

## Prez, PM and others celebrate Sunita Williams' safe return to Earth

**MI News Service, New Delhi:** President Droupadi Murmu and Prime Minister Narendra Modi joined millions of people across the country including celebrities, politicians and others on Wednesday to celebrate NASA astronaut Sunita Williams' return to mother Earth after nine long months, terming her "an inspiration for future generations", while lauding her determination. Four NASA astronauts - Sunita Williams, Butch Wilmore, Nick Hague and Russian cosmonaut Aleksandr Gorbunov splashed down into the Atlantic ocean off the coast of Florida early Wednesday on board SpaceX's Dragon spacecraft smoothly without any hitch. For Williams and Wilmore, test pilots for Boeing's new Starliner capsule, an eight-day mission stretched to more than nine months as a series of helium leaks and thruster failures deemed their spacecraft unsafe. However, later the spacecraft returned without them in September.

The president said in a post on X that India's daughter and her fellow astronauts have inspired everyone with their perseverance, dedication and never-say-die spirit.

"Congratulations to the entire team behind the safe return of NASA's Crew 9 mission on Earth! Their historic journey is a tale of determination, teamwork and extraordinary courage. I salute their unwavering resolve and wish them excellent health!" she said.

"Welcome back, #Crew9! The Earth missed you," Prime Minister Narendra Modi said in his post. "Theirs has

been a test of grit, courage and the boundless human spirit... Their unwavering determination in the face of the vast unknown will forever inspire millions. Space exploration is about pushing the limits of human potential, daring to dream, and having the courage to turn those dreams into reality.

"Sunita Williams, a trailblazer and an icon, has exemplified this spirit throughout her career. We are incredibly proud of all those who worked tirelessly to ensure their safe return. They have demonstrated what happens when precision meets passion and technology meets tenacity," the prime minister said.

The Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) termed Williams' extended stay in space a "remarkable achievement". "A testament to NASA, SpaceX, and the USA's commitment to space exploration! Your resilience and dedication continue to inspire space enthusiasts around the world," ISRO said.

Union ministers Piyush Goyal, Nitin Gadkari and Jyotiraditya Scindia were among those who also congratulated Williams.

"This incredible moment will be etched in our minds forever as a victory of human resilience. What a moment of relief, as India's daughter Sunita Williams, and the astronauts of NASA's #Crew9 mission made a safe return after their nine-month journey of endurance in space. They have gifted an inspirational story for

►► Continued on page 3

## Bengal manages irrigation projects with own resources, in absence of central fund

**MI News Service, Kolkata:** In absence of central assistance to address various flood related problems and erosion in the state, the government of West Bengal has to rely on its own resources to combat the situation. state Irrigation Minister Manas Bhuniya claimed here on Wednesday Replying to a query during the question hour in the Assembly, Bhuniya said because of the bowel like position of the state in both Ganga and Brahmaputra basins, large parts of West Bengal suffers from floodwaters that originate in the upper regions during monsoon every year.

"The Centre is hitting out at Bengal where it hurts by not releasing our due funds. While several areas of the state, both in south and north Bengal, are inundated by floodwaters during the monsoon every year, the state is not getting its due share of water, required in the lean season, for sustaining livelihoods," he said. Earlier also several state ministers accused the Central government of stopping necessary funds for various irrigation projects in the state despite its mandate of bearing 50 per cent of the expense.

"The centre has a step-motherly attitude towards Bengal irrigation projects.

The ongoing flood management schemes in the state are getting hampered due to the non-availability of central funds," the minister alleged.

"In a number of state projects, there has been no response from the centre even after completion of necessary procedural formalities and repeated persuasion," he said. Bhuniya also said that the investment clearance of Ghatal Master Plan for flood control in West Midnapore district has been withheld even after compliance of all formalities and that the Central government is not paying necessary importance to the state's demand in certain projects.

"If a state level minister writes a letter, an executive of the Central government sends a reply. Such is the indifference," he added. The state faced severe flood situation in several districts of north Bengal as well as Gangetic West Bengal last year due to excessive rain.

The state government including Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee accused the government-owned Damodar Valley Corporation (DVC) of constantly releasing water from its dams in spite of warning from the state, that further worsened the flood situation.

# Stuck in space for over nine months, Sunita Williams finally returns to Earth



**MI News Service, Florida (US) / New Delhi:** Ending all speculations and doubts, NASA astronauts Sunita Williams and Butch Wilmore returned to mother Earth on early Wednesday (IST) as per schedule, after a prolonged nine-month delayed mission aboard the International Space Station (ISS) due to technical issues.

The four-person crew, including Sunita Williams and Butch Wilmore, who were part of NASA's Crew-9 astronaut rotation mission, finally splashed down into the Atlantic ocean off

Florida's coast at 5.57 p.m. local time on Tuesday (at 3:27am India time on Wednesday) in their SpaceX crew Dragon capsule amid thunderous applause in the NASA Command centre and from people around the world.

Both Sunita Williams (59) and Butch Wilmore (62), were stuck at the International Space Station 450 miles above earth, for the past nine months after reaching there in a Boeing Starliner spacecraft in a drawn-out eight day mission, fraught with technical challenges, schedule changes and politics.

Soon after the splash down in the ocean all four crew members, particularly Sunita Williams and Butch Wilmore were assisted out of the SpaceX Crew Dragon capsule and placed on stretchers for initial medical examinations. This standard procedure addresses the physical challenges astronauts face after prolonged exposure to microgravity, such as muscle atrophy and balance issues.

Soon afterwards the astronauts were flown to their crew quarters at NASA's Johnson Space Center in Houston for several days of health checks as per routine for astronaut returns, before the space agency's flight surgeons allow them to go home to their families.

A couple of days later the astronauts will participate in debriefings to discuss their experiences, challenges, and successes during the mission. After her unexpected long mission, Sunita Williams is expected to prioritise spending time with family and friends. Personal time plays a crucial role in an astronaut's psychological well-being, helping them reconnect with loved ones and smoothly transition back to everyday life on Earth. Williams told reporters earlier this month from ISS that she was looking forward to returning home to see her two dogs and family. "It's been a roller coaster for them, probably a little bit more so than for us," she said.

The absence of gravity has its effects on long-duration space travellers, who experience dizziness, nausea and an unstable gait when they return to Earth. For Williams and Wilmore, both test

pilots for Boeing's new Starliner capsule, the eight-day mission stretched to more than nine months as a series of helium leaks and thruster failures deemed their spacecraft unsafe and had to return empty in September last year.

Astronauts who have travelled on space missions earlier have reported facing difficulty in walking, having bad eyesight, dizziness, and a condition called baby feet where space travellers lose the thick part of the skin on the soles that become soft like a baby's.

"Once the astronaut returns to Earth, they are immediately forced to readjust again, back to Earth's gravity, and can experience issues standing, stabilising their gaze, walking, and turning. For their safety, returning astronauts are often placed in a chair immediately upon return to Earth," informed sources said quoting doctors at Houston-based Baylor College of Medicine.

It takes astronauts several weeks to re-calibrate themselves to life on Earth.

"Astronauts returning to earth often experience dizziness when standing up, known as orthostatic hypotension. This occurs because gravity on the earth is stronger than in space, and it is more difficult to deliver blood from the heart to the head," the sources said. The lack of gravity also causes significant and often irreparable bone density loss. After a prolonged stay at the ISS, Sunita Williams and Butch Wilmore before wrapping up their unexpectedly prolonged mission aboard a SpaceX

►► Continued on page 3



West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee attended the Ifar party organised by Firhad Hakim at Ekbalpur on Wednesday.

