

BUSINESS AS USUAL
By UNNY

New Delhi is most polluted capital, Bymrinh in Meghalaya tops list of cities

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, MARCH 11

NEW DELHI continues to be the world's most polluted capital while Meghalaya's Bymrinh is the world's most polluted metropolitan area, according to the 2024 World Air Quality Report released on Tuesday.

With an average annual PM 2.5 concentration of 91.8 µg/m³, New Delhi remained the most polluted city followed by Chad's N'Djamena (91.6) and Dhaka (78).

In fact, between 2018 and 2024, New Delhi has topped the list — except in 2022 when N'Djamena edged past it.

PM (Particulate Matter) 2.5, which remains suspended in the air, has significant adverse effects on health, causing and worsening respiratory illnesses as well as leading to an increased risk of cardiovascular diseases.

While the World Health Organization (WHO) annual guideline for PM 2.5 is 5 micrograms per cubic metre (µg/m³),

WORLD AIR QUALITY REPORT 2024

TOP POLLUTED CAPITALS	
New Delhi	91.8
N'Djamena	91.6
Dhaka	78
Kinshasa	58.2
Islamabad	52.4
TOP POLLUTED COUNTRIES	
Chad	91.8
Bangladesh	78
Pakistan	73.7
DR Congo	58.2
India	50.6

*Annual average PM 2.5 concentration in µg/m³

Switching bibs, Rly athlete ran marathon for doctor's wife, another; all 3 banned

SHYAMAL YADAV & Nihal Koshie
NEW DELHI, MARCH 11

ACASE of impersonation via "bib switch" has led to the banning of three runners who took part in the Athletics Federation of India-approved Apollo Tyres New Delhi Marathon held here last month. The allegation of cheating has been made against a sports quota railway employee who purport-

When Dangal star Aamir met his wrestling heroes on home ground

PAGE 1
ANCHOR

SHIVANI NAIK
MUMBAI, MARCH 11

A SURPRISE move caught wrestling coach Kripa Shankar Bishnoi off guard as he entered the residence of his most famous pupil in suburban Mumbai on Monday afternoon.

Aamir Khan, for whom Bishnoi had choreographed sequences in the runaway hit, *Dangal*, jokingly greeted him with a leg hold as soon as he

India continues to engage US: Govt to House amid fears of reciprocal tariff

Prasada: Focus to be on increasing market access, reducing tariff, non-tariff barriers

RAVI DUTTA MISHRA
NEW DELHI, MARCH 11

AMID FEARS among exporters of higher tariffs in the lucrative US market from April 2 when reciprocal tariffs are set to come into effect, the Ministry of Commerce and Industry told Lok Sabha Tuesday that the government is engaging with the US to eliminate tariffs and non-tariff barriers and improve trade.

Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal concluded his US visit last Saturday and the Ministry plans consultations with exporters this week.

Representatives from sectors including automobiles, leather, textiles, electronics and pharmaceuticals, among others, are expected to present their stance on tariff concessions that may be offered to the US during trade negotiations, *The Indian Express* has learnt.

Concerns over concessions grow after US President Donald Trump said last Friday that India had agreed to cut tariffs after be-

ing "exposed" for being restrictive from a trade perspective and making it difficult for American companies to do business in India. US Secretary of Commerce

IN A strategic outreach to the new leadership in Mauritius, Prime Minister Narendra Modi met newly-elected Prime Minister Navin Ramgoolam and President Dharam Gokhool Tuesday as he began a two-day visit to the island nation.

Infant's death during a police raid rocks Alwar village, probe begins

PARUL KULSHRESTHA
ALWAR, MARCH 11

THE ANGER is palpable at a sit-in protest organised by local residents outside the house of Razeeda (26) and Imran Meo (27), whose 25-day-old child died, allegedly during an early morning police search at their home in Raghunathgarh village in Rajasthan's Alwar district earlier this month.

The family and the protesters blame police for the infant's death, alleging that she was trampled on by police personnel

EXPLAINED
Tough talks ahead

OFFICIALS IN Delhi have indicated that the grounds are being prepared for negotiations with an early bilateral trade agreement with the US. While the hope is to finalise a pact by autumn this year, there will be no short-cuts at these talks, and each product, sector and concern will be weighed before a decision is taken.

SHUBHAJIT ROY
NEW DELHI, MARCH 11

IN A strategic outreach to the new leadership in Mauritius, Prime Minister Narendra Modi met newly-elected Prime Minister Navin Ramgoolam and President Dharam Gokhool Tuesday as he began a two-day visit to the island nation.

The engagement with the new leadership is important in the context of the Indian government's involvement in developing infrastructure in Mauritius under the governments led by Anerood and Pravind Jugnauth.

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For us, Mauritius is family: PM meets country's new leadership

Modi will be chief guest at Mauritius national day today

Jugnauths. Delhi is now making an effort to reach out to the new regime led by Ramgoolam, Mauritius has been ruled by the Jugnauths and the Jugnauths ever since the country became independent in 1968.

Speaking at an event for the Indian diaspora in Port Louis, which was also attended by Ramgoolam, Modi underlined India's role as a "trusted ally in combating illegal fishing, piracy, and maritime crimes".

"As a reliable friend, India works with Mauritius to protect its national interests and secure the Indian Ocean region," he said.

He said Mauritius is not just a partner country. "For us, Mauritius is family," he said.

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Airtel inks pact with Elon Musk's SpaceX to offer Starlink internet services

SOMUNYARENDRA BARIK
NEW DELHI, MARCH 11

BHARTI AIRTEL has signed an agreement with billionaire Elon Musk's satellite company SpaceX to bring Starlink's satellite internet services to people in India. This is the first such agreement to be signed in India, although it is subject to SpaceX receiving its own authorisations to sell Starlink in India.

SpaceX has applied for security clearance with the Indian government, and it is understood that its application is undergoing review at the Ministry of Home Affairs.

Industry experts said the reason behind Airtel and SpaceX's alliance is so that the former can offer consumer satellite services in the country, as its own satellite service, OneWeb, is focused more towards the business end.



Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his Mauritius counterpart Navin Ramgoolam arrive to lay a wreath and plant a tree at the Sir Seewoosagar Ramgoolam Botanical Garden in Pamplemousses, Mauritius, on Tuesday. Reuters

For us, Mauritius is family: PM meets country's new leadership

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TRAIN TRAPPED IN TUNNEL

Baloch rebels hijack Pak train, say 30 killed, 100 are hostage

Demand release of Baloch prisoners within 48 hrs, threaten to kill hostages

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ATTACK ON JAFFAR EXPRESS

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PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
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WE ARE ALSO ON

1981 FIROZABAD KILLINGS

44 yrs later, 3 convicted of murder of 24 Dalits in UP

MANISH SAHU
LUCKNOW, MARCH 11

NEARLY 44 years after 24 Dalits, including seven women and two minors, were killed at Dehuli village in Firozabad district of Uttar Pradesh, the trial court has convicted three persons in the case.

During the long-drawn trial that was moved to a court in Mainpuri district last year on the orders of the Allahabad High Court, 13 accused died, while one still remains absconding. Twenty-four Dalits were killed after some villagers allegedly testified against a criminal gang, whose members were mostly from the upper caste.

"The court convicted three persons in the mass murder case on Tuesday, accused Ram Sevak,

who is in jail, appeared from there, while Kaptaan, who was out on bail, was taken into custody after being found guilty. The third accused, Rampal, failed to appear in court. His request for exemption was rejected, and a non-bailable warrant has been issued against him," said Government Counsel (Mainpuri) Jyoti Shukla.

The court held them guilty under various IPC sections. Shukla said the court will decide on the quantum of punishment on March 18.

According to the prosecution, 24 Dalits were killed after some villagers allegedly testified against a criminal gang, whose members were mostly from the upper caste.

"The court convicted three persons in the mass murder case on Tuesday, accused Ram Sevak,

Bengal temple entry ban: Dalits to pray under police cover today

RAVIK BHATTACHARYA
KOLKATA, MARCH 11

THE ADMINISTRATION in West Bengal's Purba Bardhaman district on Tuesday said members of the Dalit community from Gidhagram village in Katwa subdivision would perform puja at the local Shiva temple under police protection.

So far, they were barred from entering the Gidheswar Shiv Mandir, which according to local officials is nearly 200 years old.

The village, located nearly 150 kilometres from state capital Kolkata, has nearly 130 Dalit

families with 550 members. Speaking to *The Indian Express*, Katwa SDO Ahimsa Jain said, "In a meeting today, it was decided that they will offer prayers at the temple tomorrow. We will not allow any discrimination to continue. Though we had held a meeting on February 28, we were not able to do so."

The Dalits, who live in the Daspara locality of the village, were not allowed to enter the temple despite their pleas to the district administration and the police, highlighting 'untouchability and discrimination', he said.

India continues to engage US: Govt

Howard Lutnick also said that India's agriculture sector "must open up" for US products.

In a written reply in Lok Sabha Tuesday, Minister of State for Commerce and Industry Jitin Prasad said the "Indian government has been actively engaged with the United States" to enhance and broaden bilateral trade ties in a mutually beneficial and fair manner.

Responding to a question by Congress MP Sudhakar Reddy, TMC MP Sanyal Ghosh on the impact of reciprocal tariffs, Prasad reiterated that the US had not yet implemented reciprocal tariffs on India and that both countries continue to focus on "increasing trade access, reducing tariff and non-tariff barriers, and enhancing supply chain integration."

"The US issued a Memorandum on Reciprocal Trade and Tariffs on February 13, 2025, instructing the US Trade Representative to investigate harm to the US from any non-reciprocal trade agreements adopted by trading partners. A report will be submitted, based on which US action could then be undertaken under relevant US legislation. As of now, reciprocal tariffs have not been applied by the US on India," he said in his reply.

"The Government of India

continues to engage with the Government of the United States to enhance and broaden bilateral trade ties in a mutually beneficial and fair manner. Both nations released a joint statement on February 13, 2025, reaffirming their commitment to enhance economic ties. Under the ambitious 'Mission 500', both countries aim to more than double US-India trade to \$500 billion by 2030 through deepening trade ties across multiple sectors," he said.

Notably, Trump on Tuesday announced additional 25 percent tariffs on steel and aluminium from Canada and Mexico amid a growing focus on "increasing trade access, reducing tariff and non-tariff barriers, and enhancing supply chain integration."

Barthwal briefed the Parliamentary Committee on External Affairs on Trump's recent claim that India had agreed to reduce its tariffs "way down," while Foreign Secretary Vikram Mirra told the committee on China and Europe.

New Delhi most polluted capital

India's Central Pollution Control Board has set it at 40 µg/m³. Major sources of PM 2.5 include combustion engines, power generation, industrial activities, crop burning and agricultural practices, and wood and coal burning.

According to the latest report, prepared by Swiss air quality technology company IQAir, 13 of the world's 20 most polluted cities are in India, with Birmahal topping the chart with an annual average PM 2.5 concentration of 128.2 µg/m³.

The other cities are Mullapur (Punjab), Faridabad, Loni, Greater Ganganagar, Greater Noida, Bhiwadi, Muzaffarnagar, Hanumanagar, Noida, New Delhi (Central Delhi) and Delhi (average for the rest of the city).

India is the fifth most polluted city, with an average PM 2.5 of 50.6 µg/m³, 10 times more than the WHO annual PM 2.5 guideline value of 5 µg/m³.

In 2023, India was the third most polluted country.

The report has relied on data from 10,000 air quality monitoring stations at 8,954 locations in 138 countries, territories and regions. It was analysed by IQAir's air quality scientists.

Data shows that PM 2.5 concentrations in South Asia have seen a slight improvement but the NCR region is still heavily polluted. "India saw a 7% decline in PM 2.5 concentrations in 2024, aver-

aging 50.6 µg/m³ compared to 54.4 µg/m³ in 2023. Yet six of the world's 10 most polluted cities are in India. The capital, New Delhi, maintained consistently high pollution levels, with an annual average of 91.6 µg/m³, nearly unchanged from 92.7 µg/m³ in 2023," the report said.

"Air pollution remains a significant health burden in India, reducing life expectancy by an estimated 5.2 years," it said. Only seven countries met the WHO guidelines for annual average PM 2.5 level. They are Australia, Bahamas, Barbados, Estonia, Grenada, Iceland, and New Zealand.

Norway in East Asia, South East Asia and West Asia met the WHO guidelines, the report said. Other key findings of the report are:

Only 17% of cities across the world met WHO air pollution guidelines.

Out of the 138 countries and regions, 126 (91.3%) exceeded the WHO annual PM 2.5 guideline value of 5 µg/m³.

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FROM PAGE ONE

Baloch rebels hijack Pak train, say 30 killed, 100 taken hostage

FULL REPORTS ON
WWW.INDIANEXPRESS.COM

passengers had been taken hostage while nearly 350 others are believed to be safe.)

The Jaffar Express, with around 500 passengers on board in nine coaches, was on its way from Balochistan's capital Quetta to Peshawar in Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa when armed men intercepted it in a tunnel near the mountainous terrain of Gadar and Pehro Kurri on Tuesday. The gunmen opened fire at the train, injuring several passengers.

The Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA) claimed it seized control of the train by derailing it. The group said it had killed six security personnel and taken over 100 people in custody, including security personnel.

The Reuters report said the BLA claimed to have killed 30 soldiers and shot down a drone.

While the Pakistani authorities did not comment on the group's claim, security sources said the train driver and several passengers were injured in the gunfire. "There are reports of intense firing at Jaffar Express, which was heading from Quetta to Peshawar, between Pehro Kurri and Gadar," Balochistan government spokesman Shahid Rind said. He said rescue teams had been sent. "The security forces were engaged in a gunbattle with the rebels, he said.

—43 men, 26 women and 11 children — from a bogie," Rind said. However, around 400 passengers remained on the train, still trapped inside the tunnel as security forces engaged in a gunbattle with the rebels, he said.

(Reuters adds from Quetta: The BLA said it had taken 214 hostages and threatened to kill them if Baloch prisoners were not freed. The train was trapped in a

tunnel and the driver was killed after sustaining serious injuries, local authorities, police and railway officials said.)

But a district senior police officer, Rana Dilawar, said "around 30 passengers, including women and children are safe and a relief train will be reaching the area." "Security forces launched a massive operation," he said, adding that helicopters and special forces have been deployed.

A security source who asked not to be identified said many people had lost their lives in the attack, adding that 80 military personnel were among the 425 passengers aboard the train. Another security source said 80 passengers had been rescued and the militants were surrounded.

"The operation will continue until the last terrorist is eliminated," they said.

The BLA, meanwhile, said it "is prepared for a prisoner exchange," and demanded that Islamabad release within 48 hours Baloch political prisoners, activists and missing persons who it said have been abducted by the military. "If our demands are not met within the stipulated period or if the occupying state attempts any military action during this time, all prisoners of war will be neutralised and the train will be completely destroyed," it said.

The group said the hostages included Pakistani Army personnel and other security officials travelling on leave. Civilian hostages, particularly women, children, the elderly, and Baloch citizens, have been released safely and given a secure route," it said in a statement emailed to journalists and posted on Telegram. "The BLA further

warns that if military intervention continues, all hostages will be executed."

Rescue teams and security forces reached the scene, and an operation was underway to track down the assailants, officials said. An emergency was declared in the local hospitals. Security sources said the operation is complicated due to the difficult terrain.

Railways Controller Muhammad Kashif said the train, comprising nine coaches, had around 500 passengers on board. "The train was stopped by armed men in Tunnel No. 8," he said. There are 17 tunnels in this area on the railway line and due to the difficult terrain, the speed of the train is often slow.

Citing security sources, Geo News reported that the train was stopped after a portion of the track was blown up by the terrorists, who opened fire on the engine, injuring the driver. Security officials present on the train and the attackers exchanged fire, it said, adding that the terrorists then took control of the train in a tunnel.

Sources said that no contact could be immediately made with the train crew due to the lack of mobile and telephone networks at the location of the attack.

Quetta-based Mohsin Naqvi condemned the incident, saying "The beasts who fire on innocent passengers do not deserve any concessions."

Minister of State for Interior Tal Chaudhry said there was a hostage-like situation, as many passengers had been taken from the train to the nearby mountainous area. He said women and children were being used as shields.

Speaking to Geo News, the

minister also confirmed that there are some government officials and their families on the train. "The incident took place this afternoon in which the train was derailed. This is a remote area and there is a tunnel between two stations where this incident took place," he said.

He rejected the claim by the rebels that they freed women and children. "There is no truth in it... rather it is because of the women and children that the security forces are acting with utmost caution," the minister said, adding that the operation was still going on.

Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Chief Minister Ali Amin Khan Gandapur strongly condemned the attack and expressed concern over the hostage-taking. "Targeting innocent passengers and endangering their lives is a cowardly and brutal act," Gandapur said.

In the past, railway tracks in the area have been attacked by Baloch militants using rockets or remote-controlled bombs, and the BLA claimed responsibility for most of the attacks. "If our demands are not met within the stipulated period or if the occupying state attempts any military action during this time, all prisoners of war will be neutralised and the train will be completely destroyed," it said.

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Speaking to Geo News, the

For us, Mauritius is family: PM

"We want to encourage people from India, more people to come to invest in Mauritius, especially foreign investors," he said.

"We are looking forward to making businesses easier to do, less bureaucracy, less red tape," he said.

Rangomalam announced the conferment of his country's highest civilian honour, the Grand Commander of the Order of the Star and Key of the Indian Ocean, on Modi. This prestigious award is conferred on a living Indian and only the fifth global recipient of the award, recognising his contributions to strengthening India-Mauritius relations.

Earlier in the day, Modi was greeted at the airport by Rangomalam, who was joined by the Deputy Prime Minister, Chief Justice of Mauritius, Speaker of the National Assembly, Leader of the Opposition, Foreign Minister, Cabinet Secretary and members of Grand Port District Council and a total of 200 dignitaries.

During the meeting with President Gokhool, the two leaders exchanged views on deepening the special and close bilateral ties.

"Had a great meeting with His Excellency Mr Dharameer Gokhool, President of Mauritius. He is well acquainted with India and Indian culture. Expressed gratitude for inviting me to be a part of the National Day celebrations of Mauritius. We discussed how to further boost bilateral ties across diverse sectors," Modi said in a post on X.

For him, it was an honour to have him attend the National Day celebrations of Mauritius as chief guest for the second time.

In a special gesture, Modi handed over OCI cards to President Gokhool, as well as first lady Vrinda Gokhool, as well as Rangomalam and his wife Veen.

He gifted his Sangam water from the Mahakumbh in a brass container and copper pot to President Gokhool. He also gifted Makhana, a superfood from Bihar, to Gokhool.

The Prime Minister presented a Banarasi silk saree in a Sadeeli box to the wife of President Gokhool.

At the talks, President Gokhool hosted a State Lunch in honour of the Prime Minister.

Modi also visited the Ayurvedic Garden in the State House, established in collaboration with the Government of India. The Prime Minister noted that Mauritius is an important partner for India in advancing the benefits of traditional medicine, including Ayurveda.

It is commendable that an Ayurvedic Garden has been built in the State House in Mauritius. I am also happy that Ayurveda is

gaining popularity in Mauritius. President Dharameer Gokhool and I went to the Ayurvedic Garden, giving me the opportunity to see it firsthand," Modi said on X.

Before meeting President Gokhool, Modi and Rangomalam planned a sampling of Sir Seewoosagur Ramgoolam Botanical Garden.

Modi laid a wreath at the samadhi of Sir Seewoosagur Ramgoolam, the founding father of Mauritius. He also laid a wreath at the samadhi of Aneroed Jugnauth.

"Went to the Sir Seewoosagur Ramgoolam Botanical Garden with Prime Minister Dr. Navinchandra Ramgoolam. This is a fine botanical garden, a living archive of biodiversity which illustrates Mauritius' conservation efforts and botanical heritage," he said.

"Paid homage to Sir Seewoosagur Ramgoolam and Sir Aneroed Jugnauth, two great leaders who have made indelible contributions to Mauritius' progress," he said in another post.

"Humbled by the heartfelt gesture of my friend, Prime Minister Dr. Navinchandra Ramgoolam, in taking part in 'Ek Ped Maa Ke Naam' — a tribute to nature, motherhood and sustainability. His support stands tall as a symbol of our shared commitment to greener and better future," he said.

This is Modi's second State visit since 2015. He will be the Chief Guest at the National Day Celebrations on March 12.

For him, it was an honour to have him attend the National Day celebrations of Mauritius as chief guest for the second time.

In a special gesture, Modi handed over OCI cards to President Gokhool, as well as first lady Vrinda Gokhool, as well as Rangomalam and his wife Veen.

He gifted his Sangam water from the Mahakumbh in a brass container and copper pot to President Gokhool. He also gifted Makhana, a superfood from Bihar, to Gokhool.

The Prime Minister presented a Banarasi silk saree in a Sadeeli box to the wife of President Gokhool.

At the talks, President Gokhool hosted a State Lunch in honour of the Prime Minister. Modi also visited the Ayurvedic Garden in the State House, established in collaboration with the Government of India. The Prime Minister noted that Mauritius is an important partner for India in advancing the benefits of traditional medicine, including Ayurveda.

It is commendable that an Ayurvedic Garden has been built in the State House in Mauritius. I am also happy that Ayurveda is

Airtel inks pact with SpaceX

The development also heats up the fight between Reliance Jio and Musk's SpaceX, who have previously disagreed over how spectrum for such services should be assigned — with Jio pushing for an auction, but SpaceX insisting on the administrative route. The government has decided to go with administrative allocation.

The partnership, Airtel said, enabled the company to "explore how Starlink can complement and expand Airtel's offerings, and how Airtel's expertise in the Indian market complements SpaceX's direct offerings to consumers and businesses."

As part of the pact, Airtel and SpaceX will explore offering Starlink equipment in Airtel's retail stores, Starlink services via Airtel to business customers, opportunities to connect communities, schools, and health centres among many others, in some of the most rural parts of India.

"Airtel and SpaceX will also explore how Starlink could help expand and enhance the Airtel network, as well as SpaceX's ability to

utilise and benefit from Airtel's ground network infrastructure and other capabilities in India," Airtel said in a statement. "By adding Starlink, (in addition to its existing offerings via Airtel OneWeb) to its offerings, Airtel will further its ability to offer nationwide connectivity and connect previously underserved areas, particularly those with limited to no connectivity," it said. "With Starlink enterprise-grade service, Airtel will be able to offer enterprises, businesses, and communities... connectivity packages."

Gopal Vittal, MD and Vice Chairman, Bharti Airtel, said, "This partnership with SpaceX and Starlink to Airtel customers in India is a significant milestone and further demonstrates our commitment to next-generation satellite connectivity." Gwynne Shawwell, President and Chief Operating Officer of SpaceX, said, "The team at Airtel has played a pivotal role in India's telecom story, so working with them to complement our direct offerings makes great sense for our business."

Rly athlete ran marathon for 2 others

down such cases in the future".

When contacted, Nagaraj Adiga, CMD of NER Sports and the race director, told *The Indian Express*, "There were incidents of cheating during the Apollo New Delhi Marathon (in the non-elite categories). We have suspended the athletes for participating in it. We will be submitting our report to the Athletics Federation of India on Monday. The Federation can take further action as they wish."

Those in the know say that it was the fact of the matter, there was a dramatic spike after the runner to complete the race.

When contacted, the sports quota employee didn't wish to be quoted. The doctor's wife didn't take a call for comment, but her husband said the doctor's name has been taken. I am part of the management. I can tell you that he felt unconscious after 34 km. He (the sports quota employee) ran with her husband. We have clarified this and he has not been banned. We have asked and the NER has removed the data of her performance from their website," he said.

Infant's death during a police raid rocks Alwar village, probe begins

crackdown on cyber crime.

Police have filed an FIR over the incident, but the police station remained closed and reportedly made no sign of a blank paper.

"Later, we got to know that on that paper, officials wrote that the child was already sick and that this was the reason for his death. We never consented to this, but they did this to save their officers," alleged Shaheen.

Alwar SP Sanjeev Nain told *The Indian Express* that he was not aware of police making the family sign such a paper, and Additional SP Anil Sahu refused to comment, saying the matter is under investigation.

With their initial visit to the police station not successful, the family and other members of the community took the body of the infant to the SP's residence in protest. In the evening, an FIR was registered, naming constables Girdhar and Jageer, under BNS section 103, 104, 105, 106, 107, 108, 109, 110, 111, 112, 113, 114, 115, 116, 117, 118, 119, 120, 121, 122, 123, 124, 125, 126, 127, 128, 129, 130, 131, 132, 133, 134, 135, 136, 137, 138, 139, 140, 141, 142, 143, 144, 145, 146, 147, 148, 149, 150, 151, 152, 153, 154, 155, 156, 157, 158, 159, 160, 161, 162, 163, 164, 165, 166, 167, 168, 169, 170, 171, 172, 173, 174, 175, 176, 177, 178, 179, 180, 181, 182, 183, 184, 185, 186, 187, 188, 189, 190, 191, 192, 193, 194, 195, 196, 197, 198, 199, 200, 201, 202, 203, 204, 205, 206, 207, 208, 209, 210, 211, 212, 213, 214, 215, 216, 217, 218, 219, 220, 221, 222, 223, 224, 225, 226, 227, 228, 229, 230, 231, 232, 233, 234, 235, 236, 237, 238, 239, 240, 241, 242, 243, 244, 245, 246, 247, 248, 249, 250, 251, 252, 253, 254, 255, 256, 257, 258, 259, 260, 261, 262, 263, 264, 265, 266, 267, 268, 269, 270, 271, 272, 273, 274, 275, 276, 277, 278, 279, 280, 281, 282, 283, 284, 285, 286, 287, 288, 289, 290, 291, 292, 293, 294, 295, 296, 297, 298, 299, 300, 301, 302, 303, 304, 305, 306, 307, 308, 309, 310, 311, 312, 313, 314, 315, 316, 317, 318, 319, 320, 321, 322, 323, 324, 325, 326, 327, 328, 329, 330, 331, 332, 333, 334, 335, 336, 337, 338, 339, 340, 341, 342, 343, 344, 345, 346, 347, 348, 349, 350, 351, 352, 353, 354, 355, 356, 357, 358, 359, 360, 361, 362, 363, 364, 365, 366, 367, 368, 369, 370, 371, 372, 373, 374, 375, 376, 377, 378, 379, 380, 381, 382, 383, 384, 385, 386, 387, 388, 389, 390, 391, 392, 393, 394, 395, 396, 397, 398, 399, 400, 401, 402, 403, 404, 405, 406, 407, 408, 409, 410, 411, 412, 413, 414, 415, 416, 417, 418, 419, 420, 421, 422, 423, 424, 425, 426, 427, 428, 429, 430, 431, 432, 433, 434, 435, 436, 437, 438, 439, 440, 441, 442, 443, 444, 445, 446, 447, 448, 449, 450, 451, 452, 453, 454, 455, 456, 457, 458, 459, 460, 461, 462, 463, 464, 465, 466, 467, 468, 469, 470, 471, 472, 473, 474, 475, 476, 477, 478, 479, 480, 481, 482, 483, 484, 485, 486, 487, 488, 489, 490, 491, 492, 493, 494, 495, 496, 497, 498, 499, 500, 501, 502, 503, 504, 505, 506, 507, 508, 509, 510, 511, 512, 513, 514, 515, 516, 517, 518, 519, 520, 521, 522, 523, 524, 525, 526, 527, 528, 529, 530, 531, 532, 533, 534, 535, 536, 537, 538, 539, 540, 541, 542, 543, 544, 545, 546, 547, 548, 549, 550, 551, 552, 553, 554, 555, 556, 557, 558, 559, 560, 561, 562, 563, 564, 565, 566, 567, 568, 569, 570, 571, 572, 573, 574, 575, 576, 577, 578, 579, 580, 581, 582, 583, 584, 585, 586, 587, 588, 589, 590, 591, 592, 593, 594, 595, 596, 597, 598, 599, 600, 601, 602, 603, 604, 605, 606, 607, 608, 609, 610, 611, 612, 613, 614, 615, 616, 617, 618, 619, 620, 621, 622, 623, 624, 625, 626, 627, 628, 629, 630, 631, 632, 633, 634, 635, 636, 637, 638, 639, 640, 641, 642, 643, 644, 645, 646, 647, 648, 649, 650, 651, 652, 653, 654, 655, 656, 657, 658, 659, 660, 661, 662, 663, 664, 665, 666, 667, 668, 669, 670, 671, 672, 673, 674, 675, 676, 677, 678, 679, 680, 681, 682, 683, 684, 685, 686, 687, 688, 689, 690, 691, 692, 693, 694, 695, 696, 697, 698, 699, 700, 701, 702, 703, 704, 705, 706, 707, 708, 709, 710, 711, 712, 713, 714, 715, 716, 717, 718, 719, 720, 721, 722, 723, 724, 725, 726, 727, 728, 729, 730, 731, 732, 733, 734, 735, 736, 737, 738, 739, 740, 741, 742, 743, 744, 745, 746, 747, 748, 749, 750, 751, 752, 753, 754, 755, 756, 757, 758, 759, 760, 761, 762, 763, 764, 765, 766, 767, 768, 769, 770, 771, 772, 773, 774, 775, 776, 777, 778, 779, 780, 781, 782, 783, 784, 785, 786, 787, 788, 789, 790, 791, 792, 793, 794, 795, 796, 797, 798, 799, 800, 801, 802, 803, 804, 805, 806, 807, 808, 809, 810, 811, 812, 813, 814, 815, 816, 817, 818, 819,

Is there AI software to trace missing persons? HC asks police

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, MARCH 11

THE DELHI High Court has inquired from the Delhi Police if there is any Artificial Intelligence software that can be used by them to check and confirm the whereabouts of missing persons.

