bangladesh Army, student protesters and religious radicals in that country. At his weekly media briefing, MEA spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal said, "We support a stable,

peaceful, inclusive and progressive Bangladesh in which all issues are resolved through democratic means and by holding inclusive and participatory elections. We remain concerned about the deteriorating law & order situation, further exacerbated by the release of violent extremists, who were sentenced for serious crimes." Regarding attacks on Hindus and other minorities in the troubled neighbouring nation, he said, "We have repeatedly underlined that it is the responsibility of the interim government of Bangladesh to protect the Hindus and other minorities, as well as their properties and religious institutions."

Doon Prez estate to get world-class park

PRITHVIRAJ SINGH DEHRADUN, MARCH 7

The nearly 187-year-old Dehradun-based presidential retreat "Rashtrapati Ashiana" will feature a hi-tech modern park with world-class sports and recreational facilities. Set to become a major tourist attraction, the park will be inaugurated on June 20 this year. President Droupadi Murmu will lay the foundation for the park and dedicate it to the people of Uttarakhand and visitors to Dehradun on the same day. The "Rashtrapati Ashiana" has a legacy of over 200 years. Established in 1838, it initially served as a summer camp for the horses of the governor general's bodyguard in British India from May to July. After Independence, it was renamed the

President's Bodyguard. Currently, the nearly 90-hectare President's Bodyguard Estate is closely guarded by central forces with limited accessibility. The proposed park inside the President's Bodyguard Estate will feature a multi-activity zone, long cycling tracks, world-class sports facilities, a children's play area, walking and jogging tracks, a nature trail within its forest cover, and various water features. Additional secretary of the President's Secretariat Rajesh Gupta shared these details during a meeting with state government officials and the Dehradun district administration on Friday. The Uttarakhand government has been designated as the nodal agency for developing the park.

Prez: Must act decisively for Viksit Bharat by 2047

'Benefits of growth must reach disadvantaged, marginalised'

AGE CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, MARCH 7



Droupadi Murmu

The global landscape is in a state of flux and India is undergoing transformation to become Viksit Bharat by 2047, said President Droupadi Murmu on Friday, underlined an urgent need to act decisively and move ahead with unwavering commitment to accelerate progress. Addressing a group of state civil services officers who called on her at the Rashtrapati Bhavan, Ms Murmu said the decisions that they will take and policies that they will implement should contribute to the development of the country and the people. The output and outcome of the work of

siveness in their functioning. President Murmu said the benefits of development should reach all sections of society, especially the disadvantaged and marginalised. She further the essence of governance lies in responsiveness and sensitivity towards the needs of the people. "A citizen-centric administration prioritises the welfare of people, focusing on the poor and deprived. You should ensure that policies and programs are implemented in a way, which addresses their concerns effectively." "This requires an empathetic approach, robust feedback mechanisms, and, fast and efficient redressal systems," the President said.

Cong's key Budget Session meet Mon

Party plans to rake up duplicate voter identity cards issue in big way

**New Delhi, March 7:** Senior Congress leaders will meet here on Monday evening to plan the party's strategy during the second part of the Budget session of Parliament. The Congress' parliamentary strategy group will meet on Monday evening to evolve the party's strategy in cornering the government on key issues, sources said. Congress Parliamentary Party chairperson Sonia Gandhi, Congress president and Leader of Opposition in the Rajya Sabha Mallikarjun Kharge and LoP in the Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi, besides

other senior party leaders from both houses, would attend the meeting. Congress's deputy leader in the LS Gaurav Gogoi and deputy leader in the RS Pramod Tiwari would also attend the meeting. The issues that the Congress is seeking to raise during the Budget session include the duplicate voter I-card issue, which the party wants to rake up in a big way during the upcoming session. Sources said the Congress is also seeking to oppose the Waqf (Amendment) Bill, after the tabling of the report of the joint committee of

■ **THE CONGRESS** is seeking to oppose the Waqf (Amendment) Bill, after the tabling of report of the joint committee of Parliament that was scrutinising it Parliament that was scrutinising it. The second part of the Budget session of Parliament is scheduled to begin on March 10 and may conclude on April 4. Some other parties are also likely to raise the duplicate voter I-card issue during the upcoming session of Parliament. Congress general secretary Jairam Ramesh said

his party will follow "all democratic routes" to oppose the Waqf (Amendment) Bill when it comes up for passage in Parliament. He said the INDIA opposition bloc is against the "content, intent and extent" of the proposed legislation. Ahead of the start of the second half of the Budget session, Ramesh said there will be "extensive consultation" among the INDIA bloc constituents to jointly oppose the bill and the leaders of opposition in both Houses of Parliament will coordinate with the parties on the issue soon. — PTI

Covid still haunts woman who performed 15,000 funerals

RABINDRA NATH CHOUDHURY MANDSAUR (MADHYA PRADESH), MARCH 7

For 58-year-old Nirmala Devi, the "Mukti Dham sevak", death has become a routine part of life. For the past two decades, she has been performing last rites at the city crematorium in Mandasaur, Madhya Pradesh. But nothing compares to the harrowing scenes she witnessed during the Covid-19 pandemic. Nirmala lost both her sons — both in their 30s — within a year during the pandemic.

The tragedy left her devastated, but the overwhelming loss of life during that time made her a "zinda bhoot" (live ghost). "I no longer feel anything when grieving families bring their loved ones for cremation," she says. "I burn the bodies mechanically, believing that a soul is truly liberated only when the last rites are completed." Nirmala still shudders when she recalls the horrifying scenes at the crematorium during the peak of the pandemic. "There were long queues of hearses waiting outside to unload bodies. My phone



Nirmala Devi

would ring constantly through the night with calls informing me about incoming bodies from different

places in and outside Madhya Pradesh," she remembers. During this period, Nirmala and a "lakdiwala" (a man responsible for arranging logs for cremations) worked tirelessly to ensure proper funerals. Most bodies arrived with only hospital staff, as families were either absent or too afraid to come. Nirmala lost her two sons during the corona period. But the human tragedies she had witnessed during that period had hardened her so much that loss of her two sons could hardly move her.

She felt the pain of loss when the Covid-19 pandemic started receding and deaths due to Covid-19 started declining. Loss of her two sons then devastated her, but Nirmala recovered from the shock very quickly since she realised that she had to shoulder the responsibility of their widows and children. Nirmala lost her husband 20 years ago and worked small jobs to raise her two sons. After his passing, she decided to dedicate herself to social service by performing funerals at the crematorium.

Modi reaffirms pledge to low-cost medicines, cure

■ **Continued From Page 1** transformed healthcare with the mantra of "Achhi Bhi, Sasti Bhi", ensuring high-quality and affordable medicines for all. Sharing a video message on X, Mr Nadda urged everyone to visit Jan Aushadhi Kendras and try the medicines to experience their quality and affordability firsthand. He said this initiative provides essential medicines at 50-90 per cent lower prices. The Union health minister said more than 15,000 Jan Aushadhi Kendras are functioning in the country, which are selling inexpensive medicines to more than 10-lakh people,

leading to savings of Rs 30,000 crores. The minister said that Jan Aushadhi Kendras sell 2,047 medicines and 300 surgical items, covering diverse therapeutic needs. "Unlike free medicine schemes, the PMBJP maintains sustainability through stringent quality checks, competitive procurement and a robust supply chain managed by PMBI (Pharmaceuticals & Medical Devices Bureau of India). To promote entrepreneurship and inclusivity, special incentives are provided for the SC/ST communities, women and businesses in remote areas," he stated.

