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India names Sindhu, Lakshya for Asia Team Championships



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WARNING AGAINST FAKE JOBS ISSUED
The Indian government has alerted Parliament about fraudulent recruitment schemes luring Indian nationals, mainly through social media, to South-East Asian countries such as Cambodia, Myanmar, and Lao PDR, often to carry out cybercrime or other illegal activities. Minister of State for External Affairs Kirti Vardhan Singh stated that over 6,700 Indians have been rescued from these nations so far, with 2,265 from Cambodia, 2,290 from Lao PDR, and 2,165 from Myanmar. The exact number of Indians still trapped is unknown, as many travel voluntarily via unscrupulous recruitment agents or illegal channels. The government has engaged host country authorities and Indian Missions to facilitate rescue and repatriation. Multiple channels, including walk-ins, WhatsApp numbers, grievance portals like MADAD and eMigrate, and social media, are available for Indians seeking help. Authorities regularly issue advisories warning job seekers to verify recruitment agents and offers. The Ministry of Home Affairs' Indian Cybercrime Coordination Centre (I4C) monitors related cybercrime activities and coordinates preventive and corrective measures.

Avoid travel, US lawyers warn H-1B visa holders

ASHOKE RAJ ■ New Delhi

Immigration attorneys in the United States are urging H-1B visa holders to avoid travelling to India after US consulates abruptly postponed thousands of visa-stamping interviews scheduled for December 2025. The appointments — essential for re-entering the US — have now been pushed to March, April, and even May 2026, leaving many workers stranded and unsure of when they can return to their jobs.

The disruption follows the US State Department's expansion of social-media screening to include H-1B and H-4 visa applicants, a process that had earlier been rolled out for student visa holders. The new vetting requirements have added to consular backlogs and operational delays.

"As of December 15, the Department of State will conduct an online presence review for all H-1B applicants and their dependents... Due



An Indian family eating in the middle of Times Square, New York City

ISTOCK

to operational constraints related to processing these visas and to ensure that no applicant poses a threat to US national security or public safety, the Consulate must reduce the number of applicants each day. The Consulate will not be able to see you on your original appointment date. Please do not show up at the Consulate," an email sent

by the consulate to applicants read.

Interviews originally scheduled for mid- to late-December have been deferred to dates as far as summer 2026, raising the risk of prolonged separations from families and extended work absences.

Immigration attorney Rahul Reddy warned that travelling now could put H-1B

workers at serious risk. With many US companies unable to keep positions vacant for long or legally permit remote work from abroad due to compliance constraints, a delayed return could mean job loss. "Without a valid visa stamp in the passport, an H-1B employee travelling now might come back not to their job, but to unemployment," he said.

Luthras detained in Thailand after Delhi court rejects bail

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ New Delhi

Gaurav and Saurabh Luthra, co-owners of 'Birch by Romeo Lane' nightclub in North Goa where a blaze claimed 25 lives, have been detained by the authorities in Thailand, officials said on Thursday, as a Delhi court rejected their transit anticipatory bail pleas citing the duo's conduct and the gravity of the offences.

The brothers, prime accused in the case related to the tragedy that unfolded at Arpora village around midnight on December 6, would be brought back to India at the earliest to face legal action, Chief Minister Pramod Sawant assured in Panaji.

A court in Goa, meanwhile, remanded Ajay Gupta, who claimed to be a silent partner and investor in the nightclub, in police custody for seven days.

A Delhi court rejected the transit anticipatory bail pleas of Saurabh and Gaurav Luthra. The duo had sought four weeks of transit anticipatory bail so that they were not



Composite image of Gaurav Luthra (left) and his brother Saurabh Luthra (right)

PIONEER PHOTO

immediately arrested on their return, but Additional Sessions Judge Vandana dismissed the pleas. "They left, they concealed, and they are now seeking leniency," the Goa government's lawyer told the court, pointing out that they had fled immediately after the fire incident and were evading the legal process.

One of the lawyers of the Luthras submitted during the hearing that they were willing to return immediately and face the investigation.

But the court noted that the offence was serious in nature

as 25 people lost their lives in the fire. Given the "conduct" of the applicants and nature of the allegations, the court was not inclined to grant them relief, the judge said.

She pointed out that documents showed that the accused booked tickets to Phuket at 1.17 AM on December 7 (over an hour after the fire broke out), and the flight departed at 5.20 AM. This fact was "concealed", and their counsel instead stated that they had left for Thailand before the fire broke out, the judge said.

The Bystander



TOXIC EGGS FLAGGED IN J&K

The Kashmir valley faces a new public health concern as reports emerge of adulterated eggs containing nitrofurans and nitroimidazole residues. These carcinogenic and toxic substances, banned in food-producing animals, have sparked alarm among residents and lawmakers. National Conference MLA Tanvir Sadiq flagged the issue, urging Chief Minister and health authorities to act urgently. He highlighted the serious risk posed to vulnerable groups, including children, senior citizens, and patients who rely on eggs as a primary protein source. The Jammu and Kashmir government responded swiftly, ordering an urgent investigation into the allegations. The Minister for Food, Civil Supplies, and Consumer Affairs directed the Controller of Legal Metrology to submit a report in two days.

ARUNACHAL ACCIDENT CLAIMS 18 LIVES

At least 18 labourers from Assam's Tinsukia district were killed and three remain missing after the truck they were travelling in fell into a remote gorge in Arunachal Pradesh's Anjaw district on December 8. The vehicle, carrying 22 workers engaged in a construction project in Hayuliang, skidded off the road and plummeted approximately 1,000 feet into a deep gorge. The lone survivor, Budheswar Deep, alerted authorities, prompting search and rescue operations led by the Indian Army's Spear Corps, along with NDRF personnel, GREF teams, and local police. Dense foliage and inaccessible terrain delayed recovery efforts, though 18 bodies have been retrieved so far. Officials are coordinating with Assam and Arunachal Pradesh administrations to trace the remaining missing workers and investigate the circumstances of the accident.

ECI extends SIR timeline

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

The Election Commission of India (ECI) on Thursday extended the timeline for Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls in six States and Union Territories following requests from the respective chief electoral officers.

In a statement, the ECI issued the revised schedule for SIR in Tamil Nadu, Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, the Andaman and Nicobar Islands and Uttar Pradesh.

The enumeration period for these six states and Union territories was to end on Thursday and the draft electoral rolls were to be published on December 16.

The enumeration period for Tamil Nadu and Gujarat has been extended till December 14 and the draft electoral rolls will be published on December 19, the statement said. For Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, the enumeration period has been extended till December 18 and the draft electoral rolls will be published on December 23.

The enumeration period for Uttar Pradesh has been extended till December 26 and the draft electoral rolls will be published on December 31.

According to the statement, the enumeration period for Goa, Puducherry, West Bengal, Lakshadweep and Rajasthan will end on Thursday and the draft electoral rolls will be published on December 16.

IndiGo CEO back in the DGCA dock

RAJESH KUMAR ■ New Delhi

IndiGo CEO has been summoned by the aviation regulator again on Friday, according to a regulatory filing by the company. Pieter Elbers was summoned by the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) on Thursday and asked to submit a report on the flight disruptions. He reached the DGCA office around 2.24pm, and left after a little over two hours at 4.45pm.

Meanwhile, passengers of the IndiGo Airlines who were left stranded at the airports between December 3 and 5 will be

given a travel voucher worth ₹10,000 valid for 12 months. The compensation would be in addition to flight cancellations charges under DGCA norms.

In another development, JD(U) leader KC Tyagi has alleged complicity between the DGCA and airlines, saying he was forced to shell out an inordinate sum of over ₹40,000 for a Delhi-Mumbai flight. In a letter to party colleague Sajay Jha, who is the Chairman of the Parliamentary panel on tourism, Tyagi said he became a victim of Air India's "arbitrary charging."

Modi, Trump call to reset trade ties



FILE PHOTO

ASHOKE RAJ ■ New Delhi

Prime Minister Narendra Modi spoke to United States President Donald Trump on Thursday in what officials described as a "very warm conversation," during which the two leaders reviewed progress in the India-US

Comprehensive Global Strategic Partnership. Both sides expressed satisfaction at the steady expansion of cooperation across multiple sectors.

According to the official readout, Modi and Trump discussed ways to maintain momentum in bilateral trade

MODI-TRUMP INTERACTIONS IN 2025

- January 27 – Phone Call: Trump congratulates Modi; discuss bilateral ties.
- February 13 – White House Meeting: Modi meets Trump in Washington; talks cover trade, defence, and strategic issues.
- April 22 - Phone Call: Trump offers condolences after the Pahalgam incident.
- June 17 – Phone Call: Trump invites Modi to a multilateral luncheon

- hosted by the Pakistan PM and military chief.
- September 17 – Phone Call: Birthday greetings and bilateral progress discussed.
- October 21 – Phone Call: Diwali greetings exchanged; ongoing cooperation discussed.
- December 11 – Phone Call: Review of India-US Comprehensive Global Strategic Partnership, trade, defence, and critical technologies.

talks and explored avenues to widen collaboration in critical technologies, energy, defence, security, and other priority areas under the India-US COMPACT frame-

work - a mechanism aimed at boosting military partnership, economic engagement and technology cooperation for the coming decades.

E-cigarette cloud over Lok Sabha

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

After BJP MP Anurag Thakur accused a Trinamool Congress member of smoking an e-cigarette in the Lok Sabha, the BJP alleged that the lawmaker has set a new record of lowering the dignity of Parliament with his conduct.

During the Question Hour, Thakur asked the Lok Sabha Speaker if e-cigarettes, which are banned in the country, have been allowed in the House, alleging, "The TMC member has been constantly smoking in the House for



Union Minister of State Sanjay Seth with BJP MPs Anurag Thakur, Jagdambika Pal and others in the Lok Sabha

PTI

the past several days." Thakur, however, did not name the TMC MP. Amid uproar, Birla urged the members to main-

tain the dignity of the House and said he would take action if a written complaint was lodged.

Trump offers million-dollar US entry

ASSOCIATED PRESS ■ Washington

President Donald Trump announced on Wednesday that his long-promised "gold card" was officially going on sale, offering legal status and an eventual pathway to US citizenship for individuals paying \$1 million and corporations ponying up twice that per foreign-born employee.

A website accepting applications went live as Trump revealed the start of the programme while surrounded by business leaders in the White House's Roosevelt Room.

It is meant to replace EB-5 visas, which Congress created in 1990 to generate foreign investment and had been available to people who spend about \$1 million on a company that employs at least 10 people. Trump sees the new version as a way for

the US to attract and retain top talent, all while generating revenue for federal coffers. He has been promoting the gold card programme for months, and once suggested that each card would cost \$5 million, though he more recently revised that to the \$1 million and \$2 million pricing scheme.

The president said all funds taken in as part of the programme will "go to the US government" and predicted that billions would flow into an account run by the Treasury Department "where we can do things positive for the country."

The new programme is actually a green card, effectively offering permanent legal residency with the chance for citizenship.

"Basically, it's a green card but much better," Trump said. "Much more powerful, a much stronger path."

Rural India roars back as household consumption hits record highs

RAJESH KUMAR ■ New Delhi

India's rural economy is witnessing a boom due to increased purchasing power, rising incomes, stronger consumption and improved financial behavior, according to a bi-monthly survey by NABARD. According to the latest Rural Economic Conditions and Sentiments Survey (RECSS) 80 per cent of rural households reported higher consumption compared with last year.

"Moreover, 67.3 per cent of monthly household income was devoted to consumption expenditure, which is the

highest level among all rounds of the survey conducted since September 2024," the survey noted. It also highlighted that the rural investment activity is accelerating, and the credit access has also improved.

The November 2025 round of the survey was conducted after the GST rate rationalisation announced on 3 September 2025, during the festival season, and against the backdrop of sharp moderation in rural inflation and food deflation. As per the NABARD survey, 42.2 per cent of rural households reported to have experienced an increase in



Women at the Pushkar market

ISTOCK

income in the last one year, which is the highest level among all rounds of this survey so far. Importantly, the percentage of households experiencing a decline in income during the last year fell to its lowest level (15.7 per cent).

While a lower percentage of rural households (21.9 per cent) reported their savings rising during last year, as against 23.7 per cent in the September 2025 round of the survey, it still showed some improvement relative to all the pre-September 2025 rounds of the survey. There was only a modest increase in the number

of households who reported taking recourse to increased borrowings/loans during last year. Thus, it appears that the higher consumption expenditure of rural households was not funded by excessive recourse to borrowings.

Further, only 15.7 per cent reported any decline in income, the lowest so far.

"During the next one year, however, the income prospects are seen by them to improve, with 75.9 per cent expecting to witness an increase in income, which is the highest level," the survey added.

Balaghat declared naxal-free as last Maoists surrender

STAFF REPORTER ■ Bhopal

Madhya Pradesh marked a milestone in its internal security landscape as Balaghat district was officially declared Naxal-free following the surrender of the last remaining Maoist commander. Deepak, a senior insurgent carrying a Rs 29 lakh reward, and his associate Rohit, wanted for Rs 14 lakh, laid down arms at the Korkha camp in the Birsia police station area. Both expressed their intention to join the mainstream under the state's rehabilitation policy, closing a 30-year chapter of Maoist activity in one of central India's most affected regions — and doing so well ahead of the Union Home Ministry's March 2026 national deadline. The surrender caps an extraordinary series of defections that began on November 1,

MP beats deadline, ends Naxalism

Chief Minister Mohan Yadav said the country is secure under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and credited the Centre's resolute approach toward eliminating Naxalism for the major breakthrough achieved in Madhya Pradesh. He said the national mandate to end Naxalism by January 2026, driven by the leadership of the prime minister and guidance of Home Minister Amit Shah, has enabled Madhya Pradesh to completely eradicate the menace ahead of schedule. Yadav said the state bid its 'final farewell' to Naxalism on December 11, following a series of major surrenders in Balaghat. He praised the courage and sacrifice of police officers and personnel, stating that their commitment ensured the successful conclusion of a decades-long conflict.

2025, when senior Maoist cadre Sunita Oyam gave up arms at the under-construction Hawk Force camp in Chauria. Momentum intensified on December 6, when ten high-ranking Maoists — including MMC Zone in-charge Ramdher Majji and divisional committee members Chandu Usendi, Lalita, Janaki and Prem

— surrendered directly to Chief Minister Mohan Yadav. The group deposited a cache of weapons, including AK-47s, INSAS rifles, an SLR, SSRs, BGL shells, walkie-talkies and large quantities of ammunition. Area committee members Ram Singh Dada and Sukesh Pottem, along with party members Lakshmi, Sheela, Sagar,

Kavita and Yogita, were also part of the group, collectively carrying a reward of Rs 2.36 crore. Parallel surrenders took place across the tri-junction region. Twelve CPI (Maoist) operatives surrendered in Bakar Katta in neighbouring Khairagarh, Chhattisgarh, submitting additional AK-47, INSAS, SLR and .303 rifles. Prominent cadres Sangeeta and Sampat also surrendered in Gondia (Maharashtra) and Chhattisgarh. In just six weeks, more than 25 armed Maoists from the Balaghat-Rajnandgaon-Gondi a corridor abandoned the insurgency. Security officials and surrendered cadres credited Madhya Pradesh's 2023 rehabilitation policy — widely considered the most comprehensive in the country — for triggering this wave. The policy grants full

reward payouts, financial support for housing and land, government jobs or startup assistance, Ayushman Bharat coverage, skill training and social-reintegration support. Mandla SP Rajat Saklecha noted that the fundamental objective is not only to disarm insurgents but to ensure they can re-enter society with dignity. Chief Minister Mohan Yadav described the development as a decisive end to Naxalism in Madhya Pradesh, assuring full rehabilitation for all who surrendered. With Balaghat now officially Naxal-free, security forces are intensifying operations and community outreach in Mandla, Dindori and other vulnerable pockets along the Madhya Pradesh-Chhattisgarh-Maharashtra border to align with the national goal of eliminating Maoist insurgency by March 2026.



Newly appointed Bharatiya Janata Yuva Morcha State President Shyam Tailor being welcomed by his supporters upon his arrival in Bhopal on Thursday. Pioneer photo

Officials review infrastructure and telecom readiness

PNS ■ Ujjain

Simhashta Fair Officer Ashish Singh and Collector Roshan Kumar Singh conducted a comprehensive review meeting on Thursday with Railway and telecom officials at the Administrative Complex, assessing progress on key infrastructure projects ahead of the 2028 Simhashta Fair. The session focused on railway overbridges, road connectivity, and telecom network expansion to manage the anticipated high footfall. Officials reported that construction of the railway overbridge at LC No. 23 on the Ujjain-Nagda section has been completed. The overbridge at LC No. 07 on the Indore-Dewas-Ujjain rail line near Vikram Nagar is under construction. During the review of the proposed parallel bridge at Freeganj, the Fair Officer issued strict instructions to

ensure full compliance with safety standards, particularly in the underpass. Departments were directed to accelerate cable-shifting and pipeline-relocation work. Authorities confirmed that work has begun on seven of the thirteen approved railway bridges. Singh instructed the Setu

Simhashta 2028

Department to coordinate closely with Railway officials to ensure all projects are completed on time. Progress on bridges under the Public Works Department's Setu Wing was also examined. Construction continues on the Komed Bridge, the Karkaraj Parking-Bhukhi Mata bridge, the Tapobhoomi-Hamukhedhi route, and the Nursing Ghat bridge. Approval for the submersible bridge from Siddhavat to Angareshwar is pending, and

officials were told to secure clearance quickly and begin work. During the Public Works review, Singh directed that road construction between Harifatak and Lalpul be completed at the earliest. The Collector instructed departments to resolve land acquisition issues on priority. MPDC was asked to finish the OD survey without delay. Telecom representatives briefed officials on network enhancements planned for the Simhashta. Proposals include upgrading existing towers and installing new infrastructure. Companies reported that 300 km of optical fibre will be laid in the fair area, with nearly 100 pole-mounted tower sites planned to manage peak crowds. Priority zones include the Mahakaleshwar Temple, major temples across the city and primary entry routes into Ujjain. The committee also discussed proposals for laying hard pipes.

Man shot dead in broad daylight in Sihora; Attack caught on CCTV

PNS ■ Jabalpur

A 45-year-old man was shot dead in a daylight attack in Sihora town on Thursday afternoon, with the entire incident captured on CCTV and rapidly circulating on social media. The victim was identified as Dharmendra Singh Thakur, also known as Chintu. According to eyewitness accounts and video footage, Dharmendra was riding his motorcycle near Bari Bahu Stadium in the Khitola police station area around 1 pm when two men on a motorcycle intercepted him. The attackers reportedly chased him briefly before one of them forced him off the bike and threw him to the ground. As he fell, the second assailant fired three shots at close range, all hitting Dharmendra in the head. He died on the spot.

Following the shooting, the assailants fled on the same motorcycle they arrived on, leaving the area before locals could react. Police teams reached the crime scene shortly after receiving information. The body was recovered and sent to the Sihora Community Health Centre, where doctors confirmed Dharmendra had died before arrival. Initial inquiry points to the possibility of an old enmity as the motive, though investigators say it is too early to draw conclusions. Senior police officers have inspected the spot, and multiple teams have been constituted to track down the killers. The Jabalpur police have not issued an official statement so far. The investigation is ongoing, and officials say arrests are expected soon.

Cong flags deepening fiscal stress in Madhya Pradesh

STAFF REPORTER ■ Bhopal

Madhya Pradesh Congress president Jitu Patwari escalated concerns over the state's financial stability, alleging that the Mohan Yadav government is steering the state toward an unprecedented economic crisis. Patwari said the administration is borrowing nearly Rs 165 crore every day and has now reached a point where it is taking fresh loans simply to pay interest — a situation he described as fiscally reckless and unsustainable. Patwari said the government has already sold 101 public assets for Rs 1,100 crore, including high-value properties located outside Madhya Pradesh. He claimed that premium land parcels in Mumbai and Kerala were quietly auctioned, reflecting

what he described as a distress-driven liquidation of strategic assets. He warned that the aggressive borrowing pattern is creating a debt overhang that future generations will be forced to bear. "The impact may not be visible immediately, but these policies will directly affect citizens and their children for years," he said. Patwari also criticised what he called excessive government expenditure. He alleged that the chief minister's foreign trips are costing nearly Rs 3 crore per day, with substantial spending on flowers, stage décor and event arrangements. He contrasted this with ongoing distress in the state, citing farmers dying under loan pressure, rising unemployment among youth and daily air travel costs of nearly Rs 25 lakh allegedly incurred by the chief minister.

