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# mRNA Vaccine Against Tuberculosis Shows Efficacy In Mice, Results Pave Way For Larger Trials

Press Trust Of India

**A** new mRNA vaccine against tuberculosis has been shown to effectively boost immunity in pre-clinical trials conducted in mice, the results of which pave the way for clinical trials of the vaccine. Developed by researchers from Australia, the vaccine uses messenger RNA (mRNA) technology, in which instructions to create parts of the disease-causing bacteria are transferred to the host. The host's body then produces an immune response, thereby "learning" how to respond to the bacteria. mRNA vaccines were first developed for COVID-19. Tuberculosis (TB) is caused by the bacteria *Mycobacterium tuberculosis* and spreads through the air when an infected person coughs or sneezes. Symptoms include a persistent cough, chest pain, fever, and fatigue. Currently, the most widely used vaccine against TB is the Bacillus Calmette-Guerin (BCG). Developed in 1921, the vaccine works by introducing a weakened version of the TB-causing bacteria into the body. The body then develops immunity against TB. However, the effectiveness of BCG in adults is inconsistent, the team noted. The study, published in the journal *eBioMedicine*, found that the mRNA vaccine successfully triggered an immune response that helped reduce TB numbers in infected mice. Furthermore, in mice vaccinated with BCG, a booster dose of the mRNA vaccine significantly improved long-term protection, the researchers observed. Senior author Jamie Triccas, deputy director of



the Sydney Infectious Diseases Institute, said the results represent a major advance in TB vaccine research, providing a strong rationale for further clinical development. "Our findings demonstrate that an mRNA vaccine can induce potent, pathogen-specific immune responses that target TB, a disease that has long evaded effective vaccine development," Triccas added. The team expects the mRNA vaccine to be more effective and consistent compared to BCG when used in humans, as mRNA vaccines allow for rapid adaptation, making them an attractive choice for global efforts in controlling TB.

**“ Our findings demonstrate that an mRNA vaccine can induce potent, pathogen-specific immune responses that target TB, a disease that has long evaded effective vaccine development ”**

Although mRNA was discovered in the early 1960s, the success of mRNA vaccines in producing strong immune responses against COVID-19 infection has prompted scientists globally to use the technology against other infectious diseases. "mRNA vaccines offer a scalable, cost-effective, and adaptable platform that can be rapidly deployed against infectious diseases," said co-lead author Dr. Claudio Coutinho from the Centenary Institute, Sydney. "Our study provides evidence that this (mRNA) platform can be harnessed for TB, potentially improving protection and durability of immunity in a way that traditional vaccines cannot," said author Colin Pouton from Monash University. The team is looking to assess the vaccine's efficacy in larger models before moving to human studies. "These findings of a protective lipid nanoparticle (LNP)-mRNA vaccine for TB highlight the potential of the LNP-mRNA platform for TB control and support further research to facilitate translation to humans," the authors wrote. According to the World Health Organization, about half of the world's TB cases can be found in eight countries, including India, Bangladesh, China, and Pakistan.

## Banks Offering Greater Proportion Of Green Loans Have Stronger Financial Stability: IIM Research

Press Trust Of India

**B**anks that have a greater proportion of green loans experience long-term improvements in financial stability, according to research by the Indian Institute of Management

The study also emphasises that Indian banks can act as catalysts in transforming the economy towards a low-carbon economy. By increasing lending to non-carbon-intensive sectors, banks can reduce default risks, align with global sustainability goals, and



(IIM), Lucknow. The study published in the prestigious *Finance Research Letters* journal found that expansion of non-carbon intensive lending can improve the core of loan portfolios of Indian banks. The findings underscore the strategic importance of sustainable lending in the Indian banking system. A green loan is a form of financing that enables borrowers to use the proceeds to exclusively fund projects that make a substantial contribution to an environmental objective. According to Vikas Srivastava, ONGC Chair Professor, IIM Lucknow, despite global initiatives to create uniform frameworks for green lending, there are significant gaps in providing incentives, particularly in developing economies such as India. "Most Indian banks are heavily dependent on lending to carbon-intensive industries as there is no clear taxonomy to identify and promote green assets. Our study addresses this gap by designing a framework to identify non-carbon-intensive sectors and assessing their impact on the quality of the bank's loan portfolio," Srivastava told PTI. "Additionally, for the first time, the study has ranked Indian banks based on the sustainability of their credit portfolios, with a specific focus on non-carbon-intensive loans. This evaluation provides valuable insights for shaping future credit allocation strategies, helping banks balance financial stability with sustainable growth," he added.

contribute to long-term economic resilience. "Our attempt at standardisation of green loan taxonomy and finding that a critical mass of green asset lending is required for an optimised credit portfolio is a critical insight that can help the top management of banks to focus on this asset class as an opportunity to build sustained lending competence across their credit teams," said Sowmya Subramaniam, Associate Professor, Finance and Accounting, IIM Lucknow. "Our findings may help regulators to perhaps come out with appropriate regulatory nudges for banks. An optimised bank credit portfolio will go a long way to improve the competitiveness of the Indian banking sector," she added. The researchers noted that considering the high exposure to risks due to climate change and carbon-intensive industries, Indian banks must proactively modify and diversify credit portfolios. "While non-carbon-intensive lending offers a strategic opportunity to ensure sustainability, without any regulatory push, banks are suspected to face hurdles in adopting green lending practices. This highlights the urgent need for policy interventions to achieve sustainable finance," said Vidya Mahadevan, Research Scholar, IIM Lucknow. "Our study provides a data-driven framework for integrating green finance into mainstream banking operations, ensuring that Indian banks remain financially strong while contributing to a more sustainable future," Mahadevan added.

## Scientists Call For Open Access To X's Data For Academic Research

Press Trust Of India

**R**esearchers are calling for free access to social media platform X's data for academic analyses, insights from which can help understand trends in political engagement.

Efforts of a research group from Saarland University, Germany, were halted abruptly when X's owner Elon Musk blocked free access to X's data for academic research purposes in June 2023. The US-based entrepreneur acquired the platform, then known as Twitter, in October 2022.

The team wanted to know whether Twitter prioritised tweets from politicians from the right of the political spectrum between 2021 and 2023.

"It is simply not acceptable that access to these vast amounts of data is either unaffordable or provided so selectively that no meaningful analyses can be conducted," lead researcher Ingmar Weber, a professor of artificial intelligence (AI) and chair for societal computing at Saarland University, said.

The researchers called for implementation of legislation to ensure that academic researchers can regain access to social network data.

Over a period of two years, before the abrupt end, the team analysed tweets from 6,550 Twitter accounts associated with about 8,600 politicians from twelve countries known to have the highest user activity on X, including India, Argentina, Germany and the US.

The findings, published in the *Journal of Quantitative Description: Digital Media*, revealed no significant difference between the dissemination of content from left-leaning or right-leaning politicians across the countries analysed. However, the team observed a considerable increase in the number of likes, a slight increase in the likes-per-retweet ratio and



**“ It is simply not acceptable that access to these vast amounts of data is either unaffordable or provided so selectively that no meaningful analyses can be conducted ”**

a significant reduction in the number of retweets post Musk acquisition. "We believe that this is because early followers of a Twitter account are more politically engaged and tend to support content more actively. But as the political

message gets spread to a broader audience, it becomes more likely that the number of likes will go up, while the retweet rate declines," study author and computer scientist Brahmani Nutakki, a PhD scholar at Saarland University, said.

However, the team faced challenges while analysing data, many of which were related to changes introduced between November 2022 and June 2023 following Musk's takeover -- one of them being the removal of rules prohibiting hateful conduct. The rules were aimed at preventing attacks on individuals.

"Changes to Twitter's functionality also resulted in changes in the user population, which made it difficult for us to attribute the changes we observed to a single specific cause," Nutakki said.

Further, "political content on the platform reached a wider audience following these changes," according to the study's findings. "In the period before June 2023, we found no evidence of a significant difference in engagement patterns between users on the left and those on the right of the political spectrum," Weber said.

While there are media reports of instances such as posts of Republican politicians receiving greater engagement than those made by Democrats or hate content spiking, an academic analysis of X's data is needed for "continuous scrutiny".

"These worrying changes to social media platforms such as Twitter/X are jeopardising the democratic structures in many countries and require continuous scrutiny by academic researchers," Weber said.

"We are calling for the implementation of legislation such as Article 40 of the Digital Services Act (in the European Union) so that academic researchers can regain access to social network data," the author said.

The authors wrote, "These observations contribute to the ongoing discussion on the role of social media platforms in political dialogue, highlighting the importance of monitoring policy developments and trends in the digital media landscape."

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ABDULLAH NEWS AGENCY	AMIRA KADAL	BUDSHAH NEWS AGENCY	AFTAB MARKET
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GUPKARI NEWS AGENCY	LAL CHOWK	RAFIQ NEWS AGENCY	BATMALOO
KHAN NEWS AGENCY	REGAL CHOWK	MEHRAJ NEWS AGENCY	DALGATE
RASHEED NEWS AGENCY	DALGATE	ASHIQ NEWS AGENCY	GAGRIBAL
IMRAN NEWS AGENCY	KOHNKHAAN	SAMA NEWS AGENCY	SHALIMAR
KOHINOOR NEWS AGENCY	NISHAT	WANI NEWS AGENCY	HYDERPORA
SHEIKH NEWS AGENCY	HYDERPORA	AL NOOR NEWS AGENCY	NOWGAM
FAIRDEAL NEWS AGENCY	AIRPORT	BISMILLAH NEWS AGENCY	BAGH E MEHTAB
AL FALAH NEWS AGENCY	NATIPORA	FIDA NEWS AGENCY	RAJ BAGH
FIRDOUS NEWS AGENCY	PIRBAGH	HARMINDER NEWS AGENCY	GOGJI BAGH

TANTRAY NEWS AGENCY	RAJ BAGH	BASHIR NEW AGENCY	NOWHATTA
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MUSHTAQ KALASH-PURI	KALASHPORA	HABBAKADAL NEWS AGENCY	HAB-BAKADAL
ALTAJ NEWS AGENCY	FATEHKADAL	FAROOQ NEW AGENCY	GOJWARA
JEELANI NEWS AGENCY	KHAWAJA BAZAR	DAR NEWS AGENCY	QAMAR-WARI
NAZIR NEWS AGENCY	RAINAWARI	CHANDER NEWS AGENCY	BEMINA
KHALID NEWS AGENCY	HAMDANIYA COLONY	JONSON NEWS AGENCY	SEKIDAFAR
BHAT NEWS AGENCY	JAMALLATTA	SHAFAT NEWS AGENCY	HAWAL
BILAL NEWS AGENCY	KAK SARAI	KHALIQ NEWS AGENCY	NOWSHEH-RA
MUZAFFAR ALI NEWS AGENCY	ALAMGIRI BAZAR	BILAL NEWS AGENCY	NOWSHEH-RA
TARIQ NEWS AGENCY	M.K. CHOWK	MUZAMIL NEWS AGENCY	SOURA
GULZAR NEWS AGENCY	SOURA	SUBHAN NEWS AGENCY	SKIMS SOURA
HASAN NEWS AGENCY	SOURA	NISAR NEWS AGENCY	LAL BAZAR
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**BOOK APPOINTMENT**

## Speaker Warns Against House Business Leaks

Press Trust Of India

Jammu: Taking a serious note of publicity of the House business notices ahead of the Budget Session, Speaker of Jammu and Kashmir Legislative Assembly Abdul Rahim Rather has asked the members to desist from the "breach of privilege."

He said it is improper to give unwarranted publicity to the notices of questions, Bills,

resolutions and other similar matters connected with business of the House. The Budget Session of the Jammu and Kashmir Legislative Assembly is scheduled to begin on March 3. The Speaker, taking serious notice of recent unwarranted publicity of the notices given by legislators in connection with the business of the House to be taken up | [More on P10](#)



### Form Of 'Martial Law', Says Mufti

DP chief Mehbooba Mufti on Sunday said the role of the speaker of an Assembly is to safeguard the rights of the members of the House and not act as a censor. Her remarks came after Jammu and Kashmir Assembly Speaker Abdul Rahim Rather took serious note of publicity of the House business notices ahead of the Budget session. The speaker has asked the members to desist from committing | [More on P10](#)

**6** ACCORDING TO PARLIAMENTARY PRACTICE, USAGE and established convention, and prevalent rules of this house, it is improper to give unwarranted publicity to the notices of questions, bills, resolutions and other similar matters connected with business of the house."

## Some Leaders, Foreign Powers Mocking Religion: PM

Press Trust Of India

Chattarpur: Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday slammed a section of leaders over their critical remarks on Maha Kumbh, saying those with "slave mentality" keep attacking the country's religious and cultural traditions with the backing of foreign powers.

Modi termed the ongoing Maha Kumbh in Prayagraj as the "Maha Kumbh of Unity" after laying the foundation stone for Shree Bageshwar Medical Sciences And Research Institute, which will include a



cancer hospital, at Chhatrapur in Madhya Pradesh. Bageshwar Dham is a prominent religious site associated with Lord Hanuman, frequented by thousands of people. "These days | [More on P10](#)



A worker carefully lifts a freshly dyed fabric from a steaming vat at the oldest dyeing unit in old city Srinagar. KO Photo By Faisal Khan

## 4-Day Wet Weather From Tomorrow: MeT

Observer News Service

Srinagar: The Meteorological Department Srinagar has predicted four-day wet weather with light to moderate rain and snow at most places from February 25 over Jammu and Kashmir.

The weather will generally remain dry till February 24, the MeT office said.

It said the weather will remain generally cloudy with light to moderate rain and snow at most places with isolated heavy rain and snow over both Kashmir and Jammu divisions from February 25 till end of the month.

The weather office has also issued an advisory stating that there is possibility of temporary disruption of Surface transportation mainly over Sadhna pass, Razdan Pass, Sonamarg-Zojila-Gumri axis, Mughal Road, Sinthan pass & other major roads of hilly districts.

"Tourists/travellers/Transporters

## Trump Attacks USAID Over Funding To India

Claims USD 18 Mn Given To India To Help With Elections

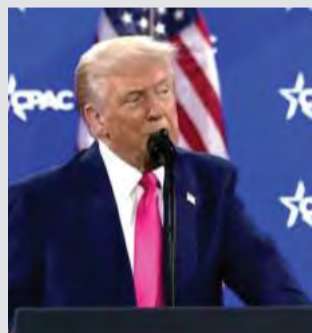
Press Trust Of India

Washington: US President Donald Trump has claimed that the Biden administration allocated USD 18 million in funding to India to help with its elections, arguing that the country doesn't need this money.

His remarks came during a speech at the Conservative Political Action Conference (CPAC) on Saturday after he repeatedly attacked the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) for allocating USD 21 million in funding to India for "voter turnout".

In his speech, Trump also accused India of taking advantage of the US.

"Eighteen million dollars



for helping India with its elections. Why the hell? Why don't we just go to old paper ballots, and let them help us with their elections, right? Voter ID. Wouldn't that be nice? We're giving money to India for elections. They don't need money," he said. "They take advantage of us pretty good. One of the

highest tariff nations in the world...We have a 200 per cent (tariffs) there and then we're giving them a lot of money to help them with their election," Trump said.

Trump also criticised the USAID for giving USD 29 million to Bangladesh.

"USD 29 million goes to strengthen the political landscape and help them out so that they can vote for a radical left communist in Bangladesh," he said, without naming anyone.

Trump has repeatedly claimed that USAID under the previous administration led by Joe Biden allocated USD 21 million in funding to India for "voter turnout", sparking a row in the country over the assistance. | [More on P10](#)

### Why Is Our Govt Silent: Congress 'Donald Trump and Elon Musk Insulting India Again & Again'

Amid the USAID funding row, the Congress on Sunday accused the BJP of indulging in "anti-national work" by spreading "fake news from America" and asserted that Prime Minister Narendra Modi and External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar will also have to answer | [More on P10](#)

## Ex-members Of Banned Jel Launch New Political Outfit

Agencies

Srinagar: Several former members of the banned Jamaat-e-Islami (Jel) on Sunday announced the formation of a new political outfit to contest polls in Jammu and Kashmir under one umbrella.

The former members, some of whom had contested last year's assembly elections as independent candidates, have named the outfit the Jammu and Kashmir Justice and Development Front.

The announcement was made at a workers' convention in south Kashmir's Kulgam district -- once a support base of the Jel.

