



Visitors poured in huge numbers at the Boimela Prangan in Kolkata on the last day of 48th International Kolkata Book Fair (IKBF) on Sunday.

Delhi Polls: BJP's vote share up 13%, AAP sees 10% decline

MI News Service, New Delhi: The BJP's vote share in Delhi has grown by nearly 13 percentage points in the last 10 years while the AAP's vote share has declined by nearly 10 percentage points during the same period. In the keenly contested Assembly polls in Delhi, there was a difference of only two per cent between the vote shares of the BJP and AAP. The saffron party has stormed to power in the national capital by winning 48 of the 70 seats restricting AAP to 22 seats. The BJP was out of power in the national capital for over 26 years but riding on a spirited campaign, it not only swept the AAP but also ensured that its heavyweights, including chief Arvind Kejriwal, had to taste defeat.

Congress drew a blank for the third time in a row in Delhi. AAP secured a vote share of 43.57 per cent, down from 53.57 per cent in the 2020 polls. In

the 2015 Assembly elections, it had secured 54.5 per cent of the votes. This is probably the first time that a party even after getting 40 per cent vote share lost the polls.

In 2020 and 2015, the party won a massive mandate by securing 67 and 62 seats respectively. The BJP secured a vote share of 45.56 per cent and won 48 seats. The saffron party's vote share rose from 38.51 per cent in 2020 and 32.3 per cent in the 2015 elections. The Congress, which was in power in Delhi for 15 years from 1998 to 2013, did not win any seat and secured a vote share of 6.34 per cent. The only consolation for the grand old party was the fact that it saw an improvement of 2.1 per cent in vote share over the last time. The party polled 6.34 per cent of the valid votes as against 4.3 per cent in the 2020 assembly polls, denting its INDIA bloc partner AAP across segments.

Chhattisgarh: Encounter kills 31 Naxalites, 2 security personnel

MI News Service, Raipur: In a major operation against the Left Wing Extremism, security forces gunned down 31 Naxalites during a fierce encounter in Chhattisgarh's Bijapur district on Sunday, police said.

Two security personnel were also killed and as many others injured in the face-off, they said.

More than 650 security personnel entered the Indravati National Park area from different sides and eliminated 31 Naxalites in their den, Chhattisgarh's Deputy Chief Minister Vijay Sharma said.

Chief Minister Vishnu Deo Sai said the end of Naxalism in the country and the state is certain. Under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Union Home Minister Amit Shah, the state will get rid of Naxalism by March 2026, he added.

With this incident, 81 Naxalites have been gunned down by security forces in separate en-

counters in Chhattisgarh so far this year.

The latest gunfight took place at a forest in Indravati National Park area in the morning when a joint team of personnel from different security forces was out on an anti-Naxalite operation, Inspector General of Police, Bastar Range, Sundarraaj P said.

Personnel belonging to the District Reserve Guard (DRG), Special Task Force (STF) and Bastar Fighters, all units of the state police, were involved in the operation, he said.

"So far, bodies of 31 Naxalites clad in 'uniform' have been recovered from the encounter site. Besides, a huge cache of weapons, including AK-47, INSAS, SLR and .303 rifles and Barrel Grenade Launchers (BGL), and explosives have also been seized from the site," the official said.

Two security personnel, one belonging to the state DRG and

the other from the STF, were killed in the gunfight and two others suffered injuries, he said.

The two injured jawans, reported to be out of danger, were being airlifted to a better medical facility for treatment, he said.

Reinforcement has been rushed to the spot and search operation is still underway in the area, he added.

CM Sai said that under the leadership of PM Modi and Union minister Amit Shah, the state will get rid of Naxalism by March 2026.

Security forces have been continuously getting success in this direction and moving rapidly towards achieving the goal. The end of Naxalism, which is like "cancer", from the country and the state is certain, he said in a statement.

"The sacrifice of our soldiers will not go in vain. I pray to God for the departed souls to rest in

peace and provide strength to the bereaved families, and for the speedy recovery of the injured jawans," Sai said.

Hailing the security forces, Deputy CM Vijay Sharma said the national park area in Bijapur was considered a safe haven for Naxalites, where more than 650 security personnel entered from different sides and eliminated 31 Naxalites in their den.

All the deceased Naxalites were clad in uniform and automated weapons were recovered from them, he told reporters.

"Our two jawans were martyred in the operation. I pay homage to them and pray to God to give strength to their families. The Vishnu Deo Sai government will always stand by their families. Two injured jawans have been airlifted (to Raipur)," he said.

Asked about the deadline of March 2026 to end Naxalism, Sharma said, "Under the guid-

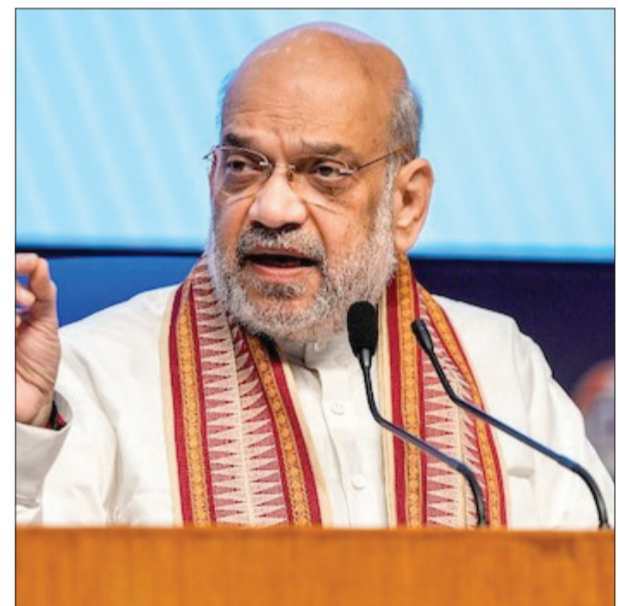
ance of Union Home Minister Amit Shah and CM Sai, the target will be achieved." "The IEDs (Improvised Explosive Devices) laid (by Naxalites) on the path of development of Bastar will be cleared and we are working with full commitment to ensure basic amenities like schools, hospitals, water, road, anganwadis (government-run women and child care centres) and mobile towers reach the entire region," he said.

Out of the 81 Naxalites gunned down in the state so far this year, 65 were killed in the Bastar division comprising seven districts, including Bijapur.

Last year, 219 Naxalites were neutralised by security forces in separate encounters in Chhattisgarh, according to police.

On October 4 last year, 38 Naxalites were killed following an encounter in Abhujmaad area along the Narayanpur-Dantewada inter-district border in the Bastar region.

Naxals will be eradicated by Mar 31, 2026: Amit Shah



Concept of fund flow from centre to states based upon tax share is unfortunate: Piyush Goyal

MI News Service, New Delhi: Union Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal has said the demand by some states that they get central funds in proportion to their contribution of taxes to the central kitty is "petty thinking" and "unfortunate".

Prime Minister Narendra Modi is of the view that if the country is to prosper, the eight states of the Northeast and eastern Indian states like Bihar, West Bengal, Odisha and Jharkhand must develop, Goyal said.

The BJP leader was speaking at the 'Rashtriya Ekatmata Yatra 2025', an event organised here by the Akhil Bharatiya Vid-yarthi Parishad (ABVP) and the 'Students Experience in Inter-State Living (SEIL)' initiative.

In the last 11 years, the Modi government's "laser focus", like that of Arjuna of the Mahabharata, was on the Northeast and eastern states, the minister said. "It is unfortunate that some states and some leaders...I don't want to politicise it but some leaders from Maharashtra used to say...leaders of the earlier government which was there for two-and-a-half years, they used to calculate the tax paid by Mumbai and Maharashtra and (demand) it should

Delhi poll win: BJP to form SIT to probe corruption

MI News Service, New Delhi: BJP announced to form a Special Investigation Team at the first Cabinet meeting of the new government to probe corruption cases.

Delhi BJP chief Virendra Sachdeva said the party has "zero tolerance" for corruption and

those involved in scams will be held accountable.

"As Prime Minister Narendra Modi said many times, and so did we, the CAG report will be presented during the first Cabinet meeting. We will also form a Special Investigation Team (SIT) to investigate all corrup-

tion cases," Sachdeva told PTI Videos.

Commenting on the BJP sweeping Delhi polls with 48 seats in the 70-member House, Sachdeva credited Prime Minister Modi and BJP president J P Nadda for guiding the party to suc-

cess. He emphasised that Delhi's voters backed the BJP for development, expressing confidence in Modi's leadership.

On the rout of the Congress which drew a blank for the third time in a row, Sachdeva said despite being a historically significant party, it

has suffered a major downfall and should "work harder".

Regarding the BJP's chief ministerial face for Delhi, Sachdeva said the party follows a systematic approach and leaves such decisions to the central leadership, as was seen in other states.

Mahakumbh: Fire breaks out in 'kalpvasi' tent



MI News Service, Prayagraj: A fire broke out in a 'kalpvasi' tent in Sector 19 of here at the Maha Kumbh on Sunday due to a leak in

a gas cylinder, officials said. Firefighters managed to extinguish the blaze within 10 minutes and no casualties were reported.

Chief Fire Officer (Kumbh) Pramod Sharma told PTI that the fire was reported in a tent set up by Om Prakash Pandey Seva Sansthan and belonged to Rajendra Jaiswal, resident of Karma, Prayagraj. Upon receiving the alert, three fire tenders were immediately dispatched to the scene.

The fire was contained within 10 minutes, but the tent was completely gutted, he said.

There have been three major fires at the Maha Kumbh besides multiple minor incidents.

Earlier on February 7, a fire

broke out in the ISKCON camp in Sector 18 of Mahakumbh Nagar and spread over to a dozen nearby camps. While no one was injured in the fire, around 20 tents were destroyed. On January 19, a massive fire broke out in the Maha Kumbh Mela area's Sector 19 due to a cylinder blast. While no casualties were reported, the blaze had left over a dozen camps gutted.

Earlier on January 25, two cars caught fire in Sector 2 of the Maha Kumbh fair area, but no casualties were reported. Short circuit in one car led to the fire which then spread to the other vehicle parked next to it, according to officials.

Ceasefire deal: IDF withdrawing from key Gaza corridor

MI News Service, Tel Aviv: Israeli official said Sunday that Israeli forces have begun withdrawing from a key Gaza corridor, part of a ceasefire deal with Hamas that is moving ahead.

Israel agreed as part of the truce to remove its forces from the Netzarim corridor, a strip of land that bisects northern Gaza from the south. The official spoke on condition of anonymity be-

cause he wasn't authorized to discuss troop movement with the media.

At the start of the ceasefire, Israel began allowing Palestinians to cross Netzarim to head to their

homes in the war-battered north and the withdrawal of forces from the area will fulfil another commitment to the deal. It was not clear how many troops Israel had withdrawn on Sunday.

Delhi polls: 80% of total candidates, including 67 Cong leaders, lose deposits

MI News Service, New Delhi: Congress candidates lost their security deposits on all but three seats in the Delhi Assembly polls as nearly 80 per cent of all contenders, including those contesting independently, forfeited their deposits. All the candidates of the AAP, BJP and its allies, Janata Dal (United) and LJP (Ram Vilas) managed to save their security deposits after the election results were declared on Saturday.

Out of the 699 candidates in the fray, 555

(79.39 per cent) candidates forfeited their deposits in the February 5 polls. It was a sorry state of affairs for the Congress that not only drew a blank in terms of seats for a third time in a row, but 67 of its candidates also lost their security deposits.

The Congress, which ruled Delhi for three consecutive terms till 2013, had fielded candidates in all 70 constituencies. Only three Congress candidates -- Abhishek Dutt from Kasturba

Nagar, the only leader from the party to finish second, Rohit Choudhary from Nangloi Jat and Devendra Yadav from Badli -- managed to save their security deposits. Shifa-ur-Rehman Khan of AIMIM, which contested two seats, also managed to save his security deposit in Okhla. According to the Representation of the People Act, 1951, any candidate from the general category contesting an election is required to deposit Rs 10,000 with the Election Commission as a security deposit.