He said the so-called "Modi Guarantee" has failed to translate into real outcomes. According to him, the government is relying on diversionary narratives while the economic backbone of Madhya Pradesh weakens and remaining public assets are sold off to manage short-term liabilities. Patwari urged the public to seek accountability for the rapid monetisation of state properties and the growing debt burden. He said these assets represent public wealth and future security, arguing that the government cannot conceal its shortcomings by liquidating resources built over decades. Congress leaders are expected to intensify their scrutiny of the government's fiscal decisions as political tensions rise ahead of upcoming legislative sessions.



Minister for Women and Child Development Nirmala Bhuria with members at the inauguration ceremony of a four-day Pari Bazaar, heritage festival season-6 at Gauhar Mahal in Bhopal on Thursday. Pioneer photo

Rewa man films wife's obscene video, uploads it to become 'porn star'

STAFF REPORTER ■ Bhopal

A man from Rewa allegedly recorded a 13-minute obscene video of his wife without her consent and uploaded it on social media in an attempt to gain "porn star"-like fame. The video went viral soon after, following which the accused fled to Mumbai. Police said his location has been traced and a team has been dispatched to arrest him. The survivor approached Saman police station with her family and lodged a complaint. An FIR has been registered against the husband under relevant sections of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS) and the Information Technology Act for voyeurism, outraging a woman's modesty and circulating obscene material. The woman told police that her husband deliberately shared the video with relatives and friends. "He has ruined my life. I am getting calls from everywhere," she said. Investigators found that the accused was addicted to pornography and idolised adult film actors. In an attempt to gain online notoriety, he recorded the intimate video and uploaded it intentionally. He also admitted that he had "no regrets," police

sources said. The victim's brother told media that the couple married on May 10 this year. Before the wedding, the groom's family allegedly demanded Rs 3 lakh in dowry, of which Rs 2 lakh was paid. The husband allegedly continued to harass the woman for the remaining Rs 1 lakh. "He took this extreme step out of anger because the balance amount was not given," the brother claimed. Police initially registered a zero FIR. After the video surfaced and the matter escalated, a formal FIR was lodged at Saman police station. CSP Rajiv Pathak said the accused is hiding in Mumbai. "We have traced his location. A team has already left for Mumbai, and he will be arrested soon," he said. Police officials said the case has highlighted growing concerns about digital exploitation within marriages and the ease with which obscene content is circulated on social media platforms. Officers said digital forensic experts will analyse the retrieved data from the victim's phone and online platforms to strengthen the case.

IPS probationers visit BHEL Bhopal

STAFF REPORTER ■ Bhopal

IPS probationers of the 77 RR batch visited the BHEL Bhopal facility today as part of their ongoing industrial training module. The visit featured a focused session on "Industrial Security of Vital Establishments" held at the administrative building, aligning law-enforcement training with the operational realities of large strategic industries. The IPS trainees also paid a courtesy visit to Executive Director Pradeep Kumar Upadhyay. Senior leadership, including General Manager HRT U Singh, General Manager SOM Rajesh Kumar Agarwal and Additional General Manager HR Arif Ahmed Siddiqui, participated in the engagement. Upadhyay congratulated the young officers for choosing a career rooted in public service and highlighted BHEL's strategic importance in India's engineering and manufacturing ecosystem. He said BHEL's technological strength and decades of operational experience offer critical insights for officers tasked with safeguarding national assets. He urged the trainees to engage deeply with communities, work with integrity and anchor their careers in social understanding and national interest.

CM joins Atal Jyoti Sandesh Yatra, says Vajpayee shaped modern India

STAFF REPORTER ■ Bhopal

Chief Minister Mohan Yadav said former prime minister and Bharat Ratna Atal Bihari Vajpayee dedicated his life to national service and emerged as one of India's most respected global statesmen. Speaking at Dharmavaram in Andhra Pradesh during the Atal Jyoti Sandesh Yatra, Yadav described Vajpayee as a towering figure "like the Himalaya," adding that his language, speech and personality were as pure as the waters of the Ganga and Yamuna. The 15-day yatra, launched as part of Vajpayee's birth centenary celebrations, will cover 20 districts across Andhra Pradesh and conclude on December 25, the leader's birth anniversary. A statue of Vajpayee has been unveiled in Dharmavaram in Sri Sathya Sai district, where Yadav offered floral tributes on Thursday. He noted that Vajpayee, born in Gwalior on December 25, 1923, rose from a modest background to international prominence through his wisdom, leadership and oratory. He also recalled Vajpayee's close association with Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu, who served as NDA president during

his tenure. Yadav highlighted Vajpayee's legacy, including three consecutive terms as prime minister, the Pokhran nuclear tests and the response to Pakistan during the Kargil conflict. He also credited Vajpayee for launching the Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana, which transformed rural connectivity across the country. The Chief Minister said the nation continues to advance along the path laid out by Vajpayee under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi. He emphasised the strong working relationship between Modi and Naidu, saying Andhra Pradesh is progressing rapidly across sectors under Naidu's leadership. He added that Madhya Pradesh, too, is moving steadily on a development trajectory guided by the prime minister. Yadav said the NDA has entrusted Madhya Pradesh to "a descendant of Lord Krishna," and credited Naidu for promoting capable leadership in Andhra Pradesh. He said the partnership between the two states reflects the spirit of "Sabka Saath-Sabka Vikas," adding that the public enthusiasm in Andhra Pradesh made it feel as though "Andhra Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh are like brothers reunited."



Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister Mohan Yadav pays floral tribute to the portrait of former Prime Minister Late Atal Bihari Vajpayee at the launch of Atal Jyoti Sandesh Yatra in Dharmavaram of Satya Sai district in Andhra Pradesh on Thursday. Pioneer photo

Police duty meet strengthens investigation tech

STAFF REPORTER ■ Bhopal

Additional Director General of Police (Technical Services) K. P. Venkateswara Rao said scientific evidence, accurate case presentation and modern forensic methods are now central to securing convictions, adding that platforms such as the Police Duty Meet significantly enhance the technical readiness of the Madhya Pradesh Police. He was speaking at the conclu-

sion of the two-day state-level Police Duty Meet held at the Dial 112 State Command Center on December 11. The event was organised to prepare a strong state contingent for the upcoming 69th All India Police Duty Meet. A total of 107 officers from various zones, districts and specialised units participated, demonstrating high-level proficiency across multiple investigative domains. Under the Scientific Aids to Investigation category, partici-

pants showcased skills in medico-legal oral examination, criminal law, fingerprint analysis, observation tests, portrait parle and scientific methods of lifting, packing and forwarding evidence. The police photography and videography competition highlighted advanced competence in evidence documentation and the use of modern imaging technology. DIG and Forensic Science Laboratory Director Shashikant Shukla was among the senior officers present.

Man caught roaming in STR with gun

STAFF REPORTER ■ Bhopal

A 24-year-old man from Kukarpani village in Chhindwara district was arrested for illegally entering the Satpura Tiger Reserve (STR) with an unlicensed firearm, after he was inadvertently filmed by camera traps installed for the upcoming All India Tiger Census 2026. The accused, Kalyan Mawasi, was captured on camera roaming in the Nishan beat of the Tawa buffer range while openly carrying a country-made gun, presumably for hunting. The footage, reviewed by the monitoring team at STR's divisional office, triggered an immediate response from the forest department. Acting on the video evidence, STR Deputy Director Rishabha Netam personally visited the location, and with the help of

Assistant Director Ashish Khopragade and the staff of Delakhari-Denwa buffer range, the suspect was identified, traced, and arrested within days. During interrogation, Kalyan Mawasi failed to provide any valid reason for carrying the weapon inside the protected area and could not produce a gun license. A case has been registered against him under relevant sections of the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972, and the Arms Act. He was produced before the Betul court, which remanded him to judicial custody. Deputy Director Rishabha Netam said, "A young man was recorded on camera with a gun in the Tawa buffer zone. Based on the clear footage, we identified and arrested him the same week. The firearm was illegal. Following this incident, patrolling has been significantly increased in the entire area to

prevent such illegal activities." In a troubling development from the same tiger reserve, four camera traps installed for the 2026 tiger census have been stolen from the highly sensitive core area in Suplai and Khamda beats, adjacent to the backwaters of Tawa Dam. Notably, this is the same stretch where a tiger was poached just weeks ago, with poachers severing and taking away one of its paws. Despite the recent poaching case and claims of strengthened security, unauthorized human movement in the restricted zone appears to continue unchecked, raising serious concerns about the safety of wildlife and effectiveness of protection measures in one of India's premier tiger reserves. Forest officials have launched an investigation into the missing cameras but are yet to recover them or identify the culprits.

IMC seals Khalsa College office over Rs 1.76 crore tax dues

PNS ■ Indore

The Indore Municipal Corporation (IMC) intensified its crackdown on major property tax defaulters by sealing the office of Khalsa College on Thursday after dues mounted to Rs 1.76 crore. Officials said repeated notices were issued to the college management, but no substantial payment was made despite multiple reminders. A revenue team from IMC arrived at the campus in the morning and sealed the administrative office as part of the ongoing enforcement drive. Rajmohalla zone assistant revenue officer Akhilesh Malviya said the college was first served a notice on December 6, directing it to clear dues within three days. "Even after repeated notices and verbal reminders, the management failed to deposit the outstanding amount. The dues had escalated to Rs 1.76 crore, leaving the corporation with no option but to seal the office," he said. Malviya added that while the college deposited a small portion of the outstanding sum earlier, the amount remained significantly high. IMC has warned that stricter action will follow if the dues are not cleared promptly. The civic body has identified 20 to 25 major



Medical students after receiving their degrees during the Graduation Ceremony-2019, at Gandhi Medical College in Bhopal on Thursday. Pioneer photo



Preparations underway ahead of Rashtriya Van Mela at Lal parade ground in Bhopal on Thursday. Pioneer photo

Three held for grabbing Kushwaha Bhavan illegally

STAFF REPORTER ■ Bhopal

T Nagar police arrested three individuals, including former state president of the BJP Backward Classes Morcha, Bhagat Singh Kushwaha, for allegedly usurping Kushwaha Bhavan — a prime community property — through forged documents. The other accused, Sitaram Kushwaha and Mohan Kushwaha, are sons of senior BJP leader and former minister Babul Bhanpur. All three were produced before the district court on Thursday and sent to judicial custody until December 24. Police said Kushwaha Bhavan, located in a prime commercial zone, was allotted nearly 15 years ago to the Kushwaha Samaj for community welfare and public activities.

Investigators allege the accused created fabricated registries and ownership papers to show the multi-crore property as their personal asset. They then operated a private office on the ground floor and ran a paid girls' hostel on the upper floors, generating substantial rental income while denying community members access to their own building. The fraud surfaced last month when legitimate office-bearers of the Kushwaha Samaj approached TT Nagar police with original allotment documents, prompting verification and a preliminary probe. An FIR was subsequently registered under sections related to cheating, forgery of valuable security, forgery for the purpose of cheating, using forged documents as genuine and

criminal conspiracy of the BNS. TT Nagar police in-charge Gaurav Singh said coordinated raids were carried out at the residences of all three accused late Wednesday night, leading to their arrest. "Several incriminating documents, including fake sale deeds and forged stamps, have been seized. The building has been sealed and will be handed back to the community after legal formalities," he said. The case has triggered strong reactions within the Kushwaha community, which has demanded swift restoration of the property and strict action against those involved. Further investigation is underway to establish the full extent of the alleged forgery network and identify additional beneficiaries, if any.

Domestic violence shocker: Gwalior man kills wife over infidelity suspicion

STAFF REPORTER ■ Bhopal

A shocking case of domestic violence emerged from Gwalior, where a man allegedly killed his wife using a wooden laundry beater (mongri) on Wednesday night over suspicion of her character. The incident took place in Khattek Mohalla under Inderganj police station limits. The accused fled the scene immediately after the attack, prompting police to launch a manhunt. The victim, 45-year-old Renu Maurya, had been married to Dharmendra Maurya for 25 years. With the family facing financial hardship, Renu worked at a private school and earned a living by escorting children to and from school. Police said Dharmendra frequently accused her of infidelity,

which had led to repeated arguments between the couple. On Wednesday night, a quarrel escalated into violence. In a fit of rage, Dharmendra grabbed a mongri lying nearby and struck Renu on the head with force. She collapsed on the bed with severe injuries. Seeing her unresponsive, he covered her body with a blanket and fled the house. At the time of the incident, the couple's 12-year-old daughter Mansi was on the first floor with her grandmother. Hearing the commotion, she came downstairs and reportedly saw her father standing beside her mother, who lay in a pool of blood. Dharmendra fled immediately upon noticing her. Renu's elder son Tarun informed the police, who reached the spot, recovered the body and seized the weapon used in the crime.

EOW books real estate firm for selling govt-mortgaged plots

PNS ■ Indore

The Economic Offences Wing has registered an FIR against the directors of Indore-based DHL Infrabulls International Pvt Ltd for allegedly selling government-mortgaged plots without permission. The case involves charges of cheating, forgery and criminal conspiracy, adding to growing concerns over fraudulent practices in the city's real estate sector. The FIR was filed after a complaint prompted a preliminary inquiry. Investigators found that the company had mortgaged 249 plots under its Icons Landmark-01 and Icons Landmark-02 projects in the Colony Cell area to secure financial facilities from the gov-

ernment. Under existing regulations, mortgaged land remains under government control until formally released and cannot be sold without a no-objection certificate and a completion certificate from the competent authority. However, the probe revealed that the firm illegally sold at least 15 of these plots to private buyers and facilitated registration of sale deeds, despite the plots remaining under mortgage and without securing mandatory clearance from the Additional Collector. Officials said these sales amounted to a clear violation of statutory conditions governing mortgaged assets. The FIR names company directors Santosh Kumar Singh, Sanjeev Jaiswal, Anirudh Dev

and others on counts of cheating, forgery of valuable security, forgery for the purpose of cheating, using forged documents as genuine and criminal conspiracy. EOW SP Rameshwar Yadav said a detailed investigation is underway and that more facts are likely to emerge as the probe expands. He added that strict action will follow against anyone found complicit. The case has heightened anxiety among homebuyers and investors in Indore, where previous instances of selling encumbered properties have already eroded market trust. Further developments are expected as investigators scrutinise transaction records and beneficiary links connected to the illegal sales.

Special events in Bhopal and Indore to mark two years of State Government

STAFF REPORTER ■ Bhopal

Chief Minister Mohan Yadav announced that the state government will host special programmes in Bhopal on December 13 and in Indore on December 14 to mark two years of the current administration. He said the government has focused on welfare decisions for the poor, farmers, youth and women, while major irrigation and water conservation projects are underway to double the state's irrigated area. He added that efforts to boost industrial growth have created new employment opportunities for young people, noting that Madhya Pradesh currently has one of the highest industrial growth rates in the country.

Speaking on governance, the Chief Minister said the administration fully supports all positive work but will not tolerate wrongdoing. He highlighted the state's recent achievements in eliminating Naxalism, including the mass surrender of Maoists in Balaghat. He said the long-term objective is to eradicate the problem completely. Yadav made the remarks while interacting with the media in Indore on Thursday before departing for Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh. He is scheduled to participate in the Atal Jyoti Sandesh Yatra at Dharmavaram in Sri Sathya Sai district, marking the conclusion of the birth centenary celebrations of former prime minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee.

CM pushes plan for world-class education in MP

Bhopal: Chief Minister Mohan Yadav announced a major push to position Madhya Pradesh on the global education map, stating that students should be able to access world-class learning within the state instead of going abroad. He said the government is taking decisive steps to bring international academic standards to local institutions, enabling students to experience global-quality education at home. Yadav made these remarks during a high-level meeting held on Wednesday at Sushasan Bhavan. He said the state will soon establish a special task force to facilitate the setting up of study centres of international universities in Madhya Pradesh, and orders to this effect will be issued shortly. Officials from the Atal Bihari

Vajpayee Institute of Good Governance and Policy Analysis briefed the meeting on ongoing progress. They confirmed active discussions with two leading US universities — Arizona State University (ASU) and Purdue University — as well as Taiwan's Asia University. These globally recognised institutions are known for excellence in engineering, research, innovation and emerging technologies. Continuous dialogue at the government level is underway to accelerate the process and finalise partnerships. The proposed study centres are expected to significantly elevate the standard of higher education in Madhya Pradesh. Students would gain access to international-level courses in engineering, AI, data science, health sci-

ences, management and other high-demand technological fields. Local industries and start-up ecosystems would also benefit from expert knowledge, joint research initiatives and stronger academia-industry collaboration. The government has nominated Professor Santosh Vishwakarma as chairperson of the new task force. The panel will examine technical, academic and legal requirements for establishing the centres and expedite agreement processes with partner universities. Officials said these initiatives would help position Madhya Pradesh as one of India's most attractive destinations for higher education, building a strong academic network of global institutions and opening new avenues for local talent.

IAS Santosh Verma shifted to GAD

Bhopal: IAS officer Santosh Verma, accused of making indecent remarks against upper-caste women, was shifted to the General Administration Department as the controversy escalated. Verma was serving as Deputy Secretary in the Agriculture Department. Sources said the state government is preparing to recommend his dismissal to the Centre, citing the seriousness of the allegations and his repeated misconduct. The move follows growing public outrage and internal assessments indicating that his continuation in service may undermine administrative integrity. An official inquiry is already underway.

BOI calls borrowers to settle NPAs at Lok Adalat on Dec 13

STAFF REPORTER ■ Bhopal

Bank of India's Bhopal Zone has issued a formal communication across all its branches announcing that the National Lok Adalat will be held on December 13, 2025. The bank has already dispatched notices to all eligible NPA account holders falling under its jurisdiction, activating a structured push to resolve long-pending loan defaults. The bank is positioning the Lok Adalat as a high-impact opportunity for borrowers whose loan accounts have slipped into irregular or NPA categories. Executives emphasise that the platform

enables mutually agreed settlements, allowing borrowers to close overdue accounts without prolonged legal escalation. The model is designed to provide financial relief, minimise litigation exposure and streamline recovery workflows for the bank. Management signals that the initiative is strategically aligned with system-wide portfolio clean-up imperatives and is expected to drive accelerated resolution of stressed assets. The bank has urged all eligible borrowers to visit their respective branches to obtain case-specific information ahead of the scheduled date, enabling them to participate

effectively in the settlement process. The Bhopal Zone expects strong borrower turnout, citing the clear value proposition: reduced financial burden, quick dispute closure and a structured mechanism to regularise accounts. Branch networks have been instructed to provide proactive support and facilitate smooth processing throughout the Lok Adalat window. Bank of India has positioned the December 13 exercise as a high-priority engagement, reinforcing its expectation that a large number of borrowers will leverage the opportunity to settle dues and exit the NPA framework.

Infantry Commanders' conference ends with key modernisation moves

PNS ■ Mhow

The 38th Infantry Commanders' Conference concluded at The Infantry School, Mhow, after a three-day engagement from December 9 to 11, 2025. The biennial conference was presided over by Army Chief Upendra Dwevedi and attended by the Vice Chief of Army Staff, six Army Commanders, seventeen Lieutenant Generals and fourteen Major Generals, including Colonels of Infantry Regiments and Regimental Centre Commandants. Senior officers participated both in person and through video links from major military stations nationwide. The conference conducted a



comprehensive review of pressing operational and structural challenges faced by the Infantry. Discussions covered conventional warfare preparedness, counter-terrorism operations, insurgency response, training protocols and capability development. Participants evaluated the future threat landscape and adopted several forward-lean-

ing decisions aimed at expanding Infantry capability, strengthening operational readiness and accelerating technology infusion. The sessions reinforced institutional cohesion across Infantry formations, strengthening bonds that extend across Regimental lines. Senior leaders underscored the need for combat-ready modernisation and seamless interoperability across theatres. During the event, the Infantry displayed its newest acquisitions, showcasing upgrades in lethality, mobility, battlefield

transparency, situational awareness and survivability. Demonstrations of newly inducted next-generation weapons and equipment underscored the Army's push toward technologically empowered Infantry formations, boosting confidence in their ability to counter evolving adversarial capabilities. Delegates described the conference as a high-yield engagement that addressed critical issues in depth and arrived at actionable solutions through collective leadership. The mix of extensive operational experience from senior commanders and innovative perspectives from younger commanding officers shaped a clear blueprint for future growth.

