

# THE PERFECT VOICE



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## In second term, Trump to meet Netanyahu first

THE ISRAEL PM SAYS HE WILL DISCUSS 'VICTORY OVER HAMAS' WITH THE US PRESIDENT

Tel Aviv: Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said Sunday he will discuss "victory over Hamas," countering Iran and expanding diplomatic relations with Arab countries in his meeting with US President Donald Trump.

Tuesday's meeting at the White House will be Trump's first with a foreign leader since returning to office. It comes as US and Arab mediators begin the daunting work of brokering the next phase of a ceasefire agreement to wind down the 15-month war in the Gaza Strip and release dozens of militant-held hostages.

Hamas, which has reasserted its control over Gaza since the ceasefire took hold last month, has said it will not release the hostages set to go free in the second phase without an end to the war and the full withdrawal of Israeli forces.

Netanyahu is under mounting pressure from far-right governing partners to resume the war after the first phase ends in early March. He has said Israel is committed

to victory over Hamas and the return of all the hostages captured by the militants' Oct. 7, 2023, attack that triggered the war.

It's unclear where Trump stands. He has been a staunch supporter of Israel, but has also pledged to end wars in the Middle East and took credit for helping to broker the ceasefire agreement. The deal has paused

the fighting and led to the release of 18 hostages as well as hundreds of Palestinians imprisoned by Israel.

An Israeli airstrike on a vehicle in central Gaza wounded five people Sunday, including a child who was in critical condition, according to Al-Awda Hospital, which received the casualties. Israel's military said it fired on the vehicle because it was bypassing a checkpoint while heading north in violation of the ceasefire agreement.

Netanyahu embraces Trump's call for peace through strength'

In a statement ahead of his departure, Netanyahu said he and Trump would discuss "victory over Hamas, achieving the release of all our hostages and dealing with the Iranian terror axis in all its components," referring to Iran's alliance of militant groups across the region, including Hamas.

He said that by working together, they could "strengthen security, broaden the circle of peace and achieve a remarkable era of peace through strength."



An aerial view of devotees at Sangam ahead of Basant Panchmi Amrit Snan during the ongoing 'Maha Kumbh Mela' in Prayagraj on Sunday. Pic: PTI

## BC largest chunk of population in TL

AFTER BIHAR, THE TELANGANA CASTE SURVEY SET TO IGNITE DEBATE

Hyderabad: Backward classes other than Muslim minorities at 46.25 per cent form the largest chunk of the total 3.70 crore population of Telangana, according to the caste survey conducted in the state.

The population of BCs is followed by the Scheduled Castes (17.43 per cent), Scheduled Tribes (10.45), backward classes among Muslims (10.08) and Other Castes (13.31), OCs among Muslims (2.48) in terms of the percentage of population.

The state planning department which conducted the survey submitted its report to the cabinet sub-committee headed by state Civil Supplies Minister N Uttam Kumar Reddy on Sunday.

The minister said the report would be presented before the state cabinet

on February 4. On the same day, it would be placed before a special session of the legislative assembly for debate.

In terms of numbers, the population of SCs is 61,84,319, STs is 37,05,929, BCs other than Muslim minorities is 1,64,09,179, BCs among Muslim minorities 35,76,588, Muslim (OC) is 8,80,424.

Total Muslim percentage in the state is 12.56, Reddy told reporters here.

Total households in the state is 1,15,78,457, while the total households surveyed is 1,12,15,134.

Telangana provides reservations to backward Muslims in the backward classes category.

Reddy, who termed the report as historic, said the survey covered

3,54,77,554 individuals (96.9 per cent of population).

He said 3.1 per cent of the population (16 lakh) were left out of the survey as they were either not available or did not show interest in participating in it.

"This process of preparing the report and the report itself is a landmark achievement to the government of Telangana which will go down in the annals of social history of the country," the minister said.

Through the survey, data-driven welfare and data-driven opportunities in social, economic, educational, political fields would be available to the "poorest of the poor, weakest of the weak and marginalised sections in Telangana", he said.

-PTI

## Maaya defeats Jessica

Mumbai: Maaya Rajeshwaran staged a spectacular comeback to defeat Jessica Failla in the qualifying draw of the L&T Mumbai Open WTA 125 Series at the Cricket Club of India in Mumbai.

In a fiercely contested battle, Maaya Rajeshwaran showcased remarkable determination to outlast Jessica Failla 6-7, 6-1, 6-4. After dropping the first set in a tense tiebreak, Rajeshwaran found her rhythm, dominating the second set with powerful groundstrokes and impeccable court coverage. The third set was tightly contested, but Rajeshwaran's composure under pressure sealed her well-deserved victory.

Second-seeded Petra Marcinko's campaign came to an abrupt end as she retired while trailing 1-2 against Aleksandar Krunic. The reason for her withdrawal was not immediately disclosed, but her departure left a significant void in the tournament.

The main draws for the tournament will commence from Monday.

## Two Indian students killed, two injured in car crash

By Aditi Khanna

London: Two Indian students in their 20s have been killed and two others remain in hospital with serious injuries after the car they were travelling in struck a tree in County Carlow, southern Ireland, according to the Irish police.

Cherekuri Suresh Chowdhary and Chithoori Bhargav were pronounced dead at the scene of the fatal road collision early on Friday morning by the local Gardaí, or police, and emergency services.

The Indian Embassy in the Irish capital of Dublin issued a condolence message on social media.

"Embassy of India in Dublin conveys its deepest condolences on the sad demise of two Indian nationals Mr. Cherekuri Suresh Chowdhary and Mr. Chithoori Bhargav in a car accident in Co. Carlow."

"The Embassy team is in touch with the family and friends of the deceased and also extending all possible support and assistance to two Indian nationals injured in the accident," it

added.

"A black Audi A6 was travelling towards Carlow town when it traversed the road and hit a tree at Graiguenaspiddoge," said Superintendent Anthony Farrell from Carlow garda station.

"The car is believed to have travelled from the direction of the Mount Leinster area, through Fenagh and on to Carlow... All of those in the car are part of our Indian community living together in Carlow town. Our sincere sympathies are extended to the community at this time," he said.

The two other passengers of the car, a man and a woman aged in their 20s, were taken to St. Luke's General Hospital in Kilkenny with serious but non-life-threatening injuries.

"Gardaí are aware of a number of images being posted on social media following the collision. It is not helpful to the Garda investigation but more importantly to a family and friends who are mourning the loss of a loved one. I would ask those people to

take the images down immediately," added Superintendent Farrell.

According to 'The Irish Times', the four friends had been sharing a house in the local area and had recently finished third-level education at South East Technological University (SETU) in Carlow. One of them is said to have been working in the local pharmaceutical company MSD. A fundraiser for expenses related to funeral costs and related expenses raised more than EURO 25,000 in less than 24 hours.

In an online post, organiser Venkat Vuppala said: "We are deeply saddened by the untimely passing of Bhargav Chitturi and Suresh Cherukuri. It is with great sorrow that we announce the tragic car accident on January 31st at Carlow, that claimed the lives of these two Indian students from SETU Carlow. "In this challenging period, we aim to unite in support of their families to help cover funeral costs and other financial challenges they may encounter."

## Porter arrested for rape on train

Mumbai: A porter has been arrested for allegedly raping a woman on a long-distance train at Mumbai's Bandra Terminus, a police official said on Sunday.

The "middle-aged" woman and her son arrived on Saturday night at Bandra Terminus via an outstation train. After getting down, she entered another train that had pulled into the other side of the platform, the official said.

The other train had no passengers at the time, said the Government Railway Police (GRP) official.

However, a porter was present on the second train and he allegedly raped the woman, the official said, citing the FIR.

The accused fled the scene after allegedly sexually assaulting the woman. The woman then approached the Bandra GRP police station and filed a complaint.

The railway police went through footage from several surveillance cameras to track down the porter and arrested him.

## Abhishek-led India crush England



Mumbai: India crushed England by 150 runs in the fifth and final T20I to take the series 4-1 with opener Abhishek Sharma scoring a blazing century, which was followed by a collective effort from the bowlers at the Wankhede Stadium.

Asked to bat first, a fired-up Abhishek unleashed seven boundaries and 13 sixes en route to 135 (54 balls) as he scored the second-fastest T20I century by an Indian batter off 37 balls to help the hosts amass 247 for 9.

Indian bowlers Mohammed Shami (3/25), Varun Chakravarty (2/25), Shivam Dube (2/11) and Abhishek Sharma (2/3) then stifled the England batters, managing to dismiss them for 97 runs with 9.3 overs to spare.

Abhishek missed equaling Rohit Sharma's record of being the fastest Indian to score a T20I ton by just two balls. Rohit had hit a 35-ball T20I century for India against Sri Lanka in 2017.

Abhishek also scored a 17-ball half-century, which

was the second fastest by an India, when he hit Jamie Overton for a massive six in the fifth over. He also shared a 115-run second-wicket partnership with Tilak Varma (24).

**Brief Scores:** India 247 for 9 in 20 overs (Abhishek Sharma 135, Tilak Varma 24, Shivam Dube 30; Brydon Carse 3/38, Mark Wood 2/32).

England 97 all out in 10.3 overs (Phil Salt 55; Shami 3/25, Varun Chakravarty 2/25, Shivam Dube 2/11, Abhishek Sharma 2/3).

## Vaishnav Thakur breaks snatch national record

THE GOLD, HOWEVER, GOES TO 'ONE-LEGGED' JAGDISH

Dehradun: Maharashtra weightlifter Vaishnav Thakur broke the snatch national record in the men's 102kg category but settled for silver as he was beaten in total lift by Services' Jagdish Vishwakarma who completed his clean-and-jerk effort standing on just one leg at the National Games here Sunday.

Vaishnav lifted 160kg in the snatch section, surpassing the previous national record of 157kg which was in the name of Jagdish. But a poor clean-and-jerk effort of 175kg meant that Vaishnav finished second in total lift (335kg).

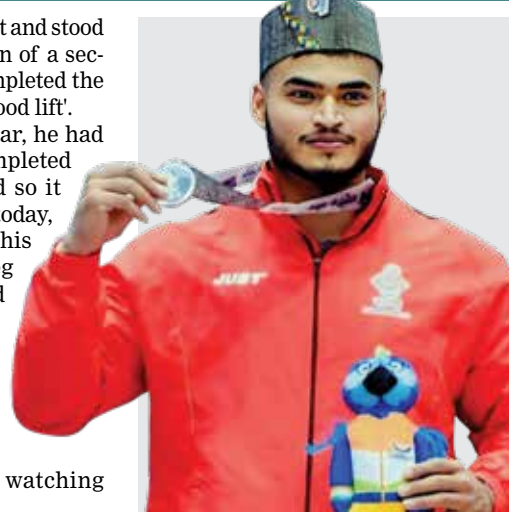
Jagdish, who could only come up with 152kg in snatch, lifted 193kg in clean and jerk for a total of 345kg to win the gold, while Haryana's Harshit Sehrawat (329kg) took the bronze.

Just like he had done in a competition last year, Jagdish lifted his left leg

after his clean-and-jerk effort and stood on just one leg for a fraction of a second. But by then he had completed the lift, meaning that it was a 'good lift'.

"In a competition last year, he had lifted his leg before he completed the clean-and-jerk lift and so it was declared a 'no-lift'. But today, he had already completed his lift when he stood on one leg and by then the judges had recorded it as a 'good lift'," an official at the venue told PTI.

Medals are awarded only for total lift in the National Games. "We have all grown up watching



Jagdish bhai, and breaking his record in front of him is a dream come true. Though he beat me overall, today is special," said Vaishnav.

Jagdish, while acknowledging the loss of his record, praised Vaishnav, stating, "I always tell the youngsters, don't focus on medals, focus on breaking records. Vaishnav did that today, but I am not done yet, this has fired me up even more."

In the women's 81kg category, Vanishita Verma of Chandigarh secured the gold medal with a total lift of 208kg, successfully lifting 93kg in snatch and 115kg in clean and jerk.

Manpreet of Punjab claimed the silver with a total of 197kg (85kg

snatch, 112kg clean and jerk), while Anjana Sreejith of Kerala took the bronze with a total of 196kg.

The women's 87kg event saw Tamil Nadu's Arockiya Alish clinch gold with a total lift of 221kg, followed by Modhumrita Baruah of Assam, who won silver with 208kg, and Usha of Karnataka, who secured bronze with 197kg.

In the men's 109kg category, Rajasthan's Harcharan Singh dominated the event, lifting 160kg in snatch and 187kg in clean and jerk, to secure the gold medal with a total of 347kg.

Mohd Jameer Hussain (Services) won the silver with a total of 337kg (150kg snatch, 187kg clean and jerk). Manish of Haryana attempted a national record of 193kg in clean and jerk but failed, settling for bronze with total lift of 331kg. -PTI





# Farmers, state ignored, says Opposition on Budget

By Quaid Najmi

**Mumbai:** The state Congress and All India Kisan Sabha (AIKS) slammed the Union Budget presented by Finance Minister Nirmla Sitharaman, terming it as 'directionless', 'ignoring' Maharashtra and 'belying' hopes of farmers, and the dream of a USD 5 Trillion economy still distant.

Congress' ex-Leader of Opposition Vijay Wadettiwar, General Secretary Sachin Sawant and AIKS' General Secretary Dr. Ajit Navale reacted strongly to the budgetary proposals and the lacunae in it.

"This budget is not for India but for Bihar, which is supporting the central government and faces elections later this year. The budget has meted out unfair treatment to Maharashtra, which pays the highest amount of taxes to the Centre. It has disappointed all sections of society like farmers, youth, women and commoners," said Wadettiwar.

Navale said that the farmers' main expectations of slashing production costs remain unfulfilled, as the budget doesn't speak of reducing the costs of fertilisers, seeds, pesticides, which could have brought down the cost of cultivation and given real benefit to the agriculturists.

Sawant claimed that the budget has proved that the country's economic policies are going in the wrong direction and the Congress policies were correct.

"The government has only focused on increasing supply, the Corporate tax was reduced but their profits did not increase and hence employment also remained stagnant. Though corporate loans were written off by banks, there was no hike in private investments or exports. FDI which was 3.6 percent of GDP during the UPA rule came down to a mere 0.8 percent and foreign institutions are fleeing the stock markets as corporates are not making profits," said Sawant.



Vijay Wadettiwar

Touching upon unemployment, Wadettiwar said that the budget has not come up with a policy to increase job opportunities for the youth, and since Make In India did not work, a new policy, National Manufacturing Mission has been brought, meaning old medicine in a new bottle.

"The government says funds are provided for Metro and railways in Mumbai, no concrete provisions are made for the rest of Maharashtra. The middle-class is suffering due to tax burdens and to check the government's falling popularity, some tax exemptions are given. It's a 'make-it-or-break-it' budget," contended Wadettiwar.

Navale reiterated that AIKS has consistently demanded a full loan waiver as more than half the farmers in the country are in debts, but instead, the government has been making loan write-offs for the corporates even without announcing it.

"The farmers have entered into debt-trap, but the budget did utter a single word about farm loans waiver, again belying the high anticipations of the farming community," Navale pointed out.

Elaborating, Sawant said with



peoples' purchasing power at the lowest now, something was needed to boost demand by putting money in the hands of the people, leading to small tax reliefs, "admitting its policy failures, and not indicating from where the Rs. 126,000-crore for this will come".

On the other hand, to achieve a fiscal deficit target, the outlay for many other schemes like MGN-REGA, Food Security and Matru Vandana will be cut, not discussion on the expenditure for education and health which is constantly being slashed, what will happen to infrastructure, ongoing development works and strengthening the rural economy, he said.

Sawant said post-Covid 19, the Make In India stands exposed as jobs in the manufacturing sector were halved while 56 lakhs have been included in the agriculture sector though its contribution to the economy has remained at 18 percent.

"To prep rural demand, the MSP must be given with legal support as demanded by the Congress, but now the farmers are even burdened with GST on farming inputs that has further dropped their incomes," rued Sawant.

