

THE PERFECT VOICE



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Indian-American musician wins Grammy award

New Delhi: Indian-American vocalist and entrepreneur Chandrika Tandon has won the Grammy award for the album "Triveni" in the Best New Age, Ambient or Chant Album category.

The 67th edition of the biggest musical awards night, organised by the Recording Academy, was held on Sunday at the Crypto.com Arena in Los Angeles.



ignites the light within all of us, and, even in our darkest days, music spreads joy and laughter. "Congratulations to all the other nominees in our category. Thank you for the music, and thank you for each and everyone that creates and supports the music; may all our lives be enveloped in Love Light Laughter," Tandon wrote on Instagram after her win.

Tandon, also a global business leader and the older sister of former CEO of PepsiCo Indra Nooyi, won the award along with her collaborators South African flautist Wouter Kellerman and Japanese cellist Eru Matsumoto. "Music is love, music is light, and music is laughter and let's all be surrounded by love, light, and laughter. Thank you for the music, and thank you to everyone who makes music," she said in the award acceptance speech.

This was Tandon's second Grammy nomination after 2009's "Soul Call" and first win. "It feels amazing," said the musician, who grew up in Chennai, in a backstage interview with the Recording Academy after winning the Grammy.

Marathi speaking compulsory

Mumbai: The state government on Monday took a major decision to promote the 'Marathi' language in the state. In Maharashtra, speaking Marathi has now been made mandatory in all government, semi-government, and municipal corporation offices.

The government resolution (GR) was issued for the usage of the Marathi language in the government offices. According to this, all employees in government offices, semi-government offices, corporations under the Maharashtra government and other government-related offices are instructed to use Marathi language with all the visitors in their offices except visitors from out of India and from other non-Marathi speaking states.

Henceforth, signboards will be mandatory in offices to promote speaking in Marathi. The government office computers will also have Marathi language keyboards. If any government officer is violating this rule, a formal complaint can be filed with the in-charge of the office or the department for necessary action.

Considering it an act of official indiscipline and if the complainant is not satisfied with the action taken against the violator, the complainant can appeal about the same before the Marathi language committee of legislature.



Akhara sadhus while taking a holy dip at the Sangam during the Maha Kumbh Mela in Prayagraj on Monday.
Pic: PTI

Reliance facilitates banned Chinese brand's re-entry

New Delhi: Chinese online fast fashion brand Shein has re-entered the India market almost five years since its ban through the country's leading retailer Reliance Retail.

Shein India Fast Fashion App from Reliance Retail currently has over 10,000 downloads on Google's Play Store and is ranked among the top-10 among peers on Apple's store.

The brand, now based in Singapore, offers affordable fashion products through its app and online stores in India -- one of its fastest-growing markets.

Almost three years after getting banned in India, Shein signed a partnership in 2023 with Reliance Retail, led by Isha Ambani, the daughter of billionaire Mukesh Ambani.

Reliance Retail Ventures Ltd (RRVL) through its subsidiary RRL (Reliance Retail Ltd), had entered into a technology agreement with Roadget Business Pte Ltd, which owns Shein, to develop an indigenous e-commerce retail platform.

In December last year, the government had informed the Lok Sabha that sale of branded products from Shein was not banned, though its app was blocked.

This platform is intended to create a network of local manufacturers and suppliers who will manu-

facture products under the brand Shein and sell them domestically and globally, Commerce & Industry Minister Piyush Goyal had said in a written reply.

The Ministry of Textiles consulted with the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY), which in turn consulted the Ministry of Home Affairs, and conveyed no objection to the proposal of RRVL, he added.

"The licence agreement covered the protection that ownership and control of the platform will always remain with RRVL through its wholly owned subsidiary," Goyal said, adding, "as per the agreement, at all times, the platform will be hosted on infrastructure in India and all platform data will remain in

India with Shein having no access to, or rights over, such data".

The agreement requires consenting parties to follow Indian laws and ensure localisation of infrastructure and platform data, Goyal added.

Established in 2008, Shein is known for its affordable pricing and is popular among millennials for its trendy women's wear and other apparel.

It was banned, along with 59 apps, by the government citing "threat to sovereignty and integrity" posed by these platforms.

However, Shein products were available in the online market through e-commerce platforms as Amazon. The issues were also brought up at the Delhi High Court.

GBS tally rises to 163

Pune: The tally of suspected Guillain-Barre Syndrome (GBS) cases reached 163 on Monday after five persons were detected with the rare nerve disorder, a health official said.

Five persons have died so far from the ailment, he added.

"Five cases were detected, though no death was reported on Monday. The number of confirmed GBS cases stands at 127. The 163 suspected cases comprise 32 from Pune city, 86 from newly added villages in Pune Municipal Corporation limits, 18 from Pimpri Chinchwad, 19 from Pune Rural and eight from other districts," he said.

Of the 163 patients, 47 have been discharged till now, 47 are in ICU and 21 are on ventilator support, the official added.

A total of 168 water samples from different parts of the city were sent for chemical and biological analysis to the Public Health Laboratory, he said, adding that samples from eight water sources were found to be contaminated. Severe cases can result in near-total paralysis. GBS is more common in adults and in males, though people of all ages can be affected.

Delhi poll Freebies, Yamuna poisoning mark 27-day campaign

New Delhi: The 27-day high voltage campaigning for the February 5 Delhi Assembly polls saw an intense battle of nerves as big guns -- AAP, BJP and Congress -- sparred over a range of issues, including "Sheesh Mahal vs Rajmahal", "poisonous Yamuna", "Bin Dulhe Ki Barat," freebies, and personal attacks.

The parties carried out public meetings, rallies, roadshows and padyatras, right after the announcement of poll schedule.

The bigwigs, including Prime Minister Narendra Modi, AAP supremo Arvind Kejriwal and Congress's Rahul Gandhi, led the race to power in the national capital.

The high pitched campaigning was dominated by intense blame-game among the three major parties, with BJP and Congress using "Sheesh Mahal" and "liquor scam" to attack Kejriwal.

The AAP hit back at the BJP, alleging breakdown of law and order under Union minister Amit Shah, and lasso in the party over the expense on Prime Minister's residence, calling it "Raj Mahal".

While governance, law and order, and women's welfare remain crucial, political narratives largely shaped the campaigning.

Freebies ruled the roost in poll



manifestos of all the three parties, with each promising a monthly grant of Rs 2,100-2,500 to women, free treatment for elderly, and free electricity. The AAP and BJP sparred seriously to woo their votaries and gain some more, with the former promising monthly payments to temple priests and gurdwara granthis, bus rides, and schemes for youth, students and auto-taxi drivers.

The Congress and the BJP promised cooking gas cylinders at Rs 500. The BJP also promised Rs 21,000 for expecting mothers, while Congress promised Rs 8,500 per month to unemployed youth.

During his rallies, PM Modi made a pitch for the removal of the ruling

AAP from power in Delhi, calling it as "AAP-da" (disaster) for the city.

The AAP returned the favour terming BJP as "Gali Galauj Party," citing alleged "abusive language" of its leader Ramesh Bidhuri.

A controversy arose over Bidhuri allegedly using derogatory reference to Congress leader Priyanka Gandhi Vadra and Atishi, Delhi chief minister and his rival in Kalkaji constituency.

AAP supremo Kejriwal landed in a controversy over his remark that the BJP government in Haryana "mixed poison" in the Yamuna water coming to Delhi to attempt "genocide" in the city. A defiant Kejriwal accused the BJP hatching a "conspiracy" to create a water crisis.

Ex-serviceman killed in terrorist attack

Srinagar: In the first non-combatant killing of the year, terrorists shot dead an ex-serviceman and injured his wife and 13-year-old niece in an attack in South Kashmir's Gulgam district on Monday, officials said here.

Details so far indicate that two terrorists armed with pistols arrived at the residence of Manzoor Ahmad Wagay in Beehi Bagh, approximately 10 kilometers from the district headquarters, and opened fire on his family members, which included his wife and niece.

According to initial statements recorded by police and army officials, Wagay, a former member of the Territorial Army, sustained additional bullet wounds while attempting to protect his niece.

The terrorists, believed to be from banned Lashkar-e-Taiba, fired upon Wagay as he returned home, and all three victims were rushed to a nearby hospital, where Wagay succumbed to injuries.

Police have taken cognizance of the incident and initiated an investigation into the attack.

Maharashtra: 1.94 lakh SEO soon

Mumbai: The Maharashtra government on Monday announced plans to appoint 1.94 lakh special executive officers (SEOs), with 33 per cent of the posts reserved for women.

The decision is part of a revised government resolution (GR) issued during the day.

The move is to streamline governance and improve public service delivery, with each SEO being responsible for approximately 500 voters, a shift from the earlier ratio of one officer per 1,000 voters, an official said.

State Revenue Minister Chandrashekhar Bawankule, who is also chairman of the SEO Selection Committee, said the newly appointed officers will be granted 13 to 14 special powers, including the authority to issue government certificates and participate in various panels.

"They will play a pivotal role in implementing government schemes, coordinating with the administration and police, monitoring development projects. However, no payment will be made to the SEOs by the government. The selection



process will be conducted through district-level committees, with district collectors serving as member secretaries," he said.

The GR said existing SEO positions will be dissolved with immediate effect to make way for new appointments.

As per the GR, the eligibility criteria for the role include a minimum educational qualification of Class 10, an age limit of 25 to 65 years, and a five-year tenure.

Additionally, the state government has decided to appoint five award-winning individuals to these positions, further enhancing the role's prestige.

"The revised decision will ensure easier access to government services and documents, bringing the administration closer to the people. Thirty-three per cent of the posts will be reserved for women," Bawankule added.

Gates explores making of his internal operating system

By Michael Liedtkeap

Washington: As he prepares to turn 70 later this year, Microsoft founder Bill Gates' new memoir explores how his childhood quirks, upbringing, friendships and experiences coalesced into shaping his internal operating system.

In "Source Code: My Beginnings," the first installment of a trilogy retracing his journey from an often misunderstood kid to a polarising technology titan to an influential philanthropist, Gates dissects his brain's unusual wiring, delves into the emotional trauma of his best friend dying while they were both in high school, and revisits the birth of Traf-O-Data, a startup that he launched in Albuquerque, New Mexico, with another childhood friend,

Paul Allen.

Traf-O-Data, conceived to create software for the groundbreaking Altair computer made Micro Instrumentation and Telemetry Systems, became Microsoft in 1975 -- a year it booked \$16,005 in revenue while Gates and Allen were making \$9 per hour.

By 1977, Microsoft had become successful enough to embolden Gates to drop out of Harvard University. In 1979, he had decided to move Microsoft to the Seattle area where he grew up. Although Gates stepped down as Microsoft's CEO 25 years ago, the Windows operating system and other software created under his reign remain the main pillar in a company that now generates \$212 billion in annual revenue, boasts a \$3.1 trillion market value,

and accounts for most of Gates' \$100 billion personal fortune.

"Source Code" ends with Gates' drive back to Seattle in 1979, meaning it doesn't touch upon his 1994 marriage to Melinda French, nor their 2021 divorce -- one of the topics likely to come up in the sequels that he still intends to write as part of a retrospective trilogy.

"I am being reflective, which is not my normal mode, but it's kind of time," Gates said during an interview about the book with The Associated Press. "As we went back and got teacher's comments or people I worked with at Harvard, it was fascinating. I had confused myself into thinking I got straight A's in ninth grade."

That might not sound like much of a revelation, but it was a surprise to the

cerebral Gates, who paints himself in the book as a "bratty smartass" prone to dismissively sneering, "That's the stupidest thing I ever heard," about remarks that seemed nonsensical to him.

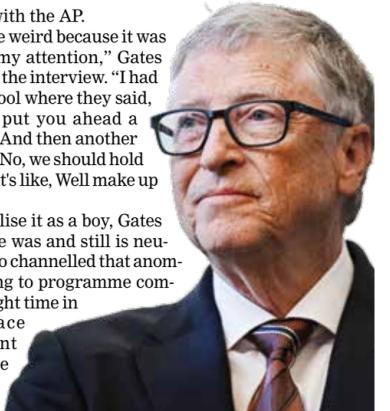
Gates' self-portrait is that of a nerd nicknamed "Trey" by his card-playing grandmother because he was the third male on this father's side of the family to be named Bill. He was a pipsqueak who had difficulty making friends and preferred living in his own head before he discovered computers, which became like slot machines that rewarded him for writing elegant lines of code.

When he did talk, the young Gates rocked back and forth like a metronome setting a rhythm for his brain -- a habit that surfaced during parts of his 45-min-

ute interview with the AP.

"It was a little weird because it was hard to direct my attention," Gates recalled during the interview. "I had one year in school where they said, Oh we should put you ahead a couple grades. And then another time, they said, No, we should hold you back. And it's like, Well make up your mind."

He didn't realise it as a boy, Gates has no doubt he was and still is neurodivergent who channelled that anomaly into learning to programme computers at the right time in the right place with the patient support of late parents.



Car sensor helped police locate Sena leader's body

Palghar: A car sensor helped the Palghar Police to reach to the dead body of Shiv Sena leader Ashok Dhodi, an officer familiar with the investigation, said.

Dhodi was kidnapped on January 20. His dead body was found in his car in a closed quarry in Gujarat 11 days later. The Palghar police investigated the case closely from all angles. The killers had planned the murder in a way that Dhodi's body would never be found. But a micro fragment of the sensor was found and the murder case was solved. The police went directly to Gujarat using this fragment and took possession of Dhodi's body.

Ashok Dhodi and the main accused Avinash Dhodi had a family dispute over house rent and liquor supply for the past few years. Avinash had a business of illegally importing liquor from Daman and Dadra Nagar Haveli to Maharashtra and selling it. Ashok Dhodi had complained to the administration many times against this. Since this was becoming a problem for Ashok, it has come to light that the accused had also attacked Ashok Dhodi many times.

Before killing Ashok, the suspect allegedly conducted a reconnaissance of his house, car and a closed stone quarry in Sarigram, Gujarat. This reconnaissance continued for a month. Of the three accused who are absconding



in this murder, one of the accused is a resident of Sarigram. He knew about this stone quarry. This stone quarry is closed. It is also very deep. No one roams here. Also, the most important thing is that the water in this stone quarry never dries up. Police sources said that it was because of this information that the accused planned to throw Ashok Dhodi's body in this quarry.

Over confidence of the accused

The accused had estimated for a month in advance that no matter which back road they took, they would not be caught by the CCTV camera. Since they were smuggling illegal liquor, these accused had a lot of experience in back roads. The accused kept all their mobile phones in one place so that they would not be suspected after the kidnapping and murder. They did this to mislead the police. They were trying to make it

look like they were partying all night at the same place on the day of the murder.

Ashok Dhodi's red Brezza car was received by the accused while it was parked in the parking lot of Dahanu railway station. But the GPS of this car was not active, which was a big obstacle for the police in finding the car. When different teams of Palghar police checked over 300 CCTVs in the area, the police saw Dhodi's car in some CCTV cameras in Gujarat. Therefore, the police were checking all the stone quarries around.

Car was seen in CCTV

The accused chased Ashok Dhodi on the day of the murder. Then, at the ghat at Zhai Borigaon, a tempo was parked in front of Ashok Dhodi's car and stopped the pickup behind it. Due to this, Ashok Dhodi could not escape. At the same ghat, the accused hit Ashok Dhodi hard on the head

with an iron rod. Dhodi died on the spot. Then, in order not to arouse anyone's suspicion, the accused took Ashok's car and drove away at high speed from near his house.

After going some distance, the accused chose a side route to dispose of the body and the car. However, the car was seen in a CCTV camera on a road in Gujarat and based on the information received from the arrested accused, the Palghar police started inspecting the stone mines in Gujarat.

The body found

During the inspection, it was seen that the lower part of the car's body was rubbed against a stone on the hill of a deep stone mine with water. When the police looked more closely, they found a small sensor of the car stuck in this stone. This further strengthened the suspicion of the police. After being convinced that the car must be in this stone mine, the police started searching for the car in the mine water with the help of divers. The car was found in 40 feet of water.

On the morning of January 31, this stone mine was inspected with the help of divers. At this time, divers came to know that a red Brezza car was there in 40 to 45 feet deep water. After 6 to 7 hours of efforts, police managed to pull the car out of water. A plastic bag tied around his mouth was also found.

Man ends life due to harassment over loan

Thane: A 38-year-old man in Thane district committed suicide after allegedly being harassed over repayment of a loan of Rs 1.8 lakh, following which police have arrested one person, an official said on Monday.

The police have registered a case against three persons in connection with the incident which took place last month.

The deceased, Amin Shaikh, had taken a loan of Rs 1.80 lakh from the accused.