For candidates from Scheduled Castes and Tribes, the amount required to be deposited is Rs 5,000. According to electoral law, the deposit will have to be forfeited if the candidate is not elected and the number of valid votes polled by him or her does not exceed one-sixth of the total number of valid votes polled by all the candidates. The BJP returned to power in Delhi after more than 26 years, winning 48 of the 70 assembly seats while the AAP won 22 seats.

World Martial Artists Council Expands Historic Free Karate Training Program for 100,000 Students

MI News Service, Kolkata: In a landmark initiative, The World Martial Artists Council (WMAC), in association with the Indian Karate Association, has launched the world's first free karate training program for students. This initiative, which began in Kolkata, aims to train 100,000 students across 100 schools annually, providing them free martial arts training up to Black Belt certification. The program is designed to empower children by improving their physical fitness, discipline, and self-defense skills while also preparing them for state, national, and international championships.

In today's digital age, children are increasingly spending time on mobile phones and other electronic devices, leading to a decline in physical activity and overall health. This program is a direct response to this issue, ensuring that young students engage in structured physical training, fostering mental resilience, confidence, and teamwork. The training will not only provide self-defense techniques but will also instill values such as perseverance, leadership, and respect, which are essential for both personal and professional growth.

After the successful launch in Kolkata, the initiative is now set to expand across India and eventually to schools worldwide, making it the largest martial arts training initiative ever undertaken. HRH Prince Dr. M.A. Ali, Director of the World Martial Artists Council, emphasized the long-term vision of the program, stating, "Martial arts are not just about fighting—they are about instilling discipline, self-confidence, and perseverance. Through this initiative, we want to ensure that every child, regardless of their financial background, gets the opportunity to train and grow into a strong and responsible individual. This is a mis-



Two young girls in red and black karate uniforms standing outdoors.

sion to build a healthier and more disciplined society, starting from the grassroots." To mark the significance of this initiative, the World Martial Artists Council has sought messages and blessings from the Hon'ble Prime Minister, President of India, Chief Minister of West Bengal, Governor of West Bengal, Minister of Sports, and Minister of Education. Their support and words of encouragement are expected to serve as a source of inspiration for students, trainers, and schools participating in this historic initiative.

The World Martial Artists Council is also the organizer of the prestigious World Meet, an internationally recognized martial arts championship that has gained global prominence. The first World Meet was held in Bangkok, Thailand, in 2019, and since then, it has grown into one of the most respected platforms for

martial arts excellence. The 5th edition was successfully hosted in Manchester, United Kingdom, with participation from 50+ countries, highlighting the event's international reputation. The 6th World Meet recently concluded in Indonesia, where Indian athletes competed on a global stage, proudly representing the country.

Messages from World Meet Officials Tony Taylor from USA, an official of the World Meet, applauded the initiative, stating, "This program is a game-changer in the world of martial arts. Offering free training at such a scale has never been done before, and I believe it will transform the lives of thousands of children."

Shahid Mehmood from UK, another key official, emphasized the importance of discipline and self-defense, saying, "In today's world, self-defense is not just a skill but a necessity. This initiative will not only make children physically strong but also instill in them the values of hard work and perseverance."

Princess Mufeeda Mubara, from Indonesia, a strong advocate for youth empowerment, expressed her excitement, stating, "This is a groundbreaking step toward making martial arts accessible to everyone. I hope to see this initiative grow worldwide, shaping future leaders and champions."

With this initiative, the World Martial Artists Council is not just creating athletic athletes—it is shaping the future of young minds and instilling a culture of fitness and discipline across the nation. Schools across India are invited to be a part of this transformative journey, which aims to redefine the role of martial arts in education and society. This program stands as a historic step toward making martial arts accessible to all and reinforcing India's leadership in the global sports arena.

Firecracker units in Kalyani reject relocation proposal after deadly explosion

MI News Service, Kalyani: All firecracker units at Kalyani in Nadia district, including the one where an explosion killed four women labourers on Friday, had been offered an alternative location to set up the factories, but none of them accepted the proposal, said a member of an association of firecracker makers.

The alternative location was offered at Char Kancharpara in Nadia district as part of the state government's efforts to set up green cracker clusters across the state.

The reluctance of the units to relocate to the proposed cluster was confirmed by Babla Roy, a member of a state government-appointed committee and chairman of Sara Bangla Atashaji Unnayan Samiti, a TMC-affiliated union. The committee was constituted to oversee the establishment of green cracker clusters.

"I persuaded them to shift to Char Kancharpara, where the government proposed to give land free of cost and extend assistance in obtaining required manufacturing licences for green firecrackers. But none agreed as they felt the new site was too far from their home-cum-factory," said Roy, before criticising police for lack of surveillance that allowed the units to operate in areas with high population density.

Roy further alleged that Opposition parties played a role in misleading the units.

"They were offered land free of cost and the necessary assistance, yet they refused. It seems the Opposition parties discouraged them from relocating," he added.

According to him, this resistance hindered the establishment of a regulated cluster in Kalyani despite the government's best efforts.

Instead of relocating to the proposed cluster site, several unit owners in Kalyani have been putting pressure on the association to ensure necessary clearance to operate in areas where they have been located for years.



In celebration of Valentine's Day on February 14th, the two-day fashion lifestyle exhibition Come Runway 2025 was held by Pink Roses Entertainment at a banquet in Fulbagan on February 8th. Pink Roses Entertainment's owner is an international model, actress and social activist Hina Kausar organised this event. The exhibition featured stalls of designer outfits along with stalls of handicrafts made by differently-abled children and the products of women who want to be self-reliant but don't get a platform. Stalls in cell system so that they can be self-reliant. Hina Kausar has been doing a lot of work in the past, trying to bring forward the talented boys and girls in the fashion world, who have been left behind in the society for a long time. This time also, through the organization of the runway, those who want to introduce themselves in the world of glamor tried to give an opportunity.

Bangla Paksha's Fish and Rice Festival

Nurul Islam Khan

There is a traditional Bengali tradition of fish and rice. Bengalis are gradually falling behind in various aspects. They are not lagging behind only in private jobs but also in various government employment opportunities. Even after being born in this land of Bengal, they are stuck in many ways. Starting from being attacked, they have to digest abuses by raising the Bengali caste in rude language. An organization called Bangla Paksha is protesting in such a difficult time. The workers of this organization have stood around. They have largely preserved the tradition of Bengal by protesting against various problems of Bengalis. But on Sunday, Bangla Paksha organized an exceptional feast near Girish Park and Baro Bazar. There was an arrangement of big, big rui and katla fish. There, ordinary Bengalis ate fish and rice free of cost. It is said that this food festival was



organized to bring back the ancient tradition of Bengalis who eat fish and rice. The head of the organization, Garga Chatterjee, said that councillor Minadevi Purohit cannot tolerate Bengalis eating fish and rice. She feels very uncomfortable. After this came into public, the organization concerned started a movement. They decided to organize a fish and rice festival. Their statement is that this is a Bengali tradition. 90 percent of people love to eat fish and rice. If any person has any difficulty, let him go to his native land. We will eat our food. He also said that if we go to Bihar or

Uttar Pradesh and talk about Bengali culture, why will they push us out? What we eat and what we study is our fundamental right. We will not listen to any leader in this matter. In Bengal, the sons of the land, Bengalis are constantly being deprived. This organization has been working against that contempt and deprivation for a long time. To be honest, the menu of Bengalis' favorite fish rice dishes turned into a festival. Fish fry, fish broth and fish curry were all over the place. The fish dishes were delicious. Many people, including top leader Kaushik Maiti, were present.



A man was killed and many huts were burnt when a fire broke out in the Narkeldanga slum on Saturday midnight in Kolkata.

Indian Gorkha Janshakti Front chief Ajoy Edwards amplifies tea bonus, land protests

MI News Service, Darjeeling: The Indian Gorkha Janshakti Front (IGJF) held a rally and public meeting in Mirik on Saturday, a pointer to the tea protest in the Darjeeling hills getting structured, raising an alarm in the industry.

Protests have been simmering over the non-implementation of minimum wages, the state notification to grant 5 decimals of land to tea workers and the failure to get a 20 per cent bonus in the last couple of years.

However, these protests had mostly been scattered and lacked cohesion.

The Ajoy Edwards-led IGJF is giving structure to these protests, which gained new momentum after chief minister Mamata Banerjee last Tuesday announced that her government would allow investors to use 30 per cent of tea garden land for non-tea use from the previous ceiling of 15 per cent.

"These (hills) are our kiptat (our homeland). We have no vacant space for others, forget about 30 per cent, we don't have even 1 per cent vacant space. There will be no survey, too (for the 5 decimal land scheme)," said Edwards.

Edwards, who is also an elected Gorkhaland Territorial Administration (GTA) Sabha member, announced a series of protests.

"If there is no concrete solution on the bonus issue, no one in the hills will pluck first flush tea," said Edwards.


First flush plucking is set to start on February 27 and this leaf fetches the highest price. Edwards wants the bonus negotiation to take place not during the Puja period but immediately.

The tea management, which is worried over Edwards' protest call, has said that the finances of the gardens would be clear only on March 31. They have hinted that negotiations would be possible only then. "We are closely monitoring the developments," said an industry source.

The IGJF also came down heavily on GTA chief Anit Thapa, who is the president of the Bharatiya Gorkha Prajatantrik Morcha (BGPM) and an ally of the Trinamool Congress in the hills.

Edwards said that since Thapa is close to chief minister Mamata Banerjee, he should come up with a solution on minimum wages and 5 decimal land issue and get the 30 per cent land cap scrapped within a week.

"If he cannot solve this issue within a week, we will take our protest to Kurseong," said Edwards. Thapa hails from Kurseong.



SEBAASHRAY

সকলের সুস্বাস্থ্য, আমাদের অঙ্গীকার



Total Registrations since inception

5,91,495



Registrations as on 08/02/2025*

12,104

AC: Metiabruz

Day 7

*As of 7:30 PM, 08/02/2025



Through free cataract surgeries, 7 residents of Bishnupur have regained their vision.

MI News Service, Kolkata: In a world where many only dream of change, MP Shri @abhishekaic turns those dreams into reality with his unwavering commitment to public welfare. Healthcare should not be a privilege rationed by affordability or accessibility; it should be a fundamental right, delivered with urgency and intent. That is what Sebaashray has stood for since Day 1, and 37 days later, the momentum has only intensified. Through free cataract surgeries, 7 residents of Bishnupur have regained their vision. Referred from the Bishnupur Model Camp to Renuka Eye Institute, their journey towards independence reflects the power of accessible healthcare. Since inception, 5,91,495 patients have received free, professional healthcare. Just today, 12,104 people were served at the 34 Health Camps in Metiabruz. As long as there are people who need care, Sebaashray will keep pushing forward! Cataracts, a widespread affliction among the elderly, slowly obscure their world, eroding their independence and diminishing their quality of life. At #Sebaashray, where service is not charity but duty, we remain resolute in addressing such challenges head-on. Today, nine elderly individuals, referred from the Bishnupur Model Sebaashray Camp, underwent successful, free cataract surgeries at Renuka Eye Insti-

tute, reclaiming their vision, confidence, and autonomy. As Sebaashray continues its mission to tackle diverse health challenges, our commitment remains unshaken – no elderly individual should be left in the darkness of impaired vision when the gift of sight can be restored. Yesterday, in Lok Sabha, I clinically dissected the Union Budget, laying bare the STARK NEGLECT OF PUBLIC HEALTHCARE. India, a nation of 140 crore people, spends just 3% of its GDP on healthcare, trailing far behind China's 5% and the USA's 16%. For a country of this scale, this is not just inadequate, it is an OUTRIGHT BETRAYAL. 100% FDI in insurance? APPROVED. 18% GST on health insurance? UNCHANGED. Public hospital infrastructure? OVERLOOKED. This is not healthcare reform; this is a RIGGED GAME, designed to serve profit over people. But against this apathy, Diamond Harbour is proving that an alternative model exists – one rooted in SERVICE, not profiteering. Today, the 34 Health Camps in Metiabruz served 12,104 INDIVIDUALS. 8,945 PATIENTS underwent critical health screenings. 12,488 patients received free medicines. 45 critical cases were identified and referred for advanced care. At Diamond Harbour, we are setting an example for the rest of the country to follow!