## "We do not believe in the politics of bloodshed", says Mamata Banerjee



**MI News Service, Kolkata:** This Eastern metropolis of Kolkata, also known as the City of Joy, has now been flooded with "Hindu Hindu Bhai Bhai" posters, sparking a poster war between the ruling Trinamool Congress (TMC) and the opposition BJP. In response, the TMC's IT cell has also launched a counter-campaign, releasing posters

that challenge the BJP's religious rhetoric.

Amidst this political tension, Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee addressed the issue during her speech in the West Bengal Legislative Assembly on Wednesday while presenting the Health Budget. Directly countering BJP's religious propaganda, she quoted revolutionary poet Sukanta

Bhattacharya, emphasizing peace over divisive politics. "We do not believe in the politics of bloodshed. We believe in the harmonious message of peace," Banerjee emphasised.

During the assembly session, the Chief Minister highlighted the state's achievements in healthcare, emphasizing that government hospitals in Bengal provide free treatment to all, irrespective of their caste, creed, or regional identity. She criticized the BJP's divisive slogans, questioning, "Do those shouting 'Hindu Hindu Bhai Bhai' will be able to prevent the migrants from Bihar and other states from getting the healthcare services? In Bengal, we provide free healthcare to everyone. Do not insult Bengal by making unfair comparisons with other states."

Mamata Banerjee further underscored that humanity transcends religious and caste divisions and that her government's mandate comes from the love and trust of the people, not from political gimmicks. She asserted, "People are preparing to give a befitting reply. We do not seek a mandate from any political party. The love and trust of the people inspire us to continue our work." As Bengal heads towards another fiercely contested election, the battle for religious and ideological dominance is set to intensify, with both parties doubling down on their core political strategies.

## Bill Gates discusses healthcare, technology with JP Nadda, Chandrababu Naidu

**MI News Service, New Delhi:** Philanthropist and Microsoft co-founder Bill Gates on Wednesday met Union Health Minister JP Nadda and reviewed the collaboration between the government and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation in the healthcare sector.

Gates also held discussions with Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu on leveraging Artificial Intelligence (AI) and predictive analytics to improve service delivery in the fields of healthcare, education, agriculture, and employment generation.

In a post on X, Nadda highlighted the strides India has made in areas such as maternal health, immunisation, and sanitation with the Gates Foundation's support.

"Met with Mr Bill Gates, founder of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, during his visit to India today. We discussed the remarkable progress India has achieved in healthcare, particularly in maternal health, immunisation, and sanitation, through our collaboration with the Foundation," Nadda said adding "I acknowledged the Foundation's valuable support in strengthening health systems and driving impactful initiatives".

"We look forward to renewing our memorandum of cooperation, furthering our shared commitment to ensuring affordable, accessible and quality healthcare for all the citizens," Nadda stated further.

After his meeting with Gates, Naidu in a post on X also lauded the role of the Gates Foundation in realising the vision of "Swarna Andhra Pradesh 2047" -- a long-term developmental goal of the state. "We believe this partnership with the Gates Foundation will play a crucial role in empowering our people and achieving this goal," Naidu said. Gates also visited Parliament

►► Continued on page 3

## Mamata Banerjee wants 'Bharat Ratna' for Sunita Williams

**MI News Service, Kolkata:** In recognition of the remarkable achievements of Indian-American astronaut Sunita Williams, who spent nine long months in the International Space Station (ISS) in a difficult mission, West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee has demanded that Sunita be honored with the Bharat Ratna, India's highest civilian award.

After an extraordinary nine-month mission in space, Sunita Williams has safely returned to Earth on early Wednesday morning, marking yet another milestone in space exploration.

Addressing the West Bengal Legislative Assembly this afternoon, Mamata Banerjee expressed immense pride in Sunita's Indian heritage and lauded her resilience. "On behalf of the Assembly, I extend my heartfelt gratitude to Sunita Williams and other astronauts, who

were stranded in space for several months, as they have endured immense physical challenges during their mission. I also commend the rescue team for their exceptional efforts. I congratulate them, as well as Sunita Williams. I think she should be honoured with Bharat Ratna," she said.

Mamata Banerjee also took to X in the morning to congratulate Sunita Williams and her team, expressing admiration for their dedication and courage. She reiterated her deep appreciation for the astronaut's achievements, calling her a true daughter of India.

"Welcome Sunita Williams and Butch Wilmore back to earth, finally and safely, after so many days. Our daughter of India returns to us, and we are deeply deeply happy and elated. We are

►► Continued on page 3

## Home Minister Amit Shah is likely to visit Bengal this month

**MI News Service, New Delhi:** Union Home Minister Amit Shah is likely to visit West Bengal for two days from March 29 to discuss organisational matters with state party leaders before the next year's Assembly elections. Informing this here on Wednesday, BJP state President in Bengal Sukanta Mazumdar stated that however, the final confirmation of his visit is awaited.

"Home Minister Amit Shah is likely to visit West Bengal for two days on March 29 and 30, when he will devote time for listening to BJP party workers besides meeting the state BJP leaders to discuss the party's prospect in the coming elections", said Sukanta Mazumdar.

Meanwhile, West Bengal Governor CV Ananda Bose has met Union Home Minister Amit Shah in New Delhi on Wednesday. However the details of the hour long meeting between them was not known.

Earlier, this month Amit Shah spent three days in Assam, where he inaugurated several projects and addressed the 57th Annual Conference of All Bodo Students Union (ABSU). On Sunday, Amit Shah addressed the 57th annual conference of the All Bodo Students' Union (ABSU) at Kokrajhar where he said that ABSU had played a significant role in establishing peace, harmony and all round development in the entire North Eastern region. Without ABSU's role, the Bodo Accord would not have been possible, and peace would not have been established in Bodoland, he said while paying tributes to over 5,000 martyrs who fought and laid down their lives for the peace of Bodoland. He said the government has decided to name a prominent road in Delhi as Bodopa Upendra Nath Brahma Marg by next month and install a bust of this popular Bodo leader.



Stuck in space for over...

**From PG 1**  
With 62 hours over nine capsule on Tuesday, bade farewell to the ISS, their 'home' since last spring, and departed along with two other astronauts. Their capsule detached from the ISS before dawn, targeting a splashdown off the Florida coast by early evening, provided weather conditions remain favourable.  
NASA astronaut Nick Hague and Russian cosmonaut Aleksandr Gorbunov, the other two members of Crew-9, joined Sunita and Butch in the ISS in September on a Crew Dragon craft with two empty seats.  
Initially the SpaceX craft has scheduled their homecoming in February but later they delayed it for over a month on March 19 for technical reasons.

With 62 hours over nine spacewalks, Sunita Williams has set a new record: the most time spent spacewalking over a career among female astronauts. She became the station's commander three months into their stay and held the post until earlier this month. This was Sunita's third space flight and she has clocked a cumulative 608 days in space. The mission also became entangled in controversy after President Donald Trump and his adviser Elon Musk, who is also SpaceX's CEO, claimed without evidence that former president Joe Biden had abandoned Williams and Wilmore on the station for political reasons. The two astronauts have however, rejected this accusation.