The query was raised by a division bench of Justices Prathiba Singh and Dharmesh Sharma while dealing with a habeas corpus petition in February.

In the petition, petitioner Dil Khush Baira sought the production of his elderly father, who has been missing since February 17, 2023. A complaint was also lodged at the Ranoah police station in this regard, but the police have been unable to trace him so far.

On February 17, the police informed the court that there had been "no trace of the petitioner's father despite the fact that requisite procedures have been followed and photographs uploaded on ZIPNET."

ZIPNET was envisioned as a tool for inter-state police coordination, especially to track missing persons and pinpoint proclaimed offenders.

The bench posted the matter for March 18 in its order for February 7.

AERODROME LICENCE EXPECTED IN MAY

Noida International Airport set to miss second deadline

NEETIKA JHA
NOIDA, MARCH 11

THE Noida International Airport in Uttar Pradesh's Jewar district is set to miss its second deadline for launch. The aerodrome licence for the operations of the flights is expected in May, officials said on Tuesday, a day after Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath chaired a meeting in Lucknow to discuss the progress at the airport site.

The airport was expected to be opened to the public in April after the October 2024 deadline was missed.

In a statement on Tuesday, Noida International Airport CEO Christoph Schnellmann was quoted as saying, "The next major milestone is the granting of the aerodrome licence, expected in May. The airport will begin operations with domestic flights, with international routes to follow in the subsequent months."

Last year, in November, Noida International Airport Limited (NIAL) CEO Arun Vir Singh said that the aerodrome licence was expected by March 20 and that the airport operations would begin any day before April 17. The



The Jewar airport had initially missed the October 2024 deadline for the launch. File

flights will begin anytime after March 20 and before April 17. For now, three international flights have been scheduled for Day 1. We are considering international flights for Europe and the Pacific region," he said at the time. Monday's meeting, chaired by the CM, was attended by Tata Sons chairman N Chandrasekaran, Tata Projects

MD and CEO Vinayak Pai, Civil Aviation Secretary V Vualnam, and Zurich International Airport MD Daniel Bircher, apart from Schnellmann.

When The Indian Express contacted UP Chief Secretary Manoj Kumar Singh to seek the details of the meeting, he refused to comment on the matter. The NIAL CEO had earlier re-

Last year, in November, Noida International Airport Limited (NIAL) CEO Arun Vir Singh said that the aerodrome licence was expected by March 20

marked that the flight schedule, number of flights, and categories of services were likely to be finalised at that meeting. "A comprehensive report on the current status of Noida International Airport will be presented before the CM," Singh had said.

The latest statement by Schnellmann also highlights that the airport is making steady progress towards operational readiness. "The Airports Authority of India (AAI) is advancing its work in the air traffic control tower, while construction of the passenger terminal and associated infrastructure is progressing well," he said.

"Discussions are ongoing with the state and the Centre regarding the start of commercial operations," he added.

At New Delhi rly station, man dies while trying to board moving train

UPASIKA SINGHAL
NEW DELHI, MARCH 11

A 62-YEAR-OLD man was severed in half while trying to board a running train at New Delhi Railway Station on Tuesday morning. According to police officers, the incident occurred at Platform 14, which, incidentally, was the site of a stampede that left 18 dead three weeks ago.

Railway officials said the man was identified as Tilak Raj, a resident of Tehsil Camp in Panipat, Haryana. The accident took place when he was trying to board the Shan-e-Punjab Express (Train No. 12497), which runs from New

The incident occurred at Platform 14, which, incidentally, was the site of a stampede that left 18 dead three weeks ago

Delhi to Amritsar, said officials. The train had departed from New Delhi at 6:40 am and had almost entirely moved out of the platform area when the mishap occurred.

On reaching the scene, police found that the man had suffered severe injuries, with both legs sev-

ered and lying between the tracks, while the rest of his body was outside the rail track.

"A mobile phone was recovered from the deceased's pocket. After some time, a call was received on the phone, through which the deceased was identified. His son, Tarun, along with relatives, arrived at the police station, and inquest proceedings under BNSS Section 174 were conducted," said DCP Railways, KPS Malhotra.

After recording statements from the family, a post-mortem examination was carried out at Lady Hardinge Medical College. The deceased's body was then handed over to his son, said police.

Fake call centre busted, 18 arrested from Outer Delhi for duping job seekers: Cops

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, MARCH 11

A FAKE call centre, which allegedly duped job seekers, has been busted, and 18 suspects linked to the fraud have been arrested from Outer Delhi, police said on Tuesday.

According to police, the job

seekers were contacted by multiple phones, and representatives from reputed banks and companies.

"They were tricked into paying for fake online courses and providing bank details. Following a detailed investigation, our team raided a location near Mata Chanandevi Hospital, Janakpuri, and ar-

rested 18 suspects, recovering multiple phones, laptops and other equipment," Deputy Commissioner of Police (Outer) Sachin Sharma said.

The accused also duped people by offering job opportunities in lieu of money.

Police continue to investigate links to other cases, the officer said.

AT COST OF RS 2.55 CRORE

12 mohalla clinics, 13 govt dispensaries to be modified

ANKITA UPADHYAY
NEW DELHI, MARCH 11

THE BJP-Led Delhi government has issued orders to modify 12 Aam Aadmi Mohalla clinics as Urban Ayushman Arogya Mandir (UAM) and 13 Delhi government dispensaries as Ayushman Arogya Mandir Primary Health Centres (PHC). The total cost of modification will be Rs 2.55 crore.

The modification has to be completed on an urgent basis, underlined letter written by the

chief engineer, health to special secretary, infrastructure, for approval. "As are being monitored at the highest level of Delhi government, and beyond and are being considered as Model for such type of Ayushman Arogya Mandir PHC & UAM buildings," read the letter.

The 12 Aam Aadmi Mohalla clinics are located in New Delhi Central District in unauthorised colonies and Jangli Bhopi clusters. Among the 13 Delhi government dispensaries, two each are located in North West and South West Delhi, and one

each in nine other districts. The average cost for the upgrade has been kept at Rs 15 lakh for the government dispensary and Rs 5 lakh each for the mohalla clinics. "The total amount required for such works is Rs 2.55 crore," said the letter.

"It was also desired to give a rough estimate for carrying out the said upgradation to the extent possible under which it is submitted that the average cost for such upgradation per dispensary will be around Rs 15 lakh each for 13 listed DGD 15x13 = i.e. Rs. 1.95 Cr. In addition the av-

erage cost for upgradation of the AAMC to Urban Ayushman Arogya Mandir is @ Rs. 5 lakh each for 12 Nos comes out to = 5x12 Rs. 0.60 Cr. Therefore, the total amount required for such work is Rs. 2.55 Cr," said the letter. It further added that to execute these works, permission may be granted to utilise the fund allotted under the dispensary head to execute these works where the budget seems available.

Delhi Health Minister Pankaj Kumar Singh, soon after taking charge last month, had an-

nounced the decision to rename the AAP's Mohalla clinics. He had also announced that 250 clinics running from rented spaces will be shut.

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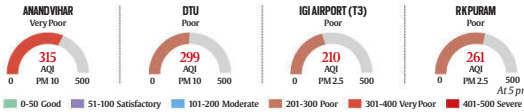
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FORECAST: March 12
Mist likely in the morning. Partly cloudy sky. Strong surface winds (speed 20-30 kmph)
MAX: 32-34 **MIN: 16-18**
3.1°C above normal 0.9°C above normal

WORLD'S MOST POLLUTED CAPITAL FOR SIXTH CONSECUTIVE YEAR

Delhi is more polluted than NCR cities for 2nd year in a row: Data

SOPHIYA MATHEW
NEW DELHI, MARCH 11

DELHI, WHICH has emerged as the world's most polluted capital for the sixth consecutive year, overtook cities in the National Capital Region (NCR) in the list of top 15 polluted regional cities in South Asia in 2023 – even as some NCR cities fared worse for the previous six years – shows a comparison of data collected for the annual World Air Quality Report over the years by Swiss air quality technology company IQAir.

The national capital broke several records in 2024. It was the second most polluted city in the world and the second most polluted regional city in Central and South Asia, as per the report.

With an annual average PM 2.5 concentration of 108.3 µg/m³, Delhi was second only to Meghalaya's Bymahat, which had a PM 2.5 concentration of 128.2 µg/m³, in the list of regional cities of South Asia in 2024. (see box). As per WHO standards, PM 2.5 levels should not exceed 5 µg/m³.

According to the report, the Capital fared worst in 2018 with average PM 2.5 levels at 113.5 µg/m³. But even then, the IQAir report had noted, "Of the cities included in South Asia, it is interesting to note that although Delhi typically receives most media coverage as one of the world's polluted capitals, the Indian capital 'only' ranks 10th for annual PM 2.5 concentration. Other cities across Northern India and Pakistan have a higher recorded annual PM 2.5 level, with nearby Gurgaon (Gurgaon) narrowly surging in the highest annual concentration of any global city recorded here during 2018."

From 2018 to 2019, even as pollution levels decreased from



Delhi is the second most polluted city in the world in 2024. Archive

MOST POLLUTED CITIES IN CENTRAL, SOUTH ASIA*

City-wise PM 2.5 annual average (in µg/m³)	
Bymahat, Meghalaya	128.2
Delhi	108.3
Karaganda, Kazakhstan	104.8
Lahore, Pakistan	102.1
Faridabad, India	101.2

WHO annual PM 2.5 guideline of 5 µg/m³ CPCB annual standard 40 µg/m³ (Source: World Air Quality report 2024) *in 2024

- The region includes
- Kyrgyzstan
 - Sri Lanka
 - Bangladesh
 - Tajikistan
 - India
 - Nepal
 - Kazakhstan
 - Pakistan
 - Turkmenistan
 - Uzbekistan

- India is the most monitored country in the region, hosting more than half of the region's stations
- Air quality data was reported from 371 cities across 11 countries in Central and South Asia
- India saw a 7% decline in PM 2.5 concentrations in 2024, averaging 50.6 µg/m³ compared to 54.4 µg/m³ in 2023

CHALLENGES:

- Vehicular emissions, industrial discharges, construction dust, and burning crop residue
- In urban centres like Delhi, vehicular emissions are leading contributor to fine particulate matter
- Seasonal agricultural practices, particularly burning of crop residue, further deteriorate air quality during winter
- Industrial emissions, construction activities also contribute significantly to pollution levels

113.5 µg/m³ to 98.6 µg/m³. Delhi ranked as the fourth most polluted regional city in Central and South Asia among 147 cities, implying that other NCR cities including Gurgaon, Faridabad and Bhiwadi – were ahead in terms of

improvement in air quality. While Gurgaon fared worse and emerged as the most polluted city in the region in 2019, the number of Delhi-NCR cities in the top 15 most polluted regional cities also increased from seven to ten.

in 2021, 2022, and 2023.

In 2023, Delhi overtook other NCR cities to emerge as the most polluted in the region. The other NCR cities on the list were Greater Noida, Muzaffarnagar, Gurgaon, and Dadri. In 2024, Bhiwadi and Faridabad were among the NCR cities on the list. In 2019, IQAir, in its report, had called the NCR "promising". However, the latest report noted that despite such a programme, challenges to reduce pollution levels persisted. It said this was because of "inconsistent policy implementation and inadequate infrastructure".

Air pollution experts have also noted this disparity, urging for better implementation of NCAP. Suni Dahiya, lead analyst and founder of Envirocatalysts, a Delhi-based think tank, said, "While Delhi has consistently made headlines as one of the most polluted cities globally over the past years, systematic actions to reduce emission loads at the source have largely remained confined to drafts within various action plans. These plans have suffered from poor implementation and a lack of long-term, systematic approaches. This is evident in persistently high air pollution levels in the city and surrounding regions, despite significant steps like the introduction of BS-VI fuel and advanced technologies in the transportation sector."

"This winter, however, has shown a shift, with regulatory bodies like Commission for Air Quality Management and Supreme Court taking steps to fix accountability and demonstrate intent to reduce emissions at the source. While this marks a small but positive start, achieving significant and lasting improvements will require a drastic overhaul in how air pollution is regulated."

NIRBHAY THAKUR
NEW DELHI, MARCH 11

A DELHI court Tuesday ordered the filing of an FIR against former CM Arvind Kejriwal for alleged misuse of funds in putting up hoardings in Dwarka. "The seriousness of the offence... can be gauged from the fact that it is not only an eyesore and public nuisance... but is also hazardous, to the smooth flow of traffic...", the court noted in its March 11 order. Additional Chief Judicial Magistrate (ACJM) Neha Mittal of Rouse Avenue Court ordered the SHO of the police station concerned to file an FIR under Section 3 (penalty for defacement of property) of the Delhi Prevention of Defacement of Property Act, 2007, and for "any other offences that appear to have been committed from the facts of the case".

The court also ordered an FIR against former AAP MLA Gulab Singh and then Dwarka councillor Nitika Sharma.

The complainant in this case is Shiv Kumar Saxena, who had moved an application under Section 156(3) (power of magistrate to order investigation) of the CrP. Saxena had alleged Kejriwal was "misusing public money by printing huge-size hoardings" in various places at Dwarka.

A status report filed in 2022 by the SHO, Dwarka South police



Former CM Arvind Kejriwal

station, stated that the complaint was filed in 2019, and at present (2022), no such hoardings were found at the alleged spot, and hence, no cognizable offence was made out. On September 15, 2022, a magistrate court in Dwarka dismissed Saxena's application seeking an FIR in this case. Aggrieved by this, the complainant filed a revision petition. On January 21 this year, the revisionist court remanded the matter back to a magistrate court, which was directed to decide the application afresh.

ACJM Mittal in her order said, "This court does not find any merit in the arguments advanced by Ld. APP (Additional Public Prosecutor) for the state that it is impossible to collect any evidence at this stage due to lapse of time and non-availability of any particulars of the printing press... this court cannot presume the fact that ordering an investigation will be a futile exercise

without even giving a chance to the investigating agency, especially in this era of scientific advancement", she added.

In response to the order, the AAP said in a statement, "The original complaint named several alleged persons including PM Narendra Modi, Home Minister Amit Shah, BJP President J P Nadda, MP Manoj Tiwari, Parvash Verma, AAP National Convener Arvind Kejriwal, and other leaders over the alleged defacement of public property. It is strange the media is only highlighting the case against Kejriwal."

As per the court order, the complainant mentioned that in another hearing, greetings of Gurnanak Dev Jayanti and Kartik Purnima were extended to residents and this hoarding bore photos and names of Nitika Sharma (accused number 3), PM Narendra Modi, Amit Shah, Manoj Tiwari, J P Nadda, Parvash Verma, Ramesh Bidhuri and others.

The court said the investigating agency has ample power to array any persons as accused. "The statement put forth by APP for the State with respect to omission of names of certain persons from the present complaint cannot have, in the opinion of this court, any bearing on the fate of the present application. Mentioning or omitting names of certain persons by the complainant cannot determine the course of investigation."

Revisiting cases of 150 deportees, 'conspiracy' FIRs: Police plan to bust illegal immigration

ALOK SINGH
NEW DELHI, MARCH 11

"TAKE ACTION Against those facilitating entry of illegal immigrants into India, creating fake IDs, facilitating movement towards Delhi, providing or arranging jobs, and providing or renting accommodation in the city... and register 'conspiracy FIRs'...": this is part of the action plan chalked out by the Delhi Police to crack down on networks believed to be linked to illegal immigrants from Bangladesh and Myanmar, the Indian Express has learnt.

Sources said the Delhi Police also decided to revisit cases of 150 alleged illegal Bangladeshi immigrants deported since 2024. The Special Branch, Crime Branch, and Special Cell will conduct intensive drives to identify, detain, and deport illegal immigrants; the plan is expected to be executed within a month, a source said.

The move comes after Home Minister Amit Shah, on February 28, directed the Delhi Police to take strict action against networks that help illegal Bangladeshi and Rohingya enter India, including those who help them get fake documents. In his first meeting with the police top brass to review the law and order situation after the formation of the BJP government in the Capital, Shah had labelled it as an issue of national security that should be dealt with strictly.

To trace such networks, directions have been issued, sources in the Delhi Police said, to register 'mother conspiracy FIRs' to intensify probes. These FIRs may be registered by the Special Cell and Crime Branch, as per an officer.

As per directions from the top brass, a source further pointed out, both the Law and Order units, along with units of Special Branch, Special Cell, and Crime Branch, will work collectively. All units have designated roles, as per the plan. The Intelligence Unit has been tasked with collecting interrogation reports of 150 Bangladeshi deportees sent back since last year from the Foreigners Regional Registration Office and districts.

The Crime Branch and Law and Order units will collect their action taken reports in the coming days and submit them to the Special Cell for further analysis to register conspiracy FIRs, sources highlighted, citing from the directions issued from the police HQ.

Another source said the Law and Order zones have been directed to "actively and sincerely put maximum effort" into identifying, tracing, verifying and questioning those staying illegally in Delhi. It also stated that local police will have to prepare their FIRs, besides taking legal action against those found staying illegally.

Meanwhile, five men from Bangladesh were arrested during a similar drive on Tuesday, said police.

'No proof victim was a minor': Court acquits man in POCSO case

NIRBHAY THAKUR
NEW DELHI, MARCH 11

A DELHI court recently acquitted a man, who spent three years and eight months in judicial custody in a case registered under the POCSO Act, as it noted that the "victim was in love" with the accused, and the prosecution failed to prove that she was a minor at the time of the alleged incident.

"All the above factors show that the victim was in a relationship with the accused. It has not come on record that the accused, at any point of time, threatened the victim or criminally assaulted her to outrage her modesty," Additional Sessions Judge Santosh Kumar Singh of the Dwarka court said in his order dated February 25, which was recently made public.

"Especially when the victim was not a minor and, therefore, being a major, the victim was at liberty to take decisions of her own for her well-being. It has come on record that the place where the offence is alleged to have been committed was, surrounded by other houses. Despite being so, the victim did not raise any voice or shout and went to the terrace of the second floor of the adjacent building to meet the accused," the court added.

The court also noted that the prosecution, which had relied on the birth certificate of the victim for age determination, had failed to prove that she was a minor.

Motorcycle rider 'slips' on pothole, dies of head injuries

New Delhi: A 37-year-old man was found unconscious with a severe head injury after his motorcycle allegedly slipped on a pothole near a traffic light close to Hamdard Hospital on the Mehrauli-Badarpur road on Monday night. He was later declared dead at AIIMS Trauma Centre, said police.

According to police officers, a PCR call regarding the incident was received at Tigris police station. On reaching the spot, authorities found the injured man, identified as Shiv Murti, and helmet were found nearby.

A case was registered against unknown persons under BNS sections 281 (rash or negligent driving) and 106(1) (causing death by negligence), and further investigation is underway, said police. "From our initial investigation, we discovered that the deceased probably slipped while riding his motorcycle over a large pothole on the road," said a police source.

The PWD did not respond when contacted for comment. ENS

3 labourers killed in fire at Anand Vihar, CM announces Rs 10L relief for families

UPASIKA SINGHAL
NEW DELHI, MARCH 11

THREE MEN, including two brothers, were killed after a fire broke out in the tent they were sleeping in East Delhi's Anand Vihar early Tuesday. Another man was injured in the incident.

According to police, the four men worked as contract labourers who laid underground pipes for Indraprastha Gas Limited and lived in a temporary tent on a DDA plot. They said the charred bodies of Jaggi, 30, and brothers Shyam Singh, 40, and Kanta Prasad, 37, have been recovered from the spot. Nitin Singh received a minor burn injury on his leg.

In the afternoon, Chief Minister Rekha Gupta and Vishwas Nagar MLA O P Sharma visited the site and spoke to the victims' families present there. "My deepest condolences to all the affected families. I pray for the peace of the departed souls and for strength to the bereaved families. While we cannot undo their loss, the Delhi government will extend all possible support



CM Rekha Gupta and Vishwas Nagar MLA O P Sharma visited the site on Tuesday. Praveen Khanna

to them. Families of the deceased will receive Rs 10 lakh each as financial assistance from the government," said CM Gupta in a statement to the media. A Delhi Fire Service (DFS) official said a call regarding the fire was received at 2.42 am, and three fire tenders were pressed into service, which doused the blaze in half an hour.

According to police, Shyam was the first to notice that the tent was on fire. "The survivor, Nitin,

told us that the four men had a few drinks before going to sleep. Around 2 am, Nitin was woken up by Shyam alerting him about the fire, while Shyam tried to open the lock on the main shift door. The tent, Nitin managed to scale up the wall against which the tent was propped up and jump to the other side... the others had also woken up by then but were unable to get out," said an officer.

Police said while Shyam's body was found near the door,

Kanta and Jaggi's charred bodies were near the compound wall. Police said the cause of the fire, in which a gas cylinder also burst, is being probed. They said the tent used to keep a small lamp lit with fuel on a cooler stand inside the tent, and locked the temporary gate. Initial reports suggest the blaze originated from some material near the lamp catching fire and spreading quickly.

Police have registered an FIR against unknown persons under BNS section 106(1) (causing death by negligence). DCP (Shahdara) Prashant Gautam told the media that the cause of death of the three victims seemed to be asphyxiation.

Police said the bodies had been shifted to the Sabzi Mandi mortuary. The deceased were residents of UP's Banda and Auraiya districts. Suman (30), the brothers' sister, was informed of the incident at 6 am. "Kanta's daughter was engaged in December, and he was looking forward to her wedding. It was supposed to happen after Diwali this year," she told The Indian Express.

BJP MLA PARVESH SAHIB SINGH AFTER TAKING OATH AS NDMC MEMBER

'Will move proposal to rename Talkatora Stadium'

SAMAN HUSAIN
NEW DELHI, MARCH 11

THE TALKATORA Stadium, the national capital's oldest indoor facility, may soon undergo a name change. On Tuesday, BJP MLA Parvash Sahib Singh announced that by the next meeting of the New Delhi Municipal Council (NDMC), he has plans to put forward a renaming proposal.

After taking oath as NDMC member, Singh, who is the MLA from New Delhi, said, "I have taken my oath today, and in the next NDMC meeting, we will bring up the matter of renaming Talkatora Stadium."



Talkatora Stadium is Delhi's oldest indoor facility. Archive

"Talkatora stadium is very famous, many big events are held here, people from the whole country and world come here... many people from the Valmiki community have come forward with a proposal... So, after February 8, in the first meeting of the NDMC, this proposal will be brought up and the name will be changed to

Hashmi, there is still an embankment inside Talkatora Garden that was once used to control the water flow. "The embankment was made to collect water that came from several streams of the Southern Ridge... this was possibly made by Feroz Shah Tughlaq... because he has done a lot of work on water infrastructure," he said. Over the years, the ruins of Talkatora, including two domed pavilions and scattered walls, have faded into obscurity. The construction of the indoor stadium and swimming pool during the Asian Games further cemented its name as a recreational hub. Today, the stadium, with a seating capacity of 2,700, regularly hosts political gatherings and sporting and cultural events. As per NDMC procedures, a name-change request must be submitted to its General Administration Department. The pro-

posal is then placed before its 13-member Council for approval. If passed, it is sent to Delhi government's Urban Development department for final clearance. The process has been made in accordance with guidelines provided by the Ministry of Home Affairs. Following the council meeting, NDMC vice-chairman Kuljeet Chahal said, "We will collectively decide as a team. The proposals will first go to the MHA before a final decision is made." Asked about renaming other places, including Tughlaq Lane, where two BJP MLAs had modified nameplates of the government-allotted bungalows to add "Vivekanand Marg", Chahal said many proposals have been received from various individuals and organisations seeking to rename locations after freedom fighters, sages, and other eminent personalities.



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Very Short E-Procurement Notice
NIT No:- NPC-NIT-16/2023-24 (6th Call)

Sr. No.	Particulars	Details
1	Name of Work	Construction & Commissioning of Final Stage Treatment Plant of Capacity 10 KLD at Chhatarpur (Rajdhani) followed by Operation and Maintenance including desludging operations for 5 years
2	Estimated Cost (INR)	Construction Cost: ₹ 2,38,31,558.00 Operation & Maintenance Cost: ₹ 1,26,22,393.00 Total: ₹ 3,64,53,951.00
3	Bid Security (INR)	₹ 3,64,540/- (Rupees Three Lakhs Sixty-Four Thousand Five Hundred Forty Only)
4	Cost of Bid Document (INR)	₹ 10,000/- (Rupees Ten Thousand Only) non-refundable
5	Time of Completion	1 year of construction which comprises 9 months of construction and 3 months of defect liability period including one month of trial run and 5 years of O&M post DLP
6	Date of publication of tender	10-03-2025
7	Document downloading start Date	17-03-2025
11	Bid submission end date	25-03-2025
12	Last date for the submission of Bid Security, cost of bid document	25-03-2025
13	Bid opening date (online)	26-03-2025
14	Mode of Submission of Bids	(https://tharkhandtenders.gov.in)
15	Name & Address of office Inviting Tender	Executive Officer, Nagar Panchayat Chhatarpur
16	Helpline Number	9471125404

Note: Only 1-tender will be accepted.
Complete bid document is available on website <http://tharkhandtenders.gov.in>

Executive Officer
Nagar Panchayat Chhatarpur
PR NO.348298 District(24-25):D

New Okhla Industrial Development Authority
Administrative Building, Sector-6, Noida-201301 (U.P.)
Website : www.noidaauthorityonline.in

E-TENDER NOTICE

E-Tenders are invited from eligible contractors/firm 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 & <https://tenderup.nic.in>. Please ensure to see these websites for any changes/amendments & corrigendum etc.

A) Fresh Tender Work:-

S.	Jobs No.	Name of the Work	Tender Amount (Rs. Lacs)
1	43/DGM/SMW C-1)/2024-25	M/o Building (Renovation of Police Control Room on Expressway), Noida.	61.48
2	44/DGM/SMW C-1)/2024-25	M/o Road (Painting work on Central verge & footpath on Expressway and MP-1 Road), Noida.	45.42

The above tenders can be uploaded by dated **27.03.2025 upto 5.00 PM**.
Pre-qualification shall be opened/downloaded on dated **28.03.2025 at 11.00 AM**.

गहनधुन सुचना-
भारतीय औद्योगिक विकास प्राधिकरण के अधिनियम क्षेत्र में भारत के सीमांत प्रदेश प्लाट एवं उत्तर प्रदेश औद्योगिक क्षेत्र विकास अधिनियम, 1976 के विधिवत सौंपित या किसी भी प्रकार का अन्य नियंत्रित प्लॉट एवं क्षेत्र है।
परमाण्विक को अलग किया जाता है कि इन प्रकार की अन्य कोलोनियों एवं अन्य निमित्त प्लॉटों में सुचना/आवेदन/दुआ/गोकार/कारखाना की खरीद-विक्री को पूर्णतः रोक रखा गया कोलोनियज के दुआएं एवं बाजार विधानों से अलग है।
यहां ही नौकर अधिनियम क्षेत्र के हिस्से एवं सुचना नदियों के सूक्ष्म क्षेत्र (Flood Plain Zone) में अनुसूचित / अधि लोड एवं काले हाइड्रो के कारखाने में सिलव भूमिकाओं के सुचना में न करें।

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Cops: 'Influencer' held for stealing bag with Rs 3 lakh

New Delhi: A social media influencer was arrested for stealing a bag with Rs 3 lakh in cash from a businessman in North Delhi's Civil Lines area, police said on Tuesday. Officers said the accused, Pawan alias Calvin alias Network of Madangir in South Delhi, posted dance videos and reels and had over 16,000 followers on Instagram.

However, he allegedly committed theft along with his associate. Pawan told police that he took to crime to earn money. He was previously arrested in a similar case, the Delhi Police said in a statement.