Speaking to reporters after the convention, former Jel member Shameem Ahmad and the president of the front, said they have "started a new movement". "We were not sad because we lost the polls, we got 26,000 votes... People supported us a lot. It was after 37 years that our people organised themselves and came forward to vote for us," he said, referring to the former Jel members' performance



in last year's assembly polls.

Another former Jel member Sayir Reshi, who contested the assembly polls unsuccessfully from the Kulgam segment, said the aim of the new front is to establish a political system that is based on "justice and endeavours for real development".

"We want to establish a system which is not based on fooling the people," he said.

Reshi said the front did not have its registration in the last assembly elections, "Otherwise, we would have contested the polls under one symbol".

"We have made a formal announcement today, but it will be formally launched from Srinagar," he added. Reshi, who is | [More on P10](#)

**6** WE WERE NOT SAD BECAUSE WE LOST THE POLLS, WE GOT 26,000 VOTES... People supported us a lot. It was after 37 years that our people organised themselves and came forward to vote for us."

## J&K Worker Stuck In Telangana Tunnel

Agencies

Hyderabad: Eight persons, including one from Jammu and Kashmir, were trapped inside after a portion of roof collapsed in the under-construction stretch of the Srisaillam Left Bank Canal (SLBC) tunnel project in Telangana, state Irrigation Minister N Uttam Kumar Reddy said on Saturday.

Trapped J&K resident has been identified as Sunny Singh.

Speaking to the media at the accident site in Nagarkurnool district, Reddy said the state government was taking the help of experts, including those who rescued the trapped workers in an incident in Uttarakhand last year. He also sought the help of the Army and the NDRF. Among those | [More on P10](#)

## Gulmarg To Get Pvt Investment, Year-Round Heli-Skiing: Omar

'No New Dates For Khelo India Winter Games Yet'

Observer News Service

Srinagar: Chief Minister Omar Abdullah Sunday said the government is in talks with some private investors to enhance the infrastructure at the famous skiing destination of Gulmarg. The chief minister also said a helicopter would be available throughout the year in Gulmarg for heli-skiing and safari.

"We are in talks with some private investors who are ready to create more skiing infrastructure in Gulmarg. Talks are on and if there is a good proposal which would create new infrastructure, we will work on it," Abdullah told reporters at the hill station in north Kashmir's Baramulla district.



He said some other plans were underway by the Jammu and Kashmir Cable Car Corporation to develop new cable car projects. "This year, we have not had much snow. But, still, skiers

are enjoying here and from today, heli-skiing will start. They can also have a tour of the scenic beauty in a helicopter. This time, the helicopter will be available throughout the year and people can | [More on P10](#)

## SC to Hear Plea On Alleged HIV Drug Shortage

Press Trust Of India

New Delhi: The Supreme Court is scheduled to hear on Monday a plea concerning alleged shortage of anti-retroviral therapy drugs for treating HIV patients in the country.

As per the cause list of February 24 uploaded on the apex court website, a bench comprising Justices Abhay S Oka and Ujjal Bhuyan is slated to hear the petition filed in 2022 by NGO 'Network of People Living with HIV/AIDS' and others.

The Centre had in July last year apprised the apex court that the government was ensuring availability of free, life-long anti-retroviral (ARV) drugs for all people

living with HIV through anti-retroviral therapy centres under the National AIDS Control Programme.

It had said as on date, there was adequate stock of all ARV drugs nationally under the programme.

The counsel appearing for the petitioners had said in view of the developments which had taken place since the filing of the petition, presently there was no shortage of ART drugs.

However, the counsel had flagged certain difficulties in regard to the process of procurement and quality of the drugs.

The top court had suggested a meeting between the Centre, | [More on P10](#)

## Mild Earthquake Jolts Kupwara



Agencies

Srinagar: Tremors were felt in Kupwara after an earthquake of 3.8 intensity on Richter scale hit Jammu and Kashmir on Sunday, officials said.

The tremors were felt at 8.47 pm and lasted for a few seconds.

As per National Center for Seismology, the epicentre of the earthquake is located at latitude 34.28 in the north and longitude 74.00 in the east, with a recorded depth of 10 kilometres in Kupwara. There was no | [More on P10](#)

## 'We're Getting Our Money Back' Trump Wants Return On Ukraine Aid

**Agencies**  
Washington: US President Donald Trump has said that he wants the United States to "get back" money spent on aiding Ukraine during its ongoing conflict with Russia.



Trump on Saturday proposed a deal in which Ukraine would grant the US access to its mineral and oil resources as compensation for the billions of dollars in war-time aid provided. "I want them to give us something for all of the money that we put up. We're asking for rare earth and oil, anything we can get," he told delegates at the Conservative Political Action Conference (CPAC) in Maryland. "We're going to get our money back because it's just not fair. And we will see, but I think we're pretty close to a deal, and we better be close because that has been a horrible situation," Trump added. Since February 2022, the US Congress has appropriated \$183 billion for Ukraine, including more than \$66 billion in security assistance, according to the Pentagon and Ukraine Oversight, the inter-agency group tasked with presenting reports to Congress. The Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky, however, has said that he is "not ready" to sign that would have granted US companies 50% ownership of the country's

mineral resources, despite growing US pressure. The Ukrainian officials have repeatedly said that the agreement is "unilateral" and Ukraine needs assurances from the US first. "In the form in which the draft is now, the president is not ready to accept, we are still trying to make changes and add constructiveness," Ukrainian officials said. US Special Envoy to Ukraine and Russia Keith Kellogg, who met Zelensky earlier this week, said the Ukrainian president understood signing a deal with the US was "critical." Trump has intensified his criticism of the Ukrainian leader, branding Zelensky "a dictator without elections," saying he has squandered opportunities for peace with Russia. President Trump insisted that Ukraine had no grounds to complain about its exclusion from the US-Russian talks held in Riyadh on Tuesday. He maintained that Ukraine's absence from the discussions was a result of its failure to capitalize on earlier opportunities to broker peace with Russia. In response to years of military and political provocations by the US and European countries, Russia began its special operations in Ukraine in 2022. Russia has managed to gain control of a fifth of Ukraine and has been slowly advancing in the east for months. Ukraine's military, supported by the US and European countries, grapples with manpower shortages and tries to hold to a chunk of territory in western Russia. Russia has demanded an end to the West's military and political provocations on its borders and Ukraine's permanent neutrality under any peace deal.

## Preliminary Probe Not Always Mandatory Under Corruption Act: SC



**Press Trust Of India**

New Delhi: The Supreme Court has said conducting a preliminary inquiry is not mandatory in every case lodged under the Prevention of Corruption Act and it is not a vested right of the accused. The court has said while a preliminary inquiry is desirable in certain categories of cases, including those lodged under the Prevention of Corruption (PC) Act, it is not a mandatory prerequisite for the registration of a criminal case. A bench of Justices Dipankar Datta and Sandeep Mehta has said the purpose of a preliminary inquiry is not to verify the veracity of the information received, but merely to ascertain whether the said information revealed the commission of a cognisable offence.

"The preliminary inquiry is not mandatory in every case under the PC Act," the bench said in its verdict delivered on February 17. "If a superior officer is in seisin of a source information report, which is both detailed and well-reasoned and such that any reasonable person would be of the view that it prima facie discloses the commission of a cognisable offence, the preliminary inquiry may be avoided," it said. The top court delivered its verdict on an appeal filed by the Karnataka government, challenging a March 2024 judgment of the state high court. The high court had quashed an FIR lodged by the Karnataka Lokayukta police station against a public servant for alleged offences under the PC Act.



## Defiant Farewell: Massive Crowds Mourn Nasrallah In Beirut

**Agencies**

Beirut: Hundreds of thousands of people bid farewell to Hezbollah's slain leader Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah at a mass funeral in Beirut on Sunday, nearly five months after he was assassinated by Israel in a massive airstrike in a stunning blow to the group. Carrying pictures of Nasrallah and flags of Hezbollah, supporters from Lebanon and other countries in the region filled Beirut's largest stadium Camille Chamoun and packed the surrounding streets. A large procession followed the late leader's coffin mounted on a truck, draped in yellow and green Hezbollah colours, to a shrine in southern Beirut, erected as his final resting place. The September killing of the charismatic leader, who had become a symbol of defiance against Israel and the West in Arab world, had deeply shocked his supporters. In a dramatic escalation four Israeli warplanes flew low over the city breaking sound barriers apparently to deter crowds. However it had the opposite effect. The charged crowds raised intense slogans of "Death to Israel" in clear defiance. Israel's Defence Minister Israel Katz wrote on X that Israeli planes were flying over the stadium while the funeral took place to "convey a clear message: whoever threatens to destroy Israel - that will be the end of them". Speaking from a remote location,

Hezbollah new Secretary General Naim Qassem addressed mourners and vowed to continue down Nasrallah's path "even if we are all killed." Qassem said Hezbollah remained "strong". "We will not submit and we will not accept the continuation of our killing and occupation," Qassem said. New leader said Hezbollah would keep following Nasrallah's path and rejected any control of "tyrant America" over Lebanon. Hezbollah considered Israel's five positions an occupation and was relying on the Lebanese government to secure a full withdrawal through diplomacy, he said. "We choose to fire when we see fit and are patient when we see fit," said Qassem. His speeches were blasted as the mourners raised their fists in the air and chanted "We are at your service" and "We are loyal to the promise, Nasrallah". 'CLINGING ON' Among those in attendance were Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi, an Iraqi delegation including politicians and militia commanders, a delegation from Yemen and activists from different countries. The mass funeral was aimed at showing strength after Hezbollah emerged battered from last year's war with Israel, which killed most of its top political and military leadership besides hundreds of fighters, observers said. Its weakened stature has been reflected in Lebanon's post-war

politics, with the group unable to impose its will in the formation of a new government and language legitimising its arsenal omitted from the new cabinet's policy statement. The impact on Hezbollah was compounded by the ousting of its friendly government in Syria, severing a key supply route. His death, while a heavy blow to the group, also demonstrated the enduring loyalty of Hezbollah's supporters, who saw him as a defender of Lebanese sovereignty and an advocate for the Palestinian cause. "We may have lost a great deal as a man, but we have not lost the value of the resistance because the resistance is clinging on," said Hassan Nasreddine, a participant at the ceremony. Hezbollah's Al-Manar television said the movement deployed 25,000 members for crowd control. A security source said 4,000 troops and security personnel were on duty. Nasrallah's death marks the end of an era for Hezbollah that grew from a rag-tag group of guerrilla fighters in 1982 to a regional force whose influence spanned across the region. He was elected leader of the group in 1992 as a 32-year-old cleric. He went on to preside over a guerrilla campaign in southern Lebanon that ultimately drove Israeli forces out of the country in 2000, ending a 22-year occupation. In 2006, he led Hezbollah in an all-out war against Israel, which foiled Israel's stated goal of dismantling the group.

## Israel Prepared To Resume Fighting In Gaza "At Any Moment": Netanyahu

**Agencies**

Jerusalem: Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on Sunday said that Israel was prepared to resume fighting in the Gaza Strip "at any moment" while vowing to complete the war's objectives "whether through negotiation or by other means."



"In Gaza, we have eliminated most of Hamas's organised forces, but let there be no doubt -- we will complete the war's objectives entirely -- whether through negotiation or by other means," he added.

**"In Gaza, we have eliminated most of Hamas's organised forces, but let there be no doubt -- we will complete the war's objectives entirely -- whether through negotiation or by other means"**

## Germans Start Voting, Polls Suggest Shift To Right

**Agencies**

BERLIN: Germans were voting in a national election on Sunday that is expected to see Friedrich Merz's conservatives regain power and the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD) score its best ever result as Europe's ailing economic powerhouse lurches rightwards. Merz's CDU/CSU bloc has consistently led polls but is unlikely to win a majority given Germany's fragmented political landscape, forcing it to sound out coalition partners. Those negotiations are expected to be tricky after a campaign which exposed sharp divisions over migration and how to deal with the AfD in a country

laying urgently needed policies to revive Europe's largest economy after two consecutive years of contraction and as companies struggle against global rivals. It would also create a leadership vacuum in the heart of Europe even as it deals with a host of challenges, including US President Donald Trump's threats of a trade war and attempts to fast-track a ceasefire deal for Ukraine without European involvement. Germany, which has an export-oriented economy and long relied on the US for its security, is particularly vulnerable. Germans are more pessimistic about their living standards now than at any time since



A campaign poster for Friedrich Merz, Christian Democratic Union party candidate for chancellor, is pictured in Berlin on Feb. 22, 2025, ahead of the parliamentary election. (Reuters)

where far-right politics carries a particularly strong stigma due to its Nazi past. That could leave unpopular Chancellor Olaf Scholz in a caretaker role for months, de-

the financial crisis in 2008. The percentage who say their situation is improving dropped sharply from 42 percent in 2023 to 27 percent in 2024, according to pollster Gallup.

## Amid Protests, Centre To Revise Draft Bill To Amend Advocates Act

**Press Trust of India**

New Delhi: Amid opposition to its various provisions from bar bodies, the government on Saturday said it will revise the draft Advocates (Amendment) Bill as it ended the public consultations on it that started earlier this month. The Department of Legal Affairs in the Union law ministry floated the draft bill on February 13 for public consultations. The government plans to amend the Advocates Act, 1961. The draft bill, which faced criticism, proposed sweeping changes in the definitions of a "legal practitioner and a "law graduate". According to the draft Advocates (Amendment) Bill, 2025, a law graduate is a person who has obtained a bachelor's degree after completing a course of three or five years or such other duration as prescribed by any centre of legal education or university established by law or a college affiliated to any university and recognised by the Bar Council of India. In a statement, the law ministry said the bill was put in the public domain, demonstrating the government's commitment to transparency and broader engagement with stakeholders and the public. "However, considering the number of suggestions and concerns received, it has been decided to conclude the consultation process now," it said. Based on the feedback received, the draft bill, "as revised", will

**"The draft bill, which faced criticism, proposed sweeping changes in the definitions of a "legal practitioner and a "law graduate"."**

be processed afresh for consultations with stakeholders, the ministry said. Several bar bodies had opposed certain provisions of the draft bill. The opposition Congress had also backed the protesting lawyers, saying the bill was not only "poorly drafted", but it also failed to address pertinent issues facing the legal fraternity. The draft bill defines a legal practitioner as an advocate or a law graduate engaged in the practice of law before courts, tribunals or quasi-judicial forums or doing legal work in any private or public organisation, including but not limited to statutory and autonomous bodies, domestic and foreign law firms and corporate entities. As of now, a legal practitioner means an advocate or a "vakil" of any high court, a pleader, a "mukhtar" or revenue agent. While putting the draft bill in the public domain, the ministry had said these amendments aimed at aligning the legal profession and legal education with global best practices.

### NEWS MAKERS

The Vatican has announced that the health of the 88-year-old leader of the Roman Catholic Church remains in critical condition. Pope Francis, who has been hospitalized for more than a week due to a respiratory infection that has developed into pneumonia in both lungs, remains in "critical" condition and developed an "asthmatic respiratory crisis," the Vatican said on Saturday. Pope Francis's condition "continues to be critical", however, he is alert, it added. The Vatican said after suffering a respiratory attack he requires "high-flow oxygen."

## Pope Francis In Critical Condition Due To 'Asthmatic Respiratory Crisis': Vatican

tory complications. Vatican sources say the pope needs supplemental oxygen to breathe, noting however, that the pontiff's heart had remained in good condition till now. On Wednesday afternoon, the Italian Prime Minister, Giorgia Meloni, visited the pope to offer him well wishes for a speedy recovery. The Vatican said the two spent 20 minutes in private. "I am very happy to have found him alert and responsive," she said in a statement. "We joked as



always. He has not lost his legendary sense of humor." US Vice President JD Vance announced last week that Pope Francis appeared to have serious health issues. He wrote on social media, "Let's all say a prayer for Pope Francis,

**"The Pope needs supplemental oxygen to breathe, noting however, that the pontiff's heart had remained in good condition till now."**

who appears to have some serious health issues." His present condition is reportedly the most serious health crisis of his 12-year papacy.

