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'Let Us Make Elephant, Dragon Dance'

China Calls for Stronger India Ties Amid US 'Tariff War'

New Delhi : As tensions escalate between China and the United States-especially after Washington doubled tariffs on Chinese imports to 20%-China's Foreign Minister Wang Yi on Friday urged New Delhi and Beijing to collaborate and "take the lead in opposing hegemonism and power politics."

Speaking after the National People's Congress meeting, Wang emphasized that "making the dragon and elephant dance is the only right choice." He further added, "Supporting instead of wearing each other down and strengthening cooperation rather than guarding against each other is in our fundamental interests."

Wang also suggested that if Asia's two largest economies joined forces, the

"democratization of international relations and the development of the Global South would have a brighter future."

India has yet to respond to these remarks. However, on Thursday, Foreign Minister S. Jaishankar stated that India and China are working toward "a more predictable and positive course" in their relationship. This includes resuming pilgrimages to Chinese-controlled sites, reestablishing direct flights, and facilitating journalist exchanges.

Responding to a query on India-China ties, Wang pointed to "positive strides" over the past year, citing military disengagement in Ladakh's Depsang and Demchok regions. He also referenced last year's meeting between Prime



Minister Narendra Modi and President Xi Jinping in Russia's Kazan. On the border dispute, Wang asserted, "We should never allow bilateral relations to be defined by the boundary question or let specific differences affect overall ties."

These developments come amid a growing trade war between the US and China, reminiscent of tensions during Donald Trump's first presidential term.

On Tuesday, Trump signed an order raising tariffs on Chinese imports from 10% to 20%. The White House justified the move as

retaliation for Beijing's alleged failure to control fentanyl exports, a synthetic opioid linked to the US overdose crisis.

China responded swiftly, with its embassy in Washington declaring, "If war is what the US wants... be it tariff, trade, or any other type, we're ready to fight till the end." In retaliation, Beijing has announced tariffs of up to 15% on key American agricultural exports, including soybeans, pork, and wheat, effective next week.

Additionally, China has lodged a complaint with the World Trade Organization, accusing the US of violating WTO rules and undermining trade relations. Beijing also dismissed the fentanyl allegation as a "flimsy excuse to raise tariffs."

Tariffs have become a prominent tool in Trump's second term, with the US President using them to pressure other nations. Alongside China, India has also been targeted. Trump has repeatedly labeled India a "high tariff nation" and accused it of trade abuses, vowing reciprocal measures.

During a joint address to Congress, Trump criticized India's high import duties as "very unfair" and announced new tariffs, including a 25% levy on steel and aluminum imports. He made the announcement via social media on February 13, just hours before a scheduled meeting with PM Modi.

The decision triggered a sharp reaction in Indian markets, causing the Sensex to plummet by over 1,000 points.

10 missing Indian construction workers rescued in Israel

Tel Aviv/New Delhi: Ten missing Indian construction workers were rescued after being trapped in the Palestinian Authority of al-Zaayem for a month.

Israel's Population and Immigration Authority announced that the 10 Indian workers were rescued on Wednesday night.

The workers had been lured to the al-Zaayem town with promises of work. However, upon their arrival, their passports were stolen. The thieves sought to use the stolen passports to enter Israel. And without their passports, the workers could not return to Israel, an Israeli website reported.

The workers were trapped for about a month before their rescue. The IDF had previously identified the fraudulent use of the stolen passports and returned them to their rightful owners.

Following the rescue, the workers were moved to a safe location.

The Indian Embassy said on X that the matter is under investigation.

"Israeli authorities traced 10 missing Indian construction workers to West Bank & have brought them back to Israel."

"While the matter is still under investigation, the Embassy is in touch with the Israeli authorities & have

requested to ensure their safety & well-being."

Earlier this month, a 47-year-old man from Kerala was shot dead at the Israel-Jordan border while attempting to enter Israel illegally on February 10. He had come to Jordan on a three-month tourist visa.

The Indian national, identified as Ani Thomas Gabriel, was from Thiruvananthapuram's Thumba. He died of a bullet wound to the head, according to reports.

Another person from Kerala, Edison, a relative of Gabriel, was shot in his leg, and was sent back to India after getting treatment at a Jordanian hospital.

According to reports, Gabriel and Edison were part of a four-member group attempting to cross the border from Jordan into Israel with the help of an agent. All four had arrived in Jordan on a three-month visit visa.

The group was intercepted by the Jordanian army at the border, but as they attempted to escape, the army opened fire at them.

In November 2023, Israel's construction sector had asked the government to allow companies to hire up to 100,000 workers from India to replace 90,000 Palestinians who lost their work permits since the start of the war.

Mumbai: IT raid at Parle G office

Mumbai: The Income Tax (IT) Department conducted a raid on Parle Products Pvt Ltd, the manufacturer of Parle-G biscuits, at its Vile Parle facility in Mumbai on Friday. According to the details, the company's offices & factories in Gujarat's Kutchh are also being raided by the sleuths; however, the exact reason for the search has not yet been disclosed. Currently, the central agency's economic wing is scrutinising the company's financial documents, and the search is being led by the Foreign Assets Unit and the Investigation Wing of the Income Tax Department. Parle Products, established in 1929, is believed to have derived its name from the Vile Parle locality in Mumbai. In 1938, the company introduced biscuits under the brand name Parle-Gluco, which gained immense popularity.

Modi govt committed to promote all regional languages, including Tamil : Amit Shah

Chennai: Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Friday said the BJP-led Government at the Centre headed by Prime Minister Narendra Modi was strongly committed to promote all the regional languages, including Tamil.

He was addressing the 56th Raising Day event of the Central Industrial Security Force (CISF) Regional Training Centre, which he renamed it after Rajaditya Cholan Regional Training Centre (RTC) in memory of the Chola prince, who died in a battle there centuries ago, at Thakkolam in Ranipet district of Tamil Nadu.

Stressing on the importance of preserving the rich cultural heritage of Tamil Nadu, he highlighted the efforts of the Prime Minister to honour the state's linguistic and cultural legacy.

In an apparent counter to the ruling dmk's oft-repeated charge that the Government headed by Mr Modi had done nothing for promoting Tamil language and development and that enough funds were not allocated, Mr



Amit Shah said Tamil Nadu's heritage significantly contributes to the broader Indian cultural fabric and the rich culture of the State has greatly bolstered India's diverse heritage.

The central government values and promotes every state's language," Mr Amit Shah said, adding "the Prime Minister has prioritised Tamil and its heritage, taking concrete steps to incorporate state languages into educational and professional spheres."

Pointing out that the government

has introduced several initiatives like inclusion of regional languages, such as Tamil, in critical examinations for the Central Armed Police Forces (CAPF), the Union Home Minister said prior to Mr Modi's tenure, candidates could not take CAPF exams in their mother tongue, be it Tamil, Bengali or Kannada.

"Now, under the guidance and leadership of Mr Modi, candidates can write the CAPF exams and other exams in their regional languages, ensuring that no candidate is disadvantaged by language barriers," he asserted.

In this context, Mr Amit Shah urged Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M K Stalin to introduce medicine and engineering courses in Tamil, a point which he had made earlier, while attending a function in Chennai.

Offering these programs in the Tamil language will greatly benefit local students and make higher education more accessible, he noted.

"I have been advocating for the introduction of medicine and

engineering courses in Tamil for the past two years, but no action has been taken so far", Mr Amit Shah said.

"I urge the Chief Minister to take necessary steps at least now and introduce medical and engineering courses in Tamil", he added.

To drive home his point, Mr Amit Shah said similar initiatives have already been implemented nationwide, allowing students to pursue courses in fields like medicine and engineering in their native languages, which helps in bridging educational gaps while ensuring greater inclusivity for students across India.

Reiterating the ambitious goals set by Mr Modi, including transforming India into the world's third-largest economy by 2027 and establishing it as a fully developed nation by 2047, the Union Home Minister congratulated the CISF's pivotal role in safeguarding the national interests, which directly contributes to the realisation of these objectives.

Russia launches another massive attack on Ukraine's energy system

Kiev: Russia launched another large-scale attack on Ukraine's energy system overnight Friday, Ukrainian Energy Minister German Galushchenko said on Facebook.

"The energy and gas infrastructure in various regions of Ukraine is again under massive missile and drone attacks," he wrote.

Rescuers workers and energy sector personnel are working at the sites of the strikes to address the aftermath, Galushchenko said.

He added that all necessary measures are being taken to stabilize energy and gas supplies.

According to the Regional Military Administration, a critical industrial facility in the western Ternopil region was hit, with the region possibly facing restrictions on gas supply.

Earlier in the day, the Ukrainian Air Force reported that Russian forces had launched several groups of combat drones, along with cruise and ballistic missiles at Ukraine.



IAF's Jaguar aircraft crashes in Ambala; pilot ejects safely

New Delhi: A Jaguar aircraft of the Indian Air Force (IAF) on Friday crashed at Ambala during a routine training sortie after encountering a system malfunction, the IAF said. The pilot, however, manoeuvred the aircraft away from habitation on the ground before ejecting safely. The IAF has ordered an inquiry to ascertain the cause of the accident, it said.

Indian Battalion with UNIFIL celebrates International Women's Day in Lebanon



New Delhi: The Indian Battalion serving with the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) celebrated International Women's Day by organising a special Yoga session for women in El Fardis, the Indian Army said here on Friday.

This initiative aimed to promote physical well-being, mental resilience, and community cohesion among women in the conflict-affected region.

The session conducted by trained instructors, introduced stress-relief

techniques, mindfulness practices, and holistic wellness approaches, offering participants a moment of self-care and empowerment, they said. The initiative aligns with the Indian Battalion's broader commitment to fostering gender equality, health, and resilience.

By organising such activities, UNIFIL peacekeepers continue to support local communities, demonstrating how peacekeeping extends beyond security to include social and emotional well-being.

India slams UK govt over 'license accorded' to Khalistani elements after EAM's security breach

New Delhi: India today slammed the UK government for its inaction on Khalistani elements who heckled External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar during his London visit, and said it "brings out the license accorded" to the separatists.

In a stern statement, the Ministry of External Affairs spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal said at the weekly media briefing:

"We have conveyed our deep concern to the UK authorities about the breach of security arrangements by UK-based separatist and extremist elements during EAM's visit.

"There is a larger context to the incident. It brings out both the license accorded to such forces, as well as indifference to their intimidation, threats, and other actions aimed at impeding our legitimate diplomatic activities in the UK. "While we have noted the statement issued by the UK Foreign Office on the matter, our view of its sincerity would depend on the action taken against culprits on this and previous occasions," he said.

India's strong statement comes a day after it issued a condemnation of the breach of security during EAM's London visit when a group of Khalistani separatists heckled him and tried to block his car.

On Wednesday evening, EAM Jaishankar was heckled by a group of Khalistani supporters who were shouting anti-India slogans when the minister was going for a programme in London.

As the External Affairs Minister left the venue, one



among the pro-Khalistani elements dashed in front of his car and tore the national flag of India, according to visuals on social media.

The issue was raised in the British parliament yesterday by Conservative MP Bob Blackman who lambasted the government of UK Prime Minister Keir Starmer over the lack of security provided to the EAM.

"This is an affront to democracy, it's an affront to our friends and allies in India; and we need to make sure that it doesn't happen again," Blackman said.

Earlier, in January this year, India had protested the disruption of the screening of Kangana Ranaut's film

'Emergency' in several halls in the UK by Khalistani elements. The film is based on the Emergency imposed by the former PM in 1975.

The MEA spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal had said then that "Freedom of speech and expression cannot be applied selectively, and those obstructing it must be held accountable."

He expressed hope that the UK side would take appropriate action against those responsible.

In March 2023, relations between the two sides had deteriorated over the UK government's inaction on the Khalistani issue.

India had summoned the senior-most UK diplomat in New Delhi then to convey its strong protest after some Khalistani elements removed the Indian flag from outside

the Indian High Commission in London and attempted to replace it with a Khalistani flag.

India had then also demanded an explanation for the complete absence of British security that allowed the Khalistani elements to enter the Indian High Commission premises.

India had demanded that the perpetrators be arrested and prosecuted and stringent measures be put in place to prevent recurrence of such incidents.

Later that year, India "disengaged" from the FTA trade talks over UK's failure to condemn pro-Khalistani activists who vandalised the Indian High Commission.

India and the UK last week re-launched the trade talks under the Keir Starmer regime.

India, US negotiating multi-sector Bilateral Trade Agreement: MEA



New Delhi: India and the US are in the process of advancing discussions on a multi-sector Bilateral Trade Agreement to strengthen two-way trade across all sectors, the Ministry of External Affairs said today.

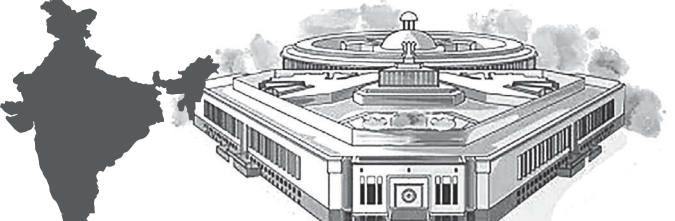
MEA spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal, addressing a question regarding the issue of US President Donald Trump raising tariffs imposed by India, said at the weekly briefing: "During PM Modi's visit to the US in February 2025, both sides announced plans to negotiate a mutually beneficial, multi-sector Bilateral Trade Agreement

(BTA)."

Commerce and Industries Minister Piyush Goyal was in the US and met his counterparts last week.

"The two governments are in the process of advancing discussions on a multi-sector Bilateral Trade Agreement," he said.

"Our objective through the BTA is to strengthen and deepen India-US two-way trade across the goods and services sector, increase market access, reduce tariff and non-tariff barriers, and deepen supply chain integration between the two countries," he added.



After rejuvenation of Kashi and Ayodhya, now it's Mathura's turn: Yogi

Mathura (UP): Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath on Friday said that after the revitalisation of Kashi and Ayodhya, now its time for the development of Mathura and Braj Bhoomi. The CM inaugurated "Rangotsav 2025" in Barsana, Mathura, during his one-day visit. On this occasion, he offered prayers at the Shri Ladli Ji Maharaj temple and commenced the festival of colours with the traditional Laddumar Holi and a floral celebration. Speaking on the occasion, he described the land of Braj as a symbol of devotion and faith, enriching Sanatan culture for over 5,000 years, where the

divine presence of Shri Radha and Shri Krishna is felt in every particle. Yogi said that UP is blessed to be home to Kashi, Ayodhya, and Mathura, three sacred pilgrimage sites that stand as eternal symbols of Sanatan unity. He credited Prime Minister Narendra Modi's leadership for establishing a new tradition of heritage preservation and development, evident in the grand success of the recently concluded Prayagraj Maha Kumbh. He said that those who questioned Sanatan Dharma, spread misinformation, and attempted to distort its essence have received a resounding response from

its devoted followers. Describing Holi as a festival of unity and harmony, the CM said that while the Maha Kumbh conveys a message of unity to the world, Holi further strengthens it. He lauded the rich traditions of Sanatan Dharma, highlighting the world-famous Lathmar Holi and Laddumar Holi of Barsana as embodiments of this cultural legacy. He announced that significant provisions have been made in this year's budget for the development of Braj Bhoomi, with projects worth crores linking Barsana to new growth opportunities. "A rope way service has been introduced

in Barsana for the first time. After the successful completion of the Maha Kumbh, the focus has now shifted to the development of this sacred land, following the transformation of Kashi, Ayodhya, Prayagraj, and Maa Vindhyavasini Dham," he said. Yogi assured that there would be no limits to the development of Mathura, Barsana and Braj Bhoomi. He expressed his devotion to Shri Radharani Ji during Holi, pledging to work tirelessly for the region's progress. Referring to the recent change of government in Delhi, he reiterated the promise to rejuvenate the Yamuna River, ensuring it

becomes as clean and uninterrupted as the Ganga. During the event, he honoured saints and extended Holi and Rangotsav greetings to devotees from India and abroad. He emphasised that Barsana represents Brahma, Nandgaon symbolises Shiva, and Govardhan embodies Vishnu, making Braj Bhoomi a source of blessings for every follower of Sanatan Dharma. He said that the 'double-engine government' guarantees security, development, and prosperity. On this auspicious occasion of Holi, the CM expressed confidence that

the development of Braj Bhoomi would gain fresh momentum. He visited the Shri Ladli Ji Maharaj temple to pray for the state's welfare. During his one-day visit to Barsana, Mathura, the CM reviewed the progress of various regional development projects. Vice President of the UP Braj Tirtha Vikas Parishad Shailaja Kant Mishra briefed the CM on development works worth approximately Rs 29 crore that have been completed. Yogi directed officials to ensure the timely and high-quality execution of ongoing projects in the Braj area. Mishra highlighted several



key projects in Barsana, including the Radharani Kitchen, facade lighting at the Shri Radharani Temple, and the introduction of a ropeway facility based on the PPP model, a first for facilitating access to the temple. Other developments included the Yatri Jan Suvidha Kendra near Govardhan Drain, Priya Kund Peeli Pokhar facade lighting, and a PWD Guest House Facilitation Center.