Mr Nadda also visited Jan Aushadhi Kendra at AIIMS, Bilaspur and interacted with beneficiaries on the occasion. The PMBI, the implementing agency of PMBJP, is celebrating the seventh Jan Aushadhi Diwas 2025, which commenced with Jan Aushadhi Jan Chetna Abhiyan on March 1 across the country and ended with the celebration of Jan Aushadhi Diwas on March 7. The newly formed BJP government in Delhi also vowed to establish Jan Aushadhi Kendras under the PMBJP across the national capital. Delhi chief minister Rekha Gupta visited a Jan Aushadhi Kendra in Ashok

Vihar, where she explained the benefits of the project and encouraged people to avail themselves of the benefit. "Delhi government will implement the Pradhan Mantri Bhartiya Jan Aushadhi Pariyojana across the city, ensuring the establishment of Jan Aushadhi Kendras throughout Delhi. The main objective of this initiative is to provide affordable medicines to the people," the CM said. Slamming the previous AAP government for failing to implement the Pradhan Mantri Jan Aushadhi Yojana in Delhi, Ms Gupta said the government will now intro-

duce this beneficial scheme to ensure that citizens get access to high-quality medicines. "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 Re 1, promoting hygiene and better health for women," said Ms Gupta. The CM also announced that the Delhi government will ensure that at least one Jan Aushadhi Kendra is established within a 500-meter radius of every government hospital.



SHORT TAKES

MoD inks \$248m deal for T-72 tank engine

New Delhi: Defence ministry has signed a contract with Rosoboronexport (RoE), Russian Federation worth \$248 million for procurement of 1000 HP engines for T-72 tanks in fully formed, completely knocked down and semi knocked down conditions. T-72 is the mainstay of the tank fleet of the Army which is at present fitted with a 780 HP engine. Equipping the existing fleet of T-72 Tanks with 1000 HP engine will enhance the battlefield mobility and offensive capability of the Army. The deal also includes transfer of technology (ToT) from M/s RoE to Armoured Vehicles Nigam Limited (Heavy Vehicle Factory), Avadi, Chennai, for integration and subsequent licensed production of engines under ToT to boost the "Make in India" initiative in defence sector.

Mukhtar's son Abbas out on 6-week bail

New Delhi: Supreme Court on Friday granted six weeks interim bail to Uttar Pradesh MLA Abbas Ansari in a case under the Gangsters Act. A bench of Justices Surya Kant and N. Kottiswar Singh directed Mr Ansari, son of late gangster Mukhtar Ansari, to stay in his official accommodation in Lucknow and seek prior permission from authorities before visiting his constituency in Mau. The reprieve from the Supreme Court will lead to Mr Ansari's release from Kasganj Jail with the legislator already being on bail in all other criminal cases against him. The apex court asked Mr Ansari not to leave Uttar Pradesh without court's prior permission and inform police authorities a day before appearing in different courts in the cases against him. The bench sought a status report from the police on compliance of the bail conditions by Mr Ansari in six weeks.

SC to hear Pegasus pleas on April 22

New Delhi: Supreme Court on Friday said it would hear on April 22 pleas seeking a probe into the alleged unauthorised use of Pegasus spyware for surveillance of journalists and politicians. A bench of Justices Surya Kant and N. Kottiswar Singh deferred the hearing after solicitor-general Tushar Mehta sought an adjournment saying the matter had come up after a long time. Senior advocate Kapil Sibal, appearing for the petitioners, said only two petitions were listed on Friday and there were other connected petitions, which required a hearing. The bench directed the registry to fix all the matters on April 22. On August 25, 2022, the SC had said the panel appointed by it to probe the unauthorised use of Pegasus said that it couldn't be established that the Israeli spyware was used.

FOREIGN SECY & RUSSIAN LEADER MEET IN MOSCOW

AGE CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, MARCH 7

Foreign secretary Vikram Misri on Friday held bilateral foreign office consultations with Russian deputy foreign minister Andrey Rudenko in Moscow during which "the two sides reviewed the entire gamut of bilateral ties and also shared perspectives on regional and global issues of mutual interest". The visit is being seen as a preparatory one ahead of the expected visit of Russian President Vladimir Putin to New Delhi this year. New Delhi said, "Both sides took stock of progress on implementation of decisions taken at the 22nd annual summit held in Moscow in July 2024, the meeting in Kazan on the sidelines of the 16th Brics Summit between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and President Vladimir Putin, the 25th session of the India-Russia intergovernmental commission on trade, economic, scientific, technological and cultural cooperation held in New Delhi in November 2024, and other high level engagements." It added, "The last round of foreign office consultations was held in New Delhi in November 2023."



Vikram Misri

Eco survey: Maharashtra economy to grow at 7.3%

SONU SHRIVASTAVA MUMBAI, MARCH 7

Maharashtra's economy is expected to grow at 7.3 per cent over 2024-25, as per the economic survey report (ESR). It has been below 0.7 per cent compared to the last financial year (2023-24). The Maharashtra deputy chief minister Ajit Pawar on Friday tabled the ESR in the state Assembly. The ESR said that the country's economy is expected to grow at 6.5 per cent. The agricultural and allied activities sector is expected to grow by 8.7 per cent, which is higher by 5.4 per cent compared last year.

As per the ESR, the state GDP rose to ₹45,31,518 crore in 2024-25 from ₹4055,847 crore last year, while the per capita income of Maharashtra grew to ₹3,09,340 from ₹2,78,681 last year.

However, Maharashtra, which is standing at fourth rank in terms of per capita income in the country, is lagging behind Telangana (₹3.56 lakh), Karnataka (₹3.32 lakh), Tamil Nadu (₹3.15 lakh) in per capita income.

Twelve out of the state's 36 districts remain below the national per capita income of ₹1,88,892 in 2023-24. The twelve districts include Jalgaon, Gondia, Nanded, Jalna, Beed, Parbhani, Yavatmal, Gadchiroli, Buldhana, Washim and Nandurbar.

The state's revenue is expected to increase to ₹4,99,463 crore for 2024-25 from the preliminary estimate of ₹4,86,116 crore in 2023-24.

TN youth can take CAPF exams in Tamil, says minister Start courses in Tamil: Shah to Stalin

AGE CORRESPONDENT ARAKKONAM, MARCH 7

Union home minister Amit Shah said on Friday the Union government will conduct recruitment examination for Central Armed Police Forces (CAPF) in regional languages. Addressing the 56th Raising Day Parade of the Central Industrial Security Force (CISF) in Thakkolam, the minister said the youth can now take the CAPF recruitment exams in Tamil and other languages which are included in the Eighth Schedule of the Constitution.

Turning the tables on chief minister M.K. Stalin, who has been running a campaign against



Women take part in a walkathon on the eve of the International Women's Day in Bikaner on Friday.

Modi interested in tareef, not concerned with tariffs

Jaishankar speaking like American envoy: Ramesh

AGE CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, MARCH 7

The Congress on Friday hit out at Prime Minister Narendra Modi over the proposed tackling of tariffs by the US.

Congress leader Jairam Ramesh accused Mr Modi of preferring praise to tackling tariffs, questioning his "56-inch chest" in handling US pressure on reciprocal tariffs. He said Congress would raise the issue in the upcoming Budget Session.

The Congress leader also alleged that external affairs minister S. Jaishankar has been speaking like an American envoy and a spokesperson for that country. "Our Prime Minister wants to hear only 'tareef (praise)', he is not concerned about tariffs. 'Tareef kum, aur tariff pe baat kijiye (talk about the tariffs issue and less about your praise),'

We have negotiated a tariff schedule. About 170 countries have negotiated a trade agreement which became the World Trade Organisation in 1995. It took about 10 years to negotiate.

— Jairam Ramesh, Congress leader

Mr Ramesh said, adding that Mr Trump is redoing the entire rules of international trade and asserting that the US President's whole idea of reciprocal tariffs is "bizarre".

"We have negotiated a tariff schedule. About 170 countries have negotiated a trade agreement which became the World Trade Organisation in 1995. It took about 10 years to negotiate. Now, Mr Trump comes up with his own bizarre notion of what constitutes international trade," Mr Ramesh said.



Amit Shah

the BJP-led Union government's alleged plans to impose Hindi on the state, Mr Shah requested him to start medical and engineering courses in Tamil. "This will not only strengthen Tamil as a mother tongue, but also benefit students studying in Tamil medium. It will also provide equal opportunities for children educated in the Tamil medi-

um," Mr Shah said.

The culture of Tamil Nadu has played a significant role in strengthening India's culture in many ways, the Union home minister said.

"Whether it is in introducing administrative reforms, achieving spiritual heights, setting educational standards or promoting the message of unity and integrity of the country, Tamil Nadu has greatly strengthened Indian culture in every field. The Tamil language, culture and traditions are invaluable jewels of India's culture, and the entire country acknowledges this," Mr Shah said.