## Man Smuggles Diamond-Gold Necklace Worth Rs 6.08 Crore At Delhi Airport, Arrested

New Delhi: A man who was smuggling in a gold necklace studded with diamonds worth Rs 6.08 crore was arrested upon arrival at the IGI Airport from Bangkok, officials here said on Sunday. On the basis of profiling, Customs officers booked a case of smuggling of gold necklace studded with diamonds on February 12 against one Indian male passenger, who arrived at IGI Airport's T-3 from Bangkok. Detailed examination of the baggage and personal search of the passenger resulted in the recovery of a diamond-studded gold necklace weighing 40 grams, having a total value of Rs 6,08,97,329 (Rs 6.08 crore), the Delhi Customs said in a post on X.



The recovered gold necklace has been seized under Section 110 of the Customs Act, 1962, and the man placed under arrest in terms of Section 104 of the act, it said and added further investigation was underway.

**"Detailed examination of the baggage and personal search of the passenger resulted in the recovery of a diamond-studded gold necklace weighing 40 grams, having a total value of Rs 6,08,97,329 (Rs 6.08 crore),"**

## Fire Devours Three Houses In Nawabazar

Agencies

Srinagar: Three residential houses were gutted in a devastating fire that broke out in the Nawabazar area of Srinagar's old city early Sunday morning.

According to officials, the fire started in one of the houses around 7:20 AM and quickly spread to two adjacent structures, causing significant damage. Fire and Emergency Services personnel rushed to the scene and managed to contain the flames, preventing further destruction.

Fortunately, no casualties or injuries were reported in the incident. The

**“The Fire started in one of the houses around 7:20 AM and quickly spread to two adjacent structures, causing significant damage.**

cause of the fire is yet to be ascertained, and an investigation is underway.

Residents of the area have urged authorities to provide immediate relief to the affected families. (KNS)

## Demise Of Senior Journalist Naseer Ahmad Condoled

Observer News Service

SRINAGAR: Joint Director Information Kashmir Syed Shahnawaz Bukhari expressed profound grief over the sad demise of Bureau Chief of Kolkata TV, Naseer Ahmad, who passed away Saturday after a brief illness.

In his condolence message, the Joint Director said that the demise of Naseer Ahmad has left a deep void in the journalistic circles which will be impossible to fill for the years to come. He described him as a thorough professional, self-respecting and great hu-



man being.

While expressing sympathies with the bereaved family, Syed Shahnawaz Bukhari prayed for peace to the departed soul and much needed strength to the bereaved to bear the inconsolable loss. He added that Naseer's demise is a huge personal loss to most of us.

## Khonmoh Residents Concerned Over Alleged Attempts To Halt Smart City Bus Service



KO Web Desk

Srinagar: Residents of Khonmoh, a village falling under the jurisdiction of Srinagar Smart City Limited (SSCL), have raised serious concerns over alleged attempts by private sumo drivers to halt the recently introduced Smart City bus service. According to residents the village has a population of approximately 30,000, the village has been allocated two Smart City buses, which have become a crucial mode of transportation for students, private employees, and daily commuters.

Speaking to Kashmir Observer, Shahid Gulzar Ahanger, a resident of Khonmoh, highlighted the importance of the service. "These Smart City buses are a lifeline for the people of our village. Many students and employees rely on them daily. It is disheartening to see efforts being made to discontinue such a beneficial service."

Residents have expressed their frustration over the insufficient number of buses, stating that two vehicles are not enough to accommodate the growing population's commuting needs. "We already struggle with overcrowding due to the limited number of buses. Instead of increasing the fleet, there are attempts to remove them altogether, which is unacceptable," said another commuter on

anonymity.

Several locals have alleged that private sumo drivers, who dominate the transport sector in the area, are putting pressure on authorities to withdraw the service. "They see these buses as competition, but public transport should prioritize the needs of the people over private interests," said a shopkeeper in the area.

Students who travel to schools and colleges everyday fear that discontinuing the service would create significant hardships. "Many of us cannot afford private transport daily. The Smart City buses are affordable and reliable," said Asif Ahmad, a college student from Khonmoh.

The residents have urged the concerned authorities to intervene and ensure that the Smart City bus service remains operational and is further expanded to meet the growing demand. "We request the administration to increase the number of buses rather than succumbing to the pressure from private transporters. This service is crucial for the well-being and convenience of our community," Ahanger added.

As the issue gains traction, it remains to be seen how the authorities will address the concerns of the people of Khonmoh, who are advocating for a more robust and sustainable public transport system.



A serene view of River Jhelum reflecting the historic Khanqah-e-Moula shrine and traditional houses in Srinagar. KO Photo Faisal Khan

# Handicapped Association Members Stage Protest

Observer News Service

Srinagar: Police on Sunday detained several members of Jammu and Kashmir Handicapped Association (JKHA) after they took out a protest march here against the government's "failure" to improve the lives of the disabled, officials said.

Dozens of members of the JKHA assembled near the Press Enclave here holding banners and raising slogans, and called for an immediate government action for the welfare of the disabled community in Jammu and Kashmir, the officials said.

The protesters alleged successive governments have failed to improve the lives of the community.

They demanded launching of a special recruitment drive for

**“Dozens of members of the JKHA assembled near the Press Enclave here holding banners and raising slogans, and called for an immediate government action for the welfare of the disabled community in Jammu and Kashmir**

qualified disabled persons, and enhancement in the monthly pension from Rs 1000 to Rs 5000.

They also demanded low-interest loans covered in subsidies and vertical reservation in jobs.

The demands also included four per cent reservation in MGNREGA work as well as in assemblies, municipalities, and panchayats.

The protesters also demanded setting up of an advisory board for their socio-economic development, and opening of separate counters for them in government offices and banks.

They tried to take out the march on the main road outside the Press Enclave, but were stopped by police, and several of them were detained, the officials said.

They were later released, the officials added.

## OBSESSIVE COMPULSIVE DISORDER

### 8 WEEK FREE GROUP THERAPY

I did wash my hand ... but... did I clean it enough? Wash it again? Is it clean now?

It's not just RECURRENT HANDWASHING AND CHECKING BUT UNSEEN PAIN, distress, myths and stigma associated with OCD

KASHMER Kashmir American Society of Healthcare, Medical Education & Research in collaboration with HPVT Help Poor Voluntary Trust.

is initiating a **free 8 weeks Group therapy** for the individuals suffering with OCD by a team of counselling clinical psychologists led by leading consultant clinical psychologist of J&K.

If you or some one you know is experiencing symptoms of OCD, seeking professional help is crucial.

You do not have to fight your battles alone.

There is no need for referral, simply call us for registration.

Happy & Healthy minds Office, HPVT Building (First Floor), Daresh Kadal Chowk, Srinagar

9070806160

- TRAFFIC POLICE : 9419993745, 01998-266686
- PCR: 0194-2452092, 2455883
- PDD: 0194-2450213
- FIRE AND EMERGENCY SERVICES : 2479488, 2452222, 2452155
- CAPD: 18001807011
- SMC HEALTH OFFICER: 9469409081
- Ambulance: Kashmir EMS Service: +91 94841 00200

**AIRPORTS**  
SHIEK UL ALAM AIRPORT: 01942303311 ✈

**RAILWAYS**

- SRINAGAR: 0194-2103259
- ANANTNAG: 01932-228243
- BARAMULLA: 0194-102029
- BUIBHARA: 01932-228243
- PAMPORE: 01933-294132
- PATTAN: 01954-293507
- QAZIGUND: 01951-296153

**HIGHWAY STATUS**

- Sgr-Jammu highway - (Open)
- Mughal Road - (Closed)
- Srinagar-Leh- (Open)

PRAYERS
FAJR 5: 42
ZUHR 12: 44
ASR 4: 43
Magrib 6: 25
ISHA 7: 45

## This Day In History

- 1152- English cleric and writer Geoffrey of Monmouth consecrated as Bishop of St Asaph at Lambeth
- 1208- St Francis of Assisi, 26, received his vocation in Portiuncula Italy 1296- Pope Boniface VIII decree Clericis laicos 1387- King Charles III of Naples and Hungary is assassinated at Buda
- 1389 - Battle at Falköping: Danes defeat King Albert of Sweden
- 1528 - János Szapolyai, disputed king of Hungary, and Ottoman Sultan Suleiman the Magnificent sign treaty
- 1739 - Battle of Karnal: Army of Iranian ruler Nadir Shah defeats the forces of the Mughal emperor of India, Muhammad Shah
- 1875 - The SS Gothenburg hits the Great Barrier Reef and sinks off the Australian east coast, killing approximately 100, including a number of high profile civil servants and dignitaries Henrik Ibsen
- 1881 - De Lesseps' Company begins work on Panama Canal
- 1881 - China and Russia sign the Sino-Russian Ili Treaty.
- 1895 - Cuban war for independence begins
- 1918 - Estonia declares independence from Russia
- 1924 - Mahatma Gandhi released from jail
- 1942 - The "Battle of Los Angeles" takes place, a series of anti-aircraft engagements over the city in response to a rumored but false Japanese attack. It would last until the morning of the following day.
- 1945 - Egypt & Syria declare war on nazi-Germany
- 1945 - Manila freed from Japanese
- 1945 - Egyptian Premier Ahmed Maher Pasha is killed in Parliament after reading a decree
- 1948 - Communist Party seizes complete control of Czechoslovakia
- 1949 - Israel & Egypt sign an armistice agreement
- 1955 - Pact of Baghdad signed between Iraq & Turkey
- 1968 - US troops reconquer Hue Vietnam
- 1969 - Mariner 6 launched for Mars flyby to study planet's atmosphere
- 1971 - Algeria nationalizes 51 percent of French oil concessions
- 1974 - Pakistan officially recognizes Bangladesh
- 1977 - US President Jimmy Carter announces US foreign aid will consider human rights
- 1979 - War between North & South Yemen begins
- 1983 - USSR performs underground nuclear test
- 1984 - Iraq resumes air attack on Iran
- 1995 - The Corona reconnaissance satellite program, in existence from 1959 to 1972, is declassified.
- 1997 - South Africa announces it is constructing largest modern day blimp
- 1998 - Elton John is knighted by Queen Elizabeth II at Buckingham Palace in London 1999- A China Southern Airlines Tupolev TU-154 airliner crashes on approach to Wenzhou airport in eastern the People's Republic of China, killing 61. 2006- President of the Philippines Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo declares Proclamation 1017 placing the country in a state of emergency in attempt to subdue possible military coup. 2008- Fidel Castro retires as the President of Cuba due to ill health after nearly fifty years 2010- Europe risks a double-dip recession after bad results emerge from France, Germany and Italy, it is reported today; the Eurozone only grew by 0.1% in the last quarter of 2009 2010- Sachin Tendulkar scores the first double century in One Day International cricket 2011- Final Launch of Space Shuttle Discovery (OV-103). 2013- Nicos Anastasiades wins the Cypriot presidential election 2013- Raúl Castro is elected to a second term as the President of Cuba 2014- A 4.4 billion-year-old Crystal is discovered to be the oldest known fragment from the earth's crust 2014- Pope Francis creates a second Secretariat with the power to audit any Vatican agency at any time 2016- Oldest Muslim graves in Europe, from the 8th century, identified at a burial site in Nîmes, France 2018- 2016 world mass start speed skating champion Lee Seung-hoon of South Korea wins the event at Pyeongchang Winter Olympics; also Olympic 10,000m champion Vancouver (2010) 2018- After taking gold in the Olympic team sprint in Sochi (2014), Finnish cross country skier Iivo Niskanen wins the 50k classical event in Pyeongchang

The Jammu and Kashmir Board of School Education (JKBOSE) has been in the news for several weeks, but unfortunately, not for so good reasons. A series of administrative lapses and blunders have raised serious concerns about the functioning of the board. From the denial of accepting Class 10 examination forms to brazen errors in textbooks, the negligence displayed by JKBOSE in last few weeks is alarming and demands urgent attention.

#### The Case of Islamic Global School Students

One of the most glaring issues that recently surfaced was the plight of 22 students from Islamic Global School, Padshahi Bagh, Srinagar. These students were left in a state of distress when they were informed that they could not appear for their Class 10 board exams due to their school's lack of registration with JKBOSE.

The students had submitted their examination forms two months before the exams, yet JKBOSE rejected them at the last moment, citing the non-registration of their institution. This decision came as a shock to the students and their parents, who had trusted the school and the education system to ensure their academic progress.

Official records indicate that the Directorate of School Education Kashmir (DSEK) had issued an order in December 2024 to link Class 9 and 10 students from the school with a nearby government institution for the academic year 2024-25. This measure was intended to ensure the continuity of their education and allow them to sit for board exams without disruption.

Following this directive, the Chief Education Officer (CEO) Srinagar communicated with JKBOSE, instructing them to process the students' registrations through Boys Higher Secondary School (BHSS) Natipora as a special case. Despite multiple official requests from both the CEO's office and the principal of BHSS Natipora, JKBOSE refused to process their registration.

It was only after sustained protests by the students and their parents, coupled with the intervention of Education Minister Sakina Yattoo, that JKBOSE finally relented and permitted the students to appear for their exams. This incident exposed the inefficiency and lack of coordination within the education board. It highlighted the distress and uncer-

## JKBOSE in 'Sorry UT of Affairs'

Ummar Jamal



**The mismanagement and inefficiency of JKBOSE are unacceptable. The board plays a critical role in shaping the academic future of students. Such repeated blunders indicate a dire need for systemic reforms**

tainty students had to endure due to bureaucratic negligence.

#### Another Student Denied Exam Entry Due to Blame Game

In another unfortunate incident, a Class 10 student from Government Girls Higher Secondary School (HSS) Khanyar, Srinagar, was denied the opportunity to sit for her annual board examination due to negligence of JKBOSE. The student, identified as Toyiba Yaqoob, was not allowed to enter the examination hall on the first day of exams, as she had not received her roll number slip.

The absence of her roll number slip was reportedly due to an error

on the part of the school authorities. However, instead of rectifying the mistake promptly, the JKBOSE officials did not take any corrective action, ultimately preventing the student from sitting for her examination.

The school authorities maintained that the mistake could have been fixed within a day had JKBOSE acted responsibly. Instead, rather than ensuring that a student did not suffer due to a clerical error, the board chose to adopt a rigid stance, demonstrating a lack of empathy and accountability.

#### Textbook Blunders

As if the previous incidents were not enough, JKBOSE found

itself embroiled in another controversy—this time concerning errors in its Class 10 textbooks. A public outcry erupted after a social media user highlighted a glaring mistake in the JKBOSE Class 10 Economics textbook titled Disaster Management and Road Safety Education.

The textbook contained a misprinted sentence stating, "Unconsciousness or fainting is a UT of human body." The intended sentence was supposed to be: "Unconsciousness or fainting is a state of the human body."

A closer examination of the book revealed that the term 'state' had been incorrectly replaced with

'UT' (Union Territory) throughout the text, even in passages related to scientific and health-related concepts. This bizarre and careless error suggested that whoever was responsible for editing the book had performed a blanket replacement of the word 'state' with 'UT', leading to absurd and factually incorrect statements.

For instance, on pages 29 and 30 of Unit IV, the original sentence, "Unconsciousness and fainting is a state of the human body," was altered to, "Unconsciousness and fainting is a UT of the human body."

Moreover, there was a major mistake in the title of a passage that read, "Fainting and losing conscience." The correct phrase should have been "Fainting and losing consciousness." Such blatant errors in an academic textbook not only undermine the credibility of JKBOSE but also reflect poorly on the education system as a whole.

#### The Need for Structural Reforms

These three incidents—students being denied examination forms, an individual being barred from exams due to bureaucratic negligence, and shocking errors in textbooks—paint a disturbing picture of JKBOSE's functioning. The shortage of textbooks in government schools is another persistent issue.

The mismanagement and inefficiency of JKBOSE are unacceptable. The board plays a critical role in shaping the academic future of students. Such repeated blunders indicate a dire need for systemic reforms.

The state of affairs at JKBOSE calls for urgent structural reforms to prevent such incidents from recurring. Officials responsible for negligence must be held accountable.

JKBOSE must acknowledge the gravity of these issues and take concrete steps to ensure that students do not have to suffer due to institutional negligence. Education is a fundamental right, and no student should have their future compromised because of inefficiency and mismanagement. The time for corrective action is now.

*Views expressed in the article are the author's own and do not necessarily represent the editorial stance of Kashmir Observer. The author is National President of J&K Students Association and Kashmir based columnist. He tweets at ummar\_jamal and can be reached at ummarjamal968@gmail.com*

## Ranji Trophy Providing More Engrossing Fare

Tushar Bhaduri

The eyes of the cricketing world will be focused on Dubai today for the 'routine' India-Pakistan group fixture at an ICC event. Despite the lopsided head-to-head record in these games over the decades, the media frenzy and social-media chatter around these 'encounters' never seems to abate, with broadcasters doing everything they can to add fuel to fire even when the actual cricketing fare on offer has often been lacklustre and the excitement largely manufactured.