Indore lad makes waves in London's indie music circuit

KISHAN SINGH RANA ■ Indore



alone was not enough — strong visuals were integral to how audiences connected with music. This instinct pulled him towards filmmaking, prompting two self-funded music videos that became his training ground. He later returned to Mumbai to study music production and sound design, spending several years as a ghost composer and arranger for artists and studios. The work was rarely acknowledged publicly, but it

sharpened his craft. A turning point arrived in 2020 with the collaborative track Hum, featuring Grammy-winner Ricky Kej, National Award recipient Arun Shankar, and playback singer Neeti Mohan. Parmar shaped the arrangement and structure of the song, and the music video's one-million-plus views gave him the confidence to push beyond India's competitive but crowded independent scene. He moved to London in 2022 and immediately noticed a gap: plenty of talent but not enough platforms. Determined to bridge that space, he began seeking out emerging voices across the city. His first UK collaboration was with Black-British hip-hop

artist Rick Ochi on What I'm On, a project that helped Ochi reach new audiences on the UK urban circuit. More collaborations followed with underrepresented artists such as Definite Music and Ivra Santi, whose musical style and visual identity he helped refine. Through this work, he realised that London's indie artists needed something deeper than online visibility — they needed live events. This led him to curate music shows. His most notable partnership came in 2024 with ACAA for the Hounslow Mela, a two-day festival attended by more than 2,000 people, giving grassroots performers a rare public stage. Around this period, Parmar met a small Bollywood cover band performing in a local venue. Sensing potential, he began guiding them towards a more original sound and a stronger identity. Their first showcase at 229 London drew 130 people. Parmar then com-

posed a reference track that helped the band reimagine their direction. Within a year, the group — now called Souljam London — sold out a 600-capacity venue in 2025, an achievement Parmar considers one of his most meaningful contributions to the city's live-music space. He is currently working on a four-part audio-visual project with Ivra Santi, backed by a UK-based studio and planned for release in 2026. Parmar calls it his most ambitious work, merging global soundscapes with narrative storytelling. Production is already underway, though details remain under wraps. From Indore's classrooms to London's independent stages, Parmar has grown into a multi-skilled creative professional — composer, filmmaker, talent scout, and event curator — determined to expand opportunities for artists who, like him, simply needed someone to open the first door.

SYMBOLIC POSSESSION NOTICE				
ICICI Home Finance Registered Office: ICICI Bank Towers, Bandra-Kurla Complex, Bandra (East), Mumbai - 400051				
Corporate Office: ICICI HFC Tower, JB Nagar, Andheri Kurla Road, Andheri East, Mumbai - 400059				
Branch Office: Ambika Arcade, 2nd Floor, Z-19, Zone 1, M.P. Nagar, Bhopal, Madhya Pradesh - 462001				
Whereas The undersigned being the Authorized Officer of ICICI Home Finance Company Limited under the Securitisation, Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002 and in exercise of the powers conferred under section 13(4) of the said Act read with Rule 3 of the Security Interest (Enforcement) rules 2002, issued demand notices upon the borrowers mentioned below, to repay the amount mentioned in the notice within 60 days from the date of receipt of the said notice.				
As the borrower failed to repay the amount, notice is hereby given to the borrower and the public in general that the undersigned has taken possession of the property described herein below in exercise of powers conferred on him/ her under Section 13(4) of the said Act read with Rule 8 of the said rules on the below-mentioned dates. The borrower in particular and the public in general is hereby cautioned not to deal with the property and any dealings with the property will be subject to the charge of ICICI Home Finance Company Limited.				
The Borrower's attention is invited to provisions of sub-section (8) of section 13 of the Act, in respect of time available, to redeem the secured assets.				
Sr. No.	Name of the Borrower/ Co-Borrower/ Loan Account Number	Description of property/ Date of Possession	Date of Demand Notice/ Amount in Demand Notice (Rs.)	Name of Branch
1.	Ritesh Ahirwar (Borrower), Brinda Bai (Co-Borrower), Khuman Singh (Co-Borrower), LHBHP00001512997.	Plot No. 112 , Survey No. 67/2/1/2, Ph. No. 26, Village Pipaliya Baijka, RNM 03, Vikas Khond Fanda, Tehsil Huzur, District Bhopal, Madhya Pradesh- 462001. Bounded By- North: Plot No. 111, South: Plot No. 113, East: Plot No. 118, West: Road, Date of Possession- 06-Dec-25	13-09-2025 Rs. 5,37,537.28/-	Bhopal
2.	Muin. (Borrower), Amreen. (Co-Borrower), LHBHP00001447647.	One House Constructed Over Plot No. 23/2, Part of Land Revenue Survey No. 290/02, P.H. No. 41, Situated At Near Bhag Yaseen Mohd, Near Masajid Ahle Hadees, Tehsil Huzur, Bhopal Madhya Pradesh- 462001. Bounded By- North: Land of Mrs Shabana Bali, South: Land of Mrs Shamim Bali, East: Property of Seller, West: Road./ Date of Possession- 06-Dec-25	13-09-2025 Rs. 53,431.55/-	Bhopal
3.	Muin. (Borrower), Amreen. (Co-Borrower), LHBHP00001447694.	One House Constructed Over Plot No. 23/2, Part of Land Revenue Survey No. 290/02, P.H. No. 41, Situated At Near Bhag Yaseen Mohd, Near Masajid Ahle Hadees, Tehsil Huzur, Bhopal Madhya Pradesh- 462001. Bounded By- North: Land of Mrs Shabana Bali, South: Land of Mrs Shamim Bali, East: Property of Seller, West: Road./ Date of Possession- 06-Dec-25	13-09-2025 Rs. 11,54,714/-	Bhopal
The above-mentioned borrowers(s)/ guarantors(s) are hereby given a 30 day notice to repay the amount, else the mortgaged properties will be sold on the expiry of 30 days from the date of publication of this Notice, as per the provisions under the Rules 8 and 9 of Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules 2002.				
Date: December 12, 2025, Place: Bhopal Authorized Office, ICICI Home Finance Company Limited				



President, PM remember Pranab Mukherjee

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

President Droupadi Murmu, Vice President C P Radhakrishnan and Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Thursday remembered former president Pranab Mukherjee on his birth anniversary.

Modi remembered Mukherjee as a "towering statesman and a scholar of exceptional depth" and said that he got to learn from the former president over his many years of interaction.

President Murmu paid floral tributes to Mukherjee at the Rashtrapati Bhavan before heading for an official visit to Manipur. Vice President Radhakrishnan said Mukherjee, in his many roles as a parliamentarian, minister, and later as the president made invaluable contributions to strengthening democratic institutions.

In a social media post, Prime Minister Modi said, "A towering statesman and a

scholar of exceptional depth, he served India with unwavering dedication across decades of public life. Pranab Babu's intellect and clarity of thought enriched our democracy at every step."

"It's a privilege that I got to learn so much from him over the many years we interacted," he said.

Congress President Mallikarjun Kharge said in every role Mukherjee assumed, he brought deep wisdom, rich experience and exemplary leadership, guiding key Governmental decisions across diverse areas and reinforcing the foundations of India's parliamentary democracy.

Born on this day in 1935, Mukherjee's political career spanned over five decades during which he played a key role in policymaking that guided the development of the country. Mukherjee, who served as the President of India from July 2012 to July 2017, breathed his last on August 31, 2020.

UP CM assures housing for needy, aid for treatment

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Gorakhpur

Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath on Thursday said the Government will ensure housing for the needy and financial assistance for the treatment of those suffering from serious illnesses.

During his stay in Gorakhpur, Adityanath met people at the 'Janta Darshan' held at the Gorakhnath temple on Thursday morning and heard their grievances, according to an official statement. He assured support to those seeking housing and promised financial aid for patients requiring treatment for critical ailments.

"The Government is committed to ensuring that every eligible and needy individual receives the benefits of welfare schemes and that all problems are resolved effectively," the chief minister said.

Around 300 people met the chief minister during the event. Adityanath personally reached out to those seated in the Mahant Digvijaynath Smriti Bhavan auditorium, listened to each grievance carefully, accepted applications and directed officials to address the issues in a time-bound, fair and satisfactory manner, the statement said.

When a woman raised the issue of not having a house, the chief minister assured her that she would be provided a home under the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana and instructed officials to take necessary action. He said the Government intends that every needy person should have a pucca house.

Another woman sought financial assistance for her husband's treatment. Adityanath assured her that funds would be provided



CM Yogi holding a meeting with public representatives on SIR and development related works in Varanasi PTI

from the discretionary fund and asked her to proceed with the treatment without worry. Several others also sought help for medical expenses.

"No one's treatment will stop for lack of money," he said, directing officials to promptly prepare estimates for high-level medical treatment for all such applicants so that funds can be released immediately. Responding to complaints about land encroachment, the chief minister instructed the police to take strict action against

anyone forcibly occupying another person's land. In one case, where a woman complained of obstruction in taking possession of her own land, Adityanath directed officials to ensure she is given rightful possession.

He also told senior officials to examine cases where eligible beneficiaries are unable to access welfare schemes and determine whether any negligence had occurred. "Officials should show prompt sensitivity towards public grievances," the chief minister added.

BEML rolls out prototype of driverless metro trainset for Bengaluru corridors

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Bengaluru

BEML on Thursday rolled out the prototype of its driverless metro trainsets, developed for the upcoming BMRL corridors. The 5RS-DM project will be part of Namma Metro's Phases 2, 2A, and 2B, including the much-anticipated Airport Line.

The prototype for the Pink Line was formally unveiled by Bangalore Metro Rail Corporation Limited (BMRL) Managing Director J

Ravishankar in the presence of BEML Chairman and Managing Director Shantanu Roy and senior officials.

The dignitaries also witnessed a test run of the train at the BEML Rail Complex.

Under the contract, BEML will supply 318 standard-gauge metro cars, designed, engineered, and manufactured at its Bengaluru facility for the Blue Line (Airport Line) and the Pink Line (Kalena Agrahara in the south to Nagawara in the

north), the company said.

The trainsets will undergo a detailed programme of testing and commissioning as per BMRL's implementation schedule, followed by comprehensive maintenance support for up to 15 years, the PSU added.

"This rollout marks a significant step toward executing the Rs 3,177-crore contract awarded to BEML through a highly competitive bidding process. The prototype reflects BEML's growing contribution to India's metro

ecosystem, especially in the domain of driverless (GoA4) urban transit systems," the company said. In August 2023, BEML secured an order for 53 driverless trainsets, which later increased to 66 trainsets comprising 396 cars. All design and engineering work for the trainsets has been carried out by BEML's in-house teams.

Speaking on the occasion, Roy said, "The unveiling of this driverless metro prototype marks yet another milestone in BEML's journey

NBA releases ₹6.2 crore to five states

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

The National Biodiversity Authority (NBA) on Thursday released ₹6.2 crore under the Access and Benefit Sharing (ABS) mechanism to support the conservation of the endangered Red Sanders and strengthen livelihoods of farmers and forest-dependent communities in five States, the Environment Ministry said.

The ABS funds have been released to state forest departments, state biodiversity boards and Red Sanders growers, who "continue to play a pivotal role in protecting this endemic and globally valued species", the ministry said in a statement.

Of the ₹6.2 crore, ₹17.8 lakh will go to farmers in Telangana and Rs 1.1 crore to farmers in Andhra Pradesh. The Tamil Nadu Forest Department will receive ₹2.98 crore, the Karnataka Forest Department ₹1.05 crore, the Maharashtra Forest Department ₹69.2 lakh and the Telangana Forest Department ₹5.8 lakh. Another ₹16 lakh will be shared among state biodiversity boards.

With this tranche, ABS funds disbursed exclusively for the conservation of Red Sanders have crossed

₹101 crore since the mechanism was operationalised.

So far, 216 farmers, 198 in Andhra Pradesh and 18 in Tamil Nadu, have benefited, along with the forest departments and state biodiversity boards of Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Karnataka, Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu and Odisha.

The ministry said the funds will be used for frontline protection, enhanced patrolling and monitoring infrastructure, research-driven silvicultural practices, expansion of community-based livelihood programmes and improving the socio-economic resilience of Red Sanders growers.

With this release, total ABS disbursements by the NBA have crossed ₹127 crore, "reinforcing India's global leadership in implementing fair and equitable benefit-sharing linked to biological resources", the ministry said.

It said the disbursement shows how ABS provisions under the Biological Diversity Act can transform conservation into a sustainable livelihood opportunity, adding that these actions underscore India's leadership in applying ABS principles to practical, result-oriented efforts for ecological security and sustainable livelihoods.

Bihar Govt initiates process to constitute Prakrit, Pali academies

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Patna

The Bihar Government has initiated the process for the constitution of two new vernacular academies- Prakrit and Pali - for the restoration, preservation and promotion of these languages.

These two academies will work under the administrative control of the newly created department of Higher Education, according to a notification issued by the Cabinet Secretariat department on December 10.

The state Cabinet, headed by Chief Minister Nitish Kumar, on Tuesday approved proposals to create three new departments — Youth, Employment and Skill Development, Higher Education and Civil Aviation.

Already existing language academies in Bihar have also been brought under the administrative control of the Higher Education department. "Functions which have been allocated to the Higher Education department include: Administrative control of institutions engaged in research work of university level in social, economic, scientific and other fields such as Sanskrit Academy, Prakrit Academy, Pali Academy, etc," the notification said.

Before the modern derivatives of Sanskrit existed, a group of languages known as the Prakrit or Middle Indo-Aryan languages evolved from India's classical language. These were the vernacular dialects of ancient times.

The best known of this group is Pali, which still serves as the canonical language of Buddhism. Other Prakrit languages such as Sauraseni, Magadhi and Gandhari embody various facets of the literatures of both the Brahmanical/Hindu and Buddhist traditions.



Home Minister Amit Shah paying tribute during veteran actor Dharmendra's prayer meeting at the Dr. Ambedkar International Centre in New Delhi. Actors Esha and Ahana are also seen PTI

Marble sculpture adorns Bikaner House in Delhi

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

A striking 10-foot-tall sculpture titled As the Wind Rises, carved from a single block of pink Makrana marble, has become the new talking point at Bikaner House in the heart of the capital.

Created by renowned sculptor and Delhi Art Society president Neeraj Gupta, the 4.2-tonne monumental work. Crafted over eight months from marble sourced from Rajasthan's Nagaur district, the sculpture features undulating waves at the base that rise into intertwined, swirling forms. Gupta describes it as "a metaphor for the eternal processes of creation, growth and transformation," evoking cosmic energy, unity in diversity and the rhythm of life itself. "Art is fundamentally subjective," Gupta said.



"Its purpose is to make people appreciate and remember a work with passion." Blending contemporary abstraction with India's rich sculptural heritage, As the Wind Rises is being hailed as a bold statement on the evolution of Indian art on global platforms.

The sculpture will remain on public display at Bikaner House daily until September 20, 2026.

Odisha CM Majhi awards citizenship certificates to 35 applicants under CAA

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ Bhubaneswar

Odisha Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi on Thursday handed over Indian citizenship certificates to 35 people from Nabarangpur district under the Citizenship (Amendment) Act, 2019 (CAA). At a special programme organised by the Odisha Census Directorate and the Union Home Ministry, Majhi said India's "traditional values of humanity and asylum" had been revived through the process launched by Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

"This holy legislation has provided a ray of hope and reassurance to minorities persecuted for years," he said. As per the rules notified on March 11, 2014, minority community



members who entered India from Bangladesh, Pakistan and Afghanistan before December 31, 2014 are eligible for Indian citizenship. Stating that these 35 people are now citizens of India, the chief minister said: "You are now part of our future. Your safety,

respect and progress are our responsibility and duty. I welcome you as citizens of India". Majhi pointed out that if a person of any other religion is persecuted in any country, there are many nations in the world that can give him shelter. "However, if a Hindu is per-

secuted in any other country, there is no other place except India that can give them shelter. If there is no such law in India, then where will they go?" the CM asked. Revenue and Disaster Management Minister Suresh Pujari said many persecuted minorities in neighbouring countries may have ancestral links to India. "Keeping in mind their persecution, the PM designed the CAA amendment law," he said, adding that the new citizens will be eligible for all benefits, including land for the landless and caste certificates where necessary. One Bapin Mirda, who came from Bangladesh in 1998 and was accorded Indian citizenship here on Thursday, said the certificate has given him a new identity.

President meets displaced persons in Imphal

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ Imphal

President Droupadi Murmu on Thursday met internally displaced persons (IDPs) at the Lok Bhavan here and assured them that the Government stands with them.

In a post on X, the President of India's office said, "President Droupadi Murmu met and interacted with a few Internally Displaced Persons in Imphal. She assured that the Government stands with them at all times to address their needs." "She affirmed that the Government is working to secure their homes, livelihoods, and the future of their children. She further assured them that taking necessary measures to facilitate their progress towards a peace the post said.

No harm in cars from ethanol petrol, says Nitin Gadkari



Ethanol-blended petrol has greatly benefitted farmers and resulted in saving of over ₹1.40 lakh crore of foreign exchange, Lok Sabha was informed on Thursday. Amid concerns over the use of ethanol-blended petrol, Union Minister of Road Transport & Highways Nitin Gadkari said after extensive testing, no adverse impact has been found in cars where ethanol mixed petrol is used.

Bihar CM inspects tourist centre in East Champaran

Bihar CM Nitish Kumar on Thursday said the upcoming tourist facility centre in East Champaran district would benefit thousands of visitors to the historic Kesariya Buddha Stupa each year and help them better understand Buddhism. Kumar inspected the centre, visited the Buddha Stupa and interacted with villagers, including women and schoolgirls, during his tour of the district, the CM's Office (CMO) said in a statement.



RS Chairman hails Deepavali's inclusion in UNESCO list



Rajya Sabha Chairman CP Radhakrishnan on Thursday welcomed the inclusion of Deepavali in Unesco's Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, and called it a moment of "immense pride" for the nation.

BJP MP accuses Opposition of unconstitutional impeachment

BJP MP Tejasi Surya on Thursday accused the DMK and the Congress of "unconstitutional weaponisation of impeachment" after several Opposition MPs submitted a notice seeking the removal of Madras HC Judge GR Swaminathan. Raising the issue during Zero Hour in the Lok Sabha, Surya said the move amounted to "an attack on the judiciary and the impartiality of judges", alleging it was driven by "anti-Hindu sentiments" within the Opposition bloc.



JP Nadda urges equal status for Vande Mataram as anthem, flag

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

Asserting that the national song Vande Matram is linked to "nationalism," BJP President JP Nadda on Thursday said the country should take a resolve a resolve to accord equal status to it as is given to the national anthem and flag.

He also charged the Congress with appeasement and negating the importance of Vande Mataram during previews and post-independence, even though the national song was linked to our ancient cultural heritage. Vande Mataram was a mantra of uniting the country, which the British feared, he said in the Rajya Sabha.

Concluding a discussion on the 150th Anniversary of National Song Vande Mataram, Nadda, Nadda, who is the Leader of the House in Rajya Sabha, also stated that the objective of this debate

was not to defame former Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru but to keep the record of India's history "straight".

The BJP leader said he fully respects the national anthem 'Jan Gana Mana' and was ready to sacrifice his life for it.

"Whenever there is an incident, then responsibility lies with the leader. Jawaharlal Nehru was the leader of the Congress party at that time," Nadda said.

He said the Congress party has always been opportunistic and cites the Nehruvian age to take credit when the situation suits the party.

However, the party does not take responsibility when the situation is adverse and seeks to put the blame on others, he alleged.

"I want to say with a sense of full responsibility that the respect and status that Vande Mataram was to be accorded, it did not receive the same and those in power at the time are fully



Union Minister of Health and Family Welfare JP Nadda speaking in the Rajya Sabha during the Winter session of Parliament in New Delhi on Thursday

PTI

responsible for it," he said.

Nadda alleged that the importance of Vande Mataram and its link to our cultural heritage was negated by then Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru, which is our charge, as he cited Nehru's words in the House from the archives.

Nadda's speech was marked by constant barbs from both sides, even as the Leader of Opposition Mallikarjun Kharge asked whether the debate was on Nehru or Vande Mataram.

Right from the beginning, the Congress Party has compromised with India's culture, ethos and thought process, Nadda alleged.

The BJP president mentioned that the Prevention of Insults to National Honour Act, 1971, does not have any provision for a penalty if one disrespects or does not sing the national song Vande Mataram.

"The country is not run by making compromises. This is our ideology. It is governed by keeping

in mind unconditional national sentiments. Therefore, the Vande Mataram song is linked to our nationalism, and one should move forward keeping nationalism at the fore," Nadda said.

Hence, he asserted that Vande Mataram should be accorded the same status as the national flag and the national anthem have in the Indian constitution, and the same should be done.

"Meaningful discussion on 150th anniversary can take place only if we take resolve that Vande Mataram has the same status as national anthem and national flag in the Constitution and it should be added," he said, while wrapping up his around 50-minute speech in the Upper House.

To this, senior Congress Member Jairam Ramesh said the national song and national anthem always had the same status, and it would continue to have the same status.

Ramesh recalled that India's

first President, Rajendra Prasad, had said the same on January 24, 1950.

Earlier in his speech, Nadda attacked the Congress Party for not giving due importance to the national song. "In 1937, it was under the Presidency of Jawaharlal Nehru that, under pressure from communal elements, they altered the sacred song discarding stanzas that invoked Bharat Mata as Maa Durga, wielding weapons of freedom," he alleged.

Talking about the importance of the national song, Nadda said Vande Mataram has been a witness to many events in history.