Raja Banthia, Deputy Commissioner of Police (DCP), North Delhi, said the complaint was filed by Rishiraj Rao, ENS

In 6 months, cruise along Yamuna on a ferry

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, MARCH 11

IN THE next six months, Delhiites might be able to take a ferry ride on the Yamuna in the city. A four to six-km stretch of the river, from Sonia Vihar to Jagatpur, will be developed for the ferry services.

The initiative will focus on eco-friendly cruise operations, featuring electric-solar hybrid boats designed to carry 20-30 passengers at a time.

These boats will be equipped with bio-toilets, public announcement systems, and life jackets to ensure a safe and comfortable travel experience.

Two HDPE jetties will be installed for smooth ops.

As per the MoU, the IWA will spearhead infrastructure development, including floating jetties, charging stations for hybrid boats, and navigational aids, while ensuring passenger safety.

DDA will provide land and shore-side facilities, last-mile connectivity, and public services such as electricity and restrooms.

DDJB will monitor water quality, manage the barrage for navigability, and facilitate drinking water supply and waste disposal.

The I&CDD will maintain embankments, grant access to approach roads, and ensure adherence to safety protocols.

The DTTDC will oversee boat operations, engage operators, and ensure compliance with inland vessel regulations to promote tourism.

(River Yamuna from Jagatpur (Delhi) to Sangam in Prayagraj (Uttar Pradesh)) stretch up stream of the Wazirabad Barrage.

Saxena, Delhi CM Rekha Gupta and Union Ports, Shipping and Waterways Minister Sarabanda Sonowal were present at the signing of the MoU at Saraband Asta Park.

The initiative will focus on eco-friendly cruise operations.

due to negative politics and was stalled. Two years ago, to make the Yamuna navigable, I requested an Indian Navy boat and tried to make it operational in Yamuna. The then CM went to the Supreme Court and all those services were stopped."

This is expected to promote short-distance navigation and recreational activities, particularly in National Waterway 110

(River Yamuna from Jagatpur (Delhi) to Sangam in Prayagraj (Uttar Pradesh)) stretch up stream of the Wazirabad Barrage.

Saxena, Delhi CM Rekha Gupta and Union Ports, Shipping and Waterways Minister Sarabanda Sonowal were present at the signing of the MoU at Saraband Asta Park.

The initiative will focus on eco-friendly cruise operations.

Agusta Westland chopper case: Court allows Michel to apply for passport from Tihar Jail

NIRBHAY THAKUR
NEW DELHI, MARCH 11

ADELHI court Tuesday allowed Christian Michel James, one of the alleged middlemen in the AgustaWestland VVIP chopper case, to apply for a passport from prison. Citing "security reasons", Michel had told the court Friday that he couldn't accept the bail granted to him by the Delhi High Court in a money laundering case registered by the Enforcement Directorate (ED).

"Will you be furnishing bail bonds? Do you want to come out?" Special Judge Sanjeev Aggarwal at Rouse Avenue Court asked Michel during Tuesday's hearing.

"Sir, there are some issues. I want to apply for a passport first. It's an online process," replied Michel. His lawyer, Aljo Joseph, moved an application before court requesting permission to apply for a passport from Tihar jail, where Michel is lodged.

"In these circumstances, the Superintendent Jail concerned is directed to allow the accused CM James to apply (for) a passport online on the aforesaid site(s), for which they will provide him an on-line facility with internet and in this regard he can take the assistance of his above Counsel Sh. Aljo K. Joseph, who is allowed to visit. Jail No. 4, Tihar to assist the accused in applying the fresh British passport on 13.03.2024 from 11 am onwards till the said formalities of applying (for) the passport are completed," the judge said in his order allowing the application.

"Do you play Holi? You are wearing white also," the judge asked Michel during the hearing. "I will just lock myself in my cell," came the response.

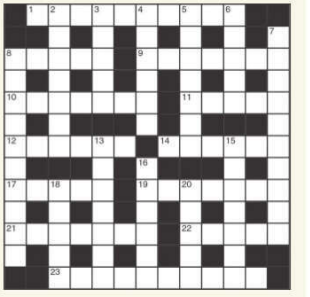
Michel had also moved an application requesting 10 days to inspect documents. The judge allowed this request and set dates for the inspection after consulting with CBI lawyer Manu Mishra, who was present in court.

The HC last Tuesday granted Michel bail in the case registered by the ED. A fortnight ago, the Supreme Court had granted him bail in the corruption case registered by the CBI in the case in 2013.

Michel, extradited from the UAE in 2018, had been in custody for over six years and two months which was close to the maximum punishment of seven years.

As per the CBI's investigation, a Rs 3,726.96-crore contract for the supply of 12 helicopters was awarded to UK-based AgustaWestland International Ltd. An agreement to this effect was executed on February 8, 2010, between the Ministry of Defence and AgustaWestland. The agency had accused Michel, as a middleman, of paying large bribes to Indian Air Force officers, Defence Ministry officials, bureaucrats and politicians via AgustaWestland.

CROSSWORD 5622



- ACROSS**
- 1 Is it instrumental in warning Parisian pedestrians? (6,4)
 - 8 Subject those people to the ultimate in abuse (5)
 - 9 Dickensian doctor and a painter to note (7)
 - 10 Hardy Lass has time for a bit of mosaic work (7)
 - 11 Move or shoot back for example (5)
 - 12 A short dress, mother, to say the least (6)
 - 14 Good reputation to consider (6)
 - 17 It may be smoked out of its den (5)
 - 19 Eggs turn into cheers (7)
 - 21 Regards foreign money as a bad thing (7)
 - 22 Bill free of bitterness? (5)
 - 23 There are terms for this (10)
- DOWN**
- 2 Catches as one comes drunkenly home (5,2)
 - 3 Pleasant about egghad member of the family (5)
 - 4 Volume of praise (6)
 - 5 Book some public transport (7)
 - 6 Recorded Edward as missing? (5)
 - 7 Decided to be resolute (10)
 - 8 Tribal symbols could be temples too (5,5)
 - 13 It's a jumbo and a minute before noon (11,7)
 - 15 Wit saying has some point with animals? (7)
 - 16 Resign because of one's self-image? (6)
 - 18 Turn aside for inspiration (5)
 - 20 Stop using TV as a diversion (5)

Solutions Crossword 5621 Across: 1 Deride, 4 Seldom, 9 Captain, 10 Token, 11 Lento, 12 Condon, 13 Reading lamp, 18 France, 20 Spade, 22 Ombre, 23 Elusive, 24 Tiled, 25 Split Down, 1 Down: 2 Rags, 3 Battered, 5 Extra, 6 Duskward, 7 Miring, 8 Encountered, 14 Enacted, 15 Last lap, 16 Aloft, 17 Swans, 19 Close, 21 Apsal

JUMBLED WORDS

Given below are four jumbled words. Solve the jumbles to make proper words and move them to the correct squares below. Select the letters in the shaded squares and jumble them to get the answer for the given clue.

— is the key to action and freedom. — Hannah Arendt (11)

LEPER

NUIGNS

ERIOS

IVYFV

OVER THE HEDGE by Michael Fry & T Lewis



CALVIN & HOBBS by Bill Watterson



MARVIN by Tom Armstrong



Difficulty Level 2s
Instructions
To solve a Sudoku puzzle, a digit from 1 to 9 must appear in each of the nine vertical columns, in each of the nine horizontal rows and in each of the nine boxes.

Difficulty Level
1s = Very easy; 2s = Easy;
3s = Medium; 4s = Hard;
5s = Very Hard;
6s = Genius

SUDOKU 5891

2	4	7	8	3	9	1	6	5
6	5	8	4	1	2	9	3	7
1	3	9	5	6	7	8	2	4
3	8	5	2	4	6	7	1	9
4	9	2	1	7	8	6	5	3
7	6	1	9	5	3	4	8	2
8	1	4	3	9	5	2	7	6
5	2	6	7	8	4	3	9	1
9	7	3	6	2	1	5	4	8

DAY TODAY

BY PETER VIDAL

ARIES (Mar 21 - Apr 20)
There is more going on than meets the eye at the moment, and you would be well advised to avoid a break or separation that involves money as much as personal feelings. A current shake-up at home could be very favourable.

TAURUS (Apr 21 - May 21)
Don't spend too much time going over old ground. Nostalgia for the past is all very well, but if you've important projects on the go, or if someone is depending on you, you should keep your attention pinned firmly to the present. Don't be too hard on who you love.

GEMINI (May 22 - June 21)
The chances of a secret romance or discreet encounter are still pretty strong, although any thoughts you may have had of going behind somebody's back are now likely to be outweighed by good old puritanical guilt: you know as well as anyone what is right.

CANCER (June 22 - July 23)
Certain personal boundaries seem to have become rather blurred recently, and if you are a typical Cancerian you may be wondering where it will all end. Yet I have no doubt at all that intimate partners will see the sense in what you are doing.

LEO (July 24 - Aug 23)
All general planetary patterns indicate that partners are encouraging you to do your best. While advising you to avoid going over the top, I must remind you of the astrological law that the better the future you expect, the better the future will be. Confidence breeds success.

VIRGO (Aug 24 - Sep 23)
Your social stars are stirring, at long last, someone would say! It's time to broaden your horizons and take as many new ideas on board as you can. Get out and about over the next four weeks, and even accept invitations you'd normally treat with disdain.

LIBRA (Sep 24 - Oct 23)
There are certain days when it is wiser to be polite and charming whatever the provocation - and this is one of them. Fortunately, you were born with an innate propensity to turn the other cheek. That does mean that sometimes people walk all over you.

SCORPIO (Oct 24 - Nov 23)
Colleagues or co-workers may have been asserting themselves recently. In fact, I don't think you have been given hearing. All you can do is undermine others' inflated faith in themselves, and if you prick someone's bubble then they've probably asked for it.

SAGITTARIUS (Nov 24 - Dec 22)
The emphasis on financial stars continues with a general note that anything connected with water is assuming greater significance. Does this refer to a holiday by the sea? Or merely routine plumbing problems? It could actually also indicate strange dreams.

CAPRICORN (Dec 23 - Jan 20)
You must do everything in your power to resolve a dispute in a close relationship. Don't allow partners to think you are totally self-obsessed and don't let them walk all over you, either.

AQUARIUS (Jan 21 - Feb 19)
You would like to be in a position to know a great deal more. Wouldn't we all? But, now that the facts are so difficult to get at, we all have our own version of the truth. Yours is as good as anybody's, so lay your ideas on the line and wait for partners' responses.

PISCES (Feb 20 - Mar 20)
It may be frustrating to be left in the dark, but are you really sure you want to know what is going on? Be happy that current planetary influences appeal to your mischievous nature and have a good time. Or, at least, have as good a time as you can.

IN PARLIAMENT BUDGET SESSION

QUESTIONS IN HOUSE

BSF SEIZED ₹461-CR OF CONTRABAND ON INDIA-BANGLA BORDER IN 2024

New Delhi: BSF has seized contraband items worth ₹461.07 crore while foiling smuggling attempts at the Indo-Bangladesh border in 2024, the highest in last 10 years, MoS for Home Affairs Nityanand Rai informed Lok Sabha Tuesday in response to a question. The data, provided by the minister showed that since 2015, the BSF has seized contraband items worth ₹2,806.17 crore at the border, of which goods worth ₹461.07 crore have been seized in 2024 alone. **PTI**

6,046 CYBER CRIMINALS HELD WITH HELP OF I4C LOCATION TRACKER

New Delhi: The "Pratibimb" module, launched by the MHA's Indian Cyber Crime Coordination Centre (I4C), which tracks the locations of criminals, has linked to the arrest of 6,046 accused, 17,185 offenders, and 36,296 cyber investigation assistance requests, MoS Home Affairs Bandi Sanjay Kumar told LS Tuesday. In response to a question, he said, "Pratibimb" maps the locations of criminals and crime infrastructure on a map to give visibility to jurisdictional officers. It also facilitates the seeking and receiving of techno-legal assistance by Law Enforcement Agencies from I4C and other SMEs." **PTI**

Tackling crimes against children, women prioritised under BNS: MoS

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE NEW DELHI, MARCH 11

THE UNION Home Ministry on Tuesday informed the Lok Sabha that tackling crimes against women and children has been prioritised and placed under one chapter in the BNS.

In a written response to BJP MP Anil Baluni during the Question Hour, MoS for Home Affairs Bandi Sanjay Kumar said strict punishments up to death sentence have been provided for offences against women. "Punishment for gangrape of a woman below the age of 18 years is life imprisonment till the remainder of the new convict's life or death. A new offence is committed to preventing false promise of marriage, employment, promotion or by concealing identity, etc. has also been incorporated in BNS," Kumar said.

Garhwal MP Baluni had asked if tackling crimes against women and children has received priority in the new criminal laws, which have replaced the British-era Indian Penal Code.

Kumar said, "In the BNS, 2023, for the first time, provisions relating to crimes against women and children have been given precedence and placed under one chapter. The government is committed to preventing human trafficking. Section 143 of the BNS provides provisions for strict punishment up to life imprisonment for offence of human trafficking," it said, adding that when the offence involves the trafficking of a child, it shall be punished with imprisonment not less than 10 years but which may extend to imprisonment for life.

"It noted that beggary has been introduced as a form of exploitation for trafficking and is punishable under Section 143 of BNS. In addition, Section 144 (1) of the BNS provides for strict punishment for the offence of sexual exploitation of trafficked children," Kumar said, adding the minimum punishment for such offences is five years, extendable up to life imprisonment.

Can't have Manipur peace at gunpoint: Cong; President's rule out of compulsion, says BJP

LALMANI VERMA
NEW DELHI, MARCH 11

TARGETING THE Centre on Manipur, which has been hit by ethnic violence since May 2023, the Congress Tuesday said peace cannot be restored "at gunpoint", and urged Prime Minister Narendra Modi to visit the state and listen to the apprehensions and concerns of the people there.

Defending the imposition of President's rule in the state, the BJP countered that the decision was not forced on the state but was taken out of compulsion.

With the state under President's rule since February 13, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman tabled the Manipur Budget in Parliament on Monday. Initiating a discussion on the supplementary demands for grants, excess grants and the Manipur Budget on Tuesday, Gaurav Gogoi, Congress's deputy leader in the Lok Sabha, said that when a no-confidence motion was moved about 21 months back, Modi had assured that peace would be restored in Manipur soon. But President's rule was imposed instead, he said.

"This is a very sensitive matter for the country. Since PM Modi himself, during the no-confidence motion in 2023, had said that Manipur was heading towards peace, he should tell us why President's rule has been imposed, and why has not yet been imposed so far," Gogoi said.

"What is the state of the Vidhan Sabha, is it dissolved or in suspended animation," he asked, adding, "Home Minister will have to take moral responsibility for President's rule in



Congress Deputy Leader Gaurav Gogoi and BJP's Bipin Deb (right) during the discussion in Lok Sabha, Tuesday. **PTI/ANI**

Manipur, I appeal to Home Minister to follow Rajdharma over his failure in Manipur."

Gogoi said that when Home Minister Amit Shah visited Manipur about two years back, he had assured that he would return soon. "So I want Home Minister to take moral responsibility. The PM should also visit the state. Peace will not be restored in the Northeast at gunpoint. Peace will not be restored in Manipur at gunpoint and through police patrolling. If you really want peace in Manipur, let the people of Manipur speak, you should have patience to listen to the people there. What are their political aspirations, what are their apprehensions, fears? You should have the strength to listen to it," he said.

Gogoi said the government only cared about headlines, speeches and optics, but was not aware about the ground situation. Saying that the government had failed in its efforts to restore peace "at gunpoint" over the last two-and-a-half years, he urged it to hold a dialogue with the

people of Manipur.

Speaking on the issue, BJP leader and former Tripura Chief Minister Bipin Kumar Deb said President's rule was not forced on Manipur, but was imposed out of compulsion as the Assembly session could not be convened within the prescribed time and constitutional provisions came into play.

Saying that both the Treasury and Opposition benches wanted peace in Manipur, Deb said the Northeast states have seen an infrastructure push after the Modi government came to power at the Centre. "Today, because of the Prime Minister, the Northeast is known across the world," he said.

President's rule was imposed in Manipur on February 13, following the resignation of N Biren Singh as Chief Minister on February 9. Since the outbreak of violence in May 2023, nearly 250 people are reported to have died in ethnic clashes in the state. Last week, the Centre's bid to enforce free movement through the state's highways was met by fresh violence.

Rao did not visit Manipur when 750 died in '93: FM hits out at Opp

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, MARCH 11

UNION FINANCE Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Tuesday hit back at the Opposition for criticising PM Narendra Modi for not visiting violence-hit Manipur and said that the then Congress PM P V Narsimha Rao and his home minister did not visit the state when 750 people died there in 1993.

Replying to discussion on the Supplementary Demands for Grants—Second Batch for 2024-25, the Deputy Minister for Excess Grants for 2021-22, the Budget for Manipur for 2025-26 and the Demands for Grants on Account for Manipur for 2025-26, Sitharaman said, "In 1993, when Rajkumar Doraiswami of the Congress was the CM of Manipur, a major flare up between Kukis and Nagas happened between April and December 1993, resulting in... 750 deaths and destruction of 350 villages in Manipur..."

"That was how we in the Opposition respected the ruling party in sensitive matters and kept at the way they go on repeating... and this despite when the violence happened, when people were in camp, honourable Home Minister Mr. Shah ji went there, spent three nights and after that... Nityanand Rai, MoS, Home, stayed there for three months," she said.

Saying that Manipur saw the worst blockade during Congress rule, she said, "...I hope Congress doesn't speak about Manipur as who is going and who is not."

Participating in the discussion, Congress's MP from Inner



Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman in Lok Sabha. **PTI**

responded. "Even at the peak of the violence in August 1993, it was a Minister of State for Home Affairs Rajesh Pilot, who addressed the Parliament," she said.

There are written records of Rajya Sabha, she said, showing that while demanding President's Rule in the violence-hit state, BJP's Sushma Swaraj did not press for the PM's reply or presence.

"That was how we in the Opposition respected the ruling party in sensitive matters and kept at the way they go on repeating... and this despite when the violence happened, when people were in camp, honourable Home Minister Mr. Shah ji went there, spent three nights and after that... Nityanand Rai, MoS, Home, stayed there for three months," she said.

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Tamil enrolment falling in TN schools: Pradhan targets DMK

ANONNA DUTT
NEW DELHI, MARCH 11

UNION EDUCATION Minister Dharmendra Pradhan said in Rajya Sabha Tuesday that the Centre was not imposing Hindi but promoting multilingualism with the New Education Policy. Replying to a debate on the discussion on the working of the Education Ministry, Pradhan cited the example of Tamil Nadu and said that the NEP in fact promotes initial teaching in Hindi. He said that data from Tamil Nadu shows that more students were moving to English medium education in government schools.

He said 67% of students were now in English medium schools, while Tamil medium enrolment dropped from 54% (2018-19) to 36% (2023-24). He added that at least 774 CBSE schools in the state were teaching Hindi as a third language. He said that youngsters of Tamil Nadu should not be denied the opportunity to grow and that he is ready to pay any personal attacks from DMK government.

"I am proud of the Tamil language," he said, "What is your opposition to NEP? It is advocating that the medium of instruction till Class 5 should be Tamil



Union Minister Dharmendra Pradhan in RS. **PTI**

language. We are promoting Sengol and that is not an understanding of the Tamil language."

"Dr Kasturirangan formulated the NEP 2020 on the basis of extensive consultation. And, what was the recommendation? It said that if a child is taught in the language that they first hear and speak, then their critical thinking will increase and their innovation capacity will increase... Nowhere does it say that it (the third language) is Hindi or Sanskrit... In NEP, none of the languages has been imposed on anybody," he said.

He said that nominated member Sudha Murthy knows Kannada, English, Sanskrit, Hindi, Odia, Marathi, Telugu, but no one imposed any language on her. Pradhan also said that Andhra Pradesh CM Chandrababu Naidu had said that his state would promote not just three but as many languages as possible, including global languages.

People being given backdoor entry by govt in educational institutions: Cong

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, MARCH 11

CONGRESS MP Digvijaya Singh Tuesday accused the government of "getting people with the ruling party's ideology through the backdoor" in educational institutions. Starting the discussion on the working of the Education Ministry, Singh said that over 5,400 faculty posts are vacant in central universities and there are contractual appointments there. "This is a clever way of getting in people with the ruling party's ideology through the backdoor in the educational institutions. Will you give contractual teachers training?" he said.

DMK MP Kanamozhi NVN Somu spoke about the Centre not releasing funds to Tamil Nadu for not implementing the PM SHRI scheme that mandates following the NEP. He said that the three-language policy was just a "backdoor entry for Hindi" and so the state was opposed to it.

Amid protest from Opposition members Tuesday, Deputy Chairman Harivansh, who was presiding over the proceedings, called Congress MP Digvijaya Singh to initiate a discussion on the working of the Education Ministry.

Kharage, who is also the Congress president, however, stood up to intervene. But the Chair said that Kharage had already been given an opportunity to speak in the morning, and added that it was Singh's turn to speak. Kharage then used the Opposition and said that the expression was ready for a discussion in the Education Ministry and would "come" the government, which led to an uproar from the Treasury benches that claimed that the expression was "unparliamentary".

The Leader of the House, P. Nadda intervened and called the expression used by Kharage condemnable and demanded an apology from Kharage. "The language used by the Leader of Opposition, the expressions on the Chair, is condemnable... This is to be condemned by one and all. The words and language used for the

Gogoi targets PM over 'absence' from House, Nirmala hits back

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, MARCH 11

UNION FINANCE Minister Nirmala Sitharaman and Congress MP Gaurav Gogoi got into a war of words in Lok Sabha Tuesday after the Opposition leader's remarks targeting Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

Initiating a discussion on the supplementary demands for grants, excess grants and the Manipur budget, Gogoi made a remark on PM Narendra Modi's "absence" in the House.

Speaker Om Birla interjected and said PM Modi had informed him and the House about his foreign visit and pointed out that previous PMs too have undertaken visits during Parliament sessions.

Modi is on an official visit to Mauritius.

Gogoi said that he has utmost respect for the PM, but it was the demand of the Treasury benches to "insult" former PMs time and again.

At this point, Sitharaman said Gogoi has made some "very profound" remarks. "It was music to my ears to hear a leading member of Opposition party say that he respects the PM only to add quickly... when the Treasury talks about the previous PMs, they speak not in a respectable language. How many times has the PM been abused in this House by them (Opposition) and how many times he was not even allowed to speak in the House... Will the honourable member Gogoi apologise for the number of times they have abused the PM..." she said.

Gogoi urged the FM to read the PM's speech during the last session. "His entire speech was abusing former PMs... Before pointing fingers, look within."

Uproar in RS over 'unparliamentary' Kharage remark; he says sorry, clarifies

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, MARCH 11

LEADER OF Opposition Mallikarjun Kharge's "unparliamentary" remark led to an uproar in Rajya Sabha Tuesday, for which he later apologised to the Chair and said it was meant for the government which was "trying to divide and break the country".

When the discussion on the working of the Education Ministry was set to begin after the Question Hour, Kharge along with other Opposition MPs demanded an apology from Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan over his remarks about DMK MPs and the Tamil Nadu government.

Pradhan had accused Tamil Nadu's DMK government of being "dishonest" and playing "politics" with the future of the state's students. While criticising the DMK government's opposition to the NEP, he also accused it of doing a "U-turn" over PM-SHRI schools.

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LoP in RS Mallikarjun Kharge on Tuesday. **PTI**

Chair is unpardonable, still he should apologise. The word should be expunged," he said.

Kharage immediately apologised for using the expression and also clarified that it was not meant for the Chair but for government postulates. "I was not speaking about you (the Chair) it was about government policies. I am sorry if you were hurt by my remarks," he said.

"You are hurting the self-respect of a part of this country and a people... The minister should be asked to resign. They are talking about dividing and breaking the country," Kharage said.

Though Nadda appreciated Kharage's gesture to apologise, but said that the remarks are still condemnable if they were meant for the government.

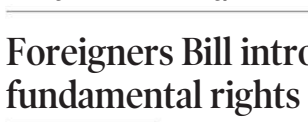
Later, the expression was expunged from Kharage's remark.

Earlier in the day, RS proceedings were adjourned after Opposition MPs protested in the Well of the House alleging that delimitation would result in reduction of seats for southern states. Opposition MPs gave notices over the Rs 267, seeking setting aside of the listed business of the day to take up a discussion on concerns of southern states over delimitation. The notices were rejected by the Chair.

DMK MP R Girisaran managed to raise the issue through a Zero Hour mention. Girisaran alleged that states like Kerala, Tamil Nadu and Punjab had implemented family planning would stand to lose seats in Parliament and that the government was planning programmes like UP Bhar and Rajasthan would gain many seats transferred from better performing states.

UP IN ARMS

DMK MP A Raja with MDKM chief Vaiko during a protest against the three-language formula under the NEP during the Budget session of Parliament on Tuesday. DMK MPs raised slogans outside the House holding posters. **PTI**



LALMANI VERMA
NEW DELHI, MARCH 11

THE IMMIGRATION and Foreigners Bill, 2025, seeking to streamline various services related to immigration and foreigners, including their entry, exit and stay in the country, was introduced in the Lok Sabha Tuesday with the Opposition calling it a "violation" of constitutional provisions and demanded the Bill to be referred to a Joint Parliamentary Committee.

Introducing the Bill in the House, MoS for Home Nityanand Rai, rejected the Opposition's view that Parliament lacked the legislative competence to introduce it.

He said that while tourists were welcome to come to India, it was the government's responsibility to ensure peace and sovereignty of the nation remain intact.

Before introducing the Bill, Rai said the proposed law seeks to correct overlapping and duplicate provisions in prevailing laws governing immigration and foreigners in the country.

He said that the Bill was aimed to confer upon the Central government certain powers to provide for requirement of passports or other travel documents in respect of persons entering into and exiting from India and for regulating matters related to foreigners, including requirement of visa and registration and for matters connected therewith or incidental thereto.

Opposing the Bill at the introduction stage, Congress's Manish Tewari said the Bill is in "violation of fundamental rights on multiple counts" and that the government might use the provisions of the proposed law to deny entry to those who are not



Union Home Minister Amit Shah and Union MoS for Home Nityanand Rai at Parliament, Tuesday. **ANI**

in sync with the ideology of the ruling dispensation of the day.

A proviso (in the Bill) fails to provide an appeal mechanism against the decision of the immi-

gration officer which violates fundamental right, fundamental canons of natural justice in jurisprudence, he said.

Either the Bill should be withdrawn or should be referred to a Joint Parliamentary Committee for very careful consideration, he said, as it "violates multiple articles of the fundamental rights under the Constitution".

Opposing the Bill, TMC's Saugata Roy said there were four Acts regarding entry and exit of foreigners in the country already and that these Acts have served their purpose so far which makes the proposed law appear "superfluous" in their place.

Roy said that the proposed law "will restrict inflow of talent and know-how in the country in fields of academics and medical science". He added that he objected to the proposed law, especially with regard to the obla-

Govt & Politics

DELHI CONFIDENTIAL



ON THE SPOT

SENIOR CONGRESS Rajya Sabha member Digvijaya Singh was assigned 35 minutes for his speech during the discussion on the work of the Education Ministry on Tuesday. Digvijaya, however, spoke for 29 minutes. The remainder of his time was assigned to someone who was not supposed to take part in the discussion: Congress MP from Maharashtra, Imran Pratapgari. Put on the spot, Pratapgari delivered a spontaneous six-minute speech that touched on a range of subjects targeting the government, earning plaudits from his party colleagues.

REACHING OUT

AMID THE tussle over the three-language policy between Tamil Nadu's ruling DMK and the Centre, some senior ministers appeared to be walking the extra mile for the party's MPs in Lok Sabha on Tuesday. During Question Hour, DMK's Thiruvananthapuram M.S. expressed concern over 'failures of the on-line payment system' for the PM Kisan Samadhi Nidhi. Union Minister Shriya Singh Choudhary assured the MP that the state minister could approach him on this. Otherwise, said Choudhary, he could himself visit Tamil Nadu to look into the matter. 'We salute the great people of Tamil Nadu, we salute the Tamil culture, the Tamil language. We are all children of Mother India and there is no question of discrimination. We will serve the people of Tamil Nadu, its farmers, with humility,' Choudhary said.

HELPING HAND

IN A first-of-its-kind initiative, Kerala Governor Rajendra Vishwanath Arerker, along with Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan, held a meeting with MPs from the state in New Delhi on Tuesday. The Governor is learnt to have surprised the MPs and the Chief Minister by saying he was aware of the problems faced by the state, and that he would stand with Vijayan in raising these demands before the Union government. Arerker's predecessor, Anil Mohammed Khan, had an uneasy relationship with the Left government in Kerala.