While the ICC Champions Trophy has garnered eyeballs and mindspace over the last couple of weeks, Indian domestic cricket has arguably provided more engrossing and riveting contests, even when the biggest stars in the game didn't feature in them. Has there ever been an instance of a fielder's helmet making such a decisive 'impact' in such a significant juncture of a knockout game! The Ranji Trophy knockout rounds once again demonstrated what, and how much, can happen over five days of cricket. Most of the players featuring in these games are often referred to as 'journeymen' with a few hoping to find their way back to the national set-up and some others hoping to catch the eye.

Kerala reaching its maiden Ranji Trophy final is a momentous achievement, especially when their most high-profile current player – Sanju Samson – was not part of either the quarterfinal or the semifinal, having surgery on an injured finger and expected to be fit in time for the Indian Premier League (IPL) starting next month.

If anything, it seems to have only strengthened Kerala's resolve as they repeatedly bounced back from the brink and lived to fight another day. Trailing Jammu and Kashmir by 80 first-innings runs with just a single wicket in hand would have prompted some sides to throw in the towel, but Salman Nizar and Basil Thampi somehow contrived to go one up – literally – on their hardy opponents. That one-run lead in itself wouldn't have counted for anything had a resolute middle- and lower-middle order not batted through the final day with J&K needing eight wickets to enter the semifinals.

A margin of one run in the quarters and two in the semifinals proves that Kerala never know when they are out of a game and have made a habit of fighting till the bitter end. The fact that their head



**A margin of one run in the quarters and two in the semifinals proves that Kerala never know when they are out of a game and have made a habit of fighting till the bitter end.**

coach Amay Khurasiya and the vital spin twins – Jala Saxena and Aditya Sarvate – don't hail from the state points to the general high standards in Indian domestic cricket, even though the national selectors may sometimes seem slow in recognising such performances.

#### No quarter given

Kerala's opponents in the final, Vidarbha, have been the form team of the Ranji season, and earned their title shot after outright victories over domestic heavyweights Tamil Nadu and Mumbai in the two knockout rounds. They were ahead of the game in both contests but, especially in the semifinal against the defending champions, had to endure some anxious moments as the lower half of the Mumbai batting – featuring the likes of Shardul Thakur, Shams Mulani, Tanush Kotian, Mohit Avasthi and Royston Dias – kept coming at the Vidarbha bowlers. Chasing 406 at Nagpur in the fourth innings and needing an outright win to progress, the visitors seemed dead and gone at 124 for six, but the aura that Mumbai carries is hard to shake off.

The seventh-wicket partnership yielded more than a 100 and the last pair added more than 50. When the runs required came into double figures, there may have been a few anxious moments for the Vidarbha set-up, but they finally got the job done and their all-round strength will make them favourites against Kerala, who will be in uncharted territory.

Though Karun Nair didn't have a great semifinal for his adopted team Vidarbha, he has been in rare form throughout the season, which must have caught the national selectors' eye. But most of those playing significant roles in their teams' success do it for the pride in their performance and the love of the game. Saxena, for example, has longevity, a body of work and statistics that make him a genuine 'domestic giant', but at 38 years of age, he has made peace with the fact that he would never know if he could have cut it at an even higher level of cricket.

#### Guest appearance

The debacle in the Border-Gavaskar Trophy Down Under, and the 0-3 whitewash suffered at

home at the hands of New Zealand prior to that, had prompted the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) to pass an edict to its star players to turn out for their domestic teams. As a result, Virat Kohli and Rohit Sharma played Ranji Trophy for the first time in a decade or even longer. Their participation brought media coverage and crowds unprecedented for the domestic First-Class tournaments, but that interest lasted only as long as the two icons were on the field.

Some youngsters at Delhi's Arun Jaitley Stadium made it clear that they were there just to watch Kohli as otherwise "Ranji kaun dekhta hai (who watches Ranji)! Ironically, chants of 'RCB, RCB' reverberated during a First-Class game, proving that Kohli is identified more with his IPL franchise than the team for which he was playing.

Neither Kohli nor Sharma managed to do anything significant on the field for their Ranji teams in their one-off appearances. They seemed to be akin to short-duration punishment postings for errant civil servants before being rehabilitated.

By the time the knockouts came calling, it was back to the players who had a real stake in the fortunes of their teams. Teams like Mumbai, Tamil Nadu and Saurashtra have a regular presence in the latter stages of the Ranji Trophy, Haryana have been there off and on, Vidarbha and Gujarat have tasted success over the last few years, while Kerala and J&K are recent additions to the list of contenders.

Apart from them, there are the likes of Karnataka, Delhi, Bengal, Madhya Pradesh, Punjab, Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, Hyderabad, Assam, Baroda, Jharkhand, Andhra and Maharashtra that, even if they don't have the teams to present a sustained challenge, produce talented players who can star at the highest level.

"Ranji kaun dekhta hai may be a feeling shared only by the most casual of cricket fans, who are only interested in stars rather than a genuine contest between bat and ball. The real connoisseurs of the game will always be interested in what's happening at venues throughout the length and breadth of this vast country.

*Views expressed in the article are the author's own and do not necessarily represent the editorial stance of Kashmir Observer. The article was originally published by Financial Express*

# An Exploration of the Contributions of Prominent Figures in Arabic Literature

Reading Dr. Lone's book on "Eleven Stars (Influential Figures) of Arabic Literature"

Dr. M. Irshadul Haq

Arabic literature boasts a rich and diverse history, featuring numerous influential figures from the pre-Islamic period to the modern era. They have left an indelible mark on Arabic literature and culture by producing works of diverse genre, including Arabic literary biographies.

Arabic literary biography is a classical literary genre that combines historical facts with narrative conventions, revealing how the biographical context can enrich the study of canonical writers. The Arabs, from the pre-Islamic times, practiced a form of oral biography through short narratives called Akhbar. The most significant types of Arabic biographical writing are sira, tarjama, barnamaj, fahrasa, and manaqib. While sira and tarjama were historically quite widespread, barnamaj and fahrasa were limited to specific regions and periods.

This practice of writing literary biography prevailed through the course of history, from pre-Islamic period to contemporary era, and there is a countless legacy available on this literary genre in the form of voluminous books. A new addition to this genre from Kashmir is Dr. Abdul Hamid Lone's "Ahada Ashara Kaukaban" (The Eleven Stars), a unique book in Arabic on the biographies and contributions of 11 influential personalities of Arabic language and literature.

The title of the book is taken from the fourth verse of Surah Yusuf (Q. 12: 4) of the noble Qur'an. Though a book with same title has been written by the famous Palestinian poet, Mahmoud Dervish, which covers and focuses on the poetic collections of the poet and the content is quite different from this book.

The book under review spans over 232 pages and the author is a retired Professor of Arabic, Higher Education Department, J&K. Published by Takbeer Publications Srinagar, the book comprises eleven (11) chapters, each dedicated to a prominent figure in Arabic language and culture. The chapters are preceded by 'Foreword' by Dr. Jauhar Qudussi (pp. 4-5), a brief 'Introduction' (pp. 7-12) by the author, 'Preface' by Dr. Muzaffar Hussain Nadwi (pp. 13-32), and a Bibliography (pp. 30-31). These chapters explore the lives and legacies of Shaykh Yaqub Sarfi Kashmiri, al-Sheikh Rifa-ah al-Tahtawi, al-Syed Jamal ud-in Afghani, al-Sheikh Muhammad al-Abduh,

Muhammad Rashid Riza, Hafiz Ibrahim, Mustafa Lutfi al-Manfalooti, Abdu Rahman al-Shokri, Abbas Mahmood al-Aqqad, Ibrahim Abdul Qadir al-Mazini, Ahmad Qandeel. Each chapter provides a critical examination of the subject's life, works, and contributions to Arabic language and literature.

Dr. Qudussi and Dr. Nadwi commend the author for such a noble addition to the knowledge, describing it as an "appreciable work" that helps us in understanding the different dimensions of the life and contributions of 11 influential figures of Arabic Language and Literature. The reason behind writing this book is mentioned in the Introduction.

The first chapter enlightens the biographical sketch of Shaykh Yaqub Sarfi Kashmiri (928-1005), a Kashmiri jurist, scholar, poet, artist, author, exegete and Traditionist, and Sufi Shaykh of the Kubrawi Hamadani order. The chapter critically discusses the literary contributions of Shaykh Yaqub Sarfi and how Sufism is dominated in his writings. It also elaborates his unique calibre in Arabic language

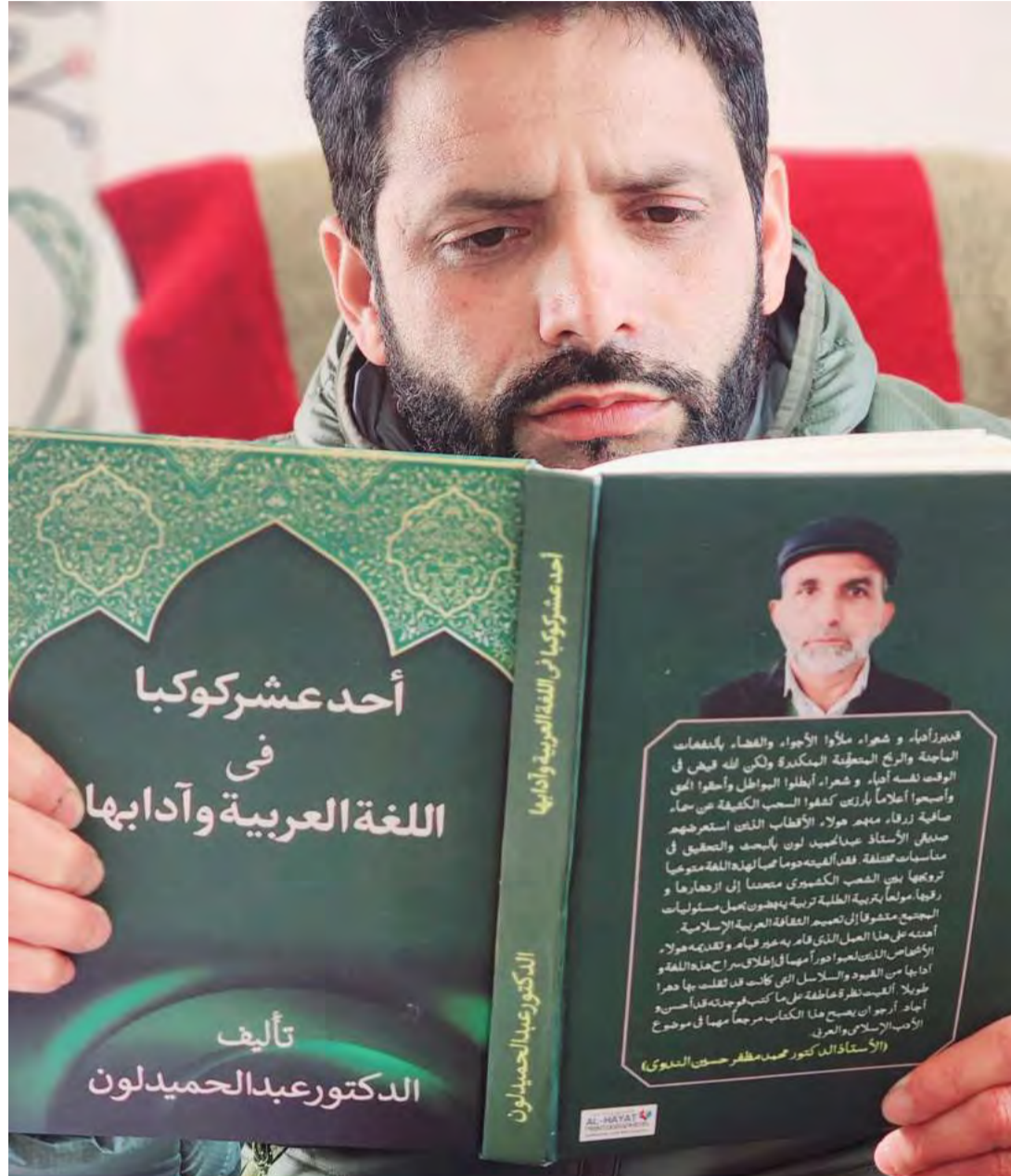


Thus, through these biographical-cum-literary sketches of prominent literary figures, the book makes a significant addition to existing literature on the contributions of pioneers in Arabic language and literature

and poetry (pp. 33-45).

The second chapter critically focuses on life and works of Rifa ah Rafi al-Tahtawi (1801-1873) who was a teacher, a scholar and one "of the first Egyptians to grapple with the question of adjusting to the West and to provide answers in Islamic terms". (p. 48)

The third chapter sheds light on the biography of Sayyid Jamal al-Din al-Afghani (1839/39-97), who is considered "among the top outstanding figures of the nineteenth century" and "a defender and reformist thinker of



Islam" (pp. 57, 58, 69).

The fourth chapter explores the biography and works of Sheikh Muhammad Abduh (1849- 1905), a religious intellectual, jurist, scholar and liberal reformer, who led the 19th-century movement to revitalize Islamic teachings and institutions in the modern world. He advocated reforms in Islamic law, administration, and higher education and, although resisted by conservatives, "he broke the barriers of Muslim ritual, dogma, and family ties despite facing severe opposition by the conservatives" (pp. 82, 83).

The fifth chapter presents the biography and literary contributions of "Muhammad Rashid Rida" (pp. 111-123), an Islamic scholar, reformer, theologian and revivalist who outlined an "intellectual response to the pressures of the modern Western world in the

light of Islamic tradition" (p.122).

The sixth chapter deals with the life and works of famous Egyptian poet Hafiz Ibrahim (1871-1932). With honorary names like "Poet of the Nile" and "Poet of the People", and for his commitment to the poor, his "poetry gave voice the concerns of the majority of ordinary Egyptians, including poverty, education, women's rights, criticism of the foreign occupation" (pp.144-145).

The seventh chapter encompasses the biography and literary

contributions of Mustafa Lutfi el-Manfaluti (1876-1924), an Egyptian writer, essayist, short-story writer, and pioneer of modern Arabic prose. Al-Manfaluti's had an easy writing style free from the existing ornamentation and exaggeration of rhymed prose. He had a lustre not found in the writings of his other contemporaries and it later formed the basis of the more accomplished modern Arabic narrative of subsequent generations of writers (pp. 158, 159).

The eighth chapter outlines the life and works of Abdel Rahman Shokry (1886 -1958), who was an Egyptian poet and among the pioneers of modern Arabic poetry. "Shukri was a romantic poet and an innovative critic of 20th century Arabic poetry who believes that poetry of fine arts is corrupt and the conventional poetry of eulogy, elegy, satire and description of daily political and social issues is the poetry of the false heart and that the true poet describes the passion of the soul to modern Arabic literature" (pp. 167, 68).

The ninth chapter critically examines the life and literary contributions of legendary polymath Abbas Mahmood al-Aqqad (1889 -1964), an Egyptian journalist, poet, and literary critic whose "writings cover a broad spectrum of areas including criticism, poetry, Islamology, history, biography, science, philosophy, politics, and Arabic literature, and thus considered a polymath" (pp. 176,177).

The tenth chapter covers the biography and contributions of Ibrahim Abd al-Qadir al-Mazini (1890 -1949), an Egyptian poet, journalist, novelist, and translator. Mazini extensively wrote on literary criticism, and in 1921 co-authored the critical work al-Diwan with al-Aqqad and Shurki, which was a rebuttal to the conservative literary style represented by classical writers such as Mustafa Lutfi el-Manfaluti and Ahmed Shawqi. They emphasized that poetry should convey the poet's experience and emotion rather than social and political issues.

The eleventh and the last chapter deals with the life and works of Ahmad Qandil (1911 -1979), a Saudi Arabian poet and writer who emerged as a folk-popular poet. "His works are sarcastic and graceful in expression which made him a writer closer to the popular choice" (pp. 201, 205).

Thus, through these biographical-cum-literary sketches of prominent literary figures, the book makes a significant addition to existing literature on the contributions of pioneers in Arabic language and literature.