Prez, PM and others...

**From PG 1**  
Goyal said, Gadkari hailed Williams as India's pride and said he is thrilled to see her return safely back to Earth.  
Scindia said, "As the world held its breath and witnessed the touchdown of NASA's SpaceX Crew-9, we celebrate the return of India's daughter, Sunita Williams, and Butch Wilmore." The duo's courage and dedication amidst uncharted challenges are truly commendable, he added.  
Messages also came in from several chief ministers. West Bengal Chief minister Mamata Banerjee took to X in the morning to congratulate Sunita Williams and her team, expressing admiration for their dedication and courage. She reiterated her deep appreciation for the astronaut's achievements, calling her a true daughter of India. She also demanded that the government's highest civilian award Bharat Ratna be conferred on Sunita Williams recognising her achievement as an astronaut.  
"Welcome Sunita Williams and Butch Wilmore back to earth, finally and safely, after so many days. Our daughter

of India returns to us, and we are deeply happy and elated. We are profoundly happy for Butch Wilmore also. Hail their return, hail human glory! I congratulate the rescue team for their overwhelming support and success," she wrote in her social media handle.  
Gujarat's Bhupendra Patel said every Indian takes immense pride in Williams' connection to the country. "Heartfelt congratulations to our very own Sunita Williams and the #Crew9 astronauts on their safe return to Earth after an extraordinary nine-month mission aboard the International Space Station. Their unwavering dedication and resilience have been a beacon of inspiration for millions," he added.  
A former US Navy captain, Williams, 59, was born to a Gujarati father, Deepak Pandya, from Jhulasan in Mehsana district, and a Slovenian mother, Ursuline Bonnie Pandya, on September 19, 1965 in Euclid, Ohio.  
According to Kerala Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan, the astronauts' "extended mission, shaped by technical challenges, has left an inspiring legacy in space exploration".

Mamata Banerjee wants...

**From PG 1**  
Butch Wilmore also. Hail their return, hail human glory! I congratulate the rescue team for their overwhelming support and success," she wrote in her social media handle.  
Williams, along with fellow NASA astronaut Butch Wilmore, safely returned to Earth on Wednesday after their extended mission aboard the International Space Station (ISS). Their return has been celebrated globally, with special excitement in India, given Sunita's Indian roots.  
During her address in the Assembly, the Chief minister also paid tribute to late Kalpana Chawla, another Indian-origin astronaut who tragically lost her life in the Columbia space shuttle disaster in 2003. Reflecting on

Kalpana's legacy, she discussed the technical failures that prevented her safe return to Earth.  
She further revealed her personal interest in space science, stating, "I have studied space science to some extent. When an aircraft has mechanical issues, it can return to base. However, with space shuttles, complications can escalate quickly. Reports indicate that this mission also faced technical snag similar to what happened with Kalpana Chawla and some other astronauts."  
Emphasizing the challenges faced by astronauts, Banerjee highlighted the importance of rescue missions in ensuring their safe return. "This is why the team had to remain stranded in space for so many months. The rescue teams deserve special recognition for bringing them back," she added.

Bill Gates discusses healthcare...

**From PG 1**  
On Wednesday where the Budget Session is presently underway. On Monday, Gates met Agriculture Minister Shivraj Singh Chauhan who said the discussions covered a range of topics, including food security, rural development and the application of AI and Machine Learning in agriculture.  
"The Gates Foundation has been working with the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, and we are planning new areas of cooperation," Chauhan said in a statement.



Mamata welcomes SC's directive on OBC Cert, hopes for better employment across state

**MI News Service, Kolkata:** The Supreme Court has recently issued a directive regarding a petition challenging the validity of Other Backward Classes (OBC) certification in West Bengal. The apex court has granted a three-month period for the state government to present fresh details and conduct a re-assessment. Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee believes this ruling could pave the way for resolving the ongoing

ing issue and ultimately facilitate the recruitment of 2-3 lakh individuals across various sectors in the state.  
On Tuesday, representing the West Bengal government, senior advocate KapilSibal informed the Supreme Court that the state is conducting a fresh survey to reassess OBC reservations. The government is verifying which communities qualify for OBC categorization before

submitting its findings. Consequently, the state sought a three-month extension for the hearing, a request the Supreme Court approved, effectively granting the administration more time to address the matter.  
Welcoming the court's observations, Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee spoke in the state assembly on Wednesday. She asserted that once the legal hurdles are cleared, the

recruitment process in education, healthcare, and police sectors could resume, benefiting lakhs of job seekers. "The Supreme Court has made an observation on the OBC issue yesterday, but it has not ruled against us. If this issue is resolved, nearly 2-3 lakh appointments can be made across various sectors. Do not obstruct recruitment to settle political scores," Banerjee declared, directing her re-

marks at the opposition. Banerjee's statement has put the opposition on the defensive, particularly as she has consistently alleged that political adversaries are deliberately stalling employment opportunities by dragging the OBC reservation issue into litigation. She had previously made similar remarks during her visit to Furfura Sharif, where she accused opponents of using legal interventions to

stall government recruitment. Additionally, the Chief Minister announced that she would be attending a session at Oxford University in London, leaving after Thursday's assembly proceedings. Her firm stance on the matter has intensified political discourse in the state, as the opposition now faces the challenge of responding to the government's claims of employment blockage.



West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee was presented with an Argentina jersey signed by footballer Lionel Messi during an iftar party organized by Firhad Hakim at Ekbalpur on Wednesday.

Kunal Ghosh granted permission for London Trip

**MI News Service, Kolkata:** Trinamool Congress leader Kunal Ghosh has been granted permission by the Calcutta High Court to travel abroad as part of Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee's official delegation to London. The division bench of Justices DebangshuBasak and Smita Das De issued the order on Wednesday, allowing Ghosh to travel from March 21 to March 30.  
The court observed that Ghosh had adhered to all regulations during his previous foreign trips. Hence, there was no valid reason to deny him permission this time. However, as a precautionary measure, the bench directed him to deposit 5 lakh before traveling.  
Mamata Banerjee is set to visit London in the third week of March, where she will deliver lectures at three prominent colleges and universities. Seeking to accompany her for professional reasons, Ghosh had approached the High Court for approval. His plea was heard by the division

bench, with senior advocates Ayan Chakraborty and Jishnu Chowdhury representing him. They argued that Ghosh had previously traveled abroad under High Court directives, complying with all conditions, and thus deserved permission again.  
During the hearing, the court inquired about the sponsorship of Ghosh's trip. His lawyers clarified that his travel expenses would be covered by the organization with which he is professionally associated. Supporting documents regarding the funding were submitted to the court.  
The Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI), represented by advocate Amajit De, stated that they had no objections to Ghosh's travel as long as he fulfilled all prior conditions. After considering arguments from both sides, the division bench approved the trip with specific conditions. In addition to the 5 lakh deposit, Ghosh has been directed to surrender his passport to the lower court upon his return.