"The events that occurred during the time of independence, in them, the chant of Vande Mataram has served as energy. Vande Mataram is a chant, an energy, a vow, a resolve. Vande Mataram is the devotion to Mother India, service, and worship," he added.

Over 6,700 Indians rescued from SE Asia fake job scams: Govt

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

The Centre on Thursday informed Parliament that it has taken notice of instances of dubious firms involved in fake recruitment job offers, having lured Indian nationals mostly through social media channels to South-East Asian countries, and till date over 6,700 Indians have been rescued from Cambodia, Myanmar and Lao PDR. Minister of State for External Affairs Kirti Vardhan Singh said this in a written response to a query in Rajya Sabha.

"It has come to the notice of the Government instances of dubious firms involved in fake recruitment job offers having lured Indian nationals mostly through social media

channels to South-East Asian countries including Cambodia, Myanmar, Lao PDR and made them to carry out cyber crime and other fraudulent activities from scam centres operating in these countries," he said.

The exact number of Indian nationals stuck in these countries is not known as Indian nationals reach these scam centres on their own volition through fraudulent or unscrupulous recruitment agents or agencies and through illegal channels, the MoS said.

The Government of India has raised this issue at political level with the host Government from time to time, the Centre said.

"Missions/Posts take up the issue of rescue and repatria-

tion of Indian nationals actively with the local Ministry of Foreign Affairs and other concerned Government agencies of the host country like immigration, labour department, home affairs, defence and border affairs and law enforcement agencies," he said.

Singh, in his response, also shared the number of Indian nationals including software engineers rescued till date, with concerted efforts of Indian embassies in Cambodia, Lao PDR and Myanmar.

These figures stood at 2,265 in Cambodia, 2,290 in Lao PDR and 2,165 in Myanmar.

The exact span of time over which these Indian nationals were rescued, however, was not specified in the data

shared. Singh said the Government has established various channels to enable Indian nationals abroad to reach out to the Mission or Post concerned, in case they need any assistance.

"They can contact the Missions/Posts through walk-in interview, email, multilingual 24x7 emergency numbers, WhatsApp numbers, grievance redressal portals like MADAD, CPGRAMS, and eMigrate, and social media etc.," he said.

The Ministry of Home Affairs has set up the 'Indian Cybercrime Coordination Centre (I4C) as an attached office to deal with all types of cyber crime in a coordinated and comprehensive manner, Singh said.

The ministry issues advi-

sories and social media posts about the fake job rackets from time to time.

Similar communications are also issued by the respective Indian Missions or Posts abroad through their official websites, social media handles and print media.

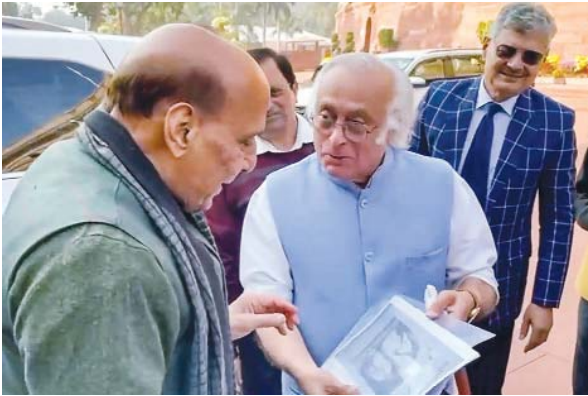
"Our Missions in South-East Asian countries issued various detailed advisories, upon receiving such information on Indian nationals being lured by fake job rackets in South-East countries, to job seekers, and advise them to verify all antecedents of recruiting agents and companies before accepting any kind of employment offer and not be enticed and entrapped in the fraudulent job offers in these countries," he said.

Congress refutes Shah's vote theft claim against Nehru

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

Congress on Thursday rebutted Home Minister Amit Shah's "vote theft" charge against Jawaharlal Nehru, saying the claim that he was made the prime minister despite Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel being the popular choice is a "lie" and a "figment of imagination".

Congress general secretary in-charge communications Jairam Ramesh said party colleague Piyush Babele has "totally exposed" one of the home minister's "many lies" in the Lok Sabha and shared his video on X. The Congress also shared Babele's video and said



Defence Minister Rajnath Singh being given a copy of Vallabhbhai Patel's daughter Maniben Patel's diary entries in Gujarati, that appeared in a book, by Congress leader Jairam Ramesh, during the Winter session of Parliament in New Delhi on Thursday. Ramesh told him that there was no mention in them of his claim that Jawaharlal Nehru wanted to build the Babri Masjid using public funds

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President on 2-day visit to Manipur



President Droupadi Murmu being welcomed by Manipur Governor Rajy Kumar Bhalla on her arrival in Imphal on Thursday

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PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Imphal

President Droupadi Murmu will begin her two-day visit to Manipur from Thursday, during which she will attend a function commemorating women's struggle against

the British colonial rule, and may offer prayers at the renowned Shree Govindajee temple, officials said.

Security has been beefed up across Manipur as militant organisations have called for a shutdown against the President's visit.

This will be Murmu's first trip to the strife-torn state after becoming the President of India.

Her visit comes around three months after Prime Minister Narendra Modi visited the state on September 13 for the first time since ethnic violence broke out in May 2023.

After her arrival, she will attend a polo event organised by the Youth Affairs and Sports Department at Mapal Kangjeibung (Imphal Polo Ground), few metres from the Lok Bhavan, in the afternoon, they said.

Later in the day, she may offer prayers at the Three Govindajee temple, the citadel of Vaishnavism in Manipur. In the evening, she will attend a civic reception at the City Convention Centre before retiring for the night at Lok Bhavan, the officials said.

CBI charges 13 in digital arrest cyber fraud scam

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

The CBI has filed a chargesheet against 13 individuals for allegedly running "digital arrest" cyber fraud scams, controlled by masterminds located in Southeast Asian countries, officials said on Thursday.

The agency also ran a parallel investigation into cyber-slavery and the organised digital exploitation networks in Southeast Asia, with slave compounds in Myanmar and neighbouring areas, that are emerging as incubators for the execution of such frauds.

In the chargesheet filed in

a special court here, the CBI said its technical analysis of 15,000 IP addresses associated with the scam network showed "extensive cross-border connections" with several key bank accounts, used for collecting and routing victims' funds, "being controlled from abroad".

From the vast technical dataset, India-based IP addresses were isolated, enabling targeted searches and identification of domestic operatives, officials said.

The agency pinpointed these accounts being controlled by "masterminds based in Cambodia, Hong Kong and China".

NIA files chargesheet against 11 in Odisha explosives loot

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Bhubaneswar

The National Investigation Agency (NIA) has filed a chargesheet against 11 accused persons in a case relating to the loot of around 4,000 kg of explosives by armed cadres of the CPI (Maoist) during transportation to a stone quarry in Odisha's Sundergarh district, an official said.

According to a statement released by the NIA on Thursday, all the 11 accused have been charged under various sections of UA (P) Act, BNSS, Arms Act and Explosive Substances Act. The charge sheet has been filed in a special court.

"During the investigation, NIA found the 11 accused to have been actively involved in criminal conspiracy, planning

and execution of the loot of around 200 explosive packets, each containing 20 kg of explosives. The explosives were being transported from Itma Explosive Station to the Banko stone quarry on May 27, 2025," it said. The vehicle, along with its driver, had been forcibly seized by 10-15 armed Maoists and was being taken to a stronghold of the CPI(Maoist) in the nearby

Saranda jungle in neighbouring Jharkhand. The NIA took over the case from the local police in June this year.

The statement said that during the investigation, the NIA found that a huge quantity of explosives had been looted for use against the Government machinery, including police and security forces, through the commission of terror acts.

■ States Focus ■



GOVT HIRE 5,215 TEACHERS IN FIVE YEARS: TRIPURA CM

Tripura Chief Minister Manik Saha on Thursday said the State has recruited 5,215 teachers over the past five years to ensure quality education in schools. Addressing an education department programme at Rabindra Bhavan here, he said the shortage of teachers was primarily due to the termination of a large number of teachers several years ago.

“People know for whom so many teachers lost their jobs in 2017, and now they have joined hands. This is political talk and I don’t want to dwell much on it,” he said, indirectly referring to the CPI(M) and Congress alliance. Following a petition filed by a group of job aspirants, the Tripura High Court had dismissed the services of 10,323 teachers, a decision later upheld by a Supreme Court division bench. As a result, 10,323 teachers lost their jobs in 2017, a year ahead of the 2018 Assembly elections.



GOVT GAVE 37,916 JOBS IN 18 MONTHS: ODISHA CM

Odisha Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi on Thursday said his Government has appointed 37,916 people during its 18 months in office and is committed to fulfilling its promise of filling 65,000 Government posts within the first two years.

Majhi made the remarks while handing over appointment letters to 591 newly recruited officers and employees in three departments – Water Resources (252), Housing and Urban Development (142) and Works (197). Majhi said, “Our Government has promised to fill all the 1.5 lakh vacant posts in five years and to fill 65,000 Government posts in two years.”

Arunachal: 18 dead, 3 missing as truck falls in gorge

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ Tinsukia/Dibrugarh (Assam)

At least 18 people from Assam’s Tinsukia district were killed and three others are missing as the truck they were travelling in fell into a remote gorge in neighbouring Arunachal Pradesh, officials said on Thursday.

The accident took place on Hayuliang-Chaglagam Road in Anjaw district in the eastern part of the hill State on December 8 when a truck was carrying 22 labourers from Tinsukia district, Defence PRO Lt Col Mahender Rawat said, citing the lone survivor’s version.

The site, approximately 12 km from Chaglagam, lies in difficult terrain with limited connectivity and the accident had not been reported by any local agency, contractor or civil representative until the survivor’s arrival, Rawat said in a statement.

“Eighteen bodies have been sighted and are being retrieved using belay ropes. ADC of Hayuliang has informed SP of Anjaw, who has reached the site, while the District Medical Officer is moving to facilitate evacua-

tion of casualties and mortal remains,” he said.

Rawat said that preliminary inputs from the survivor, who managed to reach Chipra General Reserve Engineer Force (GREF) camp, indicate that a truck carrying 22 workers from Tinsukia fell off a cliff on the night of December 8.

“The Indian Army has launched a major search and rescue operation in the Chaglagam region of Arunachal Pradesh. The operations were initiated based on information received late on December 10 regarding a vehicle accident along the Hayuliang-Chaglagam road near KM 40,” he added.

The Defence PRO said that the Army’s Spear Corps on the early morning of Thursday mobilised multiple search and rescue columns, medical teams, GREF representatives, local police, NDRF personnel and the ADC of Hayuliang.

“At 1155 hours, after four hours of intensive search and rope descent, the truck was spotted around 200 metres below the road near KM 40 in a re-entrant, inaccessible and not visible from helicopters or the road due to dense tree

cover and thick foliage,” he added.

The Anjaw District Administration has requisitioned the SDRF, which is en route at present.

“ADC Hayuliang is also questioning the sub-contractor of the Zila Parishad Member, Chaglagam, to verify the antecedents and exact strength of the workers hired,” Rawat said.

“Despite harsh terrain and poor visibility, the Indian Army, in coordination with civil administration and other agencies, is making all possible efforts to trace the remaining individuals and provide immediate assistance,” he added.

Earlier during the day, Assam’s Tinsukia District Commissioner Swapneel Paul said that at around 11 am, they received information about a vehicle falling into a gorge in Arunachal Pradesh’s Anjaw district.

“Accordingly, we contacted the DCS of Anjaw and Teju for confirmation. Both the DCS said that rescue teams have so far recovered several bodies and found one person alive. Some more persons are still missing,” he added.



Firefighters dousing a fire that broke out at Swagata Square Complex on Wednesday in Guwahati

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GUWAHATI FIRE RAGES FOR OVER 38 HOURS; MULTIPLE AGENCIES CALLED

Guwahati: A massive fire that broke out at a commercial complex in Guwahati remained untamed for over 38 hours even as more than two dozen fire tenders have been struggling to douse the blaze, officials said on Thursday.

The fire broke out at Swagata Square Complex in ABC Point around 12.30 am on Wednesday. The multi-storey building houses SBI’s zonal office, commercial branch and the premium banking branch, and a shopping mall, ‘Sohum Emporia’.

More than 25 fire tenders have been struggling for over 38 hours. Water tenders from the Indian Air Force, Indian Army and Guwahati Refinery also joined the efforts to douse the blaze, while NDRF was called in to assist with their high-tech smoke reduction machine.

Apart from Guwahati, fire tenders came from Morigaon, Kamrup and Nalbari districts, as well. “There is fire on the sixth floor. We are trying to douse it,” a senior official of the Fire & Emergency Services (F&ES) said. Smoke is also billowing from the second floor, where the fire originated at the godown of the shopping mall, he added.

“There is fire at the backside of the building. However, due to non-adherence to safety norms while construction, fire tenders are unable to reach the rear,” another official said.

J&K LG Manoj Sinha gives jobs to NoKs of Jammu terror victims

MOHIT KANDHARI ■ Jammu

After a wait of over 20 long years justice was delivered to the next of kin of Dharam Singh, brutally killed by terrorists along with four other villagers from Kotranka area of frontier Rajouri district on June 28, 2005.

During this time, Naseeb Singh, son of Dharam Singh, lived in misery, constant fear and insecurity.

“Akhtar Hussain, a resident of Reasi, was shot dead by terrorists on July 13, 2005. His wife and children endured immense hardship for two decades. It had left a deep scar on the family”.

On November 15, 2004, SPO Sanjeet Kumar was murdered along with his friend by two terrorists in Balan Tundwa, Kishtwar, while they were preparing for a neighbour’s wedding.

On Thursday, Next of Kins (NoKs) of

all these victims of terrorism of Jammu Division received an appointment letter from Lieutenant Governor Manoj Sinha at a simple ceremony.

Appointment letters were also handed over to 22 beneficiaries in Age relaxation cases and 19 wards of J&K Police martyrs under Compassionate Appointment Rules SRO-43 and Rehabilitation Assistance Scheme (RAS).

On the occasion Lieutenant Governor Manoj Sinha said, “the dark days in their lives have ended. It is a new dawn of hope and dreams for these families”.

With the government job appointment letters to 41 terror victim families, 22 age relaxation cases and 19 wards of J&K Police martyrs, we have fulfilled our commitment,” the Lieutenant Governor said.

Earlier, on July 28, 2025, the



Lieutenant Governor had handed over the appointment letters to 94 Next of Kins (NoKs) of terror victims from Jammu division. The move brings relief to 135 terror victim families from Jammu Division who were

denied justice for decades.

The families of terror victims spoke out fearlessly, recounted decades of terror and hardship and exposed the Pakistan-sponsored terrorists and their local sympathizers.

Justice will be delivered: Himanta ahead of charge sheet filing in Zubeen’s death case

TONY DAS ■ Guwahati

Appealing to people to have faith in the judicial process, Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Thursday said he believes justice will be delivered in the death case of singer Zubeen Garg.

Sarma made the statement as the police are scheduled to file the charge sheet in the sensational case on Friday.

“The SIT will submit its chargesheet, and the court will examine it. The culprit will be punished by the court,” the CM said.

“From tomorrow, the police job will be over, and the court’s role will start. I believe that the court will



definitely deliver justice,” he said, exuding confidence in the entire process.

The celebrated singer died under mysterious circumstances in Singapore on September 19 while swimming in the sea. He had gone to that country to attend the 4th edition of the

North East India Festival (NEIF).

A Special Investigation Team (SIT) under the Criminal Investigation Department (CID) of the Assam Police is probing Garg’s death case after more than 60 FIRs were lodged across the State.

Mamata slams SIR, urges people to protest

SAUGAR SENGUPTA
■ Krishnagar

Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee continued her tirade against the “mischievous implementation” of special intensive revision (SIR) of electoral rolls in Bengal “with a one-point agenda to help the BJP, asking the people to descend on the streets with kitchen tools and resist the “nefarious designs of the BJP Government” if a single name was deleted from the voters’ lists.

“They will take away the rights of mothers and sisters in the name of SIR and then they will bring police from Delhi during the election and intimidate the people of Bengal mothers and sisters, if your names are struck off, you



West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee addressing a public meeting, in Krishnagar in West Bengal on Thursday

PTI

have the kitchen tools in your hands your names are deleted. The women will fight in the front, and the men will be behind them,” Banerjee on Thursday thundered from an anti-SIR rally at Krishnagar in Nadia district.

“The people of Bihar could not understand the trick so they could not retaliate but we will not spare you here, remember an injured tiger is more dangerous than a general one,” Banerjee said. She warned of staging a

mighty dharna (sit in demonstration) “if a single name is deleted from the voters’ lists and asked the people particularly women to get prepared for a sustained struggle on the streets.

Continuing her diatribe against the BJP Government, particularly Union Home Minister Amit Shah called him a dangerous person whose eyes emitted the “villainy” of Duryodhana and Duhshasana — the two anti-heroes of epic Mahabharata.

Launching a scathing attack against Shah she said “he is a dangerous person you can see it all in his watch them one is that of Duryodhana and the other is that of Duhshasana,” alleging that the SIR was being conducted to politically help the BJP.

Govt flags nearly 2,000 aircraft GPS spoofing incidents

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

With nearly 2,000 cases of cyber-attacks or spoofing of aircraft’s GPS coming to light, the Government has acknowledged the seriousness of the issue regarding threat posed to safe flying.

In recent times, there have been instances of GPS spoofing and interference incidents at Delhi, Mumbai, Kolkata, Amritsar, Hyderabad, Bangalore and Chennai airports. Giving details of these incidents on Thursday in the Lok Sabha, Minister of State for Civil Aviation Murlidhar Mohol said a total of 1,951 issues of interference with aircraft’s GPS system have been reported during the two years since November 2023.

He said in a written reply, GPS interference reporting started after the publication of Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) advisory circular on November 24, 2023 regarding GNSS interference in airspace.

Global Positioning System (GPS)/ Global Navigation Satellite System (GNSS) spoofing and jamming refers to attempts to manipulate a user’s navigation system by giving false signals.

According to Mohol, International Civil Aviation Organisation identifies GNSS spoofing as a form of International Radio Frequency Interference and Wireless Monitoring Organisation is investigating the matter.

Goa, Israel boost tourism ties as Khaunte meets IMOT team

ASHOKE RAJ ■ New Delhi

In a significant step toward deepening tourism cooperation, the Israel Ministry of Tourism (IMOT) held a constructive meeting with Minister for Tourism, Rohan A Khaunte, in Panaji. The discussions underscored shared interest in strengthening bilateral engagement and enhancing direct connectivity between Goa and Israel.

The IMOT delegation — comprising Galit Hoffman, Consul — Tourism Affairs for India, and Amruta Bangera, Director of Marketing, IMOT India highlighted Israel’s interest in exploring a direct air link between Goa and Tel Aviv. The proposed route, they noted, could greatly improve accessibility and support the rising travel demand between India and Israel.

Rohan A. Khaunte reaffirmed Goa’s strong position in India’s tourism landscape and expressed the State’s commitment to expanding its global connections. He also assured the delegation of Goa’s support should an airline undertake the evaluation of the Goa-Tel Aviv



route, including assistance with operational requirements.

“Goa welcomes every opportunity to strengthen its global tourism partnerships. A direct connection with Tel Aviv holds strong potential to enhance two-way travel, and we are committed to extending all possible support to airlines evaluating the Goa-Tel Aviv route,” said the Minister for Tourism.

The meeting also saw discussions on hosting a tourism roadshow in Goa, aimed at spotlighting Israel’s diverse tourism offerings and engaging key travel trade

stakeholders across the State.

Expressing appreciation for the positive dialogue, Galit Hoffman, Consul — Tourism Affairs for India, IMOT, said, “Goa has long held a special place for Israeli travellers, and strengthening connectivity will only deepen this relationship. We are optimistic about the potential of a direct Goa-Tel Aviv flight and look forward to continued collaboration with the Government of Goa. We truly appreciate the support extended by Minister for Tourism, Rohan A. Khaunte.”

Goa remains one of the most preferred Indian desti-

nations for Israeli visitors, known for its beaches, culture, and warm hospitality. Each year, around 50,000 Israelis visit India, with a significant share opting for Goa — reflecting a deep cultural affinity and strong traveller interest.

On the outbound front, Israel continues to draw increasing numbers of Indian travellers, offering a blend of spirituality, history, natural landscapes, adventure activities, and culinary richness. Between January and November 2025, Israel recorded 1.18 million international tourist arrivals, with projections to close the year at approximately 1.3 million. India remains Israel’s leading Asian source market and one of its top ten inbound markets globally.

Both sides concluded the meeting on a positive note, aligned on continuing discussions to enhance direct air connectivity and strengthen tourism ties.