Despite repaying the amount with additional interest, totalling Rs 3.30 lakh, the accused allegedly continued to harass and threaten him for more money, the official from Ganeshpuri police station said.

The man, who was under severe distress, ended his life by hanging himself at his house in Ganeshpuri area on January 14.

Following the incident, the victim's body was sent for postmortem and a case of accidental death was initially registered.

During the probe, the police found a recorded message left by Shaikh on his mobile phone, in which he purportedly held three persons responsible for his extreme step, the official said.

Following the evidence, the police on Friday registered an FIR against the three persons under section 108 (abetment of suicide) of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS), he said.

The police arrested one of the accused on Saturday while search was on for the other two persons, the official said.

-PTI



Visitors at flower show organised by BMC in Mumbai on Monday.

Maha polls turnout: HC notices to ECI, CEO, Centre

By Quaid Najmi

Mumbai: The claims and doubts over the November 2024 Maharashtra Assembly elections again came to the fore in a public interest litigation before the Bombay High Court and during the speech of Congress Leader of Opposition in the Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi on Monday.

The Bombay HC today heard PIL filed by a social worker Chetan Chandrakant Ahire, 42, of Vikhroli, praying for details on the number of voters, the tokens given after the close of voting hours on Nov. 20, 2024, plus other instances of alleged discrepancies in the conducted of the elections.

The PIL has sought that if the rules of Election Commission of India (ECI) were not adhered, to declare as 'null and void' the elections for each and every assembly constituency and withdraw the certificates issued by the concerned Re-

turning Officers to the winning candidates.

Simultaneously, Rahul Gandhi raised the issue of Maharashtra state elections in Parliament pointedly asking how a huge number of some 70 lakh voters got added in the state in just six months between the Lok Sabha and Assembly polls.

Speaking to the media post-hearing, Vanchit Bahujan Aghadi (VBA) President Prakash Ambedkar - who represented the petitioner - said that the court has issued notices to the Chief Electoral Officer of Maharashtra, the ECI and the Union of India.

"The court has posted the matter for next hearing after two weeks. We have raised several issues and asked for the number of tokens handed out after 6 pm when the polling ended, and the differences in the voting figures given by the ECI. The ECI has been claiming that it does not have the details of the tokens given,"

Ambedkar said.

Focusing on the issue, the Leader of Opposition said that it was shocking how "the entire voting population of Himachal Pradesh state was added to the Maharashtra electoral rolls".

Besides the Congress, the Maharashtra Vikas Aghadi allies Shiv Sena (UBT), Nationalist Congress Party (SP), and VBA among others have been making similar demands for the past three months.

"The entire Opposition demands the data of the full voters list of the Lok Sabha and state Assembly elections. We know that the election dates were changed and postponed. And I am very confident that the ECI will not give it to us," Gandhi said.

The BJP-led MahaYuti alliance comprising Shiv Sena-Nationalist Congress Party romped home to victory while a supremely confident MVA was routed miserably in the elections.

Godhra case: Life convict held in Pune

Pune: A 55-year-old life convict in Godhra train carnage case of 2002, who absconded after jumping parole in September last year, has been arrested in Pune district in a theft case, police said on Monday. Salim Zarda, who previously also jumped parole on eight occasions, was arrested by the Pune rural police on January 22 for a theft, they said, adding he has been handed over to the Nashik police in connection with a theft case registered there.

He was among the 31 persons convicted in the Godhra train carnage case, the police said. Zarda, who was lodged at a prison in Gujarat, was released on a seven-day parole on September 17, 2024, but he failed to return.

"We arrested him and his gang members on January 22 for their involvement in thefts across rural Pune. During the investigation, his connection to the Godhra train carnage case came to light," Inspector Dinesh Tayde of Alephata police station said. On February 27, 2002, the S-6 coach of the Sabarmati Express was burnt at Godhra in Gujarat, which killed 59 persons and triggered riots in

the state.

Tayde said 31 persons had been convicted in the 2002 Godhra train carnage case. While 11 of them were initially sentenced to death, 20 got life term in the case. "Zarda was among the 11 persons sentenced to death, but the (Gujarat) High Court later commuted their sentences to life imprisonment," he said.

Zarda and his gang members were arrested in Pune last month for allegedly stealing 40 tyres valued at more than Rs 2.49 lakh from a stationary truck on January 7, the official said. They were also linked to similar thefts in Manchar area of Pune and Sinnar in Nashik. Stolen articles and a tempo truck valued at Rs 14.4 lakh have been recovered, the official said. "Zarda and his associates used to operate in Pune and nearby districts, carrying out thefts," Tayde said.

Pankaj Deshmukh, Superintendent of Police, Pune rural, said the accused has been handed over to Nashik rural police in connection with a theft case registered at Sinnar police station. "We will seek his custody again for a theft case registered at Manchar police station," he added.



Chief Minister Devendra Fadnis along with his deputy Ajit Pawar at a meeting in Mantralaya on Monday.

183 gun licenses cancelled

Chhatrapati Sambhajnagar: Authorities in Beed, which has come into focus following the murder of a sarpanch, have cancelled 183 gun-licenses in the district over the last one month, an official said on Monday.

Eight persons have surrendered their licences voluntarily, while the police have also recommended to the administration to cancel 127 more weapon licences in the district, he said. A total of 1,289 weapon licences have so far been issued in Beed.

"We have cancelled 183

licences as of now, while there is a recommendation to cancel 127 more licences. We have also issued notices (to people) in 189 other cases where the weapon licences were issued before 1990. The entire process of the review and cancellation will be completed by next month-end," a senior Beed administration official told PTI.

Massajog village sarpanch Santosh Deshmukh was abducted, tortured and murdered on December 9, 2024, for allegedly trying to stop an extortion bid targeting an energy firm in

Beed. Seven persons have been arrested in the murder case.

Walmik Karad, a close associate of Maharashtra NCP minister Dhananjay Munde, has been arrested in a related extortion case. Amid the political row over the sarpanch's murder, Maharashtra Deputy Chief Minister Ajit Pawar last week asked NCP workers in Beed district not to get involved in extortion attempts targeting development projects. Pawar also warned those brandishing guns in the public.

-PTI

Man booked for molesting minor girl

Thane: Police have registered a case against a man for allegedly molesting a nine-year-old girl residing in his neighbourhood in Thane district, an official said on Monday.

The incident took place at Kamatghar locality in Bhiwandi area on January 31, 2025 when the victim and her six-year-old brother were at their home.

The 20-year-old man came there and took the victim to his house where he allegedly touched her inappropriately, Bhiwandi town police station's assistant police inspector Jayshree Anawane said.

The girl resisted the man's move, pushed him away and ran to her aunt's house. She informed about the incident to her aunt and mother, the official said. Based on a complaint by the girl's mother, the police have registered an FIR against the accused under section 74 (assault or use of criminal force to woman with intent to outrage her modesty) of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita and provisions of the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act, she said.

-PTI

May use AI in agriculture: Ajit

Mumbai: The Maharashtra government is considering the use of artificial intelligence (AI) on an experimental basis in the agriculture sector to boost productivity and reduce production costs for farmers, Deputy Chief Minister Ajit Pawar said on Monday.

During a review meeting here, Pawar directed the state agriculture department to work with the co-operation department to assess the technical and financial feasibility of the project.

State Agriculture Minister Manikrao Kokate, Minister of State for Agriculture Ashish Jayswal, Minister of State for Cooperation Pankaj Bhojar, President of the All-India Grape Growers Association Kailas Patil, and other senior officials attended the meeting.

Pawar said, "As crucial factors like crop health, soil carbon levels and soil health can be monitored using AI, we can use it on an experimental basis in the agriculture sector to boost productivity and reduce product cost for farmers."

He said the transformation has to be practical and financially viable for farmers.

The deputy chief minister said, "AI is revolutionising sectors across the globe, and agriculture must not be left behind. In the coming years, AI will be indispensable for farmers as they battle challenges like changing weather, unseasonal rains, pest attacks, and labour shortages."

He said AI can play a vital role in enhancing productivity while reducing production costs.

"We will be able to measure carbon levels in the soil and identify pests, diseases, and even weed types, providing farmers with detailed insights into their crops and land. These advancements will ensure more precise farming methods and better management of resources," Pawar said. The deputy chief minister said, "By improving harvesting efficiency, reducing the use of chemical fertilisers and pesticides, and enhancing disease management, AI will help farmers save labour and input costs."

Madhavan pairs with Fatima in romantic film

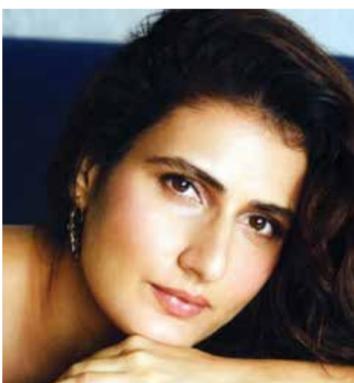
Mumbai: Streamer Netflix on Monday gave a glimpse into "Aap Jaisa Koi", a modern-day love story, starring R Madhavan and Fatima Sana Shaikh.

The project, directed by Vivek Soni of "Meenakshi Sundareswar" fame, was unveiled at Netflix's 2025 slate announcement event. The movie is produced by Karan Johar's Dharmatic Entertainment, the digital arm of Dharma Productions.

"Aap Jaisa Koi" presents a heartwarming romantic drama that delves into the lives of two unique individuals, Shrirenu Tripathi (Madhavan) and Madhu Bose (Shaikh).

Shaikh added, "I read the script and I was in awe of it. Every moment is special. It's something I completely relate to every moment. Plus it is Dharma and Madhavan."

Johar has produced the movie with Apoorva Mehta and Somen Mishra.



Karan Johar announces Ibrahim Ali and Khushi Kapoor's debut

Mumbai: Filmmaker Karan Johar on Monday said his new film production "Nadaaniyan", which marks the acting debut of Ibrahim Ali Khan, will introduce audiences to a "new face of romance". Also starring Khushi Kapoor, the romantic drama film is headed to Netflix for a direct-to-digital release. It's backed by Johar's Dharma Productions. At the 2025 Netflix slate announcement, Johar said he is excited for Khan, son of actors Saif Ali Khan and Amrita Singh, and Kapoor, daughter of

late star Sridevi and producer Boney Kapoor, to star in the movie. Directed by Shauna Gautam, "Nadaaniyan" follows a South Delhi diva, a middle-class overachiever boy, and one outrageous plan. Johar said he is happy to present a new director to the industry. When host Manish Paul said pairs are made not above, but at Dharma, Johar said: "Irony of all ironies. I could never make a pair for myself." At the event, Khan and Kapoor also performed on "Ishq Mein", the song from the upcoming film.

QUOTE OF THE DAY

"About 70 lakh voters, equivalent to Himachal Pradesh's population, were added to the electoral rolls in Maharashtra between the Lok Sabha and state elections. We have requested the Election commission to give us Lok Sabha voters' list."



Rahul Gandhi, Leader of Opposition, Lok Sabha

Cops reject 'fake encounter' claim

SEEK HC NOD TO INTERVENE IN HEARING

Mumbai: Two Thane policemen indicted by a magistrate for the custodial death of the Badlapur sexual assault case accused on Monday denied claim he was killed in a "fake encounter" and moved the Bombay High Court seeking nod to intervene in the hearing related to the matter.

The duo, in their interim application filed before a division bench, rejected the claim made by the father of the accused, Akshay Shinde, that he was killed in a "fake" encounter in adjoining Thane district on September 23 last year.

The cops stated any order passed in the matter without hearing them "would cause a great loss to their reputation in the society".

The move by senior inspector Sanjay Shinde (Thane crime branch) and Assistant Inspector Nilesh More came days after a magistrate's inquiry held five policemen, including the duo, responsible for the custodial death of Akshay Shinde (24), who was accused of sexually assaulting two minor girls inside the toilet of a school in Badlapur town of Thane district. He was an attendant at the school.

The inquiry raised doubts on their claims of opening fire at the accused in self-defence when he was being taken from Navi Mumbai's Talaja prison for questioning in a van. The police had then claimed Akshay Shinde snatched the gun of one of the cops in the van, opened fire, and was killed in retaliatory firing.



The report was submitted before the HC, where Akshay Shinde's father Anna Shinde had filed a petition alleging his son was killed by the Thane police in a staged encounter.

More, who had received a bullet injury in the alleged shootout, has urged the court to provide him a copy of the magistrate's probe report. While Sanjay Shinde has sought to intervene in the hearing of the victim's father's petition.

The HC will hear the matter next on February 6 (Thursday). Magistrate Ashok Shengde, in his report tendered in the HC last month, noted that allegations levelled by Akshay Shinde's parents -- that their son was killed in a fake encounter -- had substance if all evidences, including forensic reports, are considered.

A division bench of Justices Revati Mohite Dere and Neela Gokhale, after perusing the report, had said the Maharashtra government was bound to register a case based on the inquiry and sought to know which probe agency would investigate the matter.

Besides the duo, the other police officials indicted in the report were head

constables Abhijeet More, Harish Tawade and police van driver Satish Khatal.

The magistrate had noted the "contention raised by the police personnel of right to private or self-defence comes under a shadow of suspicion" due to evidence and other circumstances.

"The magistrate has conducted an inquiry and submitted its report. In the report, the magistrate has concluded that the five cops are responsible for the death of accused Akshay Shinde," the HC had observed after the report was submitted.

According to the probe report, "It is necessary to consider whether the use of force was justified. The vehicle was in moving condition. The alleged incident happened in a moving vehicle. The four police persons were in a position where they could easily handle the situation."

It also took note of the findings of the Forensic Science Laboratory (FSL) which has concluded that there was no fingerprint of the deceased on the pistol which he is alleged to have snatched from one of the policemen accompanying, and opened fire.

Local trains to get new design

Mumbai: Railway Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw on Monday said the Mumbai suburban railway would soon get new-design trains fitted with better features for passenger comfort and reducing overcrowding.

"A plan for new design trains on the Mumbai suburban network will be announced soon," Vaishnaw said while addressing a press conference via a video link from New Delhi.

The new design trains would have better features and acceleration, and most importantly more Oxygen content inside the trains considering the crowd, he said while hinting at an improved ventilation system for coaches and improved suspension.

The railway minister said about 10 per cent more or around 300 local train services, in addition to 3,000 services operated daily, will be introduced in phases following the completion of ongoing infrastructure projects.

"Almost 300 km of new tracks will be laid in the city," he added.

He said that railway projects of Rs 16,400 crore are in various stages of completion for Mumbai on Central Railway and Western Railway.

Vaishnaw said the current time gap between two moving local trains is 180 seconds which will be brought down to 150 seconds and subsequently to 120 seconds to reduce overcrowding and operate more services. "A record allocation of Rs 23,778 crore has been made for railways in Maharashtra in the Union Budget 2025-26, which is 20 times more than the budgetary allocations made under the erstwhile UPA governments."



People view an exhibition at CST railway station as the Indian Railways celebrates 100 years of electrification on February 3, 2025, highlighting the first steps taken by the Indian Railways, in Mumbai on Monday, 03 February 2025.
Pic: Bhushan Koyande

Torres fraud

Ukrainian actor, firm CEO in 14-day judicial custody

Mumbai: A court here on Monday remanded Ukrainian actor Armen Ataine and another key accused in 14-day judicial custody in the Torres investment fraud case.

The Platinum Hern Pvt Limited, that runs the Torres brand, is accused of cheating investors of crores of rupees through a combination of Ponzi and multi-level marketing (MLM) schemes.

Ataine was arrested last week by Mumbai police's Economic Offences Wing (EOW) from Malvani in Malad, while the firm's CEO Tausif Riyaz was held by Lonavala in Pune district.

At the end of their remand, the two were pro-



duced before additional sessions judge NP Mehta, who sent them to judicial custody as no further remand was sought by the probe agency.

Meanwhile, the victims of the fraud have approached court seeking issuance of non-bailable warrant against the absconding accused and forensic audit to unearth the money trail.

In a plea filed through advocate Sunny Punamiya,

two victims urged the court to pass an appropriate order directing the investigation in the crime "to be fair, transparent and swift".

"The relief sought is with respect to the persons who have absconded and there is apprehension that they have left the country. Thus, the court should issue an appropriate direction for issuance of arrest warrant against them," the plea said.

In another plea, two vic-

tims claimed the said fraud was one of the biggest witnessed in the last decade.

"In view of the monumental and large-scale financial effect, thereby affecting the financial health of the economy, a forensic financial audit must be conducted by the respondent agency. The move will throw light on trail of money, companies and entities used to funnel and/or siphon away the monies and ultimate beneficiaries," this plea said.

Both the pleas will be heard on February 10.

So far, six persons have been arrested in the case, while 10,848 investors have approached Mumbai police with complaints of being cheated, police said.