Import of Nepal teas hits Indian brew: Planters demand immediate government action

MI News Service, Siliguri: The unbridled influx of tea from Nepal is affecting both the domestic and international markets of Indian tea, stakeholders of the north Bengal tea industry said on Saturday.

"Around 25 to 30 million kilos of poor-quality teas are being imported into India in a year and the maximum amount comes from Nepal. This is because no import duty is charged according to the bilateral trade agreement (between India and Nepal). Nepal teas are sold domestically and exported to other countries as Indian teas. This is affecting the market and the

repute of the brew produced in India," said Prabir Bhattacharjee, the secretary general of the Tea Association of India (TAI). He was speaking at the 53rd annual general meeting of the association held at the Toorsa Gymkhana Club in Kalchini, Alipurduar district, on Saturday.

Bhattacharjee said because of the lower cost of tea production, countries like Indonesia, Vietnam, Malaysia, Nepal, and Kenya have the potential to offer average-quality tea at much lower prices, even after considering transportation charges.

"A minimum import

price of teas should be fixed in consonance with the average auction price of the country to stop the influx of cheaper teas, especially from Nepal. Also, the mechanism of inspection should be strengthened to ensure that teas imported into India comply with the guidelines of FSSAI," he added.

At the meeting, the planters said the total tea production in 2024 in India was around 1,285 million kilos, which is around 109 million kilos or eight per cent less than the production in 2023. In north Bengal, the total production in 2024 was 373.48 million kilos.



People participated in a Half Marathon organized by Kolkata Police in Kolkata on Sunday.

Concept of fund flow from centre...

From PG 1
get back that much amount (of central funds)," Goyal said.

The parliamentarian from Mumbai North was apparently referring to the previous Uddhav Thackeray-led Maha Vikas Aghadi government.

"There are some states like Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Telangana which say they should get back the amount of taxes they have paid. There can't be any (greater) petty thinking (chhoti soch) than this. There cannot be anything (more) unfortunate than this," he said. But there is no need to worry now as the present BJP-led gov-

ernment in Maharashtra is very sensitive towards Northeast India, the minister added.

The Modi government at the Centre, for the last 11 years, has been following "Act East" and "Look East" policy, prioritising Northeast India, said Goyal. Under the Modi government, the capitals of the northeastern states are being connected by railway and a network of highways is being built, he said.

PM Modi has visited the Northeast more than 65 times, he noted, and urged the people to visit the region at least once to see its beauty and culture.

CNMC celebrates 73rd gathering

MI News Service, Kolkata: The Calcutta National Medical College (CNMC) recently celebrated their 73rd re-union. Ninety-one-year-old Dulal Chandra Dalui has rarely missed his college reunions, this time it was no different.

In 1994, Dalui retired as the head of the surgery department of Calcutta National Medical College (CNMC&H) and Hospital, also his alma mater.

Many of his students, some in their 80s, sat surrounding him in a circle as they reminisced about their student days in the medical college.

Over 2,000 students, past and present, of Calcutta National Medical College and Hospital came to the campus on the first day of Plexus, the 73rd reunion of the medical college.

"I was a student here between 1952 and 1957. Later, I joined the medical college as a doctor and worked here till my retirement," said Dalui.

Scientific sessions on speciality care such as spine injury, cardio-kidney metabolic (CKM) syndrome, nephrology and neurosurgery are part of the reunion celebrations.

A photo booth with the word "Nationalites" printed on the backdrop was a favourite among both former and present students. A quiz contest,

an antakshari competition and a debate, which will be held on the final day, are among the most awaited events of the reunion. Six debaters will discuss: "This House believes medicine is a grossly overrated profession".

"Every year, one batch organises the reunion. This year, it fell upon those who entered college in 1989," said orthopaedic surgeon Rajib Basu, one of the organisers.

Siddhartha Sankar Ray or Sidhu, lead vocalist of the Bengali rock band Cactus, is from the batch. Ray, however, chose a career in music over medicine and achieved huge success.

"Cactus has had 1,600 shows since its inception. Today's show is among the most special shows. Cactus performed for the first time at Calcutta National Medical College in 1992. Today's performance in the reunion organised by my batch is very special to me," said Ray.

Jayita Bhatta and Suchetana Sengupta, both among the organisers, were discussing how a wall that used to stand surrounding the ground where the dais has been set up no longer exists. "Most of our time used to be spent around these walls. The panchil (wall) was something special for the students in our time," said Bhatta.

Bangladesh now a crime den: Mayor



"The inefficient (Muhammad) Yunus government is ruining Bangladesh. India should immediately interfere," he added.

Hakim harped on the role played by the Indian government during Bangladesh's liberation war. "(Then) Prime Minister Indira Gandhi had opened the doors because of the torture in the neighbouring country. If India did not stand by them, the Pakistan army would have crushed and slaughtered them. India stood for humanity... It is sad to see their condition today."

"Human rights are being violated. A Hindu does not have the right to live? An artiste does not have the right to live?" added Hakim.

MI News Service, Kolkata: A hub of culture has turned into "a hub of criminals, a hub of hooligans" under the "inefficient" Muhammad Yunus government, Kolkata Mayor Firhad Hakim said when asked about the current situation of Bangladesh.

"We should not comment on foreign affairs, but as Bengalis all of us have been pained. Bangladesh was a cultural hub for us. Now it is a hub of criminals, hub of hooligans," Hakim said.

Investment fraud: Police arrest 2

MI News Service, Kolkata: The cyber crime wing of Kolkata Police has made a major breakthrough in an investment fraud by arresting two persons and recovering Rs 3 lakh along with several articles that were used for running the racket. According to police sources, one Munira Safadar, a resident of New CIT Road under Bowbazar PS area was induced and tempted to "invest" for high returns. To gain her confidence, documents apparently issued by a reputed American international bank, SEBI etc were shared and the complainant in different phases, gave away Rs 9.15 lakh altogether.

The cyber sleuths who had earlier arrested 6 persons worked on a money trail in which about Rs 1.5 lakh was transferred from the victim's account in two tranches on April 29 and 30 last year. It was found that the current account belonged to an old lady residing in Howrah. Focusing on

the aspect of the account operation led the sleuths to two persons namely Abhishek Tewari (42) and Tista Sen (40) who were arrested on Saturday early morning after a night-long raid at Vedic Village.

The arrested duo not only operated this account, they, in fact, dealt with many such accounts, and have been instrumental in routing the defrauded amount through a network of accounts. Most importantly, the sleuths seized several articles that include seven mobile phones (including the one connected in this case), 59 SIM cards (including the subject SIMs), 19 stamps, 31 bank ATM cards, including the one involved in this case, 9 Pan cards, one laptop, one external hard disk, KMC documents, Rs 3 lakh cash etc. An Excel file containing 245 bank accounts' controlling credentials like account numbers, mobile numbers, g-mail ids, passwords, etc were also recovered.

New Town minor's death: Autopsy reveals victim 'strangled to death'

MI News Service, Kolkata: The preliminary post-mortem report of the minor girl whose body with torn apparel was recovered from a bush on land near the Lohapool in New Town on Friday morning has revealed that she was strangled to death. One of the several CCTV footage recovered by the police during the course of the investigation has identified the minor seated in between two youths on a motorcycle.

The sleuths are trying to find out where they went. Evidence of using force on the minor has also been found with injuries in her genitals and nail

scratches in several parts of her body. However, the allegations of rape that surfaced can be ascertained only after the detailed post-mortem report matched with other evidence.

The victim was earlier a resident of Shyamnagar area in New Town but presently lived in Gouranganagar area. The victim was seen along with two youths from Gouranganagar to Jatragachi. Tracing the two youths is the top priority for the sleuths to unearth the case. A case under the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act has already been registered by the police.

Police arrest 1 for 'impersonation' & 'rape'



MI News Service, Kolkata: The Jadavpur Police Station has arrested a person on charges of impersonation and allegedly raping a student, with the false promise of offering her a role in acting. A family member of the victim, based at Baghajatin, had filed a complaint that sometime on or before February 7, two persons namely Pratik Pal alias Sayan and Tapan Pal alias Aniket Basu hatched up a criminal conspiracy and al-

legedly impersonated and raped her and later threatened the victim with dire consequences if she opened out with the matter.

The two had posed as film directors and took advantage of the victims' desire to act in films. Acting on the complaint, police arrested Tapan from Bijoyanagar area on Friday night. Another accused Pratik Paul (37) of Nonacharan Pukur Bazar under Titagarh PS is still absconding.

Bengal govt forms SLISC

MI News Service, Kolkata: To accelerate the investment and project clearance process, the state government announced the formation of the state-level Investment Synergy Committee (SLISC). The committee will be headed by state chief secretary Manoj Pant with heads of 19 departments and directorates/organisations being a part. The initiative is to provide a streamlined, single-window interface for approvals, enabling entrepreneurs and investors to obtain required clearances without unnecessary delays. The steps are to ensure a

seamless flow of information, efficient redressal of issues and institutionalise best practices from within the departments. This new system shall also build an effective monitoring and follow-up mechanism, synergise inter-departmental coordination, increase efficacy and transparency into the system and integrate with other related online portals for creating a single bucket of information for intending investors.

The departments in the Committee include Industry and Commerce (convenor), MSME, Public Works Department, Urban

Development and Municipal Affairs, Fire and Emergency Services, Labour, Home and Hill Affairs, Land and Land Reforms, Finance, Environment, Power, Panchayat and Rural Development, Public Health Engineering, Forest, Tourism, Information Technology, Law, Police Directorate and Pollution Control Board.

The SLISC will be a single-point interface facilitating timely approvals. It will remove bottlenecks through interdepartmental coordination and enable real-time monitoring of projects. It will further ensure grievance redres-

sal and data integration.

The committee will sit fortnightly to review and address pending applications. The Industry and Commerce department will provide secretariat assistance to the committee. There will be an Investment Synergy Committee at district level which will be headed by the District Magistrate for taking up issues with the SLISC for prompt interventions as and when required. The SLISC would further strengthen Bengal's position as a leading investment destination and provide unmatched support to investors.

Madhyamik: WBTC mulls plying 'exam special' buses

MI News Service, Kolkata: The West Bengal Transport Corporation (WBTC) has announced special bus services for Madhyamik examinees on exam days to ensure that they reach their examination centres on time without any difficulties.

The Madhyamik examinations begin on Monday, February 10, and will continue until February 22. Exams are scheduled for February 10, 11, 15, 17, 18, 19, 20 and 22. Nine special buses will operate on these exam days at 9 am and 2:15 pm on various routes in Kolkata and surrounding areas to facilitate student travel. The designated routes include Tollygunge to Ghatakpur, Howrah Station to Mohan Ghosh Col-

lege, Barasat to Amtala WBTC Bus Stand, Park Circus to Dankuni, Rajabazar to Ghatakpur, Howrah Station to Amtala WBTC Bus Stand, Barasat to Barrackpore, Rajabazar to Chaitolghat, and Belgachia to Tikiapara via BBD Bag. In addition to these services, a non-AC standby bus will be stationed at Esplanade Compound from 8:30 am to 3:00 pm to handle any emergencies. Apart from buses, WBTC will also operate two special tram services for examinees. These trams will run on Route 5 from Shyambazar Terminus to Esplanade and Route 25 from Gariahat to Esplanade at 9 am and 2:15 pm. Regular fares will be charged on all special buses and

trams, which will be marked with 'Examination Special' signs. To accommodate the increased demand for transport on exam days, WBTC will deploy an adequate number of buses. Leave restrictions will be imposed on crew members during this period, except in cases of extreme emergencies. However, exemptions will be granted to employees with children appearing for the exams or those taking the exams themselves. On-duty crew members have been instructed to assist students and their companions throughout their journey. To ensure smooth operations, buses will be concentrated between 6:30 am to 10 am, and 2 pm to 5 pm on exam days.

