

# NATIONAL/INTERNATIONAL

## Delhi Assembly speaker directs departments for timely allocation of offices to newly-elected MLAs

**NEW DELHI, MAR 09:** Delhi Assembly Speaker Vijender Gupta has directed the departments concerned for a timely allocation of offices to the newly-elected MLAs to ensure that they can focus on their constituency-related work.

According to protocol, the constituency offices allocated to the previous MLAs were vacated following the Assembly polls held in February.

Now that the newly-elected MLAs have taken oath, the process of assigning new offices has commenced to ensure smooth legislative and constituency-related activities, a statement issued by the Assembly Secretariat said.

"Providing our elected rep-



representatives with the necessary resources to serve the people efficiently is our top priority," Gupta was quoted as saying in the statement.

The Assembly constituency offices serve as a

crucial link between the MLAs and the public, facilitating direct communication and problem-solving, he added.

"We have taken the necessary steps to ensure that all MLAs receive their offices in a timely manner," the speaker said.

The Assembly Secretariat has directed the departments concerned to expedite the process, keeping in mind the specific requirements and requests of the legislators.

The initiative is aimed at ensuring that the newly-elected MLAs can effectively engage with their constituents and address public concerns without any delays.

Through these offices, the MLAs will be able to engage directly with citizens and take prompt action to address their concerns. The move is expected to foster better coordination between the public and their MLAs, the statement said.

## Nepal PM Oli challenges former King Gyanendra to contest election, alleges attempt to disrupt harmony

**DHANGADHI, MARCH 9:** Nepal Prime Minister KP Sharma Oli has challenged former King Gyanendra Shah to enter mainstream politics, alleging him of making attempts to disrupt harmony.

"He (Former King Gyanendra) doesn't mention about the constitution, nor about the law, nothing about Loktantra, nothing about system, process, rather would say, support me, I will come and save the nation. What has happened to the country? This kind of activity would invite instability; chaotic activities that are inspired by him are pushing the country to the brink," the Prime Minister said while addressing the Sudur-paschim Province Assembly meeting.

Oli's reaction came after thousands of pro-monarchists came to support former King Gyanendra in Kathmandu.

Three weeks ago, former King Gyanendra, in a message on the eve of Democracy Day, pointed out the need to protect national unity and identity, calling on public support for the country's prosperity and progress.

In the release statement, the former king said that all Nepalis should unite



in nation-building, urging everyone to correct past shortcomings and move forward towards making Nepal stable, prosperous, and strong.

"It is necessary for all citizens to unite for the defense, progress and prosperity of the country," he said. "If we want to save the nation and maintain national unity, we call on all countrymen to support us for the prosperity and progress of the country."

He commented that democracy has not been able to win the trust of the citizens and has not become the system of

governance anticipated by the people. He added that the significance of democracy should not be limited to words and slogans but should be seen in practice.

Taking a jibe at the former King, Oli on Sunday responded by saying, "I want to suggest him, as a former King, ruling the nation since generation following the lineage, he should have suggested measures to rule the nation in cultured, following democratic measures, adhering the constitution and laws. Instead of, what is he asking the support for? To run the election? Asking to vote? He's saying, support me, I will come. Where do he intend to come? Come and join politics; we are ready to welcome you. Do you intend to come from an apolitical or political front? If you want to come to the politics, then you are welcome."

In the capital, Kathmandu, thousands of pro-monarch supporters have flooded the streets, welcoming the former King as he returns from a long tour to Gandaki province. The former king's return has sparked a wave of enthusiasm among his supporters, marking a

## Uddhav advocates 'Jai Shivaji, Jai Bhavani' in response to BJP's 'Jai Shri Ram'

**MUMBAI, MAR 09:** Shiv Sena (UBT) chief Uddhav Thackeray on Sunday accused the BJP of poisoning society and asked his supporters to respond to the ruling party's favoured 'Jai Shri Ram' slogan with 'Jai Shivaji' and 'Jai Bhavani'.

He was addressing Sena (UBT) workers at an event here. "If anyone says Jai Shri Ram, do not let the person leave without making sure that he says Jai Shivaji and Jai Bhavani."

"The BJP has poisoned our society. I am going to give the BJP a tough time for what they have done to our society," he said.

Thackeray also questioned the BJP's commitment to the country, citing its stance on international sports events.

He said that while BJP leaders once opposed sport-



ing events with Pakistan, India is now playing cricket matches with both Pakistan and Bangladesh.

The Sena (UBT) chief also responded to Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnis's recent jibe in the legislative assembly - "I am not Uddhav Thackeray to

which will be presented on March 10.

The Sena (UBT) leader claimed that he had halted certain projects during his tenure as CM and would have relocated the Metro 3 carshed to Kanjur Marg if he had remained in office longer. He alleged that the land is now being allocated to the Adani group.

The BJP and Thackeray's party were at loggerheads over the Mumbai Metro 3 carshed site.

After the Thackeray-led MVA government collapsed in 2022 due to Eknath Shinde's rebellion and ensured the BJP's return to power, the new government decided to set up the Metro carshed at Aarey in the western suburbs. Thackeray wanted it to be built in Kanjur Marg on the eastern side.