The author's lucid and simple writing style makes the book an interesting read for teachers, scholars, and students interested in exploring varied vistas and dimensions of Arabic language and literature.

The author hails from Pulwama and is working as Assistant Professor, Arabic, at GDC Beerwah, Budgam.

## Is It Disordered Eating or OCD?

Giulia Suro

A young woman meticulously arranges the food on her plate, ensuring that each bite is symmetrical before she allows herself to eat. Another counts calories obsessively, unable to deviate from her strict daily allotment. To an observer, both behaviors could appear to be signals of an eating disorder, motivated by a desire to control one's body. Both are also examples of rituals driven by an intrusive fear of something catastrophic happening by eating "incorrectly."

Being able to identify this distinction is key to understanding the overlap and difference between obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD) and eating disorders, particularly those that present as primarily restrictive.

A large body of evidence indicates that OCD and eating disorders frequently co-occur. Recent research demonstrates that up to 40 percent of individuals with anorexia nervosa also exhibit symptoms of OCD, and approximately 20 percent of people with OCD develop disordered eating behaviors. While these disorders have distinct diagnostic criteria, they can share many core features including rigid rules, compulsive behaviors, and an intense need for control. Individuals with anorexia may fixate on food intake and body weight, leading



to pervasive, intrusive thoughts that dominate daily life. Similarly, those with OCD experience uncontrollable intrusive thoughts, often resulting in compulsive actions.

In both disorders, these compulsions—self-weighing, strict food restrictions, or eating rituals—serve to alleviate the anxiety provoked by obsessive thoughts. However, the relief obtained is often fleeting, perpetuating a relentless cycle of obsession and compulsion.

Despite their overlap, there are

important ways in which these diagnoses differ. One of the most critical distinctions between eating disorders and OCD lies in how the individual perceives their thoughts and behaviors.

Restrictive behaviors or food rituals that are driven by an eating disorder, are often ego-syntonic, meaning an individual sees their actions as rational, justified, or even desirable. These behaviors may lead to a sense of pride or accomplishment in one's ability to control their food intake

and weight. This is one of the reasons why accepting one's eating disorder as problematic or harmful can be particularly challenging.

The experiences associated with OCD, on the other hand, generally feel ego-dystonic. In this case, the intrusive thoughts and compulsions are distressing, unwanted, and misaligned with the person's values or desires. A person with OCD who engages in food-related rituals, such as needing to eat in a specific order or avoiding certain foods due to irrational fears, often wants to stop but feels powerless against their compulsions. The behaviors may not be related to weight loss or body control, but an attempt to prevent anxiety or imagined harm.

Given these distinctions, what makes it hard to distinguish OCD and anorexia? One critical factor is the cultural reinforcement of disordered eating behaviors. While OCD compulsions—such as excessive hand-washing—are generally recognized as unfounded, behaviors like calorie counting, restriction of food groups, and exercise routines are often praised, making it easier for undiagnosed OCD to be mistaken for an eating disorder.

Moreover, when OCD and anorexia co-exist, the lines between them blur. A person with anorexia may develop OCD-like rituals around food preparation or eating, while some-

one with OCD may develop food-related compulsions that mimic restrictive eating. This overlap can lead to misdiagnosis and ineffective treatment. While traditional eating disorder treatments focus on normalizing eating patterns and challenging fears about weight gain, individuals with OCD-related food fears often need exposure and response prevention therapy (ERP), the gold-standard treatment for OCD, to address their compulsions effectively.

Recognizing the difference between food-related compulsions in OCD and restrictive behaviors in anorexia is essential for routing individuals to the right treatment. A misdiagnosis can lead to interventions that fail to address the core problem, leaving individuals stuck in a cycle of ineffective care. Clinicians must carefully assess whether food-related behaviors stem from a distorted body image (as seen in anorexia) or from intrusive, anxiety-driven fears (as seen in OCD).

By distinguishing between ego-syntonic and ego-dystonic symptoms, clinicians, patients, and families can better understand the underlying motivations behind these behaviors—leading to more accurate diagnoses and, ultimately, more effective recovery paths.

The article was originally published by Psychology Today

## Mcap Of 8 Of Top-10 Most Valued Firms Erodes ₹1.65 Trn; TCS Hit Hard



Press Trust Of India

Rs 5,26,684.38 crore. Infosys faced an erosion of Rs 17,086.61 crore to Rs 7,53,700.15 crore from its market valuation.

**NEW DELHI-** The combined market valuation of eight of the top-10 most valued firms eroded Rs 1,65,784.9 crore last week, with Tata Consultancy Services (TCS) taking the biggest hit, in line with bearish trends in equities.



**The mcap of ITC eroded Rs 11,949.42 crore to Rs 5,01,750.43 crore and that of HDFC Bank diminished Rs 2,555.53 crore to Rs 12,94,152.82 crore.**

Last week, the BSE benchmark declined 628.15 points, or 0.82 per cent, while the Nifty went lower 133.35 points, or 0.58 per cent.

The market valuation of TCS tanked Rs 53,185.89 crore to Rs 13,69,717.48 crore.

Bharti Airtel's market capitalisation (mcap) dropped Rs 44,407.77 crore to Rs 9,34,223.77 crore.

The valuation of ICICI Bank tumbled Rs 18,235.45 crore to Rs 8,70,579.68 crore and that of Hindustan Unilever plunged Rs 17,962.62 crore to

The mcap of ITC eroded Rs 11,949.42 crore to Rs 5,01,750.43 crore and that of HDFC Bank diminished Rs 2,555.53 crore to Rs 12,94,152.82 crore. State Bank of India's valuation declined Rs 401.61 crore to Rs 6,43,955.96 crore.

However, the mcap of Reliance Industries jumped Rs 14,547.3 crore to Rs 16,61,369.42 crore.

Bajaj Finance added Rs 384.33 crore to Rs 5,20,466.75 crore in its mcap.

Reliance Industries remained the most valued firm followed by TCS, HDFC Bank, Bharti Airtel, ICICI Bank, Infosys, State Bank of India, Hindustan Unilever, Bajaj Finance, and ITC.

## USAID Funded 7 Projects In India Worth \$750 Million In FY24: Finance Ministry Report

Press Trust Of India

**NEW DELHI-** The latest annual report of the Finance Ministry said USAID funded seven projects worth \$750 million in 2023-24. "Currently, seven projects worth a total budget of \$750 million (approximately) are being implemented by the USAID in partnership with the government of India," the Finance Ministry annual report for 2023-24 said.



For the financial year 2023-24, an obligation of a total of \$97 million (about Rs 825 crore) has been made by the US Agency for International Development (USAID) under the seven projects, it said.

The Department of Economic Affairs under the Finance Ministry which is the nodal department for bilateral funding arrangements has also shared the details of projects funded in 2023-24 in the report.

During the year, no funding was made for enhancing voter turnout, but to projects related to agriculture and food security programmes; water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH); renewable energy; disaster management and health.

It said funds were committed for sustainable for-

ests and climate adaptation programme, and energy efficiency technology commercialization and innovation project.

The US' bilateral development assistance to India started in 1951 and it is mainly administered through USAID. Since its commencement, USAID has provided economic assistance of over \$17 billion to India in various sectors for over 555 projects.

Political controversy erupted earlier this month after the Elon Musk-led DOGE (Department of Government Efficiency) said it cancelled a \$21 million grant to India to boost "voter turnout".

US President Donald Trump repeatedly said USAID under the previous administration led by Joe Biden allocated \$21 million

in funding to India for 'voter turnout'.

External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar on Saturday said the information put out by the Trump administration is "concerning" and that the government is looking into it.

The USAID was allowed in India "in good faith, to do good faith activities", and suggestions are being made out of America that "there are activities which are in bad faith," Mr Jaishankar had said.

The Congress party on Sunday alleged the BJP was indulging in "anti-national work" by spreading "fake news from America". The party said Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Mr Jaishankar will have to answer as to why the government is silent when President Trump and Elon Musk are "insulting" India repeatedly.



**THE USAID WAS ALLOWED IN INDIA "IN GOOD FAITH, to do good faith activities", and suggestions are being made out of America that "there are activities which are in bad faith," Mr Jaishankar had said.**

## FPIs Withdraw ₹23,710 Cr In Feb; Total Outflow At ₹1 Trn In 2025

Press Trust Of India

**NEW DELHI-** Foreign investors have pulled out over Rs 23,710 crore from the Indian equity markets so far this month, pushing total outflows past Rs 1 trillion in 2025 amid rising global trade tensions.

Going forward, V K Vijayakumar, Chief Investment Strategist, Geojit Financial Services, believes that revival of FPI investment in India will happen when economic growth and corporate earnings revive. Indications of that are likely to happen in two to three months.

According to the data with the depositories, Foreign Portfolio Investors (FPIs) offloaded shares worth Rs 23,710 crore from Indian equities so far this month (till February 21). This came following a net outflow of Rs 78,027 crore in January. With these, the total outflow by FPIs has reached Rs 1,01,737 crore in 2025 so far, data with the depositories showed.

This massive selling has resulted in the Nifty yielding negative returns of 4 per cent year-to-date.



Market concerns heightened following reports that US President Donald Trump was considering imposing new tariffs on steel and aluminum imports, along with reciprocal tariffs on several countries, Himanshu Srivastava, Associate Director-Manager Research, Morningstar Investment Research India, said.

These developments reignited fears of a potential global trade war, prompting FPIs to re-evaluate their exposure to emerging markets, including India, he added.

On the domestic front, lackluster corporate earnings and persistent depreciation of the Indian rupee, which breached multi-year lows, further diminished the appeal of Indian assets, Srivastava said.

## India UK To Resume Talks On Proposed Trade Agreement From Feb 24

Press Trust Of India

**NEW DELHI-** After a gap of over eight months, India and the UK will resume negotiations for a proposed free trade agreement (FTA) here from February 24, an official said.

UK's Secretary of State for Business and Trade Jonathan Reynolds will be here for resumption of the talks. He will hold a bilateral meeting with Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal, the official said.

The India-UK FTA negotiations were launched on January 13, 2022.

Total 13 rounds of negotiations have been held till December 2023. The 14th round, which began on January 10, 2024, was underway when negotiations were paused by the UK side in May 2024 due to elections in that country.

The talks would resume the discussions from the progress achieved previously and seek to bridge the gaps for expeditiously closing the trade deal, the official added.

The agreement is aimed at



either eliminate or significantly reduce customs duties on maximum goods traded between them. They also ease norms for promoting trade in services and bilateral investments.

The Indian industry is demanding greater access for its skilled professionals from sectors like IT and healthcare in the UK market, besides market access for several goods at nil customs duty.

On the other hand, the UK is seeking a significant cut in import duties on goods such as scotch whiskey, electric vehicles, lamb meat, chocolates and certain confectionary items.

Britain is also looking for more opportunities for UK services in Indian markets in segments like telecommunications, legal and financial services, including banking and insurance.

In such pacts, two countries

boosting bilateral trade and investments.

Britain is also looking for more opportunities for UK services in Indian markets in segments like telecommunications, legal and financial services, including banking and insurance.

The talks for the agreement may get an impetus as Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman has proposed to raise the foreign investment limit to 100 per cent in the insurance sector as part of new-generation financial sector reforms.

## Assam Clears ₹1.22 Lakh Cr Investments Before Mega Business Summit

Partha Chatterjee

**GUWAHATI:** The Assam Cabinet on Sunday approved investment proposals worth Rs 1.22 lakh crore ahead of the second edition of the state business summit.

The Summit is being held in Guwahati on 25 and 26 February, 2025, Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma announced.

Addressing a press conference after a cabinet meeting, Sarma said that it had been decided that all MoUs, which will be signed during the Advantage Assam 2.0 Investment and Infrastructure Summit here, will be "properly scrutinised and then approved" by the council of ministers.

The cabinet rejected MoUs worth Rs 45,000 crore as these were found to be on "flimsy grounds", he said.

"We don't want to create unnecessary euphoria among people, we want to be reasonable and rational," he said of the cabinet that had gone through all proposals before approval.

The two-day business summit will be inaugurated by Prime Minister Narendra Modi on February 25.



Ambassadors from over 60 countries and business delegations from several countries along with top industrialists of India are expected to attend the programme.

"The cabinet cleared MoUs worth Rs 1.22 lakh crore today and more details of these will be shared during the summit. We had decided that no MoU will be signed in the piggy sector. Other than that, MoUs have been approved in various sectors, ranging from hand-

loom and textile to power to industry to mines and minerals," Sarma said.

Besides the MoUs approved, announcements of investments by some companies are also likely during the summit, he added.

He said the MoUs and investments to be announced through the summit can be broadly categorised into four segments - announcements for investment, announcements for infrastructure, MoU finan-

cial and MoU non-financial.

Some of these investment announcements will be by the government sector, some by PSUs and also by private parties, he added.

Along with the investment proposals to be finalised at the summit here, MoUs for investment up to Rs 50 crore will be signed at the district commissioners' (DC) offices during the two days of the mega event.

Altogether, 2,590 such MoUs with investment proposals

## Climate Change May Increase Default Risk In Agri And Housing Loans Portfolio By 2030



Press Trust Of India

**NEW DELHI-** Rising temperature and growing threat of climate change may increase default risk in 30 per cent of agri and housing loans portfolio in the next five years, according to an analysis by BCG.

According to the report, the average global temperature has already increased approximately 1.2 degree Celsius versus pre-industrial levels leading to flooding in coastal areas and reduction in agriculture production.

As a result, it said, there has been a drop in per capita income of people impacted by rising extreme weather events.

Almost half of the credit of scheduled commercial banks is significantly dependent on nature and its ecosystem so any natural calamity impacts their bottomline.

By 2030, as per estimates, 42 per cent India's districts are projected to experience temperature rise by up to 2 degree Celsius. So, 321 districts may be affected by temperature rise in the next five years.

However, climate change also provides an opportunity to banks to the tune of USD 150 billion annually to fund energy transition needs of the country as public funding is hugely inadequate to achieve the goal of net-zero by 2070.

"India is committing to sway away from coal and oil in favour of renewable energy. For India to make that difference/transition, an investment of USD 150-200 billion is required annually. On the contrary, the climate finance in India is somewhere between USD 40-60 billion creating a gap of USD 100-150 billion," BCG MD & Partner; APAC and India Leader, Risk Practice Abhinav Bansal said.

"This transition will create a landscape of opportunity however we are very far from the target and we could see it happening by 2030-40 and so forth given that it begins right now," he said.

Pioneers will make the most of it by holding the lion's share of the opportunity, and "we could potentially witness a big scalp up for grabs from the banking context perspective," he added.

## 'Indian Poultry Industry Profitability To Slip In 2025-26 Over Increased Feed Cost'

Agencies

**NEW DELHI-** The Indian poultry industry's operating profitability is poised to slip next financial year 2025-26, owing to an increase in feed cost, even as strong demand leads to revenue growth of 8-10 per cent, Crisil Ratings said in a report.

SSSThe rating agency has come up with these estimates after analysing 30 poultry poultry companies it rates. Those 30 companies had generated revenue of about Rs 10,000 crore last fiscal - 2023-24.

"The industry's margin improved last fiscal and this fiscal due to favourable input costs and higher realisation, particularly from softening feed prices," said the rating agency.

In 2025-26, profitability is, however, expected to narrow next fiscal owing to an anticipated increase in prices of maize and soya-made feeds.

Jayashree Nandakumar, Director, Crisil Ratings said the price of soya, which accounts for 30 per cent of the total feed cost, declined last fiscal and this fiscal



owing to a bumper crop. "However, with the soya acreage expected to reduce, the price is likely to increase next fiscal," Jayashree Nandakumar said in the note.

The price of maize, which constitutes 60 per cent of the overall feed cost, is also expected to increase due to rising demand for ethanol production, she added.

Despite a decline in profitability, revenues of poultry companies are likely to increase 8-10 per cent next fiscal, following a similar growth rate this fiscal, driven by both healthy volume and solid realisation.

Strong growth in domestic consumption of broiler chicken and eggs is expected to drive volume growth.

## 'Housing Demand Pretty Strong Across Major Cities But Euphoria Mellowing Down'

Press Trust Of India

**NEW DELHI-** Demand for residential properties remains "very strong" across major cities but the euphoria seen in the last few years is mellowing down a little bit, particularly in Delhi-NCR... It has settled into a more sort of standard strong market."

"Euphoria that was there 6-12 months ago seems to have cooled off a little bit, but demand remains very strong," he observed.