The proposed Goa-Tel Aviv route is seen as a promising avenue to unlock new opportunities and bolster travel flows between the two destinations.

BJP MPs flag Yamuna River pollution, highway woes

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

Two BJP members on Thursday raised concerns in the Rajya Sabha regarding the pollution in the Yamuna river, which affects the Mathura-Vrindavan pilgrimage circuit, and the deteriorating condition of the Goa-Belgaum National Highway.

Speaking during Zero Hour, Tejveer Singh from Uttar Pradesh acknowledged infrastructure improvements

in Mathura and Vrindavan, but highlighted challenges, particularly Yamuna river pollution, faced by pilgrims and locals.

He also called for enhancing sewage treatment plant capacity, strict monitoring of pollution sources, and enhanced safety measures along the riverbanks.

Singh proposed a metro rail service connecting Mathura, Vrindavan, Barsana, and Govardhan to ease traffic congestion during

major festivals like Navratri, Janmashtami, and Barsana celebrations, when devotee footfalls increase manifold.

“This will not only make the journey of crores of devotees comfortable but will also reduce traffic in the entire Vrindavan area, help in environmental protection and provide global recognition to pilgrims,” he said.

He also suggested smart traffic management systems, e-shuttle bus services, multi-level parking facilities, and a

special package for local youth in tourism-related activities.

Sadanand Shet Tanavde from Goa drew attention to the deplorable condition of the Goa-Belgaum National Highway, particularly the Anmod and Chorla Ghat sections.

He said these highways serve as lifelines for Goa and Karnataka, but remain narrow, prone to landslides, and frequently blocked during monsoons.

hindered due to the non-release of funds as per the ministry’s procedures. The progress of each scheme and the status of pending dues were reviewed during the meeting.

Regarding PMAY-G, the statement said in the financial year 2025-26, only the first part of the first instalment amounting to ₹1,497 crore had been released so far.

Bihar urges Centre to release ₹7,748 crore for PMAY-G, MGNREGA

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Patna

The Bihar Government on Thursday urged the Centre to immediately release ₹7,748.49 crore pending under the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana-Gramin (PMAY-G) and the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA).

Bihar Rural Development Minister Sharwan Kumar met

engaged under MGNREGA. According to a statement issued by the State Rural Development Department, the ministers discussed several central schemes being implemented in Bihar, including PMAY-G, MGNREGA and the Deendayal Antyodaya Yojana-National Rural Livelihood Mission (DAY-NRLM).

It said the implementation of these schemes was being

payment of labourers



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Delhi court grants interim bail to Umar Khalid to attend sister’s wedding



A Delhi court on Thursday granted interim bail from December 16 to 29 to former JNU student Umar Khalid to attend his sister's wedding. Additional Sessions Judge Sameer Bajpai granted interim relief to Khalid, who is an accused in the case regarding the larger conspiracy behind the 2020 Delhi riots. The judge directed the accused to furnish a personal bond of ₹20,000 and two sureties of like amount.

"During the interim bail period, the applicant (Khalid) shall not use the social media," the court said, directing him to "only meet his family members, relatives and friends". It said Khalid also had to "remain at his home or at the places where the ceremonies of marriage as mentioned by him will take place".

Other conditions included the accused not contacting any witness and providing his mobile phone number to the investigating officer. The court directed Khalid to surrender before the prison authorities on the evening of December 29. Last year, he was granted interim bail of seven days to attend another wedding.

Death to one, life term to nine in Maharajganj communal clash murder

A local court on Thursday awarded one death and life imprisonment to nine people for a murder during communal violence last year in Maharajganj town during a Durga idol immersion procession. Last year on October 13, Ramgopal Mishra, 21, was shot dead when a communal clash broke in the mixed-population Maharajganj. Additional Sessions Judge, First, Pawan Kumar Sharma had on December 9 convicted Sarfaraz, Abdul Hameed, Mohammad Talib, Faheem, Zeeshan, Mohammad Saif, Javed, Soeb Khan, Nankau and Maroof Ali. It acquitting Khurshid, Shakeel and Afzal for lack of evidence and reserving the verdict on quantum of punishment.

On Thursday, the judge sentenced Sarfaraz – the man who fired the fatal shot – to death, and awarded life term to the remaining nine convicts. Three other accused were acquitted, Shukla said. On the night of the killing, 13 people were named as accused in an FIR – Two of them were killed in a police encounter while fleeing, while the rest were arrested over time. The killing triggered widespread tension in Mahsi, Maharajganj and parts of Bahraich city. Large-scale vandalism and arson were reported the following day as police strove to contain the situation from spiralling out.

‘Humanitarian grounds can’t override punishment’

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

Humanitarian considerations cannot override the statutory minimum punishment mandated by the legislature, the Supreme Court said on Thursday while refusing to interfere with the sentence imposed on a woman in a narcotic case.

The apex court delivered its verdict on an appeal by the woman challenging a June 2024 order of the Madras High Court which upheld her conviction and 10-year sentence in the case lodged under the provisions of the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (NDPS) Act, 1985.

While dismissing her appeal, a bench of justices Sanjay Karol and Vipul M Pancholi noted that the appellant, who was 24-year-old at the time of the incident in 2019, has urged the court to consider her age, lack of prior criminal history and responsibility towards her minor child.

The bench said while it was not unkindful of the appellant's circumstances, the NDPS Act prescribes minimum mandatory sentence for possession of commercial quantity.

"The court has no discretion to reduce the sentence below the statutory minimum under section 20(b)(ii)(C) of the NDPS Act. Humanitarian considerations, though relevant for executive remission, cannot override statutory minimum punishment mandated by the legislature," the bench

Widow gets railways compensation after 23 yrs

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

"A smile on a poor person's face is what we want to earn, nothing else," Chief Justice of India Surya Kant said on Thursday while noting that Railways finally managed to trace and pay ₹8.92 lakh as compensation to a tragedy-struck widow, who lost her husband in a train accident in 2002 after the Supreme Court's nudge.

The bench, also comprising Justice Joymalya Bagchi, said it was a difficult task to trace the elderly women, who had changed her residence in a far-flung village of Bihar and her last contact was lost as her local lawyer passed away, lauded the efforts of Railways and advocate Fauzia Shakil, who represented the widow pro bono (without any fees) to ensure she gets the financial relief.

"This young lawyer (Shakil), who represented

ECI can't treat voters with doubt, SC told

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

The Election Commission cannot assume the role of a "suspicious neighbour" or a "policeman" treating voters with doubt, the Supreme Court was told on Thursday during the final hearings on a batch of pleas challenging the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls in various states.

A bench of Chief Justice Surya Kant and Justice Joymalya Bagchi heard detailed submissions from senior advocate Raju Ramachandran representing petitioners opposed to the SIR process being undertaken in several states.

Ramachandran assailed the conceptual foundation of the SIR and urged that the poll panel's constitutional mandate is to act as a facilitator and enabler of voting rights.

"The negative way of viewing one's own role is that of a disabler or that of a suspicious policeman," Ramachandran said, adding that when there is an adequate statutory scheme regarding citizenship, the poll panel cannot become a "nosy parker" instructing booth level officers (BLOs) to cast doubt on voters.

He said initiating an inquiry

based on a BLO's suspicion effectively amounts to "suspending citizenship".

"Now, how does the EC view its role? Because depending on how it views its role will follow how it acts. Either it sees its role as a facilitator and enabler of the societal ideal of universal adult franchise, which would mean helping citizens to vote, proactively helping and enabling.

"The negative way of viewing one's own role is that of a disabler or that of a suspicious policeman or a suspicious neighbour. So depending on how you view your own role, your sense of fairness and how you go about a particular exercise will be apparent from that," he said.

He argued that while the right to vote may be statutory, it flows from constitutional rights including Article 19(1)(a) and Article 21.

"Removal from an electoral roll on suspicion amounts to giving a power to suspend citizenship," he said.

On the definition and implication of the term "migrant", he said that in the current socio-political discourse, the term is often loaded and used to imply "illegal migrant" or "exodus" rather than domestic movement.

Offering a broader view, Justice Bagchi said, "Migration

SC refuses Prajwal Revanna plea for transfer of cases

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

The Supreme Court on Thursday refused to entertain a plea of former Janata Dal (Secular) MP Prajwal Revanna to transfer the trial of two criminal cases before the special MP/MLA court in Bengaluru to another court in the city on the ground of bias.

A bench of Chief Justice Surya Kant and Justice Joymalya Bagchi told Revanna's counsel that observations of the judge cannot be a ground of bias as it dismissed his plea.

"The observations of the presiding officer of the court cannot be the ground of bias. We have no reason to doubt that the officer would not be swayed by the fact that the petitioner was found guilty in the earlier case... And will confine his conclusions on the basis of evidence led in the pending trial," the bench observed.

Senior advocates Siddharth Luthra and Siddarth Dave, representing Revanna, said that the judge made some adverse comments against the lawyers too, which

requires expunction.

Justice Bagchi said that lawyers cannot hold judicial officers to ransom and make any allegations against them.

"Mr Dave, these remarks were inspired by the high court order itself on the same lines. You cannot hold the judicial officers to ransom. This lawyer appears in collateral cases and withdraws the vakalatnama time and again," Justice Bagchi said.

CJ Kant said that Revanna's counsel can furnish an apology before the high court as it is the most unethical thing to allege bias just because some observations were made by the presiding



officer. "This is absolutely the most unethical thing done. Let him furnish an apology before the high court and it will consider it.

"We don't want to send a message that I went to the Supreme Court and got this done. We have to take care of the morale of our district judiciary as well," CJ Kant said, while declining to interfere with the high court order.

He told the senior counsels that there are hypothetical situations in the court and the judge's observation should not lead to allegations against him.

"There are hypothetical situations in court. We make observations. But I am not someone who will take browbeating of judges or courts lightly... As soon as the judge makes an observation there are allegations made against him," the CJ said.

The bench, however, said judges and courts also make mistakes but they are being rectified.

"Sometimes, errors happen as we deal with such a large volume of cases and evidence," the CJ said.



does not have a domestic import... It is their livelihood which drives them. We have a brain drain which is also migration."

Justice Bagchi, who belongs to West Bengal, cited the example of IT professionals from his own city Kolkata taking flights to the southern States for opportunities.

The CJ added a stark reality check regarding labour migration and said, "In North India, trains are full of farm workers from Bihar... They are virtually auctioned and by the

SC rejects Sanjiv Bhatt's plea seeking suspension of sentence in drug case

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

The Supreme Court on Thursday rejected a plea filed by former IPS officer Sanjiv Bhatt seeking seeking suspension of the 20-year jail sentence imposed on him in a 1996 drug seizure case. A bench of Justices JK Maheshwari and Vijay Bishnoi said it was not inclined to entertain the matter.

The top court was hearing an appeal filed by Bhatt seeking suspension of sentence in the case.

A sessions court in Palanpur town of Gujarat's Banaskantha district had sentenced Bhatt to 20 years in the case dating back to 1996.

Bhatt was found guilty of falsely implicating a Rajasthan-based lawyer by claiming that in 1996, police had seized drugs from a hotel room in Palanpur where the lawyer was staying.

Bhatt, who was sacked from service in 2015, was a superintendent of police in Banaskantha district in 1996.

The district police under him had arrested Sumersingh Rajpurohit, a Rajasthan-based lawyer, in 1996 claiming they had seized drugs from a hotel room in Palanpur town where he was staying.

However, the Rajasthan police later said Rajpurohit was falsely implicated by the Banaskantha police to compel him to transfer a disputed property located at Pali in Rajasthan.

Former police inspector IB Vyas had

signal a conclusion. The senior lawyer questioned the rationale behind selecting nine states and three Union Territories, including Chhattisgarh, Kerala, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh, for this exercise.

He termed the assumption that rapid urbanisation and frequent migration are regular features in places like Lakshadweep or the Andaman and Nicobar Islands as "facile" and a "lazy assumption" indicating non-application of the mind.

He specifically flagged the timing in Chhattisgarh, where elections are not due, arguing that rushing through the SIR process in such a "vulnerable state" under a tight time-frame called for judicial review. At the outset of the hearing, CJ Kant directed the registry not to accept any further fresh pleas regarding the matter.

"Many are coming now just for publicity. No fresh matters are required any more," the CJ said.

The matter will continue on December 16.

Earlier, the bench asked whether the Election Commission is barred from conducting an inquiry in case of a doubtful citizen and if an inquisitorial process falls outside its constitutional power.

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Former police inspector IB Vyas had



moved the Gujarat High Court in 1999 demanding a thorough inquiry into the case. Bhatt was arrested by the state CID in September 2018 in the drug case under the NDPS Act and is in Palanpur sub-jail since then.

Last year, the former IPS officer had approached the Supreme Court seeking transfer of the trial in the 28-year-old drug case to another sessions court alleging bias. He had also sought directions for recording of the trial court proceedings.

However, the Supreme Court had dismissed Bhatt's plea and imposed a cost of ₹3 lakh on him for alleging bias against a lower court judge conducting his trial in the drug planting case.

Doctors who died on duty during COVID-19 entitled to PMGKY cover



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

The Supreme Court held on Thursday that the families of the doctors who died while doing their duties during the COVID-19 pandemic are entitled to an insurance coverage of ₹50 lakh under the "Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Yojana". A bench of Justices PS Narasimha and R Mahadevan set aside a Bombay High Court judgment that had held that private doctors were not entitled to the coverage under the Government's insurance scheme.

"There is a requisition of the services of doctors and this is evident from the conjoint reading of the provisions of the Act, the Maharashtra Prevention and Containment of COVID-19 Regulations 2020, the Navi Mumbai Municipal Corporation Order dated March 31, 2020, the PMGKY-Package Scheme, the explanatory communication to the PMGKY policy and the FAQs released," the bench said.

It said the invocation of laws and regulations was intended to leave no stone unturned in requisitioning the doctors and the insurance scheme was equally intended to assure

doctors and health professionals in the frontline that the country is with them.

The court said individual claims for insurance made under the PMGKY-Package will be considered and decided in accordance with the law and on the basis of evidence.

"The onus to prove that a deceased lost his life while performing a COVID-19-related duty is on the claimant and the same needs to be established on the basis of credible evidence," it added.

The top court was hearing a plea moved by Pradeep Arora and others against a March 9, 2021, order of the Bombay High Court that held that private hospital staffers were not entitled to receive benefits under the insurance scheme unless their services were requisitioned by the state or the central Government. A plea was filed in the high court by Kiran Bhaskar Surgade, who lost her husband – who ran a private clinic in Maharashtra's Thane – to COVID-19 in 2020. The insurance company rejected her claim under the Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Package (PMGKY) on the ground that her husband's clinic was not recognised as a COVID-19 hospital.



Editor's
TAKE

Should India ban social media for kids?

Tech addiction demands layered responses — digital literacy, parental involvement, psychological support, and educational redesign

Once it was alcohol, then it was drugs; now addiction has a new name-social media. Its addicts are everywhere-across age groups, classes, and cities. It is an epidemic that spread before anyone even realised it. India, like other nations, is hooked 24x7 to social media, and this is more prominent amongst young children who are now exposed to all the good and bad the digital world has to offer. In this scenario, Australia's decision to ban social media access for children under 16 has reignited a global debate on how societies should confront the escalating crisis of tech addiction and its psychological repercussions.

The Australian government's move is undeniably sweeping and disruptive in its implications, even though its intent is clear: to protect young users from the toxic digital environment and online harm that has come to be accepted as digital normal. The factors that pushed Australia to ban social media for children may be just as relevant for India. While there is little disagreement on the need to limit children's access to social media, enforcing a blanket ban could be excessively harsh and may be counterproductive. That said, the case for intervention is undeniably strong and is the need of the hour. Psychologists worldwide have been sounding the alarm for years. Clinics now report children as young as eight showing symptoms of mental illness: hyperactivity, violent behaviour, throwing tantrums when devices are taken away, and an inability to disengage from screens.

Regular access to social media is changing cognitive and emotional development amongst children in a big way. Declining attention spans, inability to form coherent sentences, and eroded real-world communication skills are becoming disturbingly common. The picture becomes even murkier when you include incidents like the Blue Whale challenge or misogynistic school group chats-proof of how an immature mind can be drawn into, or even trigger, serious harm. Australia's ban may not be a panacea, as even the strictest age ban can be circumvented, and children adept at navigating technology may find proxy routes sooner rather than later. Indeed, no law can compensate for what is lacking at home, in classrooms, or in broader digital culture, but government intervention paves the way for incremental reforms in schools, colleges, and even at home.

India's challenge is more complex: its vast population, socio-economic diversity, and uneven digital literacy make a ban impractical and insufficient, though action is essential. Some progress is emerging through bottom-up efforts, with over 5,000 parents joining support groups to build healthier digital habits, reinforcing families as the first line of defence. Tech addiction needs layered solutions-digital literacy, parental involvement, psychological support, and educational redesign-because while a ban may raise awareness, it cannot replace the long-term task of building resilience and autonomy in young users. India must craft its own path.

The SC's push for CCTV accountability

Triggered by alarming reports of custodial deaths and the routine absence of surveillance footage, the Court's intervention underscores a stark reality: despite years of judicial directives, transparency inside police stations remains largely a myth



HASAN
KHURSHID

The Supreme Court of India's recent intervention into the disturbing pattern of custodial deaths has revived a long-standing and uncomfortable debate: Why does custodial violence persist despite decades of judicial directions, committees, and constitutional safeguards? On September 4, 2025, a Bench comprising Justices Vikram Nath and Sandeep Mehta registered a suo motu Public Interest Litigation (PIL) after taking cognisance of a *Dainik Bhaskar* report revealing that 11 people had died in police custody in Rajasthan in just the first eight months of 2025. The trigger was not only the shocking number but also the wider pattern of deliberate non-compliance with directives mandating CCTV surveillance in police stations across India. For years, courts have emphasised that CCTV cameras are not optional but essential tools for ensuring transparency, curbing torture, and upholding constitutional rights. Yet, police stations across states continue to function without operational cameras, or worse, with cameras that are conveniently "faulty" or whose footage is "unavailable." According to media reports, police routinely withhold CCTV footage in custodial death cases, citing technical glitches, storage issues, ongoing investigations, or legal barriers. These excuses have created fertile ground for impunity, where the monitor of oversight-the CCTV camera-is neutralised precisely when accountability is most needed.

This is not the first time the Supreme Court has intervened. Earlier rulings — DK Basu, Paramvir Singh Saini, and Shafhi Mohammad-laid down clear and mandatory directions for installing functional video and audio surveillance in police stations. In 2020, the Court issued detailed guidelines requiring uniform installation across all states and Union Territories. It even made Station House Officers personally responsible for maintaining CCTV systems, preserving recordings, and ensuring timely repairs. Yet, five years later, the Court has been forced to confront the same systemic neglect. During the hearing on November 25, 2025, the Supreme Court minced no words: "Custodial violence and deaths are a blot on the system. This country will not tolerate this practice. You cannot have deaths in custody." The Court demanded compliance affidavits from all states and Union Territories, posting the matter for further hearing on December 16, 2025. Its concern stems from the constitutional premise that surveillance in police stations is a fundamental safeguard-an obligation, not a discretionary administrative decision. High Courts have echoed similar concerns.

In *Akhilesh Pandey v. State of Madhya Pradesh* (2018), the Madhya Pradesh High Court warned



THE REAL TEST
NOW IS WHETHER
STATES WILL
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WHETHER
CUSTODIAL
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STATISTICS

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that failure to provide full CCTV coverage in any police station would be treated as contempt of court. This, however, has done little to change the ground reality. The disconnect between judicial directives and executive action has allowed custodial violence to fester. India's struggle with custodial brutality is not new. In 1997, the Supreme Court in *D.K. Basu* recognised custodial torture as an assault on the rule of law.

In later cases-Shafhi Mohammad (2018) and Paramvir Singh Saini (2021)-the Court expanded guidelines, with Justice Rohinton Nariman stressing that installing CCTV cameras was a constitutional necessity rooted in Articles 21 and 22. Yet, the implementation remains half-hearted, largely because custodial violence thrives in opacity, and the state machinery shows little urgency to disrupt this culture. The judiciary's frustration draws from a long history of ignored reform efforts. From the National Police Commission reports (1977-81) to the Ribeiro and Padmanabhiiah Committees, from the Malimath Committee to the landmark Prakash Singh judgment of 2006, India has been inundated with recommendations for transforming the police from a "force" to a "service."

