

# THE PERFECT VOICE



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## Dalit icon's son humiliated at Rahul's event

Patna: A row erupted here on Wednesday when freedom fighter and Dalit icon Jaglal Choudhary's son alleged that he was not given due respect at the function organised on his father's birth anniversary, attended by Congress leader Rahul Gandhi.

Bihar Congress chief Akhilesh Prasad Singh, however, maintained that the party's role was that of a 'facilitator' in the event organised by an NGO, though the latter leader's son, Bhudeo Choudhary, has been invited to Sadaqa Ashram, the BPCC headquarters, on Thursday.

"I have also come to know that Bhudeo Choudhary, son of Dalit icon Jaglal Choudhary, was not given due respect at today's function. I condemn it. He should have been given due respect. But, let me make it very clear that the event was organised by an NGO and the role of Bihar Congress was just a facilitator. Anyway, I will meet Bhudeo Choudhary at the BPCC office on Thursday," Singh told PTI.

Earlier, Bhudeo Choudhary told reporters, "I wanted to meet Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on the dais... but I was not allowed by the security personnel. I felt very bad that I was not given due respect at the function organised on my father's birth anniversary."

# Lotus to bloom in Delhi: Exit polls

New Delhi: Several exit polls on Wednesday predicted a victory for the BJP over the ruling AAP in the Delhi assembly polls, while the Congress was projected to make no significant gains from last elections.

Two exit polls, however, predicted a victory for the Aam Admi Party (AAP), and as many showed a close contest between them, with an edge for the BJP.

The Election Commission will announce the official results after the counting of on February 8. Exit polls are projections made by election survey agencies based on interviews of voters as they come out after casting their votes. These may vary widely from the actual results. In the 2020 Delhi polls, most exit polls got their predictions wrong.

The AAP rejected the exit poll results for the Delhi Assembly election on Wednesday, saying the pollsters have "historically" underestimated its performance, while the BJP termed the predictions an assertion of people's urge for change.

AAP's national spokesperson Reena Gupta told PTI that exit polls have historically underestimated the Arvind Kejriwal-led party but in actual results, the party gains several times more than these projections.

"You look at any exit poll -- whether in 2013, 2015 or 2020 -- the AAP was always shown getting a smaller number of seats. But it got a greater number of seats in the actual results," Gupta said.

Delhi BJP president Virendra Sachdeva said the



A voter gets polling slip at out side of a polling station during the Delhi Assembly elections at Jamia Nagar, Okhla in New Delhi on Wednesday. Pic: PTI

party respects the exit poll predictions. "I believe the people of Delhi made up their minds long ago that they wanted change," he added.

Delhiites want a corruption-free government. BJP workers campaigned with great dedication in the run-up to the election to fight against corruption in the city, Sachdeva said.

He exuded confidence that the AAP is on its way out of power and that the saffron party is going to form its government in Delhi after a gap of more than 25 years.

Delhi recorded 57.89 per cent voter turnout in the assembly polls on Wednesday amid charges of malpractices including money distribution and fake voting by both AAP and BJP who are engaged in an intense battle to decide who rules the national capital. The turnout is about five percentage points lower than the 2020 assembly polls (62.59 per cent) when the Arvind Kejriwal-led party won 62 seat of the 70 seats, while the BJP got eight and the Congress zero. Long queues of voters were witnessed outside polling stations in different constituencies since early morning, and there were people still waiting after the scheduled time of close at 6 pm.

According to Delhi Chief Electoral officer, 57.89 per cent votes - there are 1.56 crore eligible voters - were polled by 5 pm. The percentage will go up as officials update the figures from all the 13,766 stations.

## THE PREDICTIONS

CHANAKYA STRATEGIES	
39-44	25-28
2-3	
P-MARQ	
39-49	21-31
0-1	
JVC	
39-45	22-31
0-2	
PEOPLE'S INSIGHT	
40-44	25-29
0-2	
MATRIZE	
35-40	32-37
0-1	
PEOPLES PULSE	
51-60	10-19
0	
WEEPRESIDE	
18-23	46-52
0-1	
MIND BRINK	
44-49	21-25
0-1	
DV RESEARCH	
26-34	36-44
0	

## Leader of Ismaili Muslims dies

Paris: The Aga Khan, who became the spiritual leader of the world's millions of Ismaili Muslims at age 20 as a Harvard undergraduate and poured a material empire built on billions of dollars in tithes into building homes, hospitals and schools, died Tuesday. He was 88.

Rahim Al-Hussaini has been named the new Aga Khan, spiritual leader of the world's millions of Ismaili Muslims, reports AP.

His Aga Khan Development Network and the Ismaili religious community announced that His Highness Prince Karim Al-Hussaini, the Aga Khan IV and 49th hereditary imam of the Shia Ismaili Muslims, died in Portugal surrounded by his family.

A statement said his burial and will-reading will be held in the coming days, followed by a homage ceremony.

Considered by his followers to be a direct descendant of the Prophet Muhammad and treated as a head of state, he was a student when his grandfather named him as successor to lead the diaspora of Shia Ismaili Muslims, passing over his playboy father and saying his followers should be led by a young man "who has been brought up in the midst of the new age."

## Non-Hindus at bay in Tirupati temple



New Delhi: TDP leader Nara Lokesh asserted Wednesday there is no second thought on the decision to bar Tirupati temple board's non-Hindu employees from the management body's religious activities as it is the stand of the party's government in Andhra Pradesh.

Speaking to reporters here, the Telugu Desam Party general secretary, the son of Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu, also affirmed his party's absolute support to the BJP, saying the TDP is with Prime Minister Narendra Modi "through and through".

Asked about the decision of the Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams (TTD), which manages the Sri Venkateswara temple in Tirupati, related to non-Hindu employees, he said, "There is no second thought about it. We spoke about it before

the polls and we stand by it. We will take it to logical conclusion."

The state government minister added, "I want to be clear. There are religious sentiments involved."

He cited the example of Hindus being not allowed to work in a mosque to make his point. Lokesh said the government will fight it out if there is any legal challenges to the decision.

As many as 18 Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams (TTD) employees, who are said to be practitioners of non-Hindu faiths, have been barred from attending all religious and spiritual events conducted by the temple body, an official said on Wednesday.

The TDP has accused the previous YSR Congress government of appointing non-Hindus in the body and hurting Hindu sentiments. -PTI

## PMC seals private RO water plants

Pune: The Pune civic body has sealed 19 private RO plants in the Nanded village area, the epicentre of the GBS outbreak, after tests confirmed that the water from these facilities was unfit for drinking, officials said on Wednesday.

During the day, four fresh cases of suspected Guillain-Barré syndrome (GBS), a rare nerve disorder, were reported in Pune district, taking the overall tally in Maharashtra to 170.

The now-sealed privately owned reverse-osmosis (RO) plants, located in the Dhayari-Nanded area, supplied bottled water to a large number of people in the vicinity.

Following the crack-down, the water supply department of the Pune Municipal Corporation (PMC) announced plans to formulate standard operating procedures (SOPs) to prevent the distribution of contaminated water in the area. "During the investigation of the water samples collected from some privately run RO plants, it was found that the water from 19 such RO plants operating in the Nanded and adjoining area, was unfit for drinking.



Prime Minister Narendra Modi took a holy dip in the Sangam during Maha Kumbh at Prayagraj on Wednesday. Pic: PTI

## Stand-up comedian assaulted in Shinde's den

Solapur: Police have registered a case against 10-12 persons for allegedly assaulting stand-up comedian Pranit More in Solapur after a performance, a police official said Wednesday.

According to the police, the attackers were upset with More for his alleged comments aimed at actor Veer Pahariya, the grandson of former chief minister Sushilkumar Shinde.

A statement on behalf of More was put up on his social media account about the alleged assault on him. "...They brutally attacked him, punching and kicking him repeatedly, leaving him injured," reads a statement on his Instagram account.

More was summoned by the Solapur police to record his statement but he did not turn up, the official said. Police subsequently registered a case on a complaint by the owner of the restaurant where More had performed. As per the complaint, after More's show ended, 10 to 12 people who were upset due to his remarks targeting Pahariya assaulted the comedian.

## At 87.43 Rupee at all-time low

Mumbai: The rupee plunged 36 paise to close at an all-time low of 87.43 against the US dollar on Wednesday, as global trade war concerns fuelled risk aversion among investors.

Forex traders said the rupee is trading with a negative bias over global trade war as market participants mull the impact of tariffs being imposed by the United States and China.

Moreover, rate cut concerns by the Reserve Bank of India and broad strength of the American currency in the overseas market dented investor sentiments further.

At the interbank foreign exchange, the rupee opened on a weak note at 87.13 and touched an intraday low of 87.49 against the American currency.

The local unit finally settled at a record closing low of 87.43, lower by 36 paise over its previous close.

On Tuesday, the rupee recovered 4 paise from its all-time low level to close at 87.07 against US dollar.

Anuj Choudhary - Research Analyst at Mirae Asset Sharekhan, said the rupee touched a fresh all-

time low on rising odds of a rate cut by the Reserve Bank of India in its monetary policy meeting.

"We expect the rupee to trade with negative bias amid importer demand for dollars and ongoing uncertainty over US trade tariffs. Escalation of the tariff war may dampen global risk sentiments and raise safe haven demand for the US dollar," Choudhary said, adding that traders may take cues from non-farm employment and ISM services PMI data from the US.

Trump is pressing ahead with a 10 per cent tariff on US companies importing things from China. On Tuesday, China retaliated by announcing its own tariffs on some US products and an antitrust investigation into Google.

Trump on Monday held off on his tariff threats against Mexico and Canada for 30 days after they pledged to boost border enforcement.

Meanwhile, the dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, was trading 0.35 per cent lower at 107.58. -PTI



Dehradun: Yogasana and Mallakhamb are not just demonstration sports at ongoing National Games now and will offer medals, a decision which was taken on the request of the organisers, an Indian Olympic Association

# Now Yogasana, Mallakhamb medal sports

tion (IOA) source confirmed to PTI on Wednesday.

The IOA had classified the two games as demonstration sports ahead of the multi-sport event, which began on January 28.

In December last year, the IOA had said that the 38th National Games in Uttarakhand (January 28 to February 14) would feature 32 core and four demonstration sports - yogasana, mallakhamb, kalaripayattu and rafting.

But on Wednesday, the organisers issued a release in which yogasana and mal-

lakhamb were added as medal sports.

The move meant that the ongoing National Games are being competed in 34 sports and two demonstration sports.

Kalaripayattu - a form of martial arts that originated in Kerala - and rafting - of which Rishikesh in Uttarakhand is a well-known place - will remain as demonstration sports (non-medal).

"Yes, they (yogasana and mallakhamb) were confirmed as medal sports by the IOA as the host (state)



has a right to request two sports (as medal sports)," an IOA source told PTI.

Yogasana is a sport that focuses on the physical aspect of yoga, where players have to perform yogic postures and are judged on their difficulty, balance, control, flexibility and endurance.

Mallakhamb is a traditional Indian sport in which the practitioner performs yoga-like postures and movements on a vertical wooden pole or a rope. Mallakhamb is derived from the terms 'malla' which means a

wrestler and 'khamb' meaning a pole.

As per the statement issued by the IOA in December last year, the Games were to feature 34 sports disciplines under the original Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) signed between the IOA and the Uttarakhand State Olympic Association in 2014.

However, IOA President PT Usha and the GTCC (Games Technical Conduct Committee) had approved 32 sports disciplines and four demonstration sports. -PTI



# Lack of chlorine in water of GBS patients' houses

Pune: A water quality survey held around Nanded village, the epicentre of Guillain-Barre Syndrome (GBS) in Pune city, has found there was lack of chlorine in the drinking water supplied to households of 26 patients of this nerve disorder, officials said.

GBS is a rare condition that causes sudden numbness and muscle weakness, with symptoms including severe weakness in the limbs.

On Tuesday, three fresh cases of GBS were reported in Maharashtra's Pune city, taking the overall tally to 166, they said.

Officials of the Rapid Response Team (RRT), formed to probe the outbreak of the GBS cases in Nanded and adjoining localities in Sinhagad Road area, said there were 77 GBS patients in Nanded. Of them, the households of 62 patients were visited to take the drinking water samples.

The findings of the house-to-house survey about lack of chlorine in drinking water was discussed in the RRT's meeting.

Experts have now urged the Pune Municipal Corporation's (PMC) water supply department to take immediate action to maintain chlorine level of 0.2 ppm (parts per million) in the household water supply to ensure public health safety.

"While water at the source (well) was found to be adequately purified with sufficient chlorine levels, zero chlorine was detected in households of 26 patients out of 62," an RRT member said.

The water supply department should take immediate action to maintain a minimum chlorine level of 0.2 ppm in household water supply, he said.

Last week, Maharashtra Health Minister Prakash Abitkar said 80 per cent of the suspected GBS cases in Pune have been reported from areas



located around a mega well in Nanded.

He had noted that high number of cases in certain areas appeared to be linked to suspected water contamination.

When contacted, PMC's water supply department head Nandkishor Jagtap said the water from the well (in Nanded, which supplies to four to five villages) is adequately purified with sufficient chlorine levels.

"The reasons for zero level of chlorine level could be that the households must be sourcing water from other sources, such as private tankers or non-cleaning of overhead water tanks at the residential society or individual household," he said.

There is another reason that if the water is stored in large quantities, the levels of chlorine could go volatile, the official said.

Jagtap said his department also collected samples in which chlorine was not found in some and Escherichia coli or E. coli bacteria was found.

"After we found E. coli in some of the water samples collected from the tankers, their operators have been issued notices and they have been in-

structed to use bleaching power solutions provided by the PMC to ensure the bacteria is contained," he said.

Some of the private water ATMs were seized after E. coli was found in their samples, he added.

Meanwhile, Dr Radhakishan Pawar, deputy director of the state health department and chairman of the RRT, said the outbreak of GBS is subsiding now.

"There are around 165 cases, of which 77 are cluster cases which are from Nanded village area. The remaining cases are from other parts of Pune and other districts and they are not epidemiologically related to Nanded area," he said.

"We consider these 77 cases in Nanded and adjoining areas as an outbreak as they are more than normal and accordingly, the investigations and sample collection of water, stool, poultry, food was going on," Pawar said.

A decline in the number of GBS cases has been observed now, he added.

"There was a peak around January 18 and 19 but now a decline has been recorded," he said.

## Actor regrets over Shivaji remarks

Mumbai: Actor Rahul Solapurkar is facing flak for claiming that Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj escaped from Agra after "bribing" Mughal emperor Aurangzeb's chieftains.

While BJP MP Udayanraje Bhosale, a descendant of the Maratha king, said those who make such remarks should be shot, Suresh Dhas, an MLA of his party, said people should thrash Solapurkar wherever they see him.

In a video message, Solapurkar said he regrets hurting sentiments of Shivpremis (those who love Chhatrapati Shivaji) for using the word 'bribe' while describing the Maratha king's escape from Agra.

Bhosale said Solapurkar should be tried for treason and questioned in what capacity he made the "derogatory remarks" on the 17th century Maratha warrior.

Bhosale said, "I feel such people should be shot wherever they are found or stoned to death."

Solapurkar had claimed in an interview that Shivaji Maharaj did not escape Agra in a "sweet box" as mentioned in history, but gave bribes to the chieftains and wife of Aurangzeb.

Bhosale said he would meet Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnis and Union Home Minister Amit Shah to demand action against Solapurkar.

The BJP MP said Solapurkar's films or shows won't be allowed to be released, and asked the film industry people not to give him any work.

In 1666, Shivaji Maharaj and his son Sambhaji escaped from the Agra Fort and left the Mughal emperor baffled. Pune Police have increased security outside Solapurkar's residence.



View of a 100m long and 14.3 m wide steel bridge built between Kim and Sayan for the Mumbai-Ahmedabad Bullet Train project in Surat, Gujarat.

## Marathas force spiritual leader to cancel event

Pune: A 'kirtan' programme of Namdev Shastri, spiritual leader of the Vanjari community, scheduled at Dehu in Maharashtra's Pune district on Friday, has been cancelled after opposition from Maratha outfits and a caution issued by local police.

Shastri, the head of Bhagwangad Sansthan, recently voiced support for state NCP minister Dhananjay Munde, who belongs to the Vanjari community and is under fire over the murder of a sarpach belonging to Maratha community in Beed district.