During the third quarter of this fiscal, Pirojsha highlighted that the company achieved sales of Rs 500 crore plus in five new launches in five cities -- Mumbai Metropolitan Region, Bengaluru, Gurugram, Pune and Kolkata.

"This is perhaps for the first time that any developer in the country has seen such a positive response from new launches across that many cities," he said.

Recently, HDFC Capital Advisors MD and CEO Vipul Roongta also mentioned that growth in housing prices has slowed.



## SMC Launches Sanitation Drive At Shankaracharya Temple

Observer News Service

**SRINAGAR:** Following the directions of SMC Dr. Owais Ahmed, the Srinagar Municipal Corporation (SMC), under the supervision of the Chief Sanitation Officer, has initiated a significant sanitation drive at Shankaracharya Temple and Saidapora Eidgah in Srinagar. This initiative is part of the "Sunday for Srinagar" campaign, which aims to en-

hance cleanliness and hygiene throughout the city.

SMC officials conducted cleanliness in public areas and streets to ensure a hygienic environment for both residents and visitors.

SMC encourages community participation in these initiatives, highlighting the shared responsibility to create and maintain a clean and sustainable environment for all residents of Srinagar.

## LMD Anantnag Slaps Fine On Petrol Pump

Observer News Service

**ANANTNAG:** The Legal Metrology Department slapped a fine of Rs 50,000 upon a petrol pump located on the National Highway Anantnag after it was observed that the Nozzle of a petrol pump was delivering deficient fuel to consumers by about 35 ml against every 5 litres.

The officials found that the display panel on the dispensing unit showing the delivery was not matching with the actual quantity delivered to the customers.

The surprise inspection led to the seizure of an erratic nozzle of the petrol pump.

The offender pleaded for the compounding offence at departmental level following which a case was compounded

in terms of Section 48 of Legal Metrology Act 2009, LMD Anantnag stated.

It is pertinent to mention that the action against the petrol pump is one among the series of actions which has been taken by the department against the petrol pumps during the recent times.

LMD advised consumers to remain aware and defend their consumer rights while visiting a petrol pump.

Consumers can check the delivery of fuel on their own by using the verified 5 Litre conical measure which mandatorily needs to be kept with every petrol pump and it is a duty of every petrol pump management to facilitate the checking of fuel delivery to any consumer.

**FINED**

## Dy CM Meets Delegations; Assesses Their Issues



Observer News Service

**JAMMU:** Deputy Chief Minister, Surinder Choudhary reiterated Government's commitment towards mitigating the issues and concerns of the people saying that an effective mechanism has been put in place on this account.

"Necessary instructions have already been issued to the concerned to ensure that the public grievances are redressed on priority and developmental initiatives are sped up. An effective mechanism is in place to monitor and expedite execution of all vital developmental works", maintained the Deputy Chief Minister.

The Deputy Chief Minister was interacting with scores of deputations from Nowshera, Sunderbani and other parts of Rajouri district who called on him today to project issues related to their respective areas besides highlighting the service related issues.

Later, former Legislators, Sarpanchs, individuals from different areas also called on the Deputy Chief Minister and projected development related and other issues of their respective constituencies and areas.

The Deputy Chief Minister assured the deputations that the issues projected by them would be redressed promptly.

## Director Colleges Reviews Construction Works Of Newly Established Degree Colleges



Observer News Service

**SRINAGAR:** Director Colleges, Dr. Sheikh Ajaz Bashir conducted a two day visit to newly established Degree Colleges (GDCs) of North Kashmir to review the overall functioning of these colleges and take stock of ongoing works.

At GDC Bommali, Director Colleges inspected the construction site and said that the slow pace of work on the main building of the college is a major area of concern. Superintendent Engineer R&B assured him that the construction work will be paced up to cover up for the delay.

At GDC Dangiwachha, Director colleges took note of delay in construction of main academic block of the college. He asked the Principal to expedite the acquisition of approach road so that the prefabricated huts constructed at the college site are put to immediate use by shifting the college there without further delay.

Director Colleges also interacted with Civil Society Dangiwachha and asked them for support in operationalizing the college.

While taking a stock of developmental works at Govt. Degree College Hadipora, Director

Colleges asked the Executive Engineer, Housing Board to expedite the works of ongoing projects and sort the issues raised by the Principal so that the funds are utilized in time.

At GDC Bommali, Director Colleges inspected the construction site and said that the slow pace of work on the main building of the college is a major area of concern. Superintendent Engineer R&B assured him that the construction work will be paced up to cover up for the delay.

At GDC Thindim, Kreeri, Housing Board representatives assured that the construction on phase-II of the main building will start within a fortnight as the tender process has been finalized.

Director Colleges also visited GDC Sopore to have an on the spot assessment regarding the long pending issue of incomplete work of Girls Hostel. Executive Engineer R&B assured him that the Department will assess the construction work and suggest a way forward to ensure the resolution of this long pending issue.

## Fisheries Sector Possesses Vast Potential For Employment Generation: Javed Dar

Observer News Service

**GANDERBAL:** Minister for Agriculture Production Department and Rural Development Department, Javed Ahmad Dar underlined the need to tap vast employment potential in the fisheries sector in Jammu and Kashmir.

The Minister stated this during his visit to the Trout Fish Farm Mammer, conducted to review its functioning and assess developments in the fisheries sector.

The Minister was accompanied by MLA Kangan, Mian Mehar Ali besides others.

The Minister highlighted the huge potential of employment and economic generation in the Fisheries sector and urged the youth to take fish farming as a sustainable economic activity.

Emphasizing the need for technical awareness among the private fish farmers, the Minister directed the officials to conduct frequent field visits and educate the farmers on modern fish culture practices. He also encouraged the youth to engage in fish farming, highlighting its potential as a viable employment avenue under the Holistic Agriculture Development Programme (HADP).

Earlier, the Minister visited Khyber Aquaculture at Akhal, Kangan, where he reviewed the infrastructure developed by the private



company for raising Rainbow Trout using the advanced Recirculatory Aquaculture System (RAS).

The Minister toured the facility, appreciating its eco-friendly practices and state-of-the-art machinery aimed at sustainable trout farming.

Commending the efforts of private entrepreneurs, the Minister emphasized the crucial role of the private sector in boosting the economy of the Union Territory. He remarked that initiatives like Khyber Aquaculture will not only strengthen the regional economy but also create employment opportunities while promoting environmentally conscious aquaculture techniques.

During the visit, Director Fisheries, Abdul Majid Tak, Assistant Director Fisheries Ganderbal and other officials from the Fisheries Department briefed the Minister on the farm's operations.

It was highlighted that the Trout Fish Farm Mammer recorded a production of 7 tons of trout fish and 1.5 lakh seed production during 2024-25. The expected seed production for the current year has been projected to reach 2 lakh.

The Minister was also informed about the private sector contributions, with trout fish production reaching 50 tons and carp production at 20 tons in district Ganderbal from 140 trout and carp ponds which are operational in the private sector within the district.

Additionally, it was informed that 200 angling permits have been issued this year, further promoting recreational fishing.

The Director Fisheries informed that live feed seed from the farm is being supplied to other districts in Kashmir division, including the Union Territory of Ladakh.

**THE MINISTER WAS ALSO INFORMED ABOUT THE PRIVATE SECTOR CONTRIBUTIONS, with trout fish production reaching 50 tons and carp production at 20 tons in district Ganderbal from 140 trout and carp ponds which are operational in the private sector within the district.**

## DSEK Visits Sainik School Manasbal

Observer News Service

**SRINAGAR:** Director School Education Kashmir, (DSEK) Dr GN Itoo visited the Sainik School Manasbal where he inspected the Entrance Test center established for admissions to the classes of 6th, 9th and 11th.

During the visit, the Dir reviewed all the facilities and interacted with the students.

On the occasion, DSEK maintained that discipline and transparency are essential for an examination and stated that every concerned officer & staff member must play a vital role for the fair conduct of examination.

GN Itoo informed that two centers, one at Sainik School Manasbal and one in Kargil, had been established for the test, in which 850 students appeared.

He added that students from all districts of UT Ladakh and Kashmir province participated in this test.

Speaking regarding reopening of schools after winter vacation, the Director stated that schools will reopen on March 1st after the winter break for which the department has



GN Itoo informed that two centers, one at Sainik School Manasbal and one in Kargil, had been established for the test, in which 850 students appeared.

made all necessary arrangements for the same.

Further, DSEK said that March 1st will be celebrated as 'Welcome Day' for students while all the teaching staff will report back for the duties and

make the celebration joyful with students.

Meanwhile, GN Itoo stated that from March 1st to March 15th, a special 'Enrollment Drive' will be conducted across the Kashmir province, with the participation of school heads, teachers, and students.

He stated that the department has set up a monitoring system to ensure the successful conduct of this campaign, ensuring that no child is left out of school.

GN Itoo appealed to the parents to enroll all their children who are not attending school, so that every child in the Kashmir division avails the benefits of free education facilitated by the government.

## PCCF Reviews Functioning Of Forest Department In Kashmir

Observer News Service

**SRINAGAR:** The Principal Chief Conservator of Forests & HoFF, Suresh Kumar Gupta convened a meeting to review the functioning of the Forest Department in Kashmir at Forest Complex Sheikh Bagh, Srinagar.

At the outset, a detailed powerpoint presentation on the department's activities and achievements in Kashmir was presented by the Chief Conservator of Forests, Kashmir, Irfan Rasool Wani.

The PCCF discussed various aspects of forest management, including conservation efforts, Ek Paed Maa kay Naam, Nagarvan and Eco-tourism initiatives, Survey & Demarcation, Protection measures, community engagement and Community Social Responsibility.

Moreover, PCCF also e-inaugurated "Nature and Knowledge Centre" a forest library established by the Pirpanjal Forest Division in a Govern-



ment school at Sitharan Budgam. This initiative aims to provide students access to nature based books to promote environmental education among the younger generation.

Furthermore, the PCCF released the annual environmental calendar 2025 prepared by DFO Planning and

Publicity Division of the Forest Department. The calendar highlights the vital role forests play in nation development and human well-being.

The meeting was attended by all the Conservators of Forests, Regional heads and Divisional Forest Officers of Kashmir Region.

## Sakeena Itoo Inaugurates NTPHCs In Lammer, Chowgam villages



Observer News Service

**KULGAM:** Minister for Health and Medical Education, Social Welfare and Education, Sakeena Itoo visited Kulgam and inaugurated two newly constructed New Type Primary Health Center (NTPHC) buildings in Lammer and Chowgam villages of the district.

MLA Devsar, Peerzada Feroze Ahmad Shah; Director Health Services, Kashmir; Additional Deputy Commissioner (ADC); Assistant Commissioner Revenue (ACR); senior officers of health department and locals were present on the occasion.

While addressing the gathering on the occasion, the Minister reiterated Omar Abdullah led government's commitment towards strengthening the healthcare system across Jammu & Kashmir. "Our government is determined to bridge healthcare gaps in underserved areas and ensure quality medical services reach every door-

steps, reducing dependency of people on far-off hospitals", Sakeena stated.

The Minister further underlined the importance of accessible healthcare services for all, particularly in remote villages. "These health centres will play a major role in providing essential medical services to the people of these villages as well as adjacent areas. These centres will also ensure that no one is deprived of timely medical attention", the Minister maintained.

The Minister highlighted that the focus of the present government is to ensure quality healthcare services for all. She added that the present government will ensure that essential medical facilities are more accessible and better equipped to cater to public needs.

Speaking on the occasion, MLA Devsar, Peerzada Feroze Ahmad, said that these health facilities will significantly improve healthcare services for the local population here.

## Tarigami Criticizes JPDCL

Observer News Service

**SRINAGAR:** CPI(M) leader and MLA Kulgam, Mohammad Yousuf Tarigami, on Sunday criticized Jammu Power Development Corporation Limited (JPDCL) for advocating registration of a First Information Report (FIR) against locals protesting the installation of smart meters.

Reports suggest that JPDCL has stressed for an FIR against 10 locals in a Kishtwar village for opposing and halting the installation of smart meters in

their area.

Tarigami condemned the move, calling it an attempt to criminalize dissent, which he described as highly unfortunate and unacceptable in a democratic country.

"People have every right to express their dissent, and registering an FIR against locals for merely protesting is an extremely harsh action by the authorities," he said.

The CPI(M) leader urged the authorities to withdraw the FIR, listen to the people's concerns, and address their grievances.

## DPAP Calls For Liquor Ban In J&K

Observer News Service

**SRINAGAR:** Peer Bilal, DPAP leader has called for a liquor ban in Jammu and Kashmir, driven by concerns about alcohol consumption, respecting local customs, and etiquette.

He said that, "Given Jammu and Kashmir's Muslim-majority population, the argument for a liquor ban is compelling. The success of prohibition in other states like Gujarat, Bihar, and Meghalaya serves as

a precedent, demonstrating that such a ban can be effective in reducing alcohol-related issues and promoting a more respectful and responsible society".

Peer Bilal said that data from the National Family Health Survey reveals that while 10.5 percent of men and 0.2 percent of women in Jammu and Kashmir consume liquor, the majority of the population does not consume liquor, lending support to the argument for a ban.

## "Budget Pe Charcha" Held At Town Hall Kupwara



Observer News Service

**KUPWARA:** BJP Media Incharge Kashmir, Adv Sajid Yousuf Shah, presided over a "Budget Pe Charcha" event at Town Hall Kupwara to discuss the Union Budget 2025-26 with key stakeholders. The event brought together leaders from the Trade Body Kupwara, NGOs, Civil Society, and Transport Associations, Fruit and Hawkers association for an insightful discussion.

Kupwara witnessed an engaging and interactive session as Adv. Sajid Yousuf Shah engaged with stakeholders from various sectors. The event provided a platform for business leaders, industry representatives, and community members to voice their concerns and expectations regarding the recently announced budget.

A diverse group of stakeholders actively participated in the discussion, including representatives from the trade sector, civil society, hoteliers, and other industries.

Shah welcomed various opinions and assured the participants that their feedback

would be conveyed to the relevant authorities for review. He highlighted the government's commitment to regional development and stressed the importance of public-private collaboration in driving economic progress.

Acknowledging the crucial role of tourism and handicrafts in Jammu and Kashmir's economy, Shah assured that the government would explore policy measures to further support these sectors. The discussion also focused on increasing financial assistance for saffron and apple growers, improving market access for fruit producers, and boosting the industrial sector to enhance employment opportunities.

Additionally, Shah emphasized the importance of sustainable tourism in the district, particularly in Bungus, Lolab, and Drangyari, while advocating for environmental conservation, wetland rehabilitation. He reiterated the government's commitment to promoting eco-friendly tourism policies while ensuring that the livelihoods of local communities remain secure.

# Women Achievers To Take Over PM Modi's Social Media Accounts To Mark Women's Day

NEW DELHI, Feb 23: Calling on people to celebrate and respect the indomitable spirit of women, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said on Sunday that he will hand over his various social media accounts to women achievers from different walks of life to mark the International Women's Day on March 8.

In his monthly "Mann Ki Baat" address, Modi said these successful women will talk about their work and experience on his social media accounts.

"Let us celebrate and respect the indomitable spirit of women," he said, lauding the increasing participation of women in different sectors.

The prime minister had handed over his social media accounts to seven leading women from different fields on March 8, 2020 in a similar gesture.

With followers in tens of millions on X, YouTube and Instagram, among other platforms, Modi is one of the most-followed global leaders on social media.

The prime minister also renewed his appeal to people to take measures to deal with the growing problem of obesity, saying it is necessary for India to become a fit and healthy country.

Citing research, he said one out of eight people is suffering from obesity and their numbers have doubled in the last few years.

What is more worrisome is that it has grown four-fold among children, he added.

Modi asked people to cut down on their oil consumption by 10 per cent and said he will request 10 people to do so.



Each of them can, in turn, pose a similar challenge to 10 more people, he said.

The prime minister played audio messages from some noted personalities, including Olympic gold medallist Neeraj Chopra, to impress upon people to take measures to prevent obesity.

In the radio broadcast, Modi also appealed to people to try "one day as a scientist" by visiting research laboratories or planetariums to mark the National Science Day on February 28.

"Like space and science, there is another field in which India is rapidly carving out a robust identity — this field is AI, that is, artificial intelligence. Recently, I went to Paris to participate in a big AI conference. There, the world praised India's progress in this sector. We are also getting to see examples of how people

in our country are using AI today," he said.