Praising these initiatives, the CM emphasised that the Braj region is a major centre of Sanatan culture. He assured that no effort would be spared in accelerating its development. He directed the officials to expedite the completion of all projects across the Braj region, including Barsana, focusing on maintaining high-quality standards and ensuring that pilgrims and locals reap maximum benefits.

Women empowerment at core of BJP's vision K Reddy on International Women's Day

Hyderabad: Telangana BJP President and Union Minister for Coal and Mines, G Kishan Reddy, emphasised the significance of women's empowerment during the International Women's Day celebrations at the BJP state office on Friday. Extending his greetings to Shakti Swaroopins, or embodiments of strength, he highlighted India's unique cultural tradition of honoring women as powerful forces in society. Addressing the gathering, Kishan Reddy underscored the crucial role women have played across various fields from ancient times to the present day. He credited the BJP Mahila Morcha for its active participation in elections and acknowledged the contribution of 5,000 women workers in his constituency, who played a vital role in his victory. He also criticised previous governments for neglecting the rights of 12 crore Muslim women affected by Triple Talaq. Hailing Prime Minister Narendra Modi's leadership, he praised the abolition of the practice, ensuring justice for women, a step



even many Islamic nations had not taken. Kishan Reddy further highlighted the initiatives undertaken by the BJP government to uplift women, stating that programs like 'Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao' are not just slogans but impactful measures. He credited the government for extending maternity leave to 26 weeks and fostering opportunities for women in startups and the IT sector, where many now earn top salaries. He also lauded the Modi government's implementation of 33 per cent reservation for women in legislatures, ensuring increased

representation. In Telangana, this will translate to 40 seats for women in the upcoming elections. He noted that BJP has the highest number of women ministers, MPs, MLAs, and local body representatives. Emphasising the need to preserve Indian family values, the Minister stressed the importance of maintaining the joint family system and criticised the BRS government for neglecting women's representation since 2014. He acknowledged the contributions of Swami Vivekananda, Babasaheb Ambedkar, and Jyotirao Phule in advocating for women's empowerment.

Additionally, he expressed pride in the Modi government's recognition of women from marginalised sections, as evidenced by the conferment of Padma Shri awards upon them for their achievements and contributions. Criticising the Congress government in Telangana, Kishan Reddy accused it of failing to fulfill its promises despite being in power for 14 months. He claimed that the government had neglected employment, job creation, and youth welfare, while only offering free bus services as a symbolic gesture. He also highlighted the BJP's growing support among women, revealing that 90 per cent of votes in the MLC elections came from women teachers and graduates, reflecting their trust in the BJP's vision. Kishan Reddy called for unity among women to demand accountability from the ruling government. He urged them to raise their voices against broken promises and work collectively towards ensuring a better future for women in the state and the country.

Karnataka Budget 2025-26: Total Borrowings rise to Rs 1.16 lakh crore

Bengaluru: Karnataka Chief Minister Siddaramaiah on Friday presented the state budget for 2025-26, announcing that total borrowings for the fiscal year stand at ₹1.16 lakh crore - ₹11,000 crore higher than the previous year. The fiscal deficit for 2025-26 is pegged at ₹90,428 crore, making up 2.95 per cent of the Gross State Domestic Product (GSDP). Meanwhile, the revenue deficit is estimated at ₹19,262 crore, or 0.63 per cent of GSDP. By the end of the financial year, Karnataka's total liabilities are projected to reach ₹7,64,655 crore, constituting 24.91 per cent of GSDP. "By keeping fiscal deficit and total outstanding liabilities within the limits mandated under the Karnataka Fiscal Responsibility Act, we have maintained fiscal discipline in the financial year 2025-26," the CM noted. The budget estimates

total receipts at ₹4,08,647 crore, with revenue receipts amounting to ₹2,92,477 crore. This includes the state's own tax revenue of ₹2,08,100 crore, non-tax revenue of ₹16,500 crore, and receipts from the Government of India totalling ₹67,877 crore. Additionally, gross borrowings of ₹1,16,000 crore and non-debt capital receipts of ₹170 crore have been factored into the financial outlook. The total estimated expenditure for 2025-26 stands at ₹4,09,549 crore, comprising revenue expenditure of ₹3,11,739 crore, capital expenditure of ₹71,336 crore, and loan repayment of ₹26,474 crore. Karnataka, which ranks second in GST revenue collection nationwide, has set a revenue target of ₹1,20,000 crore for the Commercial Tax Department in FY26. The state expects to generate ₹40,000 crore from State Excise, up from ₹36,500 crore in 2024-25. Additionally, the

government aims to collect ₹28,000 crore in property registration tax, marking an increase from ₹24,000 crore last year. The Motor Vehicle Tax revenue target for FY26 has been set at ₹15,000 crore, up from ₹12,500 crore in the previous year. Royalty collections for 2025-26 are estimated at ₹9,000 crore, while revenue from the Mines and Geology Department is projected at ₹7,250 crore for 2024-25. Despite the surge in borrowings, infrastructure development in the state has been minimal, raising concerns about fund utilisation. Experts note that while the fiscal deficit remains within manageable limits, the absence of substantial capital expenditure could hamper long-term economic growth. Critics argue that unless infrastructure investment is prioritised, the increasing debt burden may fail to yield tangible benefits for Karnataka's economy.

AbhiBus enables bookings for India's first women-only intercity bus service

Kolkata: AbhiBus (ixigo bus business), is now facilitating bookings for India's first women-only intercity bus service, launched by YoloBus. The YoloBus service, exclusive for women, will operate on the Gurgaon-Chandigarh route starting March 8, according to a media statement here on Friday. Launching on International Women's Day, YoloBus aims to offer a safer and more convenient travel experience for female passengers, with a female conductor onboard to provide added assistance and comfort. Speaking on this, Rohit Sharma, COO, AbhiBus, added, "At AbhiBus, we are committed to making bus travel safer and more convenient for women. Over the last three months, we have seen a 54% YoY increase in bookings by female travellers, with solo female traveller bookings up by 50% YoY. The launch of the women-only YoloBus service aligns with our ongoing efforts to empower female travellers,



including our Pink Seat feature, which reserves dedicated seats for women across multiple routes." Sanjay Jadoun, CEO, YoloBus, said, "The safety and comfort of women travellers have always been a priority for us. Launching this service on Women's Day is our way of celebrating and empowering female travellers with a more secure and reliable intercity travel option. Through AbhiBus, women can easily access this service and book their journeys seamlessly on the platform. We believe this initiative will set a new benchmark in intercity travel."

Opposition PDP, PC, BJP slam J&K's Budget

Srinagar: Opposition parties People's Democratic Party (PDP), Bhartiya Janata Party and Peoples Conference slammed the J&K government's budget which was presented in the Assembly by Chief Minister Omar Abdullah on Friday. The PDP criticized the Budget, accusing the National Conference (NC) of failing to deliver on its election promise of providing 200 units of free electricity to every household. The PDP said the government had assured 200 units of free electricity for every household, creating hopes among the people of Jammu and Kashmir. "However, the budget announcement proves that their promise was nothing more than an election gimmick," PDP said. The Chief Minister in his budget speech announced 200 units of free electricity for Antyodaya Anna Yojana (AAY) families. The Opposition PDP said by limiting this benefit only to AAY ration card holders, the government has effectively

excluded the vast majority of the population. "Out of 16 lakh ration card holders, merely 95,000 will benefit, which is just 5-7% of the total population," the party said. The PDP also questioned why 1.27 lakh AAY cardholders were removed from the list ahead of the announcement and why the scheme was not extended to all households as promised. "This selective approach exposes their anti-people policies. If they truly intended to help the people of Jammu and Kashmir, they should have ensured that their promise was fulfilled in its entirety, rather than shrinking the beneficiaries to a fraction of what was originally committed," the PDP said in a statement. "The people of Jammu and Kashmir deserve honest governance, not broken promises," it added. The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has launched a scathing attack on Chief Minister Omar Abdullah's recently presented budget, calling it a "complete failure"



and accusing the National Conference (NC) government of deceiving the people of Jammu and Kashmir. BJP J&K spokesperson Altaf Thakur termed the budget as nothing but "jumla bazi" and a "stark betrayal" of the promises made during the elections. "Where are the 12 free gas cylinders that Omar Abdullah promised? Where is the one lakh job guarantee? Where is the free ration? This budget is a cruel joke on the people of J&K," Thakur said. The BJP leader slammed the government for offering 200 units of free electricity only to AAY beneficiaries, instead of extending the benefit to all, as was promised. "This is outright

deception. Omar Abdullah came to power by making grand announcements, but his government has failed on every front. The people will not forgive this betrayal," the BJP spokesperson warned. Handwara MLA and PC President Sajad Lone termed the Budget as "disappointment". "The budget speech was, as expected, a disappointment—same old style of parroting of Centrally Sponsored Schemes with Hindi nomenclature," Lone remarked. He said the budget reflected a significant gap between political rhetoric and economic figures, emphasizing that the presented data contradicted the

opposition's previous stance. "It glorified and endorsed the BJP's 'Naya Kashmir' discourse. And statistics, which have been berated by the NC over the past decade have become the gospel truth. Suddenly, every government statistic from the past five years is being treated as gospel truth, and the incumbent government seems eager to jump into the frame and take credit for the same statistics that, until the other day, they told us were either fudged or fiction," the PC President said. The Handwara legislator asserted that he had expected a politically viable and economically vibrant budget rather than a routine statement of outlay and expenditure. "Even the promised 200 units of electricity are only for AAY beneficiaries and are linked to the Centrally Sponsored Rooftop Scheme, which has approximately a 65% central share with a cap of 3 kW. Too many strings attached," he stated. Lone also took issue with fuel price hikes, stating, "Petrol and diesel prices are

set to increase by ₹1/Lt and ₹2/Lt, respectively, due to a reduction in rebates on petrol and diesel." He criticized the budget for neglecting key sectors, emphasizing that it offered nothing for job creation, daily wages, contractual employees, or minimum wages. Additionally, he dismissed the shifting of the police budget as a supposed "achievement," asserting that "the soul of statehood, which we believe was stolen from us, was relegated to yet another statistic." Moreover, he likened the LG's address to a political downplaying of aspirations and called the budget "a statistical relegation of aspirations." In a final jibe, the PC President noted, "The PM, the HM, and the Union Finance Minister were praised more than once," sarcastically concluding, "The saga of love letters continues. This love letter to BJP—Part II."

CM Omar presents Rs 1.12 lakh crore budget for J&K

Jammu: Jammu and Kashmir Chief Minister Omar Abdullah on Friday presented a Rs 1.12 lakh crore budget for Jammu and Kashmir for the fiscal 2025-26. Unveiling the budget in the assembly, Abdullah, who also serves as Finance Minister of the UT, announced that total budget estimate for the fiscal 2025-26 is Rs 1,12,310 crore. "The total net budget estimates for the fiscal 2025-26 are Rs 1,12,310 crore, excluding the provision for ways and means advances and overdraft. The expected revenue receipts are Rs 97,982 crore and capital receipts are Rs 14,328 crore," Abdullah said while presenting the budget. Similarly, he said that the revenue expenditure is

estimated to be Rs 79,703 crore and capital expenditure to be Rs 32,607 crore. The total gross receipts are estimated at Rs 1,40,309.99 crore, including the provision for ways and means advances and overdraft of Rs 28,000 crore, he said adding, "given these receipts, the total gross expenditure is estimated to be Rs 1,40,309.99 crore." The own revenues both tax and non-tax are estimated to be Rs 31,905 crore, he said adding, "In addition to this, Rs 41,000 crore is to flow as central assistance and Rs 13,522 crore as CSS/PMDP to the Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir." Abdullah revealed that the tax and GDP ratio is projected at 7.5 per cent for 2025-26, adding, "fiscal deficit for the year 2025-26 is



estimated to be 3.0 per cent and this is substantially lower than 5.5 per cent in 2024-25 (RE)." The GDP for the year 2025-26 has been projected at Rs 2,884,222 crore, which shows a growth of 9.5 per cent over the previous year, adding he said, "the state's own revenue both tax and non-tax revenue, is estimated to be Rs 31,905 crore." The Chief Minister said that a total of Rs 41,000 crore is to flow as central assistance and Rs 13,522 crore as centrally sponsored schemes and the Prime Minister's Development Package (PMDP). The Chief Minister however, also proposed a

free ration of 10 kilogram per person to all AAY beneficiaries from April 1, 2025, enhancement of pension to vulnerable sections of the society including old-aged persons, widows, divorcees and specially-abled persons. The pension has been revised to Rs 12,500 crore for persons below 60 years of age while Rs 15,000 crore for persons aged between 60 and below 80 years and Rs 20,000 crore for persons aged 80 years and above. He announced enhancement of financial assistance under the marriage assistance scheme from Rs 50,000 to Rs 75,000 for AAY category girls and from April 1, 2025, all women will be granted free ridership on government-owned public transport buses, including

e-buses. The Chief Minister also proposed 200 units of free electricity per month to all AAY families in Jammu and Kashmir, adding, "Integrated with the PM Surya Ghar Bijli Yojana, this initiative will enable installation of grid-connected solar systems, generating the required power and eliminating electricity bills." He said that Rs 750 crore will be invested in this scheme and it would reduce AT&C losses and promote sustainable energy. He also announced reducing the stamp duty on property gifted to blood relatives to zero and further announced the setting up of national law universities and Jammu and Kashmir skill and entrepreneurship universities.