Mumbai tops list of financial fraud cases

By Nikhil Deshmukh

Mumbai: Maharashtra reported 2,19,047 cases of financial fraud last year, with Rs 38,872.14 crore as the total amount involved and the highest number of such incidents in Mumbai, as per data shared by the state Home Department.

Among various prominent places, Mumbai reported the highest number of financial fraud cases at 51,873 involving a total amount of Rs 12,404.12 crore.

This was followed by Pune city, which recorded 22,059 fraud cases, with losses amounting to Rs 5,122.66 crore.

Pune district as a whole reported 42,802 cases, with 16,115 cases in Pimpri-Chinchwad (Rs 3,291.25 crore in losses) and 4,628 in Pune Rural (Rs 434.35 crore in losses).

Thane district followed closely with 35,388 fraud cases reported. Thane city recorded 20,892 cases, Navi Mumbai 13,260 and Thane Rural 1,236 cases. The total financial loss in the district was Rs 8,583.61 crore, according to the data.

Mira-Bhayander and Vasai Virar areas recorded

11,754 cases with financial losses reaching to Rs 1,431.18 crore.

Nagpur city reported 11,875 cases, while Nagpur Rural accounted for 1,620 cases, with total losses amounting to Rs 1,491.07 crore.

There were 9,169 cases reported in Nashik district, including 6,381 in Nashik city and 2,788 in Nashik Rural. The total loss in the district was Rs 1,047.32 crore.

Chhatrapati Sambhajnagar district reported 6,090 cases of financial fraud of Rs 543.61 crore, while Amravati district reported 2,778 cases involving Rs 223.059 crore.

There were 4,837 cases reported in Chhatrapati Sambhajnagar city and 1,819 in Amravati city, as per the data.

Solapur district recorded 3,457 cases where people lost Rs 394.54 crore in such frauds.

Among other districts, Buldhana reported 1,531 cases, Chandrapur 1,792, and Latur 1,624 cases involving amounts of Rs 239.19 crore, Rs 175.39 crore and Rs 240.45 crore, respectively.

-PTI



A Mass Marriage at YMCA ground was organized by Jashn e Shah Saqlain on Sunday with participation of 45 grooms and brides.
Pic: Bhushan Koyande

Navi Mumbai Intl airport to be named after Di. Ba. Patil

Thane: Maharashtra forests minister Ganesh Naik said on Monday that the upcoming Navi Mumbai International Airport will be named after the late Di. Ba. Patil, the leader of project-affected persons.

Naik addressed a janta darbar (public hearing) in Vashi.

"During the event, Atul Patil, son of D B Patil, met Naik to request the naming of the Navi Mumbai International Airport after his father. Responding to the request, Naik assured that

once commercial operations commence, the airport will be officially named after D B Patil," a release stated.

Naik said the demands of project-affected persons (PAPs) requesting freehold status for LIG and MIG lands along with uniform land regularisation rates will be raised with CM Devendra Fadnavis.

The work on the greenfield Navi Mumbai International Airport started in February 2018, and in 2022, the then Maha Vikas Agha-

di government decided to name it "Loknete Swargiya DB Patil International Airport".

A senior Adani Airports Holding Ltd (AAHL) executive last month said the airport is expected to be inaugurated on April 17, 2025. The operations will start in the second week of May.

The airport conducted a commercial flight test last December with an IndiGo A320 passenger aircraft landing successfully at runway 08/26, officials had said.

-PTI

Illegal call centre busted

Mumbai: Mumbai Police's crime branch on Monday busted an illegal call centre and arrested six persons who prima facie cheated US citizens under the pretext of selling them drugs like Viagra, an official said.

The accused used to speak in the American accent. Police seized six hard discs, two mobile phones, a pen drive, and some documents after raiding the purported call centre operated from a room in a building located in Sakinaka area.

Police found that the accused used VICIDIAL solution and made Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP) calls to bypass traditional phone lines to target US citizens, an official said.

He said the accused used to call up their targets and asked them to send money online by offering to sell Viagra and other drugs.

The arrested persons are identified as Asad Saleem Sayed (32), the alleged mastermind of the crime and the owner of the call centre, Zaid Ehsan Shaikh (31), the manager, Owais Ehsan Shaikh (27), Taufiq Wasim Shaikh (20), Adnan Ahmed Sayyed (21), and Rehan Yaya Khan (18) who worked as telecallers.

Duke of Edinburgh visits bunker



Mumbai: The Duke of Edinburgh Prince Edward visited a British-era bunker at Raj Bhavan in Mumbai, an official said on Monday.

The bunker is spread over 15,000 square feet and has 13 rooms. After it was discovered in 2016, restoration was carried out and it was converted into a museum, Raj Bhavan Public Relations Officer Umesh Kashikar said.

The duke visited the bunker and also met Maharashtra Governor C P Radhakrishnan on Sunday. He was also shown some of the historically significant sites in Raj Bhavan premises.

Prince Edward, the youngest son of Queen Elizabeth II and Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh, and the youngest sibling of King Charles III, started the visit with the Raj Bhavan lawn, which overlooks the sea.

He was informed that the lawn was the venue for the reception hosted in honour of then Prince of Wales, his brother Charles in 1980.

Prince Edward later visited the 'Jal Lakshman' VIP guest house usually reserved for the President and the Prime Minister of India. Queen Elizabeth II and Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh had been invited to stay at this guest house during their visit to Mumbai in 1961.

The Governor's Principal Secretary Pravin Darade and Kashikar guided Prince Edward through the historic 'Jal Kiran' guest house and the 'Jal Vihar' state banquet hall. During the pre-independence period, Raj Bhavan was known as the 'Government House' of Bombay. After independence, it became the official residence of the Governor of the Bombay State.

QUOTE OF THE DAY

"Dhananjay Munde tried to meet me two to three times. He went back from Gevrai and then came back to meet me after eight days. I did not know that Valmik Karad was there at that time."



Manoj Jarange-Patil, Activist

Grammys omit Zakir Hussain from the 'In Memoriam'

INDIAN MUSIC LOVERS WERE LEFT DISAPPOINTED AND ANGRY AS THE 67TH GRAMMY AWARDS CONCLUDED WITH THE 'IN MEMORIAM' SEGMENT WHICH DIDN'T PAY TRIBUTE TO USTAD ZAKIR HUSSAIN

By Aditi Pai

Mumbai: Fans of English songwriter Liam Payne shed tears as the Grammys aired an emotional tribute to the music sensation who was part of the band One Direction. The tribute, which was part of the award show's annual In Memoriam segment, featured Coldplay heartthrob Chris Martin. The most prestigious music awards have an In

Memoriam which honours musicians who have died in the previous year. But the absence of a tribute to India's leading tabla maestro Ustad Zakir Hussain left fans of the award show angry and disappointed.

Zakir Hussain, besides winning numerous accolades over his illustrious career, is a four-time winner of the Grammy Awards, the very institution that omitted him from the an-



nual tribute. In 2009, his album Global Drum Project won a Grammy. Over his

career, Hussain, the older son of Ustad Allarakha Khan had received seven

Grammy nominations and won the award four times. His influence of western music and culture was immense, which made the exclusion of his name even more surprising.

Enraged fans took to social media to slam the Grammy Awards for ignoring the maestro who made India proud. Finding a mention in the In Memoriam segment is considered special because it honours

the best and most influential musicians from the world over and eternalises their contribution.

Held in Los Angeles, the ceremony saw Coldplay's Chris Martin leading the emotional segment, paying respects to icons like Liam Payne, Kris Kristofferson, Cissy Houston, Tito Jackson, Joe Chambers, Jack Jones, Mary Martin, Marianne Faithfull, Seiji Ozawa, and Ella Jenkins.

Kumbh stampede: SC refuses to hear PIL



New Delhi: The Supreme Court on Monday refused to hear a PIL for specific guidelines to ensure safety of devotees attending the Maha Kumbh, where at least 30 people were killed and 60 injured in a pre-dawn stampede at Sangam area in Prayagraj.

A bench comprising Chief Justice Sanjiv Khanna and Justice Sanjay Kumar noted the submission of the Uttar Pradesh government that a plea was already filed in the Allahabad High Court on the issue and the present petition should be not examined in the apex court.

The top court noted the submissions of senior advocate Mukul Rohatgi, appearing for the UP government, that a judicial inquiry was initiated.

The PIL was filed in the top court on January 30, a day after the incident in the stampede in Prayagraj.

The incident took place on the occasion of Mauni Amavasya, one of the most auspicious days of the Hindu

calendar.

The petition, filed a day later under Article 32 of the Constitution by Tiwari, sought guidelines to prevent stampede incidents and protect the fundamental rights of equality and life under Article 21. -PTI

Noisy protests in LS, RS over stampede

New Delhi: Lok Sabha on Monday witnessed prolonged noisy protests by opposition parties demanding a discussion on the recent stampede at Maha Kumbh in Prayagraj and a list of those deceased. When the House met for the first time after the President's address to the joint sitting and presentation of the 2025-26 budget, the opposition MPs led by Congress were on their feet and demanded a discussion on the recent tragedy in Maha Kumbh. Soon the opposition members stormed the well of the House. Meanwhile, the opposition parties on Monday walked out of the Rajya Sabha after the chair did not accept their demand for an immediate discussion on alleged mismanagement at the Maha Kumbh where a stampede led to several people being killed last week.

After stampede, 'Amrit Snan' continues

By Kishor Dwivedi

Mahakumbh Nagar: Millions of people from across the globe converged at the Sangam from break of dawn on Monday for the third grand 'Amrit Snan' of the Maha Kumbh, which proceeded smoothly on the occasion of Basant Panchami.

The bathing ritual assumed special significance as it came days after a stampede during the previous 'Amrit Snan' on Mauni Amavasya (January 29) killed at least 30 people and left 60 others injured. Unlike the Mauni Amavasya dip on January 29 when crowd pressure built up at the Sangam Nose, many devotees this time were seen taking bath at different ghats as the Uttar Pradesh government, shaken by the deadly stampede, adopted a "zero errors" approach.

Determined to prevent any untoward incident, the state government has reinforced the security and crowd management measures in the Sangam area, with Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath monitoring the situation from his official residence in Lucknow since 3.30 am, officials said. DIG (Maha Kumbh) Vaibhav Krishna told PTI Videos that in light of the January 29 stampede, additional force has been deployed at the pressure points for crowd management.

"Everything is running smoothly today," he said during a pre-dawn patrolling in the Mela area. While 3.5 crore people gathered on Makar Sankranti (January 14), over 2 crore people took the dip on January 30 and February 1, and 1.7 crore on Paush Purnima (January 13), it said. While Monday's is the last Amrit Snan, two more special bathing dates fall on February 12 (Maghi Purnima) and February 26 (Mahashivratri).



NTSB investigators and members of the salvage crew recover wreckage from the Army Black Hawk helicopter that collided with passenger jet. Pic: AP

RBI may cut interest rate by 25 bps on Friday, say experts

Mumbai: The RBI is likely to reduce the key interest rate by 25 basis points this week after keeping it on hold for two years, complementing the Union Budget initiatives to push consumption-led demand, though the sliding rupee continues to be a concern.

As the retail inflation has remained within the Reserve Bank's comfort zone (less than 6 per cent) for most of the year, the central bank can take rate action to boost growth hit by sluggish consumption, opined experts.

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has kept the repo rate (short-term lending rate) unchanged at 6.5 per cent since February 2023. The last time the RBI had reduced the rate was during the Covid times (May 2020) and thereafter, it was gradually raised to 6.5 per cent.

Newly appointed Reserve Bank Governor Sanjay Malhotra will be chairing his first Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) meeting starting Wednesday.

The decision of the six-

member panel will be announced on Friday (February 7).

"There is a higher probability of a rate cut this time for two reasons. First, the RBI has already announced liquidity enhancement measures, which have improved conditions in the market. This appeared to be a prerequisite for cutting rates," said Madan Sabnavis, Chief Economist, Bank of Baroda.

Sabnavis further said the Union Budget has provided a boost and it may be appropriate to lower the repo rate in tandem to support the same.

The Reserve Bank has announced measures to infuse Rs 1.5 lakh crore worth of liquidity in the banking system on January 27.

"We can expect some changes in the forecast on growth in particular as the NSO had projected 6.4 per cent for the year. It would be interesting to see if the RBI would provide a forecast for growth in FY26, though this normally is published in the April policy," he added.

Aditi Nayar, Chief Economist and Head - Research and Outreach at Icr, opined that the growth inflation dynamics have improved since the December 2025 policy meeting.

"We don't assess the fiscal stimulus provided by the Union Budget to have a significant bearing on inflation. Accordingly, we think the balance is tilted in favour of a rate cut in the February 2025 policy review," she said.

However, if global factors cause a further material weakening in the INR/USD cross rate over the course of this week, then the anticipated rate cut may get delayed to April 2025, Nayar added.

On Monday, the rupee plunged 55 paise to close at an all-time low of 87.17 (provisional) against the US dollar.

The Union Budget presented in Parliament on Saturday has announced major income tax concessions to spur consumption especially for the middle class with a view to boost demand.

Saints warn against misuse of Sanatan Dharma

Mahakumbh Nagar: Saints and seers gathered at the Triveni Sangam for the 'Amrit Snan' on the occasion of Basant Panchami on Monday cautioned political leaders against misusing Sanatan Dharma and spreading rumours for political gain, and praised Chief Minister

Yogi Adityanath over arrangements at the Maha Kumbh. They also took a firm stand against those criticising the Maha Kumbh after the January 29 stampede. The pre-dawn crush during the Amrit Snan on the occasion of Mauni Amavasya had resulted in the

death of 30 pilgrims and injuries to 60 others. While police said it was due to overcrowding at the Sangam, some people, including opposition leaders, questioned the arrangements to handle the sea of devotees at the gathering.

According to a statement issued by UP government on Monday, Mahant Santosh Das Sattua Baba Maharaj of Panch Nirvani Ani Akhara lashed out at political leaders, particularly Samajwadi Party chief Akhilesh Yadav, saying, "You have never followed or

Substantial rise in religious tourism to Ayodhya

New Delhi: There has been a "substantial increase" in religious tourism to Ayodhya after construction of the Ram temple and the total number of visitors to the district has risen from more than 60 lakh in 2020 to over 16 crore in 2024, the government informed Parliament on Monday.

The November 2019 Supreme Court verdict had paved the way for the construction of a Ram temple in the holy town in Uttar Pradesh.

"As per information received from the state government of Uttar Pradesh, there is substantial increase in religious tourism to Ayodhya after construction of Ram Mandir. As per tourism statistics of Ayodhya, the total number of visitors to the district has risen from 6,022,618 in the year 2020 to 164,419,522 in the year 2024," Union Tourism Minister Gajendra Singh Shekhawat said in a written response to a query.

He was asked whether the government has taken any steps for rejuvenation of religious sites for boosting tourism in the country.

The consecration ceremony at the temple had taken place on January 22



last year, when the temple was partially constructed and work is currently underway to complete the entire structure under the trust -- Shri Ram Janmabhoomi Teerth Kshetra.

A massive number of devotees had visited the temple soon after it was thrown open to the public.

Settling a fractious issue that goes back more than a century, the apex court in a historic verdict backed the construction of a Ram temple by a trust at the disputed site in Ayodhya and ruled that an alternative five-acre plot must be found for a mosque in the town in Uttar Pradesh.

Shekhawat also said the Ministry of Tourism under the 'Pilgrimage Rejuvenation and Spiritual, Heritage Augmentation Drive' (PRASHAD) scheme provides financial assistance to the state governments and Union Territory administrations for development of

tourism infrastructure at important pilgrimage and heritage destinations.

"A total of 47 projects has been sanctioned in 27 States/UTs with estimated cost of Rs 1594.40 crore," he said.

In response to another query, the Union minister said, as informed by the Ministry of Defence, the Ranbhoomi App and the Bharat Ranbhoomi Darshan initiative have been launched to open areas of historical importance and valour for the citizens of India, which signify the sacrifice made by people in the Indian armed forces.

In his response, he also shared the state-wise details of "77 Shaurya Gantavya sites", which are part of the Bharat Ranbhoomi Darshan initiative, a project that seeks to promote battlefield tourism.

These include 11 sites in Jammu and Kashmir, including Gurez Sector, Baramulla and Uri; 14 in Ladakh, including Galwan Valley, Pangong Tso, Demchok and Padum Valley; seven in Sikkim, including Doklam; and 21 in Arunachal Pradesh, including Bomdila, Tawang and Kameng Region.



Congress leaders and workers celebrate after completion of BC Caste Census survey in the state of Telangana in Hyderabad on Monday. Pic: PTI

22 flights affected at Kolkata airport

Kolkata: The movement of at least 22 flights was affected at the Kolkata airport on Monday as a result of poor visibility due to dense fog, officials said.