He announced that the CISF regional training centre in Thakkolam will be

named after the great warrior of the Chola dynasty Adita Chola. "Adita Chola created numerous tales of valor and sacrifice and attained martyrdom and advanced the glorious traditions of the Chola Empire," he said.

Earlier, the Union home minister launched the CISF's annual magazine, Sentinel, and honored 10 personnel with the President's police medal, two with the Jeevan Raksha Medal and 10 with the Gallantry Medal.

He laid the foundation stone for six different infrastructure and development projects worth ₹88 crore to improve the health, smooth duty performance, and facilities for CISF personnel.

Modi to visit Mauritius March 11, to be chief guest on National Day

AGE CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, MARCH 7

Prime Minister Narendra Modi will make a two-day State visit next week to the southern Indian Ocean nation of Mauritius starting Tuesday to attend the National Day celebrations of Mauritius on 12th March as the chief guest. A contingent of Indian defence forces will participate in the celebrations along with a ship from the Indian Navy. The Prime Minister last visited Mauritius in 2015.

The MEA said, "On the invitation of the Prime Minister of Mauritius Dr N a v a n d r a Ramgoolam, Prime Minister Narendra Modi will pay a state visit to



Narendra Modi

Mauritius on March 11-12 to attend the National Day celebrations of Mauritius on 12th March as the chief guest. A contingent of Indian defence forces will participate in the celebrations along with a ship from the Indian Navy. The Prime Minister last visited Mauritius in 2015.

The MEA added, "During the visit, the Prime Minister will call

on the President of Mauritius, meet the (Mauritius) Prime Minister, and hold meetings with senior dignitaries and leaders of political parties in Mauritius."

"Prime Minister will also interact with the members of the Indian-origin community there and inaugurate the Civil Service College and the Area Health Centre, both built with India's grant assistance. A number of memorandums of understanding (MoUs) will be exchanged during the visit," the MEA said in its statement.

Fadnavis govt reconstitutes Mitra, includes NCP, BJP MLAs Shinde ally ousted from policy think tank

BHAGWAN PARAB MUMBAI, MARCH 7

In a blow to Eknath Shinde, chief minister Devendra Fadnavis has removed Shiv Sena leader's loyalist Ajay Asher from the board of the Maharashtra Information and Transformation (Mitra), which is the state's version of the Niti Aayog. Mr Asher is also a prominent

builder from Shinde's bastion Thane.

The move has come amidst ongoing tussle between Mr Fadnavis and Mr Shinde, as the DCM is reportedly not happy over the CM's move to reverse his several decisions.

According to the resolution issued by the Fadnavis-led government, the governing body of Mitra has been reconstituted by appointing two



Ajay Asher

new members — Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) MLA Dilip Walse-Patil and Bharatiya

Janata Party (BJP) MLA Rana Jagjitsinha Patil — after dropping Mr Ashar.

Mr Shinde's another supporter Rajesh Kshirsagar, however, has been retained. While former IAS officer Praveen Pardeshi is CEO of Mitra, deputy chief ministers and the finance minister are co-chairpersons.

Mitra was founded in 2022 when Mr Shinde was chief minister.



Tamil Nadu deputy chief minister Udhayanidhi Stalin during the distribution of house site pattas in Tamil Nadu's Tiruvurur district on Friday.

rata calculation as well as raising an empty rhetoric that no state would face a decrease in its seats, while reports suggested that delimitation was being considered based on population, the CM said.

Inviting the parties to join the JAC comprising Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana and Karnataka in the south, West Bengal and Odisha in the east and Punjab in the north, Mr Stalin asked the parties to nominate a senior representative each and also to attend the meeting in Chennai on March 22.

"We should not be thus penalised for effectively

controlling population growth and upholding national development goals," he said, adding that the essence of India's democracy rested on its federal character, a system that gave each state its rightful voice while honoring the sacred unity as one nation.

After the delimitation exercises in 1952, 1963, and 1973, the process was frozen in 1976 through the 42nd Amendment until the first census after 2000 to encourage population control, but as population disparities persisted, the 84th Amendment extended the freeze until the first census after 2026, he said.

Will fix duplicate voter IDs issue in next 3 mnths: EC

VINEETA PANDEY NEW DELHI, MARCH 7

Following an uproar over duplicate EPIC numbers, the Election Commission on Friday said it will address the decades long issue and remove discrepancies within 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 TMC, which had raised the issue, however, said though the EC has finally accepted its "guilt", the poll body has still not revealed how many duplicate EPICs currently exist.

The Congress, while reacting the EC move, said this reaffirms what the party has been asserting that "voter lists under the current ECI are dubious and flawed".

"As regards the issue of duplicate EPIC numbers, the commission has already taken cognisance 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

THE TMC, however, said though EC has finally accepted its "guilt", the poll body has still not revealed how many duplicate EPICs currently exist

polling station only and nowhere else. 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 2000 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. 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 EC said.

Fadnavis: Not Uddhav, won't stall projects

AGE CORRESPONDENT MUMBAI, MARCH 7

Maharashtra chief minister Devendra Fadnavis on Friday said he was not Uddhav Thackeray to stall ongoing projects.

Mr Fadnavis slammed the Opposition for allegedly praising Gujarat's investment inflow, asserting that Maharashtra has attracted three times more investment than its neighbouring state.

He was speaking on the motion thanking governor C.P. Radhakrishnan for his address to the joint session of the state legislature.

quick BITES

INDICATORS		%
Sensex	74,332.58	-0.01
Nifty 50	22,552.50	0.03
S&P 500*	5,721.62	-0.29
Dollar (₹)	86.87	-0.28
Pound Sterling (₹)	112.41	0.20
Euro (₹)	94.36	0.311
Gold (10gm)* (₹)	85,970*64	-0.07
Brent crude (\$/bbl)*	70.50	1.50
IN 10-Yr bond yield	6.688	0.007
US 10-Yr T-bill yield*	4.271	-0.011

\* As of 8:30 PM IST

Patanjali's food processing unit to begin ops

Patanjali Ayurved on Friday said its mega food processing plant which has been set up with an investment of ₹1,500 crore in Nagpur will begin operations on Sunday. The park will have fruits and vegetable processing units with a capacity of 800 tonnes per day. Patanjali Ayurved managing director Acharya Balkrishna said that the orange processing plant in Nagpur is the biggest and most advanced in Asia.

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Women reshaping cos boards

Now hold 19% of board seats in the top 100 firms, up from 15% in 2019

RAVI RANJAN PRASAD MUMBAI, MARCH 7

There is a growing participation of women in corporate leadership, reshaping boardrooms across India. Today, several listed and unlisted companies of national importance have multiple women directors, bringing diversity and strategic insight to board matters. In many family-owned businesses, aspiring women from within the family are also joining boardrooms, strengthening their presence.

For instance, entities like NSE, BSE, Maruti Suzuki have two women directors, Apollo Hospitals has six, Reliance Industries has three and Godrej Industries four women directors(4), among others.

Apollo Hospitals stands out with six women directors - two independent directors, Rama Bijapurkar and V. Kavitha Dutt, alongside four family members: Preetha Reddy, Shobana Kamini, Sun-eeta Reddy, and Sangita Reddy, daughters of founder Prathap C. Reddy. Reliance Industries has three women directors, including Isha Ambani, daughter of Mukesh Ambani. Godrej Industries also has four women directors, including two family members (Tanya Dubash and Nisaba Godrej).

Other companies with multiple women directors include Piramal Enterprises, HCL Technologies, Godrej Agrovet, Godrej Consumer Products, Cummins India, Asian Paints, Colgate-Palmolive, and AstraZeneca's Indian arm. Among PSUs, ONGC

MORE POWER

INDIA IS HOME TO OVER 7,000 ACTIVE WOMEN-LED START-UPS, ACCOUNTING FOR 7.5% OF START-UPS IN THE COUNTRY.

MORE THAN 8.9 CRORE URBAN WOMEN REMAINS OUT OF LABOUR MARKET IN 2023-2024 DESPITE A 10% JUMP IN THEIR EMPLOYMENT IN LAST 6 YEARS.

INDIA is failing to utilise skills of over 1.9 crore graduate-educated urban women due to personal choices or constraints from social norms.

WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION in work-linked, work-integrated, and direct admission programmes more than doubled, said TeamLease Edtech.

INDIA IS experiencing an encouraging increase in women's involvement in higher education.

FACTORS SUCH as caregiving responsibilities, lack of flexible work arrangements and commuting challenges continue to prevent many highly qualified women from fully participating in the economy.

OVERALL NUMBER of job postings for women in India showed a slight uptick in 2023 (0.4%), but in 2024 witnessed a 5.3% drop.

WOMEN in blue-collar jobs in India continue to face systemic hurdles that limit their career growth, as their participation in the workforce remains predominantly in lower-skilled, lower-paid, and less stable roles, a report said on Friday.

INDIAN TECH START-UP ECOSYSTEM RANKS SECOND AFTER THE US IN TERMS OF FUNDING RAISED BY COMPANIES WITH WOMEN FOUNDERS.

IN 2024, five women-led start-ups went public: MobiKwik, Usha Financial, Tunwal, Interiors and More, and LawSikho.

A BOARDROOM without women isn't just incomplete; it's a missed opportunity for innovation, balance, and sustainable growth.

—MANISHA KHADGE, CMO, Mindbowser

had two women directors, LIC and NTPC has one women director each while IRCTC had none.

"It's heartening to see women's representation on corporate boards in India steadily rising — women now hold 19 per cent of board seats in the

top 100 firms, up from 15 percent in 2019. The Companies Act 2013, which mandates at least one woman director in certain companies, has been a catalyst for change," said Puneet Gupta, MD, Protiviti Member Firm for India. "Despite SEBI's man-

date, nearly 20 per cent of NSE-listed cos still lack a woman independent director. A boardroom without women isn't just incomplete; it's a missed opportunity for innovation, balance, and growth," said Manisha Khadge, CMO, Mindbowser.

US brings crypto strategic reserve

Washington, March 7: U.S. President Donald Trump has signed an executive order to establish a strategic reserve of cryptocurrencies by using tokens already owned by the government, disappointing some in market who had hoped for a firm plan to buy new tokens.

The announcement, made ahead of a meeting with crypto executives at the White House later on Friday, sent the price of bitcoin down by around 5 per cent to \$85,000. In early European trading on Friday, bitcoin recovered to trade at \$89,200.

A 'Strategic Bitcoin Reserve' will capitalise with bitcoin owned by the government that was seized as part of criminal or civil asset forfeiture proceedings, the White House crypto czar, David Sacks, said in a post on X. The order kept open the



possibility of the government buying bitcoin in future. The U.S. commerce and treasury secretaries are authorised to develop budget-neutral strategies for acquiring additional bitcoin, provided that those strategies impose no incremental costs on American taxpayers, a factsheet on the White House website said.

"The significance of this executive order is mainly symbolic, as it marks the first time Bitcoin is formally recognised as a reserve asset of the US government," said Andrew O'Neill, digital assets MD at S&P Global Ratings. — Reuters

Focus on creating products: IT min

MADHUSUDAN SAHOO NEW DELHI, MARCH 7

Union information and technology minister Ashwini Vaishnaw on Friday challenged the Indian technology giants to develop an operating system for mobile phones in the country.

"I would like to give this challenge to our big tech companies like Infosys, TCS and Wipro take up this challenge and develop the operating system for

mobile for our country," he said at an event here. "You (tech giants) have been doing well in providing services, and time has come when we must become a product nation. Come up with new solutions. We will support. Look at not only solving today's problems, but also lay the foundation for solving future problems as well," Vaishnaw said. He urged the companies to develop technologies, and products as well.

WORLD

SHORT TAKES



AT 108, JAPANESE BARBER CROWNED WORLD'S OLDEST

Tokyo, March 7: A 108-year-old Japanese woman has been certified the world's oldest barber, Guinness World Records said — and she has pledged to keep working until at least 110.

Shitsui Hakoishi, born in 1916, decided to become a barber at the age of 14 when a friend's mother asked if she wanted to become an apprentice at a hair salon in Tokyo.

She still holds her own scissors, and took part this week in a celebration ceremony reportedly attended by her two children, an 85-year-old daughter and an 81-year-old son.

"I'm very happy. My heart is full," she said at the ceremony in Nakagawa, a town in the eastern region of Tochigi.

DOCTOR: POPE FACES LONG FIGHT FOR RECOVERY

Vatican City, March 7: Three weeks to the day after being admitted to Rome's Gemelli hospital, Pope Francis is still struggling to shake off the double pneumonia that has battered his already fragile health. The 88-year-old pontiff has not been seen in public since entering hospital, and the Vatican has given no indication of when he might come out, or when he could resume anything like his usually demanding work schedule.

The road to recovery is likely to be long and fraught with danger, said medical experts who are not involved in his care and were speaking in general terms about his condition.

"I've seen patients who have spent months in hospital in this sort of situation. Of course he can recover, but the chances for a negative outcome are high," said Professor Christoph Lange, secretary general of the International Union against Tuberculosis and Lung Disease.

Trump warns new Russia sanctions over attacks

Asks both the nations to get to table before it is too late

Washington, March 7: President Donald Trump on Friday threatened new sanctions and tariffs on Russia over its bombardments of Ukraine, after previously suspending US aid to Kyiv in a stated bid to encourage diplomacy.

"Based on the fact that Russia is absolutely 'pounding' Ukraine on the battlefield right now, I am strongly considering large scale Banking Sanctions, Sanctions, and Tariffs on Russia until a Cease Fire and FINAL SETTLEMENT AGREEMENT ON PEACE IS REACHED," Trump wrote on his Truth Social platform.

"To Russia and Ukraine, get to the table right now, before it is too late," he wrote. Trump's threat comes after Russia launched major drone and missile attacks Friday on Ukraine's energy infrastructure.

Days earlier, the Trump administration suspended US military aid deliveries and intelligence-sharing with Ukraine after a dispute with President Volodymyr Zelenskyy. Trump and Vice President J.D. Vance on February 28 berated Zelenskyy in a tel-



I AM STRONGLY considering large scale Banking Sanctions, Sanctions, and Tariffs on Russia until a Cease Fire and FINAL SETTLEMENT AGREEMENT ON PEACE IS REACHED — DONALD TRUMP, US President

Ukraine, US to meet in Jeddah next week

Riyadh, March 7: Saudi Arabia on Friday welcomed a meeting between the United States and Ukraine due next week in Jeddah, describing it as part of the kingdom's efforts "to end the Ukrainian crisis". Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy had announced he would travel to Saudi Arabia on Monday to meet with the Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, a day before

the scheduled talks between the US and the Ukrainian delegations. "Saudi Arabia welcomes the planned meeting between the United States and Ukraine, which will be held in Jeddah next week," the Saudi foreign ministry said in a statement, highlighting "Saudi Arabia's efforts to achieve lasting peace in order to end the Ukrainian crisis". — AFP

evised meeting at the White House, accusing him of ingratitude for billions of dollars in US weapons.

Trump has since faced harsh criticism from allies and domestic opponents. — AFP

TRUMP CHANGES COURSE, DELAYS SOME TARIFFS

Washington, March 7: President Donald Trump on Thursday postponed 25 per cent tariffs on many imports from Mexico and some imports from Canada for a month amid widespread fears of the economic fallout from a broader trade war.

The White House insists its tariffs are about stopping the smuggling of fentanyl, but the taxes proposed by Trump have caused a gaping wound in the decades-old North American trade partnership. Trump's tariff plans have also caused the stock market to sink and alarmed US consumers.

In addition to his claims about fentanyl, Trump has insisted that the tariffs could be resolved by fixing the trade deficit and he emphasised while speaking in the Oval Office that he still plans to impose reciprocal tariffs starting on April 2. — AFP



Supporters of arrested and impeached South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol hold a red placard showing a picture of Yoon and reading "Cancel the illegal detention immediately!" — AFP

Court orders Yoon's release from jail

Seoul, March 7: A South Korean court on Friday ordered impeached President Yoon Suk Yeol to be released from jail, a move that would allow him to stand trial for his rebellion charge.

Yoon was arrested and indicted in January over his short-lived imposition of martial law late last year.