Despite this, real change has remained elusive. Justice AN Mulla's searing 1961 remark that no group in India matches the police force's record of lawlessness-though later expunged-continues to resonate with uncomfortable accuracy. Recent events have only reinforced these concerns. During the COVID-19 lockdowns, countless videos surfaced showing policemen mercilessly beating civilians, includ-

ing pregnant women and elderly citizens. Such images laid bare the deep-seated culture of unrestrained power. One of the most horrifying examples remains the 2020 Sathankulam case in Tamil Nadu, where the CBI charge sheet revealed the savage torture of 59-year-old P. Jeyaraj and his 31-year-old son, J. Bennicks. Over seven hours, police personnel stripped, beat, and humiliated the father-son duo, forcing them to clean their own blood from the floor. Despite Jeyaraj's pleas, citing diabetes and high blood pressure, the brutality continued until both men succumbed to their injuries. Their clothes were drenched in blood to such an extent that police officers had to change their uniforms twice before presenting them in court. The investigation also exposed medical negligence-Dr Vinila, who examined them, failed to document their injuries or provide medical support that might have saved their lives. This case stands as a grim reminder that custodial torture is not an aberration but a structural crisis embedded in policing culture. CCTV cameras alone cannot eradicate it, but they can act as a crucial deterrent-if the system allows them to function. The Supreme Court's recent intervention is not merely a legal exercise; it is a moral reckoning. India cannot claim to be a constitutional democracy while allowing citizens to be brutalised behind closed doors. The real test now is whether states will finally act-or whether custodial deaths will continue to be treated as tragic but inevitable statistics. The nation's conscience demands more than compliance affidavits; it demands genuine accountability.

The Pioneer
SINCE 1865

Why educating girls is not enough: Bridge the skill gap



DEVENDRA
KUMAR

2ND OPINION
THE PIONEER

India has spent decades strengthening girls' access to education. Through scholarships, awareness drives, and community-level campaigns, the country has succeeded in bringing more girls into classrooms than ever before. Enrolment rates for girls have risen at primary, secondary, and even higher education levels. Yet a stubborn gap remains: while more young women finish school and college, far fewer make it into the workforce. This disconnect reveals a hard truth-education alone cannot guarantee employment. For Indian girls, skill development is the missing link between learning and livelihood.

Across the country, thousands of young women hold degrees but remain unemployed. This reflects a deeper

structural issue: literacy and academic qualifications, although essential, do not automatically translate into employability. Many graduates lack the practical, digital, and workplace skills demanded by contemporary industries. Compounding this are entrenched social norms and cultural expectations that often overshadow the benefits of education. For many girls, familial restrictions, gender stereotypes, and ideas about "appropriate" work limit their ability to turn education into financial independence.

These social barriers shape everything-from whether a woman is allowed to work to what kind of job she can accept. Families frequently avoid roles that involve travel, physical tasks, or late hours, forcing even educated women into narrow, low-growth career paths. Confidence-building and communication abilities-skills critical in today's work culture-are rarely nurtured in traditional classrooms, making skill development programmes essential.

The reality becomes even harsher in India's vast informal sector, where more than 90 percent of working women remain concentrated. Most are unskilled and engaged in low-paid, insecure jobs-domestic work, agriculture, tailoring, construction, home-based production, or micro-enterprises. In rural areas especially, women face severe skill deprivation and remain trapped in unsta-

ble jobs with little chance of mobility. Skill development can change this trajectory. Training in digital literacy helps women shift from low-productivity work to stable, better-paying opportunities. Today's industries-whether health-care, manufacturing, hospitality, technology, or retail-demand a blend of theoretical knowledge and practical ability, and skill training provides this bridge.

When women acquire skills, the impact extends far beyond employment. Skilled women strengthen economic productivity, innovation, and inclusive growth. Within families, a working daughter or mother enhances financial security and decision-making power. Moreover, skilled workers are better positioned to negotiate fair wages, resist exploitation, and move into formal employment.

The next step for India must be to integrate skill development into every stage of education. Rural training centres must be expanded, especially for girls with restricted mobility. Partnerships with industry can ensure training aligns with real job market needs. Crucially, communities and families must be sensitised to value skill training as essential-not secondary-to education. For India's girls, skill is the pathway to independence, confidence, and security.

The writer is the founder of the Ladli Foundation

DIGITAL EXPERIENCE



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AUSTRALIA'S SOCIAL MEDIA BAN SPARKS CALL FOR VIGILANCE

The Prime Minister of Australia has openly appealed to young people to refrain from using social media, and teenagers are now prohibited from accessing these platforms. Yet, there remains a possibility that some adolescents may still bypass restrictions by manipulating age settings or posing as older users with fake identities.

The risks facing teenagers online are well documented, and in countries like India the lack of transparency and effective oversight only heightens these concerns. With parents increasingly occupied by demanding professional lives, attentive supervision has reduced significantly. Many single children grow up without the stabilising presence of grandparents, and even when grandparents are present, their guidance is often overlooked in an over-indulgent

culture. Consequently, teenagers turn to unsolicited advice from social media posts, videos, or equally uninformed peers, creating a cycle of immature and sometimes harmful influence.

Decades ago, society provided an additional layer of support through close relatives and elderly neighbours, whose guidance parents accepted with respect. Over time, however, such involvement has come to be seen as interference, leading to the loss of a valuable safeguard.

Parents in Australia have welcomed the government's decision. A similar measure is urgently needed in India, where constant guidance for teenagers should be seen not as dictatorship but as essential support that protects their curiosity from harmful and inappropriate content.

SUNIL OKHADE | INDORE

Please send your letter to the info@dailypioneer.com. In not more than 250 words. We appreciate your feedback.

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Urban India needs coordinated reform

One of the most pressing issues in India today is the widening disconnect between rapid urban expansion and the slow pace of essential infrastructure development.

Cities continue to grow outward at extraordinary speed, yet public transport, waste management systems, and affordable housing consistently fail to keep pace, leaving both residents and municipal authorities under severe strain. The challenge is not purely financial; it also lies in weak institutional coordination, outdated planning frameworks, and a persistent tendency to prioritise high-visibility projects over everyday necessities. Consequently, even well-designed reforms often lose momentum and struggle to deliver meaningful improvements.

A more realistic solution begins with strengthening municipal governance. Cities must be granted the autonomy and technical expertise required to plan for the coming decade rather than the next election cycle. Transparent budgeting, reliable service delivery, and people-centred urban design should guide all development. If governments adopt such an approach, India's cities can evolve in a manner that is efficient, liveable, and environmentally sustainable.

Diwali's heritage glows anewx

India's Diwali, newly inscribed on UNESCO's Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity, arrives as a moment of cultural pride and personal joy. This recognition feels profoundly affirming. Diwali has never been merely a spectacle; it embodies India's civilisational spirit, carried in the quiet radiance of a single diya and the belief that renewal is always within reach.

Across centuries, the festival has gathered many layers of meaning: Rama's triumphant return to Ayodhya, Mahavira's nirvana, Guru Hargobind's liberation, and the mercantile traditions that once illuminated ancient trade routes.

Yet Diwali's deepest strength lies in its ability to anchor ordinary lives, reminding families and communities that clarity, compassion, and moral courage endure even amid turmoil.

UNESCO's recognition honours not only Diwali's history but also the people who have safeguarded it-artisans shaping earthen lamps, storytellers preserving memory, and generations who kept the flame alive in difficult times. In an increasingly anxious world, may this acknowledgement serve as a gentle reminder that harmony is a practice renewed each year.

Reimagining a song for India


Reimagining *Vande Mataram* requires sensitivity to history, culture, and contemporary identity. Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay's iconic song portrayed the motherland as nurturing, protective, and divine, and the phrase "I bow to thee, Mother" captured the emotional and spiritual bond felt during the freedom struggle. In an independent and secular India, however, there is space to consider a modern interpretation that reflects today's pluralistic values.

Vande Bharatam — meaning "I bow to thee, India" — is more direct and less symbolic, potentially making the song more inclusive for those uncomfortable with religious imagery. The name Bharat resonates across languages and regions, offering a shared identity that avoids specific cultural or devotional associations. Such universality may encourage collective participation without hesitation. Culturally, this shift signals modernisation. While the maternal depiction remains integral to the independence movement's memory, adapting the song acknowledges India's multi-faith, diverse society. Yet any alteration must be approached with care, as *Vande Mataram* is inseparable from the freedom struggle and continues to evoke the sacrifices of earlier generations.

India redraws its strategic lines with Putin’s Delhi visit

When Prime Minister Narendra Modi greeted Vladimir Putin with a bear hug and handed him a Russian translation of the Bhagavad Gita, it was more than ceremonial warmth — it was a calculated message. The gesture signalled that India will chart its own course regardless of Western discomfort

FIRST
Column



NILANTHA
ILANGAMUWA

That was no ordinary greeting; on the frosty evening of last Thursday, Indian Prime Minister Modi embraced Russian President Vladimir Putin in a bear hug at Delhi airport and, within moments, presented him with a copy of the Bhagavad Gita in Russian. The choice of gift was laden with symbolism-echoes of Robert Oppenheimer, who drew profound philosophical reckoning from the same text, declaring, “Now I am become Death, the destroyer of worlds,” after witnessing the first atomic explosion. Was Modi signalling the weight of nuclear-age responsibility to Putin, or was this a deliberate affirmation of India’s comfort in maintaining ties with a pariah state under global sanctions?

The streets of Delhi, festooned with Russian and Indian flags and dominated by colossal billboards of Modi and Putin, suggested more than ceremonial protocol-it was pageantry of influence, an audacious statement of India’s strategic independence. In that gesture, New Delhi appeared to assert that moral judgement from the West would no longer dictate its choices, and that the Indo-Russian relationship, forged during the Cold War and hardened by decades of defence dependence, remains a pivot capable of unsettling the established order in South Asia and beyond.

Putin’s first visit to India in four years, coinciding with talks in Washington over a possible Ukraine peace framework, came at a time when New Delhi is walking an increasingly delicate tightrope between Moscow and Washington. The optics of the visit-from ceremonial receptions at Rashtrapati Bhavan to summit talks at Hyderabad House-reflected not merely diplomacy but an overt projection of influence. Modi’s presentation of the Bhagavad Gita in Russian was emblematic: a centuries-old text of dharma and duty, layered with the moral weight of choice, now inserted into the theatre of high-stakes realpolitik.

Putin himself, in an interview with India Today, described India as a “major global player, not a British colony,” praising Modi as a “reliable person” who does not succumb to pressure. These words, spoken against the



PUTIN’S FIRST VISIT TO INDIA IN FOUR YEARS, COINCIDING WITH TALKS IN WASHINGTON OVER A POSSIBLE UKRAINE PEACE FRAMEWORK, CAME AT A TIME WHEN NEW DELHI WAS WALKING AN INCREASINGLY DELICATE TIGHTROPE BETWEEN MOSCOW AND WASHINGTON

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backdrop of US sanctions, EU manoeuvres to leverage frozen Russian assets for Ukraine, and growing Chinese assertiveness, highlight India’s determination to claim agency in a multipolar world where Washington and Brussels no longer set the rules unilaterally.

Historically, the Indo-Russian relationship has oscillated between strategic necessity and opportunism. Declassified CIA documents from the 1980s reveal the delicate dance India played with the USSR during the Cold War. Indira Gandhi’s approach, as the CIA observed, was staunchly nationalist and fiercely protective of India’s regional supremacy. The United States feared that India’s policies towards its neighbours, coupled with its Soviet alignment, could destabilise South Asia while simultaneously granting Moscow a strategic foothold. Today, the echoes of that era reverberate: New Delhi remains Moscow’s top arms buyer, leases nuclear-powered submarines, and maintains energy ties that have drawn ire from Washington, while ensuring that its engagement with Russia does not fully alienate the United States or Western partners.

What is important to note here are the economic metrics. India-Russia trade in FY

2024-25 amounted to approximately USD 68.7 billion, heavily skewed in Moscow’s favour due to energy imports, with a trade deficit of around USD 59 billion. Both Russia and India aim to expand bilateral trade to a target of USD 100 billion by 2030, a goal that falls just two years after the next general elections, when Prime Minister Modi is widely expected to contest again despite the symbolic 75-year age limit for party leadership-a restriction largely treated as political theatre and quickly forgotten. Meanwhile, India continues to negotiate with the United States to mitigate punitive tariffs, including a 25 per cent secondary tariff imposed on

India’s purchases of Russian oil. It is also worth noting that India recorded a goods trade surplus of about USD 41.18 billion with the US in FY 2024-25, with exports of USD 86.51 billion and imports of USD 45.33 billion, reflecting strong bilateral trade despite earlier concerns over tariffs. Remittances provide a partial counterweight: total remittances to India reached roughly USD 135.46 billion, including USD 25-30 billion from the US, while Russian remittances are negligible in comparison. This indicates that while India faces challenges in trade metrics, its diaspora injects substantial

financial resilience into the economy.

The summit also highlighted defence collaboration in stark terms. India’s USD 2 billion lease of a Russian nuclear-powered attack submarine, with delivery scheduled for 2028, signals an unprecedented deepening of underwater capabilities.

The vessel, unable to enter combat under lease terms, is intended to train crews and refine India’s nuclear submarine operations — a critical step for strategic deterrence in the Indian Ocean amid rising Chinese and US naval competition. Russia, despite sanctions and Western pressure, continues to sustain a military-industrial complex capable of producing tanks, missiles, and drones at accelerating rates. As reports from Ukraine’s Centre for Analytical Studies and Countering Hybrid Threats indicate, nearly half of Russian defence enterprises remain unsanctioned, exposing the limitations of Western punitive measures. In this context, India’s engagement with Russian defence capabilities is both a practical necessity and a symbolic assertion that strategic imperatives can outweigh Western orthodoxy.

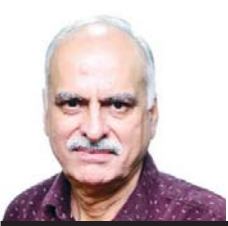
Sanctions, however, remain a persistent backdrop. The European Union, under Ursula von der Leyen, has attempted to

deploy emergency measures to convert frozen Russian assets into loans for Ukraine, challenging EU treaties and raising the prospect of legal confrontations with countries such as Hungary and Belgium. The United States, meanwhile, has explored using the same assets in US-led investment frameworks to facilitate reconstruction or political leverage. India, observing these efforts, has maintained a stance of strategic neutrality-resisting calls to condemn Russia while advocating for diplomacy, and emphasising that selective sanctioning by Western powers is inconsistent and self-serving. Putin, speaking to India Today, noted that Washington and Moscow presented papers in parallel but reached no compromises, and highlighted that over 90 per cent of Russia-India transactions are conducted in national currencies-a subtle yet potent challenge to dollar dominance.

The optics extend into nuclear and high-tech collaboration. India is developing nuclear-capable submarine-launched ballistic missiles, advancing its underwater fleet, and exploring high-tech partnerships with Russia, recalibrating the strategic environment in South Asia. Putin’s rhetoric that “Kiev is the mother of all Russian cities” and his framing of Russia’s role in eastern Ukraine resonate with historical narratives of great power assertion, yet they also serve as a conscious projection of strength aimed at partners like India. Modi’s reception was far from ceremonial; it underlined a shared understanding that global power is increasingly multipolar and that alliances must be flexible, resilient, and insulated from Western censure.

Even in the economic sphere, India challenges conventional assumptions. While the trade deficit with Russia persists due to energy imports, India’s broader engagement with global markets-including remittances from its diaspora and ongoing negotiations with the US-allows New Delhi to balance sovereignty with strategic interest. Putin’s discussions emphasising bilateral trade growth, high-technology collaboration, and future energy projects further solidify this interdependence. The bottom line is clear: the India-Russia partnership, far from being a relic of Cold War calculations, has evolved into a sophisticated framework for navigating sanctions, economic competition, and regional security challenges, and it may yet redefine the balance of power in South Asia.

Is Delhi crafting a new role for Ghulam Nabi Azad in Jammu and Kashmir?



ANIL
ANAND

A rather mysterious post appeared on the social-media platforms recently focused on former Congress veteran and head of the now defunct Democratic Progressive Azad Party (DPAP) Mr Ghulam Nabi Azad. It neither quoted anyone nor was attributed to any source but suggested that Prime Minister Mr Narendra Modi is mulling over assigning a key role to Mr Azad, most probably in the demoted and dissected Union Territory (UT) of Jammu and Kashmir.

“Prime Minister Narendra Modi has dropped a significant hint about a major role for veteran leader Mr Ghulam Nabi Azad. Sources indicate that Azad may be assigned an important position in Jammu & Kashmir, signalling a possible political shift in the Union Territory,” read the social media posts.

What makes it more interesting is that neither the Prime Minister’s Office-BJP nor Mr Azad have either confirmed or rejected these posts. It will be interesting to know how and from where these posts originated.

What role? Will a leader of national stature such as him be appointed as the Lt Governor of Jammu and Kashmir? An erstwhile state of which he was not only the chief minister but also lorded over and influenced governmental and political decisions from New Delhi.

Or, if the post has any credibility, is he being considered to helm yet another political experiment cooking in the annals of Delhi’s power corridors? Hinting at a possible chief ministerial role for him in the BJP-included future government in the UT? Or was it a mere kite-flying exercise as the post evoked no further response, particularly from the ruling dispensation-BJP and the Narendra Modi government?

What makes the post related to Mr Azad’s future curious was that it almost coincided with yet another exodus from the DPAP and leading towards the Congress-the party which he served for decades and, in turn, took the boy from the remote area of erstwhile Doda district to towering national heights. It is another matter that after his unceremonious exit from Congress he refuses to give any credit to the party for his stature as a towering national leader. And quite unconvincingly!

With his closest aides and former Minister Mr GM Saroori, credited with having backed Mr Azad to walk out of Congress and float a new

political outfit, having already joined the Congress, the new setback for him came when his two more trusted aides Mr Jugal Sharma and Mr Abdul Majid Wani, both former ministers, announced their plans to rejoin Congress. Suddenly, the mysterious posts appeared on social media about the possibility of a fresh J&K-centric assignment for Mr Azad.

Not that these developments, of Azad aides’ “ghar wapsi”, had happened suddenly. More than half-a-dozen DPAP leaders, including them, had made efforts to join Congress before the assembly elections but their attempts were foiled by a group of leaders dominating the J&K Congress and thwarting all efforts at its revival or growth. Most of these DPAP leaders later contested elections as independents to avoid any linkage with Mr Azad, whom people perceived to be soft towards the BJP, and lost narrowly.

Adding a few more seats-as these leaders would have won as Congress nominees-to the Congress Kitty would have made the party a formidable partner in the ruling alliance. It would also have broken the hegemony of a set of people controlling Congress in the UT. No probe was ever held and no heads rolled even one year after the assembly elections.

The discontent in the DPAP had started simmering a few months after the party came into being. Most of these leaders, dyed-in-the-wool secular Congressmen, had pinned their hopes on Mr Azad to provide a secular option to Congress in Jammu and Kashmir as the party had not only lost its moorings but had failed to meet the Narendra Modi-anchored BJP’s challenge. Ostensibly, they were dismayed at Mr Azad not taking a clear political stance in the politically charged Muslim-majority UT with a considerable presence of Hindus, thereby giving an impression of soft-peddling towards the saffron party.

Ever since the dilution of Article 370 on August 5, 2019, and the corresponding Constitutional changes resulting in the UTs of J&K and Ladakh, BJP’s moves at installing its government have failed. Although the Centre is adamant in ignoring the demand for restoration of statehood in J&K, and a similar demand has gained foothold in Ladakh along with bringing the tribal-dominated UT under the 6th Schedule of the Constitution of India, and their reiteration that it will be done at an appropriate time, the political winds have started blowing in different directions.

A big self-inflicted setback for the Centre and the RSS-BJP combine was the Modi government’s decision to restore the over-a-century-old tradition of ‘Durbar move’ that entails shifting the capital to Jammu and Kashmir in winters and summers respectively. This was

done, despite their earlier jubilation on discontinuing the process, under pressure particularly from people in BJP’s stronghold of Jammu which has been under economic stress due to wrong and anti-Jammu policies of the Centre and the UT governments.

Durbar move entailed Kashmiris moving to Jammu in winters. This was a major source of contribution to Jammu’s economy which has been in dire straits after the opening of the Jammu-Srinagar railway link via the holy town of Katra (Vaishno Devi) and later stoppage of Durbar move. In the absence of any alternate and viable plan to sustain Jammu’s economy, despite the region having voted for BJP in the last eight elections-from Lok Sabha down to Panchayat via UT Assembly-and religion-related and communal issues showing signs of weakening as a counter to divert people’s feelings connected with their economic survival, the Central dispensation could be toying with an idea of yet another Azad-centric political move after the failure of his DPAP experiment.

Given the none-too-pleasant political scenario in Jammu and Kashmir and with the DPAP fiasco behind his back, the question arises: Will Mr Azad bite the bullet in the twilight of his political career?

To be fair to Mr Azad, all through his political association with Congress-during which he was always, within the government and the Congress, at the decision-making levels-he had safely avoided getting involved in murky political experimentation as part of the statecraft. He definitely had his hands soiled in the Congress’s internal power dynamics which led to many stalwarts quitting or retiring from the scene, and no one even from the younger lot who held any promise was allowed to come up. The ruptures in the Congress’s organisational set-up were clearly visible once Mr Azad quit the party, with none other of any consequential stature available to take charge.