Rapido proposes Rs 150-Cr investment in Bengal

MI News Service, Kolkata: Ride-sharing platform Rapido has proposed to invest Rs 150 crore in the mobility and infrastructure segment in West Bengal with majority of the investment expected to go into urban mobility, the company said. Announcing the signing of an initial pact with the state's transport department to this effect, Rapido said as part of the partnership it will introduce a dedicated fleet of pink-coloured two-wheelers and four-wheelers, driven by women captains, ensuring a secure and

comfortable experience for female passengers under its Pink Mobility Initiative, a programme designed to provide safe and reliable commuting options for women. Currently, executing 1 lakh rides per day across Bengal, Rapido's operations have become an integral part of daily commuting in the state, the company said.

"As part of this collaboration, Rapido will invest Rs 150 crore towards key initiatives focused on electric mobility, women's safety in transportation, and road safety aware-

ness. A significant portion of this investment -- Rs 130 crore -- will be directed towards the development of urban electric mobility," Rapido said.

The company said it aims to deploy electric vehicles across Kolkata and other parts of the state while also working on building the necessary infrastructure to support a seamless transition to sustainable transportation for improving last-mile connectivity.

"West Bengal has always been an important market for us. Our invest-

ment in electric mobility and the Pink Mobility fleets reflect our commitment to sustainable and women-friendly transport solutions. We look forward to working closely with the Transport Department (of West Bengal)," said Pavan Guntupalli, Co-founder of Rapido. To further encourage women's participation in the transport sector, Rapido will provide financial assistance worth Rs 12 crore over the next three years, enabling women captains to own and operate their vehicles, the company said.

KMC to hand over vending certificates to hawkers

MI News Service, Kolkata: Based on the survey conducted by it as part of its hawk policy, the Kolkata Municipal Corporation (KMC) will soon begin handing over vending certificates to registered hawkers. The civic body had last year conducted a hawker survey, both physical and digital, to identify hawkers and get them registered.

This was done to streamline their trade in a

bid to prevent random encroachment of pavements. Several hawking zones were identified where the registered hawkers would be given designated spaces for trade. According to the KMC's survey, the number of registered hawkers in the city is around 54,000. The survey recorded the place of business, name, PAN and Aadhaar card details of each hawker. In addition, the location of the hawkers was precisely

marked through digital geo-tagging. This will ensure they are not moving out of their designated spaces. According to the KMC officials, in addition to demarcating specific places for hawkers to do business, non-vending zones were also identified. IT is being expected that the streamlining of hawkers will reduce traffic congestion and help prevent road accidents by leaving adequate space on the

pavement for pedestrians who are otherwise pushed onto the road due to hawkers grabbing footpaths.

The main objective of the hawk policy is to reduce encroachment and ensure the convenience of pedestrians. Mayor Firhad Hakim said that everyone has the right to earn livelihood but not by putting others in jeopardy. "We are not against hawkers but we want safety for pedestrians," he had said.

Raj Bhawan issues legal notice to 2 TMC MLAs

MI News Service, Kolkata: The Raj Bhawan sent a fresh legal notice to TMC MLAs of Bhagwanga and Baranagar — Reyat Hossain Sarkar and Syantika Banerjee. The MLAs stated they would respond to the notice legally. The notice relates to their absence at Raj Bhawan for oath-taking. After a month-long standoff

between Raj Bhawan and the state Assembly, Speaker Biman Banerjee ultimately administered the oaths to TMC MLAs Rayat Hossain Sarkar (Bhagwanga) and Syantika Banerjee (Baranagar).

Governor C V Ananda Bose wrote to President Droupadi Murmu, dubbing that the Assembly Speaker administering oaths

to two newly elected TMC MLAs was a "violation of the Constitution". Governor later appointed Deputy Speaker Asish Banerjee to administer oaths of the two MLAs. The Deputy Speaker, however, refused to administer the oath as it would insult the chair of the Speaker as the latter was present in the Assembly.

Bengal govt to allow 30% of tea garden land for non-tea purposes

MI News Service, Kolkata: The Bengal government has decided to allow 30 per cent of tea garden land for non-tea purposes in a bid to encourage estate owners to explore alternative business activities. The announcement was made by chief minister Mamata Banerjee. She said, "We have taken some decisions. Now, wherever in tea gardens, land is available, where tea plantations are not there, we are allowing 30 per cent for hotel business, for commercial utilisation, for eco-tourism purposes."

Earlier, the state had allowed 15 per cent of tea garden land, which are given to estate owners under long term lease, for non-tea activities. The state

believes it would allow tea gardens to generate additional revenue at a time the tea plantation sector is going through a downcycle as supply outstrips demand. The CM said the decision would create employment for local people. Many tea gardens in north Bengal have taken advantage of the existing scheme and submitted proposals to develop tourism, healthcare and education facilities. The most successful diversification gambit has so far been Ambuja Neotia's hotel, operated by Taj, in Makaibari tea estate. Tea garden owners welcomed the decision. "Given the distress in Dooars and Darjeeling, it is a good step," they said.



Gujarat govt forms panel for UCC

MI News Service, Vadodhara: The Gujarat government formed a committee under a retired Supreme Court judge to assess the need for the Uniform Civil Code in the state and prepare a draft bill for the same. The five-member committee, to be headed by former Supreme Court judge Ranjana Desai, will submit its report within 45 days, Gujarat Chief Minister Bhupendra Patel said. "To assess the need for a Uniform Civil Code (UCC) and to prepare a draft bill for the same, we have decided to form a committee under the former judge of the Supreme Court," he said. The state government will take a decision about the implementation of the UCC after receiving the report.

Anti-ragging norms: UGC issues show-cause notices to 18 med colleges

MI News Service, New Delhi: The UGC has issued show-cause notices to 18 medical colleges for non-compliance with anti-ragging regulations, officials said. The defaulter colleges include two each in Delhi, Tamil Nadu, Assam and Puducherry; three each in Andhra Pradesh and Bihar; and one each in Madhya Pradesh, Telangana, West Bengal and Uttar Pradesh. "It was found that these colleges had not complied with the mandatory requirements set forth in the Anti-Ragging Regulations, 2009, for curbing the menace of ragging. Specifically, it has come to our notice that the institutions failed to obtain the anti-ragging undertakings from students as required by the said regulations," University Grants Commission (UGC) Secretary Manish Joshi said. The Anti-Ragging Regulations, 2009, mandate that every student and their parents and guardians must submit an anti-ragging undertaking at the time of admission and at the beginning of every academic year. "This undertaking is a crucial measure to prevent and deter any incidents of ragging within educational institutions. The failure to secure these undertakings not only constitutes non-compliance with the regulations but also puts the well-being and safety of the students at risk," Joshi said. The colleges have been directed to submit a written explanation within seven days from the date of receiving the notice, detailing the reasons for the lapse and the steps they intended to take to immediately rectify this situation. "Failure to provide a satisfactory explanation within the stipulated time frame will compel us to proceed with further necessary actions as per the provisions of the Anti-Ragging Regulations, 2009, including but not limited to the imposition of penalties and other corrective measures," Joshi added.



Boxer Mary Kom at Coal India Marathon 2025 event at Birsa Munda Football Stadium in Ranchi.

Centre slashes funding for NIRDPR

MI News Service, New Delhi: The future of a national institution tasked with training officials and public representatives in rural development has come under question as funds allocation to it has nosedived from ₹73.68 crore in the revised estimate of 2024-25 to just ₹1 lakh in the budget of 2025-26. The National Institute of Rural Development and Panchayati Raj (NIRDPR), under the rural development ministry, conducts training for capacity building of officials and elected members of gram panchayats and zilla parishads on bookkeeping and modalities of implementing rural development schemes. It also handles the State Institutes for Rural Development (SIRDs) and district extension training centres. The Hyderabad-based NIRDPR, which has nearly 100 faculty members, offers a regular postgraduate diploma in rural development management and three courses in the distance mode. The employees' association of the NIRDPR has issued a statement expressing shock and concern about the future of its 222 staffers. "The decision has shocked and disheartened the 222 employees and their families who now face an uncertain future. What makes the situation more distressing is that the disengagement decision was taken without consulting the employees, including 54 from the



SC, seven from the ST and 56 from the OBC categories.... The unexpected move raises critical concerns about the government's commitment to rural development and decentralisation," said the statement. Social activist Nikhil Dey said the allocation suggested that the government seemed to have decided to close down the NIRDPR. "The allocation of ₹1 lakh for the NIRDPR gives an impression that the institute will be closed down. Apart from training officials and public representatives, it also conducts studies to evaluate schemes. It will be a big loss to the nation if it is closed down," Dey said. N.K. Sahu, a former economic adviser to the rural development ministry, said the decline in allocation may lead to a collapse of the manpower training ecosystem. "The entire rural development ecosystem of the training of manpower will break down. The government needs to have a relook at the allocation," Sahu said. He said every institution had its shortcomings and the government must take steps to re-vamp them, but such an abrupt and sharp reduction in funds allocation may not be the correct way forward.

Sealdah Division has done Girder Launching for another Foot Over Bridge at Basuldanga kolkata, 9th Feb, 2025.

MI News Service, Kolkata: On the intervening night of 8th and 9th Feb, Sealdah Division has accomplished yet another Mega infrastructure development work by Foot Over Bridge Girder Launching at Basuldanga in Sealdah South Section. Construction of a 3 meter wide FOB at Basuldanga will specifically reduce congestion on the platforms by making it easier for commuters to board trains. The modern design and advanced safety features of the FOB will provide more comfortable travel experience and facilitate easy movement in between platforms. A traffic and power block for nine and half hours were taken from 20:30 hours of 08.02.2025 to 8:00 hours of 09.02.2025 to complete the construction work. However, the much awaited infrastructure work was accomplished much before the deadline and the block was cancelled at 06:30 hours, i.e., before 01 hr 30 min. This achievement was possible only because of immaculate planning, perfect execution and fantastic coordination in between Engineering, Operating, TRD, Signal & Tele-



com and Commercial Departments under the inspiring and dynamic leadership of Sri Deepak Nigam, DRM/Sealdah. Under the shadow of this mega block, a number of long pending installation and maintenance works were done pertaining to Engineering, S&T, Operating and Electrical Departments. It was even more commendable to wind up such huge shadow works as detailed here under :- 1. At Mograhat - 3 number high thrust point machine with thick web switch installed and crossing also changed. 2. Hotar - 2 numbers high thrust IRS clamp type points machine along with thick web switch installed. 3. Deep screening of plain track by the BCM machine was done for 625 meters. 4. Deep screening at the platform no line no. 2 in Baruipur was done by a modified BCM machine. 5. Total number of welding done=116.

Unlawful religious conversions: Rajasthan introduces new bill

MI News Service, Jaipur: The Rajasthan Prohibition of Unlawful Conversion of Religion Bill, 2025 was introduced in the ongoing Budget Session of the state Assembly. The offence under the anti-conversion bill will be cognisable and non-bailable and triable by a court.

The Bill is aimed at prohibiting unlawful conversion from one religion to another and has provisions for imprisonment of up to 10 years and a fine of up to Rs 50,000. It was introduced by Health Minister Gajendra Singh Khinvsar and will be passed by the House following a debate during the session.

Religious conversion by misrepresentation, force, undue influence, coercion, allurement or by any fraudulent means or by marriage has been made an offence in the Bill. The Bill provisions imprisonment

for a term not less than one year but it may extend to five years with a fine of Rs 15,000. Those who violate the rules in respect of a minor, a woman or a person belonging to the Scheduled Caste or Scheduled Tribe shall be punished with imprisonment for a term of two years which may extend to 10 years along with a fine of Rs 25,000. The bill provisions three years of jail extending up to 10 years and a fine of Rs 50,000 in case of mass conversion.

However, those who desire to convert his/her religion shall give a declaration in the prescribed form at least sixty days in advance, to the District Magistrate. According to the aims and objectives of the Bill, the Constitution of India guarantees religious freedom to all people which reflects the social harmony and spirit of

India. The objective of this right is to sustain the spirit of secularism in India.

"In the recent past, many such examples have come to light where gullible persons have been converted from one religion to another by misrepresentation, force, undue influence, coercion, allurement or fraudulent means. "The law related to the right to religious freedom already exists in various states of the country but there was no statute on the said subject in Rajasthan. In view of the above, it was decided to enact a law to provide for prohibition of unlawful conversion," the Bill states. As per the Bill, the court shall also grant appropriate compensation payable by the accused to the victim of said conversion which may extend to a maximum of Rs 5 lakh. The Bill proposes double punishment for repeat offenders.