The hearings in his separate impeachment trial at the Constitutional Court concluded in late February, and that court is expected to rule soon on whether to formally remove him from office or reinstate him.

The Seoul Central District Court said it accepted Yoon's request to be released from jail because the legal period of

his formal arrest expired before he was indicted for alleged rebellion in connection with the martial law decree in late January.

The court also cited the need to resolve questions over the legality of the investigations on Yoon. Yoon's lawyers have accused the investigative agency that detained him before his formal arrest of lacking legal authority to probe rebellion charges.

Investigators have alleged that the martial-law decree amounted to rebellion. If he's convicted of that offense, he would face the death penalty or life imprisonment. Yoon's defence team welcomed the court's decision and urged prosecutors to release him immediately. — AFP

MUSK'S SPACEX FACES SETBACK WITH ITS LATEST TEST LAUNCH

Boca Chica, March 7: Elon Musk's SpaceX saw mixed results in the latest test launch of its Starship mega-rocket Thursday, successfully catching the massive booster but with the upper stage failing for the second consecutive time. Minutes after liftoff and booster separation, a video live feed showed the upper stage tumbling uncontrollably, with signal soon cutting out. "Can confirm we did lose contact with the ship. Unfortunately, this happened last time, too," SpaceX official Dan Huot said, alluding to the January launch that saw the upper stage explode over the Caribbean, raining debris.

The new setback could fuel questions over Musk's attention to his space company, as the billionaire spends most of his time in Washington leading President Donald Trump's government overhaul efforts.

That work has also prompted mounted scrutiny over Musk's influence on the US government space programme.

Starship, the world's biggest and most powerful launch vehicle, successfully blasted off from SpaceX's Starbase facility in Boca Chica, Texas shortly after 5:30 pm (2330 GMT).

It was Starship's eighth orbital mission — all so far uncrewed — and the first since its dramatic mid-air explosion over the Caribbean during its last trial. — AFP



Debris from the SpaceX Starship is seen in the sky from a restaurant in Turks and Caicos. — AFP

THOUSANDS | STRANDED | No further details on how bomb had been found; bomb weighed 500 kgs

WWII bomb halts busy Paris train station

Paris, March 7: The unearthing of a 500-kilogram World War II bomb near tracks outside Paris on Friday halted traffic and stranded thousands of passengers in one of the biggest rail disruptions in the French capital in years.

All traffic to the Gare du Nord train station, which is France's busiest railway terminus and serves international trains to London and mainland Europe, high-speed and local connections, was halted as police worked to disable the device. The Gare du Nord station

is in the north of the French capital, hosting the Eurostar international trains in addition to regional and suburban service, according to French railway operator SNCF.

All Eurostar trains heading to and from Paris, including the popular service to London through the Channel Tunnel, were cancelled for the rest of Friday.

Transport minister Philippe Tabarot said that rail services would resume no earlier than 1500 GMT. The unexploded bomb was found "near the



A regional train parked on the tracks in Saint-Denis, northern suburb of Paris on Friday. — AFP

tracks" about 2.5 kilometres (1.5 miles) from the station overnight during maintenance work carried out in the northern Paris

suburb of Saint Denis, the national SNCF rail company said.

There were no further details on how the bomb

had been found.

The bomb dates back to World War II, with a source familiar with the situation telling AFP that the explosive device weighed 500 kilograms (1,100 pounds). Locals did not have to be evacuated.

Mathieu Chabanel, head of rail infrastructure management unit SNCF Réseau, said that finding a bomb of such size was "really quite exceptional."

"We know that during World War II, the rail network was heavily bombed, especially here north of Paris where there were also many factories," he

told reporters.

"So we are particularly vigilant when we carry out work in this area and we detect an abnormal situation, which is what happened last night," he said, adding that police teams were immediately notified.

Sud-Rail unionist Fabien Villedieu posted a picture of the ordnance covered in dirt.

It was not immediately clear when and by who the bomb was dropped during World War II and if it dated to before or after the 1940 occupation of Paris by Nazi Germany. — AFP

THE ASIAN AGE

8 MARCH 2025

Row over Marathi won't be easy for BJP to defuse

Senior RSS leader Suresh Bhayyaji Joshi's "Mumbai has many languages" comment has put the BJP in a spot. By suggesting that different suburbs in Mumbai have different languages of their own, Mr Joshi has rekindled the "Marathi pride" plank that has dominated the politics of Maharashtra, Mumbai in particular, for over five decades. While addressing an event at Mumbai's Ghatkopar suburb on Wednesday, Mr Joshi said that "Mumbai has many languages" and "it is not necessary for people coming to Mumbai to learn Marathi". What he said was not completely untrue. It is a fact that there are areas of Mumbai which are dominated by people speaking Gujarati, Hindi or Tamil. When Shiv Sena leader Aaditya Thackeray contested the Assembly election for the first time from Worli constituency in 2019, he had put up hoarding "Kem Cho Worli", greeting voters in Gujarati. In a way, that was also an admission that Marathi is not the only language spoken by Mumbaikars. However, Mr Joshi's statement is bound to get negative reactions from Marathi speakers as it suggests that Marathi's importance in Mumbai may have diminished.

The Opposition Maha Vikas Aghadi, which has been struggling to regain political significance since its decimation in the 2024 state Assembly election, grabbed the opportunity provided by Mr Joshi with both hands. Their leaders and workers staged a protest at Mumbai's Hutatma Chowk, which is the monument dedicated to 106 people who lost their lives in the "Samyukta Maharashtra" movement in 1956. Former chief minister Uddhav Thackeray has said that the RSS leader should be booked for treason.

Maharashtra chief minister Devendra Fadnavis, conscious of the political significance of the issue, asserted that the language of Mumbai and Maharashtra is Marathi, which everyone living in the state should learn and speak. However, he pleaded ignorance about Mr Joshi's statement and thus avoided having to react to it. On his part, Mr Joshi also tried to salvage the situation by claiming that his comment was misconstrued and everyone living in Mumbai was expected to learn Marathi.

However, the fire started by Mr Joshi is not going to be doused so easily. Uddhav Thackeray and his MVA partners will ensure that it keeps burning till the Mumbai civic elections, which are expected to be held anytime soon. Then there is Raj Thackeray, Uddhav's estranged cousin, who is desperate to revive his dwindling political career and "Marathi pride" could just be the issue he wanted. The BJP's Mahayuti alliance partners, particularly the Eknath Shinde faction of Shiv Sena, are also feeling uneasy.

It seems that the BJP now has one more sensitive linguistic battle to fight after Tamil Nadu and Karnataka. In Tamil Nadu, the DMK government is at loggerheads with the Union government over the three-language formula in the New Education Policy, which it argues is an attempt to impose Hindi in the Tamil-speaking state. In Karnataka, the Congress government is insisting on a two-language policy in order to ensure that Kannada remains the primary language in the state. The RSS was credited for the BJP's landslide victory in the Maharashtra election. Now an RSS leader has inadvertently created a controversy that could become the BJP's Achilles heel.

Courts must not delay bail cases

Article 21 of the Constitution which states that no person shall be deprived of his life or personal liberty except according to procedure established by law is the guarantee of personal liberty against the possible excesses of the state. The Supreme Court being the custodian of the fundamental rights has interpreted the Article that guarantees protection of life and personal liberty and expanded its scope to hold that bail is the rule and jail is the exception. It has time and again told the courts across the country not to feel cagey about ensuring personal liberty or granting bail; they should exercise the right instead of dumping the job on the apex court.

The sad part of the story is that lower courts often refuse to intervene and ensure that personal liberty is curtailed only as per the law even when the executive makes it a point to wreak vengeance on its citizens and make the legal process the punishment. The exhortation made by the Supreme Court the other day that courts should not post hearing of bail applications at a "long date" is the latest in that series. The court, while setting the bail hearing of a person who sought liberty for the surgery of his daughter from a date several months later to an earlier date, also expressed the hope that the high courts will "at least give some weightage to our request".

It is a paradox that the highest court of the land often comes out as a helpless institution when fundamental rights are trampled by the State while the judiciary, including the constitutional courts, looks the other way. It cannot be the case that only judges sitting in the apex court know the importance of personal liberty in our Constitution. There must be a system through which this failure of the lower courts to protect it is brought to the notice of the Supreme Court and the judicial officers being made accountable for their lapses. If the Supreme Court thinks so highly of liberty, it must also put in place a foolproof system to uphold it.