At least six flights scheduled to arrive at the Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose International (NSCBI) Airport and the departure of 16 flights to other destinations were delayed, they said.

According to an Airports Authority of India spokesperson, Low Visibility Procedures (LVP) were implemented due to the fog from 1.21 am to 8.45 am.

The air traffic control (ATC) declares LVP when visibility falls below 800 metres, after which 'follow-me' vehicles guide aircraft to their stands, he said.

The LVP is also activated when the cloud ceiling is below 200 feet.

The procedures involve coordination among the airport operator, ATC and pilots to manage flights safely and minimise disruptions, the AAI official said.

These ensure that aircraft can land, taxi and take off safely using advanced navigation systems

and ground lighting, he said.

On Monday, more delays in flight operations were averted as 33 arriving flights and 44 departing aircraft operated with the help of Instrument Landing System (ILS) during the LVP, as and when the visibility conditions changed, the official said.

In addition, a total of 33 flights used either Category-II (CAT-II) ILS or CAT-III ILS for landing, while 44 aircraft opted for low visibility take-off (LVTO) during the LVP, he said.

-PTI

HC asks Google to reply to Aaradhya's plea

New Delhi: The Delhi High Court on Monday sought Google's response after Aaradhya Bachchan said her petition to restrain and take down misleading content on her health should be decided without hearing the YouTube channels that were not responding to her plea.

Justice Mini Pushkarna issued notice on an application by Aaradhya, daughter of Aishwarya Rai Bachchan and Abhishek Bachchan, seeking to proceed ex-parte since the defendants were not appearing in the matter and to pass a decree in her favour.

The high court posted the matter on March 17.

The application for a "summary judgment" was passed in a pending lawsuit

by the minor child and her father.

The court on April 20, 2023 passed an interim order restraining several YouTube channels from publishing misleading content on her health and said spreading disinformation about a child reflected "morbid perversity".

It directed Google to take down from its platform certain videos claiming Aaradhya was "critically ill" and "no more".

The court also issued summons on the lawsuit to the YouTube channels, including "Bollywood Time", "Bolly Pakora", "Bolly Samosa", "Bollywood Shine" and others, saying a prima facie case was made out for grant of interim relief to prevent further prejudice.



Indian short film 'Ruse' selected for Berlin Film Festival

New Delhi: Student filmmaker Rhea Shukla's short film "Ruse" is set to have its world premiere in the Generation Kplus segment of the 75th Berlin International Film Festival.

The short film, directed by New Delhi-born Shukla, is one of the 15 projects to compete in the category at the gala, scheduled to be held in Berlin from February 13 to February 23.

The 29-year-old filmmaker, who is pursuing a master's degree in fine arts in screenwriting and direction from New York's Columbia



University, said "Ruse" has had an incredible journey. "I am grateful I found the

right collaborators who were young and yet unfraid and took ownership of

the scenes in various ways. It comes across rather sublime on celluloid on a hum-

ming monsoon afternoon," Shukla told PTI.

According to its official plotline, "Ruse" follows three adolescent girls who practice a dance on a rainy afternoon.

"The proximity to each other takes on a life of its own, an unarticulated desire, a nuanced portrayal of the silent gazes and unspoken gestures between the girls which comes across acutely on the screen," it read.

The Generation Kplus section at the gala, also known as Berlinale, is a

competition programme which screens "international cinema exploring the worlds of children and teenagers".

Previously, Shukla also served as a creative producer on "Madhu", a film that premiered in International Film Festival Rotterdam and Lincoln Center's MoMA and won a Special Mention Jury Award at Palm Springs International Film Festival.

She also directed the music video "I Wanna Be Like You" for Norwegian music group Ora the Molecule. -PTI

QUOTE OF THE DAY

"Jaya Bachchan should be arrested for spreading false and untrue statements. Maha Kumbh is the backbone of faith and devotion where one attains Dharma, Karma and Moksha."



Sharad Sharma, Media In-Charge, VHP

DELHI ASSEMBLY POLLS

12 pc candidates face criminal charges

By Gunjan Sharma

New Delhi: From AAP chief Arvind Kejriwal to his long-time loyalist Manish Sisodia, riots accused Tahir Hussain and Shifa-ur Rehman, several candidates in fray for Delhi Assembly polls have been to jail in connection with different cases, including corruption and riots.

According to political experts, candidates having been to jail at some point, does not necessarily affect their popularity as politicians. In some cases, if a politician does benefit in terms of public sympathy by being jailed, it does not necessarily translate into votes.

Former Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal was arrested ahead of Lok Sabha polls last year in connection with a money laundering case related to the now-scrapped Delhi excise policy.

While he got a brief bail to campaign for Lok Sabha polls, he was granted an interim bail in the case in September last year with several conditions, including not accessing the CM office.

Two days later, he resigned as chief minister, saying he will only hold the post when the public declares him honest.

Party leader Atishi was



Arvind Kejriwal

then sworn in for the post, becoming Delhi's third woman chief minister.

Kejriwal has been maintaining during his Assembly poll campaign that he was arrested as the BJP wanted to project him as a "chor" (thief) but even his "fiercest enemy" believes he is not corrupt.

BJP, however, has been attacking him for wearing his stint in jail as a "badge of honour".

Azhar Mehboob, a political science scholar at Jamia Millia Islamia, said whatever image people make of a politician when he or she is jailed, is not always linked to voting patterns.

Manish Sisodia, former deputy chief minister, and AAP leader Sanjay Singh were also arrested in the case. Sisodia was granted bail in August last year after spending 17 months in jail and Singh was released on bail in April.

Satyendar Jain, who was among the first AAP leaders to be arrested in different cases, recently



Satyendar Jain

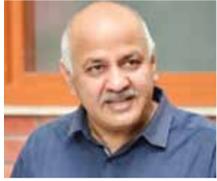
said despite the party's leadership being jailed in "false cases," the BJP has been unable to dent its image.

In jail for over 18 months in a money laundering case of about Rs 4.8 crore lodged by the ED, former health minister Jain walked out of Tihar jail in October last year after a Delhi court granted him bail.

Jain said last week that Delhi Assembly elections are being fought based on the issues and not accusations that are being levelled by the BJP.

Out of public action, the three-time MLA is campaigning in his constituency, which he has represented since 2013. He won the 2015 election by 3,133 votes and the 2020 election by 7,592 votes.

Other popular names in the fray who have been to jail are Tahir Hussain and Shifa-ur Rehman, who have been fielded from Mustafabad and Okhla by the All India Majlis-e-Ittehad-ul-Muslimeen



Manish Sisodia

(AIMIM). Both men are in jail over their alleged involvement in the 2020 Northeast Delhi riots.

Rahman, former president of Jamia Millia Islamia Alumni Association, is making his electoral debut while Hussain, a former AAP MLA, has switched sides to AIMIM. Both of them have been granted parole to campaign for the polls.

According to an analysis by polls rights body ADR, 19 per cent of candidates contesting the assembly elections in Delhi have declared criminal cases. The figure marks a slight decline from the 2020 election in which 20 per cent of candidates had reported criminal cases in their affidavits.

At least 12 per cent of the candidates in the fray face serious criminal charges, including offences punishable by five or more years in prison. The figure is down from 15 per cent in the previous election, the report stated.

-PTI



Union Home Minister and BJP leader Amit Shah at a public meeting for Delhi Assembly elections at Jangpura in New Delhi on Monday. Pic:PTI

Amit Shah slams Kejriwal, Sisodia

New Delhi: Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Monday said states having a double-engine BJP government have progressed in the last 10 years, but Delhi has been left behind because the AAP keeps making excuses and fighting with the Centre.

Addressing a public meeting in Jangpura in south Delhi, Shah dubbed AAP chief Arvind Kejriwal and his deputy Manish Sisodia as "bade miyan and chotemyian" who have looted Delhi.

Shah said Sisodia, who is fighting elections from the Jangpura Assembly seat, is the only education minister in the country who went to jail in a liquor scam.

"States having a double-engine BJP government have progressed in the last 10 years. Delhi has been left behind, they keep fighting with the Centre. They have been making excuses for 10 years while acting like crybabies," Shah said.

Kejriwal lied to the people of Delhi and gave only garbage, toxic water and corruption to the national

“This election is about bringing back the Delhi that Sheila Dikshit built -- ?a city with world class roads, clean water and efficient governance. If a government is incapable of working, it should step aside and let the Congress govern.”

Devender Yadav,
Delhi Congress chief

capital, he said. "Bade miyan and chotemyian" looted Delhi after making false promises. They are both going to lose the elections," the senior BJP leader said. The BJP is the only party which can transform Delhi into a world class capital city, he said. Delhi goes to polls on February 5 and the results

2020 riot survivors recall unkept promises

New Delhi: The trust is gone. Five years after riots in northeast Delhi, that is the oft-heard refrain as locals adapt to their changed, polarised neighbourhoods. Shops and houses that were engulfed in flames have been rebuilt but reconstructing lives is quite another thing. More than 50 people were killed and many others injured in the February 2020 riots. It was just after the assembly elections. It's election time again in Delhi, a reminder if any were needed of the many things left undone. In Shiv Vihar, one of the areas most impacted by the communal violence following clashes between supporters and opponents of the Citizenship Amendment Act, the memories linger - somewhat like the ever-present stench from a large drain that seems never to have been cleaned. "The area is calm now, but the trust is gone. People live in their own spaces without disputes, but they no longer trust each other," said Harpal Singh, a 68-year-old shop owner who moved to the locality 30 years ago.

will be declared on February 8.

BJP headed to its worst defeat ever: Kejriwal

New Delhi: AAP supremo Arvind Kejriwal on Monday claimed the BJP is going to face its worst defeat ever in these polls in Delhi and will use its "goons" and Delhi Police to influence the elections. In a video message on the

final day of campaigning for the February 5 polls, Kejriwal alleged the BJP was already resorting to unfair tactics in the face of a "massive defeat".

Despite all these, the AAP is heading towards a historic victory and the BJP its worst defeat since the party came into being, Kejriwal claimed.

-PTI

Three arrested for murder of Dalit woman

Ayodhya: Police have arrested three persons for allegedly killing a 22-year-old Dalit woman whose body was found in a canal in Ayodhya on Saturday, officials said on Monday.

Senior Superintendent of Police (SSP) Raj Karan Nayar said the arrested trio -- Hari Ram Kori, Vijay Sahu and Digvijay Singh -- committed the crime under the influence of alcohol before dumping the unclothed body of the woman, who was missing since Thursday, in a desolate canal near her village.

The family members, meanwhile, have alleged rape and murder, claiming the woman's eyes were gouged out, her bones broken, and her body bore deep wounds.

The incident has become a big ahead of the Milkipur bypoll scheduled on February 5, with opposition parties attacking the Yogi Adityanath government over the law and order situation in the region.

Samajwadi Party chief Akhilesh Yadav has alleged that atrocities are being committed against the 'PDA' community - an acronym he coined for 'Pichde (backward), Dalit,

and Alpsankhyak (minority) sections of the society.

Yadav also said the entire party, including Faizabad MP from Ayodhya Awadhesh Prasad, was hurt by the incident.

Prasad, who met the grieving family on Sunday, later broke down at a press conference, saying, "I failed to save her."

"I will raise the matter before (Prime Minister) Modi in the Lok Sabha. If we don't get justice, I will resign," Prasad said even as his colleagues tried to console him.

Reacting to Prasad's 'outburst', Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath said the Faizabad MP was engaging in "theatrics" on the issue.

Speaking at a poll rally, Adityanath also said that some "criminals from the Samajwadi Party" will be found involved in the Ayodhya incident.

Senior Congress leaders Rahul Gandhi and Priyanka Gandhi Vadra too have lashed out at the BJP over the alleged killing and demanded strict action against the culprits and the police officers whom they accused of inaction.

-PTI



Tamil Nadu CM M.K. Stalin with Deputy CM Udhayanidhi Stalin at rally to mark the death anniversary of former CM C.N. Annadurai near Marina Beach in Chennai on Monday. Pic:PTI

Eight-year-old girl alleges sexual assault

Mandya: An eight-year-old girl has alleged that she was sexually assaulted by two boys inside the washroom of her school in this district, police said.

The incident was alleged to have occurred on January 31. However, the complaint came to light on Sunday when the girl's mother approached the police, they said.

Citing her statement, a senior police officer said that the class two student of a government school has alleged that two boys allegedly took her to the washroom where they

threatened her to remove clothes and thereafter thrashed her with a stick. They also beat her on her private parts.

One of the boys she identified is her classmate while another is from a higher class, he said.

The girl alleged that the accused students threatened her not to disclose the incident to anyone but later she confided in her mother, he added.

Based on the statement of the girl, a case was registered under the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act

against the two boys and an investigation is underway to ascertain the sequence of events and verify facts, said Mandya Superintendent of Police Mallikarjun Baladandi.

As part of the investigation, police are also reviewing the CCTV footage from the school premises.

However, the medical examination report of the girl did not reveal any such injury on private parts, police said, adding that statements of the boys will be recorded and further action will be taken accordingly.

CM Biren Singh in the dock

Leaked audio: SC seeks forensic report

New Delhi: Saying the state was "limping back to normalcy", the Supreme Court on Monday sought a sealed-cover forensic report on the authenticity of leaked audio clips alleging the role of Manipur Chief Minister Biren Singh in the ethnic violence.

A bench comprising Chief Justice Sanjiv Khanna and Justice Sanjay Kumar sought the report from the Central Forensic Science Laboratory (CFSL) within six weeks and posted the plea by the Kuki Organisation for Human Rights Trust (KOHUR) on March 24.

KOHUR, represented by advocate Prashant Bhushan, sought a court-monitored SIT probe into the alleged role of the chief minister in the ethnic violence.

Over 200 people were killed and thousands rendered homeless after Meitei and Kuki communities clashed with each other in May last year.

Bhushan alleged the recorded conversation prima facie showed the com-

plicity and the involvement of the state machinery in violence against the Kuki Zo community.

He said the clips had "disturbing conversations" and the chief minister could be heard instigating the violence and protecting the attackers while fuelling the violence aside from allowing arms and ammunition to be looted.

The solicitor general opposed the plea, saying the organisation should move the Manipur High Court and said if the apex court entertained the matter, the "majesty of the high court would be undermined".

Attorney general R Venkataramani also opposed the petition and said the state government should be given leeway to restore peace.

The Kuki organisation's plea alleged the chief minister of Manipur was instrumental in "inciting, organising and thereafter centrally orchestrating the large-scale murder, destruction and other forms

of violence against the Kuki dominated areas in Manipur".

"Petitioner is praying for a court-monitored investigation team into the leaked audio tape clips as there is clear and strong prima facie evidence showing involvement of highest functionary, i.e., chief minister of a state. The investigation would need to unearth the conspiracy which appears to involve the highest functionary of state," it added.

The plea said the investigation couldn't be done by the CBI, ED, etc., and would have to be carried out by a special investigative team of officers of impeccable integrity selected by the top court.

Asked about the clip during a recent PTI interview, Chief Minister Singh said, "Some people are after me... there is a conspiracy. The matter is subjective. I won't talk much about it. An FIR has been filed."

-PTI

QUOTE OF THE DAY



"We are going to Delhi tomorrow, to talk about Yediyurappa and his son's deeds. Do you want a corrupt family or honest and loyal party workers?"

The leadership should be given into the hands of those who follow Hindutva."

Basanagouda Patil Yatnal,
Senior legislator, BJP

India's first cancer genome database

New Delhi: Indian Institute of Technology (IIT), Madras on Monday launched a first-of-its-kind cancer genome database to help research on the disease in the country.

According to IIT Madras Director, V Kamakoti, despite having a high cancer incidence, India has been under-represented in global cancer genome studies.

In the absence of genomic architecture of cancers prevalent in India, specific genetic variants from Indian cancers are not adequately captured and cata-

logued for any diagnostic kits and drug development.

"In order to fill the gap in the genomic landscape for different cancers in India, IIT Madras initiated the cancer genome programme in 2020. Under this programme, 960 whole exome sequencing from 480 breast cancer patient tissue samples collected across the country has been completed.

"We are releasing yet another health-related data, the second this academic year, the cancer genome



data after brain data. We hope that this will provide deep insights on reasons leading to this deadly disease and help prevent the same with early interventions," he said.

Kamakoti informed that the Bharat Cancer Genome

Atlas (BCGA) will fill the gap in the genomic landscape from different cancers in the country.

"It provides a compendium of genetic variants representing the contemporary Indian breast cancer population to classify vari-

ants involved in early diagnostics, disease progression, and treatment outcomes," he said.

IIT Madras in collaboration with Karkinos Healthcare, Mumbai, the Chennai Breast Clinic and Cancer Research and Relief Trust, Chennai analysed the data and assembled the anonymised summary of genetic variants from Indian breast cancer samples.