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

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

### Saint Tukaram's descendant ends life

Shirish More Maharaj (32), a kirtan performer and descendant of 17th century Marathi poet-saint Tukaram, allegedly ended his life here, police said on Wednesday. The suicide note found at his home in Dehu Road area said he was taking the extreme step due to financial distress. "On Wednesday morning, when his parents knocked on the door of his room on the first floor of the house, there was no response. They alerted the police, who arrived and broke open the door, only to find More Maharaj hanging from the ceiling," said an official of Pimpri Chinchwad Police. The body was sent for autopsy and further investigation was underway, he said. More 'Maharaj' was a well-known 'kirtankar' (performer of 'kirtan' or traditional religious discourse) and spiritual speaker, revered in the community.

Beed district.

Seven persons have been arrested in the murder case. Munde's close aide Walmik Karad has been arrested in a related extortion case.

Shastri, a revered figure

in the Vanjari community, recently claimed Munde was being targeted. He later also extended his support to the family of slain sarpach Deshmukh after they met him over the weekend.

## Rs 5 cr cash seized from shop

Bhandara: Police have detained nine persons, including a private bank manager, after Rs 5 crore cash allegedly belonging to the bank was recovered from a dry cleaning shop in Bhandara district, an official said.

Some persons apparently lured the Axis Bank's branch manager to hand over Rs 5 crore to them after promising to give him back Rs 6 crore, Superintendent of Police Noorul Hasan told PTI on Tuesday.

Acting on a tip-off, teams of the crime branch and anti-terrorism cell in coordination with the local police conducted a raid at the dry cleaning shop located at Indira Nagar in Tumsar area on Tuesday.

They seized Rs 5 crore cash kept in a box at the shop, he said.

It took the police around two hours to count the cash with the help of machines.

"Prima facie, the manager took out the cash from the bank. We have informed senior officials of the Axis Bank and more information would be obtained once they come to Tumsar," Hasan said. The bank manager and eight other persons were detained.



Government school students at Bal Parishad organised by Salaam Bombay Foundation.

## Thane to get 100 AC e-buses

Thane: As many as 100 air-conditioned electric buses will be added to the fleet of the Thane Municipal Transport (TMT) in April this year, local MP Naresh Mhaske has said.

The buses will be provided under the PM E-Bus Service scheme, said a release from his office on Wednesday.

Thane's population is increasing rapidly, and to meet the demand, the city

needs more buses under this scheme, the release said, adding that the MP has urged the central government to allocate more buses to the city.

He also requested the government to raise the subsidy of Rs 24 per kilometer to Rs 29 under the scheme. Further, the PM E-Bus Service scheme requires the buses to ply a minimum of 200 km per day, which should be re-

duced to 160 km per day.

**Student held for rape**  
Police have arrested a college student for allegedly raping a 17-year-old girl in Thane district, an official said on Wednesday.

The incident took place in Badlapur area on January 28. The 19-year-old accused took the victim to a farmhouse near Barvi dam and allegedly raped her, the official said.

## 'Drought in Marathwada will be thing of the past'

Chhatrapati Sambhajnagar: Chief Minister Devendra Fadnis on Wednesday said all lift irrigation projects in the state will be run on solar power to help provide round-the-clock electricity to farmers, and added that drought will be a thing of the past in Marathwada region.

He also said that the hurdles in the river-linking projects have been removed by the Mahayuti government and work on it will commence in the next one year.

The CM was speaking at the ground breaking ceremony of Shimpora to Kuntal irrigation project in Ashti taluka of Beed district, which will bring more than 8,100 hectares of land under irrigation.

In his address, Fadnis said, "We know when the plan was being prepared for Krishna valley, it was decided that 23 TMC water should be made available to the Marathwada region. But unfortunately, it was not implemented properly. Only 7 TMC water could be found and so 23 TMC water was available only on paper."

As per the plan, water



was supposed to reach Sina Kolegan in Dharashiv district first and then be provided to Beed, but there was no planning for it. Our government gave necessary sanction in 2022 to this project and took the work forward, he said.

"The drought in the Marathwada region will be a thing of the past. Soon, we will be able to see this area irrigated. Water here should also be taken to the farmlands through drip irrigation. We also have to bring 53 TMC water from the western region, which goes into the sea, to the Godavari valley. Once this happens, the next generation of this region will not have to experience drought again," Fadnis said.

"Now, hurdles in the river-linking project are over

and we will be able to start work in the next one year.

We are firm that the next generation here will not see drought. Prime Minister Narendra Modi has also agreed to help for the river-linking project. We are also going to run all such schemes on solar power," he added.

The lift irrigation projects will go solar by March 2027, he said.

"We will complete all the solar projects on lift irrigation schemes and farmers will get electricity required round the clock. The state is currently giving subsidies on electricity to farmers which will decrease in the state once we shift to solar power. This will also help in decreasing the load on industrial and residential consumers," he said.

## Food delivery agent killed

Nagpur: A 22-year-old food delivery agent was killed and his friend seriously injured when a speeding car hit their motorcycle in Nagpur city, police said.

The car driver was arrested following the incident which took place late Monday night at Ajni Square in Dhantoli police station area.

The two victims were enroute to Manewada area to deliver a parcel when the car hit their two-wheeler, an official from Dhantoli police station said.

Both the motorcycle riders were taken to the Mayo Hospital where the food delivery agent, Chetan Rajeshwar Gawade, was declared dead, he said.

The deceased worked with online food delivery app Zomato, according to police.

His 23-year-old friend who suffered serious injuries was undergoing treatment, the police said.

The car driver, Ajnan Izrar Hussain (25), resident of Ajni railway quarters, was later arrested, the police added.

## 'Shiv Sena (UBT), BJP not coming together'

Mumbai: Minister of state for Social Welfare Sanjay Shirsat on Wednesday said there was no possibility of the BJP and Shiv Sena (UBT) joining hands again considering the attacks on PM Narendra Modi and Home Minister Amit Shah by leaders of the Uddhav Thackeray-led party.

Shirsat, whose party Shiv Sena is an ally of the BJP in the Mahayuti government, maintained the national saffron outfit will not accept those constantly targeting its top leadership. "The BJP and Shiv Sena

(UBT) will not come together. The BJP will not accept those who badmouth Modi and Shah," he told reporters in response to a question whether there was any possibility of reconciliation between the two estranged parties.

Moreover, there was no political need for the BJP as well Shiv Sena (UBT) to join hands again, remarked the state social justice minister.

The undivided Shiv Sena and the BJP were allies until the former quit the NDA and formed the Maha Vi-



kas Aghadi in 2019 along with the Congress and the united NCP. The Uddhav Thackeray-led party later joined the INDIA bloc, a national-level grouping of

opposition parties.

Speculation about the BJP and Shiv Sena (UBT) aligning again keeps surfacing in Maharashtra's political circles from time

to time. Late last month, Chief Minister Devendra Fadnis rejected Shiv Sena (UBT) leader Sanjay Raut's claim that many leaders from the ruling BJP wish for an alliance with the Uddhav Thackeray-led opposition party. Casual meetings should not be interpreted politically, responded Fadnis to a query by the media after Raut made the assertion following an interaction between BJP minister Chandrakant Patil and Shiv Sena (UBT) president

Uddhav Thackeray's close aide Milind Narvekar in Mumbai.

Raut's comments came after Narvekar, a Member of the Legislative Council, and Patil had a few jovial exchanges in the presence of Thackeray at the wedding reception of BJP MLA Parag Alavani's daughter.

In the past, Rajya Sabha MP Raut, considered close to Thackeray, has maintained that some members of the Shiv Sena (UBT) may be harbouring sentiments of partnering with the BJP again.

### QUOTE OF THE DAY

"For your daughter's sake, you are not shifting to another bungalow just 500 metres away... then why can't you see the plight of our kids who hang themselves if they get less marks in exams?"



Manoj Jarange-Patil, Maratha Quota Activist



## Passenger caught for trafficking animals

Mumbai: A Chennai-based man was caught trafficking five baby Siamang gibbon primates after he was found carrying them in his hand bag on his arrival at the Mumbai international airport from Malaysia, officials said on Wednesday.

The action was taken after the passenger, Abdul Rahman Ahamed, arrived on Tuesday. Of the five gibbons, three had already died, while two others were in a critical condition, they said.

Siamang gibbon is an endangered arboreal primate native to the forests of Indonesia, Malaysia, and Thailand.

"The Customs department seized five Siamang gibbons from the passenger after he landed at Mumbai's Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj International Airport from Kuala Lumpur. Ahamed was caught while trying to smuggle the five primates in his hand bag. While three of the five gibbons were found dead, the remaining two are in a very critical state."

These gibbons were handed over to a city-based wildlife expert team from RAWW (Resqink Association for Wildlife Welfare) for immediate medical care, upkeep and stabilisation in consultation with the state Forest Department and Wildlife Crime Control Bureau (WCCB), he said.

"These animals will be sent back to their country of origin once they become stable and are fit as per the law. Siamang gibbon, a critically endangered species, is listed in appendix one of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species.

# BJP 'Sampark Mantri's to check on Sena

By Abhijit Mulye

Mumbai: The Maharashtra BJP has appointed 'Jilha Sampark Mantri' to districts where the post of guardian minister has gone to either of its Mahayuti partners. While the party states that the appointment is purely for the organizational purpose and that the ministers are expected to liaison between the state government and the local party organization, BJP allies are sceptical about the development, especially when the discord between the NCP and the Shiv Sena over appointment of guardian ministers still continues.

State BJP President Chandrashekhara Bawankule made the announcement in this regard on Tuesday evening while addressing the meeting of party MP, MLAs and district heads here in Mumbai. The meeting was called primarily to review the progress on the primary membership front and encourage the party middle order to achieve the target of 1.5 crore members.

While addressing the meeting, Bawankule said that the appointment of ministers is primarily to act as a liaison between the local party units and the state government. With such a liaison, the party leadership hopes to contain discontent within the grass root party workers. Such a discontent among



grass root workers of BJP and that of various like-minded organizations of the RSS family had adversely affected the BJP during 2024 Lok Sabha elections in Maharashtra. On that backdrop, the party has devised this new system.

However, the effort, which BJP emphasises as a purely organizational exercise, is being seen by its allies as an effort to indirectly pressurise the guardian ministers of the allies. The allies feel that with these appointments the BJP wants to keep the NCP and the Shiv Sena under cheque.

The BJP states that the Sampark ministers are expected to keep in touch with the grass root workers of the party and ensure that none of their issues related to the state government or even the local administration remain unattended. This clearly arises out of the fear that the guardian ministers belonging to the alliance partners won't do justice to the grass root BJP workers.

While explaining the 'Sampark Mantri' concept further, Bawankule said that the ministers shall go to the respective districts allocated to them twice a month and shall address the issues of common people.

Bawankule also said that the immediate task entrusted with these ministers is about boost thing the membership drive. The party has been able to register about 98 lakh voters across the state till now. It had registered just over one crore voters last time and wants to break its own record by registering around 50 lakh more voters over next fortnight so that the whole tally reaches to about 1.5 crore.

The party also recognized district heads and other party workers who have been able to register more number of voters. "We have devised a special app for membership and one worker can register only 1000 new members. This avoids scope for any fake registrations," he added.

## Govt to celebrate Year of Quantum Science

Mumbai: In a significant development, the state government has decided to partner with UNESCO to celebrate 2025 as the International Year of Quantum Science and Technology. Minister for Information Technology Ashish Shelar revealed this on Wednesday.

This is a pioneering initiative to position Maharashtra at the forefront of future technologies and it is for the first time that the IT department of the state government will collaborate with UNESCO for this global initiative. This also makes the IT department the first Indian institution to do so, Shelar said.

To commemorate completion of 100 years of modern quantum mechanics discovered by Noble Prize-winning German physicist Werner Heisenberg, the United Nations has designated 2025 as the International Year of Quantum Science & Technology. Recognizing the transformative potential of quantum science, the government of Maharashtra is committed to fostering innovation, research and capacity building in this critical emerging sector.

Shelar said, "Maharashtra is taking a significant step forward by actively engaging with global and national institutions in this field."

The National Quantum Mission, launched by the government of India in 2023 under the department of Science & Technology, has already set the stage for India's leadership in quantum advancements, he added.



Visitors at Mann Deshi Mahotsav exploring village life organised in Parel on Wednesday. Pic: Bhushan Koyande

# No bail to ex-Censor board CEO Singh

Mumbai: A special CBI court here has rejected the discharge plea of former Central Board of Film Certification (CBFC) chief executive officer Rakesh Kumar Singh in a 2014 corruption case, noting that there was sufficient evidence to frame charges against him.

Singh is accused of demanding Rs 70,000 through his accomplice Shripati Mishra for issuing Censor certificate for an early release of the Chhattisgarhi film "Mor Dauki Ke Bihaw".

Special judge for Central Bureau of Investigation cases S M Menjoge, in the order passed on Tuesday, held that demand of money by Rakesh Kumar is prima

facie apparent from the material on record. "He was collecting the amount through his agents. Demand and acceptance of the amount can be proved by circumstantial evidence also, as many times direct evidence is not available..." the court held.

Singh had sought discharge from the case, claiming that the CBFC CEO is not the sole authority issuing a Censor certificate. A screening committee comprising members chosen randomly issues the certificate, he contended.

A departmental enquiry also exonerated him, said Singh's lawyer.

The prosecution opposed the plea, saying it has already filed three charge-

sheets against Singh and two other accused and there was prima-facie evidence to frame the charges. Once charges are framed, a trial can begin.

The investigation also revealed that the accused had accepted an iPad and a Lenovo laptop for clearing the Tamil film "Anjaan", but later they dumped the gadgets in the Arabian Sea to destroy incriminating evidence, the CBI claimed.

A CBFC official in his statement to the probe agency claimed it was Singh who started the system of taking bribe for early issuance of Censor certificate, the court order noted while rejecting his application.

## 'BMC budget gives hollow promises'

Mumbai: Opposition Nationalist Congress Party (SP) on Wednesday hit out at the Mahayuti government over the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation's annual budget, dubbing it as a "document of hollow promises" that fails to address civic issues like "unsafe roads".

The BMC on Tuesday presented a Rs 74,427.41 crore budget, its biggest-ever, for financial year 2025-26 without any hike in taxes, ahead of the crucial civic polls expected to be held this year.

NCP (SP) chief spokesperson Mahesh Tapase alleged that the government run by the BJP, Eknath Shinde-led Shiv Sena and Ajit Pawar's NCP was prioritising grand infrastructure projects but neglecting "deteriorating" public services.

Despite significant allocations made for road concretisation, potholes continue to pose hazards in Mumbai, he said.

"Crores of rupees are spent annually on roads, yet they remain unsafe. How can citizens trust this budget?" Tapase asked.

Mumbai's air quality is alarmingly poor, but the

budgetary provisions in the BMC budget for this are just token gestures, he added.

"Water tankers and misting machines cannot combat the rising pollution caused by unchecked construction, vehicular emissions and industrial waste. Where is the long-term strategy for cleaner air?" he said.

The BMC has allocated funds for stormwater drainage and waste management, but citizens continue to face challenges, Tapase said.

Municipal healthcare and education face neglect with citizens bearing higher costs for essential services, he said. "Mumbai's public services are shrinking, while costs for essential services are rising. Where is the accountability?" asked Tapase.

Terming the budget as "pro-builder" he accused the administration of sidelining affordable housing and slum rehabilitation.

The NCP (SP) also demanded a white paper and an independent audit of the BMC's spending over the last three years.

-PTI



By CM Eknath Shinde at an event to distribute houses on the basis of lottery under Konkan Divisional Housing Project (MHADA) in Thane. Pic: PTI

## Choreographer accused of duping woman held

Mumbai: A choreographer accused of defrauding a woman of Rs 20 lakh was arrested at the Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj International Airport here while trying to flee to Dubai, a police official said on Wednesday.

Jai Kumar Nair, who allegedly cheated the complainant under the pretext of good returns on cryptocurrency, was taken into custody on Tuesday night, the official said.

The Oshiwara police had registered a case against Nair on the com-

plaint of one Dipti Asija, who deals in imitation jewellery.

The woman said she came in contact with Nair through a common friend. In November 2022, she gave him Rs 6 lakh and then Rs 14 lakh in two tranches. Nair had allegedly assured her of good returns on the investment, he said.

Nair, the finalist in the first season of the reality show 'Dance India Dance', gave monthly returns to Asija only for the initial 11 months. From December 2023, he allegedly stopped

paying any money to her.

In January 2024, he gave Rs 10,000 to her twice and after she approached the police, he gave another Rs 10,000, as per the complaint.

While the police had booked Nair for cheating, he had not been arrested. However, police had issued a Look Out Circular (LOC) against him.