Simultaneous elections: Ex-CJI Gogoi flags clause on EC power, cautions it may not pass muster

ASAD REHMAN & DAMINI NATH
NEW DELHI, MARCH 11

FORMER CHIEF JUSTICE of India and Rajya Sabha member Ranjan Gogoi on Tuesday cautioned a Joint Committee of Parliament about the Constitutional validity of some provisions of the two Bills on simultaneous elections. Gogoi, it is learnt, raised some doubts regarding a clause in the Constitution (One Hundred and Twenty-Ninth Amendment) Bill, 2024, which proposes to amend three articles of the Constitution and insert a new one, Article 82A, in order to synchronise Lok Sabha and Assembly polls. Appearing before the panel as part of its consultations with experts, Gogoi is learnt to have said that Article 82A(5) may not pass the Constitutional test and gives too much power to the Election Commission. The clause gives the EC the option of not holding any particular Assembly election along

Adityanath poster at Gyanendra rally triggers stir in Nepal

YUBARAJ GHIMIRE
KATHMANDU, MARCH 11

AMONG THE sea of supporters welcoming former Nepal King Gyanendra Shah to Kathmandu on Sunday — days after he had made his first direct appeal to the people since his ouster in 2008, seeking 'support if they wanted to secure the nation's future' — one face stood out. That of Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath. In Nepal's volatile politics, an Adityanath poster was, unsurprisingly, a lightning rod. The BJP leader is a known supporter of Nepal's deposed monarchy, and Gyanendra's Kathmandu rally is being seen as his biggest challenge yet to the increasingly unpopu-

lar K.P. Sharma Oli government, battered by allegations of corruption. Oli's supporters described

Tulsi Gabbard to join intel tsars at Delhi huddle next week

SHUBHAJIT ROY
NEW DELHI, MARCH 11

US DIRECTOR of National Intelligence Tulsi Gabbard is headed to India for the first high-level visit from the new administration under President Donald Trump, and she will be attending a major conference of intelligence chiefs in Delhi next week. Besides Gabbard, intelligence chiefs from Quad countries Australia and Japan, and prominent G7 countries are also expected to attend the gathering of



intelligence tsars. Some of them might also attend the Raisina Dialogue from March 17-19, which is organised by the Observer Research Foundation and the Ministry of External Affairs.

The conference usually takes place quarterly on the sidelines of Raisina Dialogue, when some of these officials attend the think tank event. The intelligence chiefs will gather in India, and are to be hosted by National Security Advisor Ajit Doval and chiefs of RAW (Research and Analysis Wing) and Intelligence Bureau among others.

Gabbard announced her visit to India on Monday. 'I am #WheelsUp on a multi-nation trip to the Indo-Pacific, a region I know very well having grown up as a child of the Pacific. I'll be going to Japan, Thailand, and India, with a brief stop in France en route back to DC,' Gabbard said

in a post on X, with a photograph of her boarding an aircraft.

'Building strong relationships, understanding, and open lines of communication are vital to achieving President Trump's objectives of peace, freedom and prosperity,' she said. Her first stop will be Honolulu where she will visit 'JC partners and INDOPACOM' (US Indo-Pacific Command) leaders, and 'our troops engaging in training'.

This will be Gabbard's first trip to India after taking over as the eighth Senate-confirmed and first female combat veteran Director of National Intelligence (DNI) in the second Trump administration.

Last month, Gabbard had met Prime Minister Narendra Modi during his visit to Washington DC for the meeting with Trump in the White House. She was the first US official to meet Modi at Blair House on February 12, shortly after the Indian leader arrived in the US capital.

'Met USA's Director of National Intelligence, #TulsiGabbard in Washington DC. Congratulated her on her confirmation. Discussed various aspects of the India-USA friendship, of which she's always been a strong votary,' Modi had said in a post on X.

Gabbard, who was the first Hindu member of the US House of Representatives, was tapped by Trump for the top intelligence official's job. An advocate for India, she had criticised Pakistan for providing a safe haven to terrorists, including after the Pulwama terrorist attack in 2019. She has also spoken out on the plight of Hindus in Pakistan and Bangladesh. She visited India several times in recent years, including in 2014 when she undertook a two-week trip.

'CLEARING ITS stand on the proposed delimitation, the Congress Tuesday said that states which showed early success in family planning and reducing total fertility rates stand to be "penalised" by Congress MP and general secretary in-charge for communications Jairam Ramesh said states would "lose seats simply because of their early success in family planning and reducing total fertility rates, which have been national objectives". They will be penalised for it,' he said.

He said the distribution of seats across states in the Lok Sabha is presently based on the 1971 Census. 'Article 32 that was amended with effect from Feb 2002 provides for a fresh distribution based on the population data from the first Census after 2026. When such a decennial Census will take place is open to question. It is unclear if the 2021 Census has yet to be conducted,' he posted on X.

'An analysis done in March 2019 by two scholars Milan Vaishnav and Jamie Hinton using Census 2001 and 2011 data reveals what happens to the distribution of seats if the estimated population of 2026 is used... The states that lose seats are Tamil Nadu (8), Kerala (8), Andhra Pradesh and Telangana (8), Odisha (3), West Bengal (4), Karnataka (2), Himachal Pradesh (1), Punjab (1), and Uttarakhand (1),' said Ramesh, adding that Assam, Jammu and Kashmir and Maharashtra "don't lose or gain any seats".

'The states that gain are Uttar Pradesh (11), Bihar (10), Rajasthan (6), Madhya Pradesh (4), Jharkhand (1), Haryana (1), Gujarat (1), Delhi (1), and Chhattisgarh (1),' he said.

However, in Odisha, the BJP ended Patnaik's 24-year run in power in the state. After this, the BJP slowly changed its position on not taking on the ruling party at the Centre. First, it announced it would stop lending 'unsecured support' to the BJP so that it could be a "strong and vibrant" Opposition in Parliament. Last June, it joined the Opposition in demanding a discussion on alleged paper leaks and irregularities in the state's elections such as NEET and NET.

Vijayan, however, appears unfazed by any prospect of a political controversy as there is not much room for dissent against him in his party. After his breakfast tete-a-tete with Sitharaman, Vijayan will attend the cabinet meeting at the CPM headquarters, where the top leadership will discuss an organisational roadmap to take on the BJP.

The draft resolutions, once approved by the Central Committee later this month, will be presented at the party's national conclave in Madurai.

US Director of National Intelligence Tulsi Gabbard

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The TMC delegation leaves the EC office after the meeting on Tuesday. Abhinav Saha

TMC, BJP go to EC over voter ID row, BJD flags vote 'variance'

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, MARCH 11

THE BJP and the Trinamool Congress Tuesday complained to the Election Commission about what they saw as manipulation of electoral rolls.

The TMC delegation, led by Derek O'Brien and Kalyan Banerjee, met CEC Gyanesh Kumar and raised the matter of 'numerous instances of duplicate EPICs (Electors Photo Identity Cards) bearing the same numbers being issued to multiple voters across India'.

The BJP leaders also alleged manipulation in electoral rolls in West Bengal, claiming that 13 lakh illegal voters, including Bangladeshi nationals, had been added to the voter list. About 8,415 people with similar EPIC numbers are registered in Bengal as voters, the BJP delegation, including its Bengal unit president Sukanta Majumdar and the party's co-observer for the state Amit Malviya, claimed in the petition to the EC.

In a post on X later, the EC wrote: 'The Commission welcomed the delegation of BJP today and informed them that only the citizens of India who are above 18 years of age can be registered as electors in the polling booth where they are ordinary residents.' 'Update of electoral roll is a participative process with all political parties, including established mechanisms of appeal under section 24 of the RPA (Representation of the People Act) 1950,' it said.

A Biju Janata Dal delegation also met the poll panel on Tuesday and alleged 'unusual variances' in the votes cast in the 2024 Parliament and Assembly elections in the state. The party submitted a second memorandum on the issue to the poll panel.

The BJD requested the EC to institute a periodic process audit of the entire electoral process by the CEC or independent auditors; tally all VVPAT slips with the EVM count in every booth, and mandate that the District Election Officers provide within a month copies of Form 17 C and VVPATs to any citizen on the payment of prescribed fees.

TMC MP Sakarika Ghosh, who addressed the media after the meeting with the EC, said that duplicate Aadhaar numbers had also been allotted to multiple people, which impacted their EPIC numbers since the EC had begun to seed EPIC numbers with Aadhaar.

In a four-page memorandum submitted to the poll panel, the TMC said EPIC numbers consist of an alphanumeric sequence of three letters known as the 'Functional Unique Serial Number (FUSN)', which is different for every Assembly constituency in India, and seven digits, are supposed to be unique to each citizen of the state.

'How were EPICs with the same number issued to voters in multiple Assembly constituencies across various states in the country?' the TMC said, adding, 'Why has EC not clearly stated on its Form 6B that seeding Aadhaar with EPICs is an entirely voluntary process and that it is not compulsory?' It alleged instances of arbitrary deletions and additions of names to electoral rolls in many states, claiming that in Bengal 'several fake voters had been added to the electoral rolls through the online portal'. The party demanded that the EC issue a separate list of voter deletions, new additions and modifications with every revised electoral roll.

The EC said on X: 'The Commission mentioned that all concerns including duplicate EPIC numbers, duplicate, shifted and dead voters and illegal migrants will be resolved by each Booth Level Officer and concerned Electoral Registration Officer with active participation of Booth Level Agents appointed by all political parties.'

'-WITH PTI INPUTS



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In a four-page memorandum submitted to the poll panel, the TMC said EPIC numbers consist of an alphanumeric sequence of three letters known as the 'Functional Unique Serial Number (FUSN)', which is different for every Assembly constituency in India, and seven digits, are supposed to be unique to each citizen of the state.

'How were EPICs with the same number issued to voters in multiple Assembly constituencies across various states in the country?' the TMC said, adding, 'Why has EC not clearly stated on its Form 6B that seeding Aadhaar with EPICs is an entirely voluntary process and that it is not compulsory?' It alleged instances of arbitrary deletions and additions of names to electoral rolls in many states, claiming that in Bengal 'several fake voters had been added to the electoral rolls through the online portal'. The party demanded that the EC issue a separate list of voter deletions, new additions and modifications with every revised electoral roll.

The EC said on X: 'The Commission mentioned that all concerns including duplicate EPIC numbers, duplicate, shifted and dead voters and illegal migrants will be resolved by each Booth Level Officer and concerned Electoral Registration Officer with active participation of Booth Level Agents appointed by all political parties.'

'-WITH PTI INPUTS

in a post on X, with a photograph of her boarding an aircraft.

'Building strong relationships, understanding, and open lines of communication are vital to achieving President Trump's objectives of peace, freedom and prosperity,' she said. Her first stop will be Honolulu where she will visit 'JC partners and INDOPACOM' (US Indo-Pacific Command) leaders, and 'our troops engaging in training'.

This will be Gabbard's first trip to India after taking over as the eighth Senate-confirmed and first female combat veteran Director of National Intelligence (DNI) in the second Trump administration.

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Vijayan, however, appears unfazed by any prospect of a political controversy as there is not much room for dissent against him in his party. After his breakfast tete-a-tete with Sitharaman, Vijayan will attend the cabinet meeting at the CPM headquarters, where the top leadership will discuss an organisational roadmap to take on the BJP.

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The IndianEXPRESS

FOUNDED BY
RAMNATH GOENKA

BECAUSE THE TRUTH INVOLVES US ALL

ON THE EDGE

Trump's trade policies haven't gone down well with markets. Monday's meltdown has added to the economic uncertainty

IN RECENT WEEKS, fears of an economic slowdown in the US have gained traction. On Monday, the S&P 500 fell 2.7 per cent with growing investor concerns over the impact of Donald Trump's trade policies on the US economy. The market melted down came a day after Trump appeared not to rule out the possibility of the economy entering into a recession. In an interview on Sunday, when asked, Trump also sought to deflect the issue, saying, "I hate to predict things like that." He added, "There is a period of transition, because what we're doing is very big."

However, there are some indications of an economic downturn. A few days ago the Atlanta Fed's GDPNow model had pegged US GDP growth at -2.4 per cent in the first quarter of 2025 (seasonally adjusted annual rate). While these estimates can be volatile, Goldman Sachs has now upped the odds of a recession from 15 per cent to 20 per cent. Consumer confidence in the US is also falling – the Conference Board's consumer confidence index fell to 98.3 in February, from 105.3 in January. Markets, firms and consumers dislike uncertainty. And, there is considerable uncertainty over how Trump's tariff policies will play out and what will be the retaliatory impact – Trump has already gone back and forth on levying tariffs on countries. This also reflects in the economic policy uncertainty index of the Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis which has been edging upwards. However, so far, other indicators do seem to indicate that the economy is humming along. The labour market appears to be holding up. In February, the US economy added 1,51,000 jobs, only marginally below expectations. The unemployment rate though has edged up to 4.1 per cent. Further, the New York Fed's Nowcast model is at 2.67 per cent for the first quarter of 2025. However, the long-term implications of levying such tariffs is clear. For instance, as per the Tax Foundation, a Washington-based think tank, 25 per cent tariffs on Canada and Mexico would lower long-run GDP by 0.2 per cent.

Attention will now shift to the US Federal Reserve. In its last meeting held in January, the Fed had voted to maintain the federal funds rate in the range of 4.25 to 4.5 per cent. However, retail inflation rose to 3 per cent in January, while core inflation was at 3.3 per cent. Data for February will be released on Wednesday. The imposition of tariffs, which will be inflationary, will make it difficult for the Fed to further ease policy rates – a policy stance that Donald Trump favours. The next meeting of the Fed, scheduled for March 18-19, will provide greater clues on the trajectory of monetary policy in the US.

SMOG OVER URBAN INDIA

Towns are as vulnerable to air pollution as metros. IQAir report should occasion cooperation across cities, states, countries

THE LATEST EDITION of the World Air Quality report released by Swiss Air Technology major IQAir has sobering news for India. The country has 13 of the 20 most polluted cities in the world. The study is a reminder that though governments have taken significant steps to clean air – at times after being nudged by courts – the interventions have not led to appreciable improvements. The country is ranked the fifth-most polluted country after Chad, Bangladesh, Pakistan and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). The IQAir list comprises not just urban centres whose trusts with toxic air are well known – Delhi and its adjoining areas for example – it also features small towns such as Bymtari in Assam and Mullanpur in Punjab. This is not a new finding. In recent years, towns such as Bhiwadi in Rajasthan and Begusarai in Bihar have topped the IQAir list. But the country's pollution challenge continues to be framed largely in terms of a crisis in big city governance.

A knowledge base on pollutants in some Tier 2 cities is being built up gradually. The number of pollution monitoring stations has increased from 37 in 2015 to more than 1,000 (including manually operated ones) in 2023. These, however, represent less than a quarter of the country's requirement. Small cities remain underrepresented in research and policy. There is very little micro data on most of the 74 Indian cities listed in the IQAir report. According to a 2023 study by the Centre for Science and Environment (CSE), barely 12 per cent of India's 4,000 census towns and cities are covered under air quality monitoring mechanisms. The analysis by the New Delhi-based organisation shows that 62 per cent of the country's population is outside the real-time monitoring network. The other major problem is that despite the National Clean Air Programme's emphasis on targeted interventions over large areas, pollution continues to be seen as a local problem. Individual cities and states are, by and large, left to their own devices and even emergencies such as Delhi's annual health crisis do not lead to a modicum of cooperation.

The IQAir report underlines that pollution affects even the developed economies. However, the least developed and emerging economies are the most affected. India's neighbours, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Nepal, are among the poor performers. The problem's transboundary nature has been evident for long. In recent times, experts have been advocating interventions in multiple airsheds – contiguous regions – whose geography makes it difficult for them to disperse pollutants. However, cooperation between the South Asian neighbours has been underwhelming. The IQAir report is another reminder that such transience doesn't work.

SAY WOOF

New study says people don't really get dogs as well as they think they do. Blame it on the human tendency to project

THE WRITER ADAM Gopnik once observed that somewhere between dogs' limitless intuition about people and their inner lives, and people's limitless imagination about dogs and their inner lives is where the human-canine relationship is formed. There is great solace to be found in the belief that humans – who are lonely despite and because of their uniquely complex communication cultures – can form lasting bonds of understanding with at least one other species, imperfect as such a connection may be. It turns out, however, that even this may be too optimistic, and that people don't really get dogs as well as they think they do.

The authors of a new study, Barking up the wrong tree: Human perception of dog emotions is influenced by extraneous factors', have found that people's perception of a dog's emotions is almost entirely based on context cues: Everything but the dog itself, in other words. Complicating this picture is the human tendency to project emotions – a useful quality when it comes to creative, imaginative tasks like writing books and making movies, but one that can hamper other activities like leash training a dog. Here, the problem is not so much the language guile, but people's inability to "read" their closest companions on any terms but their own.

It may be time to consider that dogs don't process emotions the way humans do. And as with all relationships, human or canine, it comes down to paying close attention to the other party, instead of relying on one's own imagination of how they might think and feel. The study's revelations also beg the question: Is it time to reappraise the popular perception of cats as inscrutable, mysterious and standoffish? It may well be that cats are all that – it is likelier, however, that people are simply as clueless about them as they are about dogs.



SANJAYA BARU

INDIA HAS DONE well to reassure Mauritius by endorsing her claim over the Chagos Islands. Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri articulated the Indian view last week, stating: "We support Mauritius in its stance on its sovereignty over Chagos, and this is obviously keeping with our long-standing position with regard to decolonisation and support for sovereignty and territorial integrity of other countries." Bravo!

Chagos is just one more territory that the neo-imperialist supporters of United States President Donald Trump are laying claim to. Last October, the British government agreed to hand over Chagos Islands, which are home to the US military base at Diego Garcia, to Mauritius. A Republican senator and Trump supporter, John Kennedy, recently warned London that it could damage its relationship with the US if its decision to cede sovereignty of the Chagos Islands to Mauritius threatened the future of the US military base on the island of Diego Garcia.

Misri's statement came, interestingly, a day after External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar's visit to London. Clearly, there is a message in there for Washington. Ironically, it emanated from the centre of one of the biggest empires of the colonial era. American imperialist ambitions and pretensions recently articulated by Trump have sparked off debates around the world on the legitimacy of territorial aggrandisement in this day and age.

The present territory of all the three so-called "Great Powers" – the US, China and Russia – is the legacy of imperial conquest and territorial expansion. Till the dawn of the 20th century, few questioned this phenomenon by which nations were created and reshaped. Europe spread itself around the globe, legitimising its acquisition of territory on every continent. The US took its final shape through the conquest of territory, Russia went eastwards, extending itself from the Atlantic to the Pacific. China marched into the heart of Asia absorbing Tibet and more.

It was in India that the greatest and longest battle against imperialism was launched. India as it now exists is in fact the only modern nation that occupies less territory than its ancient historical footprint. While there are some in India who still nurture territorial ambitions with their theory

With major powers harbouring neo-imperialist ambitions, India must be the voice of anti-colonialism

of "Akhand Bharat", the republic of free India has never harboured extraterritorial ambitions or imperialist fantasies.

The history of the 20th century has been a history of the struggle against imperialism and its multiple ideologies. India has thus far held its head high. The acquisition of Sikkim was a minor transgression but that of a few coastal territories was in line with India's pushback against European colonialism. Given this history and record, it is incumbent on India to continue to be the voice of anti-imperialism and anti-colonialism.

India's struggle against imperialism inspired anti-colonial movements across the world, reshaping the 20th century's global map. At the end of the 20th century's "war of colonial conquest", when the ambitions of Germany and Japan were thwarted and the British Empire retreated, the international community created the United Nations, making an explicit pledge against territorial expansionism. The UN Charter commits its members to "refrain in their international relations from the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any state, or in any other manner inconsistent with the Purposes of the United Nations".

The Government of India responded correctly to the Russian invasion of Ukraine by invoking the UN Charter's explicit commitment to the adherence by member nations to the territorial integrity and sovereignty of all nation-states. India has also questioned the territorial claims of other major powers. Hence, the Indian statement on Mauritius should be welcomed.

India and Mauritius may well agree to allow the US and the UK to continue to operate their military base from Diego Garcia. However, this would require US recognition of the sovereignty of Mauritius over the islands. The Chagos Islands are an obscure set of dots in the Indian Ocean. However, the ejection of "outside" powers in any region is a cause that has acquired great importance once again.

The focus on Trump's threats on trade and tariffs and on the theatrics in the daily circus at the White House have diverted attention from the US President's neo-imperialist fantasies. However, it is imperative that post-colonial nations like India, Brazil, mem-

bers of ASEAN and the African Union join hands and convene a global convention against neo-imperialism. All major powers, including the US, China and Russia, must be put on notice. The victories of the hard-won struggles of the 20th century will not be allowed to go to waste in the 21st.

Chagos may be a speck in a vast ocean. Just as the Panama Canal is but a narrow navigable lane. It is such strategic spots that have been eyed by imperial powers for centuries. Trump has raised the spectre of imperialist ambitions once again, not just eyeing such specks and spots but laying claim to the vast expanses of Canada and Greenland.

Interestingly, the Chagos decision shows the British government in a good light. It offers an opportunity for Britain, home to the last great empire, to make common cause with its colonies and revive the Commonwealth as an institution. In a rapidly changing world in which plurilateral groupings such as BRICS, ASEAN, the Quad, SCO and the African Union have become important regional platforms, the Commonwealth has the opportunity to reinvent itself as an association of post-colonial nations standing up for the principles of territorial integrity and sovereignty. It would make for an interesting inversion of the idea of the Commonwealth.

By taking a stand on Chagos, India has hopefully sent a message to all major powers, for there has been a surfeit of activity around the globe with major powers once again acquiring territory or laying claim. India should join hands with other post-colonial nations to re-ignite global consciousness about imperialism and the lasting damage it has done to societies around the world.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi did well during the hosting of the G20 Summit to convene and articulate the Voice of the Global South. With Trump's intent on dumping the G20, as indicated by the US boycott of the G20 meetings in South Africa, it would be opportune for the Global South to collectively denounce the neo-imperialist ambitions of major powers.

The writer was member, National Security Advisory Board of India, 1999-2001 and media advisor to the Prime Minister of India, 2004-08

DARK CIRCLES TELL STORIES

A survey shows women sleep far less than men. The reasons aren't hard to discern



MOUMITA ALAM

WHEN DID YOU last sleep well? People often ask me after seeing the dark circles under my eyes. These dark circles never go away, because I never sleep well. How can I? As a working woman who is a single parent – the primary caregiver of my daughter – I suffer from time poverty. I don't have time to eat properly or to sleep properly. I have to work all the time. As a person living in a semi-urban area, neither do I earn well enough to avail myself of 24x7 household help, nor do I have professional daycare facilities near my workplace. After the drudgery of a long day at work, the word "empowerment" seems like a myth.

ResMed, a global health technology leader, recently revealed in its fifth Global Sleep Survey (India) that people are losing at least three nights of restorative sleep each week. And, as expected, the report suggests that women experience poorer sleep quality than men. According to the report, they experience fewer nights of good sleep per week compared to men (3.83 vs. 4.13). They also struggle more with falling asleep (38 per cent vs. 29 per cent), with hormonal changes being a key factor. Menopause significantly impacts sleep, with 44 per cent of menopausal women worldwide struggling to fall asleep at least three times a week, compared to 33 per cent of non-menopausal women. In India, women (17 per cent) are more likely than

men (12 per cent) to take sick leave due to poor sleep.

Clearly, women are suffering from a sleep crisis. But why? A big reason is that women remain the primary caregivers in the family, for both children and elderly people. Having a steady job does not relieve them from domestic chores. With rising inflation and the growing aspirations of the neoliberal market economy, in many households, women are allowed to work outside the home on the condition that domestic chores and child-rearing are not disrupted. In places like Mumbai, it is common to see women chopping vegetables for dinner during their evening commute back home (Njanjana Bhownick, *Lies Our Mothers Told Us*). With the constant ticking of a clock in their ears, it's no wonder that women don't sleep well – to cope with the workload of the home and the workplace, sleep is the first thing to be sacrificed.

In the last few decades, a phrase we've often heard is "women's empowerment". We teach our daughters to be financially independent and pursue careers, but we have never tried to put in place a mechanism that can relieve women of the burden of household chores. Neither have we taught our sons to share these responsibilities. "Women's empowerment" thus becomes nothing short of the exploitation of women's labour.

The government, too, has not focused on the creation of a proper ecosystem for women in workplaces or at home. How many government-run creches do we have? Women are always worried of the workplace, leaving their children with nannies who might be inefficient or careless. Some are forced to leave their children with their parents back at home.

Sleep poverty is particularly a problem among lactating mothers. In the first few years of motherhood, sleep is a casualty. Often, the maternity leave that is sanctioned is not enough. And with the mass privatisation of jobs, maternity leave policies are becoming more regressive. Women employees in some states get CCL (child care leave) for two years till their children turn 18. But every female employee knows how tough it is to get CCL approved, with a male-dominated leadership posing a significant hurdle.

Ground realities in India are often grimmer than what data reflects. There is also a lack of good data – with the diversity that India has, it's very difficult for any organisation to give near-perfect data. But just look at the dark circles under women's eyes. They tell us what we need to know. Let women sleep.

Alam is a poet and writer based in North Bengal

MARCH 12, 1985, FORTY YEARS AGO

CHERNENKO DEAD

THE SOVIET PRESIDENT and Communist Party General Secretary, Konstantin Chernenko, died at the age of 73 after a long illness and was succeeded by Mikhail S Gorbachev. Long considered Chernenko's number two – as the party chief. The oldest person to hold the top post, Chernenko was in office for the briefest period – just under 13 months compared to the 15 months of his predecessor, Yuri Andropov.

GORBACHEV TAKES OVER

WITH THE ELECTION of Mikhail Sergeevich

Gorbachev to the post of general secretary of the CPSU, the leadership of the Soviet Union has passed into the hands of a new generation born much after the October Revolution. Born on March 2, 1931, he recently celebrated his 54th birthday. Known as an agriculture wizard, he made his mark in political life by transforming the Stavropol region into a rich granary.

AKALIS OUT OF JAIL

THE GOVERNMENT HAS ordered the release of eight important Akali leaders who were in detention under the National Security Act, including Akali Dal president Harchand Singh Longowal. Ironically, two top leaders,

G S Tohra, president of the SGPC, and Parkash Singh Badal, former Punjab chief minister, have not been released. There is a case against Tohra on charges of waging war against the government.

SHASTRI'S AUDI

THE BOARD OF Control for Cricket in India has decided to request the government to waive the customs duty, as a special case, on the Audi car worn by Ravi Shastri, declared champion of champions in the World Championship of Cricket in Melbourne. Under normal circumstances, the combined duty would have been about as much as the value of the car (about Rs 4 lakh).



THE IDEAS PAGE

From Delhi to Port Louis

India's relations with Mauritius rest not just on shared ethnicity, but also on a reliable partnership to strengthen the island nation's sovereignty. PM Modi's visit will strengthen ties



RAJA-MANDALA
BY C RAJA MOHAN

Few countries are closer to India than Mauritius. The ties that bind Delhi to Port Louis, the capital of Mauritius, are many. They include the island's large Indian-origin population, constituting nearly 70 per cent of its 1.3 million people. Prime Minister Narendra Modi's ongoing visit to the island state, almost exactly a decade after his last visit in March 2015, is about lending deeper strategic substance to this special bilateral relationship.

Modi's 2015 visit to Mauritius and Seychelles marked a recognition of the renewed geopolitical significance of the Western Indian Ocean islands. Modi's speech outlining India's SAGAR (security and growth for all) ambition also highlighted the urgency of putting the Indian Ocean at the top of India's diplomatic agenda.

But the geopolitics of the region have become even more contested and demanding over the last decade. India has its task cut out in raising its game in Mauritius and the Western Indian Ocean islands as more states, including Europe, Russia, China, Gulf states and Turkey, jostle for greater influence in the region. Central to Delhi's task is the clear recognition that Mauritius is not an extension of India, despite the strong bonds of ethnic kinship. Mauritius has a geopolitical identity and agency all of its own.

Few locations in the world capture the complex evolution of modern world politics more succinctly than Mauritius. Consider, for example, its colonial history. All European colonial powers — including the Portuguese, Dutch, French, and British — showed up here. Its independence from Britain did not end its battle against colonialism. One of the last vestiges of colonialism in Mauritius was sorted out only recently with the agreement between Port Louis and London over the Chagos archipelago.

When Britain gave independence to Mauritius in 1968, it separated part of the Chagos archipelago into the 'British Indian Ocean Territory' and gave the island of Diego Garcia on lease to the United States, which set up a major military base on the island. Over the last couple of decades, Mauritius had mounted a patient but powerful global campaign to reclaim its sovereignty over the Chagos archipelago.