The research was led by the institute's Centre of Excellence on Cancer Genomics and Molecular Therapeutics, which was funded

under the Centre government's "Institutions of Eminence" initiative.

"This database will be an invaluable resource to identify cancer-specific biomarkers in India, which will enable early detection of breast cancers. Further, it will also be very useful to identify novel drug targets for developing better treatment strategies specific to the Indian population," S Mahalingam, Head, Centre of Excellence on Cancer Genomics and Molecular Therapeutics, IIT Madras.

-PTI

Budget will push growth: Finance Secy

New Delhi: Finance Secretary Tuhin Kanta Pandey on Monday said the FY26 Budget has given sufficient non-inflationary stimulus to the economy which will promote incremental growth.

He said the Budget has a balanced "growth and inflation mix", while keeping exchange rates, macroeconomic stability in mind and controlling the fiscal consolidation.

"We also have sufficient stimulus in the economy, a non-inflationary stimulus, which will promote savings, investment and growth. It will push incremental growth, work on the demand side and work on the supply side," Pandey said at Ficci post-budget interactive session.

Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman in the FY26 Budget had hiked the income tax rebate limit to Rs 12 lakh, effectively meaning that individuals with income of up to Rs 12 lakh per year will not pay any income tax. This move was aimed at increasing disposable income in the hands of taxpayers to spur either savings or investment or consumption.

The Budget pegged a fiscal deficit of 4.4 per cent of GDP for FY26 and lowered the target for FY25 by 10 basis points to 4.8 per cent of GDP.

'GST rates need to be rationalised'

New Delhi: Finance Secretary Tuhin Kanta also said that enough experience has been gained with regard to implementation of GST and now the rates need to be rationalised in consultation with states. The GST Council, chaired by Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman and comprising her state counterparts, has set up a group of ministers (GoM) to suggest changes in GST rates as well as reduce slabs. The report on rate and slab rejig is long pending. It was expected that the GoM



would submit its report in the last Council meeting in December, but it did not. Replying to a query from industry representative at a Ficci post-budget meeting, Pandey said GST brought in transparency in taxation post its implementation in 2017. "Now that we have

certain experience in GST implementation, it will be very important to see how things will be going forward. The exercise needed much more consultation with states in the Council," said Pandey, who is also the Revenue Secretary. He said rate rationalisation is a work in progress and hoped that it is carried out.

Pandey said the Budget had to balance the competing imperatives.

"We have to have fiscal consolidation on the one hand because we don't want to be inflationary in our approach. If we try to stimulate (the economy) when we should not, it may turn inflationary and will reverse the very process of inflation control that we have

been working at and will be counterproductive.

"So, the Budget we have come out with, in terms of various things, balances all these imperatives while we control the fiscal consolidation," Pandey added.

The Budget has several demand-side measures and several supply-side measures, including the agriculture sector, Pandey said.

"Food inflation, for example, if we are not able to really address some of those structural supply factors it will keep hurting us year after year and it will keep our interest rates high. It doesn't help industry, doesn't help the middle class, because people end up higher equated monthly instalments."

-PTI

'India to play crucial role in global AI revolution'

New Delhi: India is set to play a crucial role in artificial intelligence (AI) and green energy sectors, emerging as a major driver of global economic growth, Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu said on Monday.

Speaking at a press conference just before the 16th Finance Commission meeting here, Naidu said there was significant global interest in India's development trajectory at the World Economic Forum held in Davos.

"India is the pulling factor for the global economic growth," the TDP chief told reporters.

Drawing parallels between the IT revolution of 1995 and current developments, Naidu said AI has become the "order of the day" with applications across all sectors.

"In 1995, it was information technology and in 2025 it is AI. At that time, I was party to it, and even today I am party and in power," he said.

The Andhra CM identified two major themes that dominated Davos discussions - artificial intelligence and green energy initiatives, particularly green hydrogen production.

He emphasized the growing focus on reducing global warming through green energy solutions and downstream industries.

The World Economic Forum this year saw increased attention on emerging economies, with India's technological advancement and environmental initiatives drawing particular interest from global leaders.

-PTI



Leader of Opposition in the Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi during the Budget session of Parliament, at the Parliament House complex in New Delhi on Monday.

Pic: PTI

Industry points out shortcomings of Budget

New Delhi: The Rs 20,000-crore allocation to drive research, the expansion of AI and geospatial initiatives and further push to Atal Tinkering Labs are some of the significant steps taken in the Union Budget 2025-26 to strengthen the country's research & development (R&D) ecosystem, but the industry players said.

Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman has allocated Rs 20,000 crore to the Department of Science and Technology to promote private sector-driven innovation.

Sitharaman further said 50,000 Atal Tinkering Labs will be set up in the next five years to cultivate scientific temper in young minds.

The 2025 Union Budget marks a significant step forward in strengthening India's R&D ecosystem,

Budget's focus on clean energy & sustainability

New Delhi: The renewable energy industry has hailed the Union Budget 2025-26, saying the focus on clean power, manufacturing, and sustainability will push the sector's growth. Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman presented her record eighth straight Union Budget in the Lok Sabha on Saturday. Vineet Mittal, Chairman of Avaada Group said strategic initiatives like global manufacturing clusters and clean tech advancements under National Manufacturing Mission will position India as a global industrial powerhouse. Sumant Sinha, Founder, Chairman & CEO, ReNew said the Rs 20,000 crore allocation for nuclear energy and proposed legislative reforms demonstrate a forward-thinking approach to energy security and decarbonization.

Shirshendu Mukherjee, Managing Director, Wadhvani Innovation Network, said.

"The Rs 20,000 crore allocation for private & public sector-driven research, the expansion of AI and geospatial initiatives, and the push for Atal Tinkering Labs demonstrate the gov-

ernment's strong commitment to fostering innovation-led growth. By nurturing creativity from a young age and advancing deep tech research, these investments will accelerate AI, digital transformation, and position India as a global leader in emerging technologies," he told PTI.

'Raise concerns through Finance Commission'

New Delhi: With southern states voicing concerns over 'unfair' tax money devolution, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman has said the states have to engage and highlight their concerns with the 16th Finance Commission, whose recommendations will decide how the funds are divided.



are laid down by them. "And if they think over a decade, they've had a distinctly different paradigm happening there. It is for them to highlight those issues to the Finance Commission," she said.

After all, she said, the Centre takes the Finance Commission's recommendations, particularly on the core suggestions, and follows them.

It is not appropriate for them to voice concerns as the central government does not decide devolution of taxes, she added.

The Finance Commission typically gives recommendations for the division of tax revenues for five years. The 13th Finance Commission gave recommendations for 2010-11 to 2014-15 and its successor recommended formula for 2015-16 to 2019-20. The 15th Finance Commission gave suggestions for 2020-21 in

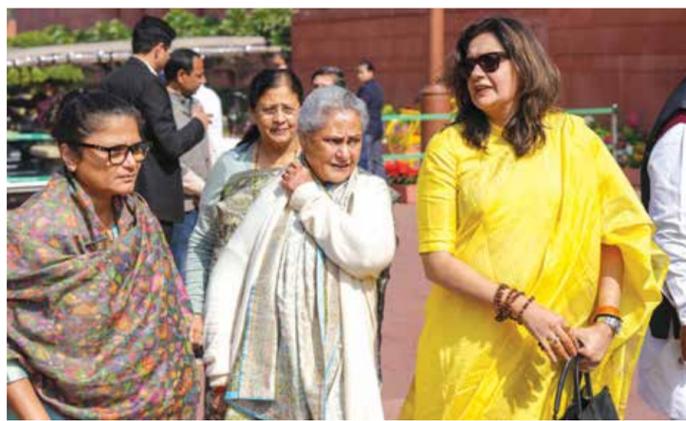
its first report and then for 2021-2025-26.

Five southern states -- Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka and Kerala -- saw their share come down to 15.8 per cent during 2021-22/2024-25 each from around 18.62 per cent in 2014-15, which was the concluding year of the implementation of the 14th Finance Commission report, and 18.04 per cent in 2015-16, which was the first year of the implementation of 15th Finance Commission's recommendations.

The 16th Finance Commission, headed by Arvind Panagariya, has been tasked to make its recommendations available by October 31, 2025, covering an award period of 5 years.

Its predecessor had suggested that states be given 41 per cent of the Centre's net tax receipts against 42 per cent for 2015-16 to 2019-20. The 14th Finance Commission had increased the share of states from 32 per cent to 42 per cent.

The 15th Finance Commission had used the 2011 census for deciding on the weightage of population against the 1971 census used by previous commissions.



TMC MP Sushmita Dev, Samajwadi Party MP Jaya Bachchan and Shiv Sena (UBT) MP Priyanka Chaturvedi during the Budget session of Parliament in New Delhi on Monday.

Pic: PTI

Scheme for 1 cr gig workers

New Delhi: The Finance Ministry, in consultation with the Labour Department, is working out the modalities of a scheme to provide healthcare facilities under the PM Jan Arogya Yojana (PM-JAY) to about 1 crore gig workers, Expenditure Secretary Manoj Govil has said.

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman, in her Budget speech, announced that the government will arrange identity cards and registration of gig workers on the e-Shram portal.

They will be provided

healthcare under PM Jan Arogya Yojana.

In an interview to PTI, Govil said the parameters and details of the scheme are being worked out in consultation with the Ministry of Labour and concerned other ministries.

Govil said the social security scheme for gig workers could either be a 100 per cent Central Sector scheme or a centrally sponsored scheme where the cost would be shared between the Centre and states in a 60:40 ratio.

"Once the scheme details

are finalised, the cost will be calculated," Govil added.

Ayushman Bharat PM-JAY is the largest health assurance scheme in the world which aims at providing a health cover of Rs 5 lakh per family per year for secondary and tertiary care hospitalisation to over 12 crore poor and vulnerable families.

The Union Cabinet on September 11, 2024, decided that all senior citizens aged 70 and above will receive health coverage, regardless of their income.

CBDT asks suggestions on new income tax bill

New Delhi: Central Board of Direct Taxes Chief Ravi Agrawal on Monday asked industry players to give their suggestions on the new income tax bill, which will be tabled this week.

The new income tax bill, which will replace the six-decade old Income Tax act, 1961, has been drafted within six months and efforts have been made to simplify the language to make tax compliance easier for taxpayers and make it easier to read and understand.

Agrawal said that the new bill has been drafted in such a way that it meets international standards.

The new law has been made concise, as old provisions have been removed, making it less bulky.

He asked the industry to give their suggestions once the new bill is introduced and assured them that the suggestions would be looked into.

With regard to updated I-T returns (ITR-U), Agrawal said in the last three years about 90 lakh such returns were filed. Around Rs 8,500 crore additional revenues were garnered. Finance Minister Nir-

Sonakshi sells Mumbai house

New Delhi: Bollywood actress Sonakshi Sinha has sold her Bandra West apartment in Mumbai for Rs 22.50 crore, according to Square Yards.

In a statement on Monday, real estate consultant Square Yards said it has reviewed property registration documents reviewed by Square Yards related to this transaction.

"The property sold by Sinha is located in 81 Aureate, a project by MJ Shah Group, spread across 4.48 acre and featuring 4 BHK apartments."

mala Sitharaman in her Budget speech had said that the time limit to file updated ITRs for any assessment year will be extended from the current limit of two years to four years. Agrawal also said the income tax department is adopting a "participative" approach and is no longer following an "adversarial" approach.

Manufacturing growth hits six-month high

New Delhi: India's manufacturing sector growth started the year 2025 on a strong footing and touched a six-month high in January, fuelled by the steepest upturn in exports in nearly 14 years, a monthly survey said on Monday.

The seasonally adjusted HSBC India Manufacturing Purchasing Managers' Index (PMI) rose from December's one-year low of 56.4 to 57.7 in January supported by the fastest upturn in new export orders since February 2011.

In PMI parlance, a print

above 50 means expansion, while a score below 50 denotes contraction.

"India's final manufacturing PMI marked a six-month high in January. Domestic and export demand were both strong, supporting new orders growth," said Pranjal Bhandari, Chief India Economist at HSBC.

Goods producers attributed the substantial increase in new orders to better domestic demand and a pick-up in international sales.

Subsequently, manufac-



turers in India continued to scale up production volumes. The latest increase

was substantial and the fastest since October 2024. Going forward, compa-

nies turned more optimistic about output prospects, with nearly 32 per cent of firms forecasting growth and just 1 per cent expecting a reduction.

According to panel members, buoyant underlying demand, better customer relations, favourable economic conditions and marketing efforts all bode well for growth prospects.

Robust sales gains and upbeat forecasts prompted companies to recruit additional workers at the start of the fourth quarter of

this fiscal year.

"The employment PMI suggested robust job creation in the manufacturing industry, as the index increased to its highest level since the series was created. Input cost inflation eased for a second month, relieving pressure on manufacturers to raise final output prices," Bhandari noted.

On the price front, cost pressures retreated to their weakest in 11 months, but selling prices rose solidly amid buoyant demand.

QUOTE OF THE DAY

"The tax cut will have an impact only on three crore taxpayers, mainly in urban India. The majority of Indians will still not be able to spend more, as they are hurting from stagnant real wages and bearing the burden of increased loans."

M V Rajeev Gowda, Chairman, Research Department, AICC



China renews threat to retaliate against US tariffs

Taipei: US President Donald Trump's trade war with Canada, Mexico and China is ramping up over the production and importation of the opiate fentanyl, along with trade surpluses and illegal border crossings by migrants from across the globe. China has reiterated its threat to take "necessary countermeasures to defend its legitimate rights and interests" following Trump's decision to impose 10 per cent tariffs on China for allegedly doing too little to stem the production of precursor chemicals for fentanyl.

The Foreign Ministry statement issued Sunday did not mention any specific retaliatory measures, but said "China calls on the United States to correct its wrongdoings, maintain the hard-won positive dynamics in the counter-narcotics cooperation, and promote a steady, sound and sustainable development of China-US relationship."

China says the US action violates World Trade Organisation rules and has vowed to bring a case before the body that governs global commerce.

The Ministry of Public Security on Sunday made near identical charges and the Commerce Ministry also issued a closely worded statement.

Who does China say is to blame?

Trump accuses China of allowing the production of fentanyl, which is then



made into tablets in Mexico and smuggled into and distributed throughout the US, which records some 70,000 overdose deaths from the drug annually.

China says the US must hold itself to account instead of "threatening other countries with arbitrary tariff hikes," the Foreign Ministry said. "The United States needs to view and solve its own fentanyl issue in an objective and rational way... (China is) one of the world's toughest countries on counter-narcotics both in terms of policy and its implementation."

What other issues may be having an impact on the dispute?

China's enormous trade

deficit with the U.S., which reached nearly USD 1 trillion last year, has been a constant target of Trump's complaints. Tariffs would make Chinese goods more expensive for US consumers, who will ultimately have to pay a significant part of the cost of importing everything from toys to clothing.

China's vital export market could be impacted if US consumers decide to "buy American." The Chinese domestic economy has failed to respond to a range of government-backed stimuli, while foreign infrastructure projects and other major government initiatives that add to the country's already high public debt threaten more economic stagnation.

That is already starting to derail Chinese President Xi Jinping's push to overtake the US in key economic and political indicators, threatening his ultimate ambition to conquer the island republic of Taiwan and assert Chinese primacy in the Indo-Pacific region.

Stopping illegal immigration has also been one of Trump's core political messages, and was named in tariff actions against US neighbours Mexico and Canada. Illegal arrivals from China are considered a fraction of such numbers, but Trump has put virtually every country on notice that he will hold them accountable for their nationals who enter the US outside the law. -AP

Trump to cut funding to South Africa

Cape Town: US President Donald Trump has said he will cut all funding to South Africa and has launched an investigation into the country's polices, claiming a "massive" human rights violation is happening over a new land expropriation law.

Trump made the pledge to stop all future funding on his Truth Social platform on Sunday, writing: "South Africa is confiscating land, and treating certain classes of people VERY BADLY."

In South Africa, Trump wrote, a "massive Human Rights VIOLATION, at a minimum, is happening for all to see. The United States won't stand for it, we will act. Also, I will be cutting off all future funding to South Africa until a full investigation of this situation has been completed!"

The South African government said Monday that the Trump administration needed to have a better understanding of the new law, which is meant to help redress the impact of decades of white minority rule in South Africa under the apartheid regime, which ended in 1994. South African President Cyril Ramaphosa said in a statement that "the South African government has not confiscated any land."

During apartheid, land was taken from South Africa's Black majority, who were forced to live in areas designated for Blacks only. Billionaire Elon Musk, who is one of Trump's close allies, was born and raised in South Africa and has also targeted Ramaphosa's government, accusing it of being anti-white and claiming in 2023 it was allowing a "genocide" against white farmers.