As Nair entered the Mumbai airport on Tuesday and approached immigration staff for his journey to Dubai, he was stopped, the official said.

## Missing shoolgirl still untraceable

Thane: A 14-year-old schoolgirl went missing from near Thane railway station three days ago, leading police to file a case of kidnapping and launch a search for her, an official said on Wednesday.

The girl was spotted coming out of her school at around 12.55 pm on Monday and heading towards Thane railway station, instead of home, and then disappearing midway, he said.

Her worried parents launched a search after their daughter did not reach home and later lodged a police complaint. They also met Maharashtra Deputy Chief Minister Eknath Shinde, an MLA from Thane city, and sought his intervention to locate the teenager.

An officer with the Thane Nagar police station said based on the complaint, a case of kidnapping under section 137 (2) of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS) was registered on February 3 against unidentified person/s.

Meanwhile, a large number of citizens on Wednesday thronged the residence of Shinde in Thane city seeking his intervention in tracing the girl.

## Technique for coatings on iron

Mumbai: The Indian Institute of Technology Bombay on Wednesday said its researchers have found a new technique that can measure the rate of degradation of coatings on iron, which could be useful for the steel industry.

By combining "hydrogen permeation-based potentiometry (HPP) and electrochemical impedance spectroscopy (EIS)", the researchers efficiently measured the coating degradation rates on the industrially relevant metal, IIT Bombay said in a statement.

Metals often have a layer of protective organic coating, like the paint on cars, but they corrode with time, the premier institute said.

The efficiency of organic coatings deteriorates with time, eventually damaging the metal as they have pores and defects that allow water and oxygen to reach the underlying metal surface over time and corrode it.

The IIT Bombay researchers combined two electrochemical techniques, HPP with EIS, which allowed them to quantify the degradation rates at the interface be-

tween the organic coating and the metal, the statement said.

While HPP gives a direct measure of hydrogen permeation, EIS provides insights into how hydrogen permeation corrodes the coated metal.

"HPP-EIS can be used to monitor how quickly the organic coating will give way for the iron to rust, and that the method would be of interest not only to the steel industry but will also be useful in the field of fuel cells and sensors," said Prof Vijayshankar Dandapani of the Department of Metallurgical Engineering and Materials Science at IIT Bombay.

HPP-EIS is cost-effective because it requires only two potentiostats, simple electronic devices that control and measure the voltage between two electrodes, said the statement.

"With hydrogen blending becoming increasingly popular to reduce emissions from natural gas, one can also apply the HPP-EIS technique to determine how quickly the coat of paint on a natural gas pipeline, where hydrogen is blended with natural gas, degrades."

## QUOTE OF THE DAY

"How it is relevant that I talk about my future plans when there are three ODIs and a Champions Trophy. The reports (on my future) are going on and I am not here to clarify those reports."



Rohit Sharma, Captain, India Cricket Team

# Adani scion Jeet's moments with 'special couples'

By Quaid Najmi

Mumbai: In a warm and humane gesture, Jeet Adani - the young scion of billionaire industrial tycoon Gautam Adani - hosted and blessed 21 newly married physically-challenged women and their husbands, just 48 hours before his own marriage scheduled on February 7, officials said here on Wednesday.

Jeet, 27, is slated to tie the knot with Diva Shah, the daughter of Mumbai-based diamondaire Jaimin Shah, the co-owner of the leading diamond house C. Dinesh & Co. Pvt. Ltd, with operations sprawled across Surat and



Hongkong.

Ahead of Jeet's 'low-profile' nuptials, the Adani family announced a new initiative 'Mangal Seva' to pour joy into the lives of 500 newly-married women with disabilities.

"Every year, they shall be provided financial assistance of Rs One Million each. Today, Jeet Adani met the first of the 21 couples under the 'Mangal Seva' ini-

tiative at his home in Ahmedabad," said an official source.

Videos and photos of a smiling, bearded Jeet clad in a simple maroon designer kurta and white pyjamas plus black comfies, bowing before the couples, felicitating them, who in turn blessed him for his own Big Day on Friday.

A thrilled Gautam Adani took to X and expressed his happiness

over Jeet's propitious move ahead of the prospective bridegroom's auspicious marriage.

He expressed his full confidence that through this sacred effort, the lives of many handicapped daughters and their families would be filled with happiness, peace and dignity.

The family said that Jeet is inspired by his mother, Dr. Priti Gautam Adani, who evolved the Adani Foundation from a small rural project in Mundra (Gujarat), into a global force heralding change.

Presently, Jeet is a Director of Adani Airport Holdings Ltd. (AAHL) - India's largest airport

infrastructure company - which is managing and developing eight airports, including Mumbai and Navi Mumbai airports.

Educated at the University of Pennsylvania's School of Engineering & Applied Sciences, he started his career with the Adani Group in 2019, at the CFO's office, focussing on Capital Markets, Risk & Governance Policy besides Strategic Finance. It involved working with all the listed verticals of Group, and in June 2020, he took over as the AAHL Director, and also oversees the Group's defence, petrochemicals, copper businesses along with digital transformation.



Bhagwat on 10-day visit to Bengal

**Kolkata:** Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) chief Mohan Bhagwat is scheduled to arrive in West Bengal on Thursday evening on a 10-day trip, where he will engage with Sangh functionaries on organisational matters and discuss the future roadmap of the organisation.

His visit will focus on instilling values such as patriotism, self-reliance, family values, environmental protection, and socializing through family-oriented practices.

According to RSS general secretary Jishnu Basu, Bhagwat will arrive in the state from Kerala.

"From February 7-10, Bhagwat will interact with RSS functionaries in Dakshin Banga zone, which includes Purba-Paschim Medinipur, Howrah, Kolkata, and North-South 24 Parganas. On February 13, he will move to Madhyabanga zone, covering areas like Bankura, Purulia, Birbhum, Purba-Paschim Bardhaman, and Nadia," Basu said.

A significant portion of the visit includes Bhagwat's participation in a brainstorming session on February 11-12, followed by the inauguration of a new RSS office in Madhyabanga on February 14. Bhagwat will also attend a conference of RSS functionaries on February 16 at the SAI complex in Burdwan.

Basu emphasised that Bhagwat's visit is aimed at bolstering the spirit of nationalism within the Hindu community, promoting 'Swadeshi' consciousness, and furthering the vision of 'Atma Nirbhar Bharat,' which is a key national goal.

# 25,000 tribal devotees to take holy bath: RSS body



**New Delhi:** About 25,000 devotees from tribal communities will visit Prayagraj to take a holy dip at Maha Kumbh Sangam and vow to "protect" their religion, culture and traditions, an affiliate of the Akhil Bharatiya Vanvasi Kalyan Ashram said on Wednesday.

The Vanvasi Kalyan Ashram has organised a "grand gathering" of devotees from tribal communities at Maha Kumbh from February 6 to February 10, the Seva Prakalp Sansthan said.

The Akhil Bharatiya Vanvasi Kalyan Ashram is one of the oldest affiliates of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS).

"In the ongoing Maha Kumbh in Prayagraj, a grand tribal gathering is being organised by the Vanvasi Kalyan Ashram from February 6 to February 10," Seva Prakalp Sansthan secretary Salil Nemani said in a statement.

In this "historic gathering", about 25,000 tribal devotees from all over the country will be present and will take a pledge to protect their 'dharma' (religion), 'sanskriti' (culture) and 'parampara' (traditions), he added.

The RSS body said a grand 'shobha yatra' of tribal seers and



PM Modi performs rituals at Sangam during the ongoing Maha Kumbh Mela 2025 in Prayagraj of Uttar Pradesh. Pic: PTI

devotees will be organised on February 7.

A large number of tribal devotees will participate in the 'shobha yatra' in their traditional attire and reach the Sangam to take a holy bath, it said.

"One hundred fifty dance troupes from various tribes from all over the country will participate in this tribal gathering and send out the message of 'tu main ek rakt' (you and I are one blood) to the entire world by performing their traditional dance and music," the RSS body said.

"These cultural programmes will be held on February 7, February 8 and February 9," it added.

The RSS body said a conference of seers will be organised on February 10.

Seers from the tribal society visiting Maha Kumbh from different parts of the country will participate in the conference and present their views on religion and culture, it added.

"Blessed to be at the Maha Kumbh in Prayagraj. The Snaan at the Sangam is a moment of divine connection, and like the

crores of others who have taken part in it, I was also filled with a spirit of devotion," Modi posted on X.

"May Maa Ganga bless all with peace, wisdom, good health and harmony," he added.

His trip lasted around 90 minutes during which there was minimal use of the road - barely three km in the car. He travelled from Prayagraj airport to a helipad near Sangam in a helicopter and later used motor boat to and fro the confluence of the sacred rivers from Arail Ghat.

## Shuttler Saina Nehwal visits Maha Kumbh

Indian badminton star and Olympic bronze medalist Saina Nehwal on Wednesday arrived here to take a dip in the sacred waters of the Triveni Sangam during the ongoing Maha Kumbh. Calling Maha Kumbh the world's largest spiritual gathering, she said she felt fortunate to be part of such a grand event. The shuttler said she would be visiting Triveni Sangam with her father in the evening and expressed her wish to return with her mother in the future. Sharing her thoughts on the occasion, Saina said, "Being part of this sacred event is a special experience. I congratulate the Uttar Pradesh government for organising such a magnificent festival. I hope more and more people visit here and make it known worldwide." She said it was a massive celebration and she felt "truly lucky" to be there.

Security was stepped up for the prime minister's visit, which comes on a day assembly polls are underway in Delhi and there are bypolls in Milkipur in Uttar Pradesh. The visit also falls five days after a stampede at Sangam claimed lives of at least 30 pilgrims and left another 60 injured.

However, barring some portions mandatory for security protocols, devotees continued to take a dip at other ghats during the VIP visit, officials said.

By 2 pm, nearly 60 lakh devotees had taken a dip on Wednesday, they added.

Rahul Sharma, who came from Jaipur to take a bath in Sangam, said, "Today, while taking a bath, it did not feel that our prime minister was present in the Sangam area because no policeman stopped anyone from going to the ghat and the bath was very comfortable."

After the holy dip, the prime minister performed rituals, including an 'aarti' as he got on board a floater, a specially built makeshift platform on the river.

He was dressed in a black jacket, white pyjamas, a saffron stole and a Himachali cap for the

## Families of deported immigrants claim ignorance

**Ahmedabad:** Family members of illegal immigrants from Gujarat who were deported from the US have claimed they do not know how their kin reached the foreign soil.

The majority of them are from Mehsana, Gandhinagar, Patan, Vadodara and Kheda districts, sources said. They are expected to reach their native places on Thursday.

Kanubhai Patel, whose daughter is among the deportees, claimed she had gone to Europe for a vacation with her friends a month ago.

"I have no idea what she planned after reaching Europe. The last time we talked with her was January 14. We have no idea how she reached the US," said Patel, a resident of Chandranagar-Dabhla village in Mehsana district.

Another deportee belongs to Luna village of Vadodara district. Her uncle Pravin Patel told reporters that she left for the US a month ago.

"She lives nearby, in the same village. She got married a year ago and went to the US last month. We only

know that she has been deported. We don't know the reason behind her deportation," he said.

BJP leader Nitin Patel said these deportees should not be harassed after their return to the state.

"I sympathise with every person who has been deported from the US. They went there to build their career, do a job or set up their business. Gujarati immigrants in the US are known for living peacefully and they never break any law. I urge the media to show some sympathy towards them...don't portray them as criminals," the former deputy CM told reporters at his residence here.

"They were living in the US for quite some time. They were not caught at the border. They are being sent back just because they don't have some permissions. I urge the state government to see to it that they are not harassed, and also help them upon their arrival here," said Patel.

Deputy Inspector General of Police, CID-Crime, Parikshita Rathod said the police will not question the deportees at this stage.

## Wild elephant attacks German tourist



**Coimbatore:** A video clip of a wild elephant tossing and throwing away a German tourist on a ghat road in the tiger valley near Valparai has gone viral and he died due to injuries suffered in the attack, an official said.

The incident occurred when the tourist, who was riding a motorcycle, was crossing a stretch of the ghat road despite noticing the presence of the elephant on the road.

In the video, which was apparently shot by those in a vehicle that came behind, the man could be seen speeding ahead. Several other road users had halted their vehicles at a safe distance from the wild animal. The foreign motorist veered to the right side of the road to avoid the animal. However, it chased and attacked him.

## UGC Draft Rules Six opposition-ruled states demand roll back

**New Delhi:** Hitting out at the Centre over the draft University Grants Commission (UGC) regulations, the Congress on Wednesday said the justification that the rules have been updated for compliance with the National Education Policy does not withstand scrutiny and must be rolled back.

Congress general secretary in-charge communications Jairam Ramesh said the State Higher Education Ministers Conclave was hosted in Bengaluru by Karnataka minister M C Sudhakar with six ministers or their representatives from Karnataka, Telangana, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Himachal Pradesh and Jharkhand (all opposition ruled states) adopting a 15-point resolution on the UGC's "draconian" draft Regulations, 2025.

"The constitutional principle of federalism is sacrosanct and the quality of higher education should be one of the ultimate endeavours of the Ministry of Education. The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 does not prevail over either and the justification that the rules have been updated for compliance

with the NEP 2020 does not withstand scrutiny," he said.

These draft regulations must be rolled back immediately, Ramesh asserted.

In a joint statement, they said the state governments must be given a pivotal role in the appointment of vice chancellors to state public universities. They asserted that the draft UGC regulations do not envisage any role for the state governments in the appointment of the vice chancellors of public universities established under state Acts and thus, impinge on the legitimate rights of the state in a federal setup.

"The regulations severely curtail the rights of the states in constituting the search-cum-selection committees for selection of vice chancellors," the ministers said.

The provision relating to appointing non-academics to be appointed as vice chancellors requires to be withdrawn, they said.

The qualifications, term and eligibility for appointment of vice chancellors require a reconsideration as they impinge the standards of higher education, the statement said. -PTI



West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee with businessman Mukesh Ambani during the Bengal Global Business Summit in Kolkata on Wednesday. Pic: PTI

## Singh backs decision on nuclear sector

**New Delhi:** India's decision to open up the civil nuclear sector is a revolutionary step which will help nuclear power become one of the main sources of the country's energy needs, Science and Technology Minister Jitendra Singh said Wednesday.

In an interview with PTI Videos, Singh said the decision to open up the civil nuclear sector, announced in the Union Budget, will also help India achieve the Net Zero emission target by 2070, declared by Prime Minister Narendra Modi at the climate summit in Glas-

gow in 2021. "This decision to open up the nuclear sector is the most revolutionary decision of the general budget. It will be the topic of discussion the world over," said Singh, who is also in charge of the Department of Atomic Energy.

Presenting the union budget on Saturday, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman said the development of at least 100 GW of nuclear energy by 2047 was "essential for our energy transition efforts".

"For an active partnership with the private sector

towards this goal, amendments to the Atomic Energy Act and the Civil Liability for Nuclear Damage Act will be taken up," she said.

Prime Minister Modi also said the decision to open up the nuclear sector to private players will have far-reaching and constructive impact in the country, according to Singh.

"In the future, nuclear power will emerge as one of the main sources of India's energy needs," Singh said, adding that alternative sources were necessary for the country to become self-reliant. -PTI

## CWG gold-winning lawn bowls players shine

**Dehradun:** Lawn Bowls stars Lovely Choubey and Rupa Tirkey, part of the history-scripting Indian team that won women's fours event gold in the 2022 Commonwealth Games, took the spotlight on Wednesday as they helped Jharkhand to top podium finish at the National Games here.

Jharkhand beat West Bengal 18-8 in the women's fours final on the fifth day of lawn bowls competition.

The other two members of Jharkhand were Reshma

Kumari and Kavita Kumari.

The silver-winning West Bengal were represented by Manisha Srivastava, Renu Mohta, Reema Pawa and Kinjal Shah.

On August 2, 2022, the Indian women's lawn bowls team of Lovely Choubey (lead), Pinki (second), Nayanmoni Saikia (third) and Rupa Tirkey (skip) had created history by winning India's first medal - a gold - in the Commonwealth Games during the Birmingham CWG.

The unheralded quartet



had beaten South Africa 17-10 in the women's fours final, pulling the sport from



obscurity to limelight with the inspiring show.

Lovely was a constable with Jharkhand Police at that time while Rupa, who too is from Ranchi, worked in the sports department.

Jharkhand ran away with three gold in lawn bowls on Wednesday. The

men's pair of Jharkhand comprising Dinesh Kumar and Sunil Bahadur beat the Assam duo of Biswajeet Khound and Biman Nath 25-4 in the final.