Kashmir schools reopen after winter break

Srinagar: Schools in the Kashmir Valley reopened on Friday after an 87-day winter break, with students returning in high spirits, an official said. Schools up to class 5 were closed on December 10, 2024, while classes 6 to 12 began winter vacations on December 16, 2024. The schools were scheduled to reopen on March 1 but due to inclement weather the winter vacation was extended by a week by the authorities in Kashmir valley. The joyful students clad in school uniforms were seen waiting on the road sides at various Srinagar localities to board their buses for the school. Some students accompanied by their parents were seen walking on foot to reach schools. "I am very happy and excited to be in school again after winter vacation to meet friends and

teachers," Izat Fatima of Birla Open Mind International School in Srinagar said. "It is a proud moment to be in school again after spending a long winter vacation," another girl student at the school Zainab-al-Zohra said. Minister of Education Sakina Itoo wished the students success. "As Winter Zone students join their schools after winter break, I wish them success for the session and future. I appreciate support from all stakeholders, especially the teaching fraternity to make it a memorable, successful year. Best wishes to all," she said. The Directorate of School Education, Kashmir, has recently instructed all Heads of Institutions to ensure a warm and conducive environment when students return to classrooms after the winter break.

Briefs :

IFS officer jumps to death in Delhi, no suicide note found

New Delhi : An Indian Foreign Service (IFS) officer jumped to his death from a building in the Chanakypuri area here on Friday, police said. According to the Delhi Police, the victim has been identified as Jitendra Rawat. The police said that no suicide note has been found from the spot. It is being said that the IFS officer was upset for the last few days. Police are investigating the case from various angles. The Ministry of External Affairs in a statement on the death, said that it is providing all possible assistance to the family, and is in touch with the Delhi Police. "The Ministry stands with the family in this hour of grief and difficulty," it said. "Further details are not being released bearing in mind the need to respect the family's privacy in this time of bereavement," it added.

Stray bull attack kills guard, narrow escape for one

New Delhi : A 68-year-old security guard died and another person received minor injuries when they were hit by a stray bull in northwest Delhi's Alipur on Thursday. The bull was later caught by corporation employees. At the time of the incident, the guard was returning home from his workplace in Nehru Enclave. The deceased was identified as Ashok Kumar, a resident of Jalaun in Uttar Pradesh. A senior police officer said that a team from the local police station found the guard's body lying on Alipur-Budhpur Road. The crime team was called to the spot, and an inspection was conducted. Witnesses told cops that the stray bull tossed Kumar into the air multiple times and struck him with its horns. The injured person, Ram Lakhan (60), a resident of Sultanpur in UP, met the police team at the site. He told them that after assaulting Ashok, the stray bull hit him with its horns; however, he did not sustain any major injuries. Police ruled out any foul play and initiated inquest proceedings under Section 194 of BNSS.

Man found dead near Dharamshala in Delhi

New Delhi : A 22-year-old man was found dead near Swarnkar Dharamshala in northeast Delhi's Kailash Colony on Friday morning, an official said. Police were alerted about an unidentified body through a call at 9:54 am at Jyoti Nagar police station. Upon receiving the information, a police team arrived at the location, accompanied by forensic specialists and a mobile crime unit to examine the site, according to police officials. Subsequently, the body was transported to GTB Hospital for post-mortem examination, and authorities have registered a case.

NDMC attaches properties in Gole, Khan markets over non-payment of tax

New Delhi: Continuing its action against properties over non-payment of property tax, New Delhi Municipal Council on Friday attached a portion of a commercial complex near Gole Market. It also attached seven properties in Khan Market. "We attached only a portion of the commercial complex in Gole Market because there are so many govt offices operating inside it, and complete attachment will affect their smooth operation. We have given two days' time to the land-owning agency to pay the dues," said an NDMC official. "At Khan Market, five days' notices have been issued to the defaulting shops and residential complexes.

Delhi's free bus-ride for women saves up to 8% of monthly household income: Report

New Delhi : The free bus-ride service for women in Delhi resulted in savings of up to 8% of their monthly household income, revealed a study published on Thursday. According to the World Resources Institute (WRI) study, half of the respondents reported savings between Rs 500 and Rs 1,000 per month on bus fares. For those who switched from other modes of shared transport, such as auto-rickshaws or the Metro, the savings were significantly higher, ranging from Rs 1,700 to Rs 2,300 every month.

The report titled 'Fare-free bus travel scheme for women: Lessons from Delhi' found that out of the 2,010 respondents, 62% took free bus rides for work and education, and that the scheme launched in 2019 increased their access to jobs, education and healthcare as women were traveling farther and more frequently.

The research used both govt data and detailed surveys of women bus users, including female students, workers and non-workers. Nearly 28% of the respondents to the survey were from economically weaker sections (EWS), with annual household incomes of less than Rs 3 lakh and another 57% hailed from homes with annual incomes of less than Rs 6 lakh.

Quoting govt data, the report mentioned that the share of women in bus ridership increased steadily from 33% in 2019-20 to 42% in 2022-23.

It noted that growing in-



terest in Delhi's gender-based fare-free public transport (FFPT) policies is increasing in states such as Punjab, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka and Telangana. It has observed that the scheme's cost is a minor portion of the total operational expenses, and it has not significantly impacted overall bus operations by Delhi govt.

As per the research, Delhi's FFPT scheme primarily benefits women from low-income families, with half the respondents reporting saving of at least Rs 500 per month. "Over 90% of these women use buses on a weekly basis for work, education, caregiving, and discretionary activities. As many as 95% of the women in our sample lack access to a private vehicle and rely on buses due to economic constraints. They reported that the FFPT scheme saved up to 8% of their household income per month. The fare waiver has also made wom-

en less dependent on male family members, enabling them to travel alone or pay transport costs for other family members," it added.

The study has found that the scheme has increased access of women to jobs, education and healthcare. "This has doubled the opportunities available within their travel range, and especially benefited students commuting to institutes of higher learning. Women report a median trip length of 10.5 km, which allows them to access nearly a quarter of the city's opportunities by bus," it said.

Highlighting how the scheme has eliminated several constraints, the report has highlighted that earlier nearly 36% of respondents opted for shared autos, and 40% relied on two-wheelers or family members for their short-distance trips. Women, who lacked these or could not afford them, needed to walk to nearby destina-

tions. It said, "The FFPT scheme has eliminated this constraint. The share of women making shorter trips (under 4 km) by bus has increased by 12% and of those traveling 4-10 km has increased by 15%. Eliminating the transfer penalty saves women time and money."

The report has also flagged gaps affecting access of women to safe and reliable bus services. These include inefficient bus schedules, overcrowding, and harassment. "Safety concerns, exacerbated by gender biases, prevent many women from utilising the available grievance mechanisms. Worries over safety due to hostile staff behavior are reported by 59% of the women in the sample. Although female ridership has increased from 33% to 42% since the scheme's introduction, transit agencies still face revenue shortfalls," it said.

SC adjourns hearing on plea challenging constitutional validity of PMLA provisions

New Delhi : The Supreme Court adjourned the hearing on a petition challenging the constitutional validity of several provisions of the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA) 2002, directing that the matter be listed before a three-judge bench.

A Bench comprising Justices Surya Kant and N. Kottiswar Singh on Thursday noted the necessity of a larger bench to hear the case.

The petition, filed by Congress MP Karti Chidambaram, seeks a review of the Supreme Court's July 2022 judgment, which upheld key provisions of the PMLA.

During the proceedings, Senior Advocate Kapil Sibal, representing the petitioners, informed the Court that the registry had not scheduled a specific date for the hearing. In response, Solicitor General Tushar Mehta and Additional Solicitor General S.V. Raju requested that the matter be taken up in the last week of April or the first week of May this year.

The Supreme Court adjourned the case to a later date, stating that counsel would be notified accordingly.

The July 2022 ruling by the Supreme Court upheld various provisions of the PMLA, reinforcing the broad investigative and arrest powers of the Enforce-



ment Directorate (ED).

The judgment made key determinations, including ED's inquiries differ from criminal investigations.

The Court ruled that procedural safeguards under the Code of Criminal Procedure (CrPC) do not apply to ED investigations. No Right to Enforcement Case Information Report (ECIR) - Unlike an FIR, the ECIR was deemed an internal document and not required to be shared with the ac-

cused. The Court upheld the stringent bail provisions under the PMLA, which place the burden on the accused to prove their innocence before the bail is granted.

Several other review petitions challenging the July 2022 judgment have been consolidated with Karti Chidambaram's case.

The next date of hearing is yet to be determined. Advocate Shally Bhasin appeared for the petitioner in this matter.

BJP govt in Odisha failed to control crimes against women : Cong

New Delhi : The Congress on Friday accused the BJP government in Odisha of failing to control crimes against women, and claimed that there was a sharp increase in atrocities since the party took power in the state.

The party also slammed the state's law and order situation, calling it "completely in shambles." Addressing a press conference, Odisha Congress in-charge Ajay Kumar Lallu and Odisha Pradesh Congress Committee (OPCC) Chief Bhakta Charan Das alleged that crimes, especially against tribal and Dalit women, have escalated significantly.

"The crime rate against women in Odisha was 9.3 percent in 2022, but now 31,000 cases have been registered, reflecting an eight percent rise," said Das.

Citing figures, he added, "The Chief Minister himself admitted that 44,000 women, children, and girls are missing. According to



NCRB data, 39 women go missing every day in India, and 13 of them are from Odisha alone."

He further alleged that the state has witnessed over 1,600 cases of rape and murder, with several cases going unregistered.

"In the last eight months of the BJP government, CM Mohan Charan Majhi has acknowledged that 3,420 women and 8,403 children are missing. Additionally, 54 incidents of gang rape have been reported during this pe-

riod," he claimed. The OPCC Chief also accused the ruling BJP of turning a blind eye to the worsening situation. "All this is happening, yet BJP's 'double-engine' government remains silent," Das said, adding that the Congress would not sit idle and would continue to raise its voice against such crimes. He also criticised the Odisha CM for blaming the previous BJD government.

"The CM is comparing his eight months of sins with BJD's 24 years of sins.

Mist sprayers on power poles to curb pollution in NDMC areas

New Delhi: New Delhi Municipal Council launched its pilot initiative for installing mist sprayers on electricity poles on Friday. The project aims to address increasing air pollution.

Fifteen mist sprayers have been installed along a 500-metre section of Lodhi Road. These will remain operational from 8 am to 11 am and from 5.30 pm to 7.30 pm.

"Five nozzles are fixed on each pole, with six spray holes per nozzle. The water consumption rate is calculated as 81 litres per pole for each hour of operation. To support their operation, four tanks with a capacity of 5,000 litres each have been set up. Only treated water from sewage treatment plants will be used," said NDMC vice-chairman Kuljeet Chahal.

Additionally, the council has planned to fix mist sprayers at two more

locations soon. "We are in the process of issuing a tender for installation of mist sprayers on Shanti Path and Africa Avenue Marg. The agencies selected will finalise the number of mist sprayers to be placed at these sites after doing a feasibility study. We will ensure non-stop water supply to mist machines," an NDMC official said.

These mist machines are basically static sprayers installed on the poles at a certain height to catch the smog effectively. The comprehensive setup is designed to maximise pollutant reduction and enhance air quality in the vicinity. "Unlike mechanical road sweepers, these will constantly spray mist in an area," the official added.

The council claimed to have undertaken several other initiatives to control pollution, such as engaging mechanical road sweepers equipped with GPS tracking.

SC defers hearing on IMA's plea against Patanjali's misleading advertisements

New Delhi : The Supreme Court on Friday deferred the hearing of the Indian Medical Association's (IMA) plea concerning misleading claims and advertisements by Patanjali Ayurveda, emphasizing the need for an "exhaustive order" to ensure effective implementation of the Drugs and Magic Remedies (Objectionable Advertisements) Act, 1954 (DMR Act). A Bench comprising Justice Abhay S. Oka and Justice Ujjal Bhuyan observed that despite submissions by various states, compliance with the Act remains inadequate. During the proceedings, Senior Advocate Shadan Farasat, the Amicus Curiae in the case, acknowledged some improvement in compliance but noted that full adherence had yet to be achieved.

"The Chief Secretaries have filed additional affidavits. While they are not fully compliant, there has been substantial progress. Rule 170 is finally being implemented by the states," he submitted.

The Chief Secretaries of Andhra Pradesh, Delhi,

and Jammu & Kashmir appeared via video conferencing, and the Court took note of affidavits submitted by various states, confirming that Rule 170 which regulates misleading advertisements—is now being enforced. Given the need for forced directions, the Court scheduled the next hearing for March 25 at 2 PM and excused the further appearance of the Chief Secretaries of Andhra Pradesh, Delhi, and Jammu & Kashmir.

On February 24, the Supreme Court reviewed the compliance status of several states, including Jharkhand, Karnataka, Kerala, Madhya Pradesh, Pondicherry, and Punjab.

The Court took a strict stance against Jharkhand's claim that no manufacturers in the state had sought permission under Rule 170, directing the state to clarify whether any advertisements violating the rule were being published.

The Bench emphasized that ensuring compliance was the state's responsibility and ordered an affidavit on the matter.

Earlier, on February 10, the Supreme Court had summoned the Chief Secretaries of Andhra Pradesh, Delhi, and Jammu & Kashmir via video conferencing on March 7, citing their failure to implement the Court's directives on regulating misleading advertisements in allopathic and alternative medicine.

On January 15, the Apex Court had issued strong directions to all states and Union Territories, warning of contempt proceedings under the Contempt of Courts Act, 1971, for non-compliance with its orders on misleading advertisements. The Court also closed contempt proceedings against Indian Medical Association (IMA) President Dr. R. V. Asokan for his remarks against the Supreme Court during the pendency of IMA's plea against Patanjali Ayurveda.

The case had drawn attention after Asokan was asked to issue a public apology, which the Court previously deemed unsatisfactory due to its minuscule font size in a published notice.

Additionally, on Au-

gust 13, 2024, the Supreme Court discharged contempt notices issued to Baba Ramdev and Patanjali MD Acharya Balakrishna in the Patanjali misleading advertisements case.

The Court accepted their unconditional apology but issued a strong warning against future violations of its orders.

In response to the Supreme Court's directives, the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting introduced a 'Self-Declaration Certificate' requirement for all advertisements. The new feature, activated on June 4, 2024, mandates advertisers and agencies to submit declarations before publishing or broadcasting ads on TV, radio, print, and digital platforms. The Supreme Court had previously instructed the government to ensure compliance with this measure to curb misleading advertisements in healthcare and wellness sectors. The matter will be taken up again on March 25, 2025, for further directions on the enforcement of regulations governing misleading advertisements.

Editorial

Gold smuggling!

A famous actress from Karnataka, Ranya Rao, has been arrested in a gold smuggling case. She has been accused of illegally bringing gold to India from Dubai in large quantities. Notably, since Ranya Rao is the daughter of a high-ranking police officer, this case has acquired even greater significance. Such a serious allegation against a family member of a law-abiding officer has sparked a debate everywhere. A thorough investigation into this case is underway, and it is possible that some more big names will come to light. The Ranya Rao case is not the first or rare case. The names of many big celebrities, businessmen, and influential people have been linked to gold smuggling before. This case has once again revealed the reality that gold smuggling does not stop despite strict action at the government level.

Allegations of illegal businesses and malpractices are not new in the entire Indian film industry, including Karnataka. A few years ago, the names of some famous artists had also come to light in drug, financial scams, and other illegal cases. Now, due to this gold smuggling case, the entertainment industry has once again come into the spotlight. This is not just a celebrity case, but also raises questions about law and order. New revelations are likely to be made in this case in the next few days.