European Council President Antonio Costa greets French President Emmanuel Macron as he arrives for an EU summit at the Egmont Palace in Brussels on Monday. Pic: AP/PTI

Over 200 quakes hit Greek's 'Instagram Island'

EMERGENCY CREWS DEPLOYED ON SANTORINI AS EARTHQUAKE SWARM WORRIES GREEK EXPERTS

Santorini: Schools were closed and emergency crews deployed on the volcanic Greek island of Santorini on Monday after a spike in seismic activity raised concerns about a potentially powerful earthquake.

Precautions were also ordered on several nearby Aegean Sea islands — all popular summer vacation destinations — after more than 200 undersea earthquakes were recorded in the area over the past three days.

"These measures are precautionary, and authorities will remain vigilant," Civil Protection Minister Vasilis Kikilias said late Sunday following an emergency government meeting in Athens. "We urge citizens to strictly adhere to safety recommendations to minimise risk."

While Greek experts say the quakes, measuring up to magnitude 4.7, are not linked to Santorini's volcano, they acknowledge that the pattern of seismic activ-

ity is cause for concern. Government officials met with scientists throughout the weekend and on Monday to assess the situation, while schools were ordered shut on the nearby islands of Amorgos, Anafi and Ios.

On Santorini, residents and visitors were advised to avoid large indoor gatherings and areas where rock slides could occur, while hotels were instructed to drain swimming pools to reduce potential building damage from an earthquake.

Fire Service rescuers who arrived on the island on Sunday set up yellow tents as a staging area inside a basketball court next to the island's main hospital.

"We arrived last night, a 26-member team of rescuers and one rescue dog," said fire brigadier Ioannis Billias.

Quakes continued rattling the island through the night and on Monday morning, many over mag-

nitude 4.0, and Billias said many residents, including entire families, spent the night in their cars.

Crescent-shaped Santorini is a premier tourism destination with daily arrivals via commercial flights, ferries, and cruise ships. The island draws more than 3 million visitors annually to its white-washed villages, built along dramatic cliffs formed by a massive volcanic eruption more than 3,500 years ago.

Prominent Greek seismologist Gerasimos Papadopoulos cautioned that the current earthquake sequence — displayed on live seismic maps as a growing cluster of dots between the islands of Santorini, Ios, Amorgos, and Anafi — could indicate a larger impending event.

"All scenarios remain open," Papadopoulos wrote in an online post. "The number of tremors has increased, magnitudes have risen, and epicentres have shifted northeast." -AP

The Grammys come with surprises

Los Angeles: All eyes at the Grammy Awards were on whether the most-nominated artist in the history of the telecast would finally walk away with the coveted album of the year trophy. She did. "We finally saw it happen," host Trevor Noah said, almost in relief.

Beyoncé winning for "Cowboy Carter" capped a night that turned into a tribute to a suffering Los Angeles, with city firefighters chosen to reveal the winner of the last award and speeches offering words of encouragement for communities devastated. The Grammys almost veered into a telethon; USD 7 million was pledged from viewers of the show.

Beyoncé and Lady Gaga were right there, as were Taylor Swift and Billie Eilish, but the honor of opening the Grammy Awards in Los Angeles was given to two local brothers deeply affected by the wildfires: Taylor and Griffin Goldsmith of the band Dawes.

They lost one brother's home along with their childhood home, instruments and much else. They've advocated for victims, raised money and were included in the Fire-Aid benefit concert on

Thursday.

Doechii won the Grammy for best rap album, only the third woman to win in that category. And, with her mother by her side, she had a strong message for young Black girls. Chappell Roan was crowned best new artist and then used her speech to demand change in the music business. Lady Gaga, accepting the trophy for best pop duo or group alongside Bruno Mars for their chart-topping collab, "Die with a Smile," gave a shout-out to the trans community, targets of President Donald Trump.

The Grammy Awards had a powerful way to prove that they've changed. They got a surprise endorsement by The Weeknd, who was last on the Grammy stage in 2017. The pop superstar in 2020 slammed the Grammys, calling them "corrupt" after he landed zero nominations despite a megahit album. "You owe me, my fans and the industry transparency," he wrote on social media. Will Smith, hosting a tribute to the late Quincy Jones, marked his first appearance at a major awards show since he slapped Chris Rock onstage at the Oscars in 2022. -AP

Congo hospitals over crowded

Goma: Hundreds of wounded people have poured into overcrowded hospitals in Goma, a major city in eastern Congo, as fighting rages on between government forces and the Rwanda-backed rebels who say they captured the city of around 2 million people.

Since the start of the M23 rebels' offensive on Goma on Jan. 26, more than 700 people have been killed and nearly 3,000 have been wounded in the city and its vicinity, officials say. Bethesda hospital alone said it receives more than 100 new patients each day, overstretching its capacity of 250 beds.

Bethesda is one of several hospitals in Goma that The Associated Press visited that has inadequate personnel and supplies. The city hosts many of the close to 6.5 million people displaced by the conflict, which is one of the world's largest humanitarian crises.

As more people arrived at the hospitals with gunshot wounds or shrapnel injuries, many were forced to share beds while others lay on the floor.



Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman greets Syria's interim President Ahmad al-Sharaa at the royal palace in Riyadh on Sunday. Pic: AP/PTI

At least 19 killed in explosion

Damascus: A car bomb exploded on the outskirts of a northern Syrian city on Monday, killing at least 19 people, all but one of them women, and leaving more than a dozen wounded, hospital workers said.

The car detonated next to a vehicle carrying mostly female agricultural workers on the outskirts of the city of Manbij. The dead included 18 women and one man, a nurse at the hospital, Mohammad Ahmad, told The Associated Press. Another 15 women were wounded, some of them in critical condition, according to the

local Syrian civil defence. No group immediately claimed responsibility for the explosion.

It was the seventh car bomb explosion in Manbij in just over a month, said Munir Mustafa, the deputy director of civil defence.

Manbij in northeastern Aleppo province continues to witness violence even after the downfall of President Bashar Assad in December.

Turkish-backed factions, known as the Syrian National Army, have clashed with the US-backed Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces. The factions took

the city from the SDF in early December during a lightning insurgency that toppled President Bashar Assad.

A resident said the car that detonated was parked on the roadside. The recurring attacks have forced residents to become more vigilant, he said.

"There are efforts from the people of Manbij to focus on protecting some neighbourhoods as well as setting up surveillance cameras in the main neighbourhoods of the city," Jameel al-Sayyed, a Manbij activist and journalist said.

US warns Panama to cut Chinese influence

By Matthew Lee and Juan Zamorano

Panama City: US Secretary of State Marco Rubio told Panamanian President José Raúl Mulino on Sunday that the Central American ally must immediately reduce Chinese influence over the Panama Canal area or face potential retaliation from the Trump administration.

Rubio, on his first foreign trip as America's top diplomat, held face-to-face talks with Mulino, who has resisted pressure from the new US government over Panama's management of a waterway that is vital to global trade.

Speaking on behalf of President Donald Trump, who has demanded that the canal be returned to US control, Rubio told Mulino that Trump had made a preliminary determination that China's presence in the canal area violates a treaty that led to the United States turning the waterway over to Panama in 1999. That treaty calls for the permanent neutrality of the American-built canal, which Rubio planned to tour later Sunday.

The statement was unusually blunt in diplomatic

terms, but in keeping with the tenor and tone Trump has set for foreign policy. Trump has been increasing pressure on Washington's neighbors and allies, including the canal demand and announcing Saturday that he was imposing major tariffs on Canada and Mexico. That prompted retaliation from those close allies, launching a trade war.

Mulino did say Panama would not be renewing its agreement with China's Belt and Road Initiative when it expires. Panama joined the initiative, which promotes and funds infrastructure and development projects that critics say leave poor member countries heavily indebted to China, after it dropped diplomatic recognition of Taiwan and recognized Beijing.

About 200 people marched in the capital on Sunday, carrying Panamanian flags and shouting "Marco Rubio out of Panama," "Long live national sovereignty" and "One territory, one flag" while the meeting was going on. Some burned a banner with images of Trump and Rubio after being stopped short of the presidential palace by riot police. -AP

QUOTE OF THE DAY

"Bangladesh belongs to all of its citizens and is a safe place for all people regardless of religion or caste. The goddess Saraswati is a symbol of truth, justice, and the light of knowledge. She is the omnipotent of knowledge, speech and melody."

Muhammad Yunus, Chief Advisor, Bangladesh



Bombs and attacks, not a concern for Iraq

NEW SKATE PARK IN BAGHDAD IS SAFE SPACE IRAQI YOUTH HAVE LONGED FOR

Baghdad: Car bombs and militant attacks are no longer a daily concern in the streets of Baghdad as they were in the chaotic years after the fall of Saddam Hussein or at the height of the battle to push back the Islamic State group.

But while violence has decreased, many young Iraqis say their opportunities remain limited.

Baghdad, a city of nearly 9 million, has seen some efforts to restore public parks and cultural spaces, but urban planning has largely overlooked youth-focused

projects.

That may be starting to change. The capital inaugurated its first skate park this weekend at a ceremony attended by foreign diplomats, sports officials and young athletes, in what many hope will be the beginning of a drive to build more spaces for recreation and creative expression.

"I have been waiting for this moment for five years," said Mohammed Al-Qadi, 19, one of the park's first visitors on Saturday.

Al-Qadi, like many skateboarders in Baghdad, used to practice in public spaces such as Al-Zaw-



raa Park and Abu Nawas Street, where skaters were often chased off by authorities, risked colliding with cars and faced safety risks due to uneven terrain and lack of designated areas.

"Before, we were often forced to move or get injured because there were no proper places for us," he

said. "Now, we have a safe space, and I hope this is just the beginning."

The facility, located within the Ministry of Youth and Sports complex near Al-Shaab International Stadium, was completed in three weeks with support from the German and French embassies.

The project underscores growing international interest in developing Iraq's sports infrastructure, particularly for activities beyond the country's traditional focus on soccer.

Al-Qadi and other enthusiasts

are now pushing for the formation of a national skating federation that could pave the way for participation in international competitions, including the Olympics.

"We have 25 male and female skaters now, but with this park, that number will definitely grow," Al-Qadi said.

The skate park also sparked enthusiasm among female skaters, despite lingering societal resistance to girls participating in the sport seen as rough and sometimes dangerous.

-AP

EDITORIAL

Tech Barrier

Maharashtra's decision to introduce a Facial Recognition System (FRS) at the Mantralaya is being sold as a step towards enhanced security, transparency and efficiency. The Devendra Fadnis-led Mahayuti government insists that the new technology will regulate entry, ensuring that only authorised personnel gain access while expediting bureaucratic processes. On the surface, it appears to be a commendable move. Yet, beyond the rhetoric of efficiency and security lies a more troubling question: Will this system serve as an enabler of governance or a barrier that alienates the very citizens it is meant to serve?

The Mantralaya, as Maharashtra's seat of power, has historically been a space where common citizens, especially those from rural or marginalised backgrounds, could physically access the corridors of decision-making. It is here that ordinary petitioners have sought direct redressal of their grievances, often bypassing bureaucratic hurdles to reach ministers and senior officials. This access, however imperfect, has been a crucial safeguard in a democracy where digital literacy and technological access remain unevenly distributed. By introducing a high-tech gatekeeping mechanism, the state risks reinforcing an already widening digital divide, privileging those who can navigate the new system over those who cannot.

The official justification for facial recognition technology is predicated on security. The argument is that by restricting entry to registered personnel, the government can weed out brokers and unauthorised middlemen who often exploit petitioners. It is a worthy goal. But technology alone cannot root out corruption or inefficiency, nor can it replace the accountability and trust that personal interactions with officials engender. A petitioner from rural Maharashtra, unfamiliar with digital systems, may now find themselves locked out of the very institution meant to address their grievances, while well-connected power brokers, builders and business magnates will still find their way in, as they always have.

The risks of such technological barriers are not theoretical. Across India, digitisation drives have often left the most vulnerable behind. The introduction of Aadhaar-based authentication for welfare schemes, for instance, was intended to streamline access and prevent fraud. Yet, in many cases, it became an obstacle for those lacking proper documentation or facing technical errors. The same risk looms over the new security measures at the Mantralaya. What happens when a daily wage worker, seeking justice for unpaid wages, is denied entry because their facial recognition data is not properly registered? Or when an elderly farmer from Vidarbha, unversed in the intricacies of online registration, finds himself shut out from reaching officials?

Too often, the allure of digital governance is seen as a substitute for systemic reform. But AI-powered surveillance will not fix a culture of bureaucratic opacity. To be sure, the government is within its rights to upgrade security at such a critical establishment. Recent years have seen instances where lax oversight has led to security breaches. But striking a balance between security and accessibility is imperative. Technology must facilitate governance, not fortify barriers between the government and its citizens.

The Perils of 'Labharthi Politics': Why Handouts Don't Guarantee Votes



By
Prasad Dixit

Ever since the BJP-led alliance's resounding victory in the Maharashtra assembly elections, welfare schemes like *Ladki Bahin* have taken center stage in the electoral playbook of political parties across India. What was once dismissed, even ridiculed, by the opposition as a populist gimmick has now become a template, with rival parties scrambling to outdo one another, promising even larger cash transfers. The upcoming elections in Delhi are unfolding along similar lines, with parties deploying what is now widely referred to as *Labharthi politics* - the politics of beneficiaries. But beneath the surface of these grand promises lies a more complex question: Does *Labharthi politics* always guarantee electoral success? Or is there a point at which the promise of handouts ceases to be a winning strategy?

History suggests otherwise. The recent passing of Dr. Manmohan Singh rekindled public memory of a

Populist politics may occasionally win the electoral battle, but history shows that well-intended schemes sans a sustainable and comprehensive policy foundation often backfire.

time when economic policy, not populist giveaways, shaped India's trajectory. In 1991, as finance minister, Singh ushered in a new era of liberalization, privatization, and globalization - transformations that lifted millions into the middle class. Yet, the foundation for this shift had been laid earlier. Rajiv Gandhi's administration, buoyed by an unprecedented parliamentary majority, had envisioned a modernized India: investments in telecommunications, computerization, and higher education paved the way for a future the country was barely ready for. By the time the 1990s rolled in, these policies bore fruit.

India's IT sector soared, capitalizing on the Y2K scare and the dot-com boom. The banking and financial services industry flourished. The automobile sector expanded, tourism and hospitality thrived. And most crucially, a vast swath of the poor and lower-middle class ascended the economic ladder, propelled by well-paying jobs in a newly globalized economy. By any metric, these citizens were *Labharthi* - beneficiaries of Congress's forward-looking policies.

Yet, at the ballot box, gratitude did not translate into votes.

From its electoral peak in 1984, Congress experienced a steady, sharp decline. Meanwhile, the BJP, once a marginal force, surged ahead, capturing a demographic that, by logic, should have remained loyal to Congress - the very voters who had gained the most from its policies. This paradox raises a crucial question: Why did the beneficiaries of Congress's economic reforms not ensure its political dominance?

One answer lies in the shifting aspirations of the middle-class Congress had helped create. As incomes rose and urbanization expanded, voters who once relied on government intervention sought different priorities. They wanted efficiency, governance, and modernity - not nostalgia for past economic crises. The Congress, instead of embracing this rising demographic, grew increasingly hesitant. Its economic vision faltered, its



reforms slowed, and, in moments of political expediency, it reversed course. The Shah Bano case, where the party surrendered to reactionary pressures, alienated progressives. Its reluctance to continue the momentum of liberalization bred disillusionment. The same middle class that had benefited from Congress's decisions no longer felt represented by it.

The lesson for today's *Labharthi politics* is stark: handouts may win hearts temporarily, but they do not secure lasting political allegiance.

For schemes like 'Ladki Bahin' and other direct cash transfers to sustain electoral loyalty, they must be part of a broader, coherent strategy. Policies cannot be contradictory - offering economic incentives while fostering social divisions is a losing game. Sustainability is another challenge. Temporary largesse, doled out in a pre-election frenzy, risks backfiring if voters sense that the well will dry up after the votes are counted. The electorate today is not as easily swayed as in the past; with greater awareness and global exposure, voters are increasingly discerning. The era of treating them as passive recipients of state generosity is waning.

The current race to replicate Maharashtra's *Ladki Bahin* scheme in Delhi underscores this challenge. While the immediate optics of such programs may be favourable, their long-term political efficacy remains dubious. Voters are in-

creasingly looking beyond transactional politics, demanding structural changes that enable sustained economic growth rather than temporary relief. Political parties would do well to heed the lessons of the past decades that economic benefits alone do not ensure loyalty, and short-term gains can quickly turn into long-term liabilities if not backed by a coherent, future-oriented vision.