India to launch Chandrayaan-4 mission

MI News Service, New Delhi: India will launch the Chandrayaan-4 mission to bring back samples of moon rocks to the Earth in 2027, Science and Technology Minister Jitendra Singh said.

Chandrayaan-4 will involve at least two separate launches of the heavy lift LVM-3 rocket that will carry five different components of the mission which will be assembled in orbit. "The Chandrayaan-4 mission aims to collect samples from the moon's surface and bring them back to the Earth," Singh told. The minister said the Gaganyaan mission, which involves sending Indian astronauts in a specially designed spacecraft to low-earth orbit and bringing them back safely, will be launched next year.

In 2026, India will also launch Samudrayaan, which will take three scientists in a submersible up to a depth of 6,000 metres in the deep ocean, to explore the seabed. "This achievement will align with the timelines of India's other landmark missions, including the Gaganyaan space mission, marking a pleasant coincidence in the nation's journey toward scientific excellence," Singh said.

Singh said Prime Minister Narendra Modi highlighted the Samudrayaan mission in his Independence Day speech. The minister underscored the potential of the Samudrayaan to unlock vast resources, including critical minerals, rare metals, and undiscovered marine biodiversity, all of which are crucial for the country's economic growth and environmental sustainability. The first uncrewed mission of the Gaganyaan project carrying a robot, 'Vyomitra', will also take place this year. Singh said that while the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) was established in 1969, it took more than two decades to set up the first launch pad in 1993. The second launch pad came up in 2004.

Gir forest: Incidents of lions killing domestic animals increase



MI News Service, Gandhinagar: Incidents of lions killing domestic animals in Gujarat's Gir forest have steadily increased, reaching a peak of 4,385 in 2023-24, according to recent government data. This is despite an increase in prey animals within the Gir forest -- the only natural habitat of the Asiatic lion -- over the past six years.

Union Environment Minister Bhupendra Yadav, citing data from the Gujarat government, informed the Rajya Sabha on Thursday that incidents of lions killing domestic ani-

mals rose from 2,605 in 2019-20 to 3,244 in 2020-21, 3,659 in 2021-22, 3,670 in 2022-23, and 4,385 in 2023-24. There is a sufficient prey base for lions in Gir and the population of the prey animals has been increasing, he said.

Data shows the number of prey animals in the Gir forest rose from 1,55,659 (1.55 lakh) in 2019 to 2,02,993 (2.02 lakh) in 2022 and further to 2,13,391 (2.13 lakh) in 2024. The most recent estimate in June 2020 put the Asiatic lion population in Gujarat at 674, up from 523 in 2015. A document from the Gujarat chief wildlife warden's office shows that the lions' distribution area rose from 22,000 square kilometres in 2015 to 30,000 square kilometres in 2020.

A 2022 scientific report in the Nature journal revealed that 48 per cent of the current lion population had dispersed outside the protected areas, spanning nine districts and 13 forest administrative divisions.

Treasure Hunt car Rally by Rotary Club of Durgapur Central



MI News Service, Kolkata: Durgapur, 9th Feb 2025; The Rotary Club of Durgapur central in association with the Automobile Association of Eastern India (AAEI) Durgapur had organized a Treasure Hunt Car Rally on 9th Feb 2025 in Durgapur. The Rally started from AAEI office and ended at Anand Amusement park near City centre. Rotarian Swapan Chaudhary, PDG; Rotarian Nirmalya Ghosh, AG; Mr Prabr Roy, Secy Genl. of AAEI from Kolkata, Mr Ajoy Ghosh, Secy, AAEI, Durgapur; Rtn Anuja Agarwal, President of Rotary Club of Durgapur Central; Rtn Santosh Maheshwari, Secy; Rtn Ashok Chandak, Organising Chairman and Rtn Mantaar Singh were present during the flag off ceremony near AAEI office today morning. There were 14 entries and all took part in this

Treasure hunt Car rally. They all were given 25 clues in Durgapur and they had to complete it within shortest time. The Winners of the Rally are; Shri Sujoy Bhattacharjee & team, Won 1st Prize; Sri Saurabh Dey & team, Won 2nd Prize; Shri Inderveer Kamboh & team, Won 3rd Prize. Shri Pulak Mishra & team and Shri Subhendu hazra & team were given Consolation Prizes. The prizes were given away by Senior members of Rotary Club & AAEI.

This rally has been organised by Rotary Club of Durgapur Central for creating awareness regarding Green environment, Save water, Maternal and child health, Pollution free, Clean drinking water, Safe drive Save life and the motto of the Rotary Club who are continuously helping the underprivileged people for social upliftment.

Centre considering new law for Safe overseas employment

MI News Service, New Delhi: The government is seriously considering enacting a new legislation to establish an enabling framework that will promote safe, orderly and regular migration for overseas employment. The proposal to frame a new law comes at a time when the US has deported 104 illegal Indian immigrants. The proposed legislation on Emigration (Overseas Mobility (Facilitation and Welfare) Bill, 2024) seeks to replace the Emigration Act of 1983 with a view to facilitate the circular mobility of people intending to emigrate for overseas employment.

This has emerged from a report by the Parliamentary Committee on External Affairs chaired by Congress MP Shashi Tharoor, which was presented in Parliament on Monday. The panel also said it desires estab-

lishment of PoE (Protector of Emigrants) offices in states where such offices do not exist currently and additional PoE offices in "migration hotspots", including states like Punjab, Uttar Pradesh, etc, should be "expedited" to ensure better outreach and support for emigrants. The Committee said the emigration process in India is governed by the Emigration Act of 1983, administered by the Ministry of External Affairs through the Protector General of Emigrants (PGE).

"Keeping in view the contemporary global migration dynamics and the needs of Indian citizens, the Committee has over the years underscored the pressing need for a comprehensive legislative overhaul to replace the outdated provisions of the Emigration Act 1983," the report

says. "After much delay, the Ministry is seriously considering enacting a new law tentatively titled 'Overseas Mobility (Facilitation and Welfare) Bill, 2024,'" it said. The Ministry has also informed that the proposed draft is under consultation with line Ministries and will, thereafter, be put up for public consultations," it said.

The Committee has said it desires that it should be "consulted on the salient features of the Bill" and the enactment of a revised act reflecting "changed global migration realities should be done in a time bound manner i.e. not later than one year". An update about the progress made in this regard may be submitted to the Committee within three months, it added. The report further said that "after the internal consultations draft will be put up

for public consultation for 15/30 days thereafter it will be followed up by Inter Ministerial Consultations along with the Draft Cabinet Note on revised draft". The Ministry has also informed that the Protector General of Emigrants (PGE) oversees the functioning of all Protector of Emigrants (PoE) offices across India. "As of now there are 14 offices of the Protector of Emigrants (POEs) located at Mumbai, Chennai, Delhi, Kolkata, Chandigarh, Hyderabad, Cochin, Thiruvananthapuram, Jaipur, Raebareilly, Patna, Bengaluru, Guwahati and Ranchi. In order to expand the outreach of the PoEs, the Ministry has established additional PoE offices in Patna, Bengaluru and Guwahati, which are fully functional," it said. Additional offices are being planned in

Tripura, Bhubaneswar and Ahmedabad, the report said.

Underlining the need to spread awareness about safe migration, the Committee has recommended that the "Ministry should collaborate with local civil society groups, media outlets in the most affected regions to ensure that emigrants are fully informed about their rights, processes involved and the risks of illegal migration". In addition, the Committee has urged that all citizens departing India should be given basic information at the immigration counters.

A US military aircraft carrying 104 illegal immigrants from various states landed in Amritsar in Punjab on Wednesday, the first such batch of Indians deported by the Trump government as part of a crackdown against illegal immigrants.

Bharat cancer genome atlas mapping started by IIT

CHENNAI: Ahead of World Cancer Day, The Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) Madras on Monday launched Bharat cancer genome atlas.

Bharat cancer genome atlas will "help identify cancer-specific biomarkers in India to enable early detection of breast cancers and identify novel drug targets for developing better treatment strategies specific to the Indian population."

The cancer genome program was initiated by IIT Madras in 2020. Under this program, the 960 whole exome sequencing from 480 breast cancer patient tissue samples collected across the country has been completed.

The institute has made this database publicly accessible at bcga.iitm.ac.in to researchers and clinicians in India and abroad.

Speaking about it in detail, Prof. V. Kamakoti, Director, IIT Madras told ANI, "So today we are making a very big move in releasing the data of breast cancer atlas, genomic atlas for India...So what we have done here is that we have collected more than around 1,000 samples across 500 patients. And this data basically will tell us what are the changes in the DNA, specifically with respect to breast cancer. Our strong belief is that every region of India, the reason for a breast cancer, the type of mutation it will bring out would be different. And that, to a large extent, they are seeing it. And the medicine that is necessary for a particular mutation is different from medicine that will be needed for another mutation."

"So we are now looking at specific three important things that could come out of this data. One thing is we have 1.4 billion population. We are around now thousands of samples, and this can be probably a few more thousands can be added, which will be a representative of all possible sequences for all the genomes that we could have and all the mutations that are possible. So first and foremost, we can start doing, as a part of a master health checkup, probably we can do this and check for this mutation, especially among mid-age ladies. And then if we find out that there is some mutation, this can be a prevention before cure. Because the mutation, the strong belief that we see as a part of this research is the mutation may start much before the actual cancer is seen out, where you can detect it through a mammogram or through a biopsy, et cetera. This is number one. So this can lead to a prevention before cure."

As per Sridhar Sivasubbu - Chief Diagnostics and Research Officer, "this data set is a preliminary indication of what is ailing our population."

"Second, what does it do when you find a mutation? You create a diagnostic kit. Now there is a discussion about costing. Doing genomes for everybody in Indian population is probably not the solution. But a diagnostic kit becomes much cheaper. We have seen in COVID, from 5000 rupees RT-PCR, we came down to 150 rupees. So, lot of mechanisms can be built in where you can bring down the cost of the diagnosis. Once the diagnosis is there, you can do mass scale screening," he shared.

Researchers at the Indian Institute of Technology, Guwahati, in

partnership with leading institutions around the world, have devised an innovative multi-stage clinical trial method that aims to revolutionise personalised medical care.

This cutting-edge approach customises treatment regimens in real time based on each patient's individual responses during trials, resulting in highly customised and effective healthcare solutions, as per the press release.

The research aims to enhance patient-specific treatment plans, improve outcomes, reduce trial-and-error in medication, and foster a more efficient, personalised healthcare approach.

The research, conducted in partnership with Duke-NUS Medical School, the National University of Singapore, Singapore, and the University of Michigan, USA, focuses on Dynamic Treatment Regimes (DTRs) designed through Sequential Multiple Assignment Randomised Trials (SMARTs).

Together, these frameworks tackle the critical challenge of optimising treatment strategies, a sequence of treatments, for patients with varying responses to therapies over time. DTRs are advanced decision rules that adapt treatments dynamically as a patient's condition evolves. For example, if a diabetes patient does not respond well to an initial medication, the DTR might recommend switching drugs or combining therapies. By incorporating intermediate outcomes, such as changes in blood sugar levels, DTRs move beyond the one-size-fits-all model, tailoring care to individual progress and needs.

Multi-stage clinical trials are essential for developing effective DTRs, and SMART methodology enables researchers to test various treatment sequences to find the best fit for each patient. Unlike traditional trials, SMART involves multiple stages of treatment, where patients are reassigned based on their responses to earlier interventions.

Traditional SMART trials assign patients to treatment arms in equal numbers, even when some treatments prove less effective, based on interim data. This often leads to unnecessary treatment failures. Dr Palash Ghosh and his team have developed an adaptive randomisation method that dynamically assigns patients to treatment arms based on real-time trial data by optimally changing the patient allocation ratios in favour of a better-performing treatment sequence at that point time of the trial.