The extreme attraction of gold to Indians has been there since ancient times. Since gold is considered a means of financial security in India, almost everyone, from the poor to the rich, is eager to buy gold. There is no reason to object to it. However, gold is found in very small quantities in India. There are no large gold mines here. But the demand is huge. Therefore, a large amount of gold has to be imported. Importing gold through official channels and selling it in India becomes expensive due to the import duty on gold. Therefore, it is brought to India and sold by smuggling. Since the profit margin in such illegal transactions is high, many are tempted to do such smuggling. Therefore, gold has been smuggling in India for many decades. In 1968, the Gold Control Act was enacted during the reign of Indira Gandhi. According to this law, the gold import duty was increased drastically and the quantity of imports was also controlled. The intention was to increase import duty and restrict gold imports, which would make gold expensive in India, and thus lead to less gold purchases. However, this had the opposite effect. As it was impossible to bring gold into India legally, smuggling increased dramatically. This had a double impact on the economy. On the one hand, gold became available in sufficient quantities in the black market, but on the other hand, the government's income decreased due to the lack of tax revenue. Over the next 35 to 40 years, a parallel economy of gold smuggling emerged in the country. The purpose of the law or restrictions is not only good and working. It needs to be coupled with strict compliance. This was not taken care of. As a result, the 'Gold Order' or gold control order implemented at that time failed. Therefore, when an attempt was made to deregulate the Indian economy in the 1990s, the import duty on gold was also reduced. Similarly, every citizen was allowed to bring gold from abroad in a certain amount legally. As a result, gold smuggling has reduced to some extent. However, the demand for gold in our country is so great that despite tax cuts and other concessions, it is not being fulfilled legally. Therefore, smuggling is still being done. As a result, a large amount of Indian currency is being exported. If all the gold held by Indians is put together, its quantity is at least 25 thousand tons, i.e. 2 crore 50 lakh kg, according to a survey. If the market price of gold is taken as 90 thousand per 10 grams today, then the total value of this gold is 2.25 crore crore rupees. It is four and a half times more than this year's Union Budget. India currently has a foreign debt of Rs 60 lakh crore. If every Indian decides to give one-third of his gold to the country, the entire foreign debt will be wiped out. Of course, this calculation is made keeping in mind the current market price of gold in India. However, this is unlikely to happen in practice. Let alone giving the existing gold to the country, more gold is being brought to India through any legal or illegal means and is also being sold. In 2024, the value of gold that came to India through legal and illegal means was at least Rs 4 lakh crore. This means that almost the same amount of foreign exchange left India. Many experts are of the opinion that investments made in gold are 'dead' or dead. This means that there is no regular return or benefit from this investment.

Only when the gold purchased is sold again, it is converted into cash at the price at the time of sale. Gold is bought because it will be useful in times of financial difficulties. However, when a real financial problem arises, the option of selling gold in lumps is used only as a last resort, many experts are of the opinion. This means that the mind of the Indian person is not ready to sell the gold once purchased, so much is the obsession with this gold. In fact, gold smuggling is getting a lot of scope due to this extreme obsession.

India also exports gold ornaments. But the quantity is small compared to the import. It is reported that India exports gold ornaments worth about 60 thousand crore rupees annually. The rest is mined in our country. Thus, the gold stock in India is increasing every year through legal or illegal means. Some amount of gold is used for scientific experiments, in the manufacture of electronic goods or for other industrial purposes, but that quantity is also very small in India. Of course, how much to chase after gold is the question.

Female Workforce Participation in India

The Round Table Discussion on Improving Female Workforce Participation in India, led by the Secretary, Ministry of Labour & Employment, and the Director, LBSNAA, were held in the Lal Bahadur Shastri National Academy of Administration (LBSNAA), Mussoorie on 3rd and 4th of March 2025. This event marks a significant step toward realizing the Viksit Bharat 2047 vision of 70% female workforce participation.

With India's Female Labour Force Participation Rate (FLFPR) at 41.7%



(PLFS 2023-24), this platform brought together government policymakers, industry leaders, global

organizations, and skilling institutions to address key challenges and barriers, including employment barriers, workplace safety, pay parity, and digital job opportunities. The two-day deliberations focused on shaping policy reforms and industry-driven solutions that will unlock India's full workforce potential, ensuring safe, inclusive, and equitable workplaces that drive sustained economic growth.

Smt. Sumita Dawra, Secretary, Ministry of Labour and Employment, Government of India, em-



phasized the crucial role of this Round Table in shaping effective workforce policies. "Focused discussions



on identifying systemic barriers and policy gaps are crucial for formulating innovative solutions that align with India's broader economic and social development goals, ensuring sustainable and equitable workforce participation for women," she stated. She highlighted how India has witnessed a positive trend in female workforce participation over the past six years, with higher economic engagement, declining unemployment, and more educated women entering the workforce. The Worker Population Ratio (WPR) for women aged 15 years and above has risen from 22.0% in 2017-18 to 40.3% in 2023-24, while the Labour Force Participation Rate (LFPR) for women has increased from 23.3% to 41.7% in the same period,

she mentioned. Notably, female unemployment has dropped significantly from 5.6% to just 3.2%, reflecting a shift toward greater inclusion and economic empowerment, she added.

The Round Table focused on four key themes: Care Ecosystem, Future of Jobs & Skilling, Safe & Equitable Workplaces, and AI & Digital Interventions. The Ministry of Labour and Employment identified key action areas critical to enhancing women's workforce participation under its mandate. Expanding affordable and quality care services was recognized as a labour market enabler, emphasizing the need to integrate care policies into employment frameworks to support working women. The alignment of skilling initiatives with industry de-

mand was highlighted as essential to ensuring women's access to high-growth sectors, reinforcing the Ministry's role in facilitating demand-driven skilling and employment linkages. Strengthening workplace safety, equitable policies, and gender-sensitive labour laws emerged as a priority, underscoring the need for compliance mechanisms, gender audits, and enforcement of PoSH regulations. Finally, as India advances in AI and digital transformation, Government is focused on leveraging digital employment platforms, en-

mentations aimed at accelerating women's workforce inclusion. Participants outlined policy reforms, industry-driven initiatives, and institutional mechanisms to break barriers and build a safe, skilled, and inclusive workforce. Secretary, Ministry of Labour & Employment, Sumita Dawra, reaffirmed that this is not one-time discussion but the beginning of a sustained effort, with a task force ensuring continued collaboration and implementation. The Joint Secretary of Ministry of Labour and Employment, Sh. Ajoy Sharma ex-

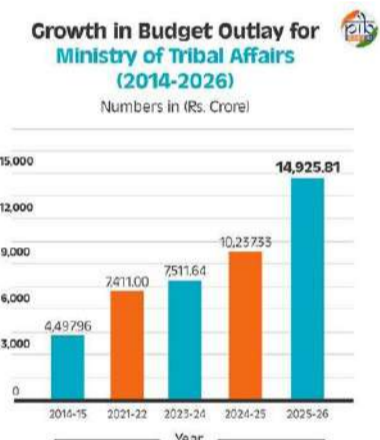


hancing women's digital literacy, and integrating AI-driven skilling programs to ensure women's equitable participation in the future of work.

The Round Table Discussions concluded with clear, actionable recom-

ended his gratitude to all participants and LBSNAA for facilitating this critical dialogue, reiterating the ministry's commitment to translating these deliberations into measurable progress for women's workforce inclusion.

TRIFED's Role in Tribal Development From Local Artisans to Global Markets



India is home to over 10.45 crore Scheduled Tribe (ST) individuals—comprising 8.6% of the total population—representing a vast and diverse tribal heritage. The Government of India has demonstrated a strong commitment to the socio-economic development of Scheduled Tribes by taking several initiatives based on a multi-pronged approach.

The overall budget for the development of Scheduled Tribes has risen from ₹10,237.33 crore in 2024-25 to ₹14,925.81 crore in 2025-26, marking an impressive 45.79% increase. A long-term perspective reveals significant progress: from ₹4,497.96 crore in 2014-15 to ₹7,411 crore in 2021-22, and now a 231.83% increase since 2014-15, demonstrating the government's sustained focus on tribal welfare.

In line with this commitment, the Tribal Cooperative Marketing Development Federation of India Ltd (TRIFED), under the Ministry of Tribal Affairs, has been actively working to enhance the marketing and economic conditions of tribal communities. TRIFED's mission is to promote the socio-economic development of tribal communities through the marketing development of tribal products.

Launched on 14th April 2018, the Van Dhan Yojana is a flagship initiative under the 'Mechanism for Marketing of Minor Forest

Produce (MFP) through Minimum Support Price (MSP) & Development of Value Chain for MFP. Implemented by TRIFED as the nodal agency, the scheme aims to generate livelihood opportunities for tribal gatherers by transforming them into entrepreneurs. Van Dhan Vikas Kendras (VDVKs) have been established in tribal-dominated districts, where tribal Self-Help Groups (SHGs) engage in the collection, value addition, and marketing of MFPs. Each VDVK cluster comprises 15 tribal SHGs with about 300 beneficiaries. The initiative, 100% funded by the Central Government, provides ₹15 lakhs per cluster to support tribal entrepreneurship, ensuring a sustainable source of income for forest-dwelling communities.

Since its inception, the Van Dhan Yojana has significantly improved the livelihoods of tribal communities across India. The initiative has benefited over 11.83 lakh tribal individuals, enhancing their income and fostering sustainable development. With substantial funding of ₹587 crores, the scheme has provided economic opportunities and empowered forest-dependent communities to become self-reliant.

The implementation of the Van Dhan Yojana follows a structured approach to empower tribal communities. The process involves the formation of 20-member Self-Help Groups (SHGs), training, provision of value addition equipment, establishment of storage and logistics systems, and branding and marketing support. These steps ensure that the tribal gatherers move up the value chain from mere raw material suppliers to producers of high-value finished goods, significantly enhancing their incomes and economic stability.

TRIFED aims at accelerating economic

development of tribal people, the poorest among the poor, through the marketing of their products on sustainable basis and providing wider exposure to their art and craft in domestic as well as international markets. More than 200 tribal communities, residing in remote regions, strive to preserve their traditional arts and crafts. To support their economic welfare, TRIFED launched TRIBES INDIA in 1999, opening its first retail outlet in New Delhi.

Today, TRIBES INDIA has expanded to 117 retail outlets across India. TRIFED operates 15 Regional Offices to source handicrafts, handlooms, and natural food products from tribal artisans, Self-Help Groups (SHGs), and affiliated organisations. These products are sold through 35 own showrooms and 8 consignment showrooms, as well as exhibitions. Expanding its reach, TRIFED now markets tribal products globally via www.tribesindia.com, ensuring fair



pricing and wider exposure for artisans.

To further its mission, TRIFED has entered into several strategic partnerships aimed at facilitating tribal entrepreneurship and enhancing market access for tribal prod-

ucts. Aadi Mahotsav, the flagship initiative of TRIFED, is an annual event that celebrates India's rich tribal heritage, culture, arts, crafts, cuisine, and commerce. The 2025 edition, held from 16th to 24th February at Major Dhyan Chand National Stadium in New Delhi, brought together over 600 tribal artisans from 30+ States and Union Territories, 500 performing artists showcasing various tribal dance forms, and 25 tribal food stalls presenting indigenous cuisines from different regions. The event also featured live painting sessions by tribal artisans, collaborations with 20 Public Sector Undertakings (PSUs) and 35 training institutes, and the signing of 25+ MoUs with design institutes and corporate houses. The theme of the festival, "A Celebration of the Spirit of Entrepreneurship, Tribal Craft, Culture, Cuisine and Commerce," represents the basic ethos of tribal life.

TRIFED's initiatives, including Van Dhan Yojana, TRIBES INDIA, and Aadi Mahotsav, are driving tribal empowerment by fostering entrepreneurship, enhancing market access, and preserving traditional crafts. With strategic partnerships, retail expansion,

Khelo India Para Games 2025

Several international para athletes will be seen in action at the upcoming Khelo India Para Games scheduled to be held in New Delhi from March 20-27, said Union Minister of Youth Affairs & Sports, Dr Mansukh Mandaviya.

This will be the second edition of the Khelo India Para Games. The first edition was also held in Delhi in December 2023. Around 1230 para athletes will compete in six disciplines in the upcoming KIPG 2025, many of them medalists from 2024 Paris Paralympics and the 2022 Asian Para Games in Hangzhou, China.

Competitions in KIPG 2025 will be held in para archery, para athletics, para badminton, para powerlifting, para shooting and para table tennis. In the first edition, football (cerebral palsy) was also played.

The Jawaharlal Nehru Stadium will host the para athletics, para archery, para powerlifting disciplines from 21st to 26th March, while IG Stadium complex will stage the para badminton and para table tennis events from 20th to



27th March. Dr. Karni Singh Shooting Range will host the para shooting events from 21st to 25th March.

Prominent among them will be gold medal winners Harvinder Singh (archery), Dharambir (club

throw) and Praveen Kumar (high jump). India finished with a record 29 medals at Paris 2024. Seven of those medals were golds. Twenty-five Khelo India athletes were part of the 84-member Indian contingent at Paris Paralympics. Five of

them returned with medals from Paris.

Para sport is a priority area for the government of India. No less than 52 para athletes are in the Target Olympic Podium Scheme core group for the 2028 LA Olympics

cycle. "The phenomenal rise of our para athletes is a huge inspiration to sportspersons at large. This 'can do' attitude is really motivating and I am sure we will see some great performances at the upcoming Khelo India Para Games," Dr Mandaviya. In 2025, the Khelo India Para Games will be the second national event conducted by the Sports Authority of India after the Khelo India Winter Games, the first part of which was held in Ladakh in January and the concluding portion scheduled in Gulmarg, Jammu & Kashmir from March 9-12. Khelo India Para Games is part of the Khelo India mission to provide a platform for talented athletes to showcase their sporting and competitive skills. The first edition of Khelo India Para Games, held in December 2023, was organized to enable para athletes to showcase their talent at the national level. The Games were played in seven sports disciplines across three venues in New Delhi. The second edition of KIPG, also to be held in the capital in March 2025, will be held in six sports.



HARYANA

Briefs :

294 cartons of illicit liquor seized, 2 held in Gurugram

Gurugram : More than 290 cartons of illicit liquor, which were being sneaked out of the city in a mini-truck, were seized by the Gurugram police. The police have arrested two persons, including the truck driver, for trying to smuggle liquor from Jhajjar to Bihar via Gurugram by hiding it between boxes of floor cleaner. The police arrested the truck driver, identified as Om Prakash, a resident of Libaspur in Delhi; and his associate, Ramniwas, a resident of Rajiv Nagar in Agra (Uttar Pradesh). An FIR was registered against the duo. According to the police, a team of the Manesar crime unit was informed that the vehicle, loaded with illicit liquor, would reach Gurugram via KMP Expressway on Wednesday night. The police team, led by Sub-Inspector Lalit Kumar, put up a barricade near the Pachgaon toll plaza on KMP and when the vehicle reached near the barricade, the duo tried to escape, but was caught by the team. When the police searched the vehicle, they found illicit liquor in it. A total of 294 cartons of English liquor, hidden under the boxes of floor cleaner, were seized. "The liquor was to be taken from Jhajjar to Bihar via KMP Expressway. We are questioning the accused to get the information about other co-accused," said a police spokesperson.

Chemists halt sale of psychotropic drugs, Panchkula shops to remain shut from today

Chandigarh : Chemists across Haryana have decided to stop the sale and distribution of psychotropic and prescription drugs in protest against the seizures conducted by the Narcotics Control Bureau (NCB) on some Panchkula-based wholesalers. All existing stocks of these drugs will be returned to distributors over the next week, while the association's executive council will meet on March 16 in Kurukshetra to decide future course of action. In Panchkula, all chemist shops will remain shut indefinitely from tomorrow as part of the protest against the raids, which have been ongoing for the past three days. Ashok Singla, general secretary of the state chemists' association and zonal president, said, "Chemists are regulated under the Drugs and Cosmetics Rules, 1945, under the State Drugs Controller, FDA Haryana. If these unwarranted raids and harassment continue, we will be unable to carry out our duties or do business in the state. The Panchkula unit has submitted a memorandum to the government and we will finalise our next steps in the March 16 meeting. Until then, chemists across Haryana have been advised to halt the sale of psychotropic drugs and return their stock to distributors." State chemists' association president Manjeet Sharma alleged that licensed chemists were being unfairly targeted while individuals who don't have licence and running shops continued to operate freely. "There are individuals who don't have licence but are running shops in every city.