Against this, inflation in all sectors of the economy is skyrocketing, salaries and wages are plummeting, household savings are at rock-bottom in the past 47 years, fuel costs are zooming and hence reduction in fiscal tax won't make much difference, he argued.

"The fact is that 24 lakh SMEs have shut down and over 80 lakh jobs have been wiped out in the past few years. The challenge is to hike exports, private investments and individual purchasing power. There is a need to increase spending on education and health which is now only 0.36% and 0.27% of the budget," said Sawant.

Taking a jibe, he said that when the government aims at a USD Five Trillion economy and touts India as a 'developed country', then why is there a slowdown in growth, a per capita income (PCI) growth of only 4.52% and the Rupee depreciating.

"As per the World, if the PCI growth rate remains the same, it will take India 75 years to touch 25% of the PCI of the USA. In other words, if the USD rate had been Rs 58 as it was during the UPA, the USD Five Trillion economy could have been achieved last year

## MPSC aspirants offered exam paper; three held

**Pune:** Pune police have arrested three persons who allegedly called up aspirants preparing for the Maharashtra Public Service Commission (MPSC) exam and offered them the question paper for Rs 40 lakh, police said on Sunday.

However, there was no evidence that the question paper had been leaked, they said.

An official said the Pune police's crime branch on Saturday arrested the accused, Deepak Gayaram Gaydhane, Sumit Kailas Jadhav and Yogesh Surendra Waghmare.

He said Suvarna Kharat, the secretary of MPSC, lodged a police complaint on Friday that some students preparing for the competitive exam received phone calls from an unknown number, with the caller offering them the exam paper for Rs 40 lakh.

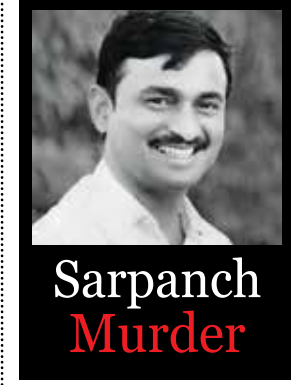
Deputy Commissioner of Police (crime branch) Nikhil Pingle said, "Three persons have been arrested in the case so far. Two accused were apprehended from the Chakan area, while another man was arrested from Nagpur."

He said as per the investigations so far, there is no evidence of the exam paper being leaked, and the matter is being probed further.

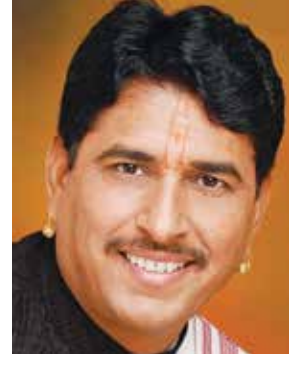
The official said the police have also recovered a list of 24 students the accused have called or were planning to call.

A case has been registered against the trio under sections 62, 318 (4), 353 (1B) and other relevant provisions of the Bharatiya Nyay Sanhita and the Maharashtra Competitive Exam Act, police said.

## Vanjari community head supports slain sarpanch's kin



Sarpanch Murder



Namdev Shastri

**Mumbai:** Namdev Shastri, a revered figure in the Vanjari community, has extended his support to the family of slain sarpanch Santosh Deshmukh who met him on Sunday.

The assurance comes days after Shastri claimed state minister Dhananjay Munde was being targeted.

The murder of the Mas-sajog village head last December triggered a political storm in Maharashtra as one of the accused in a related extortion case is a close aide of NCP MLA Dhananjay Munde.

"We will not forgive the accused. We will not shield them. From the seat of Bhagwangad, I give you my word that the accused will have no support here."

"Bhagwangad will stand with Santosh Deshmukh and his family. There is no need for concern," Shastri told Dhananjay Deshmukh, brother of the murdered sarpanch, and other family members.

Bhagwangad, situated on the border of Beed and Ahilyanagar districts, is the religious seat of the Vanjari community Munde belongs to.

Shastri said the Deshmukh family always re-

spected Bhagwan Baba and upheld harmony in their village.

The opposition has demanded Dhananjay Munde's resignation for his links with the extortion case accused Walmik Karad.

Dhananjay Deshmukh told reporters that the murder should not be viewed through the lens of caste.

"Bhagwangad will always stand with our family. We have shown the true background of the accused and the cases against them. My brother was associated with Bhagwangad," he said.

He claimed that the Deshmukh family never engaged in caste-based politics and that his brother lost his life while trying to protect a Dalit man.

"We have no criminal background. Santosh was a sarpanch for 15 years. The accused have multiple cases against them. Their mindset needs to be examined. Those supporting the accused are the ones bringing in caste narratives," Dhananjay claimed.

He said labelling public representatives as casteist will deter them from seeking justice. "Those demanding justice should not be targeted".

## Task force for AI varsity: Shelar

**Mumbai:** Maharashtra is set to establish the first Artificial Intelligence (AI) university in the country and a task force has been formed for the planning and implementation of the project, state Information Technology Minister Ashish Shelar has said.

The university will promote research and development in AI and related fields and will be a centre of excellence, encouraging collaboration between the industry, academia and government, Shelar said on Saturday evening.

The task force includes experts from the academia, industry and government.

It will work on creating an institution focused on AI education, research and innovation. This initiative aligns with the BJP's election manifesto, which highlighted the use of technology for development, Shelar said.

"The university will promote research and development in AI and related fields. It will also focus on skill development, technological innovation and policy formulation. The aim is to make Maharashtra a centre for AI education and innovation," he said.

The task force will be chaired by the Information Technology department's principal secretary.

It includes directors of the IIT Mumbai and IIM Mumbai, representatives from organisations like Google India, Mahindra Group, and L&T, and officials from the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology, Government of India.

Experts from the Rajiv Gandhi Science and Technology Commission and the Data Security Council of India are also part of the task force.

"The AI university will be a centre of excellence, fostering collaboration between the industry, academia and government. This initiative will not only position Maharashtra as a global leader in AI but also contribute to India's technological advancement," Shelar said.

The task force has held two meetings and is working on finalising the roadmap for the university's establishment. The government's decision reflects its focus on making Maharashtra a hub for technology and innovation, the minister said.



Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis visits a stall by tribal entrepreneurs in Nagpur on Sunday.

Pic: PTI

## Maoists kill man on suspicion

**Gadchiroli:** Maoists on Sunday killed a 45-year-old man in Maharashtra's Gadchiroli district while claiming he was a police informer, officials said.

The incident took place at Kiyer village under Bhamragad tehsil in south Gadchiroli in the early hours of Sunday, they said.

As per preliminary information, Maoists strangled to death an "innocent civilian", identified as Sukhran Madavi, resident of Kiyer village, a senior police official said.

In a pamphlet found near the body, Maoists falsely claimed that the man was a police informer and had

helped police to open new camps, including in Pengunda area of the district, he said.

This is the first civilian murder executed by Maoists here this year, the official said.

An investigation was on into the incident, the police said.

## Two arrested over fake documents

**Mumbai:** Police have arrested two persons for allegedly submitting fake documents to obtain birth certificates in Malegaon in Nashik district, an official said on Sunday.

Police have registered a case against three persons in connection with the offence, he said.

Two of the arrested accused were produced in the court of Chief Judicial Magistrate (Malegaon) S J Dolare, who sent them to police custody till February 4, noting that the offence was "serious in nature".

According to the police, a first information report (FIR) was registered against the accused, Sayyed Sajid Sayyed Wahab, Shabana Bano Sheikh Haneef and Nazma Bano Abdul Shakoor, based on a complaint by BJP leader Kirit Somaia to the tehsildar.

An official said that in December 2024, the trio submitted fake Aadhaar cards, ration cards, school leaving certificates, voter IDs and other documents to the tehsildar office to get birth certificates.

He said a case has been registered against the ac-

cused for forgery, cheating and other relevant charges under the Bharatiya Nyay Sanhita (BNS).

Somaia, in his complaint, claimed that the three accused were Bangladeshis, and an investigation is underway.

The police submitted in court that the two arrested accused needed to be interrogated to find out if anyone else helped them in the alleged crime.

The defence, however, pointed out that the alleged crime took place between December 4 and December 13, 2024, but the FIR was registered in January 2025.

The defence lawyer argued that as all the documents submitted by the two accused were with the tehsildar, their physical custody was not required.

He said that Wahab is a college student and all his documents are available with the college, while Nazma's name was changed after marriage, and the tehsildar issued their birth certificates after scrutiny.

The court, however, noted that "perusal of the record shows that offence is serious in nature".

## Boy cooked up 'firing' story

**Jalna:** A 17-year-old boy who claimed he was shot at and injured by three unidentified men at a toll plaza in Jalna district on January 31 was allegedly lying to cover up his act of testing a country-made revolver, a police official said on Sunday.

A probe began after the teen was rushed to a hospital in neighbouring Chhatrapati Sambhajinagar with a bullet wound on his chest, the Chandanjhira police station official said.

"At the time, he told us he was shot at by three motorcycle-borne persons while returning home. He claimed the accused snatched Rs 95,000 from him. However, we found inconsistencies in his statement. Our probe found he and a 19-year-old man had illegally bought a country-made revolver and were testing it in Chandanjhira," the official said.

The teen boy sustained a bullet wound after the revolver accidentally discharged while he was trying to switch on his mobile phone torch to dispel the darkness in the area, the official informed.

"The bullet went through the phone and hit his chest.

## 'Ready to facilitate rapprochement between two Senas'

**Mumbai:** Shiv Sena minister Sanjay Shirsat has said he is ready to facilitate reconciliation between his party and the Uddhav Thackeray-led Shiv Sena (UBT) but "hearts must meet first".

The Shiv Sena spokesperson, in an interview with a Marathi channel on Saturday, said he and many of his party colleagues share cordial ties with the Shiv Sena (UBT) leaders even today.

Shirsat said he is pained by the split in the Bal Thackeray-founded Shiv

Sena, which is now headed by Maharashtra Deputy Chief Minister Eknath Shinde.

Asked if he was ready to facilitate any efforts towards rapprochement if he gets an opportunity, Shirsat said, "I will do it, but hearts need to meet first."

Leaders of the two parties still meet each other warmly, he said.

"But the distance has become such that if it's not bridged now, it will be difficult to mend ties later," Shirsat said.

Asked whether Sena



(UBT) leader Aaditya Thackeray, the son of former Maharashtra CM Uddhav Thackeray, could facilitate a patch-up, Shirsat



said the youth leader, who is in his 30s, was not in a position to do so because of his age.

"We can forgive each

other's mistakes. If you think you can come together by insulting each other then that's not possible," Shirsat said referring to attacks by the Shiv Sena (UBT) leaders.

The original Shiv Sena, then under Uddhav Thackeray, split in June 2022 after Shinde led a rebellion, walked away with his supporters and aligned with the BJP to become chief minister of Maharashtra. Subsequently, he got the party name and its 'bow and arrow' symbol.

Since the division, the

two Sena factions have relentlessly attacked each other.

In the Maharashtra assembly elections held last year, the Sena headed by Shinde, a partner in the BJP-led Mahayuti alliance, won 57 of the state's 288 seats.

By contrast, the Sena (UBT), which has aligned with the Congress and Sharad Pawar's NCP (SP) under the Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA), bagged only 20. Altogether, the Mahayuti won 230 seats, while the MVA got just 46.

### QUOTE OF THE DAY

"India was constantly invaded. But for 125 years, only the Marathas ruled this region. No one else ruled. The rest came from outside. We are the rulers. What's wrong if we want to develop our language?"



Raj Thackeray, President, MNS



# BMC budget tomorrow

FOCUS ON INFRASTRUCTURE AND TAX REVISION EXPECTED

By Correspondent

**Mumbai:** The Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) is set to unveil its budget for the financial year 2025-26 on Tuesday. According to a source, a substantial share of the funding is likely to get routed towards key infrastructure projects like the Mumbai Coastal Road (Phase 2) and Goregaon Mulund Link Road (GMLR).

This will be the third time that the budget will be announced and submitted by the municipal commissioner, in the absence of an elected body in the BMC.

Last year, the BMC had presented a budget of Rs 59,954 crore, which was 13.9% over the budget estimate of 2024-24. Of the total budget size, Rs 31,774 crore or 53% was earmarked as capital expenditure last year.

According to the BMC data, nearly 52% of the capital expenditure has been utilised till December 31, 2024, with departments like solid waste management (SWM), coastal road, bridges, roads and Water Supply Project (WSP) witnessing substantial spend in the budget.

Civic officials said these key areas will continue to receive substantial funding in the upcoming budget as many of these projects are in the completion stage. The officials stated that one of the key focus areas would be the civic body's ongoing project of setting up seven Sewage Treatment Plants



(STP) in Mumbai at a cost of Rs 30,000 crore.

The BMC will be starting construction work for the second phase of the coastal road tunnel, which will connect Versova in western suburbs with Bhayander in the Mumbai Metropolitan Region (MMR). The first phase between Nariman Point and Bandra Worli Sea Link (BWSL) became operational in 2024. From August this year, the excavation of the two underground tunnels for GMLR are also set to be initiated by the BMC. The civic authorities also maintained that by December 31, 2025, the authorities aim to achieve 70% of the ongoing road concretisation works in Mumbai.

**Expect revision of taxes**

The BMC may revise its existing tax rates. The property tax is the major source of revenue to the civic body, which is revised after every five years and it was in 2015 when the tax

rate was last revised by the authorities. As a result, there has been no substantial rise in BMC's revenue generation.

According to the BMC's data, the SWM projects department has seen the highest utilisation of budget, with 88.87% of the allocated funds being spent till the end of December. This was followed by 78.86% utilisation by the Water Supply Project (WSP) department and 70.96% in the bridges department. Nearly 69.16% of the total allocated funds were utilised by the Coastal Road and 58.64% were utilised by the roads and traffic department.

Furthermore, the budget data also showed that the Brihanmumbai Electric Supply and Transport (BEST) undertaking has used 79.39% of the total budget that was allocated at the start of this financial year.

## Weed, gold, diamonds seized

**Mumbai:** Hydroponic weed, gold and diamonds worth more than Rs 50 crore were seized, and eight persons have been arrested at the Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj International Airport here, a customs official said on Sunday.

According to Mumbai Customs, the seizures were made during a special drive between January 28 and January 31.

Officials seized 50.11 kg of hydroponic weed worth Rs 50.116 crore, diamonds worth Rs 93.8 lakh and 2.073 kg of gold worth Rs 1.5 crore, the official said. I

He said six cases were registered, and eight people were arrested under the Customs Act during the drive.

**Eight booked for power theft**

**Thane:** Police have registered a case against eight persons on charges of electricity theft of more than Rs 5.35 lakh in Thane district, officials said.

Officials of the Maharashtra State Electricity Distribution Company Limited (MSEDCL) conducted a raid on several houses at Kongoan in Bhiwandi area on January 31.

They found some residents had bypassed the electricity meters to draw power directly from service wires connected to the electric poles.

The unauthorised connections allowed them to use power without recording the consumption between May 2023 and October 2024, leading to a substantial loss for the power supply company, an official from Shanti Nagar police station said. A case has been registered against eight persons under provisions of the Electricity Act.



Bollywood actor Aamir Khan waves as he arrives at Wankhede Stadium before the start of the fifth Twenty20 cricket match between India and England in Mumbai on Sunday.

Pic: PTI

## Merc injures five; driver arrested

**Mumbai:** Five persons, including two foreigners, were injured at Mumbai international airport on Sunday morning after a Mercedes car hit them, a police official said.

The driver of the luxury car, which was at Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj International Airport to drop off a passenger, lost control of the vehicle, resulting in the incident in the parking lot of Terminal 2, the Sahar police station official said.

"The driver of the car, identified as Navi Mumbai resident Parshuram Chincholappa Dadanavre (34), was arrested for rash driving and negligence. The five injured comprise two foreign nationals, who are admitted to Nanavati Hospital, and three airport crew members, who are undergoing treatment in Cooper Hospital," he said. "Prima facie, it seems

Dadanavre pushed the accelerator instead of the brake, which led to the Mercedes car rushing ahead at a speed breaker at airport gate number one. The vehicle has been impounded as part of the probe," the official informed.