CAB President voices concern over IPL match at Eden garden

**MI News Service, Kolkata:** On April 6, Kolkata Knight Riders and Lucknow Super Giants are set to face off at Eden Gardens. However, the match coincides with Ram Navami, raising concerns about security arrangements. In light of this, Cricket Association of Bengal (CAB) President SnehasishGanguly has stated that hosting the match without adequate security would be virtually impossible.  
The Indian Premier League (IPL) is set to commence on March 22, with KKR playing its first match against Royal Challengers Bangalore. On April 6, the same day as

the KKR-Lucknow fixture, multiple processions will be held across Kolkata in observance of Ram Navami. Given past incidents of unrest surrounding the occasion, Kolkata Police is on high alert, further complicating security arrangements for the match.  
Speaking on the matter, CAB President SnehasishGanguly emphasized that without sufficient security, the match cannot be hosted. He has already communicated this concern to the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI). Ganguly stated, "The police have informed us that providing adequate security may not be



Knights Unplugged 2.0

WBCHSE announces full marks to students for error in HS Eng question paper

**MI News Service, Kolkata:** A significant printing error in the West Bengal Higher Secondary (HS) English question paper has sparked controversy. The West Bengal Council of Higher Secondary Education (WBCHSE) has acknowledged the mistake, confirming that students will receive full marks for the affected question.  
The error was found in Question 5(a)(ii) of the English paper, where "Tajmahal" was incorrectly printed as "Tajmajal". The Council has now directed head examiners to award full marks to all students, regardless of their response.  
According to WBCHSE officials, students who answered the True or False question—whether correctly or incorrectly—will receive full marks. The evaluation instructions explicitly urge examiners to avoid unfair deductions and ensure students are not penalized for the council's mistake.  
The Higher Secondary Examination 2025 began on March 3, with the English paper held on March 5. The examination will conclude on March 18. The printing error was flagged by students and teachers immediately after the English exam,

prompting the Council's swift response. Additionally, 2025 marks the last year of examinations under the old syllabus. From 2026, the semester system will be introduced, with two HS exams held annually.  
This year, 509,000 students appeared for the Higher Secondary exams, marking a decline in enrollment compared to the previous year.

adequate forces to maintain law and order. There will be zero tolerance for any disruption." A significant police presence will be visible throughout the city and other key districts. Meanwhile, with Ram

Manoj Verma ensures heightened security for Ram Navami

**MI News Service, Kolkata:** With Ram Navami celebrations set to witness an unprecedented turnout, Kolkata Police Commissioner ManojVerma has assured that stringent security measures will be in place to prevent any untoward incidents.

Given past instances of unrest during Ram Navami processions, Kolkata Police has intensified its vigilance. Commissioner ManojVerma stated, "Based on past experiences, we have proactively deployed

adequate forces to maintain law and order. There will be zero tolerance for any disruption." A significant police presence will be visible throughout the city and other key districts. Meanwhile, with Ram

CII urges 6% of National GDP allocation for Edu Sec



(L-R): Shashwat Goenka, Deputy Chairman, CII Eastern Region and Vice Chairman, RP - Sanjiv Goenka Group, Rajiv Memani, President Designate, CII and Chairman and CEO - EY India and Chair - EY Growth Markets Council, Shreekant Somany, Chairman & Managing Director, Somany Ceramics Limited, Suvendra Kumar Behera, Chairman, CII Eastern Region and Vice Chairman & Managing Director, RSB Transmissions (I) Ltd, Manish Prasad, Managing Director & President, SAP Indian Subcontinent and John Kuruvilla, Regional Director, CII Eastern Region

**MI News Service, Kolkata:** The CII has called for an allocation of 6% of India's national GDP to the education sector, emphasizing its crucial role in economic growth. Speaking at the CII Conference on Catalysing Growth of the Eastern Region, held in Kolkata, CII President SanjivPuri, who is also the Chairman & Managing Director of ITC Ltd., highlighted India's strategic position as a major hub for Global Capability Centres (GCCs), hosting nearly 40% of these centres worldwide.  
Delivering his address on the concluding day of the conference, Puri stated that 70% of global trade is conducted through Global Value Chains (GVCs), underscoring the need for Free Trade Agreements (FTAs) and streamlined customs tariff structures. He particularly stressed the significance of India's proposed EU free trade agreement and the potential for multiple FTAs in the near future. To achieve an 8% national growth rate, Puri emphasized the need for a comprehensive activation of all economic sectors, including agriculture, services, and manufacturing, along with private investment and improved Ease of Doing Business (EODB). CII Director General Chandrajit Baner-

jee called for closer collaboration between central and state governments to establish a joint task force, along with a high-level committee focused on regulatory reforms, agritech adoption, skill development, and next-generation reforms in land, power, education, and healthcare.  
Rajiv Memani, President Designate of CII and Chairman & CEO of EY India, stressed the need for India to achieve energy independence. He noted that 20,000 crore has been allocated for R&D in the Union Budget and urged a stronger push for Global Capability Centres (GCCs) in the Eastern Region. He also advocated for the introduction of a mineral value chain in the Eastern Region, in alignment with the Critical Mineral Mission announced in the last Union Budget.  
Suvendra Kumar Behera, Chairman of CII Eastern Region, highlighted the region's 12.7% contribution to India's GDP and the importance of leveraging its rich mineral resources to drive economic growth. He emphasized the role of artificial intelligence (AI) and digital transformation in improving decision-making, alongside the adoption of sustainable and green energy solutions.

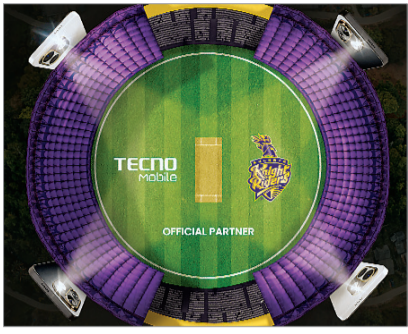
ESIC plans wage coverage hike to ₹30,000

**MI News Service, Kolkata:** The Employees' State Insurance Corporation (ESIC) is planning to increase the coverage wage limit to 30,000, announced Shri Amrith Kumar Sharma, Additional Commissioner & Regional Director, West Bengal & Sikkim Regions, at a special session organized by the Merchants' Chamber of Commerce & Industry (MCCI) on the changing role of ESIC in ensuring social justice and inclusivity.  
Sharma highlighted that ESIC has expanded to 674 districts across 36 states and Union Territories, providing five key benefits: Medical, Sickness, Maternity, Disablement, and Dependent Benefits. He reiterated ESIC's commitment to policyholders,

stating, "IP is our VIP." For super-specialty treatments, insured persons (IP) can access immediate care at tie-up hospitals without prior referral. Additionally, ESIC offers unemployment benefits under the Rajiv Gandhi ShramikKalyanYojana (RGSKY) and full-wage maternity benefits for six months.  
In West Bengal, ESIC covers over 80 lakh beneficiaries and has tie-ups with 52 super-specialty hospitals, including Apollo, CMRI, and Medica. Sharma also outlined new initiatives such as free preventive health check-ups for insured members above 40, funeral and confinement expenses, and in-house chemotherapy services.







## TECNO'S #SIGNALJEETKA CAMPAIGN HITS THE PITCH WITH KOLKATA KNIGHT RIDERS

**NEW DELHI:** Hold on to your seats, cricket fans! TECNO, the innovative tech brand that's all about embracing India's unstoppable energy, has teamed up with the iconic Kolkata Knight Riders (KKR). This electrifying partnership is all about celebrating the passion of India's youth and cricket enthusiasts, and it's going to be bigger, bolder, and more exciting than ever!