Illegal mining: 8 vehicles seized in Yamunanagar district



Yamunanagar : Local administration teams seized eight vehicles in the district last night and challaned the owners of 56 vehicles for their alleged involvement in illegal mining, transportation of mining mineral, and overloading. The teams also imposed a fine of Rs 34,51,600 on the owners of the vehicles.

According to information, a team led by Jagadhri SDM Sonu Ram seized a vehicle and issued challans

to 13 vehicles, imposing a fine of Rs 5.6 lakh on the owners.

Similarly, one vehicle was seized by a team led by Vyaspur SDM Jaspal Singh Gill, who challaned 13 vehicles and imposed a fine of Rs 3,28,100.

Four vehicles were seized by a team led by the Chhachhrauli SDM for the illegal transportation of mineral.

The Regional Transport Authority also challaned 13

vehicles and imposed a fine of Rs 17.80 lakh. According to information, two vehicles were seized by the teams of Radaur SDM Narender Kumar, who also challaned seven vehicles and imposed Rs 8,55,500 fine. Deputy Commissioner Parth Gupta said the government was determined to stop illegal mining in the state. He said e-transit passes were also being checked of vehicles passing through Yamunanagar.

Sanitation officials told to re-inspect public toilets in Yamunanagar & Jagadhri

Yamunanagar : Ayush Sinha, Municipal Commissioner of Municipal Corporation, Yamunanagar-Jagadhri (MCYJ) has directed all sanitation officials to re-inspect public toilets in the twin cities of Yamunanagar and Jagadhri to get open defecation free plus-plus (ODF double plus) certificate.

He said every toilet should be clean and in working condition besides water supply should be provided in all of them. He further said a list of supervisors, workers and toilet facilities should be displayed outside all toilets.

He added that women toilets should have a special sanitary pad machine and a yellow coloured dustbin for disposal of sanitary pads. Sinha gave these instructions at a meeting held with the officials of the Public Health Department, engineering branch and sanitation branch of the MCYJ to get best rank in Swachh Survey to be conducted in near future. At the meeting, sewerage /sewerage treatment plants (STPs), GFC (garbage free city), ODF plus-plus and other topics related to Swachh survey were discussed in detail. The Municipal Commissioner gave guidelines to the officials to get maximum marks on every subject. He gave strict instructions to the officials to prepare a file of the works and activities to be done on every



subject related to the Swachh survey. He directed the officials that they should complete the incomplete works soon and all data should be updated on the portal of the Swachh survey. "Negligence in any work will not be tolerated, therefore, all officials should take the Swachh survey work seriously," said Sinha. He instructed the officials to cover the sewerage, to repair the blocked sewerage lines and check all STPs in the urban area. He said there should be proper management of water coming out of STPs, daily log books should be prepared and there should be a complete

record of water given to farmers from the STPs. The Municipal Commissioner also discussed the subjects of ODF plus-plus and garbage free city (GFC) with the officials of the engineering branch and sanitation branch. He said in ODF plus-plus had 1,200 marks and GFC had 1,300 marks in the Swachh survey. The meeting was attended by Additional Municipal Commissioner Dr Vijay Pal Yadav, Executive Engineer Vikas Dhiman, Executive Engineer Saurabh, Chief Sanitary Inspector (CSI) Harjeet Singh, CSI Sunil Dutt, Sanitary Inspector Govind Sharma and other officials.

Swami Dayanand remembered at Kurukshetra varsity seminar

Kurukshetra : A one-day international seminar on the topic "Bhartiya Samaj, Sanskriti Evam Sahitya par Rishi Dayanand Ke Chintan Ka Prabhav" was recently organised at Dayanand Mahila Mahavidyalaya, Kurukshetra. The seminar was held under the aegis of Haryana Sahitya and Sanskriti Akadami, Panchkula.

Dr Roopkishor Shastri, the keynote speaker of the seminar, said Swami Dayanand Saraswati was a source of inspiration for society. He was a prominent advocate for equality and education, Dr Shastri added. Dharmdev Vidyarthi, Director, Haryana Sahitya and Sanskriti Ak-



adami, Panchkula, said Swami Dayanand's contributions to the fields of education, culture and social reforms were irreplaceable. Dr Kuldeep Chandra Agnihotri expressed his views on the Arya Samaj. He said Swami Dayanand's influence

widely spread in the region of 'Sapt Sindhu' (modern Punjab). He said everyone should make efforts to glorify Indian literary culture. The chief guest encouraged the students to contribute to spreading the teachings of Swami Dayanand at a

global level. Prof Arvind Kumar, former Chairperson, Department of Sanskrit, KU, expressed his views on the research papers presented by various delegates.

He said Swami Dayanand Saraswati's teachings and philosophy were effectively expressed by delegates.

Principal Dr Upasana Ahuja said the institution was working based on the teachings and educational values of Swami Dayanand Saraswati.

A total of 133 delegates presented their research papers during the seminar, and 314 persons participated in the seminar through the online and offline modes.

Vice-Prez lays stone of museum at institute

Sirsa : Vice-President Jagdeep Dhankhar on Wednesday laid the foundation stone of a museum dedicated to former Chief Minister Om Prakash Chautala at JCD Vidyapeeth, an educational institute run by the Chautala family.

Before the ceremony, the Vice-President, along with his wife Dr Sudesh Dhankhar and INLD leader Abhay Chautala, planted trees in the memory of their mothers.

The initiative aimed to promote environmental awareness and honour the memories of their loved ones. The event also included a convocation ceremony, where degrees were conferred on 430 students, and 42 students were awarded gold medals for their performance.

Dr Sudesh Dhankhar was the guest of honour, and Abhay Chautala presided over the ceremony. Other guests included



Cabinet Minister Ranbir Singh Gangwa, former minister Sampat Singh, Kanta Chautala and MLA Arjun Singh Chautala. According to JCD director-general Jai Parkash, the new museum will showcase Chaudhary Om Prakash Chautala's contributions to the fields of education and social service. It would display personal items such as books, shoes, glasses, documents and furniture used by him, offering visitors a glimpse into his life, Prakash added. During the convocation, the Vice-President encouraged the

graduates, highlighting that education played a vital role in both personal growth and societal development. He also invited students to visit the new Parliament building and join him for lunch, a gesture that was met with enthusiasm. JCD chairman Arjun Singh Chautala urged the graduates to use their knowledge for the benefit of society. Sampat Singh acknowledged the university's role in fulfilling the vision of Chaudhary Devi Lal, with alumni now holding various positions across India, and the world.

6 expensive cancer treatment injections stolen from Gurugram hospital

Gurugram : Six expensive cancer treatment injections, worth more than Rs 7 lakh, were allegedly stolen from the in-patient department (IPD) of Narayana Super Speciality Hospital, located in the DLF Phase 3 area. An FIR was registered in this regard.

According to the complaint filed by the hospital's non-medical head Jatin Negi, during an audit of IPD pharmacy drugs in February, it was revealed that six different types of injections were missing. The missing injections with their maximum retail price were

Entherto of Rs 1,67,069, Avastin of Rs 1,23,506, Erbitux of Rs 21,250, Biomab of Rs 65,643, Versavo of Rs 55,005, and Innonza of Rs 3,30,000.

The total value of six missing injections is Rs 7,62,473. "Any hospital staff could be behind the theft, as patients, their attendants or outsiders might not be aware of the high cost of these injections. We have checked CCTV footage but found no evidence of the theft so far," Negi said in his complaint. An FIR was registered.

Three-day cyber course for narcotics experts begins at Madhuban

Karnal : With an aim to modernise the Haryana State Narcotics Control Bureau (HSNCB), a three-day cyber course commenced at its headquarters in the Haryana Police Academy Madhuban on Thursday. The programme aims at equipping the bureau with modern cyber capabilities, particularly to counter drug traffickers using online platforms and digital networks. The course was started

on the directions of the HSNCB chief and Director-General OP Singh and Superintendent of Police Mohit Handa. Handa chaired the inaugural programme, which was attended by cyber cell headquarters nodal officer, DSP (Rohtak) and course director Satendra Kumar and Ambala DSP Jagbir Singh. The course is being led by cyber expert Darshan Pandey, technical adviser, special task force (STF),

Haryana, who has been providing cybercrime-related expertise to the Haryana and Punjab Police for several years. Around 25 officials are attending the training, which will cover various aspects of cybercrime and technological advancements.

Giving details, Handa said during the course, discussions would focus on understanding online drug trade operations and the tac-

tics used by traffickers. "With the increasing use of technology in crimes by criminals, the police must also adapt and strengthen the cyber skills to effectively combat emerging threats," said the SP.

He said the state government and the Haryana police remained committed to making the state drug free. Such training and capacity building programmes played a crucial role.

Countdown begins for mayoral poll in Panipat

Panipat : The countdown for the voting to elect the new Mayor of the city has begun, but the low voter turnout in the recent civic polls has raised tension among the political parties, forcing them to make plans to request voters to come out of their houses on March 9 — the polling day.

The campaigning for the Panipat Municipal Corporation (MC) elections would end on Friday evening. While the BJP has pushed all bigwigs in the electoral campaign in support of its candidates, no senior Congress leader has come to Panipat so far to campaign in support of even its mayoral candidate.

A total of four candidates — BJP's Komal Saini, Congress' Savita Garg, AAP's Preetpal Khara and independent candidate Kewal Singh — are contesting the elections for the mayoral post.

The BJP has fielded 26 candidates in all 26 wards here, but the Congress has allotted party symbols to only 20 candidates and has supported six independent candidates here. Meanwhile, the low voter turnout in the recent civic



body elections, held on March 2, has alarmed leaders of the ruling party as well as the Opposition in Panipat also. Notably, the Sonapat mayoral bypoll held on March 2 recorded the lowest voter turnout of 28.8 per cent, while in the adjoining Kamal MC polls, it recorded a total of 48.8 pc turnout. In Faridabad, the voter turnout was 40.09 per cent and in Gurugram, it was 41.9 per cent. But the political parties didn't want to take any chance in the Panipat MC polls and these parties, especially the ruling BJP, has begun plans to urge the voters to come out of their houses on the polling day here to exercise their voting right. Union Minister and former Chief Minister Manohar Lal

Khattar also held a meeting with the party leaders and party workers and asked them to work hard to reach every voter.

On Thursday, Chief Minister Nayab Singh Saini had addressed a "Panna pramukh" sammelan in Panipat and told them to bring maximum voters to the polling booths on March 9.

Apart from it, Education Minister Mahipal Dhanda, Development and Panchayat Minister Krishan Lal Panwar, Minister Dr Arvind Sharma, former MP Sanjay Bhatia, MLA Panipat Urban Pramod Vij are already campaigning in support of the BJP mayoral candidate Komal Saini and councillors' candidates. Dushyant Bhatt, BJP

district president said the BJP was contesting on all 27 seats — Mayor and 26 councillors — and the Congress was standing nowhere in the MC elections in the city.

"Though we are going to win all seats, we don't want to take any chances, that's why all party workers and leaders are working hard for the party to win," Bhatt added.

Chief Minister Nayab Singh Saini on Thursday motivated the "panna pramukhs" and gave a mantra to improve the voting percentage. The duties of all "panna pramukhs" have been assigned to improve the voting percentage on March 9, he said.

Senior Congress leader Varinder Kumar Shah 'Bulle Shah' said the Congress was fully prepared and contesting the elections with full strength.

The MC polls were for harmony and brotherhood and the Congress was contesting for the first time on symbol, he said. Congress' mayoral candidate Savita Garg had visited all wards in the Panipat Rural and Panipat City assembly area, he said.

Govt encouraging women to join police force: Haryana CM

Gurugram : Haryana Chief Minister Nayab Singh Saini called upon trainee officials of the (CRPF) to take a pledge to carry out their duties impartially and fearlessly. He also exhorted them to always be ready to protect the law and the Constitution, safeguard the rights of people with sensitivity and stand firm in their commitment to truth, honesty and dedication, regardless of the circumstances. CM Saini said this while speaking as the chief guest at the passing-out parade ceremony of 55th batch of directly appointed Gazetted Officers of the CRPF in Gurugram on Thursday. A total of 39 trainee officials, including two women officials, passed from the CRPF academy today after completing a rigorous training programme. Commending the CRPF for its invaluable contribution to the country's internal security, the CM described the force as the backbone of country's security. He also commended the CRPF for adopting modern technologies and training techniques, which are helping to develop professional and capable officials prepared to face any challenges in the field. CM Saini further encouraged the



newly passing out officers to engage in constant learning, stressing that ongoing education and re-learning were essential for success.

"PM Modi's historic decision to allow women in the Armed Forces, recognising the power of half the nation's population. The Haryana Government has also encouraged women to serve in the police force, with women currently making up 10 per cent of the state police. The state government aims to increase this figure to 15 per cent in the near future," said CM Saini. Highlighting the state government's commitment to strengthening secu-

arity forces, he said special attention had been given to technical upgrades, resource enhancement and the expansion of training facilities to better equip the police force for any challenges they might face. In addition, the state has established a dedicated Sainik and Ardh-Sainik Welfare Department to support ex-servicemen and paramilitary forces. In cases of martyrdom, families of Haryana soldiers serving in the armed forces and paramilitary forces receive a financial assistance of Rs 1 crore, along with a government job for one family member.



IAF's Jaguar fighter jet crashes in Haryana's Panchkula; pilot ejects safely

Chandigarh : A Jaguar fighter aircraft of the Indian Air Force (IAF) crashed due to a technical defect during a routine training sortie on Friday. The pilot, a Flight Lieutenant, ejected safely and was later evacuated by the IAF. The remains of the ill-fated aircraft fell in a hilly forest area near Raipur Rani in Panchkula district, close to the Haryana-Himachal Pradesh border. The aircraft had taken off from the Ambala airbase. Local villagers gathered around the spot and assisted the pilot in freeing himself from his parachute harness. "A Jaguar aircraft of the IAF crashed at Ambala during a routine training sortie today, after encountering a system malfunction. The pilot maneuvered the aircraft away from any habitation on ground before ejecting safely. An inquiry has been ordered by the IAF to ascertain the cause of the accident," an official statement by the IAF said. The Ambala airbase in

Haryana houses squadrons of Jaguar and the newly inducted Rafale aircraft, besides other ancillary units. It is the IAF's oldest airbase. There have been incidents involving the Jaguar in the past, with IAF sources saying that the fleet has suffered over 50 major and minor incidents in its 45-year service with the IAF, some of which have been fatal. At present, the IAF operates around 120 twin-engine Jaguars, equipped with six squadrons—Nos 5, 6, 14, 16, 27 and 224, based at Ambala, Jamnagar and Gorakhpur, forming a crucial element of its strike capability and tactical reconnaissance. Some Jaguars have also been modified for the maritime role with anti-ship missiles. In 1979, 40 aircraft were imported from the UK, followed by licence manufacture of 150 aircraft by state-run Hindustan Aeronautics Limited, with aircraft rolling off the assembly lines as late as 2007. India is the

sole remaining Jaguar operator, with other users—France, UK, Oman, Nigeria and Ecuador—having retired them. The Jaguars were initially armed with the Matra R-550 Magic short-range air-to-air missile, employed in an unconventional position on over-the-wing pylons as a means of self-defence during strike missions. A few years ago, the IAF began re-equipping the Jaguar with the DARIN-III advanced navigation and attack avionics suite, and earlier this year, initiated another project to re-equip the fleet with new generation close combat air-to-air missiles, transport platforms as well as cruise missiles and UAVs. Recently, India procured 31 decommissioned Jaguar airframes from France and two each from the UK and Oman, along with several thousand aero-spares, to replace some aircraft lost due to attrition and ensure serviceability of the existing fleet.