## Patanjali food park in Nagpur will provide relief to Vidarbha farmers: Gadkari

**NAGPUR, MAR 09:** Union minister Nitin Gadkari on Sunday said the new Patanjali Food and Herbal Park in Nagpur will come as a relief to cultivators in the Vidarbha region, which has witnessed several farmer suicide incidents.

Gadkari and Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnis inaugurated the food park at Miham in Nagpur.

Patanjali Ayurved's co-founder Ramdev and its managing director Acharya Balkrishna were present on the occasion.

Gadkari informed about initiatives taken by him for orange farmers in Vidarbha, on how to improve the fruit production and quality in the



region as well as ensuring good price for the produce.

"The new park will come as a relief to farmers in Vidarbha region", where there have been several cases of farmer suicides, said the

Union minister, who represents Nagpur Lok Sabha seat. Fadnis said, "I feel that this centre (park) will be a boon not only for this project, but all the orange-growing farmers."

The orange processing plant in the park will take all types of the fruit from farmers. At the plant, the sorting, grading and storage of the fruits will be done and they would be processed entirely, including the skin and seeds, Fadnis said.

Explaining why he wanted the food park to come up, Fadnis said along with oranges, all other fruits will be also be processed at the facility. He stressed the importance of processing fruits, without which there is wastage of fruits and the produce does not fetch a proper price.

Gadkari and Fadnis thanked Ramdev and Balkrishna for starting the food park in Nagpur.

## Delhi Police busts syndicate smuggling stolen phones to Bangladesh

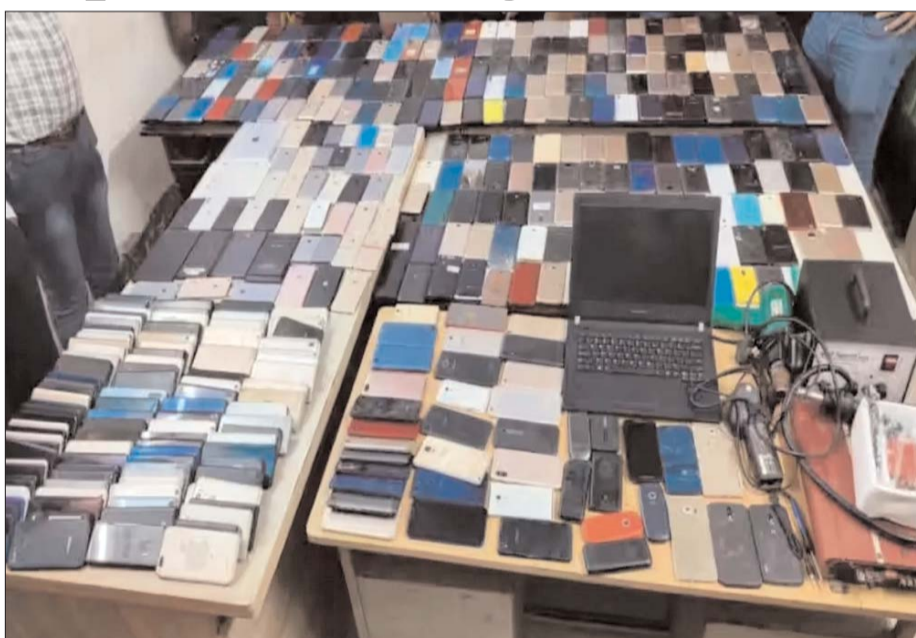
**NEW DELHI, MAR 09:** The Delhi Police has busted an international mobile theft syndicate with the arrest of a man who was allegedly attempting to flee with 48 high-end stolen mobile phones to be sold in Bangladesh, an official said on Sunday.

The accused, Abdush (24), was arrested while attempting to carry mobile phones worth around Rs 20 lakh to West Bengal, police said.

"Investigations revealed that organised gangs operate across Delhi-NCR, targeting commuters in metro stations, buses and crowded markets," Deputy Commissioner of Police (Crime) Aditya Gautam said.

The stolen phones were quickly smuggled out of Delhi, preventing law enforcement from tracking them, he added.

The accused purchased these devices for Rs 2,000-



3,000 each and transported them to West Bengal, where they were modified and resold in Bangladesh for Rs 8,000-10,000 per unit, said the DCP.

Acting on a tip-off, police laid a trap near Salimgarh Bypass and apprehended

Abdush with the stolen consignment of 48 high-end mobile phones, he said.

During interrogation, Abdush admitted to smuggling over 800 stolen phones in the past 18 months. Initially engaged in scrap trading, he was lured into the illicit

trade by operators Sameer and Salim.

The Cyber Cell is now working to identify his associates and dismantle the wider network spanning Delhi, West Bengal and Bangladesh, the DCP further added.

## Budget session set for 'EPIC' showdown; budget, Waqf bill top priority for govt

**NEW DELHI, MAR 09:** Parliament's Budget session resumes on Monday amid indications of an 'EPIC' showdown between the government and the opposition which is planning to raise issues such as the alleged manipulation of electoral rolls, the fresh bout of violence in Manipur and India's handling of the Trump administration.