"This morning at CSMIA, a driver lost control of his car in T2's de-

parture lane, injuring five people. The airport medical team immediately rushed to the spot to provide first aid. The injured have been admitted to hospital for treatment. CSMIA is working with the police and other teams to ensure the safety of passengers and continuation of operations," a CSMIA spokesperson said.



## Businessman dies during ED raid

**Mumbai:** Dinesh Nandwana, the 62-year-old founder, promoter and chairman emeritus of Vakrangee, a Mumbai-based technology company, died on Friday while an Enforcement Directorate (ED) team was conducting a search at his Andheri residence.

Nandwana's health deteriorated while the central agency's Jalandhar unit officials were conducting a search at around 11.30 am, the police said.

"He was rushed to the hospital but died before admission. Prima facie, it looks like he had a heart attack but we are awaiting the postmortem report to ascertain the exact cause of death," said Ravindra Chavan, Senior Inspector, MIDC police station. The police have registered an accidental death report.

## Five held with banned cough syrup

**Thane:** Police have arrested five persons for illegally possessing a large number of bottles of two banned cough syrups valued at Rs 31.75 lakh in Thane district, an official said.

These narcotic-laced cough syrups are often misused for intoxication, posing a serious public health hazard.

The accused were in possession of the drugs despite knowing that their sale was prohibited without proper authorisation, police said.

Based on a tip, the five persons were apprehended in Bhiwandi town on January 31, an official from Narpoli police station said.

The crime branch sleuths police seized 17,640 bottles of the cough syrups, having codeine phosphate (a type of opiate) and other chemicals. They were stored in 147 boxes and were intended for illegal sale, he said.

"We are probing from where the accused obtained the stock and to whom they intended to sell it. Further arrests may follow as we uncover the larger supply chain," the official said.

A case has been registered against the five persons, in the age group of 24 to 45 years.



Singers Sukriti and Pakriti perform during Indian Street Premier League 2025 on Saturday.

## Plans to revive Haffkine Institute

**Mumbai:** Minister Narhari Zirwal on Sunday announced plans to revive the Haffkine Institute for Public Health, which has faced financial difficulties since 2018-19.

The institute, known for producing healthcare products and exporting them to 45 countries, plays a role in global disease control efforts but has struggled in recent years.

Zirwal, the minister for food and drug administration, said the state government is committed to restoring the institute's operations.

He said, "Haffkine Institute is an important institution, and we will work towards its revival. A meeting will be held with Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis and Deputy Chief Minister Ajit Pawar to plan a long-term solution."

The minister said a six-month timeline has been set for restructuring efforts, including financial reforms and new research initiatives.

"There will be a transformation. This institution will return to profitability," Zirwal said.

As part of the plan, the institute will establish a Bi-



osafety Level-3 (BSL-3) facility, a requirement for securing UNICEF's approval for vaccine production. This will enable the institute to manufacture N-OPV vaccines and develop vaccines for future health emergencies.

Zirwal said strengthening the institute aligns with the government's broader healthcare strategy.

"The focus is on turning Haffkine into a centre for research and training," he said.

The minister said the government aims to position the institute for long-term sustainability while maintaining its contributions to public health and vaccine development.

## Ex-corporator arrested for extortion

**Thane:** Police in Thane district have arrested an ex-corporator of the Vasai Virar Municipal Corporation and three others over an alleged attempt to extort Rs 1.5 crore from a developer, an official said on Sunday.

According to the official, the former corporator had filed complaints against a builder redeveloping a slum in Mumbai's Worli area. He allegedly demanded Rs 10 crore to withdraw the complaints and brought it down to Rs 1.5 crore after negotiations.

After being alerted by the builder, police laid a trap near a hotel in Bhayander in Thane district, on the outskirts of Mumbai, and arrested the politician's aide when he collected the first instalment of Rs 25 lakh on Saturday night, the official said.

Police later arrested the ex-corporator and two more persons from Vasai in neighbouring Palghar district, said assistant inspector Amol Talekar of Navghar police station.

A probe is underway to determine if more individuals were involved in the extortion attempt, he added.

## In Mumbai, Sunak plays tennis ball cricket



**Mumbai:** Former British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak on Sunday visited the Parsee Gymkhana in south Mumbai and enjoyed a game of cricket, asserting he was happy that he did not get out too many times.

"No trip to Mumbai is complete without a game of tennis ball cricket," he wrote on X.

"Great to be with all of you at the Parsee Gymkhana Club at its anniversary celebrations. What an extraordinary achievement.

So much history and so much exciting stuff to come. I managed not to get out too many times this morning," Sunak told reporters.

He said he looked forward to more such visits.

The iconic Parsee Gymkhana was formed on February 25, 1885 with Sir Jamsetjee Jejeebhoy as its founder president and Jamsetjee Tata as chairman.

It moved to its current location along the picturesque Marine Drive in 1887.

## QUOTE OF THE DAY

"Sanjay Raut should write in Saamana about how long he is going to last in the Shiv Sena (UBT). He should write about the leader he is talks with in Delhi to join the Congress."



Nitesh Rane, Minister, Fisheries

## 'BCCI Award will push for excellence'

By Correspondent

**Mumbai:** Agni Chopra was in his teens when he perhaps got the best advice from his father and noted producer-director Vidhu Vinod Chopra, "Whatever profession you pursue, try to give it your best shot."

It wasn't one of the easiest of decisions to leave Mumbai and get out of one's comfort zone, plying his trade in first-class competition for a North Eastern state where cricket is still in its infancy.

But Mizoram cricket embraced Agni and it has been a beautiful cricketing journey for the 26-year-old who received the BCCI award for the "Top Run Getter in Ranji Trophy Plate League" from his childhood idol and Indian captain Rohit Sharma.

939 runs in the 2023-24 season with a whopping average of nearly 80 was a testimony of his voracious appetite for big scores and the consistency required to shine at the first class level.

With father Vinod and mother, noted film critic Anupama Chopra cheering him from the audience, it was a dream come true for the youngster as he found his worthy place in that special photograph alongside Sachin Tendulkar, R Ashwin, Jasprit Bumrah, Sarfaraz Khan and Smriti Mandhana, the who's who of Indian cricket.

"It meant a lot to receive this award from Rohit bhai, who is also from Mumbai and whom I have idolized for many years,"

Agni said after receiving the award.

"I have watched Rohit bhai play for almost half of my life and it feels like a full circle moment to receive it from the captain of India. To have my parents cheering me on was an incredible feeling because they have always cheered me on and supported me through difficult times when I was in and out of the Mumbai team," he said.

"It is indeed great to see my hard work receive some recognition and it is

incredibly special to receive an award for Ranji Trophy which is one of the most storied tournaments and I am grateful to receive this award."

Agni's endeavor has been to take Mizoram into the Elite group with his performances and obviously the ultimate goal that everyone who wears the whites plays for. To wear the navy blue India Test cap.

He has moved out of his comfort zone and now he is eager to push more boundaries.





# Today SC to hear plea seeking safety measures for devotees



**New Delhi:** The Supreme Court is scheduled to hear on Monday a plea seeking implementation of specific guidelines and regulations to ensure safety of devotees attending the Maha Kumbh where at least 30 people were killed and 60 injured in a stampede on January 29.

According to the cause list on February 3 uploaded on the apex court website, a bench comprising Chief Justice Sanjiv Khanna and Justice Sanjay Kumar is slated to hear the PIL filed by advocate Vishal Tiwari.

The petition seeks to prevent stampede incidents and protect the fundamental rights of equality and life under Article 21 of the Constitution.

The plea, which made the Centre and all the states as parties, has sought a direction to the Centre and the state governments to work collectively in ensuring a safe and secure environment for devotees at the Maha Kumbh.

## Stampede: Congress asks why govt not revealing actual number of deaths

The Congress on Sunday asked why the BJP government is not revealing the actual number of those who died in the Maha Kumbh stampede and claimed that the whole matter shows that it is trying to escape blame.

In the January 29 stampede at Sangam, at least 30 pilgrims died and 60 were injured with the police blaming overcrowding for the incident.

Congress general secretary in-charge communications Jairam Ramesh cited a media report which said the state administration has not given an update on the number of deaths even after four days of the incident.

It said all states should establish facilitation centres at Prayagraj to provide safety information and assist their respective residents in emergencies.

It also sought installation of signage and announcements in multiple languages to help pilgrims navigate the event with ease.

"All states shall establish in proper manner their fa-

cilitation centres at the Maha Kumbh. These centres shall provide and display the basic information regarding the safety measures and guidelines to the persons coming from their states. In emergency these centres shall be ready for any assistance," it said.

The plea said SMSes and WhatsApp messages be used to disseminate safety protocols to attendees.

"The BJP government, which gives the number of crores of devotees visiting the Maha Kumbh every day, is not revealing the actual number of dead even after five days. It is clear from the whole matter that this government is the culprit and wants to escape blame," Ramesh said.

The government's attempt to hide the figures clearly shows that they are only interested in promoting their politics, he said in a post in Hindi on X.

"Wherever credit has to be taken, all BJP members come forward to promote Modi-Yogi, but now when the responsibility is becoming theirs, they are running away from it," Ramesh said.

There is a need for coordination between the Uttar Pradesh government and other states to ensure the availability of doctors and nurses at the venue, it said.

The plea also sought regulation of VIP movement and said public safety should be given priority over VIP protocols to prevent congestion and ensure smooth crowd movement. The petitioner has urged

the top court to direct the Uttar Pradesh government to submit a status report on the stampede incident and initiate legal action against those responsible for negligence.

The stampede took place on January 29 on the occasion of Mauni Amavasya, one of the most auspicious days of the Hindu calendar.

The plea cited several past incidents of stampedes at religious gatherings, emphasising the need for proactive safety measures, and said in 1954, over 800 deaths took place due to overcrowding on a narrow bridge at the Kumbh Mela in Prayagraj.

Around 200 people were killed in a stampede triggered by restricted access at Kumbh at Haridwar in 1986, it said, adding 39 deaths and over 140 injuries took place in 2003 at Nashik.

The Kumbh Mela is one of the largest religious gatherings in the world, taking place in rotation among four major locations: Prayagraj (Uttar Pradesh), Haridwar (Uttarakhand), Ujjain (Madhya Pradesh), and Nashik (Maharashtra).

Given the massive influx of pilgrims from all states, the petition stresses the need for collective responsibility in ensuring proper crowd management, medical facilities, transportation, and security.

-PTI



Members of a six-member delegation during their visit to probe the vandalism of Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar's statue situated on Heritage Street in Amritsar on Sunday. Pic: PTI

## Appointment of ad-hoc judges in HCs CJI, top SC judges hold meeting

**New Delhi:** Chief Justice of India Sanjiv Khanna, along with two senior judges of the Supreme Court, on Sunday held a meeting with high court judges to discuss issues related to filling up of vacancies, appointment of ad-hoc judges in high courts and establishment of evening courts.

The meeting was held a day after a national conference was organised by the apex court here to address issues faced by the state judiciary.

"The conference was followed by a meeting of the chief justices of the high court and senior-most judges of the high court with the Chief Justice of India, Justice Sanjiv Khanna, Justice B R Gavai and Justice Surya Kant, judges of the Supreme Court of India," the top court administration said in a press release.

"Issues relating to filling up of vacancies in high courts, appointment of ad-hoc judges in high courts and establishment of evening courts were discussed,"

it said. On January 30, considering a backlog of over 18 lakh criminal cases, the apex court allowed the high courts to appoint ad-hoc judges, not exceeding 10 per cent of the court's total sanctioned strength.

The bench had relaxed and kept in abeyance certain conditions the top court had imposed in its April 20, 2021 judgment on the appointment of ad-hoc judges in the high courts.

The release said the conference held on Saturday witnessed the participation of judges of the top court, the high courts as well as the district judiciary.

It said issues like identification of bottlenecks in case disposal and strategies to reduce backlog of cases at different levels came up for discussion at the conference.

"The idea behind this conference was to engage in a meaningful dialogue with different stakeholders and functionaries in the state judiciary, especially

the district courts, to first understand the challenges being faced by them and thereafter, chalk out a plan to address the same," the release said.

The conference had four technical sessions that covered diverse topics affecting the performance of the state judiciary. The technical sessions were chaired by the judges of the apex court, including the CJI.

The release said the first session witnessed discussions on ways to narrow the gulf between institution and disposal of cases, identification of case types flooding judicial dockets, identification of bottlenecks in case disposal and strategies to reduce backlog of cases at different levels.

It said in one of the sessions, the feasibility of having a uniform case categorisation in different courts was explored.

"In this session, ways to leverage technology better to optimise the judicial processes were also deliberated upon," the release said.

## Kejriwal accuses BJP of hooliganism; Rajnath retorts

THE AAP CONVENOR SEEKS SPECIAL OBSERVERS IN HIS CONSTITUENCY

**New Delhi:** Days ahead of the Delhi Assembly polls, AAP supremo Arvind Kejriwal on Sunday demanded that the Election Commission deploy special observers in his New Delhi constituency, alleging "hooliganism" by the BJP.

The BJP hit back at Kejriwal, saying that he has sensed defeat in the February 5 elections and it has impacted his "language and mental condition".

The former chief minis-

ter is pitted against BJP's Parvesh Verma and Sandeep Dikshit of the Congress in a triangular contest in the New Delhi constituency.

In a press conference, Kejriwal asserted that with just three days remaining for the polls, a storm of support for the AAP is sweeping across Delhi and the party is headed to a "historic victory".

"In this desperate situation, the BJP is baffled. Specially, Amit Shah is very

much rattled and madened. The kind of hooliganism he has spread in Delhi has not been seen by the people earlier," Kejriwal charged.

BJP national spokesperson Sambit Patra hit back at Kejriwal, saying the AAP chief "is losing the polls and now abusing and calling the home minister mad".

"This is nothing but his frustration of an imminent defeat," he said.



The H3 Launch Vehicle No. 5 carrying the Quasi-Zenith Satellite Michibiki No. 6 lifts off at a launch pad in Tanegashima Space Center in Tanegashima, southern Japan on Sunday. Pic: PTI

## Japan launches navigation satellite

**Tokyo:** Japan's space agency said on Sunday it successfully launched a navigation satellite on its new flagship H3 rocket as the country seeks to have a more precise location positioning system of its own.

The H3 rocket carrying the Michibiki 6 satellite lifted off from the Tanegashima Space Centre on a southwestern Japanese island.

Everything went smoothly and the satellite successfully separated from the rocket as planned about 29 minutes after the liftoff, said Makoto Arita, H3 project manager for the Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency, or JAXA.

Officials said it is expected to reach its targeted geospatial orbit in about two weeks.

Japan currently has the quasi-zenith satellite system, or QZSS, with four satellites for a regional navigation system that first went into operation in 2018. The Michibiki 6 will be the fifth of its network.

Michibiki's signals are used to supplement American GPS and will further improve positioning data for smartphones, car and

maritime navigation and drones.

Japan plans to launch two more navigation satellites to have a seven-satellite system by March 2026 in order to have a more precise global positioning capability without relying on foreign services, including the U.S., according to the Japan Science and Technology Agency. By the late 2030s, Japan plans to have an 11-satellite network.

Sunday's launch, delayed by a day due to the weather, was the fourth consecutive successful flight for the H3 system after a shocking failed debut attempt last year when the rocket had to be destroyed with its payload.

Japan sees a stable, commercially competitive space transport capability as key to its space program and national security and has been developing two new flagship rockets as successors to the mainstay H2A series—the larger H3 and a much smaller Epsilon system. It hopes to cater to diverse customer needs and improve its position in the growing satellite launch market.

-AP

## Delhi govt did not use centre's assistance fearing Modi would get credit: Rajnath

The AAP dispensation in Delhi refused central assistance out of fear that the credit would go to the Narendra Modi-led Union government, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh claimed on Sunday.

The Defence Minister addressed three election rallies in the national capital — at Rajendra Nagar, Laxmi Nagar and Chandni Chowk. Stating that Delhi has had either Congress or AAP in power in the last 26 years, the veteran leader said the BJP should get a turn this time.