Panipat MC poll: Turn out in large numbers, CM urges voters

Panipat : Chief Minister Nayab Singh Saini on Thursday said voting was the base of democracy. If people of Panipat wanted to strengthen the roots of democracy, they should come out and vote on March 9.

Saini was addressing the 'Panna Pramukh' sammelan organised by the BJP during the ongoing Panipat Municipal Corporation (MC) elections, to be held on March 9.

Panchayat and Development Minister Krishan Lal Panwar, Education Minister Mahipal Dhandha, MLAs Pramod Vij and Manmohan Bhadana, MC election incharge and former minister Dr Banwari Lal, former MP Sanjay Bhatia and Gajender Saluja also addressed the gathering. BJP district president Dushyant Bhatt presided over the sammelan.



Saini urged the 'panna pramukhs' to go door-to-door to motivate people to

vote on March 9. He said the 'panna pramukhs' were an important link, and the

BJP was going to form a 'triple-engine' government in the civic poll. He said as

soon as he became CM, he gave jobs to 25,000 youths, and after March 12, all the promises would be fulfilled.

Saini said to develop any country or state, health facilities would have to be strengthened, and the problem of malnutrition would have to be eradicated. Now, dialysis facilities were being provided at government hospitals, due to which the lives of patients were being saved, and the patients were also saving Rs 25,000 to Rs 30,000. Taking a dig at the Congress, the CM said the Congress would not be able to win any seat in the MC poll. The opposition leaders were far removed from the ground reality and had no knowledge of the election environment, he claimed.

Panipat had got a chance to create a new record in terms of maximum voting once again, he said.

'Insurance claim to Haryana cotton farmers was Rs 281 crore, but govt, firm reduced it to Rs 80 crore'

Hisar : An alleged "fraud" by way of denying the insurance claims of cotton farmers in Bhiwani and Charkhi Dadri districts during the Kharif 2023 season had been brought to the attention of the government by some farmer activists.

The activists, who submitted a complaint to the state government, alleged that the farmers had been assessed a total insurance claim of Rs 281.5 crore in Bhiwani district on the basis of the Crop Cutting Experiment (CCE).

However, the insurance firm later approached higher authorities to challenge the insurance amount, which referred the matter to the State Technical Advisory Committee (STAC). The STAC took a decision to approve technical yield assessment for cotton crop insurance claims.

Based on this technical assessment, the insurance claim was reduced to just Rs 80 crore. More shockingly, the activists alleged that this STAC was a defunct body when it called a meeting and took the decision. Dr Ram Kanwar, a farmer activist, alleged that the matter of insurance claims was referred to the STAC, an advisory body whose term had expired on August 1, 2024.

However, the Director of Agriculture, Rajnarayan Kaushik, and the Joint Director (Statistics), Rajiv Misra, alleg-

edly convened a meeting of this defunct committee on August 20, 2024, and took a decision to approve technical yield assessment for cotton crop insurance claims. Thus, he alleged, the body was not authorised to take any decision after its term had expired on August 1, 2024. Kanwar said that the matter regarding the settlement of cotton crop insurance claims under the Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana (PMFBY) for Kharif 2023 for two districts - Bhiwani and Charkhi Dadri districts has taken serious connotations with the denial of about Rs 200 crore of claims of the farmers in the wake of a decision taken by a redundant body.

They have submitted the complaint to the chief minister for action against the officials responsible for the alleged fraud with the farmers and to ensure the insurance claims of the farmers.

Dayanand Punia, a farmer activist in Siwani tehsil of Bhiwani district, informed that as per the CCE, 34 villages in Siwani block were set to get insurance claims for cotton loss, but the technical assessment showed that about 20 villages had no insurance claim.

Punia said that they would not tolerate this injustice regarding the crop insurance of their cotton fields for the year 2023.

"Despite having insured their crops,

the Agriculture Department conducted village-wise crop cutting surveys and determined the per-acre compensation for each village. However, the insurance company, in collusion with the government, rejected the department's report," he alleged.

Punia further alleged that the insurance firm claimed that satellite reports did not show any significant crop damage and termed it a scam.

"We will stage a demonstration at the Siwani office in SDM Office on March 10," he said.

Kanwar said that as per government guidelines, the claims should be settled based on Crop Cutting Experiments (CCEs) conducted by state officials. However, the company allegedly refused to honor these claims and instead pushed for an alternative method—technical yield assessment—which is only permitted for wheat and paddy, not for cotton. The complaint further states that the District Level Monitoring Committee (DLMC) of Bhiwani, headed by the Deputy Commissioner, had also rejected the objections raised by the insurance company and directed it to release payments within seven days. "Instead of complying with the DMLC, the insurance firm challenged the decision before the Director of Agriculture and Farmers' Welfare," he stated.

Haryana committed to water security, farmers' welfare, says governor as Budget Session gets under way

Chandigarh : The Budget Session of the Haryana Vidhan Sabha began here on Friday. Governor Bandaru Dattatraya, addressing the Vidhan Sabha to mark the commencement of the Budget Session, reiterated the state's commitment to securing its legitimate share of water from the Ravi-Beas rivers and completing the Sutlej-Yamuna Link Canal. He said that continuous efforts are being made in this direction. "Moreover, the state government is actively working on the construction of the Renuka, Kishau and Lakshwar Vyasi dams on the upper reaches of the Yamuna river to ensure a consistent water supply to the state from the Yamuna and 10 its tributaries, Giri and Tons. Once completed, these dams will provide Haryana with 47.81 per cent of the total stored water," he pointed out. The Governor further maintained that a Memorandum of Understanding had also been signed with the Gov-



ernment of Himachal Pradesh for the construction of the Adi Badri Dam. This dam, being built by the Himachal Pradesh government, is expected to be completed by June 2027.

Talking of farmers' welfare schemes, the Governor said Haryana is the only state in the country where all 24 crops are procured at the Minimum Support Price (MSP). "The government has also abolished the practice of 'Abiyana', which had been in place since the British era. To directly benefit farmers, Rs 1,25,000 crore has been transferred to the bank accounts of 12 lakh farmers for the purchase of crops at

MSP over the last nine seasons through the e-kharid portal," he added. Dattatraya went on to underline that the Maha Kumbh held in Prayagraj recently was a powerful demonstration of the nation's strength and unity. "In a vast nation like ours, which encapsulates unity in diversity, our Constitution gives equal rights to every citizen. The entire world witnessed the strength of our great cultural unity during the Maha Kumbh," he noted. "Under the Mukhyamantri Teerth Yatra Yojana launched in December 2023, elderly individuals from low-income group families have been given the opportunity to

visit Ayodhya and bathe in the Sangam during the recently held Maha Kumbh in Prayagraj. Through the Happy Yojana, 11,64,692 people from the state have travelled a total of 42.14 crore kilometres, free of cost since December 2023," Dattatraya informed. Talking about the Deendayal Upadhyaya Antyodaya Parivar Suraksha Yojana, he pointed out that financial assistance amounting to Rs 840.90 crore had been provided to 22,585 poor families following the death or disability of a family member in an accident. The Governor also claimed that the law and order situation in the state remained peaceful and under control, with an atmosphere of communal harmony and peace prevailing. "In 2024, a total of 1,11,397 criminal cases were registered in the state, which is 16,216 less than last year. This marks a 12.7 per cent reduction in criminal cases compared to the previous year," Dattatraya added.

Gurugram needs perfect infra for state's growth: CM Saini

Gurugram : Minister Nayab Singh Saini while presiding over a review meeting on various development projects in the city.

Saini was in Gurugram today for the CRPF's 55th Passing Out Parade and later addressed officials on the sidelines, directing them to accelerate the implementation of major state government projects and ensure their timely completion. After reviewing a detailed report on sewerage, drainage, sanitation, water supply, construction and demolition (C&D) waste, and road systems, Saini emphasised that infrastructure development is crucial for unlocking new growth opportunities in the district. He urged all departments to work in coordination and adhere to stipulated timelines.

"Since the government is accountable to the public, officials must regularly monitor the progress of all ongoing development projects. Any delays caused by agencies concerned should result in penalties

and even FIRs," Saini stated.

Addressing the shortage of sanitation workers, he announced that more work-

ers would be deployed through HKNRL to improve cleanliness in the corporation area. Discussions were also held on enhancing the door-to-door garbage collection system. The Chief Minister instructed the Gurugram Metropolitan Development Authority (GMDA) to expedite road renovations for smoother traffic flow. "There is still ample time before the monsoon season. All road repairs



must be completed by the end of June," he said. According to officials, GMDA manages 284.5 km of roads in the city, of which 135 km has already been renovated. With GRAP restrictions lifted, work on an additional 100 km commenced on February 15 and is on track for completion within the stipulated timeframe.

Saini also directed officials to fast-track the removal of C&D waste, improve the drainage system and advance the Metro expansion project, stressing transparency and

efficiency in their execution.

Speaking at the meeting, Industry and Commerce Minister Rao Narbir Singh emphasised that desilting of drains along roads should be completed before any road renovation work begins. "PM Modi created history by encouraging women in the armed forces. The Haryana Government has followed suit by increasing women representation in the state police. Women currently make up 10% of the state police force, and we aim to raise this to 15% in the near future," the Chief Minister said. Speaking at the 55th Passing Out Parade of directly appointed gazetted officers of the CRPF in Gurugram today, Saini urged the trainee officers to protect the law and Constitution, safeguard people's rights with sensitivity and remain committed to truth, honesty and dedication, regardless of circumstances. A total of 39 trainee officers, including two women officers, graduated from the CRPF academy today.

Four youths killed in mishap

Chandigarh : A tragic road accident claimed the lives of four young men when their car crashed into a tree near Harikot village on the Hisar-Mangali road late last night. The victims were on their way to attend a wedding ceremony in Harikot village.

The deceased have been identified as Nikhil (17), Ankush (19), Sahil (19), and Hitesh. Ankush and Sahil were students at the Government Polytechnic in Hisar, while Nikhil was studying at Government College. Nikhil was set to board a flight to Belarus today for a foreign trip. According to police reports, the accident occurred when the driver lost control while negotiating a sharp



turn, causing the car to collide with a tree along the roadside. Azad Nagar police station incharge Sadhu Ram said, "As soon as we received information about the accident, our team rushed to the scene and took the victims to the civil hospital. Unfortunately, they

could not be saved." After conducting a post-mortem examination, the bodies were handed over to their grieving families today. The accident has shocked the local community, with many expressing sorrow over the loss of four promising young lives.

Cases under cow protection Act to be fast-tracked

Chandigarh : Disposal of cases registered under the cow protection Act are set to be fast-tracked, with the state government setting up four special courts with jurisdiction across Haryana.

"The Governor, with the concurrence of Punjab and Haryana High Court, hereby directs the Courts of senior-most Additional District and Sessions Judge and Civil Judge, holding regular courts, in the districts of Nuh, Palwal, Ambala and Hisar as special courts to try offences under the Haryana Gauvansh, Sanrakshan and Gausamvardhan Act, 2015, on fast track," a notification



issued by Sumita Misra, Additional Chief Secretary, Administration of Justice, said.

While the Nuh court will have jurisdiction over Nuh, Rewari, Namaul, Charkhi Dadri and Bhiwani, the Palwal court will have jurisdic-

tion over Palwal, Faridabad, Gurugram, Jhajjar, Rohtak and Sonapat districts. Similarly, Ambala, Panchkula, Panipat, Yamunanagar, Kurukshetra and Karnal district will come under the Ambala court. The

Hisar court will have jurisdiction over Hisar, Jind, Fatehabad, Sirsa and Kaithal districts. After the formation of the government under Manohar Lal Khattar, the BJP enacted the Act in 2015, prohibiting the slaughter of cows in the state. The law also aimed to reduce the consumption of beef. Under the Act, no one can slaughter, offer for slaughter, or cause to be slaughtered a cow. Killing a cow in self-defence or an accident is not considered slaughter. The Special Cow Protection Task Force enforces the Act in Haryana and collects information about cattle smuggling.

Home / Haryana / Vidhan Sabha session begins today; Budget on March 17

Chandigarh : The Opposition is gearing up to corner the Nayab Singh Saini government on paper leaks, growing unemployment, collapsing law and order and rampant mining during the budget session of the Haryana Vidhan Sabha, which begins tomorrow. The Budget will be presented on March 17.

The session will begin with the Governor's Address, and is likely to continue till March 28. A decision to this effect was taken at a meeting of the (BAC) here today. The BAC recommendations will be presented in the House tomorrow for approval. A general discussion on the Governor's Address will be held from March 10. The budget estimates for 2025-26 will be presented on March 17 by the CM, who also holds the finance portfolio. Bhupinder Singh Hooda, Congress leader and former Leader of Opposition, said, "The issues, including paper leaks in the board ex-

ams, as also the MBBS scam and the falling standards of education, unemployment, reckless mining and plight of farmers are on our agenda. The government should give us answers for failing the public and explain how so many paper leaks are happening in its regime," he said. A meeting of the Congress Legislature Party, attended by party MLAs, was held during the day. The Congress has, even five months after the Assembly elections, failed to announce a Leader of Opposition, though party leaders maintained that the announcement could come "anytime". The Indian National Lok Dal (INLD) said the party would prominently raise various issues related to public interest during the session. Meanwhile, Parliamentary Affairs Minister Mahipal Dhandha said the government, with the interest of the public at heart, would keep its manifesto promises. "The Budget will reflect our com-

mitment to public welfare and people from all walks of life will be benefited. The Opposition is weak and has nothing to say and its leaders drop the ball after raising an issue. They prefer to walk out each time the Chief Minister gives his reply. Our strategy is simply to ensure they hear out the government instead of shooting and scotching," Dhandha stated. Meanwhile, during the session, the government will bring in the state song for the approval of the House, while the issue of a new building for the Vidhan Sabha will be taken up for discussion. Earlier in the day, an all-party meeting under the chairmanship of Speaker Harvinder Kalyan endorsed the demand for a separate Vidhan Sabha building for Haryana. Legislators at the meeting contended that a separate spacious building was required for Haryana as it would have more MLAs after the delimitation exercise.



ICC reveals player of month nominees for February

Dubai: The International Cricket Council (ICC) on Friday announced shortlists for the

ICC Men's and Women's Player of the Month awards for February, casting a spotlight on the top performers from a breathless month of international cricket.

Carrying outstanding form into the ICC Men's Champions Trophy 2025, three stars of the tournament from the nominees for the ICC Men's Player of the Month.

Shubman Gill grabbed the headlines with a stellar showing in India's decisive series victory over England pre-tournament and regained top spot in the ODI Batter Rankings ahead of their opening victory over Bangladesh.

New Zealand's Glenn Phillips enjoyed an unbeaten stretch at the crease in the Tri-Nation series in Pakistan and began his Champions Trophy with a half-century on opening day.

Completing the lineup is Australia skipper Steve Smith, who recorded back-to-back centuries as Australia dominated their World Test Championship series in Sri Lanka.

Elsewhere, two heroes of Australia's victory in the standalone Women's Ashes Test comprise the shortlist alongside a prolific young Thai bowler.