The third gold for Jharkhand came when Basanti Kumari beat Suranjana Baruah of Assam 21-20

in the women's U-25 final.

Delhi won gold in men's triple event after the trio of Anant Sharma, Apurv Sharma and Abhishek Chugh beat Jharkhand (Alok Lakra, Abhishek Lakra and Prince Mahto) 25-8 in final.

In the women's single, West Bengal's Beena Shah beat Jharkhand's Sarita Tirkey 21-8 in the final to win the gold.

In the men's U-25 final, Uttarakhand's Utkrisht Dwivedi beat Assam's Bitu Das 21-20 in the final to win gold.

## QUOTE OF THE DAY

"Pakistan and China will always be friends, all-weather friends. No matter how many terrorists, how many issues crop up in the world, I will stand, Pakistan people will stand with the people of China."



Asif Ali Zardari, President, Pakistan



**Akhilesh alleges rigging by BJP in Milkipur**

Lucknow (UP): Samajwadi Party president Akhilesh Yadav on Wednesday accused the ruling BJP of undermining the democratic process and rigging the Milkipur assembly bypoll in Uttar Pradesh's Ayodhya.

The BJP, however, rubbished these claims and asserted that the by-election was conducted fairly and transparently.

In a statement issued by the Samajwadi Party (SP), Yadav urged the Election Commission to take strict action against the "corrupt practices" in Milkipur, emphasising that the by-election had been tainted by "systematic voter suppression and fraudulent activity".

The former chief minister claimed that the BJP government, in collusion with local authorities, engaged in "widespread electoral malpractice, including fake voting and intimidation of voters and election agents".

Yadav alleged that SP booth agents were harassed at numerous polling stations and the BJP supporters resorted to violent tactics to influence the outcome of the election.

"BJP goons created a chaos at multiple locations and were openly shielded by the police and administration," Yadav said, adding that the police administration allowed them to "freely violate the election code of conduct".

Yadav also alleged that "BJP-backed goons" were brought in from outside Delhi to cast fake votes.

The BJP dismissed the claims, calling them baseless and a product of frustration following the SP's defeat in elections.

# BJP alleges fake voting, AAP claims voter suppression



First time voters Anshika and Supriya show their inked fingers after casting votes during the Delhi Assembly elections at Chhattarpur in New Delhi on Wednesday.

**New Delhi:** As Delhi voters cast their ballots for the assembly polls on Wednesday, allegations of fake voting emerged in some parts of the national capital, including Seelampur and Kasturba Nagar.

High drama unfolded in Seelampur when a BJP leader accused some people wearing burqas of attempting to vote fraudulently. However, police denied any fake voting in the area.

In Kasturba Nagar, police sources said two men allegedly attempted to vote fraudulently. The two men were caught and are being interrogated, they said.

Meanwhile, AAP candidate from Greater Kailash, Saurabh Bharadwaj, claimed people were being stopped from voting in Chirag Dilli and senior party leader Manish

Sisodia alleged money was being distributed from a house in Jungpura.

In Seelampur, following allegations of fake voting by the BJP, more leaders of the party began sloganeering outside a polling booth.

Delhi Police, however, dismissed the charges pointing to security deployed in the area. Additional police and paramilitary forces were also deployed, they said.

Seelampur resident Safdar Ali told PTI that BJP candidate Anil Gaur came and said people were voting fraudulently.

"We asked him how was it possible when there are several layers of checking. The officials are checking the voter ID cards of everyone and allowing only valid voters inside the booth.

## OVER 30,000 POLICE PERSONNEL DEPLOYED

Delhi is on high alert for the assembly polls on Wednesday with over 30,000 police personnel and 220 companies of paramilitary forces have been deployed across the national capital for peaceful elections.

The voting for the high-stakes Assembly elections began, with the Aam Aadmi Party eyeing a

third straight term, banking on its governance record and welfare schemes, while the BJP and the Congress look at resurgence.

There are over 1.56 crore voters eligible to cast their ballots.

Voting will be taking place across 13,766 polling stations in all the 70 Assembly constituencies to decide the fates of 699 candidates in a

contest that could reshape the political landscape of the capital. Nearly 3,000 polling booths have been identified as sensitive, and special security arrangements, including drone surveillance, Quick Reaction Team, Striking Team and one company of Central Armed Police Force (CAPF) have been deployed to maintain law and order.

"Later he left and the situation is now normal here due to the administration and security personnel," Ali said.

Meanwhile, AAP leader Saurabh Bharadwaj claimed that police had barricaded the Chirag Dilli area, preventing people from voting. He shared a video on X showing a woman sitting alone in an au-

torickshaw near a barricade, alleging that it was deliberately placed to obstruct access to the polling station.

In another video, AAP's candidate in Jungpura Manish Sisodia alleged money was being distributed from a house in the area. He asked police officers on duty to conduct a raid at the house.

In Kasturba Nagar, police received information that two men allegedly attempted fake voting. The incidents allegedly happened at Sarvodaya Vidyalaya in the Andrews Ganj area. They were caught by the Delhi Police and are currently being interrogated, police sources said.

Police received another PCR call from a woman

who alleged that someone had cast vote in her name by the time she went to her polling booth.

Police, however, found out that another woman with a similar name, who lived in the complainant's house as a tenant, had cast the vote. After verification the presiding officer allowed both of them to vote, police said.

Pakistani Hindu refugees show their fingers marked with indelible ink after casting their votes for the first time during the Delhi Assembly elections at resettlement colony in Majnu Ka. Pics: PTI

## FIR against AAP MLA Amanatullah Khan

Delhi Police has registered a case against AAP MLA Amanatullah Khan for violating the Model Code of Conduct (MCC) in place for Delhi assembly polls, police said on Wednesday. This comes hours before voting got underway in Delhi on Wednesday morning. Khan is the AAP candidate from Okhla. An FIR was lodged at Jamia Nagar Police Station after a video surfaced online purportedly showing him distributing stickers and election materials in the Batla House area late night on Tuesday, a police source said. "Based on the video and subsequent investigation, an FIR has been registered. Further inquiries and investigation are underway," the source added. Campaigning for the assembly polls ended on Monday evening.

## 104 Indians deported from US

Amritsar: A US military aircraft carrying 104 illegal Indian immigrants landed at the Shri Guru Ramdas Ji International Airport here on Wednesday afternoon, sources said.

While 30 of the deportees are from Punjab, 33 each are from Haryana and Gujarat, three each from Maharashtra and Uttar Pradesh, and two from Chandigarh, the sources said. An official confirmation on the number of deportees is awaited.

Earlier reports claimed that US military plane C-17 was bringing back 205 illegal immigrants. The flight landed at 1.55 pm. There was heavy barricading outside the airport and police personnel were deployed in large numbers. This is the first batch of illegal Indian immigrants to have been deported by the US government.

According to the sources, the deportees are expected to be allowed to go home following verification and background checks. Police will focus on identifying any deportee with a criminal record, the sources said.

Punjab Director General of Police (DGP) Gaurav Yadav said on Tuesday that the state government would receive the immigrants and



A US military aircraft carrying illegal Indian immigrants upon its landing at the Shri Guru Ramdas Ji International Airport in Amritsar on Wednesday. Pict:PTI

set up counters at the airport.

Punjab NRI Affairs Minister Kuldeep Singh Dhaliwal on Tuesday expressed disappointment over the US government's decision and said these individuals, who contributed to that country's economy, should have been granted permanent residency instead of being deported. He said many Indians entered the US on work permits which later expired, making them illegal immigrants.

The minister said he plans to meet External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar next week to discuss the concerns and interests of Punjabis living in the US.

Dhaliwal had also appealed to Punjabis not to travel abroad through illegal means, emphasising the importance of acquiring skills and education to access opportunities worldwide.

He encouraged people to research legal ways and acquire education and lan-

guage skills before travelling abroad.

After Donald Trump assumed office as the US President last month, the country's law enforcement agencies have launched a crackdown against illegal immigrants.

Many people from Punjab, who entered the US through "donkey routes" or other illegal means by spending lakhs of rupees, are now facing deportation.

-PTI

## Naxalites kill man over suspicion

Dantewada: A 30-year-old man was hacked to death by Naxalites in Chhattisgarh's Dantewada district on the suspicion of being a police informer, an official said on Wednesday.

A group of unidentified Naxalites abducted Hadma Emla from his house in village Kakadi under Arampur police station area on Tuesday night and took him to the adjoining forest, a police official said here.

As per the preliminary probe, the assailants accused him of being a police informer before slitting his throat and dumping the body near the village, the official said.

After being alerted about the incident on Wednesday morning, a police team reached the village and sent the body for autopsy.

Security forces immediately launched a search operation in the area to trace the assailants, the official added.

The incident comes close on the heels of the murder of two men, one of them a former Naxalite, in neighbouring Bijapur district two days ago. The two were killed by Naxalites, as per the police.

-PTI

## Woman jumps to escape assault

Kozhikode (Kerala): A hotelier, who had been absconding after a woman employee jumped down from the first floor of a building here while resisting his alleged sexual assault attempt, was held from Thrissur district, police said on Wednesday.

The accused, identified as Devadas, was nabbed by the Makkam police from Kunnamkulam during a bus journey on Tuesday night. A source said the investigators received a tip-off about his movements, and a team of police personnel followed him and held him after stopping the bus midway. He was brought to Makkam police station in the early hours of Wednesday.

According to police, Devadas, who runs a moderate hotel in the district, was accused of barging into the room of a woman employee at her rented house here on Saturday night. His accomplices, Riyas and Suresh, who were also with him at the time of the alleged sexual assault attempt, remain at large, and a manhunt is underway to apprehend them, the police said.

The shocking incident came to light after the wom-

an, who sustained serious injuries from jumping from the first floor of the building to escape the assault, shared her harrowing experience with the police. Hailing from Payyannur in Kannur, the victim had joined the hotel owned by Devadas a few months ago. She gave the statement that the trio barged into her room when she was watching a video game on her phone, and she had no other way but to jump down the building to escape the assault. After hearing her cries, neighbours and local people rushed to the spot and soon shifted her to a nearby hospital.

Devadas was arrested a day after the victim's family released some mobile visuals purportedly showing the trio's assault bid and the woman's attempt to escape from them. The family said on Tuesday that the visuals got recorded accidentally in the victim's phone as her camera was automatically on because she was watching the video game.

Police said the accused were booked under various sections of the BNS. The arrest of the hotel owner would be recorded soon.

## HP: Fresh snowfall

Shimla: Fresh snowfall was recorded in the higher reaches of Himachal Pradesh, with the Met office issuing a 'yellow' alert for thunderstorm and lightning in some districts on Wednesday.

Isolated places in Shimla, Kullu, Kinnaur, Lahaul and Spiti, and Chamba districts received snow.

According to the Met office, snowfall was recorded in the famous tourist resort towns of Narkanda and Kufri in Shimla district, Dalhousie in Chamba, and Manali and adjoining areas in Kullu.

There were also reports of snowfall in parts of Mandi district, including Seraj, Prashar, Shikari and Kamrunag.

The snowfall kindled hope among hoteliers of an increase in tourist footfall.

It also brought cheer among horticulturalists worried by a dry spell plaguing the state. Snow is considered good for apple cultivation.

Shimla town received sleet while the adjoining areas of Jubbarhatti and Kufri received 8.3 cm and 4 cm of snow.

Thunderstorms hit Shimla, Jubbarhatti, Kangra, Jot, Bhuntar, Palampur and Sundernagar.

-PTI

## QUOTE OF THE DAY

"I want to see the day when Dalits, tribals and backwards become leaders, not just footsoldiers, in bureaucracy and the private sector. The BJP-RSS knows this, so they attack the Constitution, but not overtly."



Rahul Gandhi, Leader of Opposition

## Fort William renamed 'Vijay Durg'

Kolkata: In a bid to move away from the colonial legacy, the Indian Army has renamed Eastern Command headquarters Fort William in Kolkata as 'Vijay Durg', a Defence official said on Wednesday.

In a decision taken internally, the Army has also rechristened some landmark buildings inside the sprawling campus situated in the heart of the city.

"We are gradually moving away from the colonial legacy," the Defence official told PTI about the Army's

decision to rename Fort William and some other buildings inside it.

The Army has renamed St George's Gate as the Shivaji Gate, he said, maintaining that the decision to rechristen the fort and some historic edifices situated inside it was taken in November-December.

"We have renamed Kitchener House as Manekshaw House," he said. Field Marshal Sam Manekshaw was the chief of Army Staff during the India-Pakistan war of 1971 that led to the



birth of Bangladesh.

Kitchener House had been named after HH Kitchener, the First Earl of Khartoum. The Army has also renamed Russell Block inside the fort as Ba-

ghaJatin Block after freedom fighter Jatindranath Mukherjee better known as BaghaJatin, who fell to the bullets of the British police following a gunfight in Odisha's Balasore in 1915.

Built in 1781, Fort William, the former seat and symbol of authority of the British Empire, has an unparalleled aura with its historic structures and edifices in and around the fort.

Situated on the eastern banks of the river Hooghly during the British East India Company's rule, the brick and mortar fort had been named after King William III of England.

The present-day fort complex covers an area of more than 170 acres and houses many colonial and

modern-day structures together. The fort has six gates - Chowringhee, Plassey, Calcutta, Water Gate, St George's and Treasury.

The Army has also renamed St George's Gate as the Shivaji Gate, the Defence official said.

Fort William became the Eastern Army Command's headquarters in 1963 following the Sino-India war of 1962.

Prior to that, the Eastern Army was headquartered at Lucknow.

-PTI



# 'India can leverage DeepSeek's AI moment'

India's AI story is not just about replicating the success of DeepSeek, a Chinese artificial intelligence (AI) company, but going beyond to create "headlining discoveries" with the right strategic funding, says Prayank Swaroop, partner at leading venture capital firm Accel.

The DeepSeek moment of innovation has succeeded in sparking global interest around the reduced cost of building large language models (LLM). However, deeper scrutiny has also revealed shortcomings such as simple reasoning, contextual generation of content, and political bias, Swaroop said.

"This shows that innovation is not a one-size-fits-all glove for all nations to wear," Swaroop told PTI.

Bullish about the future of AI following DeepSeek's "phase of hype", he added, "When a venture claims to bring down the cost of a pioneering innovation by 100x and promises to open it for the world to see, you cannot help but take notice."

The likes of DeepSeek and Qwen (Alibaba's AI model) have shown how innovation in fundamental AI research is indeed possible, Swaroop said.

And while the final results clearly need more refinement, DeepSeek's biggest achievement has been in raising conversations around reducing the cost of building AI models, he said.

Excerpts:

**Are you convinced or somewhat sceptical about claims made by Deepseek and Qwen given limited information at this point?**

The likes of DeepSeek and Qwen have showcased how innovation in fundamental AI research is indeed possible - contrary to OpenAI chief Sam



Prayank Swaroop

Altman's words to India to "not even try" building foundational models. When a venture claims to bring down the cost of a pioneering innovation by 100x and promises to open it for the world to see, you cannot help but take notice.

Think of this as a moment similar to India's frugal space missions - as against Perseverance's cost of over USD 2.5 billion, India completed its first Mars mission successfully in just USD 74 million, a meagre three per cent of NASA's.

That said, deeper scrutiny of DeepSeek has revealed clear shortcomings, such as in simple reasoning, contextual generation of content, and political bias. This shows that innovation is not a one-size-fits-all glove for all nations to wear. While I'm fond of its frugality premise, the final results clearly need work.

**What does DeepSeek's rise mean for the competitive landscape of AI startups globally, and in India?**

DeepSeek's biggest achievement was in raising conversations around reducing the cost of



building LLM. As we iterate upon its open-source R1 LLM, we're sure to find ways to further reduce the cost of AI, and bring down the dollars-per-token metric in generative AI. This will accelerate the pace of innovation in AI, and can democratise AI from the current strongholds of the US, to the rest of the world.

For India, I'm conflicted about what this truly means, even though cabinet minister Ashwini Vaishnaw has spoken about letting developers in India access its open-source framework to build upon it. This is because DeepSeek's claims, since rising to the fore on January 20, have now been widely questioned through increasing discrepancies.

But the conversation that DeepSeek brought to the fore can now be capitalised upon by Indian AI engineers and researchers to build a foundational AI model with a clearly auditable code base, and a transparent dataset repository. In fact, this can even lead us to make new, fundamental breakthroughs in AI.

**Is the time right for India and Indian startups to invest in**

**foundation models, or are a bit late?**

That India should be investing in building its own foundational AI models is not even a question. Think of this as owning our own technology, versus licensing it from companies governed by the law of another land - which can leave us at their mercy if geopolitical equations change.