Cricket in India isn't just a sport—it's a heartbeat, a celebration, and a way of life. TECNO has always been at the forefront of keeping fans connected to the action with its sleek, powerful smartphones, designed to provide seamless signal and connectivity experience. And now, with #SignalJeetKa, TECNO is stepping up its game to ensure you never miss a single boundary, wicket, or super over. Mr. Arijet Talapatra, CEO of TECNO Mobile India, shared, "We're excited to partner with Kolkata Knight Riders. Cricket is an emotion that unites millions, and it aligns perfectly with TECNO's mission to empower India's youth. Through our #SignalJeetKa initiative, we aim to ensure fans stay connected and never miss a moment of the thrilling action. Just as KKR gives their all on the field, we're committed to delivering the best technology to keep fans at the heart of the game."

KKR's #KorboLorboleetbo motto mirrors TECNO's "Stop At Nothing" ethos, championing relentless hustle, teamwork, and the vibrant culture of cricket. This partnership reflects TECNO's ongoing efforts to engage with India's youth—a generation passionate about both technology and sports. By leveraging advanced products and unparalleled signal connectivity, TECNO reinforces its position as a brand that champions performance, excellence, and seamless connectivity in every aspect of life.



## ICONIQ WHITE WHISKY IS EMERGING AS INDIA'S MOST TALKED-ABOUT SPIRIT

**RANCHI:** Allied Blenders and Distillers Limited (ABD), the 3rd largest spirits company in India and the maker of Iconiq White International Grain Whisky, reports a significant milestone that its flagship brand has surpassed 50 Lakh or 5 million cases in FY24-25 with a good three weeks remaining in financial year, reinforcing its position as one of the fastest-growing whisky brands globally. Since its launch in September 2023, Iconiq White Whisky has gained momentum in the Prestige & Above segment, driven by its contemporary product design and strong consumer demand.

Iconiq White Whisky recorded 3.2 Lakh cases in FY22-23 during its initial launch across East and North India. In FY23-24, sales surged to 22.7 Lakh cases, earning recognition as the fastest-growing spirits brand in the world for 2023, as per Drinks International's Millionaire's Club Report 2024.



An aerial view of the city's skyline as temperature rises with the onset of summers, in New Delhi on Wednesday.

# Thermal imaging may help fruits, veggies stay fresher longer: Study

**Georgia [US]:** Before your favourite produce arrives at the grocery store, it must be carefully harvested and stored for extended periods of time. A recent University of Georgia assessment argues that new temperature sensing devices could make that procedure considerably easier, as agricultural issues are exacerbated by changing climates.

Maintaining temperature, humidity and light is critical to ensuring fruits and vegetables don't spoil or deteriorate rapidly. Temperature spikes are the root of adverse outcomes like premature spoilage and rotting, so monitoring these changes quickly and accurately is key.

Researchers say thermal imaging technology could help control temperatures before and after harvesting fruit and vegetables.

"Measuring temperature in food processing environments has to be done right," said Kevin Mis Solval, lead author of the study and an associate professor in UGA's College of Agricultural and

Environmental Sciences. "We do it on a regular basis to make sure we have the proper conditions for producing safe products, but it may not always be done practically. These types of thermal imaging tools are not only feasible but cost-effective and good at measuring temperature profiles. That is beneficial for a farmer or food processing facility."

A thermal image can replace old-school thermometers in some environments

Mis Solval evaluated the technology as a tool for rapidly sensing abrupt temperature changes in crops in real time. By collecting infrared radiation of fruits and vegetables, thermal imaging technology can gauge temperature without contact. These types of cameras are readily available to food producers and range from industrial-grade cameras to smartphone attachments. But they have one thing in common: If there's a drastic temperature spike, the technology



can flag it. "Once you harvest, there is a decomposition process that starts right there, so in some instances a rapid cooling process is very critical for extending the shelf life of fresh produce," Mis Solval said. "If this cooling process is not done correctly, then the shelf life of some fruit and vegetables is significantly shorter. We're talking two weeks compared to three or four days."

Many leafy greens must be picked and then immediately cooled, for example, so a quick temperature measurement must match

that speed. Currently, farmers and harvesters use conventional thermometers to capture the temperature of one or two items. But that process is not only time-consuming but potentially damaging to the product. Poking and prodding fruits and veggies for an accurate temperature reading can cause minor damage and increase the risk of cross-contamination.

Thermal imaging technology could save produce from the trash

External heat flux in the harvesting process is more common than it used to be.

Extreme temperatures, intense solar rays and drought stress are making products on the field more at risk for defects.

Ideally, thermal imaging technology will be automated in the future to further optimize the processing of preharvest and postharvest. Thermal imaging technology has been effective in evaluating the quality of seeds and food safety, but this is the first time it has been considered for such a key part in the pre- and postharvest processes of fresh produce.

This type of technology could make or break the quality of produce you put in your shopping basket.

"Items with a shorter shelf life have less of a chance to reach the marketplace," Mis Solval said. "If it doesn't meet the quality criteria for the supermarket, it's going to be discarded. If it makes it to the consumer and fails in quality, it's going to be thrown away. We are making sure quality produce reaches the final consumer."

## RESEARCH DISCOVERS NEW SKELETAL TISSUE WITH POTENTIAL FOR REGENERATION

**California:** An international research team has discovered a new type of skeletal tissue that offers great potential for advancing regenerative medicine and tissue engineering. An international research team led by the University of California, Irvine has discovered a new type of skeletal tissue that offers great potential for advancing regenerative medicine and tissue engineering. Most cartilage relies on an external extracellular matrix for strength, but 'lipocartilage', which is found in the ears, nose and throat of mammals, is uniquely packed with fat-filled cells called 'lipochondrocytes'. It provides super-stable internal support which enables the strength of tissue. It makes to remain soft and springy -- similar to bubbled packaging material. The study, published in the journal Science, describes how lipocartilage cells create and maintain their own lipid reservoirs while remaining constant in size. Unlike ordinary adipocyte fat cells, lipochondrocytes never shrink or expand in response to food availability. "Lipocartilage's resilience and stability provide a compliant, elastic quality that's perfect for flexible body parts such as earlobes or the tip of the nose, opening exciting possibilities in regenerative medicine and tissue engineering, particularly for facial defects or injuries," said corresponding author Maksim Plikus, UC Irvine professor of developmental and cell biology. "Currently, cartilage reconstruction often requires harvesting tissue from the patient's rib -- a painful and invasive procedure. In the future, patient-specific lipochondrocytes could be derived from stem cells, purified and used to manufacture living cartilage tailored to individual needs."

# Fibre in diet may boost the body against infections

**Washington [USA]:** A new study has found that the composition of the gut microbiome helps in predicting how likely a person will succumb to potentially life-threatening infection with *Klebsiella pneumoniae*, *E.coli* and other bugs -- and it may be altered by changing your diet.

The group of bacteria called Enterobacteriaceae, including *Klebsiella pneumoniae*, *Shigella*, *E.coli* and others, is present at low levels as part of a healthy human gut microbiome. However, certain catalytic factors such as increased inflammation in the body, or by eating contaminated food these bugs can cause illness and disease. In extreme cases, too much Enterobacteriaceae in the gut can

be life-threatening.

Researchers have used computational approaches including AI to analyse the gut microbiome composition of over 12,000 people across 45 countries from their stool samples. They found that a person's microbiome 'signature' can predict whether a person's gut is likely to be colonised by Enterobacteriaceae. The results are consistent across different states of health and geographic locations. The researchers identified 135 gut microbe species that are commonly found in the absence of Enterobacteriaceae. It likely protects against infection. The results are published in the journal *Nature Microbiology*.