Spin maestro Alana King earns her first nomination in the Player of the Month awards following a supreme display in the conclusion of the Women's Ashes series in Melbourne along with Annabel Sutherland, who shone with a mammoth score in the innings victory.

The final nominee is



20-year-old Thai bowling sensation Thipatcha Putthawong, who was among the wickets in her side's winning campaign at the Nepal Women's Tri-Nation Series.

ICC Men's Player of the Month Nominees for February:

With 406 runs at an average of over 100, India's talismanic batter Shubman Gill was restored to the summit of the ICC Men's ODI Batter Rankings during February. Three contests against England saw him make sizable contributions of 87 and 60 before a sublime 112 in Ahmedabad sealed a commanding series sweep.

With confidence high, the 25-year-old then began his Champions Trophy campaign with a stylish 101 not out against Bangladesh to help chase down a challenging 229 target under the lights in Dubai.

The Blackcaps all-rounder Glenn Phillips geared up for the ICC Men's Champions Trophy 2025 in style, providing valuable runs in the middle order to seal the Tri-Nation Series in Pakistan earlier in February.

Unbeaten scores of 28 and 20 followed a brilliant 106 from 74 balls in Lahore which featured seven maximums. Then, as the tournament commenced, Phillips

enjoyed a bright start, hitting an equally brisk 61 in 39 balls and taking a remarkable catch to remove Pakistan skipper Mohammad Rizwan, ensuring the Blackcaps protected their target in a 60-run victory in Karachi.

While Steve Smith's form was more subdued in the Champions Trophy, he once again took centre stage as stand-in skipper in Australia's dominant 2-0 World Test Championship series sweep over Sri Lanka in Galle.

The opening Test heralded a formidable 141 alongside Usman Khawaja, before he followed up with more of the same in the second Test, striking 131 in the first innings of a nine-wicket victory that sealed him the Player of the Series accolade and a spot back among the top five Test batters in the ICC Player Rankings.

ICC Women's Player of the Month Nominees for February:

Australia's premier leg-spinner Alana King enjoyed a fine Women's Ashes series, and played a starring role as they sealed the standalone Test in Melbourne to confirm a landmark series sweep. Key wickets of Sciver-Brunt, Dunkley and Wyatt-Hodge in the middle order came as King took four for

45 in the first innings, before she etched her name on the honours board with a career-best return in the longest format with five for 53 in the second innings.

A previous winner back in May 2023, Thailand left-arm Thipatcha Putthawong was again the driving force behind their surge to success in February, topping the wicket-taking charts as her side sealed the Nepal Women's Tri-Nation Series.

In the space of six days at the start of the month, Putthawong took 14 wickets which included four successive hauls of three wickets or more. Not only impressing with the ball, Putthawong hit a vital unbeaten 25 before taking four for 10 in Thailand's thrilling five-run win over the hosts on 4 February.

Despite not winning the individual accolades Annabel Sutherland was nominated for in the recently announced ICC Awards 2024 (ICC Women's Cricketer of the Year and ICC Women's ODI Cricketer of the Year).

Sutherland picked up where she left off at the back end of the year with a sparkling 163 in the Ashes Test victory over England, becoming the first woman to score a Test century at the ground in her emphatic Player of the Match performance.

Sunil Chhetri returns to international football

New Delhi: In a major boost for Indian football, Sunil Chhetri has announced his return to international football, less than a year after bidding farewell to the national team.

The decision comes at a crucial time as India prepares for key international fixtures, including the AFC Asian Cup 2027 qualifiers.

Chhetri, 40, had initially retired from international football on June 6, 2024, following a goalless draw against Kuwait in a FIFA World Cup qualifier at Kolkata's Salt Lake Stadium. His departure marked the end of an illustrious international career, during which he became India's all-time leading

goal scorer and most-capped player, with 94 goals in 151 appearances.

Despite stepping away from international duty, Chhetri remained in peak form with Bengaluru FC in the Indian Super League (ISL), where he scored 12 goals and provided two assists in the ongoing season. His stellar performances caught the attention of national team head coach Manolo Marquez, who persuaded him to reconsider his retirement in light of the challenges ahead.

"The qualification for the Asian Cup is very crucial for us. Given the importance of the tournament and the matches ahead, I discussed

with Sunil Chhetri about making a comeback to strengthen the national team.

He agreed, and so we included him in the squad," Marquez stated.

The All India Football Federation (AIFF) confirmed Chhetri's return on March 6, announcing his inclusion in the 26-member squad for the upcoming FIFA International Window. India is set to face the Maldives in a friendly match on March 19,

followed by a crucial AFC Asian Cup Saudi Arabia 2027 Qualifiers Final

Round match against Bangladesh on March 25 at Shillong's Jawaharlal Nehru Stadium.

Chhetri's return is expected to provide a significant morale boost to the squad, with fans and teammates welcoming the comeback of the 'captain, leader, legend.' As India pushes for a spot in the AFC Asian Cup 2027, his experience and leadership could prove invaluable on the international stage.



Confident New Zealand ready to implement key learnings after loss to India last week

Dubai: Having played India in Dubai once already in the Champions Trophy, New Zealand believe they can course correct in their higher stakes rematch.

After claiming Player of the Match honours for his blistering semi-finals century, Rachin Ravindra revealed that his side would spend time reflecting, before traveling to Dubai and start 'switching on' for the Champions Trophy Final.

"Well, that time has come," he said.

New Zealand have now made it back to Dubai, having played India there less than a week ago.

The Black Caps fell short in that battle for top spot in Group A, but will undoubtedly be better for the experience. It's all about how they bounce back from

that loss and what they learned - how the pitch played, in comparison to the wickets in Pakistan, and which tactics worked.

Solving those riddles could well be the difference in Sunday's tournament decider, an ICC report said.

India claimed last week's contest against the Kiwis by 44 runs, after posting 249 runs from their 50 overs and restricting New Zealand to 205 runs all out in the 46th over. While there's been a lot of focus on spin bowlers stepping up in the UAE, it was Matt Henry that starred with the ball for the Black Caps, claiming 5/42 off eight overs, in an innings where Shreyas Iyer top scored for India with a 79 off 98 balls.

Kane Williamson fought valiantly for the Kiwis with

an 81 (120 balls), but couldn't find support in the middle order. India's spinners combined for nine wickets, led by 'secret weapon' Varun Chakaravathy, taking 5/42 - coincidentally the same figures as Henry for the Kiwis - in what was just the 33-year-old leg-spinner's second One Day International. But after New Zealand's dominant semi-finals win over South Africa, Williamson declared his side will be more ready this time around - for the spinners and the conditions.

"For us, it was nice to have that last match against India," he said after their semi.

"There's some really good bits there. India are an outstanding team and (are) playing really well. So, look, it's important

we try and take away some learnings from that last game," Williamson said.

"The conditions are different, so it's important that we try and take away some of those positives and be nice and clear in how we're trying to operate come two or three days' time in the final," he said. There will be no complacency for the Black Caps heading into the decider, knowing full well how dangerous their opponents are. Particularly given India's growing familiarity with the Dubai pitch. "I suppose having played there on a number of occasions; there's real clarity in how they want to operate," he continued. "It's about the cricket that we want to play and take into account, obviously, the opposition, but be nice and smart come that Final."

Dallas to host FIFA World Cup 2026 International Broadcast Centre

Zurich (Switzerland), Mar 7 (UNI) FIFA has announced that the Kay Bailey Hutchison Convention Center in downtown Dallas has been selected as the official hub for the FIFA World Cup 2026 International Broadcast Centre (IBC).

The state-of-the-art facility will serve as the global broadcast operations centre for the game-changing tournament set to take place across 16 Host Cities in Canada, Mexico and the United States.

From January until the end of July 2026, the IBC will act as the nerve centre for television, radio and new media operations, spanning an impressive 45,000 square metres (485,000 square feet).

As the telecommunications hub for national and international media, the IBC will ensure seamless coverage of the tournament, reaching billions of fans worldwide.

It will be the second time that Dallas has been designated this prestigious function, having also hosted the IBC during the 1994 FIFA World Cup USA, the FIFA media statement

said. The IBC will benefit from the unparalleled expertise of Host Broadcast Services (HBS), FIFA's appointed Host Broadcaster for the FIFA World Cup 26.

HBS has successfully delivered services for the last six editions of the FIFA World Cup™, providing world-class operations and cutting-edge technology.

"With the FIFA World Cup 2026 set to redefine the global football experience, we're proud to have confirmed the Kay Bailey Hutchison Convention Center Dallas as the International Broadcast Centre, because it is a world-class facility that will provide top-tier services for media professionals from around the globe," said FIFA Secretary General Mattias Grafström. "This partnership highlights our dedication to maintaining the highest standards for broadcast operations. With its modern infrastructure and the expertise of our Host Broadcaster, HBS, the IBC will offer an optimal environment for broadcasters and media professionals



to deliver compelling storytelling and coverage of this historic event," he said. "In addition, media representatives from around the world will have the opportunity to discover Dallas, a dynamic city that combines modern urban attractions with deep-rooted

history, and legendary sports teams that captivate fans across the globe," Grafström added. The IBC will be home to approximately 2,000 broadcast media representatives for seven months, including in the build-up to and during the tournament. It will also

serve as the headquarters for FIFA's Host Broadcaster, Media Partners, Content Production Department and Football Technology and Innovation Department.

"Being selected as host city of the FIFA World Cup 2026 International Broadcast Centre is a monumental win for Dallas and a testament to our global appeal and readiness to shine on the world stage," said Dallas Mayor Eric L. Johnson. "I am thrilled that the Kay Bailey Hutchison Convention Center will serve as a hub to showcase our city, its rich culture and the hospitality of our community to millions of viewers around the globe," he said.

The IBC will offer a range of services to meet the needs of the large group of experts, specialists and staff helping to take the groundbreaking 23rd edition of the FIFA World Cup to over 200 countries worldwide.

These services include a 24-hour cafeteria, a lounge, concession stands, a convenience store, a gift shop, express shipping, banking and dry cleaning. This comprehensive

set-up will ensure that members of the global broadcast media workforce can focus on delivering exceptional coverage of the tournament.

"Securing the International Broadcast Centre firmly places the city of Dallas and our North Texas region at the centre of the world's attention during FIFA World Cup 2026," said North Texas FIFA World Cup Organizing Committee President Monica Paul. "It is a tremendous honour to host thousands of media professionals at the Kay Bailey Hutchison Convention Center, as they will highlight our city and region throughout the entirety of the tournament, once again showcasing our city and region's ability to collaborate and deliver on a global scale," Paul said. The announcement follows the unanimous approval of the plans by the Dallas City Council on December 11, 2024. The project will provide significant economic opportunities for local and minority businesses, which will be able to bid for contracts related to the convention centre's operations.

Target was to score on my first game: Sakshi Rana on her dream senior team debut

New Delhi: At just 17, Sakshi Rana made headway into the Indian squad and showed incredible potential at the FIH Hockey Pro League 2024/25, her debut senior international tournament in Indian colours, at the Kalinga Stadium here.

She was handed her debut during India's first match against Spain and despite their unfortunate 3-4 loss, it was a day to remember for Sakshi as she scored an incredible field goal on her debut. She then featured against Spain again and Germany respectively. "I was waiting for the day of my debut for a long time so I was really happy about it. I wasn't nervous as such before the match because the seniors supported me and told me that there are no mistakes in your first game, hence, I could play freely," Sakshi shared about her debut experience.

Sakshi's goal was a brilliant individual effort. She pressed effectively and timed her tackle perfectly to win the ball in a dangerous area, after which she took a touch and fired a backhand shot



from inside the circle to score her first goal. While talking through the moment, Sakshi explained, "My target was to score on my debut so I was very determined. When I made the effort and snatched the ball, I saw no one was around me and just took the shot. Everyone started shouting and I realised that I had scored a goal. I was extremely happy," she said. When the squad was released, Sakshi was initially named in the standbys but Chief Coach Harendra Singh recognised her hard work and potential and included her in the squad against Spain. "When he (Harendra Singh) told me I am playing, he said he is not selecting me, but my game. He told me I would get a chance to score and that the

senior players would help me on the field. He even hugged me after my goal, which was a special moment for me," she stated.

Despite her strong performances, Sakshi feels she needs to work on her speed in training. "As I have played against foreign players in the Hockey India League and Pro League recently, I have realised it is all about speed now. I have to be quick on the field, especially since I am a forward, so I will be working on that now." Sakshi was an integral part of the Indian Junior Women's Team that clinched Gold at the Women's Junior Asia Cup last year. Now, she is determined to carry that momentum forward and help India secure the Junior World Cup title in Chile later this year.

Punjab FC beat Hyderabad FC 3-1 in ISL

Hyderabad: Punjab FC defeated Hyderabad FC by 3-1 at the GMC Balayogi Athletic Stadium in the Indian Super League (ISL) match here.

At 17 years and 322 days, Punjab FC's Shami Singamayum became the youngest-ever goalscorer in ISL history on Thursday night, as Muhammad Suhail became the third-youngest in the competition to assist a goal (18 years and 175 days).

Despite holding just 43.7% of ball possession, Punjab FC were the more assertive of the two teams, taking seven shots on target as compared to the two of Hyderabad FC.

Though out of the playoffs race, they moved to 27 points with this win, breaking Hyderabad FC's five-game-long unbeaten run at home.

Asmir Suljic was a force to reckon with inside the Hyderabad FC defensive half to ensure that Punjab FC got off the blocks creatively.

His fleet footedness and eye for a pass pushed him to pick players in probing positions and pose questions in front of the home team defence.

One such delivery to Luka Majcen in the middle of the 18-yard box was struck firmly to



wards the bottom left corner by the striker, but saved in time in the 22nd minute.

The sequence had reversed just 12 minutes prior when Majcen had made a similar pass to Suljic, slicing past the Hyderabad FC defence but the latter's effort towards the bottom right corner lacked adequate pace behind it.

Punjab FC found the breakthrough courtesy of an own goal by Alex Saji in the 41st minute though.

Muhammad Suhail made the ambitious choice of going for the goal from distance in the upon receiving a pass from Ricky Shabong, and though the move did

not culminate into a goal, the sustained period of pressure for a brief while thereafter resulted in Hyderabad FC losing shape at the back, as Alex was unable to cap off a fairly straightforward clearance and instead ended up slotting the ball in his net, breaking the deadlock before the half-time break.

Majcen undertook a focused role inside the 18-yard area and did not necessarily partake in as much playmaking, with Suhail taking over those responsibilities instead.

Suhail spotted Majcen at the centre of the box in the 56th minute and served him an impeccably well-weighted pass, which

the forward drilled into the bottom left corner with his right foot at ease to double his team's lead.

Hyderabad FC stepped on the offensive post this, looking to cut the lead. While this offensive strategy propelled them to find more time on the ball in Punjab FC's half, it also left spaces vacant in their own backline.

The visitors capitalised on that with aplomb in the 86th minute, as Petros Giakoumakis played a leading role in rounding off a counter-attacking sequence by serving Shami Singamayum a delivery outside the box, which the youngster deposited into the centre of the net with his left foot.

Hyderabad FC pulled a goal back late into the second half, as Ramhlunchhunga brought his efficiency from distance to the fore by hammering a pass from Cy Goddard into the bottom right corner, but the side ran out of time to make something out of this stunning strike and ended up conceding the three points to Punjab FC.

Hyderabad FC will play Kerala Blasters FC on March 12, whereas Punjab FC are set to square off against Mohammedan SC on March 10.