Speaking at one of the rallies, Singh said India's economy had grown under the BJP government, but Delhi did not benefit from it. "The BJP has not had an opportunity

to serve Delhi in a long time. Delhi did not get the development it deserves," he said. India has been on a path of development under the Modi government. India was the 11th largest economy in 2014. Today, it is the fifth largest, he added.

"When India is developing under Prime Minister Narendra Modi, why should Delhi be left behind? The city government does not take the Centre's help. We don't discriminate against any state, but the (Delhi) chief minister is afraid that Modi ji will get the credit," he said.

## Indians in Congo asked to depart

**Johannesburg:** The Embassy of India in Kinshasa, Democratic Republic of Congo, on Sunday said it is closely monitoring the security situation in the central African country and asked all the Indian nationals in Bukavu "to immediately depart to safer locations."

The Embassy issued three advisories during the day and recommended that everyone prepare an emergency plan. There are about 1,000 Indian nationals in Congo.

Rwanda-backed M23 rebels captured the eastern Congolese city of Goma and are looking at expanding their area of control.

"There are reports of M23 being only around 20-25 kms away from Bukavu. Given the security situation, we once again advise all Indian nationals residing in Bukavu to immediately depart to safer locations by whatever means available while the airports, borders and commercial routes are still open. We strongly recommend

against any travel to Bukavu," the advisory said.

In the latest advisory, the Embassy recommended that everyone prepare an emergency plan and gave instructions to keep, at all times, all essential identity and travel documents with them; keep essential items such as medicines, clothing, travel documents, ready-to-eat food, water, etc. in a bag that can be carried easily, and monitor local media channels for updates.

-PTI

## Will join with neighbours to fight IS group: Turkiye

**Istanbul:** Turkiye, Syria, Iraq and Jordan will come together to fight the remnants of the Islamic State group, a move that would allow the United States to cut ties with Kurdish militants in Syria, the Turkish foreign minister said Sunday.

Washington's decade-long relationship with Kurdish-led forces in Syria is opposed by Turkiye. Ankara says the People's Defence Units, or YPG, are tied to another Kurdish group listed as a terrorist organisation by Turkiye,

the US and the European Union (EU).

The YPG, which spearheads the US-backed Syrian Democratic Forces, has played a central role in fighting IS alongside American special forces and now guards thousands of IS prisoners in northeast Syria.

"The basic problem is that the YPG has been guarding Daesh inmates and keeping them in prison ... they're not doing anything else," Turkish Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan said Sunday, using the Ara-

bic term for IS.

"So Turkiye, Iraq, Syria and Jordan need to come together to fight Daesh. We are capable of doing that and God willing this is the step we will be taking as four countries in the near future. We have already done the preliminary talks for that process."

Fidan, who was speaking at a news conference in Doha, Qatar, alongside Qatari Prime Minister Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al Thani, said that the new Syrian government had indicated it will take respon-

sibility for IS prisoners.

Turkiye wants US President Donald Trump to step back from supporting the Kurdish fighters, who Ankara regards as terrorists due to their links to the Kurdistan Workers' Party, or PKK, which has waged war against Turkiye since 1984.

"We hope that President Trump will make the right decision and right this wrong ... it is an open wound that needs to be closed as soon as possible," Fidan added.

Since Syrian rebels

linked to the PKK and be absorbed into a future Syrian military.

The US currently has around 2,000 troops in northeast Syria. During his first term in office, Trump said he would withdraw all American forces from Syria, which triggered a Turkish offensive against the YPG in 2019.

His seemingly warm relationship with Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan has led to speculation that Trump will again seek to remove the US military presence.

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## QUOTE OF THE DAY

"What worries me about freedom of expression is that, unfortunately, the last 10-11 years have been an object lesson in how easy it is, if not to suppress entirely, certainly to stifle, restrict, manage it."



Shashi Tharoor, MP, Congress



# 'Educate men, respect women's choices'

## SPEAKERS AT JLF ADDRESS SEXUAL HARASSMENT IN PUBLIC SPACES

**Jaipur:** The topic of sexual harassment of women in public spaces took the centre stage at the ongoing Jaipur Literature Festival, as social activist Aruna Roy, lawyer Vrinda Grover and economists Seema Jayachandran and Abhijit Banerjee discussed the factors contributing to the offence, ways for its redressal, and its long-term solutions.

The panellists were speaking at a session titled 'The City Through Her Eyes: Voices on Sexual Harassment in India' on Saturday.

The session was set around the findings of a survey conducted on women's safety in public spaces by the research centre J-Pal South Asia and NGO Aparajita by Pramod Bhasin.

The survey conducted across Jaipur and Delhi with 1,899 and 2,093 women respondents, respectively, revealed that nearly 50 per cent women in Jaipur and about 65 per cent women in the national capital faced some form of sexual harassment in public spaces in the past year, including staring, cat call, gestures, groping, stalking, flashing and sexual assault.

They reported that women were subjected to sexual harassment in virtually all public spaces, including on the streets, public transports, bus

stops and railway stations, market places, schools, and even places of worship.

Grover, who's also a child and women's rights activist, said it's important to make this distinction since there is "a social obsession with only looking at rape" as a crime against women.

"...and feeling angry about rape and that anger need not necessarily be productive. So I am really glad that today we are focusing on sexual harassment, which, as your survey shows us, is part and parcel of women's daily life in the public space," Grover said.

Roy, meanwhile, argued that to draw any conclusion from such a survey, it would have to be conducted across intersectionalities of religion, caste, and class at various places with all the differences taken into consideration.

"...with cultural differences taken into consideration because the kind of harassment they face in different places of India are different, and I think that's why one feels that all these issues are right and things like surveys produce technical support to the issues that we feel are relevant but the solutions are all democratic, political, and socio-economic," the Ramon Magsaysay awardee said.

In response to Banerjee's argument that women



Huma Qureshi and author Bee Rowlett at a session during the Jaipur Literature Festival in Jaipur on Sunday.

Pic: PTI

in rural areas may be relatively safer compared to their urban counterparts because of the social structure, Roy said women are more or less targeted in a similar manner.

"But in a rural area, culturally men cannot do certain things. Public spaces are restricted, segregated, for instance, so some kind of protection may come from that but there are as many cases of terrible sexual harassment among rural women as in urban areas, only the stations are different," Roy said.

The former bureaucrat noted that women in rural

areas may face sexual harassment based on their caste as well.

"There is a general feeling that women who belong to lower castes can be treated anyhow, which is something you don't get in an urban area," Roy said.

Talking about legal remedies available to women in such cases, Grover said despite there being a structure in place, she does not encourage women to go directly to police stations as the system is not "accessible or enabling".

"Am I therefore suggesting that these women, these girls who are going

to actually march to the police station or ask for an accountability through the law... That's not happening. I don't encourage them to go running to the police station because we have not made a legal system that is either accessible or enabling. And that process should not be further debilitating.

"But what is important is that it has spelt it out. Unfortunately, in our society, what is a wrong towards women unless and until it is spelt out in black and white... I think there is an ambiguity around it,"

Grover said.

Roy addressed Grover's concern by saying that during her work in Rajasthan, they managed to "attach Mahila Suraksha Kendra" to about 24 police stations across the state, where women can go and talk to the police "without feeling any fear".

"...that has considerably increased the possibility of getting some kind of attention in justice," she said.

Going forward, Grover felt hope that more and more women are "not accepting that kind of behaviour".

"There is mobility and they are finding answers and we move from eve-teasing to sexual harassment through feminist interventions. Women are not going to stop, either economically or socially. Politically, you see women voting in larger numbers than ever before," she said.

And even as there are hurdles such as instrumentalisation of violence against women during elections, women will continue to forge ahead, she added.

While Jayachandran suggested working with adolescent boys at home and in school to help them understand gender equality, masculinity norms and their emotions, Roy echoed that there is no one solution but a bundle of solutions, including edu-

cating men.

"The men in our society need to be educated. I think this is a fundamental reason why things happen. The society as a whole has to understand why these young men are so frustrated... Because they are jobless, on the streets and that this produces all kinds of quirks in their social behaviour," Roy said.

Grover argued that while men and boys need policing and discipline at home, women's choices should be respected for a long-term solution.

"The people who indulge in sexual harassment, they are not dropping from somewhere else, they are in our midst. Stop policing the girls and women in your family. Rather, police and discipline the men and the boys a little bit. Respect the women's choice," the lawyer said.

JLF this year features a lineup of over 300 luminaries such as Nobel laureates, Booker Prize-winners, journalists, policymakers, and acclaimed writers.

The participants include Abhijit Banerjee, Esther Dufflo, Amol Palekar, Ira Mukhoty, Geetanjali Shree, David Hare, Manav Kaul, Javed Akhtar, Rahul Bose, Yuvan Aves, Shahu Patole, and Kallol Bhattacharjee, among others.

The festival will come to a close on February 3.

-PTI

## Book offers critique of Mahatma's 'Hind Swaraj'

**New Delhi:** Author-playwright Rajesh Talwar has come out with a book which he says is a critique of Mahatma Gandhi's "Hind Swaraj" and exposes the contradictions and flaws in his rejection of modernity, industrialisation and Western thought.

"Hind Swaraj" is considered one of the most significant works of Gandhi, which he penned during his return from England to South Africa in November 1909. Banned by the British in 1910, this book is a clarion call for Indians to realise the criticality of unshackling from the bondage of imperialism.

Talwar's "The Mahatma's Manifesto" has been published by Om Publications. According to Talwar, Gandhi was a complex personality.

"Though I remain a huge admirer of Gandhi and his contributions to the cause of Indian independence; at the same time, there is so much of Gandhi that needs to be discarded, and in that respect many of his views, as expressed in 'Hind Swaraj' need to be ignored and fully discarded," he says.

Talwar says when he first read 'Hind Swaraj', he was really startled, if not shocked by its contents.

"Many of Gandhi's views were clearly not only archaic but also patriarchal and regressive," he says.

The author says there is much to admire in Gandhi and his greatness is beyond dispute, but insofar as "Hind Swaraj" is concerned, it "deserves to be roundly criticized and debunked".

Talwar, however, says Gandhi's ideas on non-violence are profound. -PTI

## Udit Narayan draws ire after kissing fan

**New Delhi:** Udit Narayan is making headlines after a video of the popular singer surfaced online, showing him purportedly kissing a fan at a live concert after she leans in to peck him on the cheek while taking a selfie.

The 69-year-old singer refused to comment on the controversy when PTI reached out to him.

In the viral video, Narayan can be seen returning kisses to female fans as he sings his popular 1990s song "Tip Tip Barsa Paani" from action thriller "Mohra".

In one of the clips circulating on social media, the singer is seen asking the security personnel to let a selfie-seeking female admirer pass and come near the stage.

When she goes closer to Narayan to click the photo with him, she leans in to kiss him on the cheek, following which the singer can be seen tilting his head and kissing her on the lips.

The date and venue of Narayan's music concert couldn't be immediately confirmed.

Many social media users



demanding an apology from Narayan -- known for several chartbusters like "Main Khiladi Tu Anari", "Main Yahaan Hoon", and "Ae Ajnabi" -- and called his action "inappropriate".

"Udit Narayan has done something very wrong. I had a lot of respect for him, but forcibly kissing a girl is a crime. A harassment case should be filed against him," wrote a user on X.

Another said Narayan gained so much respect throughout his career and "just one kissing act ruined his image".

"Yes first woman kissed him, then he kissed back and started kissing every other lady coming for a selfie. He shouldn't have done it. No one knows lady. His image is destroyed

(sic)" the user added.

Seeing the Udit Narayan video now and this doesn't look appropriate at all, said another on X.

"He should publicly apologise for this behaviour as there are many who idolise him. Saw some posts justifying this like how ??? #UditNarayan."

"From an iconic legend to shockingly inappropriate in just a moment, #UditNarayan's behavior during a live performance is unacceptable. Respect is non-negotiable, even for stars," read a post.

There were also some who defended the singer.

"She kissed him first and then he kissed her back. But problem is Udit Narayan is a man, so fault is also his only #UditNarayan #uditnarayankiss (sic)" said a fan.

"First, the girl kisses Udit Narayan without his consent. Then, Udit Narayan reciprocates. Yet, leftists and feminists cry foul only when he kisses back—because he's a MAN. The girl's actions? Conveniently ignored. WHY???" wrote another.

-PTI



Spiritual leader Sri Sri Ravi Shankar at the Sangam area during the Maha Kumbh in Prayagraj on Sunday.

Pic: PTI

## Nod for white tiger breeding

**Bhopal:** The Central Zoo Authority (CZA) has approved a proposal to set up a white tiger breeding centre in Madhya Pradesh's Rewa district, Deputy Chief Minister Rajendra Shukla said.

The project at Govindgarh reflects the MP government's commitment to Prime Minister Narendra Modi's vision for environmental protection and sustainable development, Shukla said on Saturday.

The government is trying to make MP an ideal



state for wildlife conservation and the CZA clearance for the proposed white tiger breeding centre in Rewa district is an important achievement in this direction, he said.

The facility will ensure the safety of white tigers

and an increase in their numbers, the deputy CM said.

Madhya Pradesh leads the country in terms of the number of tigers and this initiative will further strengthen the state's reputation, he added.

## Gangster deported from Philippines

**New Delhi:** Wanted by police and facing Interpol Red Notice, gangster Joginder Gyong

was deported from the Philippines to Delhi on Sunday, the CBI said.

Joginder Gyong was wanted by Haryana Police in a case of criminal conspiracy and murder registered against him in Panipat.

He was handed over to Delhi Police upon landing at the Indira Gandhi International Airport as he was also wanted by the force here, officials said.

The Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) got a Red Notice issued against Joginder Gyong from the Interpol on October 25, 2024, which was circulated to all the law enforcement agencies globally for tracking the wanted criminal, an agency spokesperson said in a statement.

"On the strength of the Red Notice, subject Joginder Gyong was deported from the Philippines via Bangkok to Delhi."

"The subject is a gangster wanted by the Haryana Police in the murder of a victim whom the subject suspected of disclosing the real identity and location of



his gangster brother Suren-der Gyong to the police. Suren-der Gyong was killed in an exchange of fire with the police," the statement said.

Joginder Gyong allegedly planned and murdered the victim to avenge the death of his brother.

"The subject was also allegedly involved in criminal cases in various states of India, including Delhi and Punjab, for the offences of robbery, murder, attempt to murder, putting person in fear of death or of grievous hurt in order to commit extortion and kidnapping for ransom," the spokesperson said.

Meanwhile, Delhi Police said Gyong was apprehended by the Philippines Bureau of Immigration (PBI) from Bacolod City, acting on India's request for his extradition. -PTI

## QUOTE OF THE DAY

"I have personally visited all the industries and plants under my ministries. However, not even a single official or leader from the Karnataka government has approached me to discuss the state's needs."



H D Kumaraswamy, Union Minister, Heavy Industries

## Study sheds light on why coffee tastes so bitter to some

**New Delhi:** Genetics may be contributing towards how one perceives the taste of coffee -- 'bitter' or 'not bitter', according to a study.

Researchers at the Technical University of Munich, Germany, have identified a new group of bitter compounds in roasted Arabica coffee and analysed how they influence its taste.

They also demonstrated for the first time that an individual's genetic tendencies also play a role in determining how bitter these roasting substances taste. The findings are published

in the journal Food Chemistry.

Beans from the 'Coffea Arabica' plant are roasted to develop a flavour before being ground and brewed for a beverage.

While caffeine has been known to be bitter-tasting for a long time, even decaffeinated coffee tastes bitter, possibly suggesting that there are other substances contributing to the bitter taste of roasted coffee, the researchers said.

'Mozambioside' is one such substance in Arabica beans, known to taste about



10 times more bitter than caffeine and activate two of the roughly 25 bitter taste receptors in the human body -- namely, the

"TAS2R43" and "TAS2R46" receptors.

However, we found that mozambioside levels significantly drop during

roasting, and therefore, the substance "only makes a small contribution to the bitterness of coffee", according to lead researcher Roman Lang.

"This prompted us to test whether roasting produces breakdown products of mozambioside are also bitter and could affect coffee's taste," Lang said.