India has missed the bus twice - first, when it came to the semiconductor boom starting in the 1960s, and second, when it came to setting-up a circular economy for electronics manufacturing.

Today, we're racing against time to skill engineers in chip fabrication, and subsidising global players to set-up component shops and chip fabs in the country. We can't afford the same with AI, for which foundational models are key.

To do this, we need substantial government support to bring India up to speed with the rest of the world. We already have the brainpower, but access to capital has often been an issue. Supporting initiatives such as the Central government's USD 1.2 billion AI Mission, an upcoming second

phase of the Indian Semiconductor Mission, and the ongoing National Quantum Mission, are good places to start.

We also need more R&D investments in core tech - the FY26 union budget's announcements on fellowships programmes for IITs can help us start building up research abilities.

In light of DeepSeek's success, and other new challengers being touted (like Qwen) what opportunities do you see for Indian startups looking to develop AI solutions?

Solutions and applications that leverage AI will form the backbone of how much AI contributes to India's economy, as a part of its GDP, in future.

It's important to know that foundational models will not be built by everyone - they do, after all, take considerably larger amounts of time, money and effort in R&D. Being a layer-one level of solutions integrator for foundational models, or further onward, will offer the biggest business opportunities for hundreds or even thousands of startups in future. These startups, built successfully, will scale up and take India's AI innovation to the world.

Owning the patent rights to a fundamental technology is one key part of India's AI journey, but an even greater economic role will be played by those that build applications that appeal to users at scale.

Look at Big Tech today - there are only five or six companies that build the foundational technologies, but millions of others are the ones that impact the biggest chunks of the global tech economy. AI will go the same way too, and India will also see numerous such AI startups in the long run.

-PTI



Ola founder and CEO Bhavish Aggarwal during the launch of the new Ola EV motorcycle in Bengaluru on Wednesday. Pic: PTI

## I-T dept to help weed out ineligible beneficiaries

**New Delhi:** The income tax department will share data with the Food Ministry to weed out ineligible beneficiaries under the Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana (PMGKAY).

Under the PMGKAY, free ration is provided to poor families who do not pay income tax. The government has budgeted Rs 2.03 lakh crore towards PMGKAY in FY26, higher than Rs 1.97 lakh crore in the revised estimates for the current fiscal.

In an office order, the Central Board of Direct Taxes (CBDT) said the Director General of Income Tax (Systems) will be the authority to furnish information to the Joint Secretary Department of Food and Public Distribution (DFPD) in the Ministry of Consumer Affairs.

As per the sharing mechanism, DFPD shall furnish the Aadhaar Number or PAN along with the Assessment Year(s) to DGIT (Systems), New Delhi. If the PAN is provided or the provided Aadhaar is linked

with PAN, DGIT (Systems), New Delhi shall furnish the response to DFPD regarding the threshold income as per the I-T department database.

If the provided Aadhaar Number is not linked to any PAN in the I-T database, DGIT (Systems), New Delhi, will inform the DFPD.

The frequency of furnishing such response and mode of exchange of information shall be decided by the DGIT (Systems) and DFPD.

To facilitate the process of furnishing information, DGIT (Systems) would enter into a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with DFPD. The MoU would include the mode of transfer of data, maintenance of confidentiality, mechanism for safe preservation of data, weeding out after usage, etc.

The Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana was launched with the specific purpose of ameliorating the hardships faced by the poor and needy due to economic disruptions.

## Global gold demand flat at 4,974 tonnes in 2024

**Mumbai:** Global gold demand remained largely flat in 2024, registering a marginal 1 per cent growth from the previous year to 4,974 tonnes, mainly due to a decline in jewellery demand following high prices, softer economic growth and heightened global uncertainties, the World Gold Council (WGC) said in a report on Wednesday.

The total gold demand stood at 4,945.9 tonnes in 2023, according to WGC's 2024 Gold Demand Trends report.

"The demand trajectory of 2024, was far from linear, with central banks posting strong demand in the first quarter before moderating through the middle of the year and finishing with a strong fourth quarter.

"Likewise, the second half of the year saw a notable resurgence from western investors which, combined with remarkable growth in Asian flows, brought global gold ETF (Exchange-traded Fund) flows into positive territory in the third and fourth quarters," WGC Senior Markets Analyst Louise Street said in a statement.

This was fuelled by the



start of rate-cutting cycles by many central banks and heightened global uncertainties, including the US presidential election and escalating tensions in the Middle East, she added.

According to the report, for the third year in a row, the central banks continued to buy gold at the same pace buying 1,044.6 tonnes in 2024, compared to 1,050.8 tonnes in 2023, led by the National Bank of Poland buying 90 tonnes.

The buying was ramped up significantly in the fourth quarter, reaching 333 tonnes.

Global investment demand increased 25 per cent year-on-year to 1,179.5 tonnes - a four-year high - compared to 945.5 tonnes in 2023, driven by a revival in gold ETF demand in the second half of 2024.

Gold ETFs added 19

tonnes in the last quarter of 2024, marking two consecutive quarters of inflows for the asset class.

Meanwhile, demand for bars and coins remained largely stable in 2024 at 1,186 tonnes, compared to 1,189.8 tonnes in the previous year. High prices dampened the demand in the jewellery sector, with annual consumption decreasing 11 per cent to 1,877.1 tonnes compared to 2,110.6 tonnes in 2023.

The decline was driven largely by weakness in China (down 24 per cent year-on-year), though Indian demand remained resilient, dropping just 2 per cent in 2024, in a record-high price environment.

"The jewellery demand dropped by 11 per cent mainly due to high gold prices and softer economic growth in many markets, including China. The environment for Chinese jewellery demand was very challenging throughout 2024, hit by a combination of poor consumer confidence amid declining income growth and surging gold prices," WGC Regional CEO, India, Sachin Jain told PTI.

## Iran's currency plunges to record low

**Tehran:** Iran's currency plunged Wednesday to a record low of 850,000 rials to USD 1 after US President Donald Trump ordered a restart to the "maximum pressure" campaign targeting Tehran.

Trump's order, signed Tuesday night, calls for halting Iran's oil exports and pursuing a "snapback" of United Nations sanctions on Iran. However, he also suggested he didn't want to impose those sanctions and wanted to reach a deal with Iran.

The move comes as Trump's moves to freeze spending on foreign aid and overhaul, or even end, the US Agency for International Development have been lauded in Iranian state media. Iranian officials appear to be signalling that they are waiting for a message from Trump on whether he wants to negotiate over Tehran's rapidly advancing nuclear programme.

At stake are potentially billions of dollars withheld from Iran through crushing sanctions and the future of a programme on the precipice of enriching weapons-grade uranium.



Vehicles covered with snow after a fresh snowfall in Keylong area of Lahaul and Spiti district on Wednesday. Pic: PTI

## NSE Clearing fails to meet liquidity norms

**New Delhi:** NSE Clearing Ltd, the clearing house of the National Stock Exchange (NSE), has failed to meet the capital markets regulator Sebi's mandated liquidity requirements, citing the non-payment of dues by rival BSE as the primary reason for the shortfall.

In its December 2024 quarterly results, NSE Clearing, the exchange's unit responsible for clearing and settling its trades, reported a shortfall of Rs 176.65 crore in its minimum liquid assets.

The company informed Sebi in a letter dated January 9 that this deficit was primarily due to the non-receipt of Rs 312.37 crore in dues from BSE.

An NSE Clearing spokesperson said its auditors flagged the outstanding payment issue in their third-quarter financial review.

The outstanding amount pertains to "interoperability arrangements", the official said.

"The company is yet to receive outstanding dues of over Rs 300 crore from BSE

Ltd. NSE Clearing is communicating with BSE on this matter," the spokesperson added.

The Securities and Exchange Board of India (Sebi) has prescribed risk-based capital and net worth requirements for clearing corporations, which must maintain adequate liquid assets to ensure financial stability.

The regulator introduced a framework for interoperability among clearing corporations on June 1, 2019, to reduce trading costs.

## Sunny buys office space for Rs 8 cr

**Mumbai:** Actor Kareenjit Kaur Weber (Sunny Leone) has purchased around 2,100 square feet of office space in Mumbai for Rs 8 crore, Square Yards said on Wednesday.

In a statement, real estate consultant Square Yards said it has reviewed property registration documents of this transaction on the website of the Inspector General of Registration (IGR).

"Kareenjit Kaur Weber (Sunny Leone) has purchased an office space in Oshiwara, Mumbai, for Rs 8 crore," it said.

The transaction was registered in February 2025.

The property purchased by Kareenjit Kaur Weber is located in Veer Signature, a commercial project by Veer Group.

The office space purchased by Kareenjit Kaur Weber has a carpet area of 176.98 square metre (around 1,904.91 sq ft) and a built-up area of 194.67 square metre (2,095 sq ft).

Weber purchased the office space from Aishwarya Property and Estates, owned by Anand Kamalanayan Pandit and Roopa Anand Pandit, Square Yards said.

## India Post partnership for last-mile delivery

**Mumbai:** E-commerce shipping platform RapidShyp on Monday announced a strategic partnership with India Post for last-mile delivery services across India.

This collaboration aims to support Direct-to-Consumer (D2C) businesses and address the growing demand in the logistics sector.

Through the collaboration, RapidShyp will integrate its advanced logistics technology with India Post's reach, ensuring faster and more reliable last-

mile delivery services, RapidShyp said in a statement.

India Post has an extensive postal network with 19,000 pin codes.

The integration leverages advanced Application Programming Interfaces (APIs) for tariff calculation, label generation, pickup scheduling, and end-to-end track and trace capabilities, ensuring a seamless experience for e-commerce businesses, from order placement to delivery, it said.

The domestic e-commerce market is the fastest



growing in the world and is projected to grow from USD 123 billion in 2024 to USD 292.3 billion in 2028, RapidShyp said.

To align with these evolu-

ting trends, the company has partnered with India Post to empower D2C businesses and meet the growing demand in the logistics sector.

"By integrating India Post's trusted network with RapidShyp's platform, sellers will now have access to a logistics ecosystem that simplifies operations and delivers results, no matter where their customers are located. With India Post as our partner, businesses can confidently cater to remote and underserved regions, unlocking new growth opportunities," said Ravi Goel, Chief Business Officer at RapidShyp.

RapidShyp said its technology simplifies order management, catalogue

management, order processing, tracking, and more, ensuring minimal disruptions to sellers.

"By combining our extensive network with RapidShyp's technology, this partnership enables e-commerce brands to serve customers in remote areas efficiently and reliably. Together, we aim to facilitate seamless connectivity and contribute to India's economic growth through enhanced logistics capabilities," said an India Post spokesperson.

-PTI

### QUOTE OF THE DAY

"India is an incredibly important market for AI in general, for open AI in particular, it's our second biggest market. I think India should be one of the leaders of the AI revolution."

Sam Altman, CEO, OpenAI CEO





# Trump eyes ownership of Gaza



By Yoshita Singh

New York: In a surprising announcement, President Donald Trump said the US "will take over the Gaza Strip", "own it" and undertake economic development there that will create "unlimited numbers of jobs and housing".

Trump made these remarks on Tuesday during a joint press conference in the White House with visiting Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu standing beside him.

Trump also suggested

**"Displaced Palestinians in Gaza should be permanently resettled outside the war-torn territory. I don't think people should be going back. You can't live in Gaza right now. You look over the decades, it's all death in Gaza."**

Donald Trump, President, US

## Greenland takes preventive action

**Nuuk:** Greenland's parliament passed a bill Tuesday that bans political parties from receiving contributions "from foreign or anonymous contributors" after President Donald Trump expressed his wish that the United States take over the vast and mineral-rich Arctic island that belongs to Denmark.

The bill is aimed at protecting "Greenland's political integrity" and will take effect immediately, according to a translation of a parliamentary document in Danish outlining the measure.

The bill "must be seen in light of the geopolitical interests in Greenland and the current situation where representatives of an allied great power have expressed interest in taking over and controlling Greenland," the document said.

Before taking office for his second term on January 20, Trump said he would not rule out the use of military force to seize control of Greenland, calling it vital to US national security. His oldest son, Donald Trump Jr., visited Greenland last month and told citizens: "We're going to treat you well."

that the US develop the land but gave no details on who would be allowed to live there.

"The US will take over the Gaza Strip, and we will do a job with it too. We'll own it and be responsible for dismantling all of the dangerous unexploded bombs and other weapons on the site, level the site, and get rid of the destroyed buildings," Trump said.

"Create an economic development that will supply unlimited numbers of jobs and housing for the people

of the area, do a real job, do something different."

"The only reason the Palestinians want to go back to Gaza is they have no alternative. It's right now a demolition site. Virtually every building is down. They're living under fallen concrete that's very dangerous and very precarious. They instead can occupy all of a beautiful area with homes and safety, and they can live out their lives in peace and harmony, instead of having to go back and do it again," Trump said.

## MASSIVE OPPOSITION FOR TRUMP'S PLAN

**Dubai:** President Donald Trump's proposal that the United States "take over" the Gaza Strip and permanently resettle its Palestinian residents was swiftly rejected and denounced on Wednesday by American allies and adversaries alike.

Trump's suggestion came at a White House news conference with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who smiled several times as the president detailed a plan to build new settlements for Palestinians outside the Gaza Strip, and for the US to take "ownership" in redeveloping the war-torn territory into "the Riviera of the Middle East."

"The US will take over the Gaza Strip, and we will do a job with it too," Trump said. "We'll own it and be responsible for dismantling all of the dangerous

unexploded bombs and other weapons on the site, level the site, and get rid of the destroyed buildings, level it out, create an economic development that will supply unlimited numbers of jobs."

The comments came amid a fragile ceasefire between Israel and Hamas, during which the militant group has been turning over hostages in exchange for the release of prisoners held by Israel.

**Mideast rejects Trumps plan** Egypt, Jordan and other American allies in the Middle East have already rejected the idea of relocating more than 2 million Palestinians from Gaza elsewhere in the region.

Saudi Arabia, an important American ally,

weighed in quickly on Trump's expanded idea to take over the Gaza Strip in a sharply worded statement, noting that its long call for an independent Palestinian state was a "firm, steadfast and unwavering position."

"The kingdom of Saudi Arabia also stresses what it had previously announced regarding its absolute rejection of infringement on the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people, whether through Israeli settlement policies, annexation of Palestinian lands or efforts to displace the Palestinian people from their land," the statement said.

Similarly, Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese told reporters in Canberra, Australia, that his country has long supported a two-state solution in the Middle East and that nothing had changed.

"Australia's position is the same as it was this morning, as it was last year, as it was 10 years ago," he said.

Trump has already made waves — and upset longtime allies — suggesting the purchase of Greenland, the annexation of Canada and the possible takeover of the Panama Canal. It was not immediately clear whether the idea of taking over the Gaza Strip was a well thought out plan, or an opening gambit in negotiations.

Albanese, whose country is one of the strongest American allies in the Asia-Pacific region, seemed frustrated to even be asked about the Gaza plan, underscoring that his policies "will be consistent."

"I'm not going to, as Australia's prime minister, give a daily commentary on

statements by the US president," he said.

"My job is to support Australia's position." New Zealand's Foreign Ministry said in a statement that its "long-standing support for a two-state solution is on the record" and added that it, too, "won't be commenting on every proposal that is put forward."

## Hamas calls it 'recipe for chaos'

Hamas, which sparked the war with its October 7, 2023, attack on Israel, said Trump's proposal was a "recipe for creating chaos and tension in the region."

"Instead of holding the Zionist occupation accountable for the crime of genocide and displacement, it is being rewarded, not punished," the militant group said in a statement.

## Thailand cuts power supplies to Myanmar towns

**Bangkok:** Thailand on Wednesday cut off power supplies to areas in Myanmar where scam networks operate, following a public outcry demanding government action to tackle the problem.

Parts of Myanmar bordering Thailand, including Myawaddy and Tachilek, are known as havens for criminal syndicates who have forced hundreds of thousands of people in Southeast Asia and elsewhere into helping run on-line scams including false romantic ploys, bogus investment pitches and illegal gambling schemes.

Such scams have stolen tens of billions of dollars from victims around the world, while the people recruited to carry them out are often tricked into taking the jobs under false pretense and trapped in virtual slavery.

Thailand's National Security Council and other government agencies met on Tuesday and agreed to cut off electricity, internet and gas supplies to five towns in Myanmar along the border with northern Thailand, citing national security and severe damage that the country has suf-

fered from scam operations.