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Farrukh Dhondy  
Cabbages & Kings



"He looks down now at his battered shoes  
And raising his head he looks at the stars  
They tell him he has nothing — so nothing to lose  
Hey, ditch the self-pity, hide those bruises and scars..."

— From **Compulsive Chores or Must Calendar**,  
by Bachchoo

After Musk in US, will UK join New World Order with Mission DOGE?

The election of Donald Trump through the "democratic" collegiate process specified by the American Constitution, which enables a candidate who gets less than 50 per cent of votes to become President, has been hailed as the New World Order.

That is perhaps appropriate. Trump is the first criminally convicted President of the United States. He has sensationally "pardoned" the criminals who attempted a coup on January 6, 2021. A new rule of law?

Claiming Canada, Greenland and the Panama Canal is megalomania, but yes, certainly a "new world order" as it hasn't been done before. And Trump's tariffed trade war is not unprecedented, but could be the trigger of the economic NWO.

In Trump's boasts about saving American taxpayer's money there is a massive dimension of hypocrisy. Elon Musk has been given the task of DOGE — the Department of Government Efficiency. According to the (so far?) free American press, Musk has characteristically spent the last month chasing

and cancelling the expenditure of the US Agency for International Development, or USAID.

Some of the money he has intercepted can certainly be characterised as wasteful and even ridiculous handouts to dictatorial or corrupt regimes, but the press is now complaining that he is swatting the flies in the room and leaving the elephant standing without a scratch.

The New Republic, a US news magazine, has highlighted the fact that "even a cursory look at the Pentagon's budget would immediately reveal billions in waste and graft". The article by Indigo Olivier lists, at first, the discovered bribery and corruption that goes towards the settlement of the Pentagon's armament contracts. One item on the list involves a 15-year prison sentence for a Navy contractor who bribed dozens of Pentagon officials with cash, luxury items and prostitutes in one of the "largest corruption scandals in American history".

Musk hasn't touched the Pentagon's budget as he and certainly Donald Trump could then be seen as endangering national security.

But the scandal of curtailing foreign aid and ignoring the Pentagon's waste and corruption is part of the New Hypocritical Order and is being criticised as such in the non-MAGA media. Result? Donald Trump has had to publicly state that the Pentagon's budget and expenditure are due for a thorough examination. Really? Watch that space. Inspired by Musk's mission statement, one British publication, a weekly called The Spectator, has launched a project

which it labels "a war on wasteful spending". Its clever-cloggy journos are calling their exposure campaign the Spectator Project Against Frivolous Funding, or SPAFF — which in idiomatic English means frittering away money. Great bants guys!

The Spectator is dedicatedly right-wing. It has a deputy editor called Toby Young who has set himself up as a panjandrum of "free speech", which means banning any socialistic pronouncement and championing right-wing propaganda.

For instance, one of their writers, an immigrant from America called Lionel Shriver, who constantly writes anti-immigrant and anti-asylum-seeker articles, once wrote against lumping all British Asians together. Fair enough. I wrote a letter to the Spectator agreeing that the Pakistani bus conductor from Bradford is not socially or financially lumpable with, say, Rishi Sunak or his millionaire (or is it billionaire?) wife and, just so, the Spectator's writers, including a cry-baby journalist called Rod Liddle and an out-an-out Islamophobe and crusader for right-wing bigotry Douglas Murray, should stop using the blanket phrase "the Left". There are many, many shades and differences in this so-called phalanx. Did the Spectator, with the supposed scion of free speech as its deputy editor, publish the letter? Has the Pope converted to Islam? Do bears emerge daily from the jungle to use public lavatories to defecate?

Nevertheless, in the first article of the SPAFF campaign they highlighted several ludicrous projects on which the British government spends taxpayers'

money, all of which, in my unsolicited opinion, are worthy of critical scrutiny.

The survey rightly names these projects "inane, insane and indefensible". Here are the first items in the SPAFF list: £21.5 million to transform Ethiopia's tax system; £26 million to "build tax capacity" in the developing world; £23 million to improve financial management in Rwanda. Under the same consideration, their columnist Rod Liddle pointed out other instances of SPAFFing by the British government: A study into the health of shrimp in Bangladesh; lectures about gender differences to Kenyans; £9.5 million spent on encouraging the civil service of the Democratic Republic of Congo to be more diverse and inclusive; introducing modern art objects, including Marcel Duchamp's urinal, to Afghan women... Yes, SPAFFistic waste and the Spectator's cover cartoon featured Keir Starmer and his Cabinet shovelling money into a dark hole.

Hang on!!! These projects were not approved and the money wasn't spent since Keir Starmer and the Labour Party were elected in mid-2024? They were approved by the Tory governments of the 14 previous years.

And who served as a minister for various departments in those Tory governments? A Mr Michael Gove. And what does he do now? Why, he's the editor of ... The Spectator!

I've written a letter to the magazine pointing this out. Will these great apostles of free speech publish it? Is the Pope a Zoroastrian?

Subhani



Trump-Zelenskyy show: Tom & Jerry at it again!



Shobhaa's Take

Last week's over-dramatised, utterly theatrical, totally absurd maara-maari between two world leaders ought to have been a global embarrassment, condemned across the board by an aghast audience watching the President of the United States, Donald Trump, slugging it out in the Oval Office with the President of Ukraine, Volodymyr Zelenskyy.

Instead, the response to the spat was so dheela, so pheeka, it made one wonder — was this all a big scam/sham? A really poorly scripted, badly directed Tom & Jerry show designed to fool the world? It appeared staged and ludicrous, besides being unprecedented. Hard to believe that Zelenskyy had zero idea what he was putting his foot into, given counter-intelligence and much else. Did he not know that this crucial meeting with the biggest bully on earth was to be conducted in front of a live television audience? Did he imagine it would be a private tete-a-tete between him and Trump which would remain a closed-door affair, with a bland, blah post-meeting statement released to the press? Entirely impossible! So then, did the two guys collude and conspire to orchestrate the whole charade and, hopefully, mislead other world leaders? Was it designed to confound and confuse all those who were not expecting a public fireworks show? What sort of a "setting" was done to facilitate this totally unclassy, despicable tamasha where a mehmaan is insulted and publicly humiliated for all to mock and condemn? Donald Trump, for all his deliberately jungli ways, invariably has a master plan working in his own interests. This was not only

Under the grim surface of Anora's 'doomed' romance is the more volatile sub-text which on so many levels pitches Trump's aggressive America with all its obvious fault lines against the arrogance of Putin's equally corrupt Russia

project commissioned by an arrogant plutocrat, Harrison Van Bruen. America's schizoid attitude towards immigrants is exposed in all its ugly ramifications. Guy Pearce, playing Mr Money Bags with scant respect for "outsiders", acutely underlines the heartless machinations of "brutes in suits" (think J.D. Vance and Co). When an old favourite song of mine, 'You are my destiny', played during a scorchingly gorgeous sequence shot inside a marble quarry in Carrera, I found myself holding my breath to wonder how Brady Corbet, the award-winning director of The Brutalist, would end the scene — well, no spoilers here. Watch the movie, and shiver! The Brutalist could so easily be another tag for Donald Trump.

The other, equally compelling film, which walked away with five Oscars, is the dark yet lush and sensual Anora, which has been stupidly bracketed with Pretty Woman and Devdas. Come on, everyone!

This is a subversive, pointedly political movie that conveys its powerful anti-America sentiments through the portrayal of a gritty immigrant lap dancer, who gets entangled with Vanya (the spoilt, drugged-out son of an oligarch), who lands in a huge mess when he marries the sex worker in Las Vegas. On the surface it is a crazy caper film that captures the seedy unreality of both protagonists — the feisty Anora from Uzbekistan, who uses her body as a survival kit, being the only transactional asset she possesses, and Vanya, the delicately beautiful Russian man-boy, reckless and wealthy enough to take

insane risks — because he can! Under the grim surface of their "doomed" romance is the more volatile sub-text which on so many levels pitches Donald Trump's aggressive America with all its obvious fault lines against the arrogance of Vladimir Putin's equally corrupt Russia.