Modi asked students appearing in the board exams to be "happy and stress-free" and added that the new format of "Pariksha Pe Charcha" has drawn admiration from various quarters.

Making a reference to the ongoing Champions Trophy, he said these days, there is an atmosphere of cricket everywhere.

"All of us know very well what the thrill of a century in cricket is. But today, I am not going to talk to you about cricket, albeit about the wonderful century that India has made in space. Last month, the country witnessed the launch of the ISRO's 100th rocket. This is not just a number, it also reflects our resolve to touch new heights in space science every day," the prime minister said.

"Our space journey had commenced in a rather modest way. There were challenges at every step, but our scientists kept moving forward, conquering them. With time, the list of our successes in this space odyssey kept getting long. Be it the manufacture of launch vehicles, the successes of the Chandrayaan, Mangalyaan, Aditya L-1 or the unprecedented mission of sending 104 satellites into space at one go with a single rocket — the ambit of the ISRO's successes has been quite expansive," he said.

Over the last 10 years alone, around 460 satellites have been launched, including many satellites of other countries as well, he added.

Another important fact in recent years is that the participation of women is constantly on the rise among India's team of

space scientists, Modi noted.

"I am also very happy to see that today, the space sector has become a favourite for our youngsters," he said.

Noting that March 8 is observed as the "International Women's Day", Modi said this is a special occasion to salute India's "Nari Shakti".

Highlighting the contribution of Hansa Mehta, the prime minister said she had brought to the fore the contribution of women from all over the country, right from the making of the national flag to sacrificing their lives for its sake.

"She was of the belief that the saffron colour in our tricolour also reflects this sentiment. She had expressed confidence that our women power would make its valuable contribution in making India strong and prosperous. Today, her words are proving to be true. If you observe any field, you will find how extensive the contribution of women is," Modi said.

This time on Women's Day, the prime minister said he is going to embark upon an initiative for a day, which will be dedicated to India's "Nari Shakti".

"On this special occasion, I am going to hand over my social media accounts like those on X, Instagram to some inspiring women of the country. Women who have achieved success in myriad fields, who have innovated and created a unique identity for themselves in various fields," he said.

"On March 8, they will share their work and experiences with the countrymen. The platform

might be mine, but it will be about their experiences, their challenges and their achievements. If you want to avail of this opportunity, become a part of this experiment through a special forum created on the Namo app and share your messages with the whole world through my X and Instagram accounts," he said.

Modi asked people if they were aware of the similarity between the Asiatic lion, han-gul, pygmy hog and lion-tailed macaque.

"The answer is that all of these are not found anywhere else in the world. They are found only in our country. Indeed, we have a very vibrant ecosystem of flora and fauna. And these wild animals are deeply embedded in our history and culture," he said.

"Many animals are also observed as the mounts of our gods and goddesses. Many tribes in central India worship Bagheshwar. There is a tradition of worshipping Waghoba in Maharashtra. Lord Ayyappa has a very deep connection with the tiger. Bonbibi, whose 'vahan' is the tiger, is worshipped in the Sundarbans," Modi said.

"We have many cultural dances like Huli Veshha of Karnataka, Pooli of Tamil Nadu and Pulikali of Kerala, which are associated with nature and wildlife. I would also like to thank my tribal brothers and sisters, because they actively participate in work related to wildlife protection," he said.

Modi said the population of tigers has grown continuously in Karnataka's BRT Tiger Reserve,

noting that a lot of credit for this goes to the Soliga tribe, the members of which worship the tiger.

Owing to them, there is almost no man-animal conflict in the area, he said.

"In Gujarat as well, people have contributed significantly in the protection and conservation of Asiatic lions in Gir. They have shown the world what coexistence with nature means," the prime minister said, adding that on account of these efforts, the population of tigers, leopards, Asiatic lions, rhinoceroses and barasingha has grown rapidly in the last few years.

And it is also worth noting how beautiful the diversity of wildlife in India is, Modi said.

Asiatic lions are found in the western parts of the country, while the habitat of tigers is east, central and south India, and rhinoceroses are found in the northeast, he noted.

Every part of the country is not only sensitive towards nature, but also committed to wildlife protection, Modi said.

"I have been told about Anuradha Raoji, many generations of whom have been associated with the Andaman and Nicobar Islands. Anuradhaji had dedicated herself to animal welfare at an early age. For three decades, she has made the protection of deer and peacocks her mission. People there call her the 'Deer Woman'. We will celebrate the World Wildlife Day early next month. I request you to encourage people associated with wildlife protection," he said. (Agencies)

## CONTD. FROM PAGE 3

### Speaker Warns

during the ensuing budget session, has expressed displeasure over this practice, saying this is against the parliamentary practices, conventions and established rules, a spokesperson of the Legislative Assembly said in a statement.

"According to parliamentary practice, usage and established convention, and prevalent rules of this house, it is improper to give unwarranted publicity to the notices of questions, bills, resolutions and other similar matters connected with business of the house," the statement said, quoting the Speaker.

Rather expressed displeasure against the members responsible for such publicity which tantamount to breach of privilege as per the prescribed rules and directed the members to desist from this practice in future, the statement said.

### Form Of 'Martial Law'

a breach of privilege. Mufti accused Rather of imposing a form of "martial law" while occupying a constitutional position.

"While Rathar Sahab may be concerned with preserving the sanctity of legislative proceedings, as Speaker, his primary role is to safeguard the rights of members, not to act as a censor," the former Jammu and Kashmir chief minister said in a post on X.

She said transparency and public awareness about legislative activities should not be seen as an infringement on parliamentary practices.

"On the contrary, informing the public about notices, questions, and resolutions in advance promotes accountability. Many significant parliamentary bills, such as the recent Waqf Bill, are debated publicly for months.

"Regrettably, it appears that Rathar Sahab, a seasoned politician, is imposing a form of martial law while occupying a constitutional position," she added.

The Budget session of the Jammu and Kashmir Assembly is scheduled to begin from March 3.

The speaker has said it is improper to give unwarranted publicity to the notices for questions, bills, resolutions and other similar matters connected with the business of the House.

Meanwhile, Mufti joined the People's Democratic Party's (PDP) signature campaign seeking a ban on liquor in Jammu and Kashmir at south Kashmir's Pulwama.

The campaign was launched by her daughter and party leader Iltija Mufti here on Saturday. Talking to reporters in Pulwama, the PDP chief appealed to Chief Minister Omar Abdullah to support the bills brought by her party.

"I request Abdullah to lend his support to pass these bills. I request the speaker that his role is to safeguard the rights of the members and not to threaten them not to talk on the resolutions and bills to be brought in the Assembly. What is this? There should be a debate on those in the public," she said.

Mufti also appealed to Abdullah that such business rules should not be framed in the Union Territory that put a stamp of approval on the unconstitutional and illegal decisions of August 5, 2019, and that too by a popular government like his.

On August 5, 2019, the Centre abrogated the provisions of Article 370 of the Constitution, which conferred a special status on Jammu and Kashmir, and bifurcated the erstwhile state into Union territories.

### 4-Day Wet

are advised to plan their trips accordingly and follow Admin/Traffic advisory", the

advisory said.

It has also advised Farmers to suspend irrigation and other farm operations during the period.

The night temperature slightly improved but stayed below freezing point at most weather stations of the Kashmir valley.

The minimum temperature recorded during the intervening night of Saturday and Sunday was recorded at Srinagar 0.0°C, ski resort of Gulmarg -5.6°C, tourist resort of Pahalgam -4.3°C and Qazigund -0.6°C.

In Kashmir Division, the maximum temperature also witnessed an increase by 2 to 4°C on Saturday with highest recorded at Srinagar 15.2°C, Pahalgam 11.0°C and Kupwara 15.2°C.

In Jammu division the night temperature also witnessed a slight drop with Baderwah at 1.2°C, Banihal 3.2°C, Jammu 9.2°C and Batote 5.1°C overnight.

Similarly the day temperature recorded the previous day in Jammu 23.5°C, Kathua 22.8°C, Batote 15.4°C and Katra 21.6°C respectively, the MeT office said.

### Trump Attacks

External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar on Saturday said the information put out by the Trump administration people is "concerning" and that the government is looking into it.

During an interaction at an event in New Delhi, he also said the USAID was allowed in India "in good faith, to do good faith activities" and suggestions are being made out of America that "there are activities which are in bad faith."

"So, it surely warrants a look. And, if there is something to it, I think the country should know who are the people involved in the bad faith activities," the external affairs minister said.

The Congress party on Saturday urged Prime Minister Narendra Modi to "talk to his friend" and strongly refute the allegation.

### Why Is Our Govt

as to why the government is silent when US President Donald Trump and Elon Musk are "insulting" India repeatedly.

The BJP has rejected all such allegations of the Congress and called Rahul Gandhi a "traitor", accusing him of colluding with foreign forces in his bid to weaken India.

Congress general secretary in-charge Jairam Ramesh said, "BJP is a procession of liars and illiterates. The news about USD 21 million, on which the BJP and their bootlickers were jumping on, turned out to be fake. The USD 21 million in 2022 was not for 'voter turnout' in India, but for Bangladesh."

"Elon Musk made a fake claim, Trump got confused between Dhaka and Delhi, Amit Malviya spread the lie further, then the rest of BJP's bootlickers seized on it," he charged.

Ever since the Trump administration's DOGE said on February 16 that USAID has cancelled the USD 21 million funding for "voting in India", the BJP has been making fabricated allegations against the Congress, Ramesh said in his post in Hindi on X.

"But now it is coming to light that this entire news is fake. When the money has not even reached India, then what would be the cancellation?" he said.

The controversy is actually about two USAID grants on DOGE's list that were given through the Washington-based Consortium for Elections and Political Process Strengthening (CEPPS), the Congress leader said.

The CEPPS was supposed to receive a total

of USD 486 million from USAID, he said, adding that according to DOGE, the funds included USD 22 million for Moldova and USD 21 million for "voter turnout in India", he said.

"The first fund USAID gave to CEPPS for Moldova was in 2016 with the ID AID117LA1600001. But the USAID USD 21 million grant for India marked by DOGE is completely fake. Because it was for Bangladesh, not India," he claimed.

And the reality is that of the USD 21 million earmarked for Bangladesh, USD 13.4 million has already been disbursed before the January 2024 elections, Ramesh said.

"Every federal grant specifies the country in which it is to be used. According to US federal spending, there have been no USAID-funded CEPPS projects in India since 2008. The only ongoing USD 21 million USAID grant to CEPPS, ID 72038822LA00001, was approved in July 2022 for Bangladesh's 'Amar Vote Amar' (My Vote Is Mine)," he pointed out.

"In November 2022, the purpose of the grant was changed to 'USAID's Nagorik Programme'. A USAID official in Dhaka also confirmed this on social media during his US visit in December 2024: 'I manage the USD 21 million CEPPS/Nagorik project funded by USAID,'" Ramesh said.

"Now the BJP should just answer this: Why did the BJP spread fake news about India's democracy? Why did the BJP did anti-national work by spreading fake news from America? If BJP's accusing India's opposition party over fake news from America is not treason, then what is it?" he said.

Ramesh said "Prime Minister Narendra Modi and External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar will also have to answer, Donald Trump and Elon Musk are insulting India again and again, and why is our government silent on this?"

The Congress leader said "Is it the case that the country's self-respect has been compromised in the process of begging for mercy for Adani?"

Trump for the fourth time in recent days has claimed that the Biden administration allocated USD 21 million funding to India for voter turnout, evoking a sharp response from the Congress which urged Prime Minister Modi to talk to his friend and strongly refute the allegation.

The opposition party has demanded a white paper on the funds received in India from developmental agencies, aid mechanisms and multilateral forums.

It also sought legal action against the RSS-BJP and their ecosystem for making wild allegations against credible civil society members, NGOs and political parties.

In Washington, speaking at a 'Governors Working Session,' Trump had said: Twenty-one million dollars going to my friend Prime Minister Modi in India for voter turnout. We're giving 21 million for voter turnout in India. What about us? I want voter turnout too.

A video clipping from the event was posted on social media by the White House on Friday.

Trump also said that money went to strengthen the political landscape in Bangladesh to a firm that nobody ever heard of.

In New Delhi, reacting to Trump's remarks, the Congress on Saturday demanded a comprehensive white paper on the funds that political parties, individuals, NGOs, organisations received from developmental agencies, aid mechanisms and multilateral forums.

The white paper should not only focus on USAID funding, but all such agencies which fund both governments, individuals and all

other entities under Indian law, Congress' media and publicity department head Pawan Khara said on Saturday.

Hitting back at Khara, BJP leader Ajay Alok said the Congress people have probably lost their mind.

### Ex-members Of Banned

the general secretary of the front, said the new outfit would select educated people from every area who would stand for their people and keep the people away from all the social evils.

He also announced that the front will contest all future elections in Jammu and Kashmir.

"God willing, we will contest the local bodies elections, and we will sweep them," he asserted.

### J&K Worker

trapped are two engineers, two machine operators and four workers. They belonged to Jharkhand, Uttar Pradesh, Punjab and Jammu and Kashmir, said sources.

The personnel were trapped 14 km inside the tunnel. The sources said the way was clear up to 13 km even as the rescue teams remained apprehensive about the overall condition of the tunnel. There was a lot of muck piled up at the accident spot, so the rescue teams were using drones to navigate forward and identify any potential dangers, they said.

PM Narendra Modi called up Telangana Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy to inquire about the incident and assured all possible assistance for the rescue operation.

The seepage of water and soil began slowly and increased later, prompting the workers to come out. They also heard a loud sound as they felt some "geological disturbance" outside the tunnel, said the minister. Those working ahead of a boring machine inside the tunnel were stuck there, he said.

### Gulmarg To Get

now enjoy the helicopter safari in Gulmarg as well," he said.

On the conduct of the Khelo India Games which were postponed due to lack of snowfall, Abdullah said the government was not in a position to make an announcement on them yet.

The Khelo India Games were scheduled to be held from February 22.

"There is a hope of fresh snowfall over three days from February 26. After that, experts of the Ski Federation will visit, they will examine the slopes and if they feel there is much snow to hold the games, then we will announce the dates.

"I would want the games to be held in the first week of March then, because otherwise, the temperature will rise and it will be difficult to hold them this year then," he added.

To another question about the upcoming Muslims' fasting month, the chief minister said he would soon take a meeting to review the preparations for the Ramadan.

### SC to Hear Plea

National AIDS Control Organisation and an organisation working for AIDS patients to discuss issues of quality and shortage of ARV drugs for treating HIV patients.

Anti-retroviral therapy involves treatment of people infected with human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) using anti-HIV drugs.

The plea had claimed that non-availability of drugs at the anti-retroviral therapy centres of the National AIDS Control Organisation hampers treatment of those living with HIV/AIDS.

### Mild Earthquake

report of any loss of life or damage to property, they said.

### Some Leaders,

we see that there is a group of leaders who mock and ridicule our religion. They are bent upon breaking the unit and are engaged in dividing people.

"Many times, foreign powers too are seen trying to weaken the country and religion by supporting these people," Modi said.

Modi's remarks come amid a row over West Bengal CM Mamata Banerjee dubbing Maha Kumbh as Mrityu Kumbh citing mismanagement and incidents of stampede. She had also accused the authorities of suppressing the death toll.

Modi said the haters of the Hindu faith have been living in different disguises for centuries.

"These people with slave mentality attack our beliefs, temples, saints, culture and traditions. These people abuse our festivals, traditions, and beliefs," he said.

Modi further said the agenda of this section was to break the society and unity of the country.

"They have the audacity of throwing slush at our religion and culture which is intrinsically progressive," he added.

Modi underlined the religious significance of Maha Kumbh in Prayagraj which is taking place after 144 years.

He praised 'safai karmis' (sanitation workers) and police personnel for doing a great job in making the Maha Kumbh a successful event.

"This is the great Kumbh of unity where thousands of doctors and volunteers work with dedication and the spirit of service. People visiting the great Kumbh of unity appreciate these efforts," he said.

Modi also hailed services rendered by ophthalmologists to the needy people at the mega religious congregation attended by crores.

He said for ages, Hindu mutts, dhams and temples have been serving as the centres of worship and belief and also for science and research.

"Hindu seers imparted the knowledge of yoga and science. The world is following Yoga. Yoga has made the country proud and making our flag fly high," he said.