The UK-Mauritius agreement on Chagos holds profound legal, geopolitical, and humanitarian significance. From the legal standpoint, the agreement reaffirms Mauritius's sovereignty over Chagos, aligns with the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice (ICJ) in 2019, which supported Mauritius's claim to the archipelago. This move strengthens international law by respecting decolonisation principles and sets a precedent for resolving similar territorial disputes between European powers and post-colonial states. The agreement between Mauritius and the UK also addresses the humanitarian concerns of the people displaced during decolonisation. It also provides the basis for long-term environmental coop-



CR Sankar

eration between London and Port Louis.

From the geopolitical perspective, Mauritius has extended the lease on Diego Garcia for 99 years, helping retain the US military base there. Although the Tories in the UK and some Republicans in the US have downplayed this agreement as paving the way for Chinese dominance of the Indian Ocean, it does exactly the opposite by retaining the US base with Mauritius's consent. This should help sustain a long-term US military presence in the Indian Ocean amid China's growing strategic focus on the littoral. During British PM Keir Starmer's visit to Washington last month, President Donald Trump endorsed the agreement.

For India and PM Modi, who stood by Mauritius in its struggle to regain sovereignty, it is a moment of quiet diplomatic satisfaction. Delhi was instrumental in promoting a pragmatic agreement between Mauritius and the UK that would meet India's regional security concerns over China's expanding naval profile in the Indian Ocean.

Meanwhile, India's construction of logistics infrastructure on Agalega Island underlines both Mauritius's enduring geopolitical significance in the Indian Ocean and Delhi's growing maritime stakes in regional security. Many things have changed in world politics over the centuries, but the importance of geographic location remains constant. Mauritius's critical position in the Western Indian Ocean earned it the name 'Star and Key of the Indian Ocean'.

For European sailors navigating down the African coast and entering the Indian Ocean after passing the Cape of Good Hope, Mauritius was indeed key to the onward journey up the African coast and across the Indian Ocean. The opening of the Suez Canal in the mid-19th century seemed to reduce the importance of Chagos, Mauritius and the Western Indian Ocean islands. But the two World Wars and the Cold War thrust Mauritius back into the centre stage of world politics.

Britain's decline as a great power and its withdrawal from the Indian Ocean in 1970 was followed by a large American military presence in the Middle East and Indian Ocean region. The US-Soviet rivalry during the Cold War led to competition between Washington and Moscow for military access to key locations in the Indian Ocean, including the Western Indian Ocean islands.

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While the Cold War's end again turned focus away from the islands, China's rise and growing influence in the Indian Ocean littoral has made Mauritius and other islands in the region — including Comoros, Madagascar, the French territory of Réunion, and Seychelles — a zone of geopolitical contestation.

China's growing reliance on African and Middle Eastern resources, its construction of major infrastructure projects including ports and transport corridors in the region, the PLA's eagerness to project naval power into the Indian Ocean, and its establishment of its first foreign military base in Djibouti underscore Beijing's growing salience in the Western Indian Ocean.

China has also consistently courted Mauritius and other Western Indian Ocean islands. It has convened two Indian Ocean conferences focusing on the island states in recent years. Beyond the military dimension, China recognises Mauritius's geo-economic importance.

During the 19th century, Mauritius was an important node in Indian Ocean globalisation, facilitating the movement of capital and labour across the region and developing sugar plantations to serve the world market. Through elite pragmatism and economic vision, post-colonial Mauritius has transformed itself into a regional financial hub, a centre of connectivity networks, and a bridge between Africa, the Middle East, and Asia.

It isn't just China that's now interested in the Western Indian Ocean. Europe is attempting to reclaim a strategic presence in the littoral. The Gulf countries, with their vast financial power, have become influential actors in the region. Russia, Iran, and Turkey are all actively expanding their regional involvement. As a complement to its prosperity rooted in global connections, Mauritius has developed a balanced ties with all major powers while strengthening its strategic autonomy. Delhi's success in Port Louis stems not from shared ethnicity but from being a reliable and benign partner in boosting Mauritius's sovereignty. That Delhi is determined to strengthen this unique bilateral strategic partnership, with all its regional and global dimensions, is the main message from the PM's visit to Mauritius.

The writer is a contributing editor on international affairs for The Indian Express

WHAT THE OTHERS SAY

"Returning Pakistan to the top of world cricket will be an arduous challenge. But for now, that is India's place — it has the team and the influence to hold on to it."

— DAWN

Green shoots in the Valley

J&K is on the cusp of a major economic transformation. Private investment will need to be nurtured, ecological concerns addressed



ROHIT KANSAL AND
DIPANKAR SENGUPTA

JAMMU AND KASHMIR has been in the news since the beginning of this year for the right reasons. On January 13, Prime Minister Narendra Modi inaugurated the Sonmarg Tunnel, a strategically significant project that will lead to year-round connectivity to the tourist resort of Sonmarg, and eventually to Ladakh. Then, on January 25, the trial run of the Jammu Srinagar Vande Bharat was completed, making Srinagar fully ready to welcome the arrival of the first train connecting the Kashmir Valley with the rest of the country. On the same day, one of India's top cement companies announced its intention to acquire a majority stake in J&K's largest cement company, making it the first such large private investment in manufacturing in the Valley.

It is easy to read these developments as a result of the policy of physical and economic integration of the region followed by the Centre post 2019. A concerted infrastructure push has seen massive improvements not just in rail and road infrastructure but also in hydropower capacity and power infrastructure. To cite just one metric, the pace of road construction tripled from 6.5 kilometres per day in 2019 to 20.5 kilometres per day at the end of 2022. However, it would perhaps be equally instructive to view these developments from the prism of economic potentiality — not just what has been achieved so far but, as Shakespeare would have said, a possibility of a 'tide, which, taken at the flood, (can) lead on to fortune'. The increased integration opens real possibilities for an economic transformation which would permanently sear the region away from its current dependence on the Centre's support for nearly half of its expenditure. Three key areas stand out as critical to this transformation.

The first one is clearly tourism. The rapidly expanding rail and road network will bring increasing numbers of tourists. The extension of the railways has already made hitherto poorly connected areas like Gool, Sangaldan and Khari eminently accessible. The engineering marvel of the highest rail bridge on the Chenab near Sangaldan is a tourist destination in itself. While hidden gems like Bani, Dugal, Bhatnagar, Guzer and Bangas are becoming more accessible due to an expanding road network, traditional favourites like Gulmarg and Pahalgam are witnessing increasing footfalls.

To reap the benefits of increased connectivity and larger inflows, J&K will have to improve its tourism strategy. This will require better carrying capacity and more infrastructure — more hotel rooms, improved urban services like sanitation and sewage treatment, better internal road networks, expanded public transport and tighter regulation. But beyond the basics, J&K will require a more creative strategy designed to offer more exclusive tourist experiences.

reiences. A rethinking via convergence with diverse sectors such as sports, fashion, cuisine, crafts, wellness and healthcare is needed. Weddings, golf circuits, health resorts, handicraft centres and even education can be imaginatively blended to create high-value tourism. A well-crafted tourism strategy will not only absorb the increased tourist arrivals but also promote unique luxury experiences by leveraging J&K's natural strengths such as stunning locales and pristine landscapes. This in turn will ensure increased revenues. Thoughtful policies on ecological conservation and carrying-capacity assessments must, however, accompany any expansion efforts. Unregulated expansion would ultimately harm the very industry it seeks to promote.

Another low-hanging fruit is horticulture. However, yields per hectare in crops like apple — the mainstay of this sector — are currently low. One estimate puts the current yields at less than an eighth of those in Italy and New Zealand. While efforts at intensive orcharding and promotion of high-yielding varieties are already on, an equally critical component would be to add value to the crop rather than ship it to the rest of the country, as is largely being done today. With better connectivity removing bottlenecks, investments in post-harvest and cold chain infrastructure and processing parks can help the region capture greater value from its produce. With global demand for organic and specialty foods rising, emphasis on high-value crops such as saffron, walnuts and exotic berries can help J&K's horticulture sector increase its current Rs 10,000 crore size manifold.

At 9.5 per cent, J&K's growth rate is promising. However, it has so far been largely driven by public investment and government expenditure. The overwhelming response to the 2021 New Industrial Development Scheme for J&K provides the possibility of strongly supplementing this with private investment-led growth. Thereby, recently concluded cement deal underlines the magnetic role that local entrepreneurs can play in this. With Indian GCCs (Global Capability Centres) being the global toast of their movement to Tier 2 and Tier 3 cities being planned, J&K can make a credible bid for this expanding pie as well. However, given the frenetic competition for investment among various states, the green shoots of private sector interest in J&K need to be carefully nurtured. Investment in, especially local people, would need to be actively encouraged to help expand their existing businesses and invest in newer ones.

All this would require a strong facilitative regime, particularly in terms of availability of land, provision of infrastructure and utilities, facilitating access to capital and investment initiatives. As a late entrant to this race, J&K needs vast improvements in governance capacities and faster response times. J&K is today at the cusp of a major transformation. A virtuous cycle of development — from targeted public investment, strong infrastructure growth, committed central support and increasing private investor confidence — bodes well for its future.

Kansal is a senior IAS officer of the former J&K cadre. Sengupta is professor of economics at the University of Jammu. The views expressed by authors are personal

Rewriting the score

Oscar-winning documentary speaks of classical music's gendered world



SUANSHU KHURANA

IN THE 1960s, when noted conductor Zubin Mehta was at the peak of his professional eminence, he made a remark about women musicians in classical orchestras. 'A woman's life in the orchestra is not as long as a man's; she is not as good as 60 as a man is,' he had said, a statement echoing the sexism in prestigious orchestras.

Mehta was 30 years old and the conductor of the Los Angeles Philharmonic Orchestra, where he had once imposed a limit of 16 on the number of women in the orchestra. It was probably a carry-over from his days at the all-male Vienna Philharmonic, his learning ground and the first orchestra he would conduct. A *Time* magazine article in 1966 spoke of how "women were ill-tuned to the rigours of symphony life and played erratically during menstruation or when they are concerned about family problems". The same article called double bassist Orin O'Brien, the first woman to join the New York Philharmonic Orchestra full-time under the direction of Leonard Bernstein — Mehta's colleague and friend — "as curvy as the double bass she plays". It forgot to mention her rigorous training and musical excellence or that she was an usher at Carnegie Hall for two years and imbibed every note with the utmost attention.

Almost half a century later, a documentary made by O'Brien's niece Meeta O'Brien, *The Only Girl in the Orchestra*, which tells the story of her struggles and successes, has won an Academy Award for the Best Documentary Short Film.

It's interesting how O'Brien, who retired from the orchestra in 2021 after a 55-year-long career, didn't want a film to be made on her. She told her niece that she wasn't important enough. The daughter of movie actor George O'Brien and Margaret Churchill, she would shrink from attention, thinking that the other members, the men, would resent her for it. "The double bass is in the supporting role in an orchestra. You don't want to stick out. You're the floor under everybody that would collapse if it wasn't secure," she says in the film. Bernstein, in one of his letters, once wrote, "Whenever I look in her direction, I see her intently looking back at me and I marvel at this concentration. How does she do it? Has she memorised every note of every bass part in every work we play? It is as impossible as any other miracle." But O'Brien played and she persisted.

The documentary on O'Brien is also a reminder of the gendered world of classical music where men and women did not play music together, where women musicians had to overcome discrimination — their talent and creativity dismissed, their presence deemed a distraction — just to persevere in their chosen vocation. Conductor Vasily Petrenko once made a decade ago, "A cute girl on a podium means that musicians think about other things". In 1930, when they were forced to accept Anna Lekas as a temporary harpist as there was a dearth of male ones. When she performed, neither was her name mentioned in the programme, nor was she shown on tel-

evision. The cameras had been instructed to pan on male musicians. The press secretary of the Philharmonic said in 1996, "compensating for the expected leaves of absence" (meaning maternity leave) was a problem that they did not "yet see how to get a grip on". The first time the Vienna Philharmonic appointed a woman musician in a permanent role was in 2003. Ursula Planchinger, a 27-year-old viola player, became the first woman to play in the orchestra in 158 years. The Philharmonic made sure that Planchinger did not speak in any interviews. Once race is thrown into the mix, the journey becomes even tougher.

O'Brien's beautifully told story brings women in classical orchestra into the spotlight, many of whom have had to work doubly hard to prove themselves and yet listen to things like "your place is in the kitchen" as Austrian conductor Hans Swarowsky once told Lekas. The gender gap sounds shocking in this day and age but it continues to exist in many orchestras. But the tide is also turning. Women recently surpassed the number of men in the New York Philharmonic. Now there are 45 women and 44 men. This little win may not heal the wounds of explicit bias, but it's a start. O'Brien, now 89 years old, is still teaching the nuances of double bass. The attention at the Oscars would probably have faded her. Perhaps she had behind her giant double bass and tinkered with it.

Women were banned from auditioning for the prestigious Vienna Philharmonic until as late as 1997, when they were forced to accept Anna Lekas as a temporary harpist as there was a dearth of male ones. When she performed, neither was her name mentioned in the programme, nor was she shown on tel-

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

CRICKETING GLORY

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'The winning habit' (IE, March 11). India's spin quartet bowled like a well-oiled machine, turning the screws on opposition batsmen. The batting lineup was versatile and reliable, and everyone contributed to the tournament. With four all-rounders, the team's balance was perfect. Winning two back-to-back white-ball ICC tournaments says a lot about our strengths. However, this should not mask the weaknesses in Test matches. The BCCI must ensure that no player plays all three formats to build a strong Test team capable of regaining lost glory.

Bal Govind, Noida

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'The winning habit' (IE, March 11). The victory at the Dubai International Cricket Stadium highlights India's dominance. Across 24 ICC tournament matches — including the 2023 ODI World Cup, the 2024 T20 World Cup, and the Champions Trophy — Rohit Sharma's men have secured 23 wins, an astounding 95.83 per cent success rate. Contributions from Rohit Sharma, Virat Kohli, Shreyas Iyer, KL Rahul, and Hardik Pandya underscored the collective effort, while on a sluggish spin, India's strategy of fielding four spinners proved decisive. Selection must not look ahead to the 2027 ODI World Cup.

SS Paul, Noida

BUILDING TRUST

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'Challenge of peace' (IE, March 11). The Manipur ethnic strife brings into the limelight the entrenched suspicion between Meitei and Kuki groups, stoked by segregation and a failed bid for reconciliation. The concept of free movement, noble though it may be, has led to even more displacement. Does this mean that peace cannot be ushered in without addressing past grievances and building trust? It is through comprehensive outreach that reconciliation must be achieved.

Anshu Bharti, Bagespur

PROTECTING DIGNITY

THIS REFERS TO the article, 'Not another Pretty Woman' (IE, March 11). National AIDS Control Organisation (NACO) data highlights that there are over 8 lakh women sex workers in India, among whom more than 6,000 are subjected to abuse, as provided by the NCRB report (2020-21). Female sex workers are more vulnerable to diseases like AIDS, STIs, and cervical cancer. The Supreme Court in 2011 extended the right to dignity under Article 21 to sex workers and suggested certain rights by constituting a panel. A balanced approach is needed — one that provides them with legal protection, ensures consent, and offers rehabilitation through law and awareness campaigns.

Vishwak Goyal, Chandigarh

12 EXPRESS NETWORK

Bus carrying Jodhpur law varsity students overturns in Nagaur, 3 dead

Jodhpur: Three students died and several others were injured when a sleeper bus carrying students from National Law University, Jodhpur, overturned in Rajasthan's Nagaur early on Tuesday while on the way back from Chandigarh after attending a sports fest.

Nagaur's Surpalaya police station house officer Siya Ram said the accident, which involved a truck, took place at about 5.30 am near Deh village. "The bus overturned following the accident, leading to the death of three students," Siya Ram said.

"Four students, who were seriously injured, were referred to Jodhpur while the others who had non-threatening injuries were given first aid and sent to Jodhpur in a government bus. There were about 20 students on the bus (that met with the accident)," he said. The students were reportedly returning from the four-day annual sports fest of the Rajiv Gandhi National University of Law, Punjab, which was organised from March 7-10. Officials from NLU Jodhpur, have also reached the accident spot, the SHO said. **ENS**

Teen shot while playing mobile game, 3 detained

Patna: Three minors have been detained for allegedly shot in the head Monday night by his friend while playing a popular mobile shooting game. On Monday night, the victim and one of his friends were playing the game when one of the other accused allegedly shot him from behind, police said. Phulvati Sharif SHO Masood Ahmed Haidari said that the three detained were "friends of the victim". Initial findings indicate that the shooting was motivated by a personal conflict between the victim and one of his friends over a romantic interest," he said. **ENS**

Rights panel seeks report from collector on Malvan demolition

MSHRC takes suo motu cognizance

MOHAMED THAYER & SADAF MODAK

MUMBAI, MARCH 11

THE MAHARASHTRA State Human Rights Commission (MSHRC) took suo motu cognizance of a series of reports published by *The Indian Express* on the incident in Malvan involving the arrest of parents of a 15-year-old who allegedly raised slogans during the India-Pakistan match and the eventual raising of the scotch cap belonging to his family, without issuing any notice.

It later came to light that the local administration demolished the residence of the boy's paternal uncle as well.

Taking suo motu cognizance

Tamil Nadu Dalit student on way to write exam dragged from bus & assaulted, his fingers severed

ARUN JANARDHANAN

CHENNAI, MARCH 11

A CLASS 11 student from a Scheduled Caste (SC) community, who was on his way to take an exam in Tamil Nadu's Thevara district on Monday, had three of his fingers severed in an attack that his family alleged was driven by caste tensions. Police have detained three mi-

nors in connection with the incident.

The family of the student said the attack stemmed from anger over the role he played in a kabaddi match in which his team defeated opponents who belonged to higher castes.

At the same time, police said they were investigating whether the attack was linked to a purported romantic relationship between the student and a girl from

a higher caste.

According to a senior police officer familiar with the investigation, the initial complaint filed by the student's father cited the kabaddi match as the motive for the attack. But a preliminary investigation and questioning of the detained minors — all classmates of the victim — pointed to the violence having stemmed from the student's purported relationship with the sister of one of the de-

tained boys, who belongs to the Thevar community.

The attack unfolded in broad daylight when the victim was travelling on a bus. The three minors allegedly stopped the bus, dragged the boy out, and attacked him, according to police and eyewitness accounts. Three fingers of his left hand were severed during the attack.

His father, who tried to intervene, was also attacked and suf-

fered injuries, including to his head. The assailants fled as bystanders rushed to their help.

The boy was first taken to Srivikundam Government Hospital before being moved to Tirunelveli Government Hospital, where doctors performed surgery in an attempt to reattach the severed fingers.

The incident has caused outrage, with the student's family and local activists calling for justice.

Centre bans 2 Hurriyat groups for five years

Mirwaiz condemns 'intimidation', Mehbooba says 'another blow to J&K'

MAHENDER SINGH MANRAL & NAVEED IQBAL

NEW DELHI, SRINAGAR, MARCH 11

THE CENTRE has banned two Jammu and Kashmir groups — Awami Action Committee (AAC) headed by Kashmir's chief cleric Mirwaiz Umar Farooq and Jammu and Kashmir Itihaadul Muslimien (JKIM) led by Mohammad Abbas Ansari — for five years for their alleged anti-national activities, "supporting terrorism and fuelling secessionist activities".

Both the organisations are constituents of the All Parties Hurriyat Conference chaired by Farooq. In separate notifications, the MHA said the AAC and the JKIM are indulging in unlawful activities that are prejudicial to the integrity, sovereignty and security of the country. JKIM members have remained involved in supporting terrorist activities and anti-India propaganda for fuelling secessionism in J&K, the MHA said.

Considering all the facts available, the MHA declared both groups outlawed for five years under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, 1967, according to the notifications.

Reacting to the ban, Mirwaiz Farooq said the move seems to be a part of the continuation of "intimidation and disempowerment" that has been followed in J&K since August 2019 (when the Centre abrogated Article 370).

Farooq said that the AAC, founded by his father, Mirwaiz Farooq, at the peak of holy relic (moumudags) agitation in 1964, "has unwaveringly stood by the people of J&K advocating

for their aspirations and rights through completely non-violent and democratic methods and calling for peaceful resolution of the Kashmir conflict through dialogue and deliberation, for which it's members suffered jails and incarceration and even martyrdom." "The voice of truth may be suppressed through force but will not be silenced," Mirwaiz said.

PDP chief Mehbooba Mufti said that banning the two organisations "is another blow to Kashmir's social and political landscape."

"Suppressing dissent will only deepen tensions rather than resolve them," the former J&K Chief Minister said and urged the Omar Abdullah led J&K government to intervene and stop such actions of the Centre.

"While silencing Kashmir's voices may serve BJP's political agenda, it undermines the very Constitution that safeguards these rights. The central government must reassess its approach and move away from heavy-handed tactics," Mufti said.

The Jamaat-e-Islami, also a part of the APHC, was banned in 2019 and the ban was extended in 2024. In 2023, the Muslim League Jammu Kashmir (Masarat Alam) was banned by the Centre under the UAPA for its alleged involvement in anti-national and secessionist activities in J&K. The "Jehade-e-Hurriyat (JH), founded by the late Syed Ali Shah Geelani, was also banned in December 2023.

In February last year, the MHA banned both factions of the Muslim Conference J&K, also a part of the APHC, for "engaging in activities against the sovereignty and integrity of the nation."



ASHES TO ASHES

Devotees and Naga Sadhus celebrate the unique tradition of playing 'Masan Hol' with funeral ashes amid burning pyres at the Manikarnika Ghat in Varanasi on Tuesday. **PTI**

Hampi: Israeli rape survivor leaves for home; police raid homestays

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE

BENGALURU, MARCH 11

DAYS AFTER two women were gangraped near Hampi in Karnataka, one of the victims, an Israeli tourist went back home Monday. A police officer said the Israeli woman was in a deep state of shock, and she chose to travel back to her home country.

The police have said the Israeli national was among the two women who were allegedly raped by three construction workers, all of whom have been arrested, on the night of March 6. Meanwhile, the Koppal district police conducted raids on homestays and guest houses Monday. Ram L Arasiddi, Superintendent of Police, Koppal, said, "We asked the

homestay and guest house owners to install CCTV cameras and take other safety measures. We also asked them to fill up Form C of the foreign tourists and share it with the police." The police have arrested Sai Chetan Kameshwara, 21, Mallesh Dasara, 22, and Sharana Basawara, 30, all residents of the Gangavathi region, in connection with the Hampi rape case.

Probe against Ranya's DGP-rank stepfather in gold smuggling case

ENS & PTI

BENGALURU, MARCH 11

THE KARNATAKA government has appointed Additional Chief Secretary Gaurav Gupta to probe the role of DGP rank officer K Ramachandra Rao, if any, in the alleged gold smuggling activity of his step daughter and Kannada actress Ranya Rao. The Chief Minister's office informed the media on Tuesday that an order appointing Gaurav Gupta was issued on Monday night.

Ramachandra Rao is presently serving as the Managing Director of the Karnataka State Police Housing and Infrastructure Development Corporation. Gupta will also probe the alleged misuse of official privileges and protocol benefits by actress Ranya Rao who was recently arrested by the

Directorate of Revenue Intelligence (DRI) while attempting to smuggle gold bars from Dubai to Bengaluru.

The government also ordered an inquiry by the Criminal Investigation Department (CID) into allegations of police misconduct following reports that Rao was harassed by police personnel during her trips to and from foreign countries. The CID has been directed to submit its findings at the earliest.

Meanwhile, the DRI, which is investigating a gold smuggling case, nabbed one more person on Sunday. The accused, Konduru Raju, belongs to a prominent business family in Bengaluru. Ranya Rao was held with 14.2 kg of gold, worth over Rs 12.86 crore, at the airport on March 3. While DRI is probing the matter, the CID too has joined the investigation.

Gangster killed during attempt to escape custody: Jharkhand Police

HIMANSHU HARSH

PATNA, MARCH 11

GANGSTER AMAN Sahu was killed Tuesday morning in an encounter in Jharkhand's Palamu district when he tried to escape custody after the police vehicle in which he was being transported from Chhattisgarh's Raipur jail to Ranchi was attacked by his gang members, police said.

Reeshma Ramasesh, SP Palamu, said the incident took place in the Ramgarh police station area. According to the police, the Anti-Terrorism Squad (ATS) of Jharkhand, was taking Sahu from Raipur Central Jail to the NACourt in Ranchi. However, at around 9:30 am, when they reached the jungle area in the Andhari Dhodha Valley at the border of Chaupur Police Station and Ramgarh Police Station, some of Sahu's associates started firing at the police party and throwing bombs and explo-



Gangster Aman Sao in custody; (right) police at the encounter spot in Palamu district, Jharkhand, Tuesday. **PTI**

sives, authorities claimed. Amid the chaos, Sahu allegedly snatched a rifle from an ATS officer in the vehicle, got out and opened fire. Police returned fire and Sahu was killed, officers said.

"One ATS officer was also shot in the thigh and is being treated at a nearby hospital," the SP said. A police officer said that Sahu's associates managed to escape.

Sahu's body was found bloodied and identified. Aman Sahu is being a key figure in this network.



shells, live cartridges and bombs from the scene". Sahu had been involved in over a hundred criminal cases, including murder and extortion, and had been in jail in some of them. Police suspected that he had links to the Lawrence Bishnoi gang. On Monday, Jharkhand DGP Anurag Gupta had said several criminal activities were being planned from inside jails and had identified Aman Sahu as being a key figure in this network.

In Arunachal's East Kameng district, STEM labs at govt schools enrich learning

TANUSREE BOSE

KOLKATA

AT SAGALI, 81 km from Arunachal Pradesh's capital Itanagar, a government school has a Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM) lab — a dedicated space where students can explore, learn and apply the concepts through hands-on experiments, projects, and activities.

Walking into the lab, one finds engineering tools on one side and posters on the walls describing each of the engineering tools in detail. There is a model of a human skeleton and a poster accompanying a detailed description of different layers of the skeletal system to the circulatory, nervous, respiratory, digestive, and muscular systems. All these tools are intended to make learning more interesting and simpler.

At PMSHRI Government



High Secondary School in Doimukh, there is another STEM lab used by students of Class 9-12. From a model of the solar system to a 3D printer, the lab has tools for an immersive learning experience.

"It's a nice way to learn," says Taksin Batri, a class 9 student at the school. "Textbook learning

becomes a bit boring at times. But over here, we are seeing for ourselves and also performing the experiments on our own. So, the learning becomes better," Batri adds.

STEM labs typically provide a collaborative and interdisciplinary environment that fosters critical thinking, creativity, and problem-solving skills. These labs often feature state-of-the-art equipment, software, and technologies that enable students to design, build, test, and refine their projects.

From access to cutting-edge technologies, such as 3D printers, robotics, and coding software, the lab provides resources to students for data analysis, simulation, prototyping, and testing. "Like the DNA model really helps us understand genetics. It's not just a textbook diagram, it's a 3D model," says Akshay Achum, another class 9 student.

While the goals of a STEM lab vary, depending on the context, common objectives include



A STEM lab at the PMSHRI Government Higher Secondary School in Doimukh; (right) East Kameng district's Deputy Commissioner Sachin Rana. **Express, Proveen Khanna**



So, our understanding of the organs is now better," says Nabum Achum, another class 9 student.

It also helps in preparing students for STEM-related careers and post-secondary education,

besides fostering problem-solving skills and providing access to resources and opportunities for the underrepresented groups.

"Science in books may not be very interesting, but through the

13 E EXPLAINED

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The Baloch insurgents behind the Pakistan train hijacking

RISHIKA SINGH
NEW DELHI, MARCH 11

INSURGENTS of the Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA) stopped a long-distance train in a rugged, mountainous area south of Quetta and took passengers hostage on Tuesday.

In a statement, the BLA said they had killed 20 Pakistani Army personnel, shot down a military drone, and were holding 182 people hostage, Reuters reported.

Among the hostages were active-duty personnel of the Pak Army, the Inter-Services Intelligence, and Anti-Terrorism Force, the BLA said.

EXPLAINED TERROR

The train and attacks

The nine-coach Jaffar Express, which was headed to Peshawar from Quetta, was targeted between Pehro Kunri and Gadalar in the Bolan area of Kachhi district, a Balochistan government spokesperson said.

Armed men stopped the train with around 500 people on board in Tunnel No. 8, according to Controller Railways Muhammad Khashif.

The train, named after Mir Jaffar Khan Janjani, a Baloch tribal leader who was close to Pakistan's founder Muhammad Ali Jinnah, began running between the capital of Balochistan province and Rawalpindi more than 20 years ago.

In 2017, the train was extended to Peshawar in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa for a journey of more than 1,600 km, touching several important Pakistani cities along the way.