Notable among the protective

gut species is a group of bacteria called *Faecalibacterium*, which produces beneficial compounds called short-chain fatty acids by breaking down fibre in the foods we eat. This seems to protect against infection by a range of disease-causing Enterobacteriaceae bugs.

The researchers suggest that eating more fibre in our diet will support the growth of good bacteria -- and crowd out the bad ones to significantly reduce the risk of illness.

In contrast, taking probiotics -- which don't directly change the environment in the gut -- is less likely to affect the likelihood of Enterobacteriaceae infection.

"Our results suggest that what

**THE GROUP OF BACTERIA CALLED ENTEROBACTERIACEAE, INCLUDING KLEBSIELLA PNEUMONIAE, SHIGELLA, E.COLI AND OTHERS, IS PRESENT AT LOW LEVELS AS PART OF A HEALTHY HUMAN GUT MICROBIOME. HOWEVER, CERTAIN CATALYTIC FACTORS SUCH AS INCREASED INFLAMMATION IN THE BODY, OR BY EATING CONTAMINATED FOOD THESE BUGS CAN CAUSE ILLNESS AND DISEASE.**

we eat is potentially very important in controlling the likelihood of infection with a range of bacteria, including *E.coli* and *Klebsiella pneumoniae* because this changes our gut environment to make it more hostile to invaders," said Dr Alexandre Almeida, a researcher at the University of Cambridge's Department of Veterinary Medicine and senior author of the paper. He added: "By eating fibre in foods like vegetables, beans and whole grains, we can provide the raw material for our gut bacteria to produce short-chain fatty acids -- compounds that can protect us from these pathogenic bugs." *Klebsiella pneumoniae* can cause pneumonia, meningitis and other infections.

# SLOW GROWTH OF CORTEX COULD PLAY ROLE IN DEVELOPING EATING DISORDERS AS ADULT

**New Delhi:** Slow maturing of the brain's cortex -- that helps with self-control and decision-making -- during teenage could be a reason for developing eating disorders as a young adult, according to a new research.

Disordered eating behaviours can be 'restrictive' -- involving dieting and purging in which one deliberately limits food intake to control body weight and shape -- or 'emotional' in response to negative emo-

tions or urges such as binge-eating.

For the study, published in the journal *Nature Mental Health*, the researchers led by those at King's College London analysed MRI brain scans of almost 1,000 teenagers from England, Ireland, France and Germany, taken at ages 14 and 23 years. Genetic data and responses to questionnaires assessing the participants' well-being and eating behaviours were also analysed. 'Brain maturation' in

which the cortex or the outer layer of brain decreases in volume and thickness during teenage, was found to be delayed and less pronounced in unhealthy eaters. The cortex is known to help perform higher-level functions such as decision-making and regulating emotions. "Age-related decreases in volumes and thickness in several brain regions, particularly in the cerebellum and prefrontal cortex, were less pronounced in restrictive eaters and emo-

tional/uncontrolled eaters, compared with healthy eaters, suggesting protracted (delayed) brain maturation," the authors wrote. They said that a delayed maturing of the cortex contributed towards the link between having mental health problems at age 14 and developing unhealthy eating behaviours at age 23, and this connection was unrelated to body mass index. In particular, they found that a reduced maturation of the cerebellum -- a

brain region that controls appetite -- helped explain the link between one's genetic risk for high body mass index and restrictive eating behaviours at age 23.

The researchers grouped the participants under three types of eating behaviours -- healthy eaters (42 per cent), restrictive eaters (33 per cent) and emotional or uncontrolled eaters (25 per cent). Young people with unhealthy eating behaviours at age 23 were found to have had

**Disordered eating behaviours can be 'restrictive' -- involving dieting and purging in which one deliberately limits food intake to control body weight and shape -- or 'emotional' in response to negative emotions or urges such as binge-eating.**

higher levels of internalising and externalising problems at age 14, compared to healthy eaters. Internalising problems could involve anxiety or depression, whereas externalising ones could involve hyperactivity, inattention or conduct issues.

Internalising problems significantly increased with age between 14 to 23 among the unhealthy eaters, the researchers said. They added that although externalising problems decreased with age across the groups,

overall levels were higher among those having emotional or uncontrolled eating behaviours.

Restrictive eaters were found to have dieted more throughout adolescence compared to healthy eaters. On the other hand, some of the emotional eaters showed an increase in dieting between ages 14 and 16, while others showed an increase in binge eating between ages 14 to 19, compared to healthy eaters, the team found.

Switzerland warns China over escalating tensions after military drills near Taiwan

MI News Service, Taipei: Switzerland has issued a warning to China, urging it to avoid escalating tensions after China conducted a live-fire exercise off Taiwan's southern coast last month, as reported by Taiwan News. Switzerland's Foreign Minister Ignazio Cassis issued a warning to Chinese authorities and the Chinese embassy in Switzerland following the military drills. According to Swiss foreign policy experts, this unusual action by Switzerland highlights the strategic significance of the Taiwan Strait. Taiwan News reported. The live-fire exercises, announced without prior notice by the People's Liberation Army (PLA) in February, took place off Taiwan's southern coast near Kaohsiung and Pingtung, as well as in the Tasman Sea off Australia's east coast. According to Taiwan News, these manoeuvres violated international norms and heightened risks for international flights and maritime safety, provoking protests from Australia, New Zealand, and Taiwan. Switzerland's involvement came after these drills raised alarms about the potential for miscalculation and regional instability. On March 11, Jean-Luc Aador, a Swiss Federal Assembly member, questioned the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs regarding Switzerland's response to China's actions. Aador, a co-chair of the Switzerland-Taiwan parliamentary friendship group, criticized China for undermining international norms and creating instability in a region vital to Switzerland's economic interests, Taiwan News reported.

Pakistan: Baloch Yakjehti Committee confirms identities of 11 disappeared individuals

MI News Service, Balochistan: The Baloch Yakjehti Committee (BYC) has confirmed the identities of 11 individuals, including three minors, who were reportedly forcibly disappeared by Pakistani security forces near SBK University in Nushki district, Balochistan, as reported by the Balochistan Post. The incident occurred on the morning of March 16, when Pakistani forces allegedly abducted dozens of people from the area surrounding the station. The group of abducted individuals includes labourers, drivers, passersby, and minors, the Balochistan Post reported. According to the Balochistan Post, BYC revealed that the list of abducted individuals is incomplete, indicating that more people may still be missing. They expressed growing concern over the fear and distress among the families of the disappeared and the local community. The committee emphasized that the abduction of minors and innocent civilians is a serious violation of human rights.



External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar, second right, along with, from left, Meta Chief Global Affairs Officer Joel Kaplan, Fincantieri CEO Pierroberto Folgiero and Swift Chief Executive - Europe, Middle East & Africa (EMEA) Marianne Demarchi during a session on 'Politics, Business, and New World Order' at the Raisina Dialogue 2025, in New Delhi.