The PM said he always worked with the principle of 'sabka saath, sabka vikaas' and has added the vow of 'sabka ilaaj and sabko aarogya'.

Highlighting efforts made by his government in fighting cancer, Modi said cancer day care centres will be opened in all districts of the country in the next three years.

He pointed to Budgetary announcements aimed at fighting cancer and the decision to make cancer medicines cheaper.

"Modi is your son, and I will continue to serve you all," the PM added.

The cancer hospital, to be set up under Shree Bageshwar Medical Sciences And Research Institute, is the brainchild of self-styled godman Dharendra Shastri, the Peethadhishwar of Bageshwar Dham.

Modi said the 100-bed cancer hospital will come up on 10 acres in the first phase over the next two years, with a cost of Rs 218 crore.

The prime minister praised Dharendra Shastri, saying he has undertaken another important initiative to serve people, the poor, and cancer patients through this modern cancer hospital, which will be constructed in an area in the impoverished Bundelkhand region.

MP Chief Minister Mohan Yadav and Shastri also addressed the gathering.

# Kohli Hits 51st ODI Ton As India Seal Thumping Win Over Pakistan

## Press Trust of India

**DUBAI:** Virat Kohli showcased his penchant to lord over Pakistan in ICC tournaments once more as the batting icon's glittering unbeaten 100 helped India claim an authoritative six-wicket win over their traditional rivals and all but seal a semifinal spot in the Champions Trophy here on Sunday.

The victory should be enough for India, who are now on top of Group A with four points, to make the last four. However, Pakistan are starting at early elimination from the eight-team event after their second successive loss.

Chasing a tricky 242, India rode on Kohli's 51st ODI ton, Shreyas Iyer's classy 67-ball 56 and Shubman Gill's brilliant start of 46 off 52 balls to overhaul the target with more than

seven overs to spare.

Kohli rebelled against his own modest recent form and a dangerous opposition to peel off a memorable knock that took 111 balls and was punctuated with seven fours.

Pakistan, on the other hand, are on their way out of the tournament of which they are the hosts.

Once again, they ran into their old nemesis — Kohli. The 36-year-old had several demons of his own to tame — a lean run, recurring form of dismissals and struggles against spin.

But he slayed each one of them, in a manner befitting a batter who also became the quickest to 14,000 ODI runs during the course of the knock. Pakistan might have hoped to hustle him a bit through pacers Shaheen Shah Afridi and Haris Rauf.

But Kohli drove them on the up with elan or pulled them with au-

dicacy as Pakistan's premier pacers transformed into dejected figures after the early high of Afridi casting Rohit Sharma (20 off 15 balls) with a peach of a yorker.

Perhaps, the biggest hope Pakistan harboured against Kohli would have been leg-spinner Abrar Ahmed, considering the Indian's recent travails against England's Adil Rashid.

Kohli did have a couple of tough moments against Ahmed but none big enough to put him in distress. He largely dealt with him in singles, cutting down risks.

But the Pakistan quicks offered him enough chances to free his arms.

At the other end, Iyer flowed with a variety of shots but a 103 metre six off spinner Salman Agha was the standout hit during his tenure, in which he assisted Kohli to raise 114 runs for the third wicket.



## Short TAKES

### At 36, It Takes A Lot Out Of Me Put That Much Effort: Kohli

Virat Kohli said his plan was to attack the pacers and take less risk against the spinners in the high-pressure Champions Trophy clash against Pakistan here on Sunday and having steered the team home with a sparkling hundred, his 36-year-old body is happy to get a week-long break before the next game.

Kohli got majority of his runs from running the quick singles and doubles as he collected only seven fours in his 100 not out off 111 balls.

"At 36, a week off is very good. It takes a lot out of me to put in that much effort," said the superstar referring to the last group A clash against New Zealand on March 2.

"It feels good to bat in that manner in an important game, where a spot for semis was there to be taken, after Rohit (Sharma) fell (20 off 15 balls). My job was clear - to control the middle overs, not take risks against spinners and take on pacers.

"I was happy with the template, it's how I play in ODIs," said Kohli at the post-match presentation after scoring his fourth hundred against Pakistan.

### Sports Department's Annual Skiing Course Begins In Gurez

The Department of Youth Services and Sports began its annual Skiing training at Gurez on Sunday. The 10-day course was inaugurated at Darthani Nallah Badwan Gurez.

The event was attended by Sub-Divisional Magistrate Gurez and Zonal Education Officer Gurez, marking the beginning of an exciting initiative aimed at nurturing young talent and promoting.

Under the guidance of the Director General YSS, the course will see the participation of 50 enthusiastic boys and girls. The program is being conducted under the supervision of District Youth Services and Sports Office Bandipora, along with the dedicated physical education staff of Zone Gurez.

This initiative is part of the Department of Youth Services & Sports J&K's ongoing efforts to promote sports and engage youth in diverse sports disciplines. The course is expected to further enhance Gurez's reputation as a winter sports haven, attracting skiing enthusiasts to take part in the skiing training.

### Mohun Bagan SG Become First Team To Defend ISL Title

Mohun Bagan Super Giant on Sunday became the first team in Indian Super League history to defend the title with a 1-0 win over Odisha FC with Dimitrios Petratos scoring the all-important goal in the added time in a dramatic match here.

Australian forward Petratos (90+3rd) struck in the third minute of the added time in front of ecstatic home supporters at the Vivekananda Yuba Bharati Krirangan Stadium.

By virtue of clinching the ISL Shield, MBSG also booked a berth in the AFC Champions League 2, the continent's second tier club competition. They retained the League Shield they had won in the 2023-24 season.

After the win in their 22nd league game, Mohun Bagan Super Giant secured 52 points and emerged Shield Winners with two matches to spare.

Their nearest rivals, FC Goa, have collected 42 points from 21 matches, and they cannot catch MBSG even if they win all their remaining three matches.

### Haaland Left Out Of Man City Squad For Liverpool Clash

Erling Haaland was left out of the Manchester City squad for Sunday's Premier League clash with Liverpool after failing to recover from injury in time.

The Norway international was an unused substitute against Real Madrid in the Champions League on Wednesday, having been forced off late in the previous game against Newcastle.

City manager Pep Guardiola had said Friday he did not know if his leading scorer would be available. Haaland has scored 27 goals in all competitions this season.

"It's better to have Erling on the pitch. Everybody is responsible for the good things and bad things for the team but obviously with Erling we are better," Guardiola said Friday.

January signing Omar Marmoush was named in attack in his place, having also started in the 3-1 loss to Madrid.

## CM Omar Flags Off Heli-Skiing Services In Gulmarg



### Observer News Service

**GULMARG:** Chief Minister Omar Abdullah on Sunday flagged off heli-skiing/helisafari services in Gulmarg.

Speaking about the developments, he said, "Heli-

skiing season begins in Gulmarg. There are many skiers who do not like to ski apart from heli-skiing because they find slopes where there is no lift arrangement, where they have not skied before, and they leave their ski

marks in the snow."

He also noted that heli-services, which were previously available only in winters, will now be benefiting both adventure skiers and tourists seeking helicopter sightseeing tours.

"It used to happen in winters, now it happens all year round, so in summers, people will also take helicopter safari in Gulmarg," he added.

Abdullah expressed optimism about hosting the Khelo India Winter Games, saying, "If the snow falls properly in these days, then we should do it in the first week of March because after that it will be hot again, making it difficult this year."

## Disappointing That India Is Not Playing In Pakistan: PCB Chief



### Press Trust of India

**KARACHI:** PCB chairman Mohsin Naqvi has reiterated his disappointment over India's decision to play their Champions Trophy matches at a neutral venue but remains confident that Pakistan's first ICC event in 29 years will leave a lasting legacy for the sport in the country.

While PCB has the hosting rights of the event, India are playing all their games in Dubai due to security concerns in Pakistan.

"We are focussed on delivering a world class event but it is undoubtedly disappointing that India is not playing in Pakistan," Naqvi told PTI before leaving for Dubai to watch the Pakistan and India match on Sunday.

"It is disappointing - not just for the PCB, but also for cricket fans worldwide, the ICC, its commercial partners and the other participating countries that India is not playing in Pakistan," he said.

Naqvi reminded that Pakistan has consistently upheld the principle of keeping sports and politics separate.

"Our team has toured India multiple times, including in 2011, 2012, 2016 and most recently in 2023. Naturally, we had hoped that India would reciprocate by participating in the Champions Trophy in Pakistan. Unfortunately, that has not materi-

alised," he said.

Having said that, the BCCI, PCB and ICC have agreed on a hybrid model for the marquee clash for all world events till 2027. Due to the tense relations between the two nations, India and Pakistan only play each other in ICC events and Asia Cup.

Naqvi, who is also the federal interior minister, said that the PCB, along with the Pakistan government, had provided comprehensive assurances regarding security, hospitality and logistical arrangements for the Indian team.

"We engaged constructively with the ICC and conveyed our willingness to facilitate every possible measure to ensure a smooth and secure visit. Despite these efforts, India has chosen not to travel."

He said the absence of India from playing Pakistan is a loss for spectators, broadcasters, media and the tournament itself.

"I think it is also a missed opportunity for Indian players to experience the warmth, love and hospitality that Pakistan has always extended to visiting teams. Pakistani fans would shown their hospitality to the Indian team."

"Nonetheless, we remain focused on delivering a world-class event, ensuring that cricket takes center stage."

## Adil Teli To Compete In UCI Gran Fondo World Championship

### Observer News Service

**SRINAGAR:** Premier Kashmir cyclist Adil Teli qualified for the UCI Gran Fondo World Championship by finishing Spiney's Dubai Cycle Challenge - 92 KM main event on Sunday.

Adil, who hails from Narbal area of Budgam district, competed against professional cyclists from across the globe and completed the event with timings of 2:01:56 at 45.27 km/h.

The 2025 UCI Gran Fondo World Championship will be held October 16 to 19 in Victoria, Australia.

"Close battles, strong legs, and a dream secured!" Adil wrote on social media. "Grateful for the journey—next stop, Australia! Special thanks to my sponsors and everyone for supporting my journey."



## Chappell Calls Curtains On 5-Decade-Long Journalistic Career

### Press Trust of India

**NEW DELHI:** Legendary cricketer Ian Chappell's insightful writings, critical reviews and anecdotes from his playing days will be missed after the Australian icon called curtains on his more than five-decade-long journalistic career, penning his last piece on Sunday.

The 81-year-old fondly recalled some of the best moments he has written about, including the legendary battle between Sachin Tendulkar and the late spin wizard Shane Warne in the 1998 Chennai Test, as well as VVS Laxman's iconic 281 against Australia in Kolkata, in his last column for 'ESPNCricinfo'.

"There have been many pleasures from writing, notably Sachin Tendulkar combating Shane Warne in Chennai. Other highlights included writing about the genius of Brian Lara, Ricky Ponting's aggression, and VVS Laxman's classic 281 in Kolkata," Chappell wrote.

However, he felt the time was right for him to "put down the pen and pack away the computer", adding that retirement from journalism was as emotional as stepping away from cricket.



"I've been writing for more than 50 years, but the time has come and this will be my last column. Retirement from journalism is similar to cricket - I knew the time was right," said the former top-order batter, who played 75 Tests, scoring 5,345 runs.

"In my playing days I asked former Australia captain Richie Benaud if retirement was a difficult decision. 'No Ian,' Benaud replied wisely, 'It's easy. You'll know the right time.'"

## CHAMPIONS TROPHY: New Zealand Aim For Semifinal Spot; Bangladesh Fight For Survival

### Press Trust of India

**RAWALPINDI:** A confident New Zealand side will be eager to seal their semifinal spot when they take on Bangladesh, who will be fighting for survival, in their Champions Trophy Group A match here on Monday.

The Black Caps started their campaign in dominant fashion, defeating hosts Pakistan by 60 runs. This emphatic victory placed them at the top of Group A with a healthy net run rate of 1.200. A win on Monday will put them within touching distance of a semifinal berth.

Bangladesh, on the other hand, suffered a six-wicket loss to India and currently sit third in the group with a net run rate of -0.408. They must secure a victory to stay in contention for the knockout stage.



New Zealand looked clinical in their opening match, and their recent triumph in the tri-series has further helped them adapt to the conditions in Pakistan.

However, they now face a selection dilemma with the potential return of Rachin Ravindra from a head injury. In his absence, Devon

effectively. Dropping him would also disrupt the left-hand-right-hand combination at the top, which could be crucial for New Zealand's batting strategy.

Meanwhile, Conway appears to be regaining his best form. Apart from this selection call, New Zealand look well-settled and are unlikely to make further changes to their playing XI.

Bangladesh, however, face an uphill task and must regroup quickly after their disappointing defeat against neighbours India.

The pressure will be on their top order to deliver, as their batting struggles were evident in the previous match.

If not for the 154-run sixth-wicket partnership between Jaker Ali and Towhid Hridoy, Bangladesh would have struggled to

even reach 100.

Despite winning a crucial toss, the Najmul Hossain Shanto-led side failed to capitalise on the advantage and got off to a poor start.

Their bowlers performed well but lacked the runs to defend.

Adding to their woes, sloppy fielding cost them valuable opportunities, and they will need a significant improvement in that area if they hope to challenge a quality side like New Zealand.

Bangladesh, however, can take inspiration from their previous Champions Trophy clash against New Zealand, where they knocked the Black Caps out of the tournament.

They will be hoping for a similar upset to keep their semifinal hopes alive.

Match starts at 2.30 pm IST.

# Musk says all US govt staff must justify their work or lose jobs

Agencis

Elon Musk, the billionaire advisor to Donald Trump, said on Saturday that all US federal employees must justify their work or lose their jobs, hours after the president pushed him to be "more aggressive" in slashing government spending.

Musk — the world's richest person and Trump's biggest donor — has led the effort to fire swaths of the government workforce.

"All federal employees will shortly receive an email requesting to understand what they got done last week. Failure to respond will be taken as a resignation," Musk wrote.

According to a copy of the email provided to AFP, federal workers were asked to submit "approximately 5 bullets of what you accomplished last week."

The email came from the US Office of Personnel Management (OPM), with the subject line "What did you do last week?". The deadline to reply was 11:59pm Monday, though the message did not say failure to do so would lead to termination.

The OPM did not immediately reply to AFP's request for comment on Saturday evening.

The American Federation of Government Employees (AFGE), the largest federal employee union, vowed to challenge any unlawful terminations in a statement from national president Everett Kelley.

Kelley slammed Musk and the Trump administration, saying the move showed "their utter disdain for federal employees and the critical services they provide to the American people."

"It is cruel and disrespectful to hundreds of thousands of veterans who are wearing their second uniform in the civil service to be forced to justify their job duties to this out-of-touch, privileged, unelected billionaire who has never performed one single hour of honest public service in his life," he said.

Several federal employees told AFP that they were advised by their agencies not to respond to the email and wait for further instruction, a recom-



mendation echoed by the National Treasury Employees Union.

"I have so much work to do, I am not going to neglect actual patient care for this drama," a physician at the Department of Veterans Affairs, who received the email, told AFP.

Musk later appeared to downplay the requirements of the request, writing on X that the bar is "very low" and saying, "An email with some bullet points that make any sense at all is acceptable!"

'More aggressive' Earlier on Saturday, Trump said on his Truth Social platform that Musk was "doing a great job, but I would like to see him get more aggressive".

"Remember, we have a country to save," the Republican leader added.

Trump has put the tech entrepreneur in charge of the new Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE) advisory body, tasking him with slashing public spending and tackling alleged waste and corruption.

In the latest cuts announced Friday, the US Defence Department is to reduce its civilian workforce by at least

five per cent starting next week.

Trump's administration has already begun firing many other federal workers who are on probationary status.

DOGE is a free-ranging entity run by Musk, though its cost-cutting spree has been met with pushback on several fronts and mixed court rulings.

A judge on Thursday denied a union bid to temporarily halt the firing of thousands of people.

Musk said this week he would work with Trump for as long as he "can be helpful", as the pair dismissed concerns over conflicts of interest due to the tycoon's government contracts.

"Elon is doing a great job," Trump told a meeting of conservative activists on Saturday, running through a list of what he said were "some of the flagrant scams" that had been uncovered.

"We love Elon, don't we? He's a character," Trump added. "People said, what official position does he have? I said, 'Patriot!'"

Musk said this week DOGE was publicising its actions on its website and that the transparency would hold him accountable.

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