Parties banking on *Labharthi politics* must also acknowledge the law of diminishing returns. If every party jumps on the bandwagon, the competitive bidding war renders each new promise less effective. Worse, voters may begin to see through the game: that these schemes are less about empowerment and more about electoral arithmetic. The danger for politicians is clear - if voters perceive that they are merely pawns in a zero-sum contest of short-term giveaways, the backlash will be swift.

History does not look kindly upon those who ignore its lessons. Congress once assumed that economic prosperity would translate into unwavering political loyalty. It didn't. Today's politicians, flush with the confidence of cash-driven campaigns, would do well to remember that even the most generous handouts cannot replace a compelling, sustainable vision for the future.

(The author works in the Information Technology sector. Views personal.)

GLOBAL WATCH

Tariffs and Tribulations

Donald Trump's latest broadside, sweeping tariffs on Canada, Mexico and China, lands a punch in the gut to global markets and American consumers alike. The move, cloaked in the language of nationalism, fulminates against fentanyl, illegal immigration and economic injustice. The president, now fully unshackled in his second term, has declared a national emergency, citing the International Emergency Economic Powers Act to impose tariffs of 25 percent on Canada and Mexico and 10 percent on China.

Trump's protectionist crusade is not new. Higher tariffs on Canadian lumber and Chinese pharmaceuticals have invited swift retaliation. Mexico and Canada have announced countermeasures, while China plans to challenge the move at the WTO. The last tariff war (2018-19) drove up costs for U.S. firms and consumers, and history may repeat itself. Automakers like Volkswagen warn of supply chain disruptions, while energy producers brace for instability.

Trade wars are neither good nor easy to win. The 2018-2019 tariff battles resulted in higher costs for American businesses and consumers, with studies showing that the bulk of the financial burden fell on U.S. firms rather than foreign exporters.

For American households, the effects will be immediate. A new round of tariffs means higher costs on everything from household appliances to food. Trudeau's retaliatory tariffs on \$155 billion worth of U.S. goods including peanut butter, beer and wine will send ripple effects through the agricultural sector. Meanwhile, Mexican and Chinese countermeasures could squeeze American manufacturers, forcing them to pass costs onto

Trump's trade wars promise pain today for a distant and uncertain gain.



consumers. The prime justification for these tariffs is their purported link to the fentanyl crisis. The Trump administration insists that Mexico and Canada are complicit in the opioid epidemic, citing a "growing presence" of fentanyl production in both nations. Yet, experts in law enforcement and public health overwhelmingly disagree.

Critics disagree with the White House's assertion that fentanyl has killed tens of millions of Americans. At the peak of the opioid crisis in 2022 and 2023, total overdose deaths, from all drugs combined, reached around 114,000 annually - a national tragedy, no doubt, but nowhere near the apocalyptic scale Trump describes.

Trump's weaponization of emergency powers to enact these tariffs is already facing legal scrutiny. The International Emergency Economic Powers Act was never intended to be a trade cudgel. Beyond its domestic consequences, Trump's tariff blitzkrieg is straining America's global alliances at a precarious moment. The European Union has said it would respond firmly should Trump extend his tariff war across the Atlantic.

For India, the tariff war presents a complex scenario in form of both risks and opportunities in the evolving global trade landscape.

On the one hand, the disruptions in U.S.-China trade relations could allow India to position itself as an alternative manufacturing hub, particularly in sectors like pharma-

ceuticals, electronics, and textiles. Multinational companies looking to diversify supply chains away from China may consider India, especially given New Delhi's efforts to incentivize domestic production under the Production-Linked Incentive (PLI) scheme.

On the other hand, India could also suffer collateral damage. The global slowdown triggered by trade wars could dampen demand for Indian exports, particularly in sectors like IT services, auto components, and chemicals, where India depends on both China and the U.S. for raw materials and markets.

Trump has long accused India of being a "tariff king" and has previously targeted Indian exports. However, New Delhi has been taking steps to improve trade optics. Recent budgetary revisions have reduced peak customs duty rates from 150 percent to 70 percent, signalling an attempt to counter criticism from Washington.

While India has not been directly affected by the latest round of U.S. tariffs, its diplomatic strategy will be crucial. Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government has been strengthening ties with Washington, particularly on defence and technology cooperation. If Trump were to escalate tariff measures against other trading partners, India may seek bilateral exemptions or leverage its growing strategic partnership with the U.S. to negotiate trade-offs in sectors like semiconductors, clean energy and defence procurement.

STATES WATCH

A Fierce Tug of War

Delhi has always been a battleground not just for political parties but for competing visions of governance, identity and power. As the hectic campaigning for the February 5 Delhi Assembly elections winds down, the contest is shaping up to be one of the most fiercely contested in recent memory. For the first time in over a decade, Arvind Kejriwal's Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) faces serious headwinds. The BJP, long consigned to the sidelines of Delhi's politics, is making a renewed push, while the Congress, though battered, is hoping for a resurrection.

Kejriwal, the master of retail politics, has built his decade-long rule on a heady mix of welfarism, political theater and an unrelenting battle with the Centre. Yet, the cracks are beginning to show. The city's voters, who once saw him as an anti-corruption crusader, are now grappling with allegations of graft within his own ranks. Ministers behind bars, developmental grievances and a resurgent BJP mean that AAP's iron grip on Delhi may no longer be as firm.

For the BJP, Delhi has been an enigma. The party has ruled at the Centre with an unchallenged majority for a decade, yet its ability to win the capital has remained elusive. The last time the BJP held power in Delhi was in 1998, and since then, it

The capital's high-stakes election pits Kejriwal's populism against BJP's weight and Congress's nostalgia.

has seen the city slip away despite repeated attempts to claw back. This time, however, the party has employed a different strategy: rather than relying on a singular leader, it is focusing on breaking into AAP's bastions.



DELHI

Delhi's poorest voters have long been Kejriwal's most loyal supporters, drawn in by his promises of free electricity, water and public transport. But BJP strategists believe these same voters are growing restless. Complaints about water quality, potholed roads, and stalled infrastructure projects have started to chip away at AAP's appeal.

And yet, the BJP is hobbled by its old problem of lacking a credible local leader. Unlike Kejriwal, whose face is plastered across every hoarding in the city, the BJP has deliberately avoided projecting a chief ministerial candidate. The official line is that the party fights on the strength

of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's brand. But Delhi isn't a Lok Sabha contest; it's an intensely local election, and the absence of a clear challenger to Kejriwal could cost the BJP dearly.

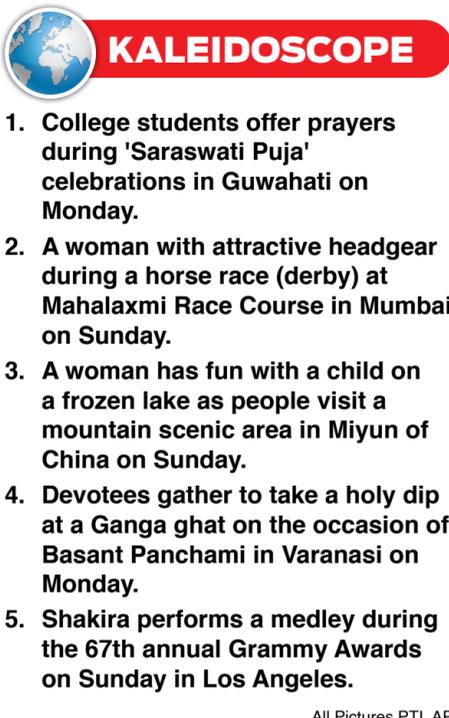
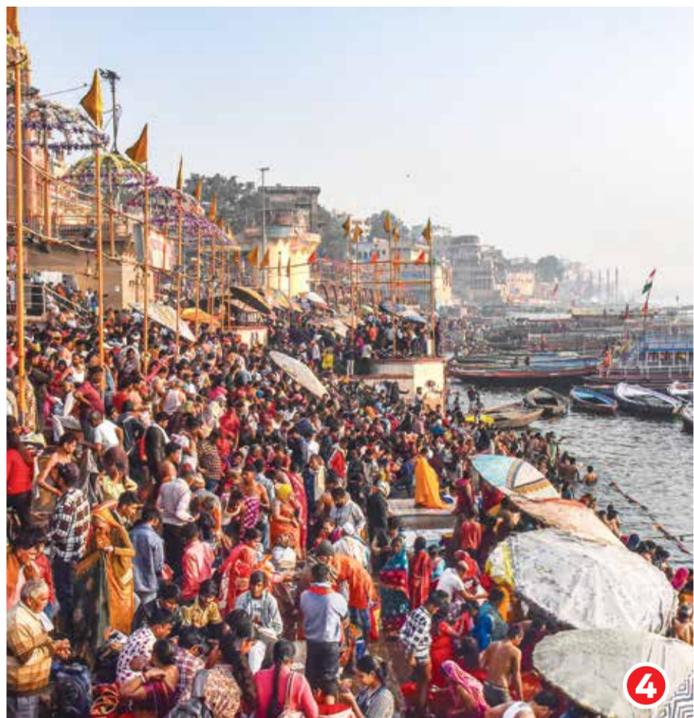
Then there's the Congress, a party that once ruled Delhi for fifteen uninterrupted years under Sheila Dikshit. Its collapse after 2013 was so absolute that it failed to win even a single seat in the last two Assembly elections. Now, it is fighting for relevance.

The Congress's biggest gamble this time is its promise of a Rs.2,100 monthly allowance for women - a move clearly aimed at countering Kejriwal's successful welfare playbook. But even its own supporters quietly acknowledge that an improved vote share is the best it can hope for. Winning seats remains a different challenge altogether. Muslim and Dalit voters, once the bedrock of the Congress's support in Delhi, have largely

moved to AAP. The party's leaders are now working overtime to woo them back, but a decade of neglect is hard to undo in a single election cycle.

For the BJP, a victory would be a much-needed breakthrough in a city that has consistently resisted its advances. For Congress, any gains would signal that its long, painful exile from Delhi's political map is finally ending.

Beyond the political stakes, there is also a cultural and symbolic dimension to the election. As Delhiites prepare to cast their votes, the city stands at an inflection point. The AAP juggernaut is still strong, but for the first time in years, it is facing a real contest. Whether voters opt for continuity or change will not just determine the fate of Delhi's government but will reshape the narrative of Indian politics.



KALEIDOSCOPE

1. College students offer prayers during 'Saraswati Puja' celebrations in Guwahati on Monday.
2. A woman with attractive headgear during a horse race (derby) at Mahalaxmi Race Course in Mumbai on Sunday.
3. A woman has fun with a child on a frozen lake as people visit a mountain scenic area in Miyun of China on Sunday.
4. Devotees gather to take a holy dip at a Ganga ghat on the occasion of Basant Panchami in Varanasi on Monday.
5. Shakira performs a medley during the 67th annual Grammy Awards on Sunday in Los Angeles.

All Pictures PTI, AP

EXPLAINERS

Why Southeast Asia Looks to Nuclear Power?

Southeast Asia's only nuclear power plant, completed four decades ago in Bataan, about 40 miles from the Philippine capital Manila, was built in the 1970s but left idle due to safety concerns and corruption. It has never produced a single watt of energy.

Now the Philippines and other countries in fast-growing Southeast Asia are looking to develop nuclear energy in their quest for cleaner and more reliable energy. Nuclear energy is viewed by its proponents as a climate solution since reactors don't emit the plant-warming greenhouse gases released by burning coal, gas or oil. Advances in technology have helped reduce the risks from radiation, making nuclear plants safer, cheaper to build and smaller.

"We see multiple signs of a new era in nuclear power across the world," said Faith Birol, executive director of the International Energy Agency, adding that it expects 2025 to be a historical high for nuclear-generated electricity because of new plants, new national plans and interest in smaller nuclear reactors.

Nuclear energy has been used for decades in wealthier nations like the US, France and Japan. It produces about 10% of all electricity generated worldwide, with 413 gigawatts of capacity operating in 32 countries, according to the IEA. That is more than Africa's entire generating capacity. The IEA says construction of new nuclear power plants needs to "accelerate significantly" in this decade to meet global targets for ending emissions of greenhouse gases.

Southeast Asia will account for a fourth of global energy demand growth between now and 2035, and fossil fuels account for most of the region's energy capacity. Many countries in the region are showing interest in building nuclear power plants — which typically produce one gigawatt of power per plant — to help clear their smoggy skies and boost capacity.

Indonesia plans 20 nuclear power plants. A Korean company is assessing restarting the mothballed Philippine plant. Vietnam has revived nuclear plans, and Malaysia's future



plans include nuclear energy. Singapore signed a nuclear cooperation agreement with the U.S. last year, and Thailand, Laos, Cambodia, and Myanmar have shown interest in nuclear power.

But nuclear power plants are expensive, take years to build and require a long time to become profitable. Vietnam suspended a nuclear project in 2016 after costs soared to \$18 billion, but on Jan 14, it signed a deal with Russia on atomic energy cooperation.

International financing for nuclear energy is becoming more available, said Henry Preston, a United Kingdom-based communications manager for the World Nuclear Association, noting that 14 major financial institutions endorsed a goal for tripling global nuclear energy capacity by 2050 at the latest Climate Week NYC.

Financing sources are still limited, though. The World Bank does not fund any nuclear energy development projects.

"We hear the call from some stakeholders to explore nuclear power to decarbonize energy and improve energy supply reliability," a World Bank spokesperson said in a recent written response to questions from The Associated Press. "We continue to have conversations with our board, management, and external stakeholders to understand the facts. Any reconsideration of our position is ultimately a decision for our member countries."

Developing robust nuclear energy policies and regulations, now lacking in many countries, could catalyze more funding by reassuring investors, Preston said.

Technological advances are making nuclear power more affordable,

experts say.

Small modular reactors, which advocates say can generate up to roughly one-third the amount of power of a traditional reactor, can be built faster and at lower costs than large power reactors, scaling to fit the needs of a particular location. Advocates say they are safer due to simpler designs, lower core power, and more coolant, giving operators more time to respond in case of accidents.

Critics question how inexpensive the technology might be since smaller reactors have not been widely commercially deployed, said Putra Adhiguna of the Jakarta-based think tank Energy Shift Institute.

The small modular reactors already operating are run by state-owned entities that aren't transparent about performance or costs. The cost of the first such reactor that was to be commercially deployed in the U.S. inflated by about half before it was cancelled, he said. The Idaho-based project had a target of delivering 40 years of electricity at \$55 per megawatt-hour, but project costs climbed to \$89 per MWh, according to a report by The Institute for Energy Economics and Financial Analysis.

Nuclear disasters dimmed earlier enthusiasm for nuclear power in Southeast Asia. Ukraine's 1986 Chernobyl disaster was a factor behind the decision to shelve the project in the Philippines. Meltdowns in 2011 at the Dai-ichi nuclear power plant in Fukushima, Japan, following a catastrophic earthquake and tsunami also raised worries, leading Thailand to halt its nuclear power plans. In 2018, Malaysia's then prime minister Mahathir Mohamad cited such disasters when deciding against using nuclear energy. -AP

Is Aid Surging into Gaza Helpful?

Two weeks after the ceasefire between Hamas and Israel took effect, aid is flooding into the Gaza Strip, bringing relief to a territory suffering from hunger, mass displacement and devastation following 15 months of war.

But Palestinians and aid workers say it's still an uphill battle to ensure the assistance reaches everyone. And looming large is the possibility that fighting will resume if the ceasefire breaks down after the six-week first phase.

As part of the ceasefire agreement, Israel said it would allow 600 aid trucks into Gaza each day, a major increase. Israel estimates that at least 4,200 trucks have entered each week since the ceasefire took hold.

Humanitarian groups say aid distribution is complicated by destroyed or damaged roads, Israeli inspections and the threat of unexploded bombs.

A surge of aid

The main UN food agency, the World Food Programme, said it dispersed more food to Palestinians in Gaza during the first four days of the ceasefire than it did, on average, during any month of the war. Over 32,000 metric tonnes of aid have entered Gaza since the ceasefire, the agency said last week.

Aid is now entering through two crossings in the north and one in the south. Aid agencies said they are opening bakeries and handing out high-energy biscuits, and Hamas police have returned to the streets to help restore order.

Before the ceasefire, aid organisations said delivery was complicated by armed gangs looting the trucks, attacks on aid workers, arduous Israeli inspections and difficulties coordinating with COGAT, the Israeli military body charged with facilitating aid. Israel blamed the UN and humanitarian organisations for failing to deliver aid once it reached Gaza.

There's now the "political will to make everything else work," said Tania Hary, executive director of Gisha, an Israeli organisation dedicated to protecting Palestinians' right to move freely within Gaza.

Food prices are still a challenge

Nadine Jomaa, a young woman in



Bureij in central Gaza, said the aid is not freely available, and she needs to buy canned goods. "We need more food, water, household items for the kitchen and bathroom and women's items," she said.