Interior Minister Anutin Charnvirakul, who oversaw the process at the Bangkok headquarters of the Provincial Electricity Authority, said the annual revenue from the electricity sold in these areas was about 600 million baht (\$17.8 million). Deputy Prime Minister Phumtham Wechayachai said Tuesday that scams have caused an estimated damage of 80 million baht (\$2.3 million) to Thailand a day.

Anutin, who also serves as a deputy prime minister, said a clause in the supply contract allows Thailand to cut off the supply on the grounds of national security. "Today, the government said we must stop, because you supply our electricity to those who cause damage to our country," he said.

Myanmar, Cambodia and Laos have become known as the major centres of on-line scam operations, while Thailand has recently received attention as an area of transit for victims of false recruitment for scams.

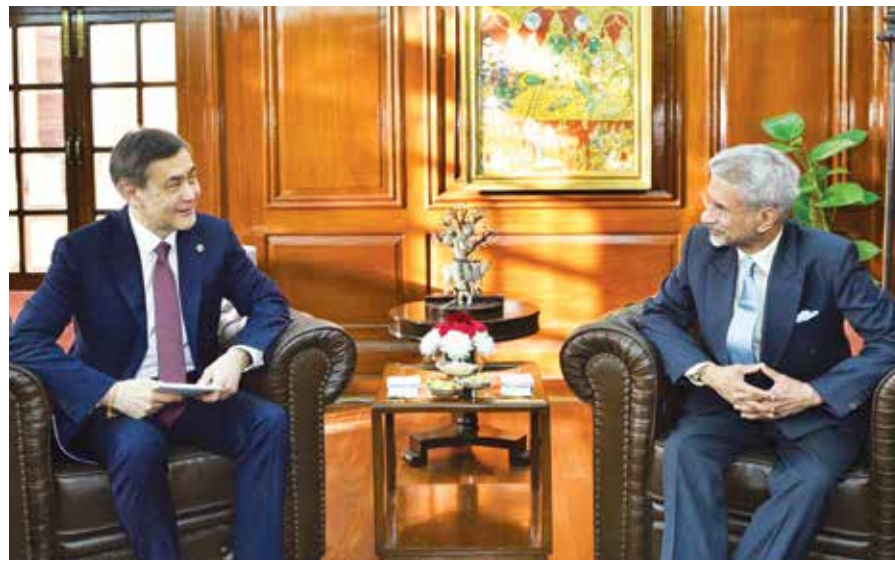
Public scrutiny heightened recently when a sen-

ior Chinese official visited Thailand last week to discuss cooperation in cracking down on scam operations, many of which are believed to be run by Chinese nationals. The Royal Thai Police said the meeting with Liu Zhongyi, China's Vice Minister of Public Security and Commissioner of the Criminal Investigation Bureau, addressed rescue missions, law enforcement and cutting off utilities to the areas where scam networks operated.

Liu's visit came shortly after the disappearance of a Chinese actor in Thailand, who was later found near the border of Myanmar, made global headlines.

Beijing has also put pressure on Myanmar's military government to curb the scam centers, but they are often in areas under the control of ethnic rebel groups where laws are not enforced.

Last month, Thailand's Cabinet approved a new law aiming to tackle scam problems, which is expected to take effect some time this month. The law says banks and telecoms providers would share liability for the victims' losses. -AP



Union External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar during a meeting with Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) Secretary-General Nurlan Yermekbayev in New Delhi. Pic: AP/PTI

## Trump to withdraw from UNHRC

**Washington:** President Donald Trump announced Tuesday that the United States will withdraw from the top U.N. human rights body and will not resume funding for the U.N. agency helping Palestinian refugees.

The US left the Geneva-based Human Rights Council last year, and it stopped funding the agency assisting Palestinian refugees, known as UNRWA, after Israel accused it of harboring Hamas militants who participated in the surprise October 7, 2023, attacks in

southern Israel, which UNRWA denies.

Trump's announcement came on the day he met with visiting Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, whose country has long accused both the rights body and UNRWA of bias against Israel and antisemitism.

Trump's executive orders also call for a review of American involvement in the Paris-based U.N. Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, known as UNESCO, and a review of US funding for the Unit-

ed Nations in light of "the wild disparities in levels of funding among different countries."

The United States, with the world's largest economy, pays 22 per cent of the U.N.'s regular operating budget, with China the second-largest contributor.

"I've always felt that the U.N. has tremendous potential," Trump told reporters in the Oval Office. "It's not living up to that potential right now. ... They've got to get their act together." -AP

## Mass shooting leaves 11 dead

**Stockholm:** Sweden's worst mass shooting left at least 11 people dead, including the gunman, at an adult education centre west of Stockholm as officials warned the death toll could rise.

The gunman's motive, as well as the number of wounded, had not been determined by early Wednesday as Sweden — where gun violence at schools is very rare — reeled from an attack with such bloodshed that police early on said it was difficult to count the number of dead among the carnage.

The school, called Campus Risbergska, offers primary and secondary educational classes for adults age 20 and older, Swedish-language classes for immigrants, vocational training and programmes for people with intellectual disabilities. It is on the outskirts of Orebro, which is about 200 kilometres west of Stockholm.

Justice Minister Gunnar Strommer called the shooting "an event that shakes our entire society to its core."

The shooting started Tuesday afternoon after many students had gone

home following a national exam. Students sheltered in nearby buildings, and other parts of the school were evacuated following the shooting.

Authorities were working to identify the deceased, and police said the toll could rise. Roberto Eid Forest, head of the local police, told reporters the suspected gunman was among the dead.

There were no warnings beforehand, and police believe the perpetrator acted alone. Police have not said if the man was a student at the school. They haven't released a possible motive, but authorities said there were no suspected connections to terrorism at this point.

Police raided the suspect's home after Tuesday's shooting, but it wasn't immediately clear what they found. "Today, we have witnessed brutal, deadly violence against completely innocent people," Prime Minister Ulf Kristersson told reporters in Stockholm late Tuesday. "This is the worst mass shooting in Swedish history. Many questions remain unanswered, and I cannot provide those answers either."

## QUOTE OF THE DAY

**"The main person (Hasina) is not in the country. How we would arrest them who are abroad? As the red notice has been issued by the ICT, the host country is liable to arrest them."**

Md Jahangir Alam Chowdhury, Home Advisor, Bangladesh



## Singapore passes new law on racial harmony

By Gurdip Singh

**Singapore:** A new law consolidating existing statutes to preserve racial harmony and providing safeguards against foreign interference has been passed unanimously in the Singapore Parliament.

New safeguards against foreign interference will be introduced in multi-racial Singapore where some 300 clan and business associations are to be designated as "race-based entities" subject to disclosures, such as receiving foreign

donations.

The law was passed on Tuesday.

While the authorities already had powers to deal with conduct that threatened racial harmony, Home Affairs and Law Minister K. Shanmugam said the Bill brought these powers together in one place, while affirming the importance of racial harmony in the multi-ethnic city-state.

The new law empowers the authorities to issue restraining orders against individuals involved in making content that preju-



dice Singapore's racial harmony, taking close reference from the existing Maintenance of Religious Harmony Act (MRHA).

It also introduces a community remedial initiative, which gives those who have committed less egregious race-related offences a

chance to mend community ties in lieu of prosecution.

"We have always treated racial harmony as being fundamental in Singapore, and so this Bill has to be seen in that context," Shanmugam said.

"Multiracialism, underpinned by racial harmony, is a foundational principle for us," local media reports had the Minister as saying in the house.

During the debate on the bill, Shanmugam sought to allay concerns that the legislative changes would curtail free speech.

Members of parliament had raised concerns that the Government's new power to issue restraining orders could stifle legitimate discourse and sought clarity on scenarios where this power would be used.

Minister Shanmugam said the best evidence of how these powers are likely to be used is how the Government has used similar powers it has had since the MRHA was enacted in 1990.

No orders have been issued under the MRHA to date, but the legal framework means everyone un-

derstands what is not allowed in Singapore, he added.

"That gives you an indication of how the Government approaches these powers. The important thing is to have the powers, but also to be very, very careful and judicious in how you use them," he said.

The Minister cited a previous case where a preacher made highly disparaging remarks on YouTube about Buddhism and Taoism. Officials spoke to the preacher, who agreed to withdraw his remarks.



## EDITORIAL

## Lofty Promises

Despite the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) unveiling its highest-ever budget of Rs. 75,000 crores for 2025-26, the real test for the Devendra Fadnis-led Mahayuti government lies in execution. The city's infrastructure remains creaky, and unless these ambitious projects translate into tangible improvements, Mumbai risks yet another cycle of grand promises with little to show for it.

This budget, submitted for the third consecutive year under an administrator rather than an elected body, is clearly aimed at the impending BMC elections. While politically motivated, it does introduce some notable measures. Impressively, no new taxes have been proposed, despite the scale of projects envisioned. The civic body has earmarked Rs. 43,162 crores for capital expenditure - accounting for over half the budget - signalling a push for much-needed infrastructure development. However, familiar challenges remain: Mumbai's overburdened transport, waste management and sewage systems have long suffered from slow-moving projects, bureaucratic bottlenecks and rampant inefficiency.

The marquee projects in the budget include the Rs. 5,545 crores allocated for the Mumbai Sewage Disposal Project, which aims to construct seven Sewage Treatment Plants. These facilities, set to become operational in phases between 2026 and 2028, could significantly improve Mumbai's waste management. However, previous projects of similar scale have often faced delays and cost overruns. The near-complete Mumbai Coastal Road, a rare success story, offers hope, but other big-ticket items like the Goregaon-Mulund Link Road and Versova-Dahisar Coastal Road remain in early stages.

The budget proposes to revive the long-stalled Mumbai Eye, a Ferris wheel modelled after the London Eye, under a Public-Private Partnership (PPP). Despite past failures due to feasibility issues and environmental opposition, especially from Bandra Reclamation residents, the BMC's latest push seems more like an election stunt than a serious development plan. One of the budget's most crucial allocations is for the city's water supply. The long-delayed Gargai Dam project, stalled since 2019 due to environmental concerns, has been revived with an allocation of Rs. 36 crores. The project aims to improve Mumbai's precarious water supply. However, given the ecological implications which require the felling of 4.5 lakh trees, the government must tread carefully.

Healthcare funding has been boosted to Rs. 7,380 crore, a 13.95 percent increase, with notable expansion of the Aapla Dawakhana initiative, which has served 90 lakh patients. However, like infrastructure projects, the success of these schemes depends on execution, as the city's public health sector has struggled with inefficiencies and inadequate facilities despite previous budget increases. The Mahayuti government has no shortage of plans, but Mumbai's history is littered with projects that never materialized or were delivered half-baked. Without strict execution, monitoring and accountability, this record-breaking budget will remain just another grand announcement. Mumbai deserves better than just promises - it needs action.



By  
Praveen Dixit

Crimes against women in India remain a grim reality, their nature and frequency painting a stark picture of systemic failure. Official figures from the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) catalogue a litany of horrors: rape and murder, gang rape, domestic violence, dowry deaths, feticide, abetment to suicide, acid attacks, honour killings, sexual harassment and an ever-expanding digital frontier of cybercrimes in form of marital frauds, financial scams, fake digital arrests and the insidious spread of online sexual harassment. The scale is vast and the urgency to act unmistakable.

In significant legislative overhauls, the Indian government has sought to confront these crises head-on. The introduction of the Bhartiya Nyaya Sanhita, the Bhartiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita and the Bhartiya Sakshya Adhinyam in July last year marks a departure from archaic colonial-era criminal laws, promising a more victim-centric approach to justice. These laws embrace technological innovation with electronic evidence now admissible in court and e-FIRs encouraged while summonses can be issued digitally and trials can proceed even in the accused's absence - a crucial provision given how many perpetrators flee abroad to evade justice.

The government's push for immediacy extends beyond legislation. The 112 India emergency app, operational nationwide, ensures that police response times in urban areas have dropped to under ten minutes. The cyber helpline

1930, along with the www.cybercrime.gov.in portal, allows victims to lodge anonymous complaints, mitigating the fear of social stigma. For survivors of sexual violence, justice is meant to be swift: investigations into rape cases must now conclude within two months, fast-track courts have been established, in-camera trials are mandated, and the victim's identity cannot be disclosed in the media. Legal aid and financial compensation have also been introduced to help survivors rebuild their lives.

The intentions are noble. Yet, the battle is far from won. Laws alone cannot bridge the chasm of mistrust between victims and the justice system. Many women still hesitate to report crimes, fearing retribution, social ostracization or worse, apathy from law enforcement. If these new legal frameworks are to succeed, they must be accompanied by systemic and cultural change.

A first step is ensuring that victims feel heard from the very moment they seek help. All complaints related to sexual harassment and rape must be recorded via video, in the complainant's own words, eliminating the possibility of manipulation by law enforcement or legal loopholes exploited by the accused. Transparency in the process is paramount.

Second, courts need to function at an accelerated pace. Zero-pendency must be the goal, and achieving it requires dedicated judicial bodies operating in two shifts. Delays in trials only embolden perpetrators and wear down victims' resolve. Maharashtra's former Director General of Police implemented a 24-hour charge sheet filing system for sexual harassment cases - a practice that should be adopted nationwide. Early legal intervention can ensure both the victim's safety and a fair trial, free from external pressure or influence.

Third, bail policies must be revisited. Time and again, individuals accused of sexual crimes reoffend while out on bail. In such cases, stringent preventive

## EXPERTS' VOICE

## India's Reckoning with Crimes Against Women



measures should be imposed, including surety bonds from the victim's relatives and women-led surety groups to ensure accountability.

Additionally, legal representation must be bolstered. Prosecutors should include a panel of lawyers with expertise in cybercrime, acknowledging the increasingly digital nature of gender-based violence. Victims navigating these cases require not only legal but also psychological support. Recognized counselors must be available at every administrative subdivision to guide survivors through the arduous process of seeking justice.

Yet, justice cannot be purely reactionary. Prevention demands an overhaul of societal attitudes. Schools and colleges must implement continuous education programs on gender sensitization, sexual harassment laws, and digital safety. Self-defence training should be mandatory in educational institutions, ensuring that young women are equipped to protect themselves in an increasingly hostile world. Awareness campaigns for the 112 emergency app need to be relentless—broadcast daily on radio, television, and social media until its use becomes second nature. Today, even in metropolitan cities like Chennai, few are aware of this life-saving resource.

Another crucial, yet often overlooked, aspect of women's safety is environmental design. Universities, workplaces, and public spaces must enforce strict access controls to prevent predators from targeting unsuspecting women. Surveillance systems, well-lit pathways, and rapid-response security personnel should be the norm, not the exception.

There is reason for cautious optimism. India has taken a significant step toward creating a legal system that prioritizes victims over bureaucracy, action over inertia. But the real test lies in implementation. Will police officers execute these laws with diligence and sensitivity? Will the judiciary commit to speed without sacrificing fairness? Will society at large abandon its culture of victim-blaming and rally behind survivors instead of shaming them into silence?

If these new laws are to mark a true turning point, they must be accompanied by a societal shift that moves beyond reactive measures. Anything less would be yet another betrayal of the countless women whose voices have long gone unheard.

(The writer is DGP (retd.) Maharashtra and recipient of the President's Medal for Distinguished Service. Views are personal)

## GLOBAL WATCH

## A Tale of Two Funds

Indonesia's government has just placed a bold wager with the House of Representatives approving the creation of Danantara, the country's second sovereign wealth fund (SWF) in five years. While many resource-rich nations have SWFs to manage their windfalls, maintaining two parallel funds is an anomaly. The move signals President Prabowo Subianto's ambition to supercharge Indonesia's economic growth, yet it also raises pressing concerns about governance, legal oversight and the necessity of a second fund in a nation still grappling with fiscal constraints.

Danantara, an acronym for Daya Anagata Nusantara (the future power of Indonesia), is set to become a financial juggernaut. With an initial asset pool of approximately \$600 billion sourced primarily from seven state-owned enterprises (SOEs), it could soon swell to nearly \$1 trillion, making it the fourth-largest SWF globally. Its size will put it in the same league as Norway's Government Pension Fund and China's Investment Corporation.

Unlike INA, the Indonesia Investment Authority, which was established in 2020 to attract foreign investment, Danantara is designed to play a more active role in managing state assets. It will consolidate control over some of the country's largest SOEs, including banking giants Bank Mandiri and Bank BRI, energy behemoth Pertamina, and telecom leader Telkom Indonesia. The government argues that streamlining the management of these enterprises will improve efficiency, but skeptics warn that such centralization carries risks.