The team showed that mozambioside degrades into seven different products during roasting, which are found in varying amounts in roasted coffee, depending on roasting tem-

perature and duration.

Through experiments on cells, the seven products were found to activate the same bitter taste receptors as mozambioside.

Three of the roasting products even had a stronger effect on the receptors, compared to the original mozambioside, the researchers said.

However, they also found that the concentrations of these roasting products measured in brewed coffee were too low to induce a noticeable taste on their own. -PTI



# Budget is by the people, for the people, says FM

By Vijay Joshi

**New Delhi:** Paraphrasing Abraham Lincoln, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Sunday described the Union Budget as "by the people, for the people, of the people", and said Prime Minister Narendra Modi was fully behind the idea to cut taxes for middle class but it took time to convince the bureaucrats.

"We have heard the voice of the middle class" who had been complaining about their aspirations not being met despite being honest taxpayers, she told PTI in an interview.

With the honest and proud taxpayers wanting the government to do more to limit the impact of factors like inflation, the prime minister was quick to task Sitharaman to look at ways to give relief.

While Modi was quick to agree to tax relief, it took a bit of convincing to get on board the officials in the finance ministry and the Central Board of Direct Taxes (CBDT) - who are tasked to ensure revenue collection to meet welfare and other schemes, she said.

Presenting her eighth straight budget, Sitharaman on Saturday announced an increase in the personal income tax threshold below which taxpayers owe no tax to Rs 12 lakh, up from Rs 7 lakh, as well as a regij in tax brackets that would help those earning higher than that save up to Rs 1.1 lakh.

The Rs 5 lakh hike in exemption limit is the biggest-ever and equals all the reliefs that were given



between 2005 and 2023.

"I think the prime minister put it succinctly, he said it's the people's Budget, it is the Budget which the people wanted."

Asked to describe the ethos of the budget in her own words, she said, "as they say in democracy in Abraham Lincoln's words, it is Budget by the people, of the people for the people."

Sitharaman said the new rates would "substantially reduce the taxes of the middle class and leave more money in their hands, boosting household consumption, savings and investment".

Explaining the thought that went behind the big announcement, Sitharaman said the tax cuts were in the works for sometime.

One of the ideas was to make the direct tax simpler and easier to comply with.

Work on this started in the July 2024 Budget and now a new law is on the anvil, which will simplify the lan-

guage, reduce compliance burden and be a bit more user-friendly.

"It wasn't talking about rate restructuring, although for several years now, we have been looking at ways in which the rates can be a lot more reasonably taxpayer friendly. And therefore that work was also going on," she said. "Equally, after the July budget, there was this voice of the middle class, which felt that they were paying tax... but also felt they don't seem to have much in the way of redressing their problems."

There was also this feeling that the government was very inclusive in taking care of the very poor and the vulnerable sections.

"So the voice which came wherever I travelled was we are proud taxpayers. We are honest taxpayers. We want to continue to serve the country by being good taxpayers. But what do you think about what kind of

things you can do for us?," she said. "And so I had this discussion also with the prime minister who put me on the specific assignment to see what is it that you can come up with."

Numbers were worked and presented to the prime minister who gave guidance for what was presented in the FY26 Budget on Saturday, she said.

Asked how much persuasion did it take to get the prime minister on board, Sitharaman said, "No, I think your question should be, how much did it take for me to convince the ministry (and) the board (CBDT)."

"So, it is not so much the PM, the PM was very clear that he wants to do something. It is for the ministry to have had the comfort level and then go with the proposal," she said. "So, the more work that was needed, was needed for convincing the Board that efficiency in collection and honest taxpayers' voice" needs to be heard.

The ministry and CBDT needed convincing because they have to be sure of revenue generation. "So, they were not wrong in reminding me periodically, saying what would it mean? But ultimately, everybody came around," she added.

The finance minister said the prime minister meets and listens to the voice of people from different sectors and industry leaders and responds to their needs.

"I'm very happy to be a part of this government, which literally hears the voice and responds," she said.

-PTI

## MONEY MATTERS

# Focus on Personal Budget



By  
Kaustubh Kale

Every year on 1st February, the Union Budget captures the nation's attention. From revised tax policies to increased spending in various sectors, people eagerly analyze every announcement, hoping for immediate benefits. While the national budget undeniably affects the broader economy, it's time to ask: are we giving it too much importance in our personal financial planning?

Focusing solely on the Union Budget can pull us away from what truly matters—managing our own finances effectively. Rather than getting caught up in macroeconomic changes, why not direct your energy toward the "micros" of your financial life? Creating a personal budget ensures you're in control of your money, managing it wisely, and directing it where it should go, rather than constantly wondering where it went.

### Build Skills, Boost Income

While many turn to the Union Budget for economic relief, a more effective long-term strategy is focusing on increasing your own income. By upgrading your skills, learning to sell, building new things, and networking better, you create opportunities to enhance your earnings. While government policies can influence economic growth, personal growth is a far more powerful tool for creating financial stability.

### Saving and Investing Smartly

A key principle of financial stability is maintaining a healthy savings rate. However, saving alone isn't enough. You need to invest your savings wisely. Smart asset allocation is

essential for ensuring your money grows and beats inflation over the long term. Consider allocating the majority of your savings to inflation-beating assets such as direct stocks, equity mutual funds, and gold. These investments have historically offered better returns than inflation and can help build lasting wealth.

### Protect Your Savings

Just as important as growing your savings is protecting them from unforeseen events. Health insurance is crucial in safeguarding your finances against unexpected medical expenses, which can quickly erode savings. Similarly, securing your family's future with term life insurance protects their financial goals, ensuring they remain on track even in your absence.

### Consult a Financial Advisor

Managing personal finances can feel overwhelming, but consulting a well-qualified, full-time financial

advisor can make a significant difference. A skilled advisor brings education, wisdom, experience and expertise to the table, helping you craft a tailored financial plan and personal budget that meet your goals while providing a solid safety net.

As we head into 2025, it's time to shift our focus away from the Union Budget and towards our own financial success. By enhancing our skills, increasing our savings, investing wisely, and protecting our wealth, we can take charge of our financial futures—regardless of government policy changes.

Ultimately, a well-structured personal budget is the real key to financial independence and lasting peace of mind.

(The author is a Chartered Accountant and CFA (USA). Financial Advisor. Views personal. He could be reached on 9833133605.)



## Budget prudent: SJM

**New Delhi:** Hailing the Union Budget as "prudent budget amidst challenges", the Swadeshi Jagran Manch (SJM) on Sunday said it has tried to address all the key concerns to take the country's economy forward and also make it self-reliant.

The SJM is an affiliate of the RSS.

Presenting the Union Budget for 2025-26 in Lok Sabha on Saturday, Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman made a slew of announcements and also exempted annual income of up to Rs 12 lakh from income tax, rejigging tax slabs.

In her budget speech, she laid out a blueprint for next-generation reforms, including raising the FDI limit in the insurance sector, simplification of tax laws and cutting duties on intermediaries while providing enhanced fiscal support for welfare measures.

It's a "prudent budget amidst various challenges" the country was facing, the SJM co-convenor Ashwani Mahajan said in a statement.

"Concerns were being expressed about health of the economy due to deceleration in GDP growth in last two quarters, depreciating rupee, continuing inflation, decline in consump-

tion, rising trade deficit, declining forex reserves," he said.

It was a "real challenge" for the government to spur manufacturing growth, push for self-reliance in agriculture, support farmers and address imbalance in agriculture production, reduce dependence on foreign countries regarding pulses and edible oils, and also give tax relief to middle-income taxpayers, and address the inflationary concerns at the same time, Mahajan added.

"Budget 2025-26 has tried to balance all these concerns and take the economy forward," he added.

Mahajan said the Budget has given a push to the manufacturing sector in the country. The MSME manufacturing mission, enhanced credit guarantee for the MSME, credit card for micro-enterprises, the extension of the PLI beyond an earlier list and several other measures proposed in the Budget to improve manufacturing will insulate the country from "Chinese dominance".

"The Swadeshi Jagran Manch was demanding a well-defined manufacturing policy in the country for a long time. The present endeavour of the government will go a long way towards this goal," he added.



People fly kites during the annual Basant festival fair at Chheharta on the outskirts of Amritsar on Sunday.

Pic: PTI

## Power consumption growth subdued

**New Delhi:** India's power consumption increased by just 2.7 per cent to 137.49 billion units (BU) in January as use of heating appliances like heater and geysers reduced owing to above normal temperatures.

According to India Meteorological Department (IMD) the country's mean temperature in January was 18.98 degrees Celsius, the third highest for the month since 1901, behind 1958 and 1990.

According to official data, power consumption was 133.94 BU in January 2024.

Similarly, the highest supply in a day (peak power

demand met) also rose to 237.30 GW from 222.32 GW in January 2024.

The peak power demand touched an all-time high of about 250 GW in May 2024. The previous all-time high peak power demand of 243.27 GW was recorded in September 2023.

Earlier last year, the power ministry projected a peak power demand of 235 GW during the day and 225 GW during evening hours for May 2024 while 240 GW during daytime and 235 GW in the evening hours for June 2024.

The ministry had also estimated that peak power demand may hit 260 GW in

the summer of 2024.

According to government estimates, peak power demand is expected to touch 270 GW in the summer of 2025.

Experts opine that power demand as well as consumption remained subdued last month mainly due to decrease in use of heating appliances like heaters and geysers amid day and night temperatures remaining above normal levels.

They further said the growth of power demand as well as consumption will be subdued in February also due to rise in mercury levels.

## More taxpayers may shift to new regime: CBDT Chairman

By Neelabh Srivastava

**New Delhi:** The Budget announcement of zero tax for earnings upto Rs 12 lakh per annum and the rejig of tax slabs across the board should prompt more than 90 per cent of individual taxpayers to embrace the new tax regime as compared to the about 75 per cent as of now, CBDT Chairman Ravi Agrawal said on Sunday.

In a post-Budget interview exclusively to PTI, Agrawal said the government's philosophy and approach is to ensure a "non-intrusive" tax administration in the country through an enhanced usage of Artificial (AI) apart from the regular human intelligence gathering mechanism.

The CBDT chief said the tax processes available to a "common" taxpayer for reporting their income were not "very complex" giving examples of the simplified ITR-1, pre-filled Income Tax Returns, automatic computation of Tax Deducted at Source (TDS) etc. available to them.

He also cited the new tax regime (NTR), where there

are no deductions or exemptions allowed like the old regime, which has "simple" calculations for a taxpayer, enabling them to file their ITR without the help of a professional.

The Central Board of Direct Taxes (CBDT) is the administrative body, under the Union finance ministry, for the I-T Department.



Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Saturday announced significant income tax cuts for the middle class and declared that individuals earning up to Rs 12 lakh per year will not have to pay any taxes, raising this exemption threshold from Rs 7 lakh.

An additional Rs 75,000 standard deduction is available for the salaried class.

She also altered tax slabs for people earning above this threshold to help save up to Rs 1.1 lakh in taxes for those with income up to Rs 25 lakh in a year, according to the Budget documents.

Agrawal acknowledged

there always remains "a scope for improvement" going forward and it's true across the spectrum, including where there are complex business structures. "But by and large, I would say, for a common taxpayer, the things have been simplified to a great extent."

Moving ahead, he said, with the announcements made in the Budget vis-a-vis payment of income tax, more and more taxpayers "would be prompted" to opt for the NTR.

"If not 100 per cent of the taxpayers, at least going forward next year onwards, we should see figures in the 90s (90 per cent) or maybe more than that," he said.

As per current data, about 74-75 per cent of individual taxpayers have moved to the NTR that was brought in by the government a few years back.

Agrawal emphasised that the Budget provisions, related to income tax payment, benefits not just those who earn Rs 12 lakh per annum but "all across".

The thought behind these decisions, he said, was basically the interest and "substantial relief" for the middle class. -PTI

## Push for homestays can boost local economies

**New Delhi:** The Centre's move to promote homestays as part of its broader push for tourism development has been welcomed by stakeholders, with many saying it could help boost local economies and create employment opportunities.

Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman, in her Budget speech on Saturday, announced that homestays would be eligible for Mudra loans, a move aimed at supporting small-scale hospitality businesses in rural and semi-urban areas.

The initiative is expected to provide financial assistance to individuals looking to establish or expand homestays, particularly in popular and emerging tourist destinations.

K Syama Raju, president of the Federation of Hotel and Restaurant Associations of India (FHRAI), said the introduction of Mudra loans for homestay businesses is another positive step which will give local entrepreneurs the chance to start and grow small tourism businesses and help create more jobs and

encourage tourism in these regions.

The decision comes as the tourism sector witnesses a steady revival post-pandemic, with demand for new accommodation options rising.

Industry reports suggest that the homestay segment has grown significantly in recent years, driven by domestic travel and interest in experiential tourism.

However, industry experts stress the need for streamlined implementation to ensure the benefits reach those who need them



the most.

"Financing has always been a challenge for small hospitality ventures. If these loans come with minimal paperwork and low interest rates, they can encourage more entrepreneurs to enter the sector," Sandeep Kulkarni, who runs a homestay in Kasar

Devi in Uttarakhand.

"But the government must also ensure proper marketing and infrastructure support to sustain this growth," he said.

According to a recent government report on the tourism sector, the homestay industry has the potential to create significant employment opportunities, in rural areas.

The report highlighted the need for financial incentives, capacity building, and digital marketing support to help homestay owners thrive.

It also emphasised the importance of developing tourism clusters in rural areas to ensure a steady flow of visitors.

Under the Mudra loan scheme, micro and small businesses can avail funding of up to Rs 10 lakh. The tourism ministry is expected to work closely with banks to facilitate easier access to these loans for homestay operators.

While welcoming the initiative, some industry players pointed out challenges in securing financial assistance. -PTI

## QUOTE OF THE DAY

"A committee will be set up under the mission which will go into the details and examine all the issues in detail (like) the role of Centre, and states. Different ministries will be involved, private players will also be involved."



Piyush Goyal,  
Minister, Commerce and Industry



# Trump puts tariffs on Canada, Mexico, China spurring trade war

By Josh Boak, Zeke Miller, Rob Gillies and Christopher Sherman

Washington: President Donald Trump on Saturday signed an order to impose stiff tariffs on imports from Mexico, Canada and China, drawing swift retaliation and an undeniable sense of betrayal from the country's North American neighbours as a trade war erupted among the longtime allies.

The Republican president posted on social media that the tariffs were necessary "to protect Americans," pressing the three nations to do more to curb the manufacture and export of illicit fentanyl and for Canada and Mexico to reduce illegal immigration into the US.

The tariffs, if sustained, could cause inflation to significantly worsen, threatening the trust that many voters placed in Trump to lower the prices of groceries, gasoline, housing, autos and other goods as he promised. They also risked throwing the global economy and Trump's political mandate into turmoil just two weeks into his second term.

Trump declared an economic emergency in order to place duties of 10% on all imports from China and 25% on imports from Mexico and Canada. Energy imported from Canada, including oil, natural gas and electricity, would be taxed at a 10% rate. Trump's order includes a mechanism to escalate the rates charged by the US against retaliation by the other countries, raising the spect-



er of an even more severe economic disruption.

"The actions taken today by the White House split us apart instead of bringing us together," Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau said in a sombre tone as he announced that his country would put matching 25% tariffs on up to \$155 billion in US imports, including alcohol and fruit.

He channelled the betrayal that many Canadians are feeling, reminding Americans that Canadian troops fought alongside them in Afghanistan and helped respond to myriad crises from wildfires in California to Hurricane Katrina.

"We were always there standing with you, grieving

with you, the American people," he said.

Mexico's president also ordered retaliatory tariffs. China did not immediately respond to Trump's action.

"We categorically reject the White House's slander that the Mexican government has alliances with criminal organisations, as well as any intention of meddling in our territory," Mexican President Claudia Sheinbaum wrote in a post on X while saying she had instructed her economy secretary to implement a response that includes retaliatory tariffs and other measures in defense of Mexico's interests.

"If the United States government and its agencies

wanted to address the serious fentanyl consumption in their country, they could fight the sale of drugs on the streets of their major cities, which they don't do and the laundering of money that this illegal activity generates that has done so much harm to its population."