Operations of the train have been frequently impacted by the raging Baloch militancy. Services were suspended from August 26 to October 10 last year after a series of bombings by the BLA destroyed critical infrastructure, including a railway bridge on the train's route.

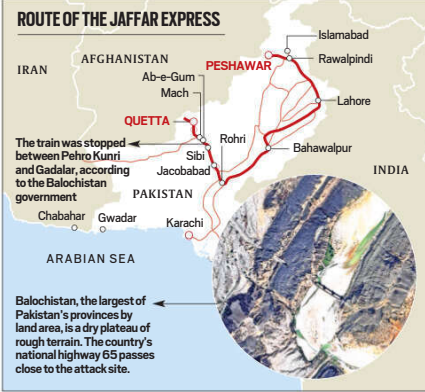
In early November, 62 people were killed in a blast at Quetta railway station. The following month, services of the train were suspended again over security concerns.

The Majed Brigade

The BLA are a Baloch ethnonationalist group who emerged in the early 2000s with the aim of achieving independence for Balochistan. Pakistan banned the organisation in 2006, and the United States designated it as a global terrorist organisation in 2019.

In its statement, the BLA said that its fideyoon or suicide squad unit Majed Brigade was leading Tuesday's hijacking of the Jaffar Express.

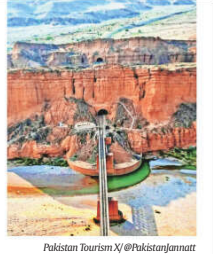
The Majed Brigade has been active since 2011, and has been involved in other strikes, including on a complex near Balochistan's Gwadar port in March 2024, which resulted in the deaths of several security personnel



Balochistan, the largest of Pakistan's provinces by land area, is a dry plateau of rough terrain. The country's national highway 65 passes close to the attack site.

and militants.

The BLA's Special Tactical Operations Squad (STOS), Fatah Squad, and Zirab Units were also involved in Tuesday's operation,



The 10-coach train came under attack near Tunnel Number 8 in a rugged, sparsely populated mountainous area (left) that has a network of 17 tunnels, including the historic Mashkaf Railway Tunnel (above) built by the British in the late 19th century.

lated of Pakistan's four provinces. It has substantial reserves of oil and gas, alongside gold and copper deposits, but has lagged in economic growth compared to other regions in

the country.

Leaders of the ethnic Baloch minority have long blamed the central government for the region's economic backwardness, as well as the stranglehold of Punjab over the country's resources.

After Partition, Balochistan remained independent until March 1948 as part of a friendship treaty with the new state of Pakistan. The Khan of Kalat, the main tribal leader whose writ ran over much of the region, was keen to remain independent, but came under tremendous pressure to join Pakistan, including from his feudatories, the rulers of Makran, Las Bela, and Khairpur.

He signed the instrument of accession, but the sentiment in favour of Baloch independence remained alive.

Tens of thousands of Baloch nationalists and civilians have been killed in the insurgency over the past decades. Pakistan has accused India of aiding the Baloch insurgent groups – an allegation that India has strongly denied.

Over the last several years, Baloch insurgents have targeted Chinese personnel and assets involved in the construction of infrastructure for the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). In October 2024, two Chinese nationals were killed in a suicide bombing for which the BLA claimed responsibility. These attacks have been chalked up to a lack of faith in how these major infrastructure projects might benefit the local Baloch population.

EXPLAINED GLOBAL

WHY FORMER PHILIPPINE PRESIDENT RODRIGO DUTERTE WAS ARRESTED

FORMER PHILIPPINES President Rodrigo Duterte was arrested on Tuesday on a warrant issued by the International Criminal Court (ICC), which was investigating allegations that "crimes against humanity" were committed during his so-called "war on drugs".

The ICC, which has 125 countries as its members, has international jurisdiction over four types of crimes: crimes against humanity, genocide, crimes of aggression, and war crimes. It can step in when countries are unwilling or unable to prosecute suspects for these crimes.



Rodrigo Duterte during a speech in the Philippines in 2021. Reuters

Allegations against Duterte

Before becoming President in 2016, Duterte was the mayor of Davao, a sprawling southern metropolis, for 22 years, and gained fame for making the city one of the country's safest from street crimes. He used Davao's reputation to cast himself as a tough-talking anti-establishment politician ahead of the 2016 elections.

In the final campaign rally that year, Duterte told the crowd to "forget the laws on human rights". He added, "You drug pushers, holdup men and do-nothings, you better go out... Because I'll kill you."

During his six-year term, which ended in 2022, more than 6,000 suspects were killed by police or unknown assailants as part of his "war on drugs" campaign. A UN report subsequently revealed that most of the victims were young, poor urban males, and that the police who do not need search or arrest warrants to conduct house raids, systematically forced suspects to make self-incriminating statements or risk facing lethal force," according to a report by the BBC.

Duterte, who had faced sexual harassment and drug-related accusations, also withdrew the Philippines from the ICC

in 2019. The international court first took note of the alleged abuses in 2016, and started its investigation in 2021. It covered cases from November 2011, when Duterte was mayor of Davao, to March 2019.

The political angle

Duterte's arrest has come at a time when his relationship with President Ferdinand R Marcos Jr has deteriorated sharply. Marcos rose to the presidency after forming a political alliance with Duterte's daughter Sara, who was elected as his Vice President. However, Marcos and Sara got embroiled in a political tussle, especially due to their differing views on the relationship of the Philippines with the US and China.

The Philippines had decided to not rejoin the ICC but the Marcos government in 2023 quietly allowed the court's investigators to enter the Philippines. Last year, the country's House of Representatives also started an inquiry into Duterte's drug war.

Duterte remains a popular leader in the country, and his daughter is expected to be a presidential candidate in 2028.

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE

HARISH DAMODARAN

THE RABI (winter-spring) crop, especially wheat, is still in the field and one can't be fully sure about the yields to be harvested. But production concerns are not confined to wheat. Equally, if not more, serious is the situation with regard to sugar. The output prospects and stock position, which also matter for food inflation, seem most uncertain in these two commodities today.

Wheat: Managing stocks

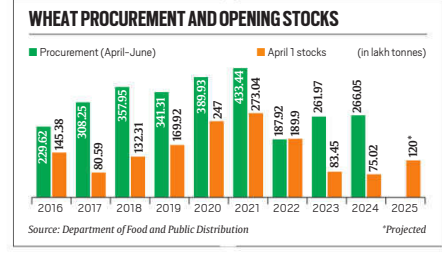
In wheat, the silver lining is the opening stocks before the new crop's procurement from April 1.

Last year's stocks in government godowns on April 1, at 75.02 lakh tonnes (lt), were the lowest for this date since the 58.03 lt of 2008 and just over the required minimum buffer of 74.6 lt.

A major reason for the stocks depleting to a 16-year-low was the 2024 Lok Sabha election. During 2023-24 (April-March), the record 100.88 lt of wheat was stockpiled from the Food Corporation of India's offerings into the open market. Much of those sales, including 6.73 lt under the Bharat Aata scheme offering wheat flour at a subsidised retail price of Rs 27.5/kg, happened in the run-up to the polls from November 2023.

Although the aggressive open market sales then helped moderate wheat prices, the step was a risky gamble. Had the 2023-24 crop turned out bad – like in the previous two years – government agencies would have struggled to procure sufficient wheat to replenish the barely above-buffer stocks.

Thankfully, production was reasonable enough to enable procurement of 266 lt, more than the 262 lt and 188 lt of 2023 and 2022 respectively. However, it was nowhere near the 341-434 lt range of the preceding



four years (chart).

This time, the government has not taken any risk. It has offloaded just 9.59 lt of wheat under the open market sale and Bharat Aata schemes during April-January 2024-25, and may not offload more than 30 lt for the entire fiscal. Government stocks as of March 1 were around 140 lt, and are projected at 120 lt at the start of the new procurement season from April 1. That's higher than last year's 75 lt opening stocks.

Wheat is wholesaling in Delhi at Rs 2,900-2,950 per quintal, compared to Rs 2,400-2,450 a year ago. The Centre, unlike last year, has not sought to cool down prices through excessive open market sales and stock drawdown. Instead, it has imposed stocking limits, with traders not being allowed to hold more than 250 tonnes and retailers only 4 tonnes for each outlet. These limits are applicable until March 31.

It's all about temperatures

Having more stocks relative to last year gives the government some comfort, reducing its pressure to procure to that extent.

For now, open market rates – Rs 2,900-2,950/quintal in Delhi and Rs 2,540-2,550 in Madhya Pradesh's (MP) Ujjain and Indore markets – are ruling above the Centre's minimum support price of Rs 2,425.

Prices may ease once the new crop arrives

—from the second to third week of March in Maharashtra and Gujarat, third week of March to first week of April in MP and early April in Rajasthan. The extent of fall in prices will depend on how high the production is.

While the Agriculture Ministry's record 1,154.30 lt output estimate may be premature, ground reports suggest a bumper crop in central India. This wasn't the case last time, when grain yields fell due to the delayed onset of winter affecting the crop's vegetative growth and tillering) followed by foggy weather with a lack of sunshine in January (leading to poor pollination and seed setting).

There have been no major temperature anomalies or fog/smog conditions this time. Rajiv Yadav, principal scientist at the New Delhi-based Indian Agricultural Research Institute, expects average wheat yields in MP to be 15-20% more than last year.

The question mark is mainly over yields in north and northwest India, where the crop is in the grain-filling stage. Usually, every extra day during this period confers an additional wheat yield of 40-50 kg per hectare. So long as maximum temperatures don't cross 35 degrees Celsius and there are no sudden spikes, the kernels will keep accumulating starch and other nutrient material.

Currently, the temperatures are well within range. If they remain so until April and yields in north and northwest India turn out

as good as last year, the inflation woes in wheat will end, with no dearth of grain in mandis or government warehouses.

Situation in sugar: Not as sweet

Things don't look so sanguine in sugar, where all output estimates have gone awry.

Initial estimates by the Indian Sugar & Bio-Energy Manufacturers Association pegged gross production of the sweetener for the 2024-25 season (October-September) at 33.1t. This – after deducting 40 lt of sugar diverted to make ethanol for blending with petrol – translated into a net output of 293 lt, down from 319 lt in 2023-24.

But as the crushing season has progressed, the estimates have been continuously reduced. As of February 28, net production was hardly 220 lt, against 255 lt for the same period of 2023-24. Moreover, out of 533 mills, 186 had ceased to crush for want of cane, versus 72 last year.

Latest industry estimates put net sugar production at 265 lt, with some even projecting at 255 lt. Given 79.23 lt of opening stocks, 285 lt domestic consumption, and 10 lt exports (which the government permitted on January 20), a net production of 265 lt would leave 49.23 lt available on September 30.

The closing stocks would be lower if production falls to 255 lt. At below 40 lt, they would suffice for less than 17 months of domestic consumption. That, by itself, isn't a problem. But with Diwali and Dussehra both falling in October, and mills not beginning crushing operations before November, it can create a demand-supply mismatch and increase prices.

Ex-factory sugar prices are already at Rs 40.10-41.10 per kg in Uttar Pradesh (UP) and Rs 38-38.70 in Maharashtra, up from their corresponding year-ago levels of Rs 37.30-38.50 and Rs 33.80-34.25. It would not be surprising if the government clamps stock limits on sugar, or even makes it easier to import in the months ahead.

The impact of subpar 2023-24 rainfall in Maharashtra and Karnataka, besides the increased susceptibility of the dominant Co-0238 sugarcane variety in UP to rot disease and top shoot borer pest attacks, have been underestimated. And it is showing in the production numbers too.

Delhi's air worst among capitals, Byrnihat's the world's most foul: new report

ALIND CHAUHAN
NEW DELHI, MARCH 11

ASWISS company that tracks global air quality has named Delhi as the world's most polluted national capital for the sixth straight year. Thirteen of the world's 20 most polluted cities are in India, according to the World Air Quality Report for 2024 released by IQAir on Tuesday.

The most polluted city in the world is Byrnihat on the border of Assam and Meghalaya, according to the report. IQAir examined data collected from 40,000 air quality monitoring stations in 138 countries.

The report looked specifically at concentrations of fine particulate matter, or PM2.5, the smallest but most dangerous of pollutants.

PM2.5 comes from sources such as the

combustion of fossil fuels, and can cause respiratory problems, chronic kidney disease, cancer, and stroke or heart attacks.

Aglobal problem

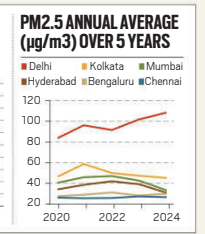
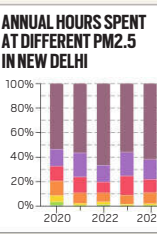
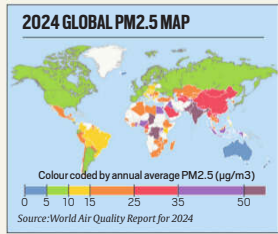
In 2024, most of the global population was breathing dirty air, the report shows.

Only 12 countries, regions, and territories recorded PM2.5 concentrations below the Quality Report for 2024 recommended average annual limit of 5 µg/m³.

Most of these countries were in Latin America, the Caribbean, or the Oceania region.

The five most polluted countries, according to the report, were Chad, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Congo, and India, with annual average PM2.5 concentrations of 91.8 µg/m³, 78.1 µg/m³, 73.7 µg/m³, 58.2 µg/m³, and 50.6 µg/m³ respectively.

Only 17% of the 8,954 cities around the



world recorded air quality that met WHO PM2.5. The 10 most polluted cities – located in India, Kazakhstan, Chad, Pakistan, and China – exceeded these guide-

lines by more than 10 times.

Pollution in India

At 50.6 µg/m³, India's average PM2.5

concentration last year was 7% lower than in 2023 (54.4 µg/m³).

However, six Indian cities made it to the list of the world's 10 most polluted.

Byrnihat, the most polluted city in the world, had an annual average PM2.5 concentration of 128.2 µg/m³.

Delhi continued to see high levels of pollution, with an annual average of 91.6 µg/m³ in 2024, which was almost unchanged from the 92.7 µg/m³ recorded in 2023.

India's northern states, particularly, witnessed severe pollution episodes in 2024, the report noted. For instance, "January air quality was especially poor in Delhi and Himachal Pradesh."

Extreme levels of pollution were seen in November in Delhi, Punjab, Chandigarh, Haryana, and Himachal Pradesh.

Crop stubble-burning remained the major contributor to PM2.5 levels, accounting for 60% of pollution during peak periods.

Other major sources of pollution in the context of polluted vehicular emissions, industrial discharges, and construction dust, the report said.

TOP OF THE WORLD



Pope Francis

THE VATICAN

Pope out of immediate danger: Doctors

Rome: Pope Francis woke up Tuesday to good news from his doctors: They upgraded his prognosis and say he is no longer in imminent danger of death as a result of the double pneumonia that has kept him hospitalized for nearly a month in the longest and gravest threat to his 12-year papacy. The 88-year-old pope isn't out of the woods yet, however. Doctors are still cautious and have decided to keep him hospitalized for several more days to receive treatment, not to mention a period of rehabilitation he will likely need. But the doctors said he remains stable and has consolidated improvements in recent days, according to blood tests and his good response to treatment. Francis, who has chronic lung disease, is still using supplemental oxygen. **AP**

SOUTH AFRICA

12 killed as bus overturns in Johannesburg

Johannesburg: A bus overturned on a highway on Tuesday and passengers were thrown out of it, killing at least 12 people and injuring 45 in the South African city of Johannesburg, emergency services said. Emergency crews were trying to lift the bus back onto its wheels to see if any more victims were trapped underneath it, said William Nthladi, a spokesperson for the city's Ekurhuleni Emergency Management. "On arrival we found patients lying across the road," Nthladi said. **AP**

UNITED KINGDOM

One held in North Sea ship collision case

London: British police arrested a man Tuesday on suspicion of manslaughter as they searched for answers about why a cargo ship hit a tanker transporting fuel for the US military off eastern England, setting both vessels ablaze. One sailor was presumed dead in the collision, which sparked fears of significant environmental damage. Humberside Police said the 59-year-old was detained "on suspicion of gross negligence manslaughter in connection with the collision." The man, who was not named by police, has not been charged. **AP**

WILL RESUME INTELLIGENCE SHARING, SAYS U.S. AFTER JEDDAH TALKS

Ukraine agrees to 30-day ceasefire with Russia, conclude mineral deal with US

REUTERS
JEDDAH, MARCH 11

UKRAINE AGREED to accept an immediate 30-day ceasefire in the conflict with Russia during talks with US officials in Saudi Arabia, the countries said in a joint statement.

US Secretary of State Marco Rubio said he would now take the offer to the Russians, and that the ball is now in Moscow's court. The United States will resume sharing intelligence with Kyiv.

Ukrainian and US officials met behind closed doors for hours to find a path towards ending the war with Russia, after Kyiv's forces launched their largest drone attack on Moscow of the war overnight.

After more than eight hours of talks, the two sides issued a joint statement that said Ukraine was willing to accept the US proposal for an immediate, interim 30-day ceasefire that could be extended by mutual agreement of the parties, subject to acceptance and implementation by Russia.

"The United States will communicate to Russia that Russian reciprocity is the key to achieving peace," the statement said. "The United States will immediately lift the pause on intelligence sharing and resume security assistance to Ukraine," the statement said.

The two sides also said Washington and Kyiv agreed to conclude as soon as possible a



US Secretary of State Marco Rubio, National Security Advisor Mike Waltz, Ukrainian Foreign Minister Andriy Sybiha and Head of Presidential Office Andriy Yermak in a meeting with Saudi Foreign Minister Faisal bin Farhan and National Security Advisor Mosaad bin Mohammed Al-Aiban in Jeddah on Tuesday. **Reuters**

comprehensive agreement for developing Ukraine's critical mineral resources, a deal that has been in the works for weeks and was thrown into limbo by an acrimonious White House meeting between US President Donald Trump and Ukraine President Volodymyr Zelenskyy last week.

3 killed drone attack
Ukraine on Tuesday launched its biggest ever drone

attack on Moscow and the surrounding region, killing at least three employees of a meat warehouse, injuring 17 others and causing a short shutdown at the Russian capital's four airports, Russian officials said.

A total of 343 drones were downed over Russia, including 91 over Moscow region and 126 over the western region of Kursk where Ukrainian forces have been pulling back, as well

as near the Kursk nuclear power plant, the defence ministry said.

The dawn attack unfolded ahead of talks between US and Ukrainian officials in Saudi Arabia on seeking an end of the three-year war and as Russian forces try to encircle thousands of Ukrainian soldiers in Kursk. Moscow Mayor Sergei Sobyanin said it was the biggest Ukrainian drone attack on the city.

Zelenskyy, Saudi Crown Prince discuss achieving sustainable peace



Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy and Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman in Jeddah on Monday. **Reuters**

Dubai: Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy discussed efforts to achieve "sustainable fair, and comprehensive" peace in Ukraine, according to a joint statement published on Tuesday by the Saudi state news agency (SPA).

Crown Prince Mohammed and Zelenskyy said in their meeting they will boost investment relations between the two countries in sectors including energy, food industries and infrastructure, the joint statement added. "The two sides said they are looking forward to exploring joint co-operation opportunities in the areas of oil, gas, their derivatives, and petrochemicals," according to the joint statement. **REUTERS**

Israeli fire kills 4 Palestinians in Gaza Strip

Tel Aviv: Israeli fire has killed four people and wounded 14 in the Gaza Strip over the past 24 hours, Palestinian officials said, even as a fragile ceasefire with Hamas has largely held.

Israeli strikes have killed dozens of Palestinians who the army says had approached its troops or entered unauthorized areas in violation of the January truce. Israel last week suspended supplies of goods and electricity to the territory of more than 2 million Palestinians as it tries to pressure the militant group to accept an extension of the first phase of their ceasefire.

Israel wants Hamas to release half of the remaining hostages in return for a promise to negotiate a lasting truce. Hamas wants to start talks on the ceasefire's more difficult second phase. **AP**

China, Iran, Russia hold joint naval drills as tensions rise between Tehran and US

ASSOCIATED PRESS
TEHRAN, MARCH 11

CHINA, IRAN and Russia conducted joint naval drills Tuesday in the Middle East, offering a show of force in a region still uneasy over Tehran's rapidly expanding nuclear programme and as Yemen's Houthi rebels threaten new attacks on ships.

The joint drills, called the Maritime Security Belt 2025, took place in the Gulf of Oman near the strategic Strait of Hormuz, the narrow mouth of the Persian Gulf through which a fifth of all crude oil traded worldwide passes.

The area around the strait in the past has seen US-led operations and commercial ships and launch suspected attacks in the time since President Donald Trump first



Warships take part in a joint Navy exercise in the Gulf of Oman on Tuesday. **Reuters**

unilaterally withdrew America from Tehran's nuclear deal with world powers.

The drill marked the fifth year the three countries took

part in the drills. This year's drill likely sparked a warning late Monday from the British military's United Kingdom Maritime Trade

Operations centre, which said there was GPS interference in the strait, with disruptions lasting for several hours and forcing crews to rely on backup navigation methods.

"This was likely GPS jamming to reduce the targeting capability of drones and missiles," wrote Shaun Robertson, an intelligence analyst at the EOS Risk Group. "However, electronic navigation system interference has been reported in the region previously during periods of increased tension and military exercises." China and Russia in the Middle East waters patrolled by US Navy Russia's Defence Ministry identified the vessels it sent to the drill as the corvettes *Rekty* and the *Hero* of the Russian Federation *Aldar Tsyzdzhapov*, as well as the tanker *Pechenega*.

FBI joins search for Indian student who went missing in Dominican Republic

ASSOCIATED PRESS
SANTO DOMINGO, MARCH 11

THE FBI has joined the search for a 20-year-old Indian student who went missing nearly a week ago in the Dominican tourist town of Punta Cana, police said.

Police said they are re-interrogating people who were with Sudiksha Konaoki, the University of Pittsburgh student, at a beach in front of the Riu Republica Hotel.

The hotel said in a statement that her disappearance coincided with a power outage that prompted multiple guests to head to the beach where she was last seen. Dominican President Luis Abinader said, "All government agencies are searching... because the latest information we have from one of them, from the last person who was with the young woman, what he says according to the reports is that a wave, while on the beach, crashed into them."

US deports Pakistan's envoy due to 'immigration objection'

SAJJAD HUSSAIN
ISLAMABAD, MARCH 11

THE US authorities denied entry to Pakistan's ambassador to Turkmenistan and deported him from Los Angeles, a media report said on Tuesday.

Ambassador K K Wagan, who holds a valid US visa and all necessary travel documents, was stopped at Los Angeles airport by US immigration authorities. The News quoted diplomatic sources as saying, "Ambassador K K



Ambassador of K K Wagan

Wagan was deported from the US. He had an immigration objection which led to his deportation," a senior foreign ministry official said. The officials forced him to return to his last port of departure, raising concerns about diplomatic protocol and the nature of the decision. Foreign Office

confirmed the envoy had gone to the US on a private visit.

It said the Ministry of Foreign Affairs was looking into the matter and an investigation was underway. The Foreign Office also advised avoiding any speculation in the matter. Earlier, sources said the US immigration system flagged Wagan over "controversial visa references", leading to his immediate deportation.

It remains unclear what specific concerns triggered his response from American authorities. **PTI**

Former Philippine President Duterte arrested in Manila on ICC warrant

Investigation in a case of crime against humanity was launched by ICC in 2011

JIM GOMEZ
MANILA, MARCH 11

A PLANE carrying arrested former Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte left Manila Tuesday night for him to be turned over to the International Criminal Court in The Hague which has ordered his arrest for alleged crimes against humanity. President Ferdinand Marcos said.

Duterte was arrested after arriving with his family from Hong Kong at the Manila international airport Tuesday morning on a warrant from the ICC. The global court ordered his arrest through Interpol after accusing him of crimes against humanity over deadly anti-drugs crackdowns he oversaw while in office. Marcos said in a late-night news conference.

Walking slowly with a cane, the 79-year-old former president turned briefly to a small group of aides and supporters, who wept and bid him goodbye, before an escort helped him into the plane.

His daughter, Vice President Sara Duterte, said she sought entry to the airbase where her father had been held but was refused. She criticised the Marcos administration for surrendering her father to a foreign court which currently has no jurisdiction to the Philippines.

Marcos said Duterte's arrest was "proper and correct" and not an act of political persecution, since the Philippines is a mem-



Philippine former president Rodrigo Duterte at Villamor Air Base, after being served an arrest warrant by ICC on Tuesday. **Reuters**

ber of Interpol. Among the most feared leaders in Asia while in power, Duterte became the first ex-leader from the region to be arrested by the global court.

Clad in a dark jacket, an irate Duterte protested his arrest after arrival in Manila and asked authorities the legal basis of his detention. His lawyers immediately asked the Supreme Court to block any attempt to transport him out of the Philippines.

"Show to me now the legal basis for my being here," Duterte asked authorities in remarks captured on video by his daughter, Veronica Duterte, who posted the footage on social media. "You have to answer now for the deprivation of liberty." **AP**

Syria: UN says entire families killed in military crackdown



A Syrian Alawite, who fled the violence in western Syria, crosses Nahr El Kabir River in Akkar, Lebanon, on Tuesday. **Reuters**

REUTERS
GENEVA, MARCH 11

ENTIRE FAMILIES including women and children were killed in Syria's coastal region as part of a series of sectarian killings by the army against an insurgency by Bashar al-Assad loyalists, the UN human rights office said on Tuesday.

Pressure has been growing on Syria's Islamist-led government to investigate after reports by hundreds of civilians in villages where the majority of the population were members of Assad's minority Alawite sect.

"In a number of extremely disturbing instances, entire families - including women, children and individuals hors de combat - were killed, with predominantly Alawite cities and villages targeted in particular," UN human rights office spokesperson Thania Al-Kheitan said, using a French term for those incapable of fighting.

So far, the UN human rights office has documented the killing of 111 civilians and expects the real toll to be significantly higher. Al-Kheitan told a Geneva press briefing. Of those, 50 were men; 18 were women; and three were children, he added.

"Many of the cases documented were of summary execution. They appear to have been carried out on a sectarian basis..." Al-Kheitan said.

WORKERS REMOVE FUEL DEBRIS IN A MONUMENTAL NUCLEAR CLEANUP EFFORT THAT COULD TAKE MORE THAN A CENTURY

Massive Fukushima plant cleanup exposes workers to high radiation and stress

MARI YAMAGUCHI
OKUMA, MARCH 11

THE FUKUSHIMA Daiichi nuclear power plant's radiation levels have significantly dropped since the cataclysmic meltdown 14 years ago Tuesday. Workers walking around in many areas wearing only surgical masks and regular clothes.

It's a different story for those who enter the reactor buildings, including the three damaged in the 2011 earthquake and tsunami. They must use maximum protection - full face-

masks with filters, multi-layered gloves and socks, shoe covers, hooded hazmat coveralls and a helmet. As workers remove melted fuel debris from the reactors in a monumental nuclear cleanup effort that could take more than a century, they are facing both huge amounts of psychological stress and dangerous levels of radiation. A remote-controlled extendable robot with a tong had several mishaps including equipment failures before returning in November with a tiny piece of melted fuel from inside the damaged No. 2 reactor.

That first successful test run was a crucial step in what will be a daunting, decades-long decommissioning that must deal with at least 880 tons of melted nuclear fuel that has mixed with broken parts of internal structures and other debris inside the three ruined reactors. Akira Ono, chief decommissioning officer at the Tokyo Electric Power Company Holdings, which manages the plant, says even the tiny sample gives officials a lot of information about the melted fuel. More samples are needed, however, to make the work smoother when



A worker in hazmat suit walks under the Unit 5 reactor pressure vessel at the nuclear power plant. **AP**

bigger efforts to remove the debris begin in the 2030s. A second sample-retrieval mission at the No. 2 reactor is expected in coming weeks.

Operators hope to send the extendable robot farther into the reactor to take samples closer to the center, where overheated nuclear fuel fell from the core, utility spokesperson Masakatsu Takata said. He pointed out the target area as he stood inside the inner structure of the No. 5 reactor, which is one of two reactors that survived the tsunami. It has an identical design as No. 2. Radiation levels are still dan-

gerously high inside the No. 2 reactor building, where the melted fuel debris is behind a thick concrete containment wall. Earlier decontamination work reduced those radiation levels to a fraction of what they used to be.