Although humanitarian officials have long said the best way to prevent extortion is to flood Gaza with aid, Palestinians in the north say that, so far, the influx appears to have only boosted shadowy middlemen. Residents complain that there are not nearly enough tents entering Gaza while non-essential items such as chocolate, nuts and soda are suddenly ubiquitous.

Ahmed Qamar, 34, who returned to live in the ruins of his former home in Jabaliya, said his area has seen just a few dozen aid trucks. "Though aid workers say the Israeli inspection process has accelerated, getting certain types of aid into Gaza is still challenging. Some items are deemed "dual-use," barring them from Gaza because of concerns they could be diverted by militants for military purposes.

Some hospitals and desalination plants still have fuel shortages. And Hamas on Sunday accused Israeli officials of obstructing the delivery of medical supplies and reconstruction machinery. According to a list circulated to humanitarian groups by COGAT and

shared with The Associated Press, desalination and water-collection devices, storage units, tools, tent kits, ovens, water-resistant clothing and equipment for shelter construction teams all require "pre-approval" before entering Gaza. Large tents, sleeping bags, portable toilets, heating pads and vaccines are cleared to enter the strip without Israeli approval.

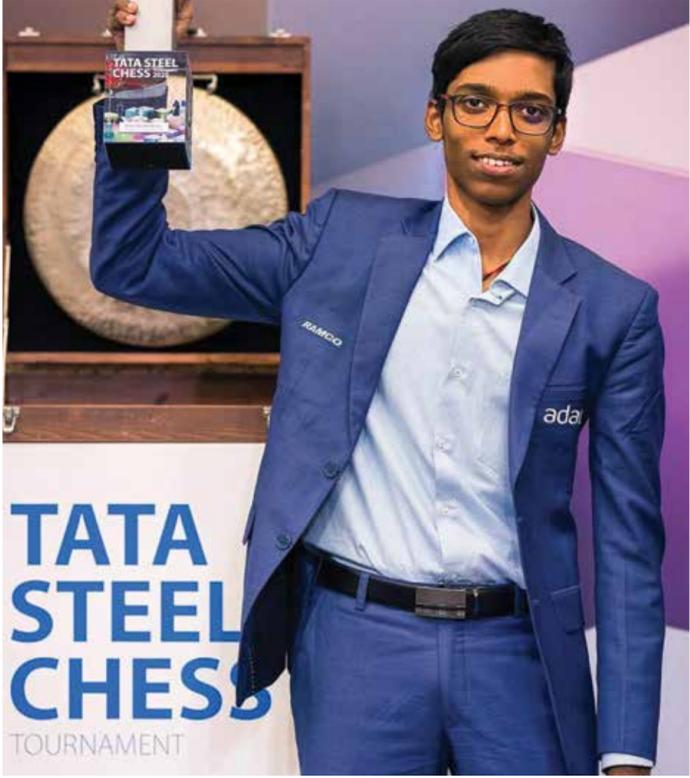
COGAT acknowledged keeping certain items on the dual-use list but said it is still permitting them into Gaza after screening. The agency said tents are not considered dual-use, and Israel has allowed tens of thousands into Gaza in recent weeks "without restriction." It also said Israel has extended the hours crossings are open and allowed road repairs inside Gaza.

Destroyed roads, unexploded ordnance

Roads have been heavily damaged by the war, and unexploded bombs litter the landscape. The UN estimates that 5 per cent to 10 per cent of all ammunition dropped in Gaza has failed to detonate, making the territory potentially perilous for civilians and aid workers.

UNMAS, the UN agency handling unexploded ordnance, said that since the ceasefire took hold, humanitarian convoys and civilians have reported finding large aircraft bombs, mortars and rifle grenades. As they return home, many Palestinians are living in areas where the water network has been destroyed. That makes dehydration and the spread of disease due to poor sanitary conditions and limited medical care a threat. -AP

Pragg beats Gukesh; clinches Tata Chess title



Wijk Aan Zee (Netherlands): The Indian juggernaut in international chess remained unstoppable as Grandmaster R Praggnanandhaa fought through exhaustion and nerves to defeat world champion D Gukesh in a clash of compatriots to clinch the Tata Steel Masters title for the first time in his prolific career.

The bespectacled 19-year-old from Chennai, a city that has become the

cradle of Indian chess, came from behind to upstage the 18-year-old world number three 2-1 in the tie-breaker of the event's 87th edition here on Sunday. This was after both players ended up tied on 8.5 points after losing their 13th-round games. While Gukesh lost to fellow Indian Arjun Erigaisi, Praggnanandhaa went down to Vincent Keymer of Germany.

In the tie-breaker, there

was huge drama typical of two young players looking to win each and every game they played in the tournament as they played the tie-break.

"I am still shaking, it was such a crazy day. I don't know how to express. I didn't really expect to win. Somehow things went my way," Praggnanandhaa told the official tournament website after his triumph.

Asked if it was the most

tense day of his chess career, which began when he was a mere two years of age.

"Today is more special because I won the tournament. Definitely most stressful day," he responded.

The teenager became the first Indian after Viswanathan Anand to win the title. Anand won it thrice (2003, 2004 and 2006) individually when it was called the Corus Chess Tournament, named on the title sponsor of that time. The legend also shared the honours twice (1989 and 1998) in its earliest form of Hoogovens Tournament.

Praggnanandhaa faced the Benoni with reversed colours in the first game of the tie-break and it seemed like he had equalised easily in the middle game.

However, Gukesh had other thoughts as he kept trying and won, thanks to a blunder by Praggnanandhaa that cost him a full rook.

In a must-win second game of the tiebreaker, Praggnanandhaa employed the Trompowsky opening, and this time Gukesh could claim a slight advantage with his black pieces.

"I was just trying to relax, to rest a bit. It was a very difficult game. Against Vincent I didn't play anywhere close to the level I was playing here. I should buy something for Arjun. At some point I thought Gukesh was better," the former world youth champion quipped.

"For sure, (this win) it is the highlight. When I came

here, I wanted to win but the field was very strong. I didn't really think about it much until yesterday," he added.

"I am completely exhausted. I was also quite tired. I just want to get some rest now."

During the tie-break, by just keeping his position together, Praggnanandhaa patiently waited and capitalised on an unforced error from Gukesh to first knock down a pawn and then his technical abilities were enough to see the normal blitz games through with a 1-1 score.

This took the match into sudden death, where Praggnanandhaa drew white and once again Gukesh was better with some imaginative play on the queen side that netted him a pawn.

The sudden death had a time control of two minutes and thirty seconds for white against three for black but that did not deter Praggnanandhaa from trying to defend an inferior endgame.

Just while the position looked completely drawn and another game was on the cards, Gukesh lost control in the battle of nerves and first lost a pawn then his last remaining knight.

Praggnanandhaa showed perfect technique to take the full point and his maiden victory at the Masters.

For Gukesh, this was the second year running when he tied for first position and lost the tiebreaker. In the previous edition, Gukesh had lost to Chinese Wei Yi.

-PTI



Shooters compete in the women's 15m air rifle event at the 38th National Games at Maharana Pratap Sports College in Dehradun on Monday.

Pic: PTI



Dehradun: Fifteen-year-old Bengaluru shooter Jonathan Antony delivered a grand performance on the biggest domestic stage when he outwitted Paris Olympics bronze-medallist Sarabjot Singh and the more fancied Saurabh Chaudhary to clinch the 10m air pistol gold at the National Games here on Monday.

Jonathan, whose shooting career took wings when he won gold in the CBSE South Zone Rifle Shooting Competition in 2022 while studying in eighth standard, shot a superb 240.7 for Karnataka in the final to overcome the challenge of Services veterans Ravinder Singh (silver, 240.3) and Gurpreet Singh (bronze, 220.1) and Sarabjot, who

such talented shooters who have represented India at the highest level makes this victory even more meaningful. Today was my day, and I'm proud of how it all came together," Antony said.

-PTI

Jonathan, 15, clinches air pistol gold

won a bronze in the Paris Olympics' 10m air pistol mixed team event with Manu Bhaker last year.

Sarabjot finished fourth on Monday.

The champion marksman had earlier entered the final placed eighth with a score of 578, denying Olympian and national record holder Saurabh Chaudhary, who also shot an identical score but missed out in the shoot-off to finish ninth and out of contention for the eight-shooter final.

Ravinder topped the qualification with 584, while Sarbjot finished second with an aggregate of 583.

Jonathan showed nerves of steel in the medal round despite some of his shots fetching him low-nine scores.

This would count as Jonathan's biggest achievement in the senior category after the Bengaluru teenager won the 10m air pistol mixed team (junior) gold and bronze in the youth category.

"I'm thrilled with this win. Competing against

Punjab's Sift Kaur Samra secured gold in the women's 50m rifle 3-positions event after shooting a superb 461.2 to overcome the challenge of state-mate Olympian Anjum Moudgil, who shot 458.7.

Surabhi Bharadwaj of Telangana bagged the bronze medal, shooting 448.8. The 23-year-old Samra, an Asian Games gold medallist, produced a commanding performance in the qualification round as well to finish second behind Madhya Pradesh's Ashi Chouksey (598).

Ashi was in a different zone in the qualification but she could not maintain the rhythm in the final to finish a dismal seventh.

"This feels like a come-back for me after the Olympics," said Samra, who had a forgettable Paris Olympics.

-PTI

Veer finishes tied 49th in Bahrain



Bahrain: India's Veer Ahlawat put together a gritty 1-under 71, his third under par round in four days, to finish the 2025 Bahrain Championship at 4-under and tied-49th.

It was a modest finish after his T-27 in Ras Al Khaimah, but Veer showed that he was getting used to the elite Tour, which he got into by topping the PGTI Order of Merit in 2024.

As a result of an alliance between the PGTI and the DP World Tour, the OOM winner gets a card to play on the DPWT.

The 28-year-old DLF Academy golfer birdied four times in the final round with the gains coming from second, eighth, ninth and the 17th.

He dropped shots on

third, 13th and the 16th. His earlier rounds were 70-70-73.

Veer is slated to play the Qatar Masters next and he will be joined by Shubhankar Sharma, a regular on DPWT.

Laurie Canter saved his best until the last as he beat Pablo Larrazabal and Dan Brown in a play-off to win the 2025 Bahrain Championship and claim his second DP World Tour title.

The Englishman had looked like coming up just short after carding an eagle and a birdie in a flawless 69 to share the clubhouse lead on 14 under.

But he was given a lifeline when leader Larrazabal bogeyed the last to set up a play-off with Canter and countryman Brown.

He took full advantage of it, producing a shot-of-the-day contender at the first extra hole to give himself a close-range birdie putt.

Canter made no mistake, nervelessly sinking the winning putt to enter the DP World Tour winner's circle for the second time in a year.



Denmark's players celebrate with the trophy after the final match between Denmark and Croatia at the Handball Men's World Championships in Oslo Norway on Sunday.

Pic: PTI

Preparatory camp for shuttlers

New Delhi: The Indian badminton contingent, including top players like PV Sindhu and Lakshya Sen, will put the finishing touch on their preparations ahead of the Badminton Asia Mixed Team Championships during a five-day preparatory camp, beginning in Guwahati on Tuesday.

Having clinched a bronze at the 2023 edition, the Indian team will be aiming to

improve on their performance and secure a better medal at the prestigious event, scheduled to take place in Qingdao, China, from February 11-16.

The Indian squad is set to depart for the tournament on February 8.

Badminton Association of India (BAI) Secretary General Sanjay Mishra highlighted that the camp will offer valuable exposure to young players at the

National Center of Excellence, giving them the chance to train alongside the country's elite players.

"... a senior team camp here will also allow the juniors an opportunity to learn from the country's finest while also providing India's top talents to train together and create an ideal environment of team bonding ahead of this big team event," said Mishra in a release.

Sanju Samson fractures index finger

New Delhi: Star wicket-keeper-batter Sanju Samson has fractured his index finger after being hit by a Jofra Archer scorch during the fifth T20 International against England in Mumbai and will be out of action for more than a month, side-lining him from the upcoming Ranji Trophy quarterfinals.

It is learnt that Sanju has returned to his home base Thiruvananthapuram and will only start training after completing his rehabilitation at the National Cricket Academy (NCA), he would need NCA's green light before returning to competitive action.

"Samson has fractured his right index finger. It will take him five to six weeks before he can resume proper nets. So there is no chance of him playing the Ranji Trophy quarter-final for Kerala (vs J&K) in Pune from February 8-12," a BCCI source told PTI on conditions of anonymity.

"In all likelihood, his comeback will happen in the IPL for Rajasthan Royals."

Indian women in Team of the Tournament



Kuala Lumpur: Newly-crowned champions India dominated the ICC's 'Team of the Tournament' for the just-concluded women's Under-19 T20 World Cup with four players from the country, including the swashbuckling G Trisha, finding a place in the line-up.

India outclassed South Africa by nine wickets in the final here on Sunday to defend the title that they had first won in 2023.

The hard-hitting Trisha, who was named Player of the Tournament, her opening partner G Kamalini along with left-arm spinner pair of Vaishnavi Sharma and Ayushi Shukla made it to the team, the ICC said in a statement.

Trisha was also the top run-getter in the tournament, making 309 runs with a hundred against Scotland, the first-ever three-digit score in showpiece.

She averaged 77.25 and made runs at a strike rate

of over 147. She also picked up seven wickets with her handy leg-spin.

Kamalini gave solid support to Trisha at the pole position, making 143 runs and her most important innings was an unbeaten 56 from 50 balls against England in the semifinal to send India into the final.

Aayushi took 14 wickets in the tournament and she grabbed two for 9 against SA in the final.

Vaishnavi, who bagged 17 wickets, recorded a sensational 5/5 against Malaysia including a hat-trick.

South Africa's Jemma Botha, England's Davina Perrin, and Australia's Caoimhe Bray, all of whom scored more than 100 runs over the course of the competition, too found a place in the team. Sri Lanka's Chamodi Praboda, Puja Mahato of Nepal and England's Katie Jones were the other members of the team, with South Africa's Kayla Reyneke as the captain.

METHOD TO MADNESS

By Devarchit Varma

Mumbai: In a format as fickle as T20 cricket in which a batter is destined for more failures than success, India's newest power-hitter Abhishek Sharma has learnt quite early that self-belief and fearlessness are essential to increase the probability of a favourable outcome.

It has not yet been a full year since the Punjab batter arrived at the international stage on the back of high promise in domestic cricket, including an im-

mensely successful IPL with Sunrisers Hyderabad in 2024.

But at only 24, Abhishek has begun threatening records which took several years for others to create.

His maiden T20I century was the joint-third fastest for any Indian (46 balls) in only his second match. On Sunday against England, his second T20I ton was the second fastest for any Indian (37 balls).

In between, he smacked a 28-ball century to claim the joint-fastest hundred for any Indian in the pres-

tigious Syed Mushtaq Ali T20 Trophy.

What is the secret of such towering success at a young age, one would wonder. The answer is not too complex for Abhishek, who grew up partnering Shubman Gill for Punjab in the opening slot.

Yuvraj Singh's imprints on Abhishek's flourish are hard to miss but to his credit, he has reciprocated on the field all that the great Indian all-rounder has sounded to him in their countless sessions in myriad set-ups over the last few



years.

"The focus was very much clear (during practice). Yuvi Paaji put all these things in my mind three or four years back," Abhishek told the media

after his 54-ball 135 (13x6s, 7x4s) became the highest individual total by an Indian in T20Is, surpassing his friend Gill (126 off 63 balls in 2023).

"Yuvi paaji was the one to

believe in me, and when someone like Yuvraj Singh is telling you that you are going to play for the country and you are going to win the games, obviously you try to think that 'okay I will play for India and I will do my best,'" he said.

"They (Yuvraj and Punjab coach Wasim Jaffer) have played a major role in my cricketing career and they are going to continue doing that. But as I have said before, it is all because of him (Yuvraj)," he said.

It is only natural for a young cricketer to have

self-doubt and insecurities, but Abhishek's success story tells that believing in the trust shown by well-wishers can go a long way in dealing with those. This support system also includes the Indian team management.

"Because of the way he (Yuvraj) has treated me in the past and (during) every innings, he is someone who is always there for me," said Abhishek, who made 484 runs in 16 IPL matches in 2024 at a strike rate of 204.21 with three fifties.

Abhishek said the confi-

dence given to him by the team management to go all-out and not worry about failures also helps.

And then there was Brian Lara who rates him very highly and gave him an idea that made a huge difference to his approach.

While he has shown incredible promise in an incredibly unpredictable format, Abhishek knows how far he can go in making or breaking records, like Yuvraj's six sixes in an over.

"I don't think that record can be broken anytime soon."

-PTI