This innovation ensures that more patients receive effective treatments while maintaining scientific rigour. By focusing on both short-term and long-term outcomes, the method improves the entire treatment process, reducing failures and enhancing patient care.

Speaking about the research Dr. Palash Ghosh, Assistant Professor, Department of Mathematics, IIT Guwahati, said in a statement, "Adaptive designs like this would encourage more patient participation in clinical trials like SMART. When patients see they are receiving treatments tailored to their needs, they are more likely to stay engaged. This approach also has vast potential for public health interventions, such as tailoring substance abuse recovery plans.



A fisherman rows the boat in the Dal Lake during the sunset, in Srinagar on Sunday.

(ANI Photo)

INDIA'S DOMESTIC WORKERS: WHY ARE THEY MARGINALIZED?

While domestic work should be socially valued and remunerated appropriately, the law may also require respectable working conditions. Taking into account programs such as the National Health Insurance Scheme and the Pradhan Mantri Shram Yogi Maan-Dhan Yojana, a specific legal framework for domestic workers should be created. This will ensure better safety at the workplace, enforce minimum wages, and provide necessary social protection. This law will empower domestic workers by resolving power inequalities, improving working conditions, and ultimately enhancing their economic stability and human dignity.

DR. SATYAWAN SAURABH

In India, the majority of domestic workers are women, who form a large part of the unorganized labor force. According to recent estimates, the number of domestic workers varies from official estimates of 4.2 million to unofficial estimates of over 50 million. In January 2025, the Supreme Court drew attention to the widespread exploitation of domestic workers and the lack of legal protections for them and ordered the central government to examine the possibility of passing a separate law to protect their rights. The Supreme Court ordered the central government to enact a separate law for domestic workers. The Minimum Wages Act and the Equal Remuneration Act, among other labor laws, do not apply to domestic workers. A separate law could offer organized regulation. Because there is no official framework, domestic workers often work without any set wages and are subject to arbitrary treatment.



Employers do not consider their homes a "workplace" or themselves an "employer," making domestic work largely informal and unregulated. Since their work is not officially recorded, workers cannot be granted basic rights such as social security or minimum wages. Women now make up the majority of those employed in domestic work, which is feminized and undervalued in society. This inequality on the basis of gender can be addressed by a special law. Due to social undervaluation, women are often paid less for domestic work than men. Domestic work conditions vary by region. A committed law can take into account regional issues and solutions. Regulations in Kerala and Delhi have attempted to address regional issues such as wage rates and employment registration in different ways. Clear procedures to uphold workers' rights and provide legal recourse in case of violations could be mandated by a separate law.

Without employment documentation, domestic workers may find it difficult to receive their wages, which can result in exploitation. Exploitation of domestic workers in India through low wages is one of their challenges. The low wages that domestic workers often receive are inadequate for the amount of labor they perform. The absence of minimum wage regulation makes this problem even worse. Domestic workers in Mumbai may struggle to meet their basic living expenses despite long workdays if their pay falls below the minimum wage. Due to the lack of legal protection from harassment or unfair treatment, domestic workers are particularly susceptible to abuse. The worker in Delhi may face physical or verbal abuse, but since there is no formal contract, they have no legal protection.

Since domestic work is performed in private homes, regulations become more complex, and the power differential between

employers and employees increases. Since employees are often laid off without warning, there is a lack of job security, which exacerbates financial instability. After years of service, an employee can be suddenly fired without pay, leaving them with no financial support or legal options. Since domestic work is socially undermined as "women's work" and often associated with marginalized communities, it renders workers voiceless and invisible. Rural migrant women may face social stigma and struggle to be accepted as legal employees. A specific legal framework can help address vulnerabilities. A specific law can set a minimum wage, guaranteeing that workers receive fair compensation commensurate with their working hours and duties.

A national law could establish a uniform minimum wage for workers across all states, guaranteeing that cooking, cleaning, and caregiving tasks are consistently

paid for. A well-defined legal framework, with processes for resolving grievances, would enable workers to receive protection from harassment and abuse. The law could make employment contracts mandatory to prevent exploitation and provide workers with a legal basis to resist abuse. A national framework could improve workers' financial and health security by providing health insurance, pensions, and other social benefits. Workers in Kerala currently receive some benefits, but national legislation could guarantee consistent access to social protection for all domestic workers in India. To ensure that both parties are aware of their rights and responsibilities and to prevent exploitation, a law could require employers to register their workers.

Unions representing domestic workers have pushed for registration as a way to prevent termination and provide legal aid when needed. Domestic work and care can be valued and acknowledged by a specific legal framework, increasing social recognition of domestic workers. Apart from ensuring that domestic work is socially valued and fairly remunerated, the law can also require respectful working conditions. Taking into account programs such as the Rashtriya Swasthya Bima Yojana and the Pradhan Mantri Shram Yogi Maan-Dhan Yojana, a specific legal framework for domestic workers should be created. This will ensure better safety at the workplace, enforce a minimum wage, and provide necessary social protection. Through resolving power inequalities, improving working conditions, and ultimately advancing their economic stability and human dignity, this law will empower domestic workers.

REVDI CULTURE IS A WRONG TRADITION

RAGHUVANSH NARAYAN SINGH

Offering freebies to lure voters is not good for the country and the state's economic health. Favoring a particular class for electoral gains and putting economic burden on other classes is a sign of short-sightedness. The announcement of free schemes by political parties at the time of elections paves the way for economic downfall. Free gifts to voters by political parties have an adverse effect on development work. Offering free schemes to people instead of efforts to increase income resources cannot be justified from the point of view of the country's economic health.

Despite there being no con-

crete plan to increase the revenue of the country and the state, political parties are merely deceiving the public by making populist announcements at the time of elections.

Not only this, by giving free schemes to a particular class, an additional burden of tax is being imposed on a particular class of the country. Political parties need to consider this a wrong tradition and put a stop to it.

The Supreme Court and the Election Commission should also consider making concrete laws to prevent political parties from making such announcements.

It is not wise for political parties to consider only the political aspect while making a flurry of announcements during election

campaigns. Rather, meaningful efforts should be made in this direction considering the country's economic condition as paramount. Political parties need to make efforts on a priority basis to improve the country's economic condition and direction. Due to the increasing expenditure due to freebies offered to voters in the budgetary allocation and limited resources, there is a shortage of funds for development work in the states.

This culture of revdi needs to be seriously pondered over. The way political parties are distributing freebies to voters at the government's expense, in a way bribing people to vote in their favour, doing so cannot be considered appropriate at all in

terms of the economic condition of the states. Offering free facilities or gifts to voters affects the government treasury. In this regard, the Supreme Court has also said that any free distribution affects all the people in the true sense. In such a situation, the idea of fair and free elections will prove to be meaningless. Spending more than income is fatal for any government.

A vivid example of this is Sri Lanka. The reason for Sri Lanka's economic downfall is the free gifts given to the voters by the political parties there.

Ban on the culture of Revdi will undoubtedly increase the economic prosperity of the country and the state.

The Bharatiya Janata Party-

led Mahayuti government came into existence in Maharashtra and the Jharkhand Mukti Morcha-led coalition government in Jharkhand. With this, there was a race to implement the free announcements/promises made to the voters of their respective states during the elections. Election promises like Ladli Behan Yojana in Maharashtra, Mukhyamantri Maiya Samman Yojana in Jharkhand, loan waiver and free electricity for farmers, free bus travel for women, free gas cylinders were made in Maharashtra and Jharkhand. With the formation of the government, efforts have also been started by the government towards implementing it.

Namibia's 'founding father' Sam Nujoma passes away at 95

MI News Service, Windhoek: Sam Nujoma, the freedom fighter leader who led Namibia to independence from apartheid South Africa in 1990 and served as its first president for 15 years, has passed away at the age of 95. He died on Saturday night after a three-week hospitalisation in Windhoek, according to the Namibian presidency.

In a statement shared on Facebook, the Namibian Presidency stated, "The foundations of the Republic of Namibia have been shaken. Over the past three weeks, the Founding President of the Republic of Namibia and Founding Father of the Namibian Nation was hospitalized for medical treatment and medical observation due to ill health. Unfortunately, this time, the most gallant son of our land could not recover from his illness." "It is with utmost sorrow and sadness that I announce this morning of the 9th of February 2025 to the Namibian people, our African brothers & sisters and the world at large, about the passing of our revered freedom fighter and revolutionary leader, H.E. Dr. Sam Shafishuna Nujoma @DrNangoloM-bumba President Nujoma passed on at the age of 95 on the 8th of February at 23h45 in Windhoek, Namibia," it added. Hailed as Namibia's "founding father", Sam Nujoma was considered a charismatic father figure in Namibia, who steered his country to democracy and stability after colonial rule by Germany and a war of independence from South Africa. Al Jazeera reported, Nujoma was the last of a generation of African leaders who guided their countries out of colonial rule or white minority rule that included South Africa's Nelson Mandela, Zambia's Kenneth Kaunda, Zimbabwe's Robert Mugabe and Mozambique's Samora Machel. He was the head of the South West Africa People's Organisation (SWAPO) that led the liberation struggle since its inception in 1960.

Israeli forces expand Samaria anti-terror operation

MI News Service, Tel Aviv: The IDF (Israel Defense Forces) reported that Israeli security forces are expanding the current anti-terror operation in northern Samaria, where they have been acting in recent days in Jenin. As part of the operation to counter terrorism, many forces of the IDF, the Shin Bet (Israel's anti-terror General Security Service) and the Border Police began overnight an operation to counter terrorism in Nur al-Shams next to Tulkarm. The forces have so far struck a number of terrorists and arrested additional wanted terrorists in the area.



Veterinary workers sanitize the premises of a veterinary college-based poultry of Birsa Agricultural University (BAU) as precautionary measure against 'bird flu' after 150 Guinea fowls died over the past 20 days, in Kanke block of Ranchi.

Netanyahu returning to Israel after wrapping up US visit

MI News Service, Tel Aviv: After a week of discussions with US leaders, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu departed Washington on Sunday morning. Netanyahu was the first foreign leader to visit President Donald Trump since his inauguration. The Prime Minister also met with various Trump administration officials, bipartisan Congressional leaders, Jewish students and Evangelical Christian leaders.

On Friday, Netanyahu met with Speaker of the United States House of Representatives Mike Johnson at the US Capitol, inviting Johnson to visit Israel. "You're invited to Israel this year in Jerusalem. I know you're busy but find space to do that. You'll be welcomed with a red carpet," Netanyahu told Johnson.

Reiterating American support, Johnson stressed that Israel would not be alone "so long as we are governing here." Meanwhile, Israeli Defense Minister Israel Katz instructed



the army to prepare plans to leave the Strip. The initiative would establish options for departure through land crossings, as well as via air and sea, Katz said. His announcement follows US President Donald Trump's suggestion on Tuesday that the Strip's residents relocate to third countries while Gaza is rebuilt. Details of Trump's suggestion have not

been worked out, but any Gaza who wishes to emigrate would be able to do so, provided another country agrees to take them in. On Thursday, Netanyahu's office confirmed that the Prime Minister gifted Trump with a golden pager when the two met on Tuesday.

The gift "symbolizes the Prime Minister's decision that led to a turning point in the war and the starting point for breaking the will of the terrorist organization Hezbollah," Netanyahu's office said. The operation, in which booby trapped pagers injured more than 3,500 figures throughout Hezbollah's ranks in September "expresses the power, technological superiority and cunning of Israel against its enemies," Netanyahu's office added. While in Washington, Netanyahu also ordered that "appropriate action" be taken after hostages Or Levy, Eli Sharabi, and Ohad Ben Ami returned in malnourished and gaunt condition.

US, Japan oppose China's "unlawful maritime claims," call for peace in Taiwan Strait

MI News Service, Washington DC: US President Donald Trump and Japanese Prime Minister Shigeru Ishiba have strongly opposed China's actions, reiterating their firm stance against any attempts by the country to alter the status quo in the East China Sea through force or coercion.

The two leaders also stressed the importance of peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait, emphasizing that its security is vital for "security and prosperity for the international community."