The premier of the Canadian province of British Columbia, David Eby, specifically called on residents to stop buying liquor from US "red" states and said it was removing American alcohol brands from government store shelves as a response to the tariffs.

The tariffs will go into effect on Tuesday, setting up a showdown in North America that could poten-

tially sabotage economic growth. A new analysis by the Budget Lab at Yale laid out the possible damage to the US economy, saying the average household would lose the equivalent of \$1,170 in income from the taxes. Economic growth would slow and inflation would worsen - and the situation could be even worse with retaliation from other countries.

Democrats were quick to warn that any inflation going forward was the result of Trump's actions.

"You're worried about grocery prices. Don's raising prices with his tariffs," Senate Democratic leader Chuck Schumer of New York wrote in a series of posts on X. "You're worried

about tomato prices. Wait till Trump's Mexico tariffs raise your tomato prices," read another. "You're worried about car prices. Wait till Trump's Canada tariffs raise your car prices," read another.

A senior U.S. administration official, speaking on condition of anonymity to brief reporters, said the lower rate on energy reflected a desire to minimize disruptive increases on the price of gasoline or utilities. That's a sign White House officials understand the gamble they're taking on inflation. Price spikes under former President Joe Biden led to voter frustration that helped return Trump to the White House.

The order signed by Trump contained no mechanism for granting exceptions, the official said, a possible blow to homebuilders who rely on Canadian lumber as well as farmers, automakers and other industries.

The official did not provide specific benchmarks that could be met to lift the new tariffs, saying only that the best measure would be fewer Americans dying from fentanyl addiction.

The order would also allow for tariffs on Canadian imports of less than \$800. Imports below that sum are currently able to cross into the United States without customs and duties.

"It doesn't make much economic sense," said William Reinsch, senior adviser at the Center for Strategic and International Studies and a former U.S. trade official. "Historically, most of our tariffs on raw

materials have been low because we want to get cheaper materials so our manufacturers will be competitive... Now, what's he talking about? He's talking about tariffs on raw materials. I don't get the economics of it."

With the tariffs, Trump is honouring promises that are at the core of his economic and national security philosophy. But the announcement showed his seriousness around the issue as some Trump allies had played down the threat of higher import taxes as mere negotiating tactics.

The president is preparing more import taxes in a sign that tariffs will be an ongoing part of his second term. On Friday, he mentioned imported computer chips, steel, oil and natural gas, as well as copper, pharmaceutical drugs and imports from the European Union - moves that could essentially pit the U.S. against much of the global economy.

Trudeau warned of economic pain as the tariffs take effect and encouraged Canadians to "choose Canadian products and services rather than American ones." But he also voiced optimism in the enduring relationship between the two countries.

"It is going to have real consequences for people, for workers on both sides of our border. We don't want to be here. We didn't ask for this, but we will not back down in standing up both for Canadians and for the incredible successful relationship between Canada and the United States," Trudeau said. -AP

## Prince Edward on India visit

London: Britain's Duke of Edinburgh, Prince Edward, began a three-day visit to India on Sunday to celebrate the shared ties between the two countries, Buckingham Palace said in a statement here.

Edward, who is the youngest brother of King Charles III, will travel to Mumbai and Delhi to promote the Duke of Edinburgh's International Award - set up by their late father Prince Philip in 1956.

The award is delivered in India as the International Award for Young People (IAYP), a non-formal education and learning framework supporting young people to "find their purpose, place and passion in the world".

"His Royal Highness The Duke of Edinburgh is visiting India, from Sunday 2nd February to Tuesday 4th February, to celebrate the shared ties between the UK and India, and champion young people and the benefits of non-formal education," the palace statement said.

During the visit, he will meet young people undertaking the award, Indian education and business leaders and philanthropists, and join events that celebrate UK-India shared interests in sport and the arts, and how these can be used to support young people to reach their full potential, it noted.

The visit by Prince Edward, who took over the title of Duke of Edinburgh in March 2023, marks the first official UK royal visit to India since Charles visited India in November 2019 - then the Prince of Wales.

Since its inception in India in 1962, the IAYP is said to have helped more than 150,000 students.

## In a signal to Iran, Syria's President lands in Saudi

Dubai: Syria's interim President made his first trip abroad Sunday, travelling to Saudi Arabia in a move likely trying to signal Damascus' shift away from Iran as its main ally.

Ahmad al-Sharaa, who was once aligned with al-Qaida, landed in Riyadh alongside his government's foreign minister, Asaad al-Shaibani. The two men travelled on a Saudi jet, with a Saudi flag visible on the table behind them.

Saudi state television trumpeted the fact that the first trip by al-Sharaa, first known internationally by the nom de guerre Abu Mohammed al-Golani, made Riyadh his first destination.

Syria's new three-star, tricolour flag flew next to Saudi Arabia's own at the airport as al-Sharaa in a suit and tie walked off the plane. He was scheduled to meet with Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, the kingdom's de facto ruler, on the trip.

Saudi Arabia had been among the Arab nations that poured money into insurgent groups that tried to topple former President Bashar Assad after Syria's 2011 Arab Spring protests

turned into a bloody crackdown. However, its groups found themselves beaten back as Assad, supported by Iran and Russia, fought the war into a stalemate in Syria.

That changed with the December lightning offensive led by al-Sharaa's Hayat Tahrir al-Sham. The group was once affiliated with al-Qaida but has since denounced its former ties.

Al-Sharaa and HTS have carefully managed their public image in the time since, with the interim president favouring an olive-coloured military look similar to Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, appointing women to roles and trying to maintain ties with Syria's Christian and Shiite Alawite populations.

That also includes keeping both Iran and Russia largely at arms' length as well. Iran has yet to reopen its embassy in Damascus, which had been a key node in running operations through its self-described "Axis of Resistance," including Assad's Syria, Lebanon's Hezbollah militia and other partners. Russia meanwhile would like to maintain access to

air and sea bases it has in Syria, but took in Assad when he fled Syria during the advance.

Those moves appear aimed at reassuring the West and trying to get crippling sanctions lifted on Syria. Rebuilding the country after a decade of war will likely cost hundreds of billions of dollars, not to mention covering the needs of Syria's people, millions of whom remain impoverished.

Saudi Foreign Minister Prince Faisal bin Farhan visited Damascus in January and said Riyadh has been "actively engaging in dialogue" to lift sanctions on Syria. Saudi Arabia, unlike Al-Sharaa's key allies in Turkey and Qatar, restored ties with Assad in 2023 alongside most of the Arab world. Getting sanctions lifted could go a long way in cementing their relationship.

Syria's interim government still faces challenges from the Islamic State group and other militants in the country. On Saturday, a car bomb exploded in Manbij, a city in Syria's Aleppo governorate, killing four civilians and wounding nine, SANA reported.



People gather in Buenos Aires, Argentina on Saturday to protest President Javier Milei's speech at the World Economic Forum in Davos. Pic: AP/PTI

## India experienced transformation: Yang

By Yoshita Singh

United Nations: India has experienced "remarkable transformation" in the last decade, UN General Assembly President Philemon Yang has said, underlining that his upcoming visit to the country will give him an opportunity to see how digital and technological innovation has "fuelled this change".

Yang will visit India from February 4 to 8, his first official visit to the country as President of the 79th session of the UN General Assembly.

"As the world's largest

democracy, the fifth-largest economy and home to one-fifth of humanity, India is an important member of the United Nations," Yang told PTI in an exclusive interview ahead of his trip.

Responding to a question on the visit's focus, Yang said he looks forward to "understanding, more deeply, India's priorities and vision for the future of multilateralism."

During the visit, he will engage with Indian leadership, including President Droupadi Murmu and External Affairs Minister Dr S Jaishankar.

Recalling that he had visited India in 2013 as Prime Minister of Cameroon, Yang said that since then, India has experienced a "remarkable transformation" and he expects the visit to give him the "opportunity to see how digital and technological innovation has fuelled this change, all the way to the grassroots level."

"The visit will also serve to highlight the importance of information sharing and capacity building in advancing sustainable development in the Global South. India has in many respects led the way through its South-South cooperation."

## Pakistan's economic growth stalls: Report

By Sajjad Hussain

Islamabad: Pakistan failed to kick-start economic growth in the first seven months of the current fiscal year despite a massive 10 per cent reduction in the interest rate by the central bank during this period, according to a media report.

The State Bank of Bank in the latest cut on January 27 further reduced the interest rate by 1 per cent to set it at 12 per cent, a whopping 10 per cent down from 22 per cent in June last year. It was expected the decision would help to increase money supply and growth.

The Dawn newspaper reported that despite a steep fall in the interest rate, the monetary expansion remained negative during the first seven months of the current fiscal year, noting that the frequent declines in interest rates resulted in a massive outflow of liquidity from banks to the private sector and non-bank financial institutions (NBFIs).

Still, it has failed to stimulate economic growth, it said.

Bank advances to the private sector and NBFIs increased sharply in the sec-

ond quarter of FY25.

While financial experts believe that the impact of high liquidity supply to the private sector will take time to impact the economy, the government fears that inflation may catch the economy again, imports would be higher, and resultantly the current account would face a deficit which was currently surplus with USD 1.2 billion in the first half of FY25.

The latest data showed that the M2 growth (money supply) was negative Rs973 billion in July 1-Jan 17, FY25, compared to a net growth of Rs 416 billion in the same period last fiscal year.

Expanding the money supply is meant to result in lower interest rates and borrowing costs to boost consumption and investment.

The M2 data shows that the broad money expanded by Rs 4.94 trillion in FY24 and Rs 4.17 trillion in FY23. This huge supply, mostly to the government, created only inflation, which reached a record high of 38 per cent in May 2023. It badly hampered economic growth as the State Bank increased the interest rate to tame surging inflation.

### QUOTE OF THE DAY

"They may have their own relations, but talking about Ukraine without us - it is dangerous for everyone. I believe that, first and foremost, we (must) hold a meeting with him (Trump), and that is important."



Volodymyr Zelenskyy, President, Ukraine

## LA residents furious over hazardous waste

Duarte (US): Not far from where Ceci Carroll lives, a rock-mining company has polluted the air with dust across the San Gabriel Valley, she said.

Now, as crews clean charred remains from the Los Angeles wildfires, she worries about a new potential source of contamination: a site to process hazardous debris from the Eaton Fire.

"I'm concerned about the community and also the school districts here, where we have children," said Carroll, a Duarte resident

of 23 years and former local school board member.

"We're dealing with the site with the chemicals and hazardous materials," she said. "Parents are absolutely concerned."

Carroll is among residents from Duarte, Azusa and nearby cities opposing the Environmental Protection Agency's use of Lario Park in Irwindale as a temporary site to separate, package and transport potentially hazardous materials from the Eaton Fire.

In ordinary times, people picnic, bike or ride horses



on equestrian trails in the federally owned land. They now worry about dangerous waste that could pollute the air or seep into groundwater.

The blazes that began on January 7 charred thousands of buildings, cars and electronics across the Los Angeles area. The EPA has

begun the enormous task of removing potentially hundreds of tons of hazardous materials from the Eaton and Palisades fires. That includes paints, pesticides, solvents, compressed gas cylinders, ammunition and lithium-ion batteries from electric cars that could turn toxic when burned.

"The removal of these materials should not come at the cost of creating a toxic environment for communities already disproportionately impacted by pollution," Los Angeles

County Supervisor Hilda Solis said in a statement.

Residents have questions about waste site

At a town hall Wednesday, California Sen Susan Rubio and local mayors opposing the site grilled state and federal officials: How was the site chosen? Why weren't we consulted or notified? Why truck toxic waste 15 miles (24 kilometers) from the burn zone and risk contaminating our communities? What testing will be done after it's

closed?

Hundreds of residents crammed into the performing arts center and spilled into the hall. They shouted "Shut it down!" and chanted "Leave it in Altadena!"

EPA coordinator Tara Fitzgerald told the audience that sites closer to the Eaton burn zone were being used for emergency fire operations, including the Rose Bowl and the Santa Anita Park in Pasadena. They chose the Lario Park site because it suited their needs and was available.

-AP



## EDITORIAL

## Bold Promises

For her eighth consecutive budget, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman struck a populist tone, offering tax cuts, sectoral incentives and ambitious growth targets. Yet, as with all budgets, execution will determine whether these proposals translate into tangible gains. India has seen its share of grand announcements, only for bureaucratic inertia to stall their impact. This year must be different. The government must swiftly implement its pledges, ensuring they do not remain mere aspirations.

The budget's most talked-about feature is the massive relief for taxpayers. The middle class, long grumbling about its tax burden, received a windfall with the tax rebate threshold was raised from Rs. 7 lakh to Rs. 12 lakh. The highest tax rate of 30 percent now kicks in only after Rs 24 lakh. The move leaves more disposable income in the hands of consumers. The government is betting that this will spur consumption and private-sector investment, reigniting economic activity.

However, the gamble is not without risks. The Rs. 1 lakh crore in foregone tax revenue risks straining public finances even as the government targets a 4.4 percent fiscal deficit in 2025-26. The feasibility of achieving this target while expanding social-sector schemes remains to be seen. Much will depend on whether tax relief truly stimulates growth.

Beyond tax cuts, the budget focuses on self-reliance. The National Mission for Edible Oilseeds seeks to achieve independence in pulses over six years, targeting crops like tur, urad and masur dal. The move is pragmatic as India remains heavily dependent on imports for its oilseed requirements. A more resilient domestic supply chain will insulate the country from global price shocks. Yet success will depend on whether central agencies such as NAFED and NCCF efficiently procure and distribute produce, preventing the kind of bureaucratic bottlenecks that have hampered past agricultural reforms.

Politics, too, played its part. Bihar, which heads to the polls later this year, has received a generous allocation. Meanwhile, Andhra Pradesh, a key NDA ally, finds itself largely ignored. The opposition has been quick to seize upon this, questioning whether fiscal policy is being used to reward electoral loyalty.

The budget signals a shift in capital expenditure, missing projections by Rs. 1 lakh crore. Despite historically high allocations, the slowdown is concerning, as infrastructure investment drives jobs and growth. The government must prevent this dip from stalling economic momentum.

There is, however, a welcome shift towards employment generation. The Production Linked Incentive (PLI) scheme, which previously favoured capital-intensive industries, is now supplemented by incentives for labour-intensive sectors such as textiles and leather.

Looking ahead, much will hinge on how effectively these policies are implemented. India's economic survey envisions 8 percent growth annually to achieve 'Viksit Bharat' by 2047. The finance minister's task does not end with presenting a well-crafted budget. The government must now ensure that promises translate into real benefits. Delays in execution will mean lost opportunities, and India, poised for high growth, can ill afford them. Speed matters.



By  
Sumant Vidwans

# Who Wins Tartus? The Battle for Strategic Control Begins

## GLOBAL AFFAIRS

minimal Russian military presence throughout the 1990s and early 2000s. During that period, the base was used only sporadically for refuelling and maintenance.

With the outbreak of the Syrian Civil War in 2011, various international actors started supporting opposition groups, and Russia also saw an opportunity to reclaim its influence. Russian President Vladimir Putin established a 16-vessel Mediterranean task force in May 2013, designating Tartus as the base.

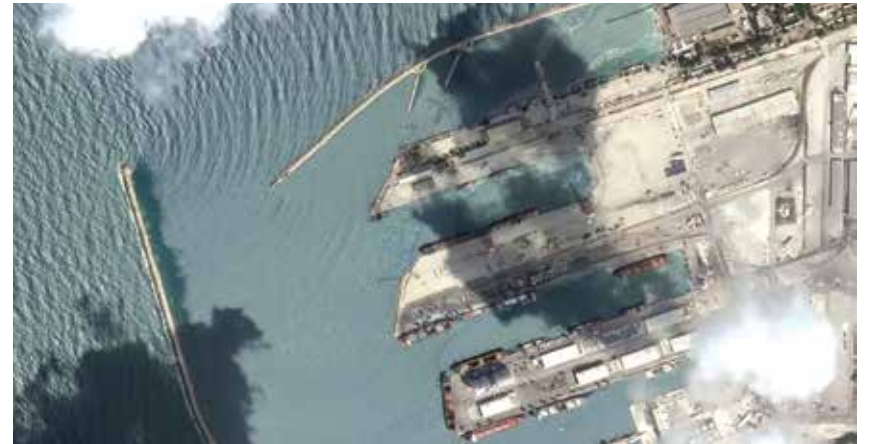
In 2015, Russia launched a full-scale military intervention in Syria, deploying air and naval forces to support Assad's government. The Tartus Naval facility became a critical logistics hub for Russian operations, facilitating arms shipments, troop movements, and missile strikes against anti-government forces.