How could he be relevant in Jammu and Kashmir’s political scenario under these circumstances, despite the fact that he still has some credibility left?

In any new experiment, even if he accepts Mr Modi’s offer-which could range from becoming Lt Governor, simultaneously of the two UTs, or functioning in an interlocutory capacity focused on the problems of J&K and Ladakh, and not a direct political role-he would only be seen as a representative of the Modi government, with BJP being the political arm of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh.

The writer is a political and national affairs analyst

dailypioneer

@dhounti

The Pioneer



NASIR
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India’s sporting rise is no longer measured only in medals or Olympic success; it is unfolding quietly in school grounds, small towns, and remote districts where a new era of sports infrastructure is taking shape. For the first time in decades, government ambition for a fitter and more inclusive nation is aligning seamlessly with private sector innovation. Together, they are creating an ecosystem defined by accessibility, sustainability, and world-class standards, marking a transformative chapter in India’s sporting journey. Government investment through programmes like Khelo India has played a central role in this shift. What started as a mission to identify talent and nurture young athletes has evolved into a nationwide movement to strengthen grassroots infrastructure. With more than a thousand Khelo India Centres sanctioned across the country, access to sporting facilities is no longer a privilege restricted to metropolitan areas.

The rapid development in remote regions underscores this change. When a multi-purpose indoor hall opens in Arunachal Pradesh’s Kamle district or when Himalayan states receive hundreds of crores for sports facilities, it reflects a deeper reorientation of development priorities. Sports infrastructure is now seen as integral to inclusive growth, not an optional extra. A child in Ladakh, Nagaland, or Meghalaya should have the same chance to train, play, and dream as a child in Delhi or Mumbai, and India is beginning to make that aspiration real. By taking modern facilities to remote, tribal, and hilly regions, the country is not merely constructing fields and courts — it is building a future pipeline of talent that previously remained invisible due to lack of access. But infrastructure alone cannot drive change. The private sector has stepped forward to bridge the gap between policy and execution. India’s sporting future must evolve without compromising the planet’s well-being. For example, Gallant’s partnership with Nike Grind, Nike’s global sustainability initiative, is a testament to this commitment. Providing world-class sports gear is of utmost importance for the country’s sporting excellence — rubber infill, delivering football turfs, multi-sport courts, and athletic tracks that meet global standards while remaining suited to India’s climate and usage patterns. These surfaces are durable, safe, weather-resis-

The Pioneer
SINCE 1865

tant, and engineered to ensure sustainability never comes at the cost of performance. India’s varied geography and climatic extremes make it essential to pair global technology with local delivery. Many companies, including Gallant, work on the model that integrates international expertise with strong on-ground execution, ensuring that facilities in rural districts rise to the same benchmarks as those in major cities. Today, world-class facilities are emerging in district schools, universities, sports academies, and community grounds, creating a more level field for talent across regions. This is also an era where public vision and private execution are reinforcing each other. Government funding through Khelo India and Special Area Games schemes is reaching even difficult terrains.

Private innovators are ensuring these facilities are built using sustainable materials that reduce long-term costs and environmental impact. CSR support from corporates is further enhancing the reach and quality of sports infrastructure across communities. Together, these collaborations are building a model that is scalable, eco-conscious, and socially impactful. The future demands more than just building more fields; it demands facilities that are greener, smarter, and longer-lasting. With rising environmental concerns, the sports sector too must move towards responsible innovation. Materials like Nike Grind contribute to a circular economy by reducing waste and repurposing discarded material into high-performance surfaces. Gallant Bounce installations reflect this mindset, prioritising accessibility, safety, and longevity. These facilities become inspirational spaces where

children discover confidence, athletes sharpen their skills, and communities gather with pride. India’s next sporting leap will likely emerge from its remotest corners. A new turf in a tribal school or a synthetic track in a hilly region reinforces that talent is not determined by geography. As India prepares for global competitions and future Olympics, the foundations being laid today will determine the champions of tomorrow. The road ahead is filled with promise. India’s sporting aspirations now reflect a larger cultural commitment to fitness, resilience, and collective growth.

With government vision and industry innovation working in tandem, the nation is steadily moving towards a future where world-class, sustainable sports infrastructure becomes the norm. The fields being built today will shape not only athletes but the spirit of a confident and progressive India.

The writer is the founder of Gallant Sports

dailypioneer

@dailypioneer

nasirali-gallant

A boat carrying migrants overturned early on Thursday on the Sava river in eastern Croatia, killing at least three people and injuring eight, officials said. The accident happened in the eastern town of Slavonski Brod, by the border with Bosnia.

ASSOCIATED PRESS
 Tokyo

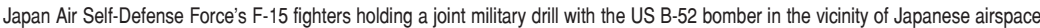
US strategic bombers joined a fleet of Japanese fighter jets in a joint military exercise meant to demonstrate their military cooperation around Japan's airspace, defence officials said Thursday, as tensions with China escalate.

The exercise showcasing joint Japanese-US air power came a day after Chinese and Russian bombers flew togeth-

er around western Japan, prompting Tokyo to scramble fighter jets, though there was no airspace violation. It also follows China's military aircraft locking radar on Japanese jets Saturday, another incident that has caused Tokyo-Beijing relations to further deteriorate.

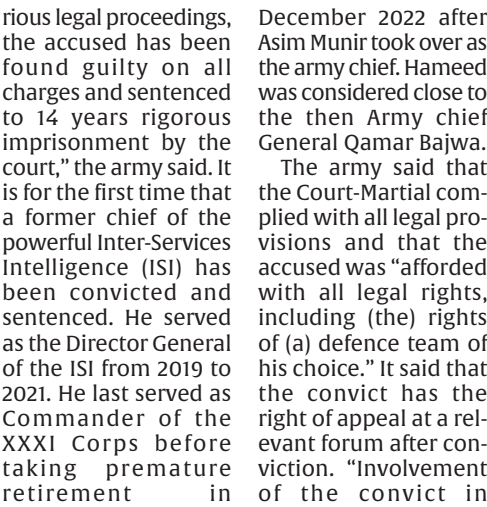
Japan's Air Self Defence-Force and the US military conducted the joint exercise Wednesday as "the security environment surrounding our country is becoming even

ever," the Japanese joint Staff said. It said the allies "reaffirmed the strong resolve to prevent unilateral attempts to change the status quo by force and the readiness between the SDF and the US forces." Two US B-52 strategic bombers and three Japanese F-35 stealth fighter jets and three F-15 jets conducted their joint flight drills near Japan's western airspace, above the waters between the country and South Korea, officials said. Exercises held as the security environment grows more tense. The joint Staff denied that the exercise was conducted in response to a specific incident, but acknowledged Chinese military aircraft's recent radar-locking on Japanese jets and the China-Russia joint bomber exercises Tuesday as examples of a worsening security environment around Japan. Relations between Japan and China have deteriorated after Japan's Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi said in early November that Japan's military could get involved if China were to take action against Taiwan, the self-governing island that Beijing claims as its own.



PT

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ Islamabad



omenting vested political agitation and instability in cohorts with political elements and in certain other matters is separately being dealt with," the army said. Hameed, a former lieutenant general, was arrested in connection with a petition filed by Top City housing society's chief executive officer in the Supreme Court last year, wherein he was accused of land grabbing and stealing valuables from the owner of a private housing society during a raid. However, the Supreme Court asked the Pakistan Army to investigate complaints against him in the Top City case. The army began the court-martial process against the former spy chief based on these complaints.

Speaking to *Geo News*, Information Minister Atta Tarar described the verdict as a “historic”, saying the

decision strengthens the rule of law and accountability mechanisms in Pakistan.

He said that red lines had been crossed and political interference had taken place. He said the former ISI chief had acted as a political adviser to PTI and provided Khan's party with "full political support." The information minister said that the decision would reinforce the rule of law and the country's accountability mechanisms.

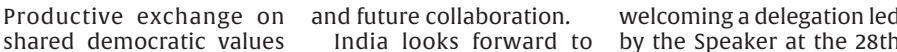
He added that the trial was fair, saying Hameed was given a full opportunity to defend himself, including the chance to present evidence and witnesses in his favour. Tarar said that investigations into Hameed's alleged involvement in political matters were still ongoing and would continue. Defence Minister Khawaja Asif was more cautious in his reaction. He said

the nation will face the consequences of decisions made under Gen (ret'd) Bajwa and the ex-spy-master.

"The country will keep reaping the harvest of seeds sown by Faiz Hameed and General [redt] Bajwa for years," he wrote or said. X. "May God forgive us. May those in power recognise that authority is a divine trust and use it for the welfare of His (God's) creation (people). May the fear of God guide the rulers!" Senator Faisala Vawda, considered to be close to the army, told Geo News that the conviction marks "just the beginning," adding that the May 9-related cases are expected to move forward next.

Wawda said that if a former senior army officer can be tried in the May 9 cases, "you can imagine the fate of the real perpetrators" involved in the violence.

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
 Toronto



Indian High Commissioner to Canada has met Canadian Speaker of the House of Commons and discussed advancing parliamentary ties between both the countries along with productive exchange on shared democratic values and future collaboration.

In January, India will be welcoming a delegation led by the Speaker Francis Scarpaleggia at the 28th Conference of Speakers and Presiding Officers of Parliaments of Commonwealth Countries (CSPCO). "High Commissioner @DineshKPatnaik met with the Speaker of the House of Commons @HoCSpeakerHonourable Francis Scarpaleggia @ScarpaleggiaSL today to discuss advancing India-Canada parliamentary ties.

Productive exchange on shared democratic values and future collaboration. India looks forward to

welcoming a delegation led
by the Speaker at the 28th

ASSOCIATED PRESS ■ Kathmandu

The ICIMOD has signed a deal to formally transfer the Himalayan University Consortium (HUC) to Kathmandu University, launching its next phase as an "independent and regionally rooted" consortium. The ICIMOD (International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development) signed a Memorandum of Understanding on Wednesday at a ceremony in its headquarters in Kathmandu. ICIMOD is a regional intergovernmental organisation that represents all eight Himalayan nations. "This MoU reflects our shared commitment to strengthening regional leadership and research for sustainable mountain development. Kathmandu University is exceptionally well placed to guide HUC into its next phase as an independent and regionally rooted consortium," remarked Pema Gyamtso, director general, ICIMOD.

केनरा बैंक

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E-AUCTION SALE NOTICE

Appendix-IV-A

(See provision to rule 8(6))

SALE NOTICE FOR SALE OF IMMOVABLE PROPERTIES

E-Auction Sale Notice for Sale of Immovable Assets under the Securitisation and Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002 read with provision to Rule 8 (6) of The Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules, 2002. Notice is hereby given to the public in general and in particular to the Borrower (s) and Guarantor (s) that the below described Immovable property mortgaged/charged to the Secured Creditor, the Symbolic / Physical possession of which has been taken by the Authorised Officer the Canara Bank (Secured Creditor) will be sold on "AS IS WHERE IS BASIS, AS IS WHAT IS BASIS" & WHAT EVER THERE IS" on 29.12.2025 for recovery of bank dues to the Canara Bank (Secured Creditor)

Name of Branch Name and address of the Borrower & Guarantors	Outstanding Amt. Auction Date	Description of Properties & Name of Property Owner	Reserve Price EMD Amt. Bid Increment Amt.
Branch : Canara Bank, Basari, Mob.: 80853-46667, Email: cb1915@canarabank.com			
Borrower - M/s Ashish Kumar Mishra, S/o Rajkishore Add- 216K, Nai Basti Ganj, Vill.- Ganj, Tehsil-Rajnagar, Dist Chhatarpur (M.P.)-471105 Guarantor: Babu Lal Kushwaha S/o Ghappu Kushwaha Add-Ward No 6 Kuitia Mohalla, Ganj Teh Rajnagar, Chhatarpur (M.P)	Rs. 20,30,64,79/- + Interest & other Charges Auction Date 29-12-2025 (SYMBOLIC)	Emt of Land and Building Situated at KH No. 487 Rakwa No 0.009 Hect Moja Ganj Ph. No 60 Ri Circle Basari (M.P) Tehsil Rajnagar Dist. Chhatarpur (M.P) Boundaries: North: Land of Seller, East: Land of Sh Bihari Ji Temple, South: Land of Sh Babu Lal Kushwaha, West: Proposed Road 15 Ft	Rs. 8,13,000/- Rs. 81,300/- Rs. 10,000/-
Branch : Canara Bank Bina Branch, Ph.: 80905-90026, E-mail : cb2383@canarabank.com			
Borrower- Ashok Kumar S/o Kashi Ram Add: R/o House No. 476, Ganesh Khalipha Marg, Ballabh Nagar Ward Sagar, Sagar, Sagar City, Madhya Pradesh - 470002 Co-Borrower-Smt. Beverane Add: R/o House No. 476, Ganesh Khalipha Marg, Ballabh Nagar Ward Sagar, Sagar, Sagar City, Madhya Pradesh - 470002	Rs. 13,03,139.05/- + Interest & other Charges Auction Date 29-12-2025 (SYMBOLIC)	Emt of Residential House Situated at Plot No. 93, Part of Khasra No. 466/1/4/2/9, Ph.No. 51, Gandhi Ward No. 19, Bina, Sagar, (M.P), Boundaries: East: Others Land, West: Road Colony 18' Wide, North: Plot No. 92, South: Plot No 94.	Rs. 9,41,000/- Rs. 81,300/- Rs. 10,000/-
Branch : Canara Bank, Niwari Ph.: 9716821430, Email: cb5921@canarabank.com			
Borrower -M/s Shri Radhe Construction Add: Ward No.9 Purani Sabji Mandi Niwari (M.P) Proprietor:- Mayank Khare S/o Om Prakash Khare Add: Village –Beejour, Niwari (M.P.)	Rs. 14,36,451.60/- + Interest & other Charges Auction Date 29-12-2025 (SYMBOLIC)	Emt of Land & Building Khasra No.2208/1/ ka New Number 2208/1/1/1 Area-30x40=1200 Sq Feet Situated At Village Niwari Ward No.06 Ahilyabai Ward Patwari Halka No.45 Dist Niwari (M.P) Boundaries: North: Plot of Man Singh, East: Land of Mr Hardayal, South: Aam Rasta, West: House of Ramesh Ahirwar	Rs. 13,50,000/- Rs. 1,35,000/- Rs. 10,000/-
Branch : Canara Bank, Khurai Ph.: 9039883050, Email: cb4257@canarabank.com			
Borrower - Ms Radhe Krishna Motors Prop. Mohit Parihar S/o Chandrbhan Singh Add: Between Old Hemant Takies, To Ambedkar Murti Tegore Road Khurai Sagar, Khurai (M.P.)-470117 Proprietor: Mohit Parihar S/o Chandrbhan Singh Add: Village Jerai Tehsil Khurai Dist Sagar -470115 Guarantor: Sh.Chandra Bhan Singh S/o Udaybahn Singh Add: 72, School Gali Villa Jerai Khurai Dist-Sagar (M.P)	Rs. 98,40,179.96/- + Interest & other Charges Auction Date 29-12-2025 (SYMBOLIC)	Emt of Property Situated At Village Jerai Phalka Ni 15 Khas No 677/1/2 Circle Narioli The Sagar Land Area-86080 Sq. Ft., Boundaries: North: Land of Raijpoot Ji, East: Road, South: Road, West : Land of Raijpoot Ji	Rs.1,05,30,000/- Rs. 1,62,500/- Rs. 10,000/-
Branch : Canara Bank Garhakota, Ph.: 88395-16623, E-mail : cb6230@canarabank.com			
Borrower - M/s Raikwar Enterprises Add: Plot No 37 12 Kanekera Garhakota, Distt. Sagar (M.P.)-470229 Proprietor - Sh. Aravind Raikwar S/o Sh. Dhaneeram Add: Ram Ward Garhakota Distt. Sagar (M.P.)-470229 Guarantor: Sh. Rajkumar Raikwar S/o Sh. Dhaneeram Add: 5, Ram Ward, Garhakota Distt. Sagar (M.P.)-470229	Rs. 12,17,808.51/- + Interest & other Charges Auction Date 29-12-2025 (SYMBOLIC)	Property Situated at Part of Khasra 37/1/2/2, Patwari Halka No. 32/37, Village - Kenkar, Tehsil- Garhakota, Distt. Sagar (M.P.), Boundaries: North: Sagar Damoh Road, East: Land of Owner, South: Land of Shree Dev Jagdeesh Swami Temple , West: Land of Leela Patel	Rs. 16,25,000/- Rs. 1,62,500/- Rs. 10,000/-
Branch : Canara Bank, Sagar-2, Ph.: 97135-16112, E-mail : cb17880@canarabank.com			
Borrower -Sh. Sachanand Panjwani S/o Somandas Panjwani Add: Opp Primary School, Sindhi Camp Subash Nagar, Sagar (M.P.)-470002 Guarantor -Smt. Anita Panjwani Add: Sindhi Camp Subash Nagar, Sagar (M.P.)-470002	Rs. 19,28,325.15/- + Interest & other Charges Auction Date 29-12-2025 (SYMBOLIC)	Emt of Land and Building Situated At House No-466/6, Behind Govt Primary School, Sindhi Colony, Sant Kunwar Ram Sagar, Sagar (M.P)- 470001, Area: 1250 Sqft. Boundaries: North: CC Road, East: House of Bhagwan Das, South: Lane, West: House of Vijay	Rs.19,35,000/- Rs. 1,93,500/- Rs. 10,000/-
Branch : Canara Bank, BINA, Ph. 80905-90026, E-mail : cb2383@canarabank.com			
Borrower: M/s Shiram Computer Prop. Sh. Anand Soni, S/o Ramsvarup Soni Add- Kachcha Road Old No. 3, School Bina, (M.P.)-470113 Proprietor - Sh. Anand Soni S/o Ramsvarup Soni Add: 351, Veer Savarkar Ward, Bina-470113 Guarantor & Mortgagor – Sh. Ramsvarup Soni S/o Babulal Soni Add: Veer Savarkar Ward, Bina-470113	Rs. 12,29,621.91/- + Interest & other Charges Auction Date 29-12-2025 (SYMBOLIC)	Emt of Land And Building Situated At Survey No. 419/2 (Old) After Mutation 419/11, Veer Savarkar Ward, Bina. Area 800 Sq Ft. Boundaries: North: Land of Seller, East: Road South: Land of Seller, West: Land of Seller	Rs. 12,15,000/- Rs. 1,21,500/- Rs. 10,000/-
Branch : Canara Bank Bina Branch, Ph.: 8090590026, E-mail : cb2383@canarabank.com			
Borrower- 1. Shyam Sundar Litoriya S/o Shri Ram Sahay Litoriya Add: Station Road Bina, Dist.- Sagar 2. Ram Sahay Litoriya S/o Shri Kundan Lal Litoriya Add: Daulatpur Gram Rampur, Teh Bina Distt Sagar (M.P) Mortgagor- Shyam Sundar Litoriya S/o Shri Ram Sahay Litoriya Add: Station Road Bina, Dist.- Sagar	Rs. 7,07,501.69/- + Interest & other Charges Auction Date 29-12-2025 (SYMBOLIC)	EMT of residential House having the extent of site 1295 square feet (covered area 800 sq feet), situated at PH. NO. 55, Partly of Khasra No. 71/2, village Dolatpur, Bina, Sagar. Boundaries: East: Plot of Ram Vishal Litoriya, West: Plot of Shivram Litoriya, North: Road Colony, South: Gali Colony.	Rs. 7,80,000/- Rs. 78,000/- Rs. 10,000/-

Date & Time of E-Auction: 29.12.2025, 01:00 PM to 02.00 PM (With Unlimited Extension of 5 Minutes Duration Each)