President Prabowo has grand economic ambitions. He wants to push Indonesia's GDP growth to 8 percent



by the end of his term and fund large-scale initiatives like free school meals. However, his government faces a chronic fiscal deficit which is expected to widen further. Danantara, in theory, provides a mechanism to finance these goals without further burdening the state budget.

Yet the logic behind its creation remains murky. Indonesia already has an SWF in the form of INA, which was launched under Prabowo's predecessor, Joko Widodo, with a mandate to attract foreign capital. Some officials have suggested that INA will eventually be folded into Danantara, though details remain unclear. If the objective is to improve management of state assets, why not expand INA's scope rather than create a competing institution?

A more troubling concern is whether Danantara will function as a political tool. Unlike INA, which operates under the Finance Ministry, Danantara will report directly to the president. This raises fears that it could be used to advance political priorities rather than sound financial investments. Given Indonesia's checkered history with corruption and mismanagement of state resources, placing an entity of this scale under direct presidential control could be a recipe for trouble.

Danantara's creation was made possible through a controversial amendment to Indonesia's 2003 Law on State-Owned Enterprises. The revised law grants Danantara sweep-

ing powers, including the ability to merge or split SOEs and create new holding companies. Perhaps most alarmingly, it provides the fund with immunity from asset seizures by law enforcement agencies. This provision, while ostensibly aimed at protecting state assets from external claims, also raises concerns about a lack of accountability.

Indonesia is no stranger to scandals involving state funds. In the early 2000s, the Bank Indonesia Liquidity Support scandal saw over \$13 billion in emergency bailout funds misused. More recently, the Jiwarsaya scandal—a multibillion-dollar fraud involving the state-owned insurer—exposed deep vulnerabilities in financial oversight. Given these precedents, the idea of a trillion-dollar fund operating with limited legal scrutiny is cause for concern.

With parliamentary approval secured, Danantara is now a reality. The immediate challenge is securing its promised startup capital of \$61.3 billion without diverting funds from other critical government programs.

Indonesia's economic potential is undeniable. It is Southeast Asia's largest economy, with vast natural resources and a growing middle class. However, economic ambition must be matched with institutional safeguards. Without clear legal boundaries and robust oversight, Danantara risks becoming an opaque financial behemoth.

## STATES WATCH

## Trampled Faith and Slanging Matches

Following the stampede at the Mahakumbh Mela where at least 30 people were killed, India's politicians have responded in their usual fashion - with acrimony, deflection and grandstanding rather than any introspection.

In Parliament, opposition lawmakers have wasted little time in turning the Mahakumbh tragedy into a political flashpoint, accusing the BJP government of gross negligence, bureaucratic indifference and, more darkly, a concerted cover-up. Samajwadi Party leader Akhilesh Yadav, spearheading the attack against Yogi Adityanath's government, has alleged that authorities deployed JCB machines not merely to clear the aftermath but to erase evidence - a claim that, if true, would suggest something far graver than mere mismanagement.

Yadav and his party insist that the official death toll, already devastating, is a fraction of the real figure, pointing to thousands of reported missing persons. The government, for its part, has dismissed these assertions as alarmist, reducing the opposition's claims to little more than political theatrics.

Yet the absence of transparency, the reluctance to release a full list of the deceased and the conflicting accounts from the ground have only deepened public suspicions.

For its part, the ruling BJP has sought to frame the disaster as either an unfortunate accident or,

more ominously, a conspiracy. Ravi Shankar Prasad, a senior BJP MP, declared in Parliament that the government was "getting the smell of a conspiracy" from its ongoing investigation.

The Mahakumbh has always been an event of staggering complexity, involving weeks of religious gatherings, processions and mass pilgrimages. Ensuring the safety of millions of devotees is an immense logistical challenge, one that transcends party lines. Yet instead of pushing for a serious investigation into security lapses or proposing concrete reforms, opposition leaders have opted for rhetorical excess, turning grief into ammunition for their broader ideological battles.



## UTTAR PRADESH

DMK MP Kanimozhi, for instance, used the occasion to denounce the government's vision of "civilisational nationalism," linking the stampede to the BJP's alleged suppression of minorities and its handling of laws such as the Citizenship Amendment Act. Her remarks did little to address the core question of administrative failure at the Mahakumbh.

The opposition's outrage is in keeping with its own electoral calculations. For the Samajwadi Party, attacking the BJP over the Maha-

kumbh disaster is a way to consolidate its position. The DMK's broader critique of religious politics dovetails neatly with its ideological opposition to Hindutva. But pointing out failures is easy, offering meaningful alternatives is harder. The truth is, political parties of all hues have failed to build an effective, depoliticised mechanism for disaster management at such events.

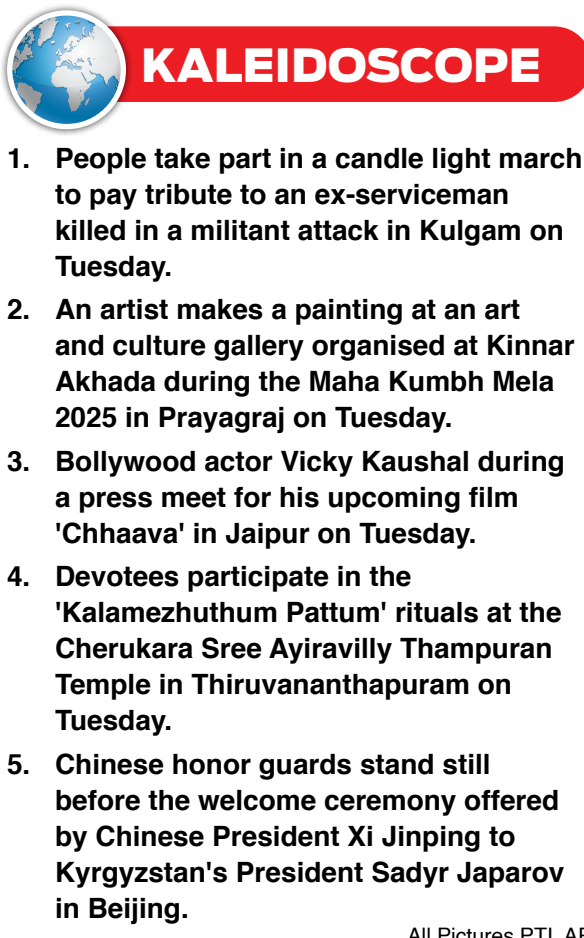
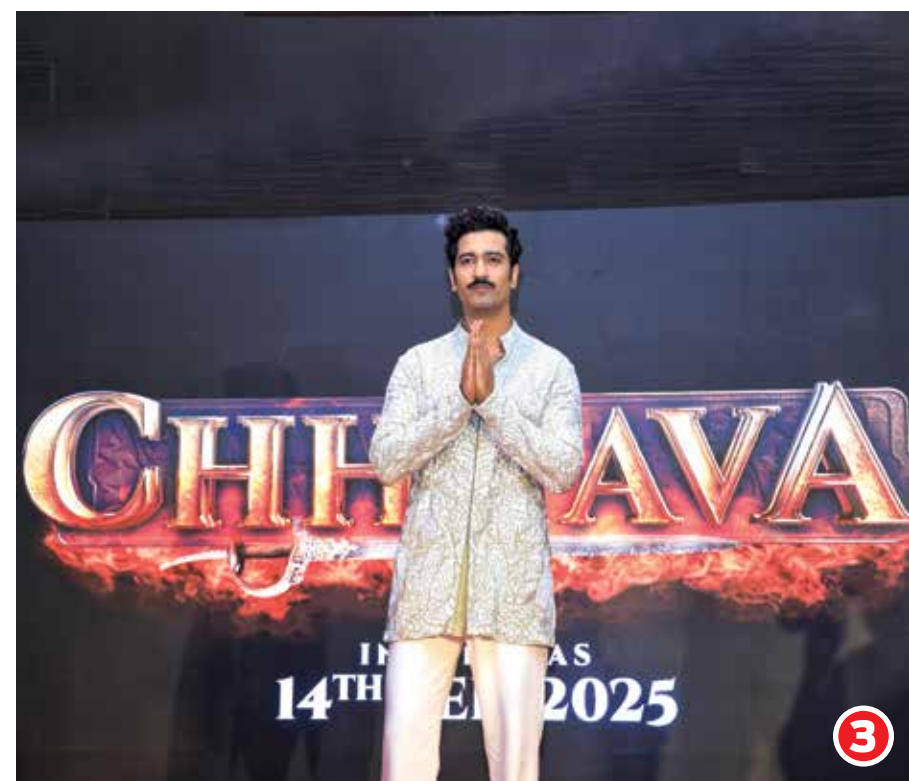
Despite India's history of deadly religious gatherings - stampedes at the Kumbh Mela in 1954, 2003, and 2013, among others - the authorities continue to be woefully unprepared. Crowd control measures remain inadequate, emergency response systems sluggish, and, most damningly, accountability elusive. Instead of quibbling over body counts, India's political class should be asking why such tragedies keep recurring and what must change to prevent them.

The government's refusal to release a detailed, transparent list of the deceased only fuels public suspicion. If the official figures are accurate, why not publish the names? The lack of transparency creates a vacuum in which rumours and political opportunism thrive. Meanwhile, the suggestion that missing persons reports could run into the thousands demands either confirmation or categorical refutation, not evasion.

The tragedy of the Mahakumbh stampede is not just the loss of life but the predictability of the response that followed. In a nation where faith and politics are deeply intertwined, religious gatherings become political spectacles and disasters become partisan battlegrounds. In Prayagraj, as in so many past calamities, responsibility is shirked, blame is traded and the cycle of negligence continues. If there is a conspiracy here, it is one of collective political failure.

In the aftermath of the Mahakumbh stampede, India's politicians have retreated to their familiar trenches, trading blame instead of solutions.





**KALEIDOSCOPE**

1. People take part in a candle light march to pay tribute to an ex-serviceman killed in a militant attack in Kulgam on Tuesday.
2. An artist makes a painting at an art and culture gallery organised at Kinnar Akhada during the Maha Kumbh Mela 2025 in Prayagraj on Tuesday.
3. Bollywood actor Vicky Kaushal during a press meet for his upcoming film 'Chhaava' in Jaipur on Tuesday.
4. Devotees participate in the 'Kalamezhuthum Pattum' rituals at the Cherukara Sree Ayiravilly Thampuran Temple in Thiruvananthapuram on Tuesday.
5. Chinese honor guards stand still before the welcome ceremony offered by Chinese President Xi Jinping to Kyrgyzstan's President Sadyr Japarov in Beijing.

All Pictures PTI, AP

EXPLAINERS

## Did DeepSeek 'Inappropriately' Copy ChatGPT?

Until a few weeks ago, few people in the Western world had heard of a small Chinese artificial intelligence (AI) company known as DeepSeek. But on January 20, it captured global attention when it released a new AI model called R1.

R1 is a "reasoning" model, meaning it works through tasks step by step and details its working process to a user. It is a more advanced version of DeepSeek's V3 model, which was released in December. DeepSeek's new offering is almost as powerful as rival company OpenAI's most advanced AI model o1, but at a fraction of the cost.

Within days, DeepSeek's app surpassed ChatGPT in new downloads and set stock prices of tech companies in the United States tumbling. It also led OpenAI to claim that its Chinese rival had effectively pilfered some of the crown jewels from OpenAI's models to build its own.

In a statement to the New York Times, the company said: We are aware of and reviewing indications that DeepSeek may have inappropriately distilled our models, and will share information as we know more. We take aggressive, proactive countermeasures to protect our technology and will continue working closely with the US government to protect the most capable models being built here.

**What is distillation?**  
 Model distillation is a common machine learning technique in which a smaller "student model" is trained on predictions of a larger and more complex "teacher model".

When completed, the student may be nearly as good as the teacher but will represent the teacher's knowledge more effectively and compactly.

To do so, it is not necessary to access the inner workings of the teacher. All one needs to pull off this trick is to ask the teacher model enough questions to train the student.



**A fraction of the resources**  
 DeepSeek claims that both the training and usage of R1 required only a fraction of the resources needed to develop their competitors' best models.

There are reasons to be sceptical of some of the company's marketing hype – for example, a new independent report suggests the hardware spend on R1 was as high as USD 500 million. But even so, DeepSeek was still built very quickly and efficiently compared with rival models.

This might be because DeepSeek distilled OpenAI's output. However, there is currently no method to prove this conclusively. One method that is in the early stages of development is watermarking AI outputs. This adds invisible patterns to the outputs, similar to those applied to copyrighted images. There are various ways to do this in theory, but none is effective or efficient enough to have made it into practice.

There are other reasons that help explain DeepSeek's success, such as the company's deep and challenging technical work.

**A series of lawsuits**  
 OpenAI's terms of use explicitly state nobody may use its AI models to develop competing products. However, its own models are trained on massive datasets scraped from the web. These datasets contained a substantial amount of copyrighted material, which OpenAI says it is entitled to use on the basis of "fair use".

Training AI models using publicly available internet materials is fair

use, as supported by long-standing and widely accepted precedents. We view this principle as fair to creators, necessary for innovators, and critical for US competitiveness.

This argument will be tested in court. Newspapers, musicians, authors and other creatives have filed a series of lawsuits against OpenAI on the grounds of copyright infringement.

Of course, this is quite distinct to what OpenAI accuses DeepSeek of doing. Nevertheless OpenAI isn't attracting much sympathy for its claim that DeepSeek illegitimately harvested its model output.

The war of words and lawsuits is an artefact of how the rapid advance of AI has outpaced the development of clear legal rules for the industry. And while these recent events might reduce the power of AI incumbents, much hinges on the outcome of the various ongoing legal disputes.

**Shaking up the global conversation**  
 DeepSeek has shown it is possible to develop state-of-the-art models cheaply and efficiently. Whether they can compete with OpenAI on a level playing field remains to be seen.

Over the weekend, OpenAI attempted to demonstrate its supremacy by publicly releasing its most advanced consumer model, o3-mini.

OpenAI claims this model substantially outperforms even its own previous market-leading version, o1, and is the "most cost-efficient model in our reasoning series".

-The Conversation

## Where Did Gaza Go Wrong?

Gaza has long been a powder keg, and it exploded after Hamas fighters stormed southern Israel on October 7, 2023, and began killing and abducting people, sparking a crushing Israeli military operation there that's only recently reached an uneasy ceasefire.

President Donald Trump's suggestion Tuesday that that displaced Palestinians in Gaza be permanently resettled outside the war-torn territory and the US take "ownership" may spark new tension over the enclave on the Mediterranean Sea.

### 1948 - 1967: Egyptian rule of Gaza

Before the war surrounding Israel's establishment in 1948, present-day Gaza was part of the large swath of the Middle East under British colonial rule. After Israel defeated the coalition of Arab states, the Egyptian army was left in control of a small strip of land wedged between Israel, Egypt and the Mediterranean.

During the war, some 700,000 Palestinians either fled or were forced from their homes in what is now Israel — a mass uprooting that they call the Nakba, or "catastrophe." Tens of thousands of Palestinians flocked to the strip.

Under Egyptian military control, Palestinian refugees in Gaza were stuck, homeless and stateless. Egypt didn't consider them to be citizens and Israel wouldn't let them return to their homes. Many were supported by UNWRA, the United Nations agency for Palestinian refugees, which has a heavy presence in Gaza to this day. Meanwhile, some young Palestinian fighters who conducted raids into Israel.

### 1967 - 1993: Israel seizes control

Israel seized control of Gaza from Egypt during the 1967 Mideast war, when it also captured the West Bank and east Jerusalem — areas that remain under Israeli control. The internationally recognised Palestinian Authority, which administers semi-autonomous areas of the occupied West Bank, seeks all three areas for a hoped-for future state.

Israel built more than 20 Jewish settlements in Gaza during this pe-



riod. It also signed a peace treaty with Egypt at Camp David — a pact negotiated by US President Jimmy Carter.

Egyptian President Abdel Fattah el-Sissi has referenced this 40-year-old treaty when he declined to permit Palestinian refugees from Gaza into Egypt, saying the potential entrance of militants into Egypt would threaten longstanding peace between Israel and Egypt.

The first Palestinian uprising against Israeli occupation erupted in Gaza in December 1987, kicking off more than five years of sustained protests and bloody violence. It was also during this time that the Islamic militant group Hamas was established in Gaza.

### 1993 - 2005: The Palestinian Authority takes charge

For a time, promising peace talks between Israeli and Palestinian leaders made the future of Gaza look somewhat hopeful.