Once again, the contempt and heartlessness shown towards helpless, poor immigrants, is emphasised over and over again as Anora hurtles towards its unexpected climax. There are no winners here as Yankee versus Russi war is ruthlessly fought. Conclusion: Both are equally evil. But what one remembers from the two outstanding films is America's abusive relationship with the world it claims to help, its cruelty towards immigrants and its monumental ego that manifests itself through people like Donald Trump. The system here is the chief villain. The Brutalist is not an individual. Not a film. It is a metaphor.

Closer to home... The Black Warrant, based on a book by the same name written by Sunil Gupta, a former jailer at Delhi's notorious Tihar Jail, and journalist Sunetra Choudhury, makes viewers squirm as the superbly directed cast of competent actors, led by Zahaan Kapoor and Rahul Bhat, lay bare the tragedy of India's pathetic prison system, which treats inmates worse than defenceless animals. So many years after Sunil Gupta retired, has anything changed? We continue to dehumanise and ill-treat undertrial prisoners (countless innocents amongst them) rotting in over-crowded jails across India, and nobody blinks or cares. We are not America, we say smugly to ourselves. No, we are definitely not America — we are much worse! A film as disturbing as The Brutalist has still to be made here. We have the talent, budgets and actors to ace it... but what we sadly lack is the guts to take on the establishment and share our ugly truths with the world.

Instagram handle @ShobhaaDe; Twitter handle @DeShobhaa

LETTERS

GOOD LUCK, DADA

Sourav Ganguly, former India captain, will be making his acting debut in the upcoming OTT serial, Khakee: The Bengal Chapter, by director Neeraj Pandey. Sourav was seen wearing a police Uniform in a trailer launch of the the series. Cricketers and films have an old relationship and various cricketers like Sandeep Patil, Salim Durani, Sreesanth and Salil Ankola have tried out their acting chops, even if none of them enjoyed any lasting success. It is hoped that Dada will outperform the others. A biopic has been announced on him where Rajkummar Rao will play his part. We wish Sourav success in his new role.

D.B. Madan  
New Delhi

DERELICT MEDIA

IT IS HIGHLY unfortunate the media is giving little to zero space to the rescue operation going on to find the eight workers who have been trapped after a portion of the Srisailem Left Bank Canal tunnel in Telangana collapsed on them on February 22. But the Champions Trophy cricket tournament has been covered as though it is a question of life and death. Even a trapped elephant gets more media coverage and public attention than trapped labourers. I love animals. But I hate a cavalier attitude towards poor labourers who build our homes and our roads, bridges, and tunnels.

Sujit De  
Kolkata

MANY FLIP-FLOPS

FOR THE second time in less than 48-hours, US President Donald Trump rolled back the newly imposed taxes on imports from Canada and Mexico by signing orders significantly expanding the goods exempted from duties slapped on America's two biggest trade partners. Earlier, Trump said he would temporarily exempt carmakers from 25 per cent import taxes just a day after they came into effect. The trade war tensions have roiled markets, with the leading US stock indexes all ending lower in Thursday's trade.

Sankar Paul  
Chakdaha, West Bengal

SHORT TAKES

Harleen guides Gujarat home

**Lucknow:** Skipper Meg Lanning's impactful 92 went in vain as Gujarat Giants defeated table-toppers Delhi Capitals by five wickets to register a hat-trick of wins and book their place in the Eliminator of the Women's Premier League here on Friday. Already through to the playoffs, Delhi Capitals rode on Lanning's 57-ball 92 laced with 15 boundaries and a six to pile up a competitive 177 for 5. But the total was not enough as Gujarat rode on Harleen Deol's unbeaten 70 off 49 balls and Beth Mooney's 35-ball 44 to be in contention. Towards the end, skipper Ashleigh Gardner (22 off 13) and Deandra Dottin (24 off 10) helped Gujarat Giants past the target in the 20th over. Gujarat lost a wicket early when Mooney and Deol joined hands to stitch 84 runs for the second wicket. — *PTI*

**Brief Scores:** Delhi Capitals 177 for 5 in 20 overs (Meg Lanning 92, Shafali Verma 40, Meghna Singh 3/35, Deandra Dottin 2/37) lost to Gujarat Giants 178 for 5 in 19.3 overs (Beth Mooney 44, Harleen Deol 70 n.o, Ashleigh Gardner 22, Deandra Dottin 24, Shika Pandey 2/31, Jess Jonassen 2/38.

Harman fined for showing dissent

**Lucknow:** Mumbai Indians captain Harmanpreet Kaur was on Friday fined 10 per cent of her match fee for showing dissent at umpire's decision during her team's match against UP Warriorz at the Ekana Cricket Stadium here. The incident occurred at the end of the 19th over of UPW innings when umpire Ajitsh Argal informed Harmanpreet that only three fielders could be outside the circle in the final over due to a slow over rate. Seemingly unhappy with the ruling, she was seen engaged in a brief argument with the umpire, with teammate Amelia Kerr also joining the discussion. "Harmanpreet Kaur admitted to the Level 1 offence under Article 2.8 which relates to showing dissent at an umpire's decision during a match. For Level 1 breaches of the Code of Conduct, the Match Referee's decision is final and binding," WPL said in a release. Harmanpreet also had a spat with UP Warriorz's Sophie Ecclestone during the match, when the English cricketer, standing at the non-striker's end, walked toward the umpire to explain something. — *PTI*

Kyrgios is down and out at Wells

**Indian Wells, USA:** Lucky loser Botic van de Zandschulp advanced to face five-time Indian Wells champion Novak Djokovic on Thursday as first-round foe Nick Kyrgios was forced out of his latest comeback event with a right wrist injury. A distraught Kyrgios trailed 6-7 (7/9), 0-3 when he called a halt after consulting the trainer. The mercurial Australian, last seen grimacing from an abdominal injury and firing expletives at his coaching box as he fell in the first round at the Australian Open, was playing on a protected ranking after missing 18 months following knee surgery and wrist reconstruction. "It's always hard to see someone walk off court like that," van de Zandschulp said. "But especially Nick. His previous year, couple of years, have been tough ... (it's) tough to see someone hurting like this." Kyrgios had displayed some of his crowd-pleasing best in the opening set, keeping one rally alive with two between-the-legs shots. — *AFP*

Maternity fund for tennis women

**Paris:** Pregnant players on the women's tennis tour now can receive 12 months of paid maternity leave, and those who become parents via partner pregnancy, surrogacy or adoption can get two months off with pay, under a program sponsored by the Public Investment Fund of Saudi Arabia, the WTA announced. Independent contractors and self-employed individuals don't typically have these kinds of maternity benefits provided and available to them. They have to go out and sort of figure out those benefits for themselves, WTA CEO Portia Archer said. This is really sort of novel and groundbreaking. More than 300 players are eligible for the fund, which is retroactive to January 1. The WTA would not disclose how much money is involved. — *AP*

LAST HURRAH Veterans Virat, Rohit eye silver in final fling

**Dubai, March 7:** India play New Zealand in the Champions Trophy final in Dubai on Sunday in what could be a last hurrah for veteran stars Virat Kohli and Rohit Sharma.

The 36-year-old Kohli and skipper Rohit, 37, came into the 50-over tournament with speculation swirling over when they will retire following lean patches in Test cricket.

Mainstays of a formidable India side for more than 15 years, the duo retired from T20 internationals after winning the World Cup last year. This weekend could be the end for them in ODIs, with the next 50-over World Cup not until 2027.

India go into the final at Dubai International Cricket Stadium as favourites and with their confidence sky-high. They have won all four of their matches at the eight-nation tournament, including beating New Zealand by 44 runs in the group phase, although both teams had already reached the semi-finals by then.

Rohit's side have played all their games in Dubai after refusing to visit Champions Trophy hosts Pakistan because of political tensions. Rohit and Kohli came into the competition under pressure. Master batsman Kohli silenced his critics with an unbeaten 100 against arch-rivals Pakistan, then hit a match-winning 84 against world champions Australia in the semi-finals.