"Working under high levels of radiation (during a short) time limit made me feel nervous and rushed," said Yasunobu Yokokawa, a team leader for the target area as he stood inside the inner structure of the No. 5 reactor, which is one of two reactors that survived the tsunami. It has an identical design as No. 2. Radiation levels are still dan-

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TAX OFFICIALS MAINTAIN BILL HAS MADE NO CHANGES TO PROVISIONS IN EXTANT I-T ACT

I-T Bill proposes govt can 'override' online access codes, sparks privacy concerns

SOMU ARENDRA BARIK
NEW DELHI, MARCH 11

A SMALL phrase in the proposed Income Tax Bill, 2025, around search and seizure powers available to the government, has raised privacy concerns among digital rights activists and many tax consultancy firms — as the Bill allows the government to break open, or 'override' access codes, such as passwords, set up by users for their digital communication on social media platforms, email services, and possibly even communication on encrypted platforms like WhatsApp.

While tax officials maintain that the Income Tax Bill has made no changes to the search and seizure provisions in the extant Income Tax Act, and any changes to the language have been made to make it easier to understand, there is one major addition in the Bill, which is absent in the Act — the ability of income tax officers to override any access code a person may have set on their phones or laptops.

The Income Tax Act grants tax authorities the power to enter and search premises and forcibly break locks if an individual fails to provide requested documents or

VIRTUAL DIGITAL SPACE

A **VIRTUAL** digital space, in the Bill, has been defined as a digital environment that is constructed and experienced through computer technology, and includes: (i) email services; (ii) social media account; (iii) online investment account; trading account, banking account, etc.; (iv) any website used for storing details of ownership of any asset; (v) remote server or cloud servers; (vi) digital application platforms; and (vii) any other space of similar nature

financial records after receiving an official summons. The legislation also authorises officials to examine electronic records. The proposed Bill maintains these existing provisions while additionally empowering authorities to access virtual digital environments during search and seizure operations, including the ability to override any access codes of computer systems, or 'virtual digital spaces', that would otherwise restrict entry.

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that if the Digital Personal Data Protection Act would have been in force right now (the Act has still not been implemented, with draft rules currently undergoing consultation), it would make no difference to the proposal in the Income Tax Bill, as tax authorities are likely to be exempted from the privacy law's scope — a criticism that has been levelled against the law for affording wide-ranging exemptions to government agencies.

Officials said that under Section 132 of the existing I-T Act, tax authorities have been seizing electronic devices such as desktops and hard disks, and collecting evidence from communication platforms such as emails, WhatsApp, and Telegram. An official said that such evidence is crucial in calculating the amount of tax evasion.

Another tax expert, speaking on the condition of anonymity, said that the tax authorities were already asking people under scrutiny to give them access to their online communications or documents, but overriding access controls remained a grey area legally. "With the proposed change, they want to explicitly make it clear that the government has the power to bypass these protections for those under

the tax lens. Of course, some safeguards need to be there," this person said.

"This represents a notable departure from the present Income-tax Act, 1961, which did not explicitly cover such digital domains... Without clear safeguards, these extensive powers could lead to taxpayer harassment or unnecessary scrutiny of personal data," news agency Reuters quoted Vishwas Panjari, a partner at law firm Nangia Andersen LLP, as saying.

In a letter to the Select Committee of Parliament, which is currently deliberating on the Bill, the Delhi-based digital rights body Internet Freedom Foundation (IFF) said that it was "necessary to ensure that the proposed digital search and seizure provisions uphold constitutional safeguards and prevent excessive enforcement powers".

The Bill should "explicitly incorporate the proportionality standard," as established by the Supreme Court in its landmark 2017 ruling to privacy judgement, "by requiring the least invasive measures," IFF said.

"Without these necessary safeguards, the Income Tax Bill, 2025, risks enabling unchecked surveillance and infringing on privacy rights."

AN AMERICAN RECESSION

Trump's tariffs have rekindled possibilities of a US economic downturn

ANIL SASI
NEW DELHI, MARCH 11

SHARES ON Wall Street slumped on Monday to record one of the worst trading days since 2022, driven by concerns about Trump's trade policies on the US economy. Investors are now worried that a trade war could push the world's biggest economy into a possible recession, with Trump appearing not to rule out that possibility.

Speaking to Fox News on Sunday, Trump ramped a question on whether the US is headed into a recession with uncharacteristically ambivalent response: "I hate to predict things like that. There's a period of transition, because what we're doing is very big. We're bringing wealth back to America, that's a big thing. And there are always periods (where) it takes a little time." This came days after Trump said his measures would lead to some pain in the "short term".

This seems to be a markedly different outlook from Trump in his first term, where he was much more responsive to stock market patterns. Incidentally, in his first term, a focus on tariff in the sell-off, while the tech-heavy NASDAQ was down over 4 per cent, Elon Musk-promoted Tesla was one of the stocks that fell the most, down more than 10 per cent and sharply lower than its peak back in December.

Recession talk

There are three issues that analysts are pointing to amid the renewed "recession" talk. One, that Wall Street is perhaps now overreacting to the fact that it did not really believe Trump would follow through on this threat of tariffs that he made throughout his election campaign. So, when last week, the tariffs came into effect on Canada, Mexico and China, and more tariffs are likely on steel and aluminum products, the stock markets have reacted sharply.

Secondly, bond yields — or the return a bond investor expects to receive each year over its term to maturity — are perhaps a better indicator of whether a recession is in the making. The American 10-year bond yield, which has been hovering around 4.5 per cent since Monday's demand for 10-year assets increased after Trump decided to rule out a recession as a result of his tariff policies. When bond yields are going down, it means that the return an investor can expect from holding a bond is decreasing, which is typically caused by the price of the bond rising in the market (yields and prices of bonds have an inverse relationship).

Thirdly, though the broader economic data at this time is not indicating an impending American recession, there are some clear pointers to a growth slowdown. Job market data is holding up so far based on the February jobs report that came out Friday, but consumer confidence is down, and business surveys cite uncertainty as a reason



US President Donald Trump speaks to reporters aboard Air Force One on March 9. Reuters File

Trump says he will double tariffs on metals from Canada to 50%

Washington: US President Donald Trump on Tuesday ramped up a burgeoning trade war with Canada, saying he will double tariffs set to take effect within hours on all imported steel and aluminum products from Canada to 50 per cent, amplifying a focus on tariff increases that has sent financial markets reeling and business leaders ringing alarm bells about weakening consumer demand.

In a post on his Truth Social media platform, Trump said he has instructed Commerce Secretary Howard Lutnick to add an additional 25 per cent tariff on the metals products from Canada that will go into effect on Wednesday morning. Tariffs totaling 25 per cent on all imported steel and aluminum products originating from other countries will start that day.

for being cautious about capital investment. Fourth-quarter US gross domestic (GDP) growth for 2024 came in at a strong 2.3 per cent, driven primarily by consumer spending.

However, the early data for this year suggest a slowdown could be on the cards.

The various Federal Reserve Bank surveys have shown more caution among businesses, with the Philadelphia Federal Reserve's Manufacturing Business Outlook Survey results showing that new orders and hiring are down, while prices are up. Comments from businesses across the country focus on the uncertainty surrounding tariffs and the potential negative impact on orders, adding to the pessimism. But Trump has, so far, shown that his administration is willing to tolerate this to achieve his broader ambitions, including rebalancing trade, his plans for deregulation, including promised tax cuts later in the year.

And while Trump appears to have relatively good recession prospects, his commerce secretary Howard Lutnick, and the main cheerleader of reciprocal tariffs within the new administration, was a lot less ambivalent at a press briefing. "There's going to be no recession in America. What there's going to be is global tariffs are going to come down because President Trump has said, you want to know us 100 per cent? You're going to charge us 100 per cent! You want us 100 per cent? They say, No, no, no, don't charge us 100 per cent, we'll bring ours down... We'll unleash America out to the world, grow our economy in a way we've never grown before. You are going to see, over the next two years, the greatest set of growth coming from America. I would never bet on recession. No chance."

Problems with US's high tariffs plan

Lutnick's bluster aside, there is a reason why the high tariff threats by the US are not likely to sustain. The structural issues with the American economy is one key reason. The US economy relies heavily on trade, and that's part of its structural construct in the post-World War II era. This is because the American economy consumes more goods than it produces domestically at full employment. As a result, its imports are almost always higher than its exports, resulting in a trade deficit.

This trade deficit is a point of contention for Trump, which he's used as the trigger for the imposition of tariffs on countries around the world. But that's part of its structural construct in the post-World War II era. This is because the American economy consumes more goods than it produces, it will have a deficit with a lot of countries. This is also triggered by the fact that the labour costs in America are high, and so it does not merit economic logic for US workers to be producing this efficiently in the country, like say garments or low-end consumer goods. So, other countries that have relatively low recession prospects, his commerce secretary Howard Lutnick, and the main cheerleader of reciprocal tariffs within the new administration, was a lot less ambivalent at a press briefing. "There's going to be no recession in America. What there's going to be is global tariffs are going to come down because President Trump has said, you want to know us 100 per cent? You're going to charge us 100 per cent! You want us 100 per cent? They say, No, no, no, don't charge us 100 per cent, we'll bring ours down... We'll unleash America out to the world, grow our economy in a way we've never grown before. You are going to see, over the next two years, the greatest set of growth coming from America. I would never bet on recession. No chance."

Also, Trump has consistently insisted that tariffs are paid for by foreign countries. This hardline, has resonated within his base, but is blatantly false. It is, in fact, US importers — American companies or representatives of foreign companies in the US — that end up paying the tariffs. They are going to see, over the next two years, the greatest set of growth coming from America. I would never bet on recession. No chance."

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Derivative loss of ₹2,100 crore: IndusInd Bank shares crash by 27%

GEORGE MATHEW
MUMBAI, MARCH 11

A DAY after IndusInd Bank revealed a potential 2.35 per cent adverse impact on its net worth after an internal review of its derivative portfolio, the lender's shares crashed by 27 per cent on the stock exchanges. The stock closed Rs 244 down at Rs 655.95 on the BSE on Tuesday, even as several broking firms downgraded the stock.

The derivative losses will have an approximate impact of ₹2,100 crore on the bank, the management said during an analysts' call. As per the Reserve Bank of India's (RBI) report on investments issued in September 2023, banks are prohibited from conducting internal trades/ hedging and, accordingly, IndusInd Bank too ceased internal trades from April 1, 2024. However, during an internal review, the bank identified certain discrepancies where accounting of losses on forex derivatives/ swap transactions executed prior to April 2024 (over the past 5-7 years) to hedge foreign debt/ debt were not recognised through net interest income (NII), while the corresponding treasury



Bank's stock closed Rs 244 down at Rs 655.95 on BSE even as several broking firms downgraded the stock

gains were recognised in the profit and loss (P&L) statement.

"These accumulated losses (pre-tax Rs 2,100 crore and post-tax Rs 1,580 crore) are estimated to have an adverse impact of 2.35 per cent on its net worth as of December 2024. The bank clarified that it will take the hit through P&L, which, coupled with accelerated provisions on the MFI portfolio, will push the bank into losses during Q4FY25 and drive down the FY25 RoA (return on assets) by 30 bps to 0.9 per cent," Emkay Global Financial Services said in a report. The bank reported a net profit of ₹1,401 crore during the December quarter of FY2025.

The bank has hired an external agency to review and validate the findings, and had intimated

'Enough reserves to absorb impact'

New Delhi: IndusInd Bank on Tuesday fought the fall-out of a Rs 2,100 crore discrepancy in accounting, saying it has enough reserves and capital to cover it.

IndusInd Bank CEO and managing director Sumit Kathpalia said that the accounting lapse was noted around September-October last year and the bank gave a preliminary update to the RBI about this last week. "The bank's profitability and capital adequacy remain healthy to absorb this one-time impact. The issue was identified by the bank... The bank has enough reserves and capital to manage this," Kathpalia said.

In an analyst call late on Monday night, Kathpalia said that the discrepancy in the derivative portfolio has been accumulated in the book over a period of 5-7 years prior to April 1, 2024.

The RBI a week ago about its preliminary findings. Notably, the CFO (who resigned in January 2025) was also aware of this accounting discrepancy.

Derivatives are used by treasury to manage forex deposits/ loans. The bank's profitability and capital adequacy remain healthy to absorb this one-time impact. The issue was identified by the bank... The bank has enough reserves and capital to manage this," Kathpalia said.

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TCS to buy commercial realty firm for ₹2,250 cr

URVIMALVANIA
MUMBAI, MARCH 11

TATA CONSULTANCY Services (TCS) will acquire Bengaluru-based Darshita Southern India Happy Homes, a commercial real estate firm, for ₹2,250 crore, the IT services major said in an exchange filing on Tuesday.

The building and the land owned by Darshita Southern India Happy Homes will serve as a delivery centre, it added. The deal

will be executed through a call option to acquire 100 per cent equity stake in the entity after two years.

Earlier in January, CFO Samir Sekhsaria said that TCS is looking to expand its seating capacity throughout the country through a combination of owned and leased properties.

"We have bought land (in Bengaluru) to expand our (seating) capacity over three to four years. We have been expanding 150 planes will be produced at the planned FAL, which 'most likely' will come up at the Hisar aerodrome in Haryana and should be functional by the end of 2025, Sakthi Aircraft Industry's managing director and chief executive officer Vaibhav D told reporters on the sidelines of the event.

30,000 seats in the last one year. We started operations in Coimbatore as well," he said.

In January this year, the company announced the acquisition of TRL Bengaluru Real Estate Six for ₹1,650 crore to service the need for expanded seating capacity. He added that the capacity expansion is part of the firm's physical infrastructure capex plans.

"Losing helps us flex our capacity while owning protects us against inflation," he explained on

the strategy regarding owned and leased office spaces.

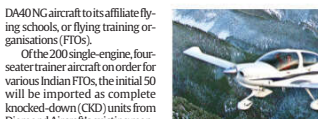
According to a CareEdge report, Darshita Southern India Happy Homes is a special purpose vehicle funded by property management outfit Salarpura Satva group.

The SPV was originally planned as a residential project. In FY19, it was changed to a commercial office space on lease under the name 'Salarpura Satva Knowledge Point (KP)' in Bengaluru.

Hisar likely to house India's first pvt sector trainer plane manufacturing unit

SUKALP SHARMA
NEW DELHI, MARCH 11

INDIA'S FIRST-EVER private sector manufacturing facility for trainer aircraft is likely to come up in Haryana's Hisar by the end of the year with Tamil Nadu-based diversified Sakthi group and Austria's Diamond Aircraft Industries joining hands to set up a final assembly line (FAL) for the latter's popular DA40 NG trainer planes, which will be supplied to various flying schools across the country. Sakthi Aircraft Industry, the joint venture of Sakthi group and Diamond Aircraft, inked an initial pact with the Aero Club of India on Tuesday to supply 200



DA40 NG aircraft to its affiliate flying schools, or flying training organisations (FTOs).



Tamil Nadu-based diversified Sakthi group and Austria's Diamond Aircraft Industries join hands to set up a final assembly line for the latter's DA40 NG trainer planes.

The JV is looking to produce 100 trainer aircraft a year in India, anticipating significant demand from flying schools in the world's third-largest and fastest-growing major aviation market. According to Vaibhav, Sakthi Aircraft

ready supplying to global majors like Airbus and Boeing. As for the 200-plane order, which is being tested as among the biggest trainer aircraft orders globally, the JV expects to complete deliveries sometime in 2027.

Financial details of the 200-aircraft order and likely investment in setting up the FAL were not immediately available. Industry sources said the return on investment of a DA40 NG aircraft range starts from around \$600,000. The Diamond DA40 NG is a modern, single-engine, four-seat aircraft rated highly for its efficiency, safety, and technological features, and is counted among the popular trainer aircraft globally. It is also a popular aircraft for private own-

ers. Other major international players in the general aircraft and trainer aircraft segments include Cessna and Tecnam.


With India's aviation sector expanding rapidly with massive aircraft orders amid a surge in demand that is likely to continue for the foreseeable future, the country would also have a robust pipeline of homegrown pilots. According to Civil Aviation Minister K Ram Mohan Naidu, India will need 30,000 pilots over the next 15-20 years up from the current 6,000-7,000 pilots, given that Indian airlines cumulatively have over 1,700 aircraft on order. India's commercial aircraft fleet currently stands at over 800 aircraft. On average, one aircraft re-

quires an airline to have 15-20 pilots for narrow-body aircraft and 25-30 pilots for long-range wide-body jets. Speaking at the event, Naidu emphasised the need to develop a large and world-class flying training ecosystem in the country to meet the Indian aviation sector's rapidly growing demand. Currently, there are 38 FTOs in India, and the number is slated to rise in the coming years given the rising demand for pilots.

The collaboration between the Aero Club of India and Sakthi Aircraft Industry is projected to enable training of 1,000 commercial pilots annually and 10,000 pilots over the next 10 years.

Full Report on www.indianexpress.com

	<p align="center">CHENNAI METRO RAIL LIMITED (A Joint Venture of Govt. of India & Govt. of Tamil Nadu) (ISO 9001:2015 AND ISO 14001:2015 CERTIFIED)</p>	
<p align="center">METRO5, ANNA SALAI, NANDANAM, CHENNAI - 600 035.</p>		
<p align="center">GeM tender ID: GEM/2025/B/5948531 NOTICE INVITING TENDER CMRL invites online bids for the tender “Secondary Suspension Assembly for Rolling Stock Maintenance Activities”. Tender documents can be downloaded from https://gem.gov.in. DIPR/9637/TENDER/2025 Chief General Manager (RS, S&T)</p>		



बिहार सहासक कृषि योजना

कायावली अतिरिक्त का कायावली सिंचाई प्रमवलय, नयापनवासा (अतिरिक्त)

अल्पकालीन निधिवा आमरण सूचना संख्या – 04/2024-25

(केबल ई- निधिवा पद्धति में अनुमति वेबसाईट www.eproc2.bihar.gov.in)

1. कार्य का विवरण :-

सूच सं.	कार्य का नाम	प्रकार/विधि (रु में)	अवधि की राशि (रु में) (प्रति मंजूर अवधि नगरी भूमि में मुण्डो)	सिंचनवा विवरण का नाम (आयोजना/सिंचनवा क्षेत्र) (सिंचन क्षेत्र में मुण्डो) (रु में)	मंडली का क्षेत्र (सिंचन क्षेत्र में मुण्डो) (रु में)	कार्य समाप्ति की तिथि
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1	पहिला किलोमी एल नयापनवा विवरण का नाम पहिला किलोमी एल एलब्रिडज एल नयापनवा एल विवरण के SLR Bridge का नाममात्र सिंचन	27,22,126.00	54,500.00	5,000.00	590.00	25.05.2025

02. निधिवा प्राप्त का नाम एल खा :-

03. निधिवा अलगका सूचना निधि का क्षेत्र की तिथि :-

04. निधिवा कयावली अलगका/अलगका करे की तिथि :-

05. एलब्रिडज वीर कोले की तिथि एल खास :-

06. निधिवा वीर कोले की तिथि एल खास :-

07. निधिवा कोले का खास :-

08. निधिवा की निदेश की तिथि :-

डिस्क नयापनवा state.bihar.gov.in/prdihar वा ई वेबसाईट (सूच सं.)

कारणका अतिरिक्त सिंचाई अलगका नयापनवा(ग्रामीण) विवरण/अतिरिक्त विवरण (प्रति-अलगका)

Email :- ec-irrigationdivisionnpg@gmail.com

मोबाईल नं० :- 9554737302 / 9438890216

दिनांक:- 08.03.2025

दिनांक:- 17.03.2025 से 24.03.2025 में अलगका 3 करोड़ रु. केबल केबलवा :-

दिनांक:- 25.03.2025 में अलगका 3.39 करोड़ रु. केबल केबलवा :-

सास प्रमवलय एल खास व कोले की तिथि :-

केबल केबलवा :-

120 गि. (ई कोले का खास) कायावली अतिरिक्त सिंचनवा नयापनवा (अतिरिक्त) मो 94038890216

PR- 23476 (W R D) 2024-25

नगरी की नगर, बाबाई एल नगरी परिवार।

[illegible][illegible]

 **GOVERNMENT OF TAMIL NADU**
HIGHWAYS DEPARTMENT
Tiruvannamalai Highways, (Construction & Maintenance) Circle

TENDER NOTICE
T.N. No.31 /2024-25 / HDO / Dated : 11.03.2025

For and on behalf of the Governor of Tamil Nadu,
Percentage tender under Two cover system pertaining to Tiruvannamalai (H) C&M Division through online only will be received upto **23.04.2025 / 12.00 hours** by the Superintending Engineer (H), C&M, Tiruvannamalai Circle for **CRIPD 2024-25 (5 Works)**.

Details of works, approximate value of works, EMD, availability of tender documents and all other details are available from **19.03.2025** onwards in the Government website **<https://tntenders.gov.in>**. If any Changes / Corrections in the tender, it will be published in the above Government website only.

**Superintending Engineer (H),
C&M, Circle, Tiruvannamalai.**

DIPRI/ 962 /TENDER/2025

ग्रामीण कार्य विभाग

विहार ग्रामीण पथ विकास अधिकरण

क्राफि मार्ग बैरक -10-03 (हज़ मयन के बंगल में), पटना- 800001

अति आवश्यकता विविध कामा सुचना

विहार ग्रामीण पथ विकास अधिकरण, ग्रामीण कार्य विभाग, विहार सरकार के निष्पादनार्थक एक एग्रेसी है। विहार दिनांक 18.03.2025 के अन्तर्गत ए दिनांक 22 मार्च 2025 से 24 मार्च 2025 तक मीटिंग नैदान, बिहार में ग्रामीण कार्य विभाग का पेशेवरता स्थापित करे से संबंधित कार्य का निष्पादन, बिहार में ग्रामीण पथ विकास अधिकरण द्वारा किया जायेगा। इस कार्य हेतु विहार दिनांक पेशेवरता से संबंधित कार्य की वित्स्तु विवरणी निम्नो अभिलेख में दणित है।

उक्त कार्य हेतु आवश्यक अर्हता रखने वाले प्रत्येक कर्मचारी/संस्थानों से वांछित कामजातों के साथ अथवा मुख्य कामजातों पदाधिकारी-सचिव, ब्रह्मा के पद मयन से दिनांक-18.03.2025 को अपराह्ण 3:00 बजे तक निम्नलिखित कार्य के साथ सहुरद्व 02 लिखाके में (तकनीकी एतु वित्तीय निदान अलग-अलग लिखाके में) निविदा अभिलेखत किया जायेगा। तकनीकी निविदा दिनांक-18.03.2025 को अपराह्ण 3:30 बजे खोला जायेगा।

निम्नो की तस्ति वित्स्तु निविदा अभिलेख में दणित है, जिसे प्रत्येक कार्य विभाग के वेबसाइट से प्रत्येक किया जा संकलत है।

उक्त सुचना www.state.bihar.gov.in/prdihar पर भी देखी जा सकती है।

प्रशासनिक पदाधिकारी,

विहार ग्रामीण पथ विकास अधिकरण, पटना

PR. No. 21654 (RWD) 2025-26

नशामुक्त से जय विहार, सुखित ग्रामीण पथ धर परामिक।

<div>  <div> गया नगर निगम ई-टेंडरिंग आमंत्रण सूचना No-E-Quotation-12/2024-25 (ई-टेंडरिंग साइट: https://eproc2.bihar.gov.in) </div> </div>				
1. विद्यमान दस्ता के पदानुसार चयन या	नगर आवास नगर निगम			
2. कोटेशन आमंत्रण सूचना निगम की तिथि	दिनांक- 10.03.2025			
3. कोटेशन प्रारम्भ करने की तिथि /समय	दिनांक:- 01.04.2025 को 10:00 बजे से (on website https://eproc2.bihar.gov.in)			
4. प्री बिड मीटिंग का समय/स्थान /तिथि	समय 11:00 बजे, स्थान-काकोरिया, गया नगर निगम दिनांक:- 02.04.2025			
5. संवेदक द्वारा कोटेशन अपलोड करने की अधिकतम तिथि /समय	दिनांक:- 08.04.2025 को 15:00 बजे तक (on website https://eproc2.bihar.gov.in)			
6. एक्जीक्यूटिव कीड खोलने की तिथि /समय	दिनांक:- 11.04.2025 को 15:30 बजे तक (on website https://eproc2.bihar.gov.in)			
7. वित्तीय बीड खोलने की तिथि /समय	तकनीकी बीड निगमन के बाद। (on website https://eproc2.bihar.gov.in)			
कार्य का विवरण:-				
क्र.सं	खोजना का नाम	परिमाण निरूपण मुद्रक (Through online payment)	Bid Processin g Fee (Through online payment)	कार्य अवधि
1	गया नगर निगम अंतर्गत लार्ड संख्या 01 से 20 में पूर्व से अधिकांशित स्ट्रीट लाइट, निमी हाइमालय लाइट, हाइमालय लाइट, एक्सीक्यूटिव लाइट के सम्मति पूर्व रख-रखाव का कार्य	10000	AS PER EPFOC	03 Year
2	गया नगर निगम अंतर्गत लार्ड संख्या 21 से 37 में पूर्व से अधिकांशित स्ट्रीट लाइट, निमी हाइमालय लाइट, हाइमालय लाइट, एक्सीक्यूटिव लाइट के सम्मति पूर्व रख-रखाव का कार्य	10000	AS PER EPFOC	03 Year
3	गया नगर निगम अंतर्गत लार्ड संख्या 38 से 53 में पूर्व से अधिकांशित स्ट्रीट लाइट, निमी हाइमालय लाइट, हाइमालय लाइट, एक्सीक्यूटिव लाइट के सम्मति पूर्व रख-रखाव का कार्य	10000	AS PER EPFOC	03 Year
निरणुता जानकारी state.bihar.gov.in/prdbrdhi से प्राप्त की जा सकती है।				
प्रो: 201402 (B & C) 2024-25			नगर आवास गया नगर निगम	
नये से बचने का एक ही उपस्थान, दूर संकेत और परिवार से त्याग				

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Urban Development and Housing Department

1st Floor, Vikas Bhawan,
New Secretariat, Patna-800015
(Tel: 8612-221580, Fax: 2217659 Email: urban-dev-hbh@nic.in)

Tender Cancellation Notice

13/5BM/01/2025943

Tender Cancellation Notice P.R. No.-018084 (B&C) 2024-25,
Due to some unavoidable reason the Tender of "Request for Setting up of
Project Management Unit (PMU) at State Level for SBM (U) Scheme." ** (PR
No.-018084 (B&C) 2024-25 is being cancelled.

Deputy Secretary,
Urban Development and
Housing Department

PR. No. 021653 (Urban) 2024-25

This information is available on website www.state.bihar.gov.in/prd/bihar also

संपूर्ण सूचना बिहार सरकार, नए सेक्रेटरीट, पटना-800015 पर www.state.bihar.gov.in/prd/bihar पर उपलब्ध है।

Govt. of Bihar

 **SOUTH BIHAR POWER DISTRIBUTION CO. LTD., PATNA**
Registered Office: Viduth Bhaswan, Baily Road, Patna-21.
A Govt. of Bihar Undertaking
CIN No. U40109B2012SG001890

Notice Inviting Tender (NIT) for Insurance Coverage of Assets and Properties of South Bihar Power Distribution Company Limited.
(Through e-procurement mode only <http://eproc2.bihar.gov.in>)

Short Notice Notice No. - 27/PS/SBP/CO/2025
Online Tenders are invited by CFO-cum-GM (F&A), South Bihar Power Distribution Company of Assets from eligible bidders to participate in the bidding process for Insurance Coverage of Assets and Properties of South Bihar Power Distribution Company Limited.

Sale of tender document	Any time from 17.03.2025 (16:00 Hrs) to 07.04.2024 (12:00 Hrs)
Pre Bid Meeting	24.03.2025 (15:00 Hrs)
Deadline for submission of bids Date & time for Bid Opening (Technical Bid Only)	Submission/ Submission: 07.04.2025 (12:00 Hrs) Bid opening 07.04.2025 (15:00 Hrs).
Date of opening of Price Part	To be notified after Technical Bid Evaluation. (http://eproc2.bihar.gov.in).

While participating in e-tendering process, the agencies shall have to get themselves registered to get user ID, Password and digital signature. This will enable them to access the Website: <http://eproc2.bihar.gov.in>

The RFP Bid documents are available at website <http://eproc2.bihar.gov.in>

E-tendering introduced in SBPDC, for tenders above Rs. 25 lacs. For registration log on to <http://eproc2.bihar.gov.in> and e-Procurement Help Desk First Floor, junction services limited, RJ Complex, 2nd Floor, Canara Bank Campus, Khapura, Ashiyana Road, P.S.-Sashti Nagar, Patna-800014. Bihar at 8005726571.