US slams China's military drills near Taiwan as "brazen, irresponsible"

MI News Service, Washington DC: A spokesperson from the United States Department of State heavily criticised China's recent military exercises near Taiwan, calling them as "brazen and irresponsible threats," while reaffirming the United States' long-standing support for Taipei (capital city), as reported by Taipei Times. The spokesperson said, "China cannot credibly claim to be a 'force for stability in a turbulent world' while issuing brazen and irresponsible threats toward Taiwan." According to Taipei Times, the official emphasized that Washington's long-standing commitment to Taiwan would persist as it has for 45 years, and the US "will keep supporting Taiwan in response to China's military, economic, informational, and diplomatic pressure." "Together with our international partners, we strongly advocate for peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait and oppose any efforts to alter the status quo through force or coercion," the spokesperson added.

The spokesperson also stated that the US military was keeping track of the Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA) movements around Taiwan, but provided no further details, as reported by Taipei Times. According to Taiwan's military, on Monday, the PLA deployed over two dozen military aircraft across the median line of the Taiwan Strait and sent dozens more into Taiwan's air defence identification zone, coordinating with Chinese naval vessels. Taipei Times reported that China's Taiwan Affairs Office spokesperson, Chen Binhua, stated that the drills on Monday were a "just and necessary" action to protect national sovereignty and maintain peace in the Taiwan Strait. He added that the drills were also a response to actions by "Taiwan's leader" who is spreading "separatist ideas promoting 'Taiwan independence'" and escalating tensions and confrontation across the Strait, referring to President William Lai. Taipei Times reported.

Public Relations Department Of Eastern Railway Conducts Safety Awareness Campaign At Level Crossing Gate Near Barrackpore Station



MI News Service, Kolkata: RPF post at Barrackpore, conducted an awareness campaign at Level Crossing Gate No. 14/SPLT near Barrackpore station over Sealdah Division today (19.03.2025). During the campaign, pedestrians and road vehicle owners crossing the level crossing were counseled about the safety rules to be followed while passing through a Level Crossing Gate. The staff of the Public Relations Department and officials of the RPF, Eastern Railway, advised them about the importance of exercising patience for the smooth closure and opening of the Level Crossing Gate, allowing precedence to the approaching train, which in turn helps in the streamlined flow of both train and road traffic.

MI News Service, Kolkata: RPF post at Barrackpore, conducted an awareness campaign at Level Crossing Gate No. 14/SPLT near Barrackpore station over Sealdah Division today (19.03.2025). During the campaign, pedestrians and road vehicle owners crossing the level crossing were counseled about the safety rules to be followed while passing through a Level Crossing Gate. The staff of the Public Relations Department and officials of the RPF, Eastern Railway, advised them about the importance of exercising patience for the smooth closure and opening of the Level Crossing Gate, allowing precedence to the approaching train, which in turn helps in the streamlined flow of both train and road traffic.

Egypt, Kuwait, Bahrain warn Israel's renewed attacks on Gaza threaten regional stability

MI News Service, Cairo: Egypt, Kuwait and Bahrain warned on Tuesday that renewed Israeli attacks on the Gaza Strip threaten regional peace and stability. The remarks were made during separate phone conversations between Egyptian President Abdel-Fattah al-Sisi, the Emir of Kuwait Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and King of Bahrain Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa, the Egyptian Presidency said in two statements. Sisi and Al-Sabah condemned Israel's resumption of hostilities in Gaza, which has so far resulted in hundreds of civilian casualties, including children and women, the presidency said. The two leaders affirmed that the Israeli attacks constitute a flagrant violation of international law and the ceasefire agreement that has been

reached, affirming the Israeli airstrikes are also part of deliberate attempts to make Gaza unlivable and drive Palestinians to emigrate. The Egyptian president and the Emir of Kuwait stressed the need for the international community to assume its responsibilities to push for an immediate ceasefire, implement the two-state solution, and establish a Palestinian state along the 1967 borders with East Jerusalem as its capital. Meanwhile, the Egyptian president and king of Bahrain emphasized the urgent need for an immediate ceasefire, calling on the international community to protect the people of Gaza from the "brutal aggression they are facing." They also reiterated the importance of fully adhering to the decisions of the recent

extraordinary Arab summit hosted in Cairo, particularly the Arab plan for the reconstruction of Gaza. Both sides stressed their total rejection of any actions or decisions that would lead to the displacement of Palestinians from their lands, affirming that the establishment of a Palestinian state is the only guarantee for achieving lasting peace and stability in the region. Early Tuesday, Israel launched massive airstrikes across Gaza, killing more than 400 people and shattering a fragile ceasefire that took effect on Jan. 19. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said later in the day that Israel would escalate its renewed assault on the enclave and that "from now on, the negotiations (on Gaza ceasefire) will take place only under fire."

Comprehensive Security arrangements at stations to streamline passenger flow

MI News Service, Delhi: Union Minister of Railways Ashwini Vaishnaw while said in the replying to the question in Lok Sabha, said that Each railway station has unique operational challenges due to varying passenger movement patterns during the festivals. For the security arrangements and to streamline passenger flow, station specific plans are made involving all the stakeholders that include Government Railway Police (GRP), Local Police and Local Civil Administration and accordingly action is taken to manage the influx of passengers.

To handle the rush of passengers during Maha Kumbh 2025 at Prayagraj, new infrastructure were created building seven additional platforms, bringing the total to 48 platforms across 9 stations in the Prayagraj area. The approach roads to these stations have also been widened to ensure smooth movement of pilgrims. In total, 17 new permanent Yatri Ashryas were constructed, increasing the holding capacity of these shelters from 21,000 to over 1,10,000. Additionally, 21 new Road Over Bridges (ROBs) and Road Under Bridges (RUBs) have been built, eliminating all level crossings in the region. A well-coordinated train operation plan was deployed to ensure smooth transportation during the Kumbh. Each station was having its own control room, with a central master control room at Prayagraj Junction. Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) were developed for train operations and crowd management at stations.

To facilitate smooth rush of passenger flow, extensive measures have been put in place, including single entry and exit points at stations on major Snan days and unidirectional movement on platforms, foot over bridges (FOBs), and ramps. Security arrangements for Mahakumbh-2025 were comprehensive, with an emphasis on surveillance and real-time monitoring. A total of about 1200 CCTV cameras, including 116 Face Recognition System (FRS) cameras and Drone cameras were also deployed for surveillance of tracks and crowd management at approach roads to stations. Additional deployment of 15,000 personnel from the Railway Protection Force (RPF), Government Railway Police (GRP) and para-military forces were done to ensure security.

Also, additional deployment were made at other sensitive railway stations where high rush of passengers were expected i.e. Varanasi, Ayodhya, Pandit Deen Dayal Upadhyaya, Danapur and New Delhi etc.

New Delhi Railway Station has adequate infrastructure. It has 16 nos. of platforms, three foot over ridges (FOBs), access from both Paharganj and Ajmeri gate side, large open spaces in front of the station etc. Large rush of passengers during festivals and events like Kumbh, Chhat, Holi etc. are being handled regularly on New Delhi Railway Station. Further, redevelopment of New Delhi Railway Station has been sanctioned under Amrit Bharat Station Scheme. Amrit Bharat Station Scheme envisages development of stations on a continuous basis with a long-term approach. This scheme involves preparation of Master Plans and their implementation in phases to improve the amenities at the stations like improvement of station access, circulating areas, waiting halls, toilets, lift/escalators as necessary, cleanliness, free Wi-Fi, kiosks for local products through schemes like One Station One Product, better passenger information systems, executive lounges, nominated spaces for business meetings, landscaping etc. keeping in view the necessity at each station. The scheme also envisages improvement of building integrating the station with both sides of the city, multimodal integration, amenities for Divyangians, sustainable and environment friendly solutions, provision of ballast less tracks etc. as per necessity, phasing and feasibility and creation of city centres at the station in the long term.