Rohit's highest score has been 41 in their opening win over Bangladesh but the opener has been lauded for handling the team quick starts to build totals on at a venue where batting is tough. India, who are looking to win the Champions Trophy for a record third time, also boast a world-class spin attack. They unleashed four spinners in beating New Zealand with Varun Chakravarthy returning figures of 5 for 42 to help bowl out the Black Caps for 205 in their chase of 250.

**HENRY INJURY DOUBT** In front of them lies a New Zealand team hoping to win the tournament for the second time, having done so in 2000. The Black Caps powered into the final by beating South Africa by 50 runs in Lahore. But the victory came at a price with an injury to pace bowler Matt Henry after he landed on his shoulder awkwardly while taking a catch. Henry, who took 5 for 42 against India in the group phase, is in a race to be fit for Sunday. "Still a little bit unknown at this stage," head coach Gary Stead said. — *AFP*



Virat Kohli (left) and Rohit Sharma share a light moment during a post-game chat in this file photo.

Key men in the big game

**Dubai, March 7:** India and New Zealand face off in the final of the Champions Trophy in Dubai on Sunday to decide the winner of the eight-nation ODI tournament. Here's a look at five key factors that could decide the fate of the title clash.

ROHIT'S START

India captain Rohit hasn't hit top gear in the tournament, with his highest score being 41 in the opening win against Bangladesh.

But even his scores of 20-plus in two matches — against Pakistan and Australia — have handed India quick starts for others to build on.

Critics have slammed the opener for not converting those starts into bigger scores.

Head coach Gautam Gambhir says his impact has been crucial and not driven by numbers.

"You evaluate from the runs; we evaluate from the impact. That's the difference," Gambhir shot back at a question on Rohit's form.

RACHIN, KANE THREAT

Rising star Rachin Ravindra and old warhorse Kane Williamson come into the final fresh from centuries against South Africa in Lahore.

The left-handed Ravindra and Williamson put together 164 runs in a match-winning stand in the semifinal and have the ability tackle the Indian spinners with aplomb.

Williamson, 34, hit a valiant 81 in the previous match against India and with Ravindra, 25, will once again pose a serious threat to India on an expected sluggish pitch.

Skipper Mitchell Santner said Williamson and Ravindra's batting makes



life a "little easier" for the bowlers.

CHAKRAVARTHY'S SPIN

Wrist spinner Varun Chakravarthy was a late addition to the India squad for the tournament and against New Zealand bamboozled the opposition with figures of 5 for 42.

That was his first match of the tournament and only his second ODI, having made his debut against England in February.

The 33-year-old, a mystery spinner who has many variations up his

sleeve, took another two wickets in the semi-final against Australia.

Chakravarthy could be key to India's chances — if part of the XI — on pitches that have helped the spinners.

HENRY'S OPENING BURST

New Zealand pace spearhead Matt Henry leads the bowling charts in the 50-over tournament with 10 wickets — five when the Black Caps faced India earlier in the competition.

Henry took down Shubman Gill and Virat Kohli in the group match in Dubai to reduce India to

● India captain Rohit hasn't hit top gear in the tournament, with his highest score being 41 in the win against Bangladesh. But he has got the side off to quick starts against Pakistan and Australia for others to build on.

● New Zealand's rising star Rachin Ravindra and old warhorse Kane Williamson come into the final fresh from centuries against South Africa in Lahore.

30-3, before a middle-order fightback lifted Rohit Sharma's team to 249-9.

Henry, who combines pace with good seam movement, returned figures of 5 for 42, albeit in a losing cause.

His opening burst in the final could be vital for New Zealand in gaining the upper hand.

THE PITCH FACTOR

The pitches at Dubai International Cricket Stadium have been a talking point with India playing all their matches at the same venue after refusing to tour Pakistan for political reasons.

The surface in Dubai has been sluggish and aided spinners with Australia posting the highest total in this tournament of 264, which was overhauled by India with 11 balls to spare. Tracks in Pakistan have produced tall scores with New Zealand getting a Champions Trophy record 362 for 6 before restricting South Africa to 312 for 9 in Lahore.

While India stay at their temporary home for the final, New Zealand's Ravindra said "we pride ourselves in adapting and playing the situation in front of us". — *AFP*

Pranav emerges World Junior Chess champion

**New Delhi, March 7:** India's Pranav Venkatesh won the World Junior Chess Championship (Under-20) after settling for a draw against Matic Levrencic of Slovenia in the 11th and final round in Petrovac, Montenegro on Friday.

It turned out to be a great day for Indian chess after Aravindh Chithamabaram won the Prague Masters ahead of many fancied stars.

Venkatesh, who had won the challengers section in the Chennai International last year, continued his great show among juniors in the world, remaining undefeated during the course of the event.

The Indian scored a total of seven victories and four draws to end up on nine points out of a possible 11 and when the final round pairings were announced it was clear that a draw will be enough for Venkatesh.

Levrencic opted for the Sicilian defence with black but the game went in to uncharted territory as Venkatesh sacrificed a pawn early to get some lead in development.

There were reasons to be worried for the Slovenian and he just decided to play it safe and agreed for a draw in mere 18 moves and will likely win either silver or gold medal.

Venkatesh's success was already writing on the wall, given his past few performances and especially after he was picked up for the Westbridge Anand Chess Academy where the students are mentored and hand-picked by Viswanathan Anand himself.



Pranav Venkatesh

Interestingly, Anand had himself made a mark on the world stage by winning the World Junior Championship back in 1987. Thereafter, P. Harikrishna won in 2004 and Abhijeet Gupta had followed suit in 2008.

It has nearly been a 17-year-old wait for the open title to come back to India. More recently, Divya Deshmukh had won the girls' section when it was held in Ahmedabad in 2024. Before Divya, Soumya Swaminathan won the girls' event in 2009, D. Harika in 2008 and Koneru Humpy in 2001.

Anand lauded Venkatesh. "Congratulations to the World Junior Champion Pranav Venkatesh. He has been in great form lately. Our @WacaChess mentee. He is very meticulous in his work and constantly analyses his own games, comes back with suggestions and takes feedback. You join a very prestigious line of World Junior Champions!" Anand wrote on his X account. — *PTI*

ARAVINDH IS BEST AT PRAGUE CHESS

**Prague (Czech Republic), March 7:** India's dominance in chess continued unabated with Grandmaster Aravindh Chithamabaram winning the first major title of his career after finishing ahead of established names including compatriot R. Praggnanandhaa at the Prague Masters tournament here on Friday.

The 25-year-old Aravindh ended the tournament with six points after settling for a draw with Gurel Ediz of Turkey in the ninth and final round.

World No. 8 Praggnanandhaa finished tied second with five points after losing to Dutchman Anish Giri.

Tamil Nadu's Aravindh ended on six points out of a possible nine after his three victories and six draws in the tournament.

Praggnanandhaa concluded his campaign on five points with Giri and top seed Wei Yi of China.

Aravindh chose the solid Caro Kann to counter Ediz's King pawn and the Turkish youngster went for the Advance variation. Aravindh had to part with a pawn early in the opening but the complications remained as white had a fractured king side and the extra pawn on the other flank was not of much use.

"I have not slept well in the last two days, I was completely fine till the seventh round and then I got this lead and there was pressure," Aravindh said. — *PTI*



Aravindh

Man U held in first leg match

**Paris, March 7:** Manchester United drew 1-1 away to Real Sociedad in the first leg of their Europa League Last-16 tie on Thursday, while Tottenham suffered a 0-1 loss at Dutch side AZ Alkmaar. Joshua Zirkzee drilled in from just outside the area to give United the lead on 57 minutes in San Sebastian but Mikel Oyarzabal levelled from the spot after Bruno Fernandes was punished for a handball.

Zirkzee cut a distraught figure after missing the decisive penalty in last week's FA Cup shootout loss to Fulham and has endured a testing first

THE RESULTS

Real Sociedad (Oyarzabal 70-pen)	1
Manchester United (Zirkzee 57)	1
AZ Alkmaar (Bergvall 18-og)	1
Tottenham Hotspur	0

season at United, whose only remaining hope of silverware is in the Europa League.

He scored for the first time in Europe this term, unleashing a sharp low drive from 20 yards after being teed up by Alejandro Garnacho's inviting pass. — *AFP*

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