Russia and Syria signed a 49-year lease agreement in 2017, effectively granting Russia control over the base until at least 2066. This deal transformed Tartus into a comprehensive naval base. Under this agreement, Russia was permitted to expand the facility, allowing up to 11 Russian warships, including nuclear-powered vessels, to be stationed there.

The Tartus naval base has been strategically significant for several reasons. Russia used Tartus to monitor NATO activities, effectively countering NATO influence in the region.

The base also served as a platform for power projection in the Middle East, allowing Russia to influence regional conflicts and support its allies. Furthermore, Tartus ensured Russian naval access to key maritime trade routes, securing important energy corridors. It also enabled Russia to sustain long-range military operations without relying on Black Sea ports or distant bases.

Perhaps most importantly, Tartus was Russia's only warm-water port with direct Mediterranean access. Post-2022, amid tighter Western sanctions and na-



val restrictions, it became an even more crucial logistics hub, supporting Russian naval operations and presence.

On the other hand, the militarisation of Tartus was a concern for the NATO countries, who saw it as part of Russia's broader strategy to expand its influence in the Mediterranean and challenge Western naval dominance.

The situation changed dramatically when Assad, a key Russian ally, fled to Moscow in November 2024. Soon Russia also started withdrawing its navy assets from the Tartus base. Eventually, the new Syrian government cancelled the investment agreement with the Russian company Stroytransgaz, which managed this base.

After Russia's withdrawal from Tartus, both the US and China might seek to establish a presence there, given their ongoing competition for global influence and the strategic location of the Tartus port. China has been expanding its military footprint abroad, highlighted by the establishment of its first overseas base in Djibouti in 2017. It has also constructed artificial islands and deployed military assets in the South China Sea. On the other hand, the US also maintains a network of overseas bases to uphold its global military presence. The proximity of US and Chinese bases in Djibouti has

already led to geopolitical tensions, highlighting the competitive nature of their global strategies.

However, at this time, it's hard to predict which way the US might go. Given President Trump's recent foreign policy initiatives, such as asserting control over the Panama Canal and expressing interest in acquiring Greenland, it is plausible that his administration might also consider establishing a presence at the Tartus naval base. But at the same time, this also appears to contrast with the new US administration's previous stance on reducing US military commitments overseas.

The termination of Russia's Tartus lease reshapes Middle Eastern geopolitics, weakening its Mediterranean foothold and inviting global powers to compete for influence. The United States and China seek expansion of their military and economic presence and may view this as an opportunity to establish their positions in Syria. The evolving dynamics at Tartus could thus become a focal point in the broader competition between these nations, with implications for regional stability and international relations.

(The author is a foreign affairs expert. Views personal.)

## GLOBAL WATCH

## Diplomatic Mirage

The war in Ukraine has entered a new, more insidious phase.

A Russian missile barrage on Saturday killed at least fifteen people, reducing residential buildings to rubble, plunging homes into darkness, and leaving a central city reeling. The strike on Poltava alone claimed eleven lives, four of them children. In Kharkiv, another drone attack killed one person, while three police officers died in Sumy. Russia, undeterred and unrepentant, continues its campaign of destruction with a strategic precision designed not just to cripple infrastructure but to terrorize an already exhausted population.

Yet, while missiles rain down, a different kind of battle is playing out behind closed doors. In Washington and Moscow, the future of Ukraine is being discussed in hushed conversations that pointedly exclude Kyiv. President Donald Trump and his aides have floated the idea of a negotiated settlement that could swiftly end the war. Trump's former National Security Advisor Keith Kellogg insists that Ukraine must hold elections, even as it battles an existential threat. But democracy under bombardment is a contradiction in terms, and for Ukraine, holding elections under martial law is constitutionally impossible.

Meanwhile, in Moscow, the Kremlin presses its advantage. Reports of Russian advances in eastern Ukraine, particularly near the city of Toretsk, suggest that Putin's forces are leveraging military gains to strengthen their position at the bargaining table. This is war by



other means: a strategic combination of battlefield success and diplomatic manoeuvring designed to force Ukraine into a weaker negotiating position. Every missile strike, every encroaching battalion, underscores the Kremlin's desire to dictate the terms of any future settlement.

President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, for his part, is acutely aware of the risks of being sidelined. He has insisted that Ukraine must be present at any peace talks, and those talks must include its key Western allies. The idea that Washington and Moscow could strike a deal over Ukraine's fate without Ukrainian involvement is not just undemocratic - it is ominous. A settlement forged in Kyiv's absence would amount to a tacit endorsement of Russian expansionism, rewarding aggression and setting a perilous precedent for future conflicts.

Russia, for its part, has little reason to negotiate in good faith. The battlefield momentum has shifted. And in the West, war fatigue is real. The longer the conflict drags on, the harder it becomes to justify the billions in military aid.

Zelenskyy understands this. A peace process that sidelines Ukraine is not a peace process but is a surrender disguised as diplomacy. In Trump's calculus, a quick deal

would be a victory, regardless of what it means for Ukraine's long-term security.

If Ukraine is forced into a ceasefire on Russia's terms, the consequences will extend far beyond its borders. A frozen conflict would entrench Russian territorial gains, giving Putin a permanent foothold in the country. More alarmingly, it would send a message to other would-be aggressors: that military conquest, if sustained long enough, can be legitimized through diplomacy.

The recent Russian strike on Odesa, condemned by UNESCO for damaging historic buildings, is a grim reminder of the cultural and human toll of this war. But beyond the immediate devastation, the long-term fight for Ukraine's independence is being waged in a realm where bombs do not fall—across negotiating tables where its future is being decided in absentia.

Zelenskyy is right to insist on a seat at those discussions. For the West, the choice is either to stand firmly behind Ukraine, ensuring it has both the military strength and diplomatic leverage to negotiate on its own terms, or risk orchestrating a settlement that merely sets the stage for the next war. For now, Ukraine fights on. The world debates. And in Poltava, in Kharkiv, in Sumy, the sirens keep wailing.

## STATES WATCH

## Shift Towards Right?

In a political climate marked by increasingly blurred ideological lines, Kerala's Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan finds himself caught between maintaining the Left's legacy of secularism and navigating the ever-more-confrontational terrain of national politics. Amid Opposition accusations of pandering to the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), the Kerala government's move to slash critical scholarships for minority students has irked Muslim and Christian outfits, with the opposition UDF vowing to hit the streets in protest.

Despite the claims of Vijayan's Marxist regime that the move was to save money, it has raised eyebrows among those who had long viewed the CM as an unflinching defender of Kerala's secular fabric.

While Kerala's fiscal constraints are no secret, the scale of the reductions raises an interesting question of whether the move is yet another attempt on Vijayan's part to 'appease' the BJP-led Centre in Delhi or appease the Hindu populace in the state with the aim of preventing saffron inroads in 'red' Kerala?

From the Prof. Joseph Mundassery Scholarship to the APJ Abdul Kalam Scholarship, financial support that has helped students from Muslim and Christian communities has been slashed, in some cases by as much as 50 percent. This decision comes despite the allocation of Rs. 87.63 crore for scholar-

**The Kerala government's move to slash minority scholarships has drawn accusations that Chief Minister Vijayan's regime was pandering to the BJP.**

ships in the 2024-25 budget, with only 2.69 percent of that amount disbursed in a year that has just two months left.

In a state that has long prided itself on being a bastion of progressive values, the cut to scholarships has been greeted with anger and disbelief. For Muslim Students Federation (MSF) leaders, the decision represents a stark betrayal of the minority communities that the Left has historically championed. The move is seen not only as an attack on educational access for disadvantaged groups but also as an attempt to appease the growing Hindu nationalist sentiments sweeping the nation.

Opposition leader V.D. Satheesan reiterated his accusation of Vijayan allegedly trying to 'appease' the BJP. The BJP's growing influence in Kerala, beginning with its success in securing a foothold in local elections and its first parliamentary seat in the 2019 Lok Sabha elections, has forced the CPI(M) to reconsider its strategy. The BJP's increasing vote share, especially in constituencies once considered Left strongholds, has

prompted a re-evaluation of the Left's traditional approach to minority communities.

Last year, revelations that Additional Director General of Police M.R. Ajith Kumar had allegedly met with RSS leaders on Vijayan's say-so had caused a furore.

In this new political calculus, the slashing of minority scholarships can be viewed as a means of appeasing Hindu voters, a demographic that has been steadily courted by the BJP.

The CPI(M) has been battered by internal dissent and external challenges, with allegations of corruption and compromised governance threatening to further weaken its standing. With accusations of an unholy alliance between the CPM and the RSS lingering in the air, Vijayan's move to cater to the right-wing's demands has all the markings of a political survival strategy.

It is perhaps no coincidence that the cuts to scholarships come amid a broader effort to divert attention from accusations of government mismanagement, including a controversial public relations campaign designed to bolster Vijayan's image.

For the Left, the potential cost of these moves could be high. A party that has long prided itself on its secularism and commitment to social justice risks losing both its minority vote and its core supporters, many of whom see the scholarships as a crucial lifeline. Even as Kerala's political landscape changes, the fear that the CPI(M) is playing a dangerous game of ideological compromise remains palpable.

Vijayan's actions, whether the product of pragmatism or desperation, have reignited an age-old debate about Kerala's place in the national political ecosystem. As the BJP tightens its grip on the country, Vijayan's 'secular' credentials face a very real threat of being unmasked.

**As Russia tightens its grip and Ukraine demands a seat at the table, the future of the war is being negotiated without its primary victim.**





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### KALEIDOSCOPE

1. An aerial view of people blocking the Bridge of Freedom during a protest over the collapse of a concrete canopy that killed 15 people more than two months ago in Novi Sad, Serbia on Saturday.
2. Actors Rahul Dev and Mugdha Godse during the Blender's Pride Fashion Tour in Gurugram on Saturday.
3. Participating cars are seen during 'Vintage and Classic Car Rally 2025' in Kolkata on Sunday.
4. Devotees light earthen lamps (diyas) on the occasion of Ganesh Puja in Guwahati on Sunday.
5. People visit the replica of Ayodhya's Shri Ram Temple constructed at the Maha Kumbh Mela area in Prayagraj on Saturday.



5

All Pictures PTI, AP

### FORENSIC MATTERS

## DNA 3D Molecular Photofitting: Frontier in Criminal Identification



By  
Dr. Keshav Kumar

The foolproof identification of an accused in undetected criminal cases remains a significant challenge for investigating officers. Traditionally, under the Identification of Prisoners Act, 1920, identification relied on fingerprints, footprints, and photographs. While these methods played a crucial role in the past, their susceptibility to manipulation necessitated the adoption of more advanced identification techniques. Recognizing this need, the Government of India repealed the 1920 Act in 2022 and introduced the Criminal Procedure Identification Act, 2022.

This new Act represents a monumental leap in forensic identification by incorporating biological samples, behavioral attributes (such as signature and handwriting), and the examination of blood, semen, hair, swabs, and DNA analysis. For the first time in Indian legal history, DNA analysis was formally recognized as a means of identification through legislation. Although the first judicial recognition of DNA evidence in India occurred in *Kunhiraman v. Manoj* (1991) in the Kerala High Court, it was only with the enactment of the 2022 Act that DNA analysis received statutory legitimacy.

In cold and undetected cases where body fluid evidence is available but the accused is at large, DNA analysis can be instrumental in identification, provided a suspect is identified for comparison. Modern DNA technology has progressed to the extent that even a microscopic biological sample, as small as one picogram, can yield significant forensic insights. In the United States, forensic experts have developed 2D facial reconstruction from DNA, offering a

groundbreaking method to aid investigations, which is also called Snapshot DNA Analysis, developed by Parabon NanoLabs, INC [www.parabon-nanolabs.com](http://www.parabon-nanolabs.com).

Paraben Corporation, a U.S.-based digital forensics company, has pioneered advancements in forensic DNA technology, particularly in DNA-based suspect identification. Their innovative approach involves generating a 2D facial print from a DNA sample, assisting law enforcement in reconstructing facial features. By analyzing genetic markers linked to skin tone, hair color, and facial structure, Paraben's technology translates raw DNA data into a detailed 2D representation of an individual's face. This advancement is particularly beneficial in cases where photographic evidence or eyewitness



accounts are unavailable. In India, there could be many such cases.

With the advent of 3D printing technology, forensic DNA analysis has reached new heights over 2D DNA printing. 3D Molecular Photofitting is an advanced forensic technique that reconstructs a person's facial features using DNA evidence. By analyzing genetic markers associated with traits such as skin tone, eye color, hair color, and facial structure, forensic experts can generate a predictive 3D model of an individual's face. The DNA Technology is under trial phases developed by Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, Centre for Biotechnology, Troy, NY, USA.

This cutting-edge technique integrates genomics, bioinformatics, and AI-driven modelling, significantly enhancing suspect identification, especially in cold cases. The technology

offers a promising solution for cases where conventional methods fail, aiding law enforcement in suspect identification with unprecedented accuracy and precision in the case of Saif Ali Khan.

While these emerging DNA technologies hold immense potential, they are still in their incipient stages and require further refinement. The cost factor remains a hurdle, but advancements in forensic science are making these methods more accessible. For instance, which once took months to develop a DNA profile, can now generate results in just 90 minutes through RapidHit Technology developed by ThermoFisher. It's available with Gujarat and Odisha FSL. Law enforcement agencies must harness these technological advancements to ensure swift and effective justice delivery. DNA-based facial reconstruction can be a game-changer in cases where CCTV footage-based facial matching is disputed or where traditional forensic methods fail to yield results.

While DNA 3D Molecular Photofitting presents promising opportunities for forensic science, its implementation must be accompanied by stringent ethical guidelines and privacy safeguards. Concerns surrounding genetic profiling, data security, and potential misuse necessitate robust regulation and oversight to ensure responsible and ethical usage.

As forensic science evolves at a rapid pace, the integration of advanced DNA-based technologies promises to transform criminal investigations, offering a level of clarity that has often eluded law enforcement. These innovations could eradicate the uncertainties that have historically clouded the search for justice, speeding up investigations and infusing the courtroom with a new standard of scientific rigor. The future of forensic identification lies in harnessing these breakthroughs to unite the precision of science with the intricacies of the legal system. It's time to place more science at the heart of the courtroom, where justice meets technology.

(The author is a retired IPS officer and forensic consultant to the Assam government. Views personal.)

### BOOK MUSINGS

## A Paragon of Judicial Integrity



By  
Hemant Shetye

In the 18th century, when Montesquieu, the French philosopher, argued for the separation of powers in his groundbreaking work *De L'Esprit des Loix* ('The Spirit of Law', 1748), his views were met with fierce opposition from monarchs like Louis XIV, who famously declared, "L'État, C'est Moi" (translated as 'I am the state').

But Montesquieu's principles gained traction in countries like England, the United States and later in India. In a remarkable parallel across time and geography, Ram Shastry Prabhune, the pioneering Indian judge, embodied Montesquieu's ideas with a clarity that would resonate even today.

'Ram Shastry Prabhune: An Icon of Judicial Integrity and Independence' (2023), written by Advocate Vilas Patane and translated by Advocate Ramakant Khalap, explores the political and social landscape of Pune during the Peshwa rule, shedding light on the intrigues, conspiracies and power struggles of the time. It shows how Shastry's vision of an independent judiciary that upholds the rights of the people above the ambitions of rulers remains as relevant today as it was in the Peshwa era. It also reveals the moral and ethical fiber that should guide every judge in their pursuit of justice.