The focus of the government will be on getting Parliament nod for the demands for grants, completion of the budgetary process, seeking approval for the Manipur budget and passage of the Waqf Amendment Bill.

Home Minister Amit Shah is expected to move a statutory resolution seeking Parliament approval for the proclamation of President's Rule in Manipur.

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman is also scheduled to table the budget for Manipur on Monday. Manipur

has been under President's Rule since February 13 after the resignation of Chief Minister N Biren Singh.

The opposition said it is set to corner the government over the issue of duplicate Electoral Photo Identity Card (EPIC) numbers.

The Trinamool Congress has taken the lead in flagging the issue, following which the Election Commission declared that it would take corrective measures within the next three months.

The Election Commission had rejected the Trinamool Congress claim that the voter lists were manipulated to allow voters from other states to exercise their franchise in West Bengal.

The poll body also made it clear that while the EPIC numbers of some voters "may be identical", other details such as demographic information, Assembly constituency and polling booth are different.

Trinamool Congress leaders are meeting the Election Commission on Monday and have also rallied other opposition parties, including the Congress, DMK, Shiv Sena-UBT, to raise the issue in both Houses of Parliament during the second part of the Budget session.

For the government, the early passage of the Waqf Amendment Bill is a priority.

Parliamentary Affairs Minister Kiren Rijiju said at the India Today Conclave last week that the government is keen on the early passage of the Waqf Amendment Bill as it will solve many issues of the Muslim community. A Joint Committee of Parliament submitted its report on the bill in the Lok Sabha amid vociferous protests by the opposition.

Issues such as the fresh violence in Manipur, the threat of reciprocal tariffs by US President Donald Trump, the political furor over the

delimitation of parliamentary constituencies are also expected to find an echo in Parliament.

Congress leader Jairam Ramesh has said the opposition INDIA bloc leaders will hold "extensive consultation" to jointly oppose the Waqf bill.

Ramesh also said the Congress will also keep raising the issue of irregularities in the election process, alleging that elections are "no longer free and fair" and are being "masterminded and orchestrated".

He said the Congress will raise the issue of Trump's reciprocal-tariff threats during the second half of the Budget session and called for a bipartisan collective resolve to deal with the threats.

The first part of the Budget session of Parliament was from January 31 to February 13. The second part will commence on March 10 and continue till April 4.

## Pope thanks volunteers for 'miracle of tenderness' as another Holy Year event passes without him

**ROME, MAR 09:** Pope Francis issued a message Sunday thanking volunteers for the "miracle of tenderness" they offer the sick, as he continued his recovery from double pneumonia and doctors reported positive news.

After more than three weeks in the hospital, the 88-year-old pope is responding well to treatment and has shown a "gradual, slight improvement" in recent days.

For the fourth Sunday in a row, the 88-year-old Francis didn't appear for his weekly noon blessing, but he met

with his top deputies and the Holy See distributed the text he would have delivered if he were well enough. In it, the Argentine pope thanked all those who were caring for him and others who are sick and experiencing a "night of pain."

"Brothers and sisters, during my prolonged hospitalisation here, I too experience the thoughtfulness of service and the tenderness of care, in particular from the doctors and health care workers, whom I thank from the bottom of my heart," read the

message from Gemelli hospital. "And while I am here, I think of the many people who in various ways are close to the sick, and who are for them a sign of the Lord's presence.

We need this, the miracle of tenderness which accompanies those who are in adversity, bringing a little light into the night of pain," he wrote.

Francis, who has chronic lung disease and had part of one lung removed as a young man, has remained in stable condition at Gemelli, with no



fever and good oxygen levels in his blood for several days, doctors reported in a Vatican statement Saturday.

The doctors said that such

stability "as a consequence testifies to a good response to therapy." It was the first time the doctors had reported that Francis was responding posi-

tively to the treatment for the complex lung infection that was diagnosed after he was hospitalised on February 14.

But they kept his prognosis as "guarded", meaning he's not out of danger. On Sunday morning, the Vatican reported he was resting after a quiet night.

In his absence, the Vatican's day-to-day operations continued alongside celebrations of its Holy Year, the once-every-quarter-century Jubilee that brings millions of pilgrims to Rome.

On Sunday, Canadian Cardinal Michael Czerny, who is close to Francis, celebrated the Holy Year Mass for volunteers that Francis was supposed to have celebrated. During the Mass in St. Peter's Square, the giant banner bearing Francis' papal coat of arms fluttered from the loggia of the basilica above. Even while in the hospital, Francis is very much still the pope and in charge of the Catholic Church.

That was evident too by the fact that the Vatican secretary of state, Cardinal

Pietro Parolin, and chief of staff, Archbishop Edgar Peña Parra, visited the pope on Sunday, for the third time since he has been in the hospital. The Vatican has noted that such meetings are the routine way the pope governs while at the Vatican, making clear that he was getting essential work done from Gemelli.

Francis has been using high flows of supplemental oxygen to help him breathe during the day and a non-invasive mechanical ventilation mask at night.