Ishiba visited the US from February 6 to 8, and held the first in-person summit meeting with Trump in Washington DC. "The two leaders reiterated their strong opposition to any attempts by the People's Republic of China (PRC) to change the status quo by force or coercion in the East China Sea. The two leaders reaffirmed their

strong opposition to the PRC's unlawful maritime claims, militarisation of reclaimed features, and threatening and provocative activities in the South China Sea," the White House said in a US-Japan joint leaders' statement. The statement added, "The two leaders emphasised the importance of maintaining peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait as an indispensable element of security and prosperity for the international community. They encouraged the peaceful resolution of cross-strait issues, and opposed any attempts to unilaterally change the status quo by force or coercion. The two leaders also expressed support for Taiwan's meaningful participation in international organisations." Notably, the Taiwan-China conflict remained a longstanding geopolitical issue centred on Taiwan's sovereignty.

N Korea blames US, Japan, South Korea for tensions in region; vows to bolster nuke forces

MI News Service, Seoul: North Korean leader Kim Jong-un, whom American President Donald Trump says he shares a good relationship with, has blamed the United States, Japan and South Korea for escalating tensions in the region, saying the allies' military cooperation has destabilized the security environment, as per state media of the nuclear-armed country.

In his speech during his visit to North Korea's Ministry of National Defence, Kim referred to a series of new plans for bolstering "all deterrents" and reaffirmed the country's "unshakable policy of more highly developing the nuclear forces," Yonhap reported citing the Korean Central News Agency (KCNA). Further, the North Korean leader criticized the United States for "standing in the centre behind the scene of the war

machine." Japanese news outlet Kyodo report cited KCNA.

US nuclear strategic assets deployed on the Korean Peninsula, the US-led nuclear war simulation exercises and the US-Japan-South Korea military cooperation are "inviting military imbalance" on the peninsula and in Northeast Asia, causing "a new conflicting structure" and posing a grave challenge to North Korea, Kim was quoted as saying. While stressing the need for vigilance against the trilateral "military alliance," Kim also voiced concern that their collaboration could bring about the formation of a "NATO of Asian version," the Korean news agency further said. The development came after the first in-person summit between Donald Trump and the Japanese Prime Minister Shigeru Ishiba in Washington on February 7.

They should not be handcuffed, chained ...: USISPF chief on US' deportations of Indian nationals



MI News Service, New Delhi: The President and CEO of the US-India Strategic Partnership Forum (USISPF) Mukesh Aghi acknowledged concerns surrounding the treatment of Indian nationals while being deported back to India.

Speaking to ANI on Sunday, he said that the Indians should "not be handcuffed and chained", but also emphasised that the US authorities are "simply following legal procedures" without making exceptions for anyone. "I empathize that they should not be handcuffed

and chained as they're moving," he said. "But you have to understand there's a law and the example is Strauss-Kahn, the IMF chief who was arrested in New York City and he was running for President of France. He was arrested. He was put in handcuffs. Why? Because that's the law?" "So I think if there's a law, they're following that law and they're not making exceptions to anybody," he added.

He also referred to efforts made by the Ministry of External Affairs to the US and affirmed hope that their will be some "empathy and sympathy" during the deportation process.

"The MEA has made an appeal and others talked to it. Hopefully, there'll be some empathy and sympathy towards the process," he said. On February 5, the US Air Force plane carrying Indian citizens who allegedly illegally migrated to the US arrived in Punjab's Amritsar. During the recent special briefing by the Ministry of External Affairs on Friday, ahead of Prime Minister Modi's overseas visit, Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri responded to queries regarding the potential returnees from the US. Being asked about the number of Indians who would be deported by US, Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri said that the number of flights and returnees will depend on the number of 'confirmed people.' "It's hard to give an exact number because we can't confirm anybody as an Indian national until we check that", Misri said.

Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf holds public meeting in Swabi, demands Imran Khan's release and return of 'stolen mandate'

MI News Service, Islamabad: The Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) marked the first anniversary of the February 8 polls with a public meeting at the Swabi Interchange on the Islamabad-Peshawar Motorway, where it called for the release of party founder Imran Khan and the return of its 'stolen mandate,' Dawn reported.

During the public meeting, several PTI leaders, including Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Chief Minister Ali Amin Gandapur, addressed the people, claiming that the elections held on February 8 were rigged and their mandate was stolen under "a well-planned conspiracy and a fake government was installed."

The PTI leaders said that the government did not realise that the more Imran Khan remained in prison, the more his popularity would increase. The PTI leaders called for his immediate release and pledged to continue their struggle for his freedom, Dawn reported.

PTI chairman Barrister Gohar Ali Khan said the universal right of the franchise was violated in the February 8 polls as the incumbent government comprised "defeated leaders." He said, "This is the reason we are campaigning; to make it clear to the masses that their true mandate and decision to vote for Imran Khan had been stolen." Gohar Ali Khan claimed that the Imran Khan-founded party could easily form a government in the Centre and Punjab if its mandate was not 'stolen', Dawn reported. He said, "This is the reason we are campaigning; to make it clear to the masses that their true mandate and decision to vote for Imran Khan had been stolen."

Ukraine: NATO's Dragone meets Zelenskyy; discusses military aid, long-range drones



MI News Service, Kyiv : Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy met Giuseppe Cavo Dragone, Chair of the NATO Military Committee on Saturday, and the two held discussions on Ukraine's long-range weaponry, preparations for the upcoming Ramstein meeting, continued military aid from NATO allies, and investments in the production of long-range drones. Sharing a post on X, Zelenskyy wrote, "I met with the Chair of the NATO Military Committee, Giuseppe Cavo Dragone @CMC_NATO. During our visit to a defense industry enterprise, we reviewed the capacities and characteristics of Ukraine's long-range weaponry." Zelenskyy also expressed gratitude for Dragone's first foreign visit to Ukraine.

The post added, "Key topics of our discussion included preparations for the upcoming Ramstein meeting, continued military assistance from NATO member states, and direct

investments in domestic production of long-range drones. I am grateful to Giuseppe Cavo Dragone for making his first foreign visit in this role specifically to Ukraine. I thank the people working on our long-range weapons for the tangible results, which are greatly helping us, feared by the Russians, and recognized by our NATO partners." Notably, relations between NATO and Ukraine date back to the early 1990s and have since developed into one of the most substantial of NATO's partnerships. Since 2014, cooperation has been intensified in critical areas. The starting of the ongoing Russia-Ukraine war also connected to NATO, as Kyiv wanted to become a part of the security alliance, despite fierce opposition from Moscow. Earlier on Wednesday, Zelenskyy met UK Foreign Secretary David Lammy in Kyiv, where the two leaders discussed sanctions on Russia and the implementation of the 100-year partnership agreement between the two countries. In a post on X, Zelenskyy said, "I met with UK Foreign Secretary David Lammy. I am grateful to Prime Minister Keir Starmer, the UK government, and the British people for their steadfast support of Ukraine. We focused on how to strengthen our warriors on the front lines, intensify sanctions against Russia, and secure reliable security guarantees."

A closer look at the terrorists released from Israeli prisons

MI News Service, Tel Aviv: Israel released 183 imprisoned Palestinian terrorists on Saturday in exchange for hostages Or Levy, Eli Sharabi, and Ohad Ben Ami. The list includes 18 terrorists who were serving life sentences and 111 Palestinians from Gaza who were detained during the war. Here is a closer look at some of the terrorists who were freed. Falah Ratib Shahadeh, a Fatah figure who was serving 27-year sentence for carrying out shooting attacks, planting bombs and recruiting terror cells during the Second Intifada. Shahadeh will be deported.

Iyad Abu-Shkheidem, a member of Hamas masterminded a double suicide bombing in Beer-Sheva in 2004 in which 16 people were killed and more than 100 injured. He was also accused of preparing a bomb belt for a terrorist in 2004 who was caught on his way to a Jerusalem restaurant. Yousef al-Mabhouh of Gaza was



serving a 15-year term for firing rockets, planting bombs and working in Hamas tunnels. Mabhouh had an additional 15 years added to his sentence for stabbing a guard at the Nafna Prison. Hatem al-Jayousi, a founding member of Fatah's Al Aqsa Mar-

tyrs Brigades serving multiple life sentences for the murder of six Israelis. Ali Haroub, a Hamas bomb-maker. In 2013, Israeli prison authorities thwarted a kidnapping plot that Haroub had planned from his cell.

Jamal Tawil, a Hamas figure

who had been working to extend the terror groups influence in Judea and Samaria. Arrested in 2021, Tawil was convicted of inciting violence, organizing riots, and trying to set up Hamas headquarters in Ramallah. Shadi Barghout, who was serving 27 years for numerous shooting and bombing attacks. The ongoing first phase of the ceasefire is supposed to see a total of 33 Israeli hostages freed over six weeks in exchange for hundreds of Palestinian terrorists imprisoned in Pakistan. The exact number will depend on how many are alive. Since the ceasefire went into effect, 583 Palestinian prisoners have been released. The fate of the remaining 65 hostages will be determined by negotiations during the ceasefire's second phase. Critics say the phased approach condemns hostages not freed in the beginning to open-ended captivity and undermines Israel's war gains.

Pakistan: Balochistan farmers reject 35 pc tax on agricultural production, call it "cruel", "anti-farmer"

MI News Service, Balochistan: The Green Kissan Ittehad (GKI) has rejected the 35 per cent tax imposed on agricultural production in Pakistan's Balochistan and across the country, imposed under the instructions given by International Monetary Fund (IMF), terming the measure "cruel" and "anti-farmer", Dawn reported. While addressing a press conference, GKI President Agha Lal Jan Ahmadzai called for providing compensation to farmers impacted by the construction of the Quetta-Karachi Highway in Khuzdar, Kalat, Mangochar, Mastung, Surrab and other regions. He said that 75 per cent of people in Balochistan work with the agriculture sector, which supplies fruits, vegetables and other agricultural products to the entire country and contributes millions of rupees in taxes. He noted that despite this, the agriculture sector is on the verge of collapse. Agha Lal Jan Ahmadzai slammed the Quetta Electric Supply Company for its performance, terming it highly disappointing. He compared their actions to the economic murder of farmers, contributing to the gradual decline in agricultural production capacity and the drying up of orchards.

England name Tom Banton as Bethell's cover for third ODI against India

LONDON : England have called up Somerset batter Tom Banton as a cover for all-rounder Jacob Bethell for the third ODI against India, which will take place on Wednesday.

The match, taking place at Ahmedabad's Narendra Modi Stadium, will be missed by Bethell, who sustained a left hamstring injury. He had featured in the first ODI at Nagpur.

The injury will be assessed further when the team arrive in Ahmedabad on Monday.

Banton, who last played for England in an ODI in August 2020, has been in outstanding form in T20 franchise cricket. He is currently the leading run-scorer in the UAE International League T20 (ILT20) competition, where he has amassed 493 runs from 11 innings at an average of 54.77, including two centuries and three fifties, at a strike rate of 151.69. He is set to arrive in India tomorrow, as per a press release from the England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB).

Banton has featured in six ODIs for England, having made 134 runs in five innings at an



average of 26.80, with a half-century and best score of 58. In 14 ODIs, he has scored 327 runs at an average of 23.55, with a strike rate of 147.96, with two fifties. His best score is 73.

England captain Jos Buttler won the toss and elected to bat first against India in the second ODI of the three-match series at Cuttack's Barabati Stadium on Sunday.

With India 1-0 up in the series after a four-wicket win in the first ODI at Nagpur, England would be aiming to make a comeback in the series and set up an exciting decider.

For India, Virat Kohli comes back after recovery from a sore knee and Yashasvi Jaiswal sits out. Varun Chakravarty is also set to make his ODI debut.

For England, Mark Wood, Gus Atkinson and Jamie Overton come back into the playing XI.

England (Playing XI): Philip Salt(w), Ben Duckett, Joe Root, Harry Brook, Jos Buttler(c), Liam Livingstone, Jamie Overton, Gus Atkinson, Adil Rashid, Mark Wood, Saqib Mahmood

India (Playing XI): Rohit Sharma(c), Shubman Gill, Virat Kohli, Shreyas Iyer, KL Rahul(w), Hardik Pandya, Axar Patel, Ravindra Jadeja, Harshit Rana, Mohammed Shami, Varun Chakravarty.