Following the Oslo accords — a set of agreements between Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin and Palestinian Liberation Organisation leader Yasser Arafat that laid the groundwork for a two-state solution — control of Gaza was handed to the fledgling Palestinian Authority.

### 2005 - 2023: Hamas seizes power

Just months after Israel's withdrawal, Hamas won parliamentary elections over Fatah, the long-dominant Palestinian political party. The following year, after months of infighting, Hamas violently seized

control of Gaza from the Fatah-led Palestinian Authority.

Israel and Egypt imposed a crippling blockade on the territory, monitoring the flow of goods and people in and out. For nearly two decades, the closure has crippled the local economy, sent unemployment skyrocketing, and emboldened militancy in the region, which is one of the most densely populated places on the planet.

### 2023 Hamas attack sparks the Israel-Hamas war

The October 7, 2023, Hamas attack killed some 1,200 people, mostly civilians, and saw around 250 people taken hostage. Over 100 hostages were freed during a weeklong ceasefire in November 2023, eight have been rescued alive and dozens of bodies have been recovered by Israeli forces.

Israel's air and ground war has killed over 47,000 Palestinians, more than half of them women and children, according to local health authorities, who do not say how many of the dead were fighters. The war has left large parts of several cities in ruins and displaced around 90 per cent of Gaza's population of 2.3 million people.

Under the first phase of the latest ceasefire, which went into effect on Jan. 19, Hamas is to release a total of 33 hostages, eight of whom Hamas says are dead, in exchange for nearly 2,000 Palestinian prisoners. Israeli forces have pulled back from most areas and allowed hundreds of thousands of Palestinians to return to devastated northern Gaza while aid flows in.

-AP



# From singles to doubles' glory

HOW SATISH AND AADYA COMPLETED THEIR JOURNEY

By Amit Kumar Das

**New Delhi:** What happens when two singles players join forces in doubles? It could go either way, but for Satish Kumar Karunakaran and Aadya Variyath, the move worked wonders as they are now Indian badminton's top mixed doubles pair.

They have risen to world number 33 in just a year and a half.

On February 4, 2023, Satish and Aadya clinched the Iran International Challenge title. Exactly a year later, the duo secured their maiden gold at the National Games in Dehradun on Tuesday.

In between, the young pair bagged titles in Azerbaijan and Uganda and also made a bid for the Paris Olympics. Though that goal didn't materialize, the Indian duo made a remarkable leap from world No. 432 in 2023 to the 33rd spot.

Satish and Aadya fought hard to defeat Deep Rambhiya and Akshaya Warang 21-11, 20-22, 21-8 in a thrilling mixed doubles final to win gold at National Games.

While they tasted plenty of success since teaming up, their journey has also seen its share of challenges.

Since last April, the duo has been training in Kuala Lumpur under Malaysian coach Jivananathan Nair. However, they can't stay there for more than a



month due to visa restrictions, meaning they frequently fly in and out of the country.

"It has only been one and a half years together. I had some family issues in India, so I had to move to Malaysia," Satish, who started as a swimmer and turned to badminton aged 12 after following his elder brother Arun Kumar, told PTI recently.

Aadya added: "So, since last April, we have tried to train in KL. If it's more than two weeks, we travel to KL. Otherwise, we manage a week of training at one of the centres in India."

**Seeking long-term Malaysian visa**

The 23-year-old Aadya said they are trying for a long-term visa so that they can train in Malaysia without having to worry about travelling frequently.

"We train mostly in Bangalore because my home is

me. My coach Jiva and my trainer Varun Suresh have been taking care of me. We are training at the Asia Badminton Academy in Malaysia," Satish said.

So how does he balance the two formats?

"I have been playing mixed doubles since U-17. The program is given by the coaches. So far, everything is going well. Our team believes in us, so let's see," he said.

"We were almost close to qualifying, but in the last few tournaments, I wasn't well, so I missed out on the Olympics."

Aadya, daughter of a software engineer, was enrolled into a summer camp in Mumbai at the age of four and began regular badminton coaching at six. She then trained under Ganguly Prasad for seven years, following her father's transfer to Bangalore and then worked for another seven years with Ajit Wijetlekk.

"I was a singles player but have also shifted to doubles in the last year and a half. We go sparring in different places. The pace at which singles happen is different from mixed doubles. We go to different clubs, sometimes sparring with independent players, so it's good for our game."

The duo will have to train in India this month as its next goal is the All England Championships, set to take place from March 11 to 16.

-PTI

## 'I am the greatest scorer'

**Madrid:** Cristiano Ronaldo approaches his 40th birthday with the same confidence and self-esteem as he has always boasted throughout his successful career.

Ronaldo, the former Real Madrid star who now plays in Saudi Arabia, will turn 40 on Wednesday and apparently has no doubt about who should be considered the best soccer player ever.



"I am the greatest scorer in history," Ronaldo said in an interview with Spanish television channel La Sexta. "Although I am not left-footed, I am in the top 10 in history for goals scored with the left foot. These are numbers, I am the most complete player who has ever existed."

"I play well with my head, I take good free kicks, I am fast, I am strong, I jump... I have never seen anyone better than me."

The Portugal star holds most scoring records in men's international soccer, including most appearances with 217 and most goals with 135.

He had said it before, more than once, that he feels he will go out as the best ever in the history of soccer. Whenever he was asked about the discussion of who is better, him or Lionel Messi, he always praised the Argentine but ended siding with himself.



From left, Mumbai Indians' Jhulan Goswami, Charlotte Edwards, Harmanpreet Kaur and Sajeevan Sajana pose for photographers during the pre-season Women's Premier League (WPL) 2025 press conference in Mumbai on Wednesday. Pic: PTI

## Umpire Menon out of CT

**Dubai:** India's only representative in the ICC Elite Panel of Umpires, Nitin Menon, has opted out of officiating in the Champions Trophy in Pakistan this month due to personal reasons.

The ICC on Wednesday announced a list of 15 match officials, including three match referees and 12 umpires for the marquee tournament, scheduled to commence in Karachi on February 19 with the final on March 9.

Australian legend David Boon, Sri Lankan great Ranjan Madugalle and Zimbabwe's Andrew Pycroft were named as match referees for the eight-team tournament.

The event will be held at three venues in Pakistan - Karachi, Lahore, and Rawalpindi - while India will play all their matches in Dubai, starting with a clash against Bangladesh on February 20, owing to security concerns.

"The ICC wanted to put him (Menon) on the Champions Trophy roster. But he decided against travelling to Pakistan due to personal reasons," a BCCI source



told PTI.

Menon could not have stood in the matches in Dubai as the ICC follows the policy of appointing neutral umpires. The world body did not comment on Menon in its statement to unveil the list of officials.

All the three match referees chosen for the tournament are experienced. Boon has featured in the 2017 Champions Trophy final, while Madugalle is back after officiating the 2013 final. Pycroft also featured in the 2017 tournament.

"A distinguished panel of 12 umpires will officiate the eight-team event, with six returning officials from the 2017 edition, including Richard Kettleborough, who stood in the final of the previous Champions Trophy in the UK," the ICC said in a release

Kettleborough, a veteran

of 108 ODIs, will be joined by fellow umpires Chris Gaffaney, Kumar Dharmasena, Richard Illingworth, Paul Reffel, and Rod Tucker, who also officiated in the 2017 tournament.

"Dharmasena will be extending his stint of officiating 132 ODIs at the upcoming tournament, a record for an umpire from Sri Lanka in the One-Day format."

Kettleborough and Illingworth, who both stood together during the 2023 World Cup final in Ahmedabad, will be joined by Michael Gough, Adrian Holdstock, Ahsan Raza, Sharfuddin Ibne Shahid, Alex Wharf, and Joel Wilson. All of them officiated at the World Cup in India.

**Match Officials: Umpires:** Kumar Dharmasena, Chris Gaffaney, Michael Gough, Adrian Holdstock, Richard Illingworth, Richard Kettleborough, Ahsan Raza, Paul Reffel, Sharfuddin Ibne Shahid, Rodney Tucker, Alex Wharf, Joel Wilson.

**Match Referees:** David Boon, Ranjan Madugalle, Andrew Pycroft.

-PTI

## Tararudee Overcomes Schmiedlova

By Correspondent

**Mumbai:** Thailand's Luk-sika Tararudee pulled off a remarkable upset against Slovakia's third-seeded Anna Karolina Schmiedlova in the L&T WTA Mumbai open Played at the Cricket Club of India courts. Tararudee emerged victorious in straight sets 7-6, 6-4.

In the first set, the 20-year-old Tararudee kept fighting for each point eventually leading 5-4 with her opponent 10 years older than her but faltered. Tararudee played effective shots sending Schmiedlova standing and in wrong directions. Schmiedlova's resilience kept each set tightly contested, but Tararudee's impressive net play and consistent first serves proved decisive. Her ability to remain composed during critical points was instrumental in her triumph.

Japan's Mai Hontama and the Philippines' rising star Alex Eala delivered a match filled with intensity and drama. Hontama clinched victory in straight sets 7-6, 6-5, demonstrating remarkable composure in

high-pressure moments. The first set saw a fierce battle, with both players engaging in long baseline rallies and pushing each other to the limit. Eala showcased her fighting spirit by forcing a tiebreaker but ultimately fell short as Hontama maintained her composure. The second set remained equally competitive with Hontama securing the win by exploiting Eala's errors and maintaining superior shot placement.

In doubles action, Arianne Hartono and Prarthana Thombare delivered a commanding performance against Thailand's Peangtarn Plipuech and Japan's Chihiro Sato. The Dutch-Indian duo secured a convincing 6-2, 6-3 victory, demonstrating excellent coordination and strategic volley placements. Hartono's aggressive returns combined with Thombare's deft net play left their opponents struggling to find answers.

Swiss fifth seed Jil Teichmann faced a stern challenge from the Netherlands' Arienne Hartono in one of the most gripping matches of the round.



Egor Agafonov of Russia returns to Alexis Galarneau of Canada during the men's singles Round of 32 match at the ATP Challenger Chennai Open 2025 tennis tournament in Chennai on Wednesday. Pic: PTI

## Reliance to lock horns with Brothers

By Correspondent

**Mumbai:** The Reliance Foundation Young Champs continued their brilliant run in Dream Sports Championship and registered a place in the regional final of the tournament after an impressive 4-0 win against Mumbai School Sports Association at Cooperage Stadium. In the final, they will face Brothers Sports Association, who beat Mumbai City FC on the last day of the group stages.

RFYC scored a couple of goals in each half with

Shawn Fernandes netting twice in the 4th - a lovely bicycle kick - and in the 11th minute of the match respectively. Riding on a 2-0 lead, they went into the half time in a strong position and then stretched the lead in the 75th minute after Pritom Brahma scored the third for the side. Faris A provided the final touches as he struck one in the 88th minute to make it 4-0.

In the second clash of the day in the Mumbai leg, Brothers Sports Association defeated Mumbai City FC 3-1 to secure a place in

the final. Mumbai City FC took an early lead after Neev Chhipa got his name on the scoresheet in the 3rd minute of play. But Gavish Goyal soon brought Brothers Sports Association back in the hunt with an equaliser in the 12th minute.

Captain Teinam Marshilong followed it up with another one in 29th minute to hand his side a lead in the first half. Nibash Singh later scored the third goal in 94th minute as Brothers Sports Association wrapped up a comprehensive win.

## Mumbai's Ranji QF shifted to Eden

**Mumbai:** Defending champions Mumbai's Ranji Trophy quarterfinal against Haryana has been shifted by the BCCI from Lahli to Kolkata due to unavoidable circumstances.

All the quarterfinals will be five-day affairs, starting from February 8-12.

"Yes, we have received a communication from BCCI that our quarterfinal against Haryana will be played at the Eden Gardens," Mumbai Cricket Association (MCA) president Ajinkya Naik told PTI on Wednesday.

It is understood that although it is the back-end of the winter season, the weather, at times, could still play spoilsport in Northern India.

The match will feature India's T20 captain Suryakumar Yadav, current national team all-rounder Shivam Dube, out of favour Shardul Thakur and skipper Ajinkya Rahane.

The Haryana team will be headlined by seam-bowling sensation Anshul Kamboj.

## Dutch and German Badminton Tournaments

### India name 17-member junior squad

**New Delhi:** National U-17 champion Gnana Dattu T will lead India's 17-member squad at the Dutch Junior International and German Junior badminton tournaments to be played in February and March this year.

The squad also includes junior world number six Raunak Chouhan, Adarshini Shri and doubles specialists Bhavya Chhabra and Param Chaudhary, among others.

The Dutch Junior International will be played in Haarlem, Netherlands from February 26 to March 2, while the German Junior will be held in Mulheim an der Ruhr from March 5-9.

The Indian contingent consists of four boys and girls singles players each, two boys doubles and two girls doubles combinations, and two mixed doubles pairs.

The squad was selected based on the BAI selection committee's guidelines, granting direct entry to winners of the All India Junior Ranking Tournament (U-19) in Hyderabad, while the remaining spots

were filled through selection trials held in New Delhi, featuring top-ranked players and semifinalists from the Hyderabad event.

"The Dutch Junior International and the German Junior competitions have been important tournaments as stepping stones for the development of young athletes. Indian players have been making a mark in these competitions over the last few years before transitioning to the senior circuit," Badminton Association of India General Secretary, Sanjay Mishra said in a release.

"This augurs well for the junior development plan that BAI has been focusing on for the last few years, especially with 10 players currently in the top 10 of the BWF World Junior Rankings."

Surya Charisma Tamiri had bagged the girls' singles bronze medal in the 2024 German Junior, while Ayush Shetty had won the boys' singles bronze medal a year earlier before going on to clinch the 2023 world junior bronze.

-PTI

# India tour good preparation for CT: Buttler

By Aparajita Upadhyay

**Nagpur:** It hasn't quite gone the way England would have liked but skipper Jos Buttler on Wednesday said the ongoing tour of India is "as good a preparation as you can have" for this month's Champions Trophy given the similarities in conditions with Pakistan where his team will be based for the event.

Buttler also believes that veteran batter Joe Root will play a pivotal role in both the ODI series against India, starting Thursday, and the upcoming Champions Trophy, given his experience.

England, coming off a disappointing 1-4 T20I series loss, have received a much-needed

boost with Root's return. The seasoned batter, who has 171 ODIs under his belt, recently enjoyed a successful stint in SA20 with Paarl Royals, further reinforcing his form.

"Root is one of the great players of the game, so in all the formats here he's obviously been a vital part of ODI cricket for England for a long time," Buttler told reporters on the eve of the first ODI here.

"He's got loads of experience in ODI cricket, which would be great for some of the guys who haven't played as much in our group. He's been a vital player for England in all formats, and we feel like he's got a crucial role for us to play in these games."

The ODI series serves as Eng-

land's final preparation before the Champions Trophy, where Buttler and his team will begin their campaign against Australia on February 22 in Lahore.

"As preparation goes for any tournament, I think taking on India in India is always going to be a great challenge and as good a preparation as you can have," Buttler said.

"The conditions here in India may be similar (to those in Pakistan). Each ground that we play at always has their own nuances and a little bit of difference. We're always trying to adapt to that," he added.

The England captain reaffirmed his team's commitment to the aggressive brand of cricket that has come to define it.

"We want to find ways to put pressure on the opposition with the bat. You've got to take wickets, I think, and it's crucial you see how, if you let guys back for a period of time, they can go on to hurt you."

"So, we'll be desperate to try and find ways of taking wickets," he said.

"It's always about execution, really. Whether you want to be aggressive, you want to be conservative, you want to be measured, you've still got to go out there and execute it and play it well," he added.

Buttler was all praise for under-fire India skipper Rohit Sharma, who will look to regain form in the series.

"If I look back at that World

Cup (2023), the two teams in the final were playing a really positive and aggressive round of cricket, you think of the way Travis Head took that final on with the bats, so you see it can be successful," he said.

"Obviously, Rohit takes a lot of credit for the way he's come out and played himself as a captain and pushed India more towards that style of cricket, so absolutely, we want to be exactly the same."

The growth of T20 cricket and resurgence of Tests has raised serious questions over the relevance of the 50-over game, and concerns for its future. Buttler said he too understands the doubts.

"I'm unsure (about ODIs fu-

ture). I've really enjoyed 50-over cricket. It's always been one of my favourite formats. But it's certainly been pushed a little bit towards the margins in the recent years and the way scheduling is, and obviously the rise of T20 and franchise cricket."

"But I still believe if you talk to guys about winning a World Cup, they'd probably say a 50-over World Cup ahead of a T20 World Cup at the moment. Whether that continues to be the case moving forward, I don't know," he said.

-PTI