The plan for redevelopment of New Delhi Railway station, envisages larger new station buildings at both sides, spacious Air Concourse with modern ameni-

ties for passenger, Multi Modal Transport Hub connecting different mode of transportation and providing parking and other facilities. The redeveloped station envisages a network of surface and elevated roads to provide access at two levels and to decongest surrounding areas of New Delhi railway station. Adequate security measures like CCTV cameras, access control, movement regulation and waiting space etc are also envisaged.

The details of allocation of funds for development and maintenance of stations are maintained Zonal Railway-wise and not footfall-wise or Work- wise or Station-wise. Passenger amenities are generally funded under Plan Head-53 'Customer Amenities'. An allocation of ₹12,994 Crores (Revised Estimate) has been made for the financial year 2024-25 under Plan Head-53. New Delhi railway station in Delhi falls under Northern Railway Zone and the fund allocation to Northern Railway for development and maintenance of stations under Plan Head-53 'Customer Amenities' for the year (RE 2024-25) is ₹ 1531.24 Cr. To handle heavy rush of passengers at stations, following decisions have been taken by railways -

1. Permanent holding areas at 60 stations: a. During the festival season of 2024, holding areas were created outside stations. These waiting areas were able to hold large crowds at Surat Udhna, Patna and New Delhi. Passengers were allowed only when the train came to the platform. b. Similar arrangements were made during Mahakumbh at nine stations of Prayagraj area. c. Based on the experience of these stations, it has been decided to create permanent waiting areas outside stations at 60 stations across the country which periodically face heavy crowds. d. Pilot projects have started at New Delhi, Anand Vihar, Varanasi, Ayodhya, and Ghaziabad stations. e. With this concept, the sudden crowd will be contained within the waiting area. Passengers will be allowed to go to platforms only when the trains arrive at the platform. This will decongest the stations. 2. Access control: a. Complete access control will be initiated at the 60 stations. b. Passengers with confirmed reserve tickets will be given direct access to the platforms. c. Passengers without a ticket or with a waiting list ticket will wait in the outside waiting area. d. All unauthorised entry points will be sealed. 3. Wider foot-over-bridges (FOB): a. Two new designs of 12 metre wide (40 feet) and 6 metre wide (20 feet) standard FOB have been developed. These wide FOBs with ramps were very effective in crowd management during Mahakumbh. These new standard wide FOBs will be installed in all the stations. 4. Cameras: a. Cameras helped crowd management in a big way during Mahakumbh. A large number of cameras will be installed in all stations and adjoining areas for close monitoring. 5. War rooms: a. War rooms at large stations will be developed. Officers of all departments will work in the war room during crowd situations. 6. New generation communication equipment: a. Latest design digital communication equipment like walkie-talkies, announcement systems, calling systems will be installed on all heavy crowd stations. 7. New design ID card: a. All staff and service persons will be given a new design ID card so that only authorised persons can enter the station. 8. New design uniform for staff: a. All staff members will be given new design uniforms so that they can be easily identified during a crisis situation. 9. Upgradation of station director post: a. All major stations will have a senior officer as station director. All other departments will report to the station director. b. Station director will get financial empowerment so that he can take on-the-spot decisions for improving the station. 10. Sale of tickets as per capacity: a. Station Director will be empowered to control the sale of tickets as per capacity of the station and the available trains. CCTV cameras are installed at New Delhi railway station, which is being monitored round the clock. A high-level inquiry committee has been constituted for comprehensive investigation into the incident at New Delhi railway station.

Promise made, promise kept: Trump hails return of Crew-9 astronauts, thanks Elon Musk

MI News Service, California: The White House on Tuesday (local time) highlighted how US President Donald Trump prioritised the return of stranded NASA Crew-9 astronauts Sunita Williams, Nick Hague, Butch Wilmore, and Russian cosmonaut Aleksandr Gorbunov. The White House stated that the astronauts safely returned in the Gulf of America, crediting Elon Musk for their safe return.



Elon Musk for their safe return. "PROMISE MADE, PROMISE KEPT: President Trump pledged to rescue the astronauts stranded in space for nine months. Today, they safely splashed down in the Gulf of America, thanks to Elon Musk, SpaceX, and NASA!" Elon Musk congratulated the NASA and SpaceX teams on their successful return and thanked Trump for prioritising the mission. "Congratulations

Crew-9 astronauts breathed earthly air for the first time in over nine months following the successful splashdown of SpaceX's Dragon capsule. The astronauts disembarked the capsule on stretchers, as is customary, CNN reported. This precaution is taken by SpaceX for all astronauts returning from long-duration space missions. Delays caused by issues with Boeing's Starliner spacecraft, which surfaced during a test flight piloted by Butch Wilmore and Sunita Williams last summer, led to the astronaut duo remaining in space for nine months instead of a week, CNN reported. NASA's SpaceX Crew-9 completed the agency's ninth commercial crew rotation mission to the International Space Station on Tuesday, splashing down safely in a SpaceX

Dragon spacecraft off the coast of Tallahassee, Florida, in the Gulf of America, according to a NASA statement. NASA astronauts Nick Hague, Sunita Williams, and Butch Wilmore, along with Roscosmos cosmonaut Aleksandr Gorbunov, returned to Earth at 5:57 pm EDT. Teams aboard SpaceX recovery vessels retrieved the spacecraft and its crew. After returning to shore, the astronauts will travel to NASA's Johnson Space Center in Houston to reunite with their families.

"We are thrilled to have Suni, Butch, Nick, and Aleksandr home after their months-long mission conducting vital science, technology demonstrations, and maintenance aboard the International Space Station," said NASA acting Administrator Janet Petro.

Former WUC chief calls for action on Uyghur repression at UN Human Rights Council session

MI News Service, Geneva: Former World Uyghur Congress President Dolkun Isa called on the United Nations to take stronger action against China's ongoing repression of Uyghurs during the 58th session of the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva. Isa's remarks were delivered alongside the launch of a WUC exhibition aimed at exposing the Chinese government's transnational repression of Uyghurs, which included the forced deportation of Uyghurs from Thailand, forced abortions, the detention of Uyghur intellectuals in camps, and the use of Uyghur forced labour. In his address, Isa emphasized, "Chinese government used all capacity trying to undermine the Human Rights Council, UN Human Rights System, and they spread the fake news, disinformation campaign, but the reality for the Uyghur in Turkistan has never changed. Still, the millions of people suffering in the concentration camp, still Uyghur people subjected to

forced labour." He also condemned China's Communist Party, calling them "liars" who manipulate the international human rights system and continue to perpetuate a campaign of repression against the Uyghur population. Isa pointed to a recent incident as an example of China's reach and repression, noting that just two weeks ago, 40 Uyghur refugees were forcibly deported from Thailand to China, where they face grave risks. He described this deportation as a clear indication of China's strong transnational repression. "United Nations should wake up and don't trust China," Isa urged. "Its main aim is to improve human rights. The United Nations should not remain silent and must speak out against the Uyghur genocide." Isa's remarks and the WUC exhibition serve as a call for the international community to stand up against China's violations of Uyghur rights and to advocate for stronger actions to hold China accountable.