सूचना काकर्ता www.state.bihar.gov.in/rfpdbir से प्राप्त की जा सकती है।

Sd/-
(Pradip Maji)
General Manager (F&A)

PR. No. 2153A (S) & 2/024-25

नगरपालिका से जाए बिहार, सरलचित्त से घर परिवार

 <h2 style="text-align: center;">Jharkhand Urja Sancharan Nigam Ltd.</h2> <p style="text-align: center;">(CIN : U40100RJ1003SCG001704)</p> <p style="text-align: center;">General Manager, Contracts & Materials, National Funding Projects, JSUNL Building, Cross Colony, Doranda, Ranchi – 834002 (Jharkhand) Email: pujussnl@gmail.com Visit us at : www.jharkhandnders.gov.in (E-mail: cjeunsl@gmail.com)</p>				
<ENDER FOLLOWING NOTICE				
Due to unavoidable circumstances, the Dates of the following N/T are hereby extended as follows:-				
NIT No.	Name of work (Request for Bid (RRB))	Last date of submission/ uploading bid by the bidder	Date of Opening of technical part of bid	
366/PJR JSUNL 2024-25	Design, Supply, Installation, Testing & Commissioning of 12/33KV GIS Substations at Chhatpur (Lelehov Work)	24.03.2025 16:00 Hrs	25.03.2025 16:30 Hrs	<i>as per</i>
367/PJR JSUNL 2024-25	Design, Supply, Installation, Testing & Commissioning of 12/33KV GIS Substations at Sandamarg (Lelehov Work)	24.03.2025 16:00 hrs	25.03.2025 16:30 Hrs	<i>as per</i>
नोट: ये प्रतियोगी न मिले बिना, इसका कार्य ठीक कर दिया जायेगा। प्र. 100562567 (विजय शिरोजी) पर कार्य होगा।		PR NO - 346767 प्र. 100562567 (विजय शिरोजी) पर कार्य होगा।	Sd/- General Manager. CGM (MLP)	
PR 348347 Jharkhand Urja Sancharan Nigam Ltd [24-25] D				
Rajasthan Urban Drinking Water Sewerage and Infrastructure Corporation Ltd. (A Government of Rajasthan Undertaking) Old Working Women Hostel, Behind Nawa Place, Lakhtori, Tonk Distt. Jaipur-302015 Ph: 0141-2424240 Email: ruidco@rajasthan.gov.in, ruidco@rediffmail.com Web: urban-ruijan.gov.in/ruidco F12 (N11) RUDISCO/CBG 2024/JW/119				
NIB NO. 10/2024-25				
Notice inviting online bid for Sewerage works in Jalore under Budget Ghoshna				
Rajasthan Urban Drinking Water Sewerage & Infrastructure Corporation Limited (RUIDSCO), a Government of Rajasthan undertaking, invites bids from eligible bidders on behalf of the Government of Rajasthan through e-procurement portal http://eprocure.rajasthan.gov.in from eligible bidders in accordance with the RPTP Act 2012 and Bidding Rules 2013, announced up-to-date and under Open Competitive Bidding (OCB) National with single stage-two envelope bidding procedure for following works:				
S. No.	Name of Work	Project Cost Amount in Rupee	Bid Security Amount in Rupee	Period of completion
1.	JaloreSewerage work	24.39	2.6395	24 months
The details of NIB can be seen at e-procurement portal of state government upon registration and login upto 10/03/2025 till the date of 10.03.2025 at 17:00 Hrs till the end date of online submission of bids is 01.04.2025 up to 1500 Hours. Those interested addendum/corrigendum shall be published only at the e-procurement portal.				
URN No. : RDPAZ24WS080178 NIB Code : RDPAZ24WS0403 Raj Samardar C/24 I/3024				
				Executive Director RUIDSCO, Jaipur
कार्यालय अधीक्षण अभियन्ता चण्डी वृष, लोके निगम विभाग, जयपुर (कर्मचारी निगर)				
 (Phone/Fax: 099424-24021)		E-mail- sepwush@gmail.com 		

गुड्डा प्रतियोग्यक निविदा (e-tendering)						
महाराष्ट्र राज्यपाल उन्नयनसंहिता की ओर से अधीनस्थ अधिकारी, जूनियर वी.डी.एच. एलसी (उपनिवेश) द्वारा निमित्तित कार्य हेतु ई-टेंडरिंग पोर्टल विड सिस्टम के अन्तर्गत निविदा आमंत्रण जारी की जा रही है। निविदा से संबंधित सभी सूचनाएं वेबसाइट http://www.ukenders.gov.in पर निर्दिष्ट दिनांक 18.03.2025 से उपलब्ध रहेगी।						
क्र. सं.	कार्य का नाम	घोषित धारकता (₹. लाख में)	निविदा प्रसारण की तिथि	निविदा की सीलदा (दिवस)	कार्य पूर्ण करने की अवधि (माह में)	टेण्डर कर की श्रेणी
1	2	3	4	5	6 माह	7
1	वर्षिक अनुसंधान के अंतर्गत वर्ष 2025-26 में कस्तूरी टुकड़दार मार्ग में बी.बी.ड्राइव नवीनीकरण का कार्य।	5.20 5000.00 + 18% GST	+ 5000.00 	120	06 माह	केंद्रवार्षिक लक्ष्यक के नियामक/उपक्रम के मार्ग कार्यालय को जीएम A एवं उपभाल से पीछेकर

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SPORT

HOME-GROWN CHAMPION

Making of India's AX-factor

Studious and skilled, Axar Patel used the serene Nadiad landscape to hone a game that unshackled his batting

MIHIR VASAVDA
NADIAD, MARCH 11

EVERY AXAR Patel anecdote in the city that raised him begins with the same question: "Have you seen the canal?"

It's hard to miss the winding channel that runs through the centre of Nadiad, lending the dusty, and place a soothing touch.

Right on its edge, on a tree-laden dirt road, Bharat bhui regales you with heart-warming stories of the 'normal person, who has no airs about himself' over *kadak cha* and *lasaniya daabla*. The hard-on heart snack — deep-fried potatoes with garlic-basted spicy stuffing in chickpea flour, a local *bhujia* delicacy — would fuel a young Axar's mornings.

"He'd sit there...", says the modest roadside stall owner, pointing at the concrete parapet along the canal, "...and have his meal with tea — less water, ginger, a little sugar and some cardamom. For the 15-20 years that he's been coming here, he's had his tea made the same way."

The rest of the day would be spent at the cricket ground — located inside his college campus — less than 500 metres from here. By evening, Axar would be back at the canal, pouring Thums Up in a glass and emptying a packet of *sing bhujia* in it. "He survived on that," laughs Keval Patel, Axar's childhood friend, still unable to wrap his head around one of India's fittest cricketers' eating habits.

"Even today," says Keval, "when he returns home, you can spot Axar at the canal relaxing with his friends over endless cups of tea. To the world, he might be 'Axar'. For us, he is still the same, old 'Akshar'."

What's in a name, you ask? The man's complete identity.

'Akshar' remains a simpliciton at home, a large-hearted friend and a ruthless prankster who binges on 'padikas' (tiny snack packets) and home-made bhaaki dipped in ginger tea. On the cricket field, Axar — the spelling change thanks to an administrative error at school — devours wickets and feeds on big hits.

Like the T20 World Cup last year, throughout India's Champions Trophy campaign, Axar had an out-sized impact on the outcomes in a typically understated manner, very much personifying his city.

In some ways, if Nadiad defined Axar, Axar is now redefining Nadiad, bringing the forgotten town back into prominence.

Nadiad, in railway parlance, is a short two-hour journey between the country's main capital, Anand, and trading hub, Ahmedabad. In the history books, it's a mere answer to trivia as the birthplace of Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel's birthplace.

The ancient city continues to draw believers to its nearly 200-year-old temple and aspirants at massed in its reputed education institutes. But on the 22-yards, it has always been dwarfed by Baroda and Saurashtra, places with proper cricketing heritage.

Engineering, not cricket, might have been Axar's calling too if not for his father, Rajeshbhai, who sent him to the city's only ground to improve his fitness — not in terms of losing weight, but in his childhood was slender than he is right now, but to gain muscle. "We met for the first time at the ground," says Keval. "As is the norm, for a couple of days, we were made to run laps. Axar got bored and began bunking. He'd leave home wearing whites but go to another place to play tennis-bat cricket."

One morning, Rajeshbhai swung by at the ground only to be surprised by his son. "Proper *padu bhuti* (he had it properly)," Keval says in Gujarati. "After that, he never bunked practice."

Axar didn't have to. He completely immersed himself in his new routine, not knowing that the 2km stretch from the canal to his home, with the cricket ground and his



He didn't want any functions. He requested us to gather all the academy boys and girls at the ground and have a session with them. He not only shared his life experiences with them but also told stories behind the World Cup win.

MANISH DESAI
PRESIDENT, KHEDA CRICKET ASSOCIATION

college on the way, would shape his life. It's where he would learn his craft, continue to shine academically, make lifelong friendships, meet his childhood sweetheart whom he'd eventually marry and build a new home that, unsurprisingly, is a short walk from the canal.

The wider cricketing world might have woken up to his batting exploits at No. 5 only now after Gautam Gambhir promoted him to experiment with left-right combinations, strengthen the batting depth and provide the captain with more bowling options.

But those who have watched him grow since his childhood are hardly surprised. For, he has always played in that position — and rarely failed.

"Axar bowled pace in school competitions," says Amrith Patel, Axar's childhood

coach. "He had long strides but didn't have enough leg strength and would sometimes fall over while releasing the ball. When he would get tired, he'd switch to spin. That's when he would take wickets."

Over the years, they moulded him into a spin-bowling all-rounder but in his mind, Axar was never in doubt that batting remained his predominant craft.

"He enjoyed playing lofted shots," says former Gujarat Ranji Trophy player and selector Bharat Mistry. "Once, during the Under-16 West Zone tournaments, he was dismissed while attempting those shots in successive matches, wasting his good starts. Some selectors wanted to drop him as a punishment for his reckless shots. But a couple of us backed him, advised him to be more judicious with his shot selection."

He was retained for the final match against Saurashtra in Rajkot. "And he scored a century there," adds Keval. "Since then, he has never looked back. Bowling was something he was always confident of doing well. But contributions with the bat have given him more pleasure."

Around four years ago, during the phase when he wasn't getting consistent game time, Axar returned to the ground where he began his journey, and spent "three-to-four hours" every afternoon polishing his game. "For the first half hour or so, he'd only bowl," says Gujarat's Ranji Trophy player Vishal Jaywal, who, like Axar, bats left-handed and bowls left-arm spin. "After that, he would unshackle himself. He'd hit really long... every day, we lost 2-3 balls and by the end of these-



(From top.) A young Axar Patel. The roadside stall which Axar frequents to have *kadak cha* and *lasaniya daabla*. Axar talking to academy cricketers in Kheda. The only stand at the Kheda District Cricket Association ground.

sion, we'd be completely knackered."

During those sessions, he rediscovered his love for his 'favourite' shot: the slog sweep. "He always loved to play that but had reduced it a lot in the last few years," says Keval. Until it resurfaced again. Once famously during the T20 World Cup final against South Africa last year, and then against New Zealand earlier in the Champions Trophy. Unshackling himself with a slog-sweep off Mitchell Santner and propelling India to a match-winning total.

MANISH DESAI

Manish Desai, the president of the Kheda District Cricket Association, gauges success not only by the trophies and individual awards Axar keeps piling up but also by the transformational impact he has had on the game in Nadiad. After he first played in the Indian Premier League, there was an elaborate road show where thousands lined up to welcome Axar. A similar procession was planned following India's T20 World Cup title this year.

When Axar learnt about it, he delayed his homecoming and returned only on one condition. "He didn't want any functions," Desai says. "He requested me to gather all the academy boys and girls at the ground and have a session with them. He not only shared his life experiences with them but also told stories behind the World Cup win."

Desai says that from '70-80 boys' a decade ago, between 250 and 300 young players train at their ground daily, aspiring to be like Axar. That number, he adds, will increase

Axar bowled pace in school competitions. He had long strides because but didn't have enough leg strength and would sometimes fall over while releasing the ball. When he would get tired, he'd switch to spin. That's when he would take wickets."

AMRITH PATEL
AXAR'S CHILDHOOD COACH

during the summer vacation camps. But while boys were always drawn to the sport, Desai says Axar's success has inspired many families in Nadiad to send their daughters to the ground.

Ani Patel, who started playing just two years ago, says there used to be just one-old girl who'd play along with 'hundreds of boys' earlier. "But after seeing Axar making a successful career in cricket, more girls have come forward. In last year's summer camp, there were 40 girls," Ani, 25, says.

She was one of the players sitting in the audience last year when Axar relived the T20 World Cup title-winning campaign with them, hanging onto every word he spoke. By the end of the session, Axar's 'simplicity' left her amazed. "Whenever he is in Nadiad, he doesn't give a vibe that he is such a big cricketer. He behaves like one of us, almost like saying 'This is my ground, my people, my Nadiad. I'll play, relax and just be myself.'"

RONALDO SCORES FOR AL-NASSR

Cristiano Ronaldo was on target as Saudi Arabia's Al-Nassr beat Iran's Esteghlal 3-0 to progress to the quarterfinals of the AFC Champions League Elite.

—AP

INDIAN TEST DRIVER

Will Maini get a race in F1?

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
MARCH 11

KUSH MAINI became the third Indian driver to join a Formula One team on Tuesday after the Alpine F1 team announced that the 24-year-old has been added to their pool of reserves for the 2025 season, which kicks off with the Australian Grand Prix in Melbourne later this week.

Maini will continue as driver for Alpine's team in the lower-rung Formula 2 series while also being their 'Test and Reserve' driver for their F1 operation, meaning unlike his Indian predecessors Narain Karthikeyan and Karun Chandok, he is not yet guaranteed to be driving an F1 car in an officially licensed Grand Prix.

Who is Kush Maini?

Maini, a 24-year-old from Bengaluru, comes from a family of racers with his father Gautam being a driver in the F1 developmental categories in the past. He got his start in motorsport as young as seven — as many drivers do to develop their motor skills behind a wheel — when he started karting, and rose through the ranks of open-wheel racing through his teenage years.

Maini joined the Alpine academy in October 2023, where he was mentored by former two-time world champion Mika Hakkinen. The 2025 season will be his third in F2 after a successful campaign last year with the DAMS team. The Indian had impressed, with five podiums and a race win in Hungary, following which he has earned the promotion with the French team (Alpine is majority owned by French automotive company Renault).

"Kush has impressed the team through his TPC performances and Formula 2 results whilst we have been working with him and we expect

EXPLAINED he will continue to do so in 2025," Alpine Academy Director, was quoted as saying by formula1.com.

"His wider role allows us to further expand our pool of driving talent who can provide support and resources to the whole team during the busy season."

Maini expressed happiness with the development.

"I am delighted to step up to the role of Test and Reserve Driver for BWT Alpine Formula 1 Team this season," he said. "I am looking forward to getting more track time in Formula 1 machinery in this role and building on what I have already learned."

What is a reserve driver?

Reserve drivers are kept on standby during Grand Prix weekends and may compete if a team's regular driver is unable to participate. That means that should one of Alpine's regular drivers — France's Pierre Gasly and Australia's Jack Doohan — miss out on a race, Maini may be asked to step up.

Traditionally, teams have stuck to announcing one official test driver per season, but in recent times, teams have chosen to keep their options open by keeping a pool of reserve drivers, as Alpine have done with Maini. He will be their fourth Test and Reserve driver alongside Franco Colapinto, Ryo Hirakawa and Michael Belloc.

Maini will also use the driver-in-loop simulator at Alpine's base in the British village of Enstone to support their car development and set-up objectives, as well as participate in the TPC (Testing of Previous Cars) programme.

Have reserve drivers made it big in the past?

Some of F1's most high-profile drivers got their starts as reserve drivers. Four-time World Champion Sebastian Vettel's first official Grand Prix race came in at the US GP in 2007 with the BMW-Sauber team at the age of 19. The German had impressed by finishing eighth.

Two members of the F1 paddock in 2025 also raced in their first Grand Prix as reserve drivers. Oliver Bearman impressed by subbing in for Carlos Sainz last year, following which he earned a permanent place in F1 with Haas at the start of 2025. Max Verstappen's latest teammate at Red Bull, Liam Lawson, also raced for the first time as a reserve driver for Alpha Tauri (now Racing Bulls) back in 2023.



Indian driver Kush Maini joined BWT Alpine F1 team for 2025 season. Express

GRAND PRIX

Para athletics star Vanessa's return to India is a full-circle moment

PRITISH RAJ
NEW DELHI, MARCH 11

12°57'N 77°37'E is tattooed on the left arm of multiple Paralympic medalist Vanessa Low of Australia. The co-ordinates are of Bengaluru. Her first-ever visit to India in 2009 was to the Garden City. She was 19 then and it was her first international classification event. She has three more coordinates of Christchurch, Lyon and Doha, host cities of the World Para Athletics Championships.

Over a decade and a half since her visit to Bengaluru, the 34-year-old is back in the country as three-time Paralympic gold medalist and three-time World Champion in the T63 Long Jump. She's in the capital to take part in the first-ever World Para Athletics Grand Prix happening in the national capital. "2009 was my first trip. It was very chaotic. Transport didn't work well and there were struggles but I loved every minute of it. The reason we are here is the sport and I am so excited to be back," Vanessa told *The Indian Express*.

When asked what has changed from the last time, Vanessa said, "A lot has changed from the last time. This time the organization is very smooth and I am happy to see the facilities.

Over the years, the sport has become more professional and it is visible in how the tournament is being organized."

A trailblazer

Currently, representing Australia, Vanessa represented her birth country Germany from 2009 to 2017. Since getting married to Paralympic champion sprinter Scott Readson, she had settled down in Australia. "It feels like I have lived two different lives. But the good thing is that I have been embraced by both countries. When I won in the 2020 Tokyo Paralympics, the German team celebrated alongside me," said Vanessa.

Born in Schwerin, Germany, Vanessa was into handball, snowboarding and long distance running. However, at the age of 15 she was struck by a train after she lost balance when standing on the platform. Her left leg got severed in the accident and doctors had to amputate her right leg during a life-saving surgery. She was in a coma for two weeks.

It took Vanessa two years to start walking using the prosthetics. "I woke up from the coma and slowly realized things had changed for me. I just wanted to run," Vanessa said.

She turned to para athletics in 2009 and for the longest time Vanessa was the only active



Vanessa Low of Australia.

female track athlete with two above-knee amputations (running). Despite competing against athletes with one functional leg, gradually Vanessa started dominating at the international level. When asked if she ever felt any disadvantage, Vanessa said, "No, I don't think I had any disadvantages. I focused on my own training and played on my own strengths. It is difficult in para athletics sometimes as the disabilities of the athletes are different. But I believe hard work can outweigh talent. I took 7

years to win my first medal. It took me some time to run on prosthetics but I found a way to make it work," she added further.

Vanessa has won eight medals at the World Championships and four Paralympic medals across two events (T63 Long Jump and T42 100m).

Motherhood and sport

Apart from being a multiple-time Paralympic gold medalist, Vanessa is also a mother of a two-year-old son. "My day starts when my kid wakes me up. I usually do four training sessions and six jump sessions after dropping off my little one to the daycare," Vanessa said. When asked how tough it is to pursue a full-time sports career with a kid, Vanessa said, "The fact that I have to balance my family and work means I have developed the habits that make me a better athlete. He understands things now and is the odd one out in the family with me and Scott having amputations," she said.

"His friends ask him about us and he feels very proud of us. He feels that we have compensated legs but I can see that he adores both of us." Despite winning a bagful of medals, Vanessa is still motivated to strive to remain on the podium at major events. "I thought I would

be done after Paris and would be able to let the sport go, but it didn't happen. I guess I just love the training. I am aware of my age but I feel there is a lot more I can achieve. I would love to touch the 6-metre mark. It seems really far because when I started out the world record was 3.79m. Having ticked off a lot of milestones, I think 6m is in reach. I think I can jump 6 metres. The closest I got was 5.92 in practice before the 2024 Olympics. I was ready to jump 5.80 on the day (Paris) but I didn't get the board. It's not far," she added.

Vanessa's love for the sport, she feels, is the reason she keeps at it.

"People recognise me due to this sport and I have gone to great lengths to train and become what I am today. I guess all those years, when I put in hard yards without thinking of the results, they kept me going," she said.

India win 31 medals

Indian para athletes won 31 medals on the first day of the World Para Athletics Grand Prix at the JLN Stadium, New Delhi. The Indian contingent won a total of eight gold, 13 silver, and two bronze medals. Para Paralympics medalist Preeti Pal clocked 14.85 seconds in the women's 100m T35 to win the silver medal.

Allying long rallies and tall tosses, Malvika ousts Jia Min

She pushed beyond her limits and tired out the better-seeded Singaporean in a three setter at Birmingham

SHIVANI NAIK
MARCH 11

MALVIKA BANSOD politely declined the offer of having legendary coach Irwansyah sit for her All England opening match against Singaporean Vesia Jia Min. The Indian understood perfectly, as Malvika and her regular coach for the last two years at Thane's Shrikant Vad Academy, Vignesh Devlekar, had a plan to take down the World No 12.

The 23-year-old from Nagpur had lost to Jia Min previously and was coming off a first round loss from Orleans. But pushing herself beyond limits of exhaustion, with both players utterly knackered by the end, Malvika recorded a stunning 21-13, 10-21, 21-17 victory to advance to the second round. Things were tricky in 11-9 in the decider, but Malvika did well to conserve energy, and mix her usually well-executed high tosses and lifts with

attacking openings on cross shots as Jia Min tired out, fading off at the baseline.

Vignesh had won five national ranking titles in 2019 in doubles, and played Maldives Open, the only international trip he could afford on his parents' salaries that year—mother a BMC teacher, and father a clerk in a PSU. The lockdown ended my playing dreams and I had no funds anyway. But when coaching Malvika, I lean on my weaknesses—I never had a big attack or great physical strength. I was good at finding solutions," Devlekar says. The long rallies and tall tosses that would strain Jia Min, the coach and athlete had analysed thoroughly.

In addition, Malvika dumped low serves in the large Birmingham hall for high serves—again pressuring Jia Min's neck—and injected pace into her first stroke. The Indian was prepared for the long rallies, but had no intention of defending endlessly. She created openings, pouncing on the short lengths. Malvika has compiled nearly a dozen thick diaries where she jots down details of fitness workouts she observes when at tournaments and national camps. "She must be the only player at this level (World No 28) who designs own fitness. We are desperately looking for an experienced trainer but we don't have the funds for it yet. So, she plans it herself," Vignesh notes.

Same shoes, different paths

Malvika, a cerebral player, has spent the last



Malvika Bansod won her All England opener 21-13, 10-21, 21-17. Badminton Photo

few months devising two strokes from the same position, guided by Vad and Vignesh, she's tweaking angles with wrist work, because a giant smash isn't suddenly going to materi-

alise. "We work within our limitations, but we are looking to get her stronger if we get a trainer," he adds. The engineering graduate who had beaten

Olympic bronze medalist Gregoria Tunjung at China, has immersed herself even deeper into badminton, and shut out all noise that questions if she has a future when 23 already. "Qualifying for the LA Olympics is the plan. We are working towards it," Vignesh says, adding they hit it off, geeking out on the sport because he was in constant analysing/plotting mode as coach. A BWF Level 1 certified coach, he's pursuing his MBA alongside, but the natural aptitude for coaching and the bond he struck with Malvika has brought good results.

One of the biggest tweaks is her preference for round the head strokes that are fetching winners the backhand didn't. Three sessions a day barely leave her with any time for anything else, and she's closed out all social media and communication to focus on badminton.

At times, her worried mother, a self-trained sports science professional and nutritionist offers her a piece of chocolate to de-stress, but Malvika's rigorous self control has seen her issue a rule that nobody in the family will eat chocolates or binge on chips for 7-8 months now. She is known to steal a glance at Pani puri and bhel, two things she loves plenty, but not venture close to them, from fear of catching a sore throat.

All evenings see her work on fitness by herself. "She's working hard like crazy. We don't have funds for beyond the coach. Hopefully if we get results and few top 10 wins, they will

consider funding her," Vignesh says.

Sen advances, Prannoy falters

PTI adds: Lakshya Sen fought his way back to reach the second round of the All England Championships on Tuesday, while compatriot HS Prannoy was eliminated in the opening round of the men's singles competition here.

Lakshya, ranked 15th in the world, came from behind to defeat Chinese Taipei's world No. 37, SU Li Yang, with a 13-21, 21-17, 21-15 win in the opening round of the Super 1000 event. The 23-year-old from Almora will face Indonesia's third seed Jonatan Christie next. Lakshya had defeated Christie en route to his fourth place finish at the Paris Olympics last year. Prannoy, a bronze medalist at the 2023 World Championships and Asian Games, struggled against France's Toma Junior Popov, who is ranked 17th.

Prannoy fought for 53 minutes before going down 10-21, 16-21. In the mixed doubles, Sathish Kumar Karunakaran and Aadya Varjath had a tough outing against China's world No. 7 pair of Guo Xin Waa and Chen Fang Hui, losing 6-21, 15-21 in 51 minutes. Two-time Olympic medalist PV Sindhu and former World No 1 pairing Satwiksairaj Rankireddy and Chirag Shetty will start their campaign on Wednesday.

WFI suspension revoked; office moved to yet another address

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, MARCH 11

THE UNION government on Tuesday revoked the ban imposed on the Wrestling Federation of India (WFI) imposed in December 2023 and restored on it the status of a National Sports Federation.

The suspension was put in the aftermath of the sexual harassment charges levelled at former WFI president Brij Bhushan Sharan Singh. The Indian Olympic Association had put in place an ad-hoc committee to conduct the affairs of the federation, and barred the office-bearers, who had been elected in a subsequent election, from taking or implementing any decisions in this regard.

One of the points raised, and verified by a report in The Indian Express was that the residence of former WFI chief Singh, a five-time former BJP MP, still functioned as the de facto headquarters of the federation even after he was succeeded by Sanjay Singh. WFI affairs were being conducted from 21, Ashoka Road, New Delhi, even though the official address was given as 101, Hari Nagar Ashram in the Capital. The office did move there after the federation was suspended in 2023, but when this newspaper visited that address in January 2025, a new tenant was found at the place.

An inspection was carried out in this regard and WFI claimed that it has recently shifted its HQ to a new address—E-81, Street No. 1, West Vinod Nagar, Delhi—110092.

"Whereas there have been media reports about WFI not functioning from the address, which it claims to function, therefore, in the public interest to check the veracity of the claims made by the WFI, a Committee was formed to have an in camera, on the spot inspection of the premises, as claimed by WFI. The WFI informed by email that it has shifted its office to a new premise at E-81, Street No.1, West Vinod Nagar, Delhi-110092. The report of the Committee has been received. The Committee has in its report stated that WFI is functioning from E-81, Street No.1, West Vinod Nagar, Delhi-110092, where it has recently shifted its office," a government order said.

While the world governing body of the sport, United World Wrestling (UWW), recognised the

elected office-bearers as members of the national federation, the suspension of the WFI and the presence of the ad-hoc panel was hampering the sport and the athletes' participation in international events. The selection of wrestlers for the Senior Asian Championships scheduled from March 25 in Amman, Jordan, was at risk. The government is said that wrestling had been put in the 'high priority' category as it is a source of medals at major events, and the prevalent situation could hurt India's prospects at the 2026 Asian Games and the 2028 Olympics.

"There does not appear to be a competent body which can be entrusted with the task of selecting the team and to make other arrangements so that the participation of the wrestlers in the aforesaid international event, which is to commence from 23.03.2025, can be ensured. As far as the interest of the sports and athletes are concerned, there cannot be a more unhappy situation," the Delhi High Court had observed in its order dated March 6.

Union sports minister Mansukh Mandaviya noted that revoking the suspension will now allow Indian wrestlers to participate in international competitions. "According to the High Court order, it was necessary to recognise WFI so that we can send our wrestlers for the Asian Championship and World Championship. Otherwise, it would have been an injustice to the future of our country's wrestlers," Mandaviya said.

In its Tuesday order, the ministry also directed the WFI that "any person who is not elected as an office-bearer, as also the suspended/terminated salaried officials of the WFI, must remain completely disassociated from the federation and its affiliate units."

The Executive Committee of the WFI has to provide an undertaking to this effect within four weeks.

"The WFI must revert the amendments carried out during the suspension period and have a balance of power among the designated office-bearers and provide checks and balances in the decision-making process, and this process should be completed in four weeks," the order added.

It also instructed WFI to ensure adherence to the Sports Code, principles of good governance, and athlete welfare policies.



Sanjay Singh was elected WFI president late in 2023 but the NSF was suspended three days later. PTI

काया हांडी काची वीर मेरा इसने खूब पका
जै हांडी काची रही तो माटी में मिल जा
काल नेड़े नहीं आ सगे जमड़ा शीश नवा
लाधूनाथ हडिया पकी बांगो हंस अमर घर जा

Heartiest Greetings on the birth anniversary of Sant Shri Shiromani Ladhu Nath Ji Maharaj

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