New Zealand Cricket issues fitness update on Rachin Ravindra

KARACHI : New Zealand Cricket (NZC) issued an update on all-rounder Rachin Ravindra's injury after the ball hit his head while fielding during the first ODI of the tri-nation series against Pakistan on Saturday.

Ravindra's unfortunate injury occurred in the 38th over of the second innings, when, while going for a catch off Michael Bracewell, he lost sight of the ball due to floodlights and took a heavy blow to his face. He was taken off the pitch after he started to bleed.

A statement from NZC as quoted by ESPNCricinfo said, "Ravindra was forced from the field after being struck in the forehead by the ball attempting a catch in the 38th over. He sustained a laceration to the forehead which has been addressed and treated at the ground, but is otherwise well. He came through his first HIA (Head Injury Assessment) well and will continue to be monitored under HIA processes."

New Zealand are already dealing with injury concerns following Lockie Ferguson's hamstring injury during the ILT20 in the UAE.

Speaking of the match, batting all-rounder Glenn Phillips' blitzkrieg knock powered New



Zealand to a 78-run victory over Pakistan in the first match of the ODI Tri-Series.

NZ won the toss and opted to bat first. After NZ was down to 39/2, performances from Kane Williamson (58 in 89 balls, with seven fours), Daryl Mitchell (81 in 84 balls, with two fours and four sixes) and Phillips (106* in 74 balls, with six fours and seven sixes) took NZ to 330/6 in their 50 overs.

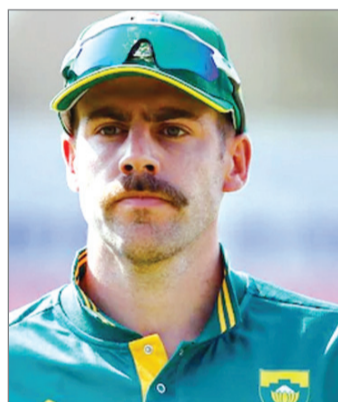
Shaheen Shah Afridi (3/88) and Abrar Ahmed (2/41) were among the top wicket-takers for Pakistan. During the run-chase

of 331 runs, Fakhar Zaman played a strong knock of 84 in 69 balls, with seven fours and four sixes to start off the innings, but Pakistan was reduced to 119/4.

Salman Agha (40 in 51 balls, with two fours and six) and Tayyab Tahir (30 in 29 balls, with four boundaries) put on a 53-run partnership, but Pakistan was skittled out for just 252 runs in 47.5 overs.

Skipper Mitchell Santner (3/41), pacer Matt Henry (3/53) and Michael Bracewell (2/41) were among top bowlers for NZ.

Corbin Bosch replaces injured Anrich Nortje in South Africa squad for Champions Trophy 2025



JOHANNESBURG : Right-arm seamer Corbin Bosch is named as the replacement for Anrich Nortje in a 15-member squad for the upcoming ICC Men's Champions Trophy which is scheduled to take place in Pakistan and the United Arab Emirates from February 19 onwards.

Earlier in the last month, the fast bowler was ruled out of the upcoming ICC Champion Trophy which is scheduled to take place in Pakistan from February 19 after suffering a back injury. The extent of Nortje's injury was revealed after the pacer underwent scans.

Nortje also missed South Africa's previous participation in an ICC event - the Cricket World Cup in 2023 in India - due to a stress fracture in his back.

The 31-year-old's steady variation, bounce and pace have been pivotal in South Africa's pace unit in the white-ball format, proven

by his 36 wickets in 22 ODIs and 53 wickets in 42 T20Is.

The right-arm speedster's last outing in the ODI format came over 15 months ago, in the Proteas' second ODI against Australia in Bloemfontein.

Bosh made his international debut in December last year. He has played just one ODI and a Test so far. Along with Bosch, South Africa have also added fast bowler Kwena Maphaka in the squad as a travelling reserve. The two fast bowlers along with batter Tony de Zorzi will travel to Pakistan on Sunday to join the squad for the remainder of their ODI series.

The Proteas team are currently featuring in the tri-nation ODI series along with Pakistan and New Zealand in Pakistan. Their first match of the series is against the Kiwis side at the Gaddafi Stadium in Lahore on February 10 and after that, they will lock horns

with Men in Green at the National Stadium, Karachi on February 12. If the team qualifies for the final, then they will be seen in action again on February 14 at Karachi.

Following the completion of the tri-nation ODI series, the Champions Trophy will begin. Group B features South Africa alongside Cricket World Cup 2023 champions Australia, Afghanistan, and England.

The Temba Bavuma-led side kickstarts their Champions Trophy campaign will be against Afghanistan on February 21 at Karachi. Their next match of the competition will be against Australia at the Rawalpindi before they travel back to Karachi for their last group stage fixture against England on March 1. South Africa squad for tri-nation ODI series: Temba Bavuma (c), Eathan Bosch, Matthew Breetzke, Junior Dala, Wiaan Mulder, Mhlangeni Mpongwana, Senuran Muthusamy, Lungi Ngidi, Gideon Peters, Meeka-eel Prince, Tabraiz Shamsi, Jason Smith, Kyle Verreynne.

South Africa squad - ICC Champions Trophy 2025: Temba Bavuma (c), Corbin Bosch, Tony de Zorzi, Marco Jansen, Heinrich Klaasen, Keshav Maharaj, Aiden Markram, David Miller, Wiaan Mulder, Lungi Ngidi, Kagiso Rabada, Ryan Rickelton, Tabraiz Shamsi, Tristan Stubbs, and Rassie van der Dussen. Travelling reserve: Kwena Maphaka.

India's ace all-rounder Deepti Sharma to lead UP Warriorz in Season 3 of WPL

LUCKNOW : The UP Warriorz are all geared up for Season 3 of the Women's Premier League (WPL), and have named a new captain. India's ace all-rounder Deepti Sharma, one of the mainstays of the UP Warriorz squad, was announced as captain, by the former India cricketer Suresh Raina, who also hails from Uttar Pradesh, as stated in a release from the franchise.

Deepti, who was born in Agra in Uttar Pradesh, will be the first UP Warriorz captain to lead the team out at their home stadium - the Ekana Cricket Stadium in Lucknow. For the first time in WPL, the Captain announcement was done live on broadcast during the Amul cricket live show just ahead of India's ODI against England.

Season 3 of the WPL marks the first time that the tournament will come to Lucknow, the home ground for the UP Warriorz, who will also be led by a cricketer from the home state. At the Ekana Cricket Stadium, the UP Warriorz will play the Gujarat Giants (March 3), Mumbai Indians (March 6) and Royal Challengers Bengaluru (March 8).

Deepti, who bats left-handed and is one of the best off-break bowlers in the women's game, has been an integral part of the UP Warriorz set-up since Season 1. For the newly appointed captain, Season 2 of the WPL was particularly memorable from a personal point of view as she became the



first Indian bowler to take a hat-trick in the WPL, against the Delhi Capitals, before going on to receive the Most Valuable Player (MVP) award for the season as well.

She has played 17 games for the UP Warriorz, scoring 385 runs in 16 innings, with three half-centuries to her name, along with a highest score of 88 not out. With the ball, Deepti has picked 19 wickets throughout the 17 games.

That apart, Deepti was a crucial part of the London Spirit side, who won The Hundred in 2024. The India all-rounder has also played in the Women's Big Bash League, where she has represented the Melbourne Stars and the Sydney Thunder sides.

Deepti, who won the Asia Cup title with India in 2022, was also part of the squad that finished runners-up in the Women's T20 World Cup in 2020 in Australia. In

the India colours, the 27-year-old has played 124 T20Is, scoring 1086 runs from 79 innings, with two fifties to her name, and a highest score of 64.

With the ball, she has picked up 138 wickets and is the highest wicket-taker in T20Is for the Indian women's team. That apart, Deepti also became the first Indian across the men's and women's game to take 100 T20I wickets. She achieved this milestone during the 2023 Women's T20 World Cup.

Earlier in the first two seasons of the WPL, UP Warriorz, who were captained by the Australian Alyssa Healy made the playoffs in the first season. Speaking on the appointment, Deepti Sharma said that it was an honour for her to be named captain of the UP Warriorz. "I am delighted and honoured to be named captain of the UP Warriorz, which is a team from my home state. The UP Warriorz has a fantastic squad, and we are confident that we will entertain our fans with the Warriorz brand of cricket, at the WPL this season as well. We can't wait to play in Lucknow in front of our home fans, and hope to inspire the next generation of women athletes," Deepti was quoted in a release from UP Warriorz as saying.

The UP Warriorz open their WPL Season 3 campaign against the Gujarat Giants on February 16 in Vadodra.

"Class and legacy of Babar is such...": Fakhar Zaman advocates for Pakistan's struggling star

LAHORE : Opening batter Fakhar Zaman has come out in support of Pakistan's premier batter Babar Azam and backed him to find his lost form in the upcoming fixtures amid his dwindling form.

Since returning home from South Africa, Babar's form has fallen off a cliff. After firing three successive fifties in the two Tests in South Africa, Babar lost his mojo since encountering the West Indies in Multan last month.

Formats changed, but Babar continued to face scrutiny for his inconsistency. In the first match of the ODI tri-series between Pakistan and New Zealand, Babar opened alongside Fakhar but failed to deliver something meaningful.

In Pakistan's 331-run chase, Babar produced a scratchy 10(23) on the benign surface of the scenic Gaddafi Stadium. As Babar's other outing turned into a fiasco, he is still in search of that elusive century since his 151-run knock against Nepal in August 2023.

"It happens in cricket, but the class and legacy of Babar is such that you can't say much about one match, and you will see that he will perform in the upcoming matches," said Fakhar at the post-match press conference on Saturday, as quoted from Geo News. It all started for Babar on the turning Multan strip in the first Test. In Pakistan's emphatic 127-run victory, Babar flopped with scores of 8(20) and 5(11).

In the second contest of the



In Pakistan's pursuit of 331, Fakhar waged a lone war while the rest of his compatriots fell one after another. He blazed his way to 84 from a mere 69 deliveries, laced with seven fours and four towering sixes at a strike rate of 121.74.

series, Babar's Achilles heel was exposed by the spin duo Gudkesh Motie and Kevin Sinclair. With just 1(5) in the first innings, Babar showed glimpses of his brilliance but eventually fell on 31(67).a

"And again, when it's your day, even your edge would dodge the keeper and run away for the boundary, but if it is not your day, then you must have seen how well they took the catch of Tayyab [Tahir]," said the left-handed batter.

In Pakistan's pursuit of 331, Fakhar waged a lone war while the rest of his compatriots fell one after another. He blazed his way to 84 from a mere 69 deliveries, laced with seven fours and four towering sixes at a strike rate of 121.74.

With Fakhar's dismissal, Pakistan's hopes of chasing down the target dashed away. The experienced southpaw was disappointed with the loss rather than missing out on a century.

"I am disappointed with the loss, but I am not worried about not scoring a century," Fakhar said.



England women's team reaches India ahead of FIH Pro League matches in Bhubaneswar

BHUBANESWAR : The England Women's Hockey Team arrived at the Biju Patnaik International Airport in Bhubaneswar, Odisha on Sunday ahead of the FIH Hockey Pro League 2022/25 India leg matches.

The world number seven side will face the hosts India and current world number one Netherlands in the FIH Hockey Pro League 2024/25 India leg, scheduled to take place in Bhubaneswar from February 15-25. With one win and three losses so far, England has made a rocky start to their FIH Pro League campaign and will be hoping to turn things around despite facing challenging opponents.

Forward Darcy Bourne shared her excitement upon arriving in India saying, "We are very excited to be in India especially after the Hockey India League, expecting

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the atmosphere to be really big. This is my first time in India, but the buzz around hockey here is nothing like I have ever seen so I am extremely excited."

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Head coach David Ralph also echoed the excitement and stated, "We are expecting the matches to be very challenging but we are excited. It is going to be wonderful for the girls to play in front of the Indian crowd. In hockey, this is one of the best things you can experience." The FIH Pro League matches of the India leg will be televised on Jio Cinema and Sports 18.