BSE Sensex

Close	74,332.58	Percent change	-0.010%
Previous close	74,340.09	Open	74,347.14
High	74,586.43	Low	74,038.03

Nifty 50

Close	22,552.50	Percent change	0.035%
Previous close	22,544.70	Open	22,508.65
High	22,633.80	Low	22,464.75

Nifty 500

Close	20,443.40	Percent change	-0.018%
Previous close	20,447.10	Open	20,428.15
High	20,549.20	Low	20,377.60

Nifty Next 50

Close	59,852.55	Percent change	-0.44%
Previous close	60,114.35	Open	60,113.70
High	60,391.90	Low	59,673.65

Nifty 100

Close	23,027.70	Percent change	-0.048%
Previous close	23,038.80	Open	23,008.35
High	23,127.30	Low	22,956.35

Nifty Bank

Close	48,497.50	Percent change	-0.27%
Previous close	48,627.70	Open	48,463.80
High	48,709.05	Low	48,359.35

Nifty Midcap 100

Close	49,190.60	Percent change	-0.32%
Previous close	49,348.10	Open	49,340.00
High	49,644.95	Low	49,082.65

Top Gainers

Company	Current	% Gain
Reliance	1,249.80	3.32
Nestle	2,238.45	1.69
Bajaj Auto	7,574.75	1.51
Bharat Elec	276.99	1.48
Hindalco	691.35	1.38

Top Losers

Company	Current	% Loss
IndusInd Bank	936.75	-3.60
NTPC	329.55	-2.47
Shriram Finance	630.85	-2.10
Infosys	1,686.00	-1.74
HCL Tech	1,557.95	-1.73

Commodities

Commodity	Price	Change (%)
Gold Apr 04	85,970.00	-64.00 -0.07
Silver May 05	97,878.00	-263.00 -0.27
Crudeoil Mar 19	5,868.00	84.00 1.45
Naturalgas Mar 26	365.20	-8.70 -2.33

MPOC, OTAI forge strategic collaboration to promote Malaysian palm oil in India

Mumbai : Aiming to foster sustainable trade growth between the two nations, the Malaysian Palm Oil Council (MPOC) and the Oil Technologists' Association of India (OTAI) have formalized a collaboration to enhance awareness of Malaysian palm oil's nutritional benefits and health attributes in the Indian market.

Recognizing India as a crucial market for Malaysian palm oil, this agreement paves the way for targeted awareness campaigns to address misconceptions and highlight palm oil's role in health, nutrition, and industrial applications. The partnership will focus on consumer education, industry engagement, and scientific research to strengthen palm oil's position as a key ingredient in India's food and non-food sectors, a joint statement by MPOC and OTAI said.

Speaking on the significance of this collaboration, Belvinder Sron, CEO of MPOC, emphasized that "India remains one of the most important markets for Malaysian palm oil, and fostering greater awareness through science-backed initiatives is key to reinforcing its acceptance. Through this partnership with OTAI, we aim to provide factual, research-driven insights into palm oil's benefits and its role in the Indian food industry."

He further highlighted the importance of industry partnerships, saying: "Collaborations with organizations like OTAI allow us to draw on their expertise and network to effectively engage with key stakeholders. By working together, we can dispel misinformation, drive consumer confi-

dence, and ensure that the positive attributes of Malaysian palm oil are widely recognized."

Not only is palm oil free of trans fats, but it is one of the richest sources of Vitamin E antioxidants which come in two main varieties: tocopherols and tocotrienols. While both offer antioxidant benefits, tocotrienols pack an extra protective punch. Palm oil possesses a unique balance of saturated and unsaturated fatty acids, and this well-rounded fatty acid profile is crucial for overall health.

Natural compounds present in palm oil like tocotrienols and beta-carotene also support cardiovascular health, making it a suitable option for maintaining a balanced diet.

Established in 1943, OTAI is a leading association representing technologists, scientists, academicians, researchers, and industry professionals working in the fields of oils, fats, oleochemicals, surfactants, and allied products. With regional offices in Delhi, Kolkata, Mumbai, Hyderabad, and Kanpur, OTAI plays a pivotal role in promoting technical advancements and

fostering knowledge-sharing through seminars, workshops, and research initiatives.

Under this collaboration agreement, MPOC and OTAI will work together to organize industry seminars, conferences, and academic lectures aimed at educating Indian consumers, food manufacturers, and industry stakeholders about the health benefits and diverse applications of Malaysian palm oil.

Sensex sees marginal fall of 7.51 pts



Mumbai : Snapping a winning streak of the last two sessions, the BSE Sensex on Friday declined 7.51 pts at 74,332.58 as selling was seen in Consumer Durable, Realty and IT stocks.

The National Stock Exchange (NSE), on the other hand, rose 7.80 pts at 22,552.50.

The market remained volatile, as the Sensex opened at 74,347.15, rising 7 pts. It advanced by 246 pts at 74,586.43, the days high.

Later it erased earlier gains and dropped 302 pts at 74,038.03, the days low, before closing at 74,332.58, easing 7.51 pts from its previous close.

The Nifty registered the day's high at 22,633.80 and low at 22,464.75 pts.

The stocks that slipped were Consumer Durable by 1.11 pc, IT by 0.83 pc and Realty by 0.75 pc.

The Mid-cap fell 0.30 pc, while the Small cap went up 0.75 pc.

In 30 scrips, 12 advanced and 18 declined

The losers were IndusInd Bank by 3.71 pc to Rs 935, Zomato by 3.64 pc to Rs 217.20, NTPC by 2.29 pc to Rs 330, and Infosys by 1.62 pc to Rs 1684.50

The gainers were Reliance industries by 3.01 pc to Rs 1247, Tata Motors by 1.28 pc to Rs 648.45, Nestle India Ltd by 0.92 pc to Rs 2222 and Ultracemco by 0.77 pc to Rs 10,570.05.

Parnika India aims to achieve Rs 160 cr revenue; to expand operations in South, East India

Royal Bhutan Service Ott



New Delhi : Surat based manufacturers and exporter of women ethnic wear firm Parnika India on Friday announced its expansion plans to southern and eastern India, along its existing base in Maharashtra and Gujarat, as the company sets an ambitious target of achieving a revenue of Rs 160 Crore by the end of FY 25-26.

Operating on a B2B model, the company is seeking to broaden its reach as well as its production capacity, which is currently more than 5 lakh pieces per month.

Parnika India is actively involved in several social initiatives and empowers women by offering employment and entrepreneurial opportunities, one of their goals is to have at least 50 percent female staff which shows their commitment towards women empowerment, the company said in a release.

"Parnika India is expanding its network and production capacity. We are extending our operations to the eastern and southern parts of India and adding new product lines, including uniforms

and men's wear, alongside our women's ethnic wear. We are committed to maintaining high-quality standards and are strengthening our leadership team to support our aggressive growth plans," said Vishal Pacherial, Managing Director of Parnika India.

Parnika India ensures streamlined logistics and a supply chain management system by working with reliable logistics partners. They have invested in advanced inventory and distribution systems that enable efficient management of orders, shipping, and warehousing. They also leverage technology to track and manage their operations across multiple locations, ensuring timely delivery and seamless supply chain management.

The company has experienced consistent growth, with its market expanding both domestically and internationally. Parnika's growth rate has averaged 15-20 percent annually, with a significant increase in demand for their high-quality fabrics and collections.

Sunstone celebrates Women's Day by strengthening scholarships and career growth

New Delhi : As the World celebrates International Women's Day on March 8, Sunstone, a leading higher education company of India, reaffirmed its commitment to empowering women in higher education through industry-aligned learning, skill development, and career opportunities.

Over the past six years, Sunstone has empowered more than 3,000 female students and allocated over ₹10 crores in scholarships to support them. By doing so, Sunstone is actively contributing to closing gender gaps in higher education and employment.

Women from Tier 2 and Tier 3 cities of India including Bokaro, Bhagalpur, Bhopal, Firozabad, Jaipur, Shimla, Bageshwar,



(Uttarakhand) are making significant strides in professional education, challenging norms, and transforming their aspirations into achievements.

Feeling elated by the exceptional achievements of women, Ashish Munjal, Co-Founder and CEO of Sunstone, stated, "At Sunstone, we hold the conviction that education is the most powerful tool for change. The

growing participation and success of women in higher education is a testament to their dedication and potential. Our mission is to support and nurture this transformation by offering access to industry-aligned learning, skill development, and placement opportunities."

"The fact that women at Sunstone have a 36.7% higher selection rate in placements, along with an 11.26%

higher overall placement rate, proves that when given the right resources, they can achieve remarkable success. On this International Women's Day, we reaffirm our commitment to making education accessible to women across India, empowering them to break barriers and lead with confidence," he added.

Sunstone takes immense pride in seeing its female students not only enrolling in higher education but also excelling beyond their peers in various domains.

Sunstone has founded in 2019; he is one of India's leading higher education companies that works with top colleges and leading recruiters across India to connect students with their dream careers.

K&R Rail Engineering signs MoU with Indian Port Rail & Ropeway Corporation

Mumbai : K&R Rail Engineering said that it has entered into a memorandum of understanding

(MoU) with Indian Port Rail and Ropeway Corporation to execute large scale projects, fostering seamless growth for both organizations within India and abroad.

The MoU includes the execution of major railways, roads, highways, ports and other projects of larger volume in range of Rs 50 crore to Rs 5,000 crore for mutual benefit and seamless growth of both.

The organisations,

K&R Rail Engineering and Indian port Rail and Ropeway Corporation within India and Abroad.

K & R Rail Engineering is carrying on the business of providing end-to-end EPC services, which include earthwork, bridges & civil works,

Overhead electrifications (OHE) works, signaling & telecommunication (S&T) works, railway operation & maintenance (O&M) consultancy in preparing detailed DPRs.

And other allied activities, a statement said.

Telangana govt appoints Ex-OYO CXO Kavikrut as new CEO of T-Hub

Hyderabad : Telangana Government has appointed Ex-OYO CXO Kavikrut as the new CEO of T-Hub, one of the world's leading startup incubators, dedicated to fostering entrepreneurship and scaling startups through impactful programs, global market access, and deep industry collaboration.

With effect from March 10, his appointment underscores T-Hub's commitment to nurturing startups that deliver world-class products and services, further strengthening Telangana's position as a leading hub for

entrepreneurship, a release said here on Friday. T-Hub has supported over 2,000 startups. Kavikrut's appointment will further strengthen T-Hub's mission to empower entrepreneurs, accelerate startup growth, and drive the development of world-class products from India for the world.

With a career spanning entrepreneurship and corporate leadership, the Ex-OYO CXO was most recently the Chief Growth Officer at OYO, where he played a pivotal role in expanding the company's footprint across

100+ cities in India, launching new ventures, and leading as well as scaling multiple business functions.

He also spearheaded OYO's international expansion into Japan in partnership with Yahoo! Japan and SoftBank Japan in 2018.

His deep expertise will be critical in strengthening T-Hub's role as a leading enabler of startup growth and market expansion.

Under Kavikrut's leadership, T-Hub will grow the startup ecosystem by enabling founders and their ventures to scale, achieve

profitability, and maximize their impact, with a key focus on strengthening Hyderabad and Telangana's position as a leading startup hub.

Welcoming Kavikrut's appointment, Jayesh Ranjan, Special Chief Secretary (IT and Industries), Government of Telangana, stated "Kavikrut's passion for startups, global experience, and hands-on operational skills make him the ideal leader for T-Hub. His leadership will play a crucial role in making

India a powerhouse of entrepreneurship," he said.

BVR Mohan Reddy,

Founder Chairman of Cyient and Founding Director at T-Hub, said "Kavikrut's appointment as CEO marks a significant milestone for T-Hub. His entrepreneurial mindset and proven track record of leading high-performance teams will be instrumental in shaping India's next generation of startups."

"I am confident that T-Hub will continue to create a thriving ecosystem for entrepreneurs."

Speaking on his appointment, Kavikrut said: "I am honoured to have the opportunity to build upon the pio-

neering work that T-Hub has been doing for the past decade. I am excited by the potential of Hyderabad, the city I hail from, as it steadily grows into a hub for startups building products and services from India for the world."

Holding an MBA from Harvard Business School and an MSc in Finance from the Birla Institute of Technology and Science, Pilani, Kavikrut started his career as a healthcare startup founder and later worked with leading companies such as Amazon and Piramal Group.

Average increment expected to be 8.8 pc in 2025 compared with 9.0 pc in 2024: Survey

New Delhi : Facing global and local headwinds, the Indian companies are likely to keep pay increase at same level of last year or reduce it marginally as the focus is on optimizing compensation cost budget, says a survey by Deloitte on India Talent Outlook 2025.

Among all Indian companies there is a clear focus on optimising compensation cost budgets, with pay increases for 2025 being forecast at 8.8 percent (compared with 9.0 percent in 2024). The survey shows 75 percent of companies will either reduce or keep their pay increases the same as the last year.

Furthermore, while most sectors will keep the increment growth stable or moderately lesser than the

previous year, the consumer products sector expects a significantly lower increment budget. While organ-

isations continue to focus on retaining key talent, top performers can expect a 1.7x higher increment than average performers, which is moderately lower than last year. Employees at individual contributor and junior management levels can expect a 1.3x higher increment than the top management level.

While a third of the participating companies expected to make lower promotions than last year, the overall percentage of employees receiving promo-

tions is projected to remain steady at about 12 percent. Most companies expect to not increase their promo-



tion-linked pay increases compared with previous years, says the survey.

Attrition in 2024 has moderated to 17.4 percent. However, it is important to highlight that companies

are still quite optimistic about hiring, and almost 80 percent of companies plan to increase headcount in the coming financial year.

Prakhar Tripathi, Partner, Deloitte India, said, "In an environment where companies are witnessing muted revenue growth, compensation budgets are naturally coming under pressure. Controlled attrition and moderate inflation

are helping companies optimise pay increases without adversely affecting talent outcomes. However, we expect the focus on performance and talent differentiation

to remain core to the HR strategies, regardless of other considerations."

Learning and development Organisations increasingly adopt a structured, data-driven approach to workforce upskilling/reskilling by implementing a common skills framework to identify talent capability gaps. However, one in every two organisations acknowledges that they do not have a structured competency framework or do not update it regularly. Organisations indicated challenges in balancing business priorities and training needs, assessing skill gaps, measuring the impact of the learning initiatives and keeping up with technology changes as the top challenges for learning and development.

ICRA pegs FY26 GDP growth at 6.5 pc on pick-up in consumption

New Delhi : India's GDP growth outlook for FY2026 remains healthy at around 6.5% amid expectations of a pick-up in domestic consumption and investment activity, research and rating firm ICRA said on Friday.

ICRA said that rural demand is likely to remain upbeat in the near term, aided by farm cash flows from the rabi harvest and above-normal reservoir levels which would provide some insurance against a delayed start or inadequate rainfall in the early part of the monsoon season.

"However, beyond H1 CY2025 (first half of 2025), a normal and well-distributed monsoon remains key to support farm sentiments and incomes. Urban consumption, which has been slug-



gish in the ongoing fiscal, is set to improve in FY2026, supported by favourable developments including income tax relief announced in the Union Budget, the onset of rate easing cycle and expectations of moderation in food inflation," the rating agency said. "Additionally, investment activity will be supported by the healthy expansion in Centre's capex, continuation of capex loans

to state governments and healthier outlook for housing demand vis-à-vis FY2025, auguring well for construction activity and the GDP growth," it further said. ICRA expects private capex to remain measured and non-exuberant amid external headwinds. Overall, the rating agency has projected the GDP and GVA at basic prices to grow by 6.5% and 6.3%, respectively, in FY2026.