Born in 1726, Ram Shastry served as chief justice in the court of the Peshwa in Pune, during an era dominated by political intrigue and a rigid caste system. An epitome of integrity, fearlessness and judicial excellence, Shastry's work transcended the constraints of his time. Like Montesquieu, he believed that justice should stand above all, independent of the whims of rulers, religious authorities or societal pressures.

The British historian James Grant Duff lauded Ram Shastry for his wisdom, honesty, integrity and fearlessness - virtues that elevated him in the eyes of both contemporaries and history. In a world where the independence of the judiciary is a cornerstone of democracy, Shastry's legacy resonates with the principles enshrined in

trating executive and judicial power in one person would lead to societal ruin.

Beyond his legal rulings, Shastry's reforms underscored a progressive vision. He allowed widow remarriage, long considered taboo, and took bold steps to challenge entrenched caste hierarchies. When the Peshwa decreed that the Kayastha Prabhune caste could not perform Vedic rituals, Shastry overturned the edict, granting them the same rights as Brahmins. He reprimanded the Peshwa for neglecting duties in favour of excessive worship and forced his wife to return lavish gifts from the Peshwa's wife, demonstrating his commitment to fairness.

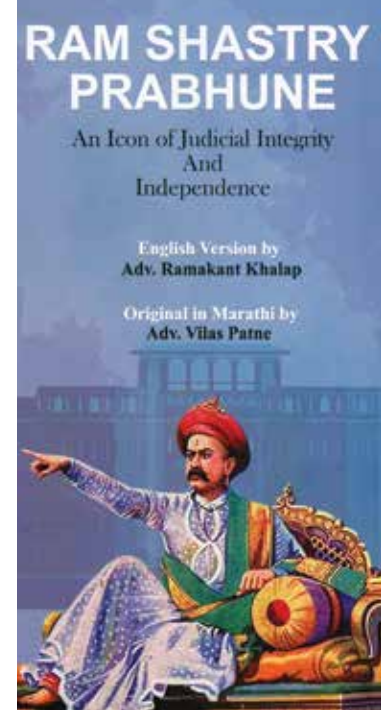
Shastry's work extended far beyond the courtroom. A scholar of ancient texts, including the Manu Smriti and the Arthashastra, he balanced respect for tradition with a belief that laws must evolve with society.

His famous act of allowing an imposter to present his case despite widespread disbelief in the fraud. This was testament to his adherence to the principle of *Audi Alteram Partem* ('Let the other side be heard'). It wasn't just about the facts of the case but about ensuring that justice was served impartially.

Ram Shastry Prabhune's legacy is not just one of judicial courage, but of a commitment to justice that transcended his time. His fearlessness in holding powerful figures accountable, his advocacy for the rights of marginalized communities, and his progressive stance on issues like widow remarriage and caste discrimination marked him as a visionary in an age that rarely allowed for such radical ideas to take root.

The book not only chronicles Shastry's remarkable career but also reflects on the judicial practices of the Peshwa era, offering readers a glimpse into the legal and administrative challenges of the time. It shows how Ram Shastry's vision for a fair, just, and independent judiciary was ahead of its time.

(The author is librarian at the Jitendra Chauhan College of Law, Mumbai.)



the United Nations Resolutions of 1985 and 1990 which underscore the crucial need for a clear separation of powers.

Shastry's most notable act of judicial courage came when he investigated the gruesome 1773 murder of Narayanrao Peshwa, holding Raghoba Dada responsible and sentencing him to death. This decision, a bold stand against a powerful figure, led Shastry to resign from his position in protest of the political interference he faced. Yet, his integrity was unshaken. Even after he withdrew into seclusion, Nana Fadnavis and Sakhararam Babu had to assure him, in writing, that no one would interfere with his future judicial duties. This moment exemplifies Shastry's unwavering commitment to an independent judiciary, echoing Montesquieu's belief that concen-



# INDIA THRASH SA to win U-19 women's T20 WORLD TITLE

**Kuala Lumpur:** An utterly dominant India flaunted their embarrassment of riches to win a second successive U-19 Women's T20 World Cup title with a nine-wicket shellacking of South Africa here on Sunday, the triumph giving a peek into the game's most perfectly calibrated youth structure.

Having outclassed every team during their march to the final, India asserted themselves yet again, getting the job done with as many as 52 balls to spare while also becoming the first team to win the tournament without dropping a single game.

The biggest star of the day was all-rounder Gongadi Trisha, who completed her excellent 3/15 with an unbeaten 33-ball 44 while batting.

South Africa, led by Kayla Reyneke, opted to bowl first, but their decision backfired quickly as India's three-pronged spin attack bowled them out for 82.

Left-arm spinner Aayushi Shukla was the star of the show with figures of 4-2-9-2, while leg-spinner Trisha, who has also been a revelation with the bat, further underlined her all-round capabilities with her triple strikes with the ball.

Trisha once again anchored India's chase with an unbeaten knock that was studded with eight fours.

Vice-captain Sanika Chalke (26 not out; 22 balls,



4x4) sealed the victory with a powerful heave to the square-leg boundary, forcing the young Indian players, draped in the Tricolour, to break into wild celebrations.

"I've dreamt of this moment for the past two years, and I can't believe I hit the winning runs -- it's truly surreal. My teammates' support made all the difference, and this moment is one I'll cherish forever," said Sanika after the match.

Left-arm spinner Parunika (4-0-6-2) provided India with an immediate breakthrough, dismissing opener Simone Lourens for a duck as South Africa struggled from the outset.

Right-arm seamer Shabnam Shakil (2-0-7-1) then removed the dangerous Jemma Botha, reducing

South Africa to 20/2 by the end of the fourth over.

The pressure intensified when Aayushi bowled Dilara Ramlakan, further denting South Africa's innings.

At the halfway mark, South Africa were struggling at 33/3, unable to gain any momentum.

Captain Kayla Reyneke (7) tried to stabilise the innings but fell to Trisha, who later stumped Mieke van Voorst (23) to break a promising 30-run partnership for the seventh wicket.

Their skipper attempted to break free but perished while trying to go big, holding out to Trisha at long-off.

Despite Fay Cowling (15; 20 balls) and Mieke van Voorst putting up a small resistance, South Africa's

struggles continued.

The duo tried to rebuild but with just four overs remaining, South Africa were precariously placed at 58/5.

Trisha's breakthrough then triggered a collapse and they were eventually bowled out in the final delivery of their innings.

India got off to a strong start in their chase, scoring briskly with a steady flow of singles and boundaries. Trisha was once again the aggressor with her exquisite strokes, while Kamalini G also chipped in.

The opening partnership was moving smoothly until Kamalini was dismissed for 8, caught by Simone Lourens off Kayla Reyneke's bowling, leaving India at 36/1 in 4.3 overs.

Sanika faced a few dot balls before settling in as

South Africa's wayward bowling and fielding also helped India's cause.

Trisha, on the other hand, continued to exude confidence, accumulating runs with a mix of singles and boundaries.

Indian opener Trisha, who struck the only century of this edition of the tournament -- 110 against Scotland -- finished as the top-scorer with 309 runs from seven innings at a fantastic average of 77.25 and a strike rate of over 147.

She also returned with seven wickets at an economy rate of 6.42 across the seven outings.

Vaishnavi emerged as the tournament's top wicket-taker, claiming 17 scalps at an outstanding economy rate of 4.35 from six matches, while Aayushi Shukla supported her brilliantly with 14 wickets from seven matches.

In the final, India were 71/1 at the halfway mark of their innings.

The defending champions enjoyed a flawless campaign, winning all their group-stage matches against the West Indies, Malaysia, and Sri Lanka. Their winning momentum continued in the Super Six stage with victories over Bangladesh and Scotland.

In the semi-final, India delivered a commanding performance against England to extend their unbeaten run to six matches.

-PTI



Mohammed Siraj with captain CV Milind during the fourth day of Ranji Trophy cricket match between Hyderabad and Vidarbha in Nagpur on Sunday. Pic: PTI

## J & K quarterfinal in Pune

**Pune:** The Ranji Trophy quarterfinal between Jammu and Kashmir against Kerala will be played at the Maharashtra Cricket Association Stadium here from February 8.

The match has been relocated from its original venue in Srinagar due to "potential weather concerns" raised by the Jammu and Kashmir Cricket Association with the BCCI.

"We have a good infrastructure to host the game of cricket, and I'm sure it will be a great playing experience for both teams under these conditions," MCA president Rohit Pawar said on Sunday. "Our venue poses no weather concerns," said MCA secretary Kamlesh Pisal.

J&K on Sunday crushed Baroda by a huge margin of 182 runs in their final Elite Group A clash to qualify for the final eight along with defending champions Mumbai.

Jammu and Kashmir

produced a fine performance to crush Baroda by 182 runs and seal their place in the quarterfinals of the premier domestic tournament.

With this win, J&K topped their group.

Having set Baroda a target of 365, J&K's off-break bowler Sahil Lotra finished with career-best figures of 7/75 as his team bundled out Baroda for 182 in 54.5 overs.

Left-arm spinner Abid Mushtaq played the perfect foil to Lotra, returning figures of 3/71 while also taking the wicket of Baroda's number 11 Akash Singh to seal a memorable win for J&K.

Meanwhile, the match between Maharashtra and Tripura in Solapur ended in a draw with the latter reaching 310 for five in their second innings on the final day. Both the captains decide to call it off at that stage of the game.

Maharashtra bagged

three points owing to their first-innings lead, while Tripura got one.

### Second highest run chase for services

Riding on openers Shubham Rohilla's 209 not out and Suraj Vashist's unbeaten 154, Services achieved the second highest successful run-chase in Ranji Trophy history as they overhauled a 376-run target against Odisha without losing a wicket in their Group A match on Sunday.

Services' effort is second only to Railways' 378-run chase against Tripura in Agartala last year.

Vashist and Rohilla's unbroken 376-run partnership is also the second highest stand in a successful fourth-innings run-chase in First-Class cricket history.

Services were set the imposing target after Odisha notched 394 in the second innings, with Anil Parida remaining unbeaten on 99.

## Praag, Gukesh in joint lead



**Wijk Aan Zee (The Netherlands):** World Champion D Gukesh played out a draw with Jorden van Foreest of Holland, while Grandmaster R Praggnanandhaa beat Alexey Sarana of Serbia as the two Indians shared the lead after a thrilling day at the Tata Steel Masters here.

Praggnanandhaa notched up his third consecutive win to take his tally to a commendable 8.5 points, same as his compatriot Gukesh after the 12th and penultimate round.

The two Indians are now poised for an exciting finish in the prestigious tournament, with the remarkable prospect of one of them potentially clinching the title—a first in Tata Steel Masters history.

Eying the top spot after the 11th round, Nodirbek

Abdusattorov of Uzbekistan was outdone by Arjun Erigaisi and is all but out of title contention on 7.5 points.

Praggnanandhaa was involved in another Queen's gambit declined opening. Only this time he was playing with white pieces.

It was quite a contrast from his previous round game against Caruana as Sarana went for an early advance of king side pawns and then castled on the queen side. It was time to launch an attack against the black king and Praggnanandhaa did not disappoint.

In tactical complications, Praggnanandhaa was at his best as he sacrificed a piece to rip apart the black's king position and what followed thereafter was a pleasure to watch.

## Hard to go past India, Australia in CT: Ponting

**Dubai:** The legendary Ricky Ponting feels the quality of players and recent history make India and Australia the favourites to compete in the summit clash of the upcoming ICC Champions Trophy.

The 50-over tournament will take place from February 19 to March 9 across three venues in Pakistan and one in Dubai.

"It's hard to go past India and Australia again," Ponting told the ICC Review.

"Just think about the quality of players in both countries right now, and you look back in recent history when these big finals and big ICC events have come around, and inevitably Australia and India are there somewhere."

India and Australia are the only teams to have won the Champions Trophy twice. India secured the crown in 2013 and shared the trophy with Sri Lanka in 2002 after the final was washed out, while Australia clinched back-to-back titles in 2006 and 2009.



Indian players take selfies at the Davis Cup 2025 World Group play-off match against Togo in New Delhi on Sunday. Pic: PTI

## Balaji, Bollipalli keep India in World Group I

By Amanpreet Singh

**New Delhi:** N Sriram Balaji and Rithvik Choudary Bollipalli sealed India's place in the Davis Cup World Group I with a convincing straight set victory, which handed the hosts an unassailable 3-0 lead against Togo in the play-off tie here on Sunday.

With a 2-0 lead in pocket, India needed to win just one of the three matches of the day and the pair of Balaji and Bollipalli did the job in the very first contest against M'lapa Tingou Akomolo and Hod'abalo Isak Padio. They won 6-2 6-1 in just 57 minutes at DLTA Complex.

Togo replaced their best player Thomas Setodji with M'lapa Tingou Akomolo due to an arm injury and it hurt them as he could not hold serve even once in the contest.

Balaji was sensational with his serving. Playing percentage tennis, he lost just one point on his serve during the match.

India are likely to hand

young Karan Singh debut in the dead rubber.

It was a pretty straightforward show from Balaji and Bollipalli, who had won a Challenger together last year.

Bollipalli was a bit under pressure when he could not pick up a half-volley, making it 30-all in his first ever service game on debut but managed to hold. After that it was one-way traffic throughout.

The Indians got their first break when Akomolo served in the third game. At 15-15, Bollipalli hit an up-pish forehand return that sailed over the two players but landed inside the lines. Balaji then hit a service return winner to earn two break points.

A riveting volley rally ensued on first break points with all four players showing some great reflexes, but eventually, one Akomolo return flew over the baseline. It gave India a 3-1 lead and Balaji made it 4-1 with another strong service game.

# Two-tier Test format likely before India's tour of England

**London:** When Australia face South Africa in the World Test Championship final, it will mark the end of the current format, which is set to be relaunched as a two-tier system ahead of India's tour of England later this summer.

In a bid to create a "fairer competition", England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) chairman Richard Thompson, who is the head of the ICC's strategic growth committee, recently held talks with the apex body's chairman Jay Shah and the two will lead the plan.

With just five months left for the next cycle to start with England hosting India at Headingley from June 20,

Thompson acknowledged the urgency of the matter.

"It is fully understood that the current structure does not work in the way it should and we need to find a fairer, better competition, but at this stage no recommendations have been put forward," Thompson told Telegraph Sport.

"We have five months to work on this, step back and look at what the structure should be going forward. The World Test Championship should be fairer and more competitive. It is going to change to ensure it always encourages the best teams to reach the final and encourages other nations that want to play Test cricket.

"We will protect, grow and ensure the integrity of Test cricket because the format is crucial to the DNA of the game."



et, to play Test cricket.

The current model has drawn criticism for its inconsistencies. Teams do not play every other nation within the two-year cycle,

and an excess of two-Test series has skewed standings.

Political constraints mean India and Pakistan do not face each other, impact-

ing the integrity of the competition.

Similarly, South Africa reached the final without playing Australia, though they will meet in the title clash at Lord's in June.

Discussions will also explore the possibility of four-day Tests, as this could help boards schedule three-Test series around franchise leagues, the report has said.

Notably, no three-Test series involving teams outside the "big three" of England, India, and Australia has taken place since 2019.

However, the four-day Tests won't be there for marquee series such as the Ashes or matches between

tier-one nations.

The push for a two-tier system gained traction following Australia's blockbuster series against India, which set attendance records.

The proposed model would see the top-tier nations play each other more frequently, potentially sidelining other teams and series which has evoked negative responses from the legends of the game.

West Indies great Clive Lloyd has been a strong critic of the system, saying it would be "disastrous for smaller teams".

"All these countries have worked very hard to get there. We have been in ICC

for nearly 100 years. We've a great history and now you're going to tell us, because of a monetary situation, this is how it's going to be," Lloyd had said.

Sri Lanka's World Cup winning skipper Arjuna Ranatunga has also criticised the move, saying it would only benefit the three boards.

"Sport isn't just about Pounds, Dollars and Rupees. Administrators must nurture and protect the game."

Bangladesh batter Mominul Haque and England's former pacer Steven Finn have also criticised the move.

-PTI