Other Terms and conditions : (1) The Property will be sold in "AS IS WHERE IS" condition including encumbrances, if any. (There are no encumbrances to the knowledge of the Bank. For details of encumbrances, contact the undersigned before deposit of the Earnest Money Deposit referred to in Clause 9(d) below). Auction/ bidding shall be only through " Online Electronic Bidding" through the website: <http://baancknet.in> Bidders are advised to go through the website for details terms before taking part in the e-auction sale proceedings. (2) The Property will be sold only for a price above the Reserve Price. (3) The property can be inspected with prior Appointment with Authorised Officer, on any working day between 3.00 PM to 5.00 PM before 28.12.2025. (4) The intending bidders should register their names at portal <http://baancknet.in> and get their User ID and password free of cost. (5) Prospective bidder may avail online training on E-auction from the service provider M/s PSB Alliance (baancknet), Mr. Dharmesh asher, Contact No. 98922-19848, E-mail: support.baancknet@psballiance.com and avp.projectmanager.2@psballiance.com though the website: <http://baancknet.in> EMD deposited by the unsuccessful bidder shall be refunded to them. The EMD shall not carry any interest. (6) Auction would commence at Reserve Price, as mentioned above. Bidders shall improve their offers in multiples of Rs. 10,000. The bidder who submits the highest bid (above the Reserve price) on closure of "Online" auction shall be declared as successful bidder. Sale shall be confirmed in favour of the successful bidder, subject to confirmation of the same by the secured creditor. (7) The Successful bidder shall deposit 25% of the sale price (inclusive of EMD already paid), immediately on declaring him/her as the successful bidder and the balance within 15 days from the date of confirmation of sale by the secured creditor, if the successful bidder fails to pay the sale price, the deposit made by him shall be forfeited by the Authorised Officer without any notice and property shall forthwith be put up for sale again. (8) For sale proceeds of Rs. 50 Lac (Rupees fifty Lac) and above, the successful bidder will have to deduct TDS at the rate 1% on the Sale proceeds and submit the original receipt of TDS certificate to the Bank. (9) All charges for conveyance, stamp Duty/ GST registration charges etc, as Applicable and any currt, revenue/dues by any local authority aad be burnt by the successful bidder only. (10) Authorised Officer reserves the right to postpone/cancel or vary the terms and conditions of the e-auction without assigning any reason thereof. (11) In case there are bidders who do have access to the Internet but interested in participating the e-auction, they can approach concerned Regional office or any branch who, as a facilitating centre, shall make necessary arrangements. (12) EMD Amount of 10% of the Reserve Price is to be deposited in E-Wallet after successful Registration of Ekbray Website by way of Net Banking/Debit Cards/Challan on or before 28.12.2025. After Successfully transferred the EMD Amount in E-Wallet, Bidder can participate in the in Eligible properties. For further details contact Recovery & Legal Section, Canara Bank Regional office, Gwalior Mob.: 9981898987

Place: Gwalior

Date : 11/12/2025

AUTHORISED OFFICER CANARA BANK

Airstrike on hospital leaves 34 dead in Myanmar

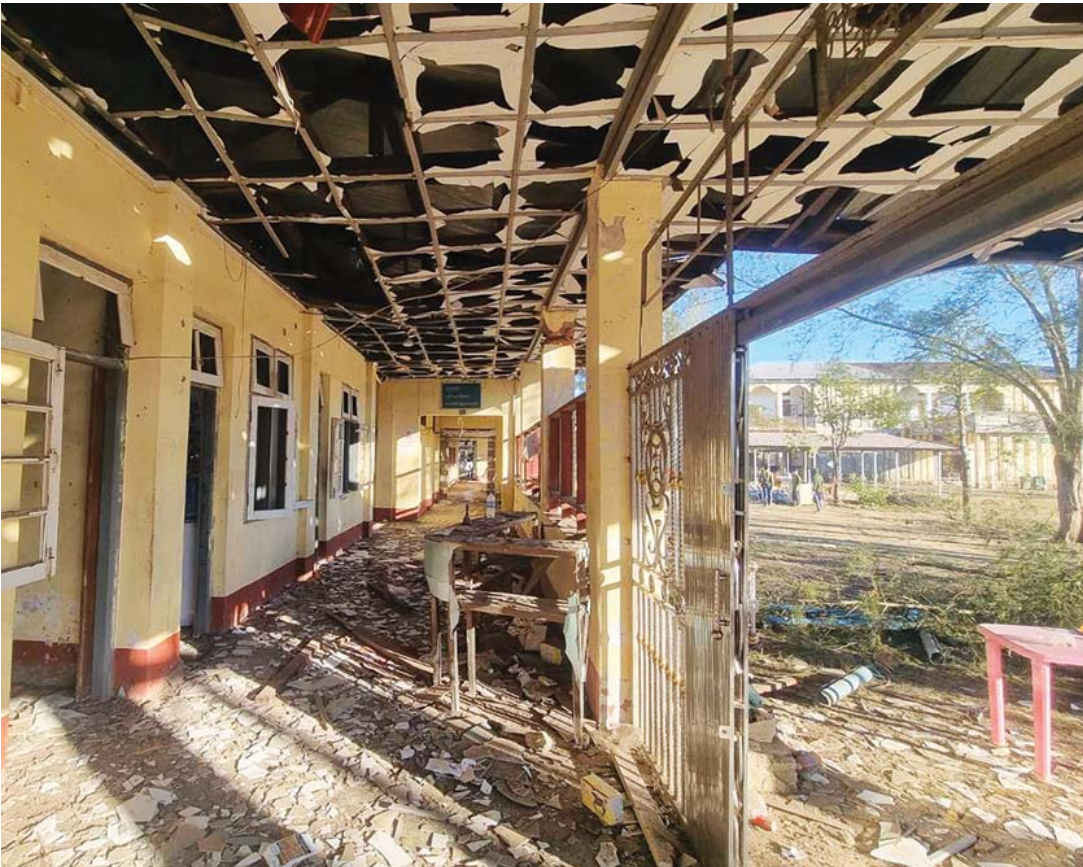
ASSOCIATED PRESS ■ Bangkok

An airstrike by Myanmar's military destroyed a hospital in an area controlled by a leading rebel armed force, killing 34 patients and medical staff, according to a local rescue worker and independent media reports on Thursday.

About 80 other people were injured in the attack Wednesday night on the general hospital in Mrauk-U township, an area controlled by the ethnic Arakan Army in the western state of Rakhine.

The ruling military has not announced news of any attack in the area. Wai Hun Aung, a senior official for rescue services in Rakhine, told The Associated Press that a jet fighter dropped two bombs at 9.13 pm with one hitting the hospital's recovery ward and the other landing near the hospital's main building. He said he arrived at the hospital early Thursday to provide assistance and recorded the deaths of 17 women and 17 men. He said that most of the hospital building was destroyed by the bombs, and taxis and motorbikes near the hospital were also damaged.

Rakhine-based online media posted photos and videos



Damaged building is seen at the hospital that was allegedly hit by a military air strike in Mrauk-U township in Rakhine state, Myanmar

showing damaged buildings and debris, including medical equipment. The hospital has been the main source of health care for people in Rakhine, where most hospitals have closed because of Myanmar's ongoing civil war, said Wai Hun Aung.

It was reopened after doctors gathered in Mrauk-U to provide much-needed medical services. Mrauk-U, located 530 kilometres northwest of Yangon, the country's largest city, was captured by the Arakan Army in February last year. The Arakan Army is the well-trained and well-armed military wing of the Rakhine ethnic minority movement, which seeks autonomy from Myanmar's central Government. It began its offensive in Rakhine in November 2023 and has seized a strategically important regional army headquarters and 14 of Rakhine's 17 townships. Rakhine, formerly known as Arakan, was the site of a brutal army counterinsurgency operation in 2017 that drove about 7,40,000 minority Rohingya Muslims to seek safety across the border in Bangladesh.

There is still ethnic tension between the Buddhist Rakhine and the Rohingya.

Ex-PM Khaleda is responding to treatment: Doctor



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Dhaka

Bangladesh's critically ill former prime minister Khaleda Zia is "responding" to treatment, but no decision has yet been taken on whether she will be flown abroad for further medical care, her personal doctor said on Wednesday. The 80-year-old Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) chairperson has been undergoing treatment at Dhaka's Evercare Hospital since November 23 for multiple health complications. "She is being provided treatments which are needed for a critically ill patient," Zia's personal physician and BNP's decision-

making standing committee member, AZM Zahid Hossain, told reporters outside the private hospital. "In medical terms, she is responding to the treatment as she did in the past," he added, noting that foreign doctors are involved and medical-board decisions are being taken in nighttime meetings. Hossain said the three-time prime minister is receiving care in the hospital's intensive care unit (ICU). He said while a transfer abroad remains a possibility, no date has been fixed, urging people not to give in to speculation. "The time has not yet come to give a definite date," the doctor said.

Pragmatic engagement with Taliban: India at UN



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ United Nation

India told the UN Security Council that it calls for a "pragmatic engagement" with the Taliban as New Delhi underlined that a focus on only punitive measures will ensure a 'business as usual' approach. Addressing the UN Security Council meeting on the Situation in Afghanistan on Wednesday, India's Permanent Representative to the UN Ambassador Parvathaneni Harish said India calls on the United Nations and the international community to adopt nuanced policy instruments that help bring sustainable benefits for the people of Afghanistan. "India calls for a pragmatic engagement with the Taliban. A coherent policy of engagement should incentivise positive actions. A focus on only punitive measures will only ensure that a 'business as usual' approach continues as we have been seeing now for the last four and a half years," Harish said. He reiterated India's commitment to meeting the development needs of the people of

Afghanistan. Harish said the recent decision by the Indian Government to restore the status of Delhi's Technical Mission in Kabul to that of an Embassy "underscores this resolve." "We will continue our engagements with all stakeholders to augment our contribution to Afghanistan's comprehensive development, humanitarian assistance, and capacity-building initiatives, in keeping with the priorities and aspirations of Afghan society," he said.

PUBLIC NOTICE

This is to inform to the public in general that Property Situated at Survey no. 367/2 Paiki Part, Eastern side part Plot number 123 Situated at 'Udhog Nagar' Village Musakhedi, Indore (MP). The Admeasuring Area is 600 Sq.ft. is in possession and ownership of Shri Shyam Ji Gupta S/o Anjani Kumar Gupta Residing At ~ 73, Shahin Nagar, Musakhedi, Indore (MP).

The aforesaid property proposed to be mortgage in Aditya Birla Capital Ltd. Therefore any person, society, bank etc. have any objection on said transaction then he filed objection within 7 days with legal documents from publication of this notice, otherwise any objection raise by any person, society, bank etc. may not be effected and loan is disburse to the concern person.

Jaagmohan Verma (Advocate)
139, Badi Bhanori, Near Bhamori Plaza, Indore (M.P.)
Mobile no. 88780-98000

Justice department can unseal Epstein records : US Court

ASSOCIATED PRESS ■ New York

Secret grand jury transcripts from Jeffrey Epstein's 2019 sex trafficking case can be made public, a judge ruled Wednesday, joining two other judges in granting the Justice Department's requests to unseal material from investigations into the late financier's sexual abuse.

US District Judge Richard M Berman reversed his earlier decision to keep the material under wraps, citing a new law that requires the Government to open its files on Epstein and his longtime confidant Ghislaine



Maxwell. The judge previously cautioned that the 70 or so pages of grand jury materials slated for release are hardly revelatory. On Tuesday, a different federal judge ordered the release of records from Maxwell's sex trafficking case. Last week, a judge in Florida approved the unsealing of transcripts from an abandoned Epstein federal grand jury investigation in the 2000s.

The Justice Department asked the judges to lift secrecy orders after the Epstein Files Transparency Act, passed by Congress and signed into law by President Donald Trump last month.

ICICI Home Finance
Registered Office: ICICI Bank Towers, Bandra-Kurla Complex, Bandra (East), Mumbai- 400051
Corporate Office: ICICI HFC Tower, JB Nagar, Andheri Kurla Road, Andheri East, Mumbai- 400059
Branch Office: Shrimaya square, 2nd Floor, 62,Kapank marg, Freeganj, Opp. Madhav nagar Hospital, Ujjain- 456010

Whereas
The undersigned being the Authorized Officer of ICICI Home Finance Company Limited under the Securitisation, Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002 and in exercise of the powers conferred under section 13 (12) read with Rule 3 of the Security Interest (Enforcement) rules 2002, issued demand notices upon the borrowers mentioned below, to repay the amount mentioned in the notice within 60 days from the date of receipt of the said notice.
As the borrower failed to repay the amount, notice is hereby given to the borrower and the public in general that the undersigned has taken possession of the property described herein below in exercise of powers conferred on him/ her under Section 13(4) of the said Act read with Rule 8 of the said rules on the below-mentioned dates. The borrower in particular and the public in general is hereby cautioned not to deal with the property and any dealings with the property will be subject to the charge of ICICI Home Finance Company Limited.
The Borrower's attention is invited to provisions of sub-section (8) of section 13 of the Act, in respect of time available, to redeem the secured assets.

Sr. No.	Name of the Borrower/ Co-Borrower/ Loan Account Number	Description of property/ Date of Possession	Date of Demand Notice/ Amount in Demand Notice (Rs.)	Name of Branch
1.	Vijayant Singh Gosar (Borrower), Ranjana Gosar (Co-Borrower), LHJUN00001539407.	Ews Flat No. 104 And 105 First Floor, Suryansh Paradise Parisar, Badnagar Ward No. 10, Kasba Barnagar, Tehsil Badnagar, District Ujjain, Madhya Pradesh 456001. Bounded By- North: Common Rosta, South: Parking Area, East: Flat No. 103, West: Parking Area/ Date of Possession- 07-Dec-25	17-09-2025' Rs. 13,23,010/-	Ujjain

The above-mentioned borrowers(s)/ guarantors(s) are hereby given a 30 day notice to repay the amount, else the mortgaged properties will be sold on the expiry of 30 days from the date of publication of this Notice, as per the provisions under the Rules 8 and 9 of Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules 2002.
Date: December 12, 2025, Place: Ujjain Authorized Officer, ICICI Home Finance Company Limited

Aadhar Housing Finance Ltd.
Corporate Office: Unit No. 802, Natraj Rustomjee, Western Express Highway and M.V. Road, Andheri (East), Mumbai - 400069
Mandideep Branch : Office No.1, Plot No. 200, 1st Floor, Jyoti Cineplex, M.P. Nagar, Zone-1 Bhopal - 462001 (M.P.)
Shujalpur Branch: House No.17,Ward No.15, Panjabi Mohalla, Digambar Jain Mandir Road,Shujalpur,Shujalpur Mandi, Shujalpur Dist.Madhyapradesh-465333
Dewas Branch: Plot No- 01, Vimla Townner, Second Floor, Ram Nagar, A.B. Road, Dewas-455001, Madhyapradesh
Ashok Nagar Branch: H.no.02/1019 ,ward No.02,Sulajia Tower, First Floor,Soni Colony, Guna Road, Ashok Nagar-473331, MP



DEMAND NOTICE
UNDER SECTION 13(2) OF THE SECURITISATION AND RECONSTRUCTION OF FINANCIAL ASSETS AND ENFORCEMENT OF SECURITY INTEREST ACT, 2002 READ WITH RULE 3 (1) OF THE SECURITY INTEREST (ENFORCEMENT) RULES, 2002.
The undersigned is the Authorised Officer of Aadhar Housing Finance Ltd.(AHFL) under Securitisation And Reconstruction of Financial Assets And Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002 (the said Act). In exercise of powers conferred under Section 13(12) of the said Act read with Rule 3 of the Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules, 2002, the Authorised Officer has issued Demand Notices under section 13(2) of the said Act, calling upon the following Borrower(s) (the "said Borrower(s)"), to repay the amounts mentioned in the respective Demand Notice(s) issued to them that are also given below. In connection with above, Notice is hereby given, once again, to the said Borrower(s)to pay to AHFL, within 60 days from the publication of this Notice, the amounts indicated herein below, together with further interest as detailed in the said Demand Notice(s), from the date(s) mentioned below till the date of payment and/or realization, payable under the loan agreement read with other documents/writings, if any, executed by the said Borrower(s). As security for due repayment of the loan, the following assets have been mortgaged to AHFL by the said Borrower(s) respectively.

S. No.	Name of the Borrower/ Co-Borrower & Guarantor	Demand Notice Date & Amount	Description of secured assets (immovable property)
1	(Loan Code No. 070000003310 / Mandideep Branch) Ram Nareish (Borrower) Suman Prashad (Co-Borrower) Narendran Sahu (Guarantor)	08-12-2025 & ₹ 12,63,579/-	All that piece and parcel of the property bearing, Plot No. D-40, Golden City , Khasra No. 97, Patwari Halka No. 33, Ward No. 26, Village Neelbad, Tehsil Huzur, Dist Bhopal, MP. Boundaries : East - Plot No. D-32, West - Proposed Road, North - Proposed Road, South -Plot No. D-39
2	(Loan Code No. 09100000362/ Shujalpur Branch) Mehboob Mansuri (Borrower) Maksud Khan (Co-Borrower) Sohrab Khan (Guarantor)	08-12-2025 & ₹ 2,42,662/-	All that piece and parcel of the property bearing, Survey No 1141/2/1/10, 1142/2/2/3, 1143/1/3, 1144/2, 1145/1/4 PH No 68 Ward No 14 Talen Road Gram Padhana Teh Sarangpur Dist Rajgarh, Madhya Pradesh 465697 Boundaries : East -15 Ft. Wide Road, West -House Of Imami Kha, North - Plot Of Smt Leela Bai Gurjar, South - Plot Of Shri Badrilal Marmat
3	(Loan Code No. 02100000720 / Dewas Branch) Rafik Khan (Borrower) Shamina Bai (Co-Borrower)	08-12-2025 & ₹ 2,96,319/-	All that piece and parcel of the property bearing, P H No 68 H No 331 Ward No 08 Near Bus Stand Gram Padhana Tehsil Sarangpur, Dist. Rajgarh, M.P. 465697 Boundaries : East -Bazar Sadak, West -Land Of Anjuman Momen Samai, North - House Of Akil Kha, South - House Of Mohammad Kha Mansuri
4	(Loan Code No. 14510000060/ Ashok Nagar Branch) Laxminarayana Jha (Borrower) Kamlesh Ojha (Co-Borrower)	08-12-2025 & ₹ 6,74,313/-	All that piece and parcel of the property bearing, 0Ganesh Colony, Ward No. 07, Patwari Halka No. 27, Survey No. 859/1Min, Janpad Panchayat Ashok Nagar, Tehsil Ashok Nagar, Dist Ashok Nagar, Madhya Pradesh Boundaries : East - Proposed Common Way 15FtWide, West -House Of Shri Shrivastav, North - Proposed Common Way 15FtWide, South - House Of Prakash Singh Raghuwanshi

If the said Borrowers shall fail to make payment to AHFL as aforesaid, AHFL shall proceed against the above secured assets under Section 13(4) of the Act and the applicable Rules, entirely at the risks of the said Borrowers as to the costs and consequences. The said Borrowers are prohibited under the Act from transferring the aforesaid assets, whether by way of sale, lease or otherwise without the prior written consent of AHFL. Any person who contravenes or abets contravention of the provisions of the said Act or Rules made there under, shall be liable for imprisonment and/or penalty as provided under the Act.

Place : Madhya Pradesh, Date : 12.12.2025

Sd/- Authorised Officer
For : Aadhar Housing Finance Limited

केनरा बैंक Canara Bank
Regional office -1st Floor, Sai Baba Complex, Near GDA Building, Phool Bagh, Gwalior Ph. 0751-2423126

E-AUCTION SALE NOTICE

Appendix-IV-A {See prevision to rule 8(6)}
SALE NOTICE FOR SALE OF IMMOVABLE PROPERTIES
E-Auction Sale Notice for Sale of Immovable Assets under the Securitisation and Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002 read with provision to Rule 8 (6) of The Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules, 2002. Notice is hereby given to the public in general and in particular to the Borrower (s) and Guarantor (s) that the below described Immovable property mortgaged/charged to the Secured Creditor, the Symbolic / Physical possession of which has been taken by the Authorised Officer the Canara Bank (Secured Creditor) will be sold on "AS IS WHERE IS BASIS, AS IS WHAT IS BASIS" & WHAT EVER THERE IS" on **29.12.2025** for recovery of bank dues to the Canara Bank (Secured Creditor)

Name of Branch Name and address of the Borrower & Guarantors	Outstanding Amt. Auction Date	Description of Properties & Name of Property Owner	Reserve Price EMD Amt. Bid Increment Amt.
Branch: Bank Canara Bank, GWL SME Branch, Ph.: 635450-0595, E-mail : cb3910@canarabank.com			
Borrower: Smt. Dolly Sharma D/o Shri Anand Sharma Add: House No -250, Anilbhatia Parisar Tiger Chouck, Shatabdipuram, D.D. Nagar Gird, Gwalior (M.P.)-474020 Guarantor: Shri Girraj Sharma S/o Shri Ram Bharoshi Add: 51-E Sectors, Deendayal Nagar, Gwalior, (M.P.) - 474005	Rs. 19,87,196.49/- +Interest +other Charges Auction Date 29-12-2025 (SYMBOLIC)	Emt of Residential Flat Situated at Ward No. 44, Flat No 101, First Floor, Shukla Apartment, Opposite Dahimandi, Daulatganj, Lashkar, Gwalior Area: 42.60 Sqmt. Cersai Id: 400055884774, Boundaries: East: House Digar, North- Property Shukla, West- Common Road, South-Property Jain	Rs. 19,66,500/- Rs. 1,96,650/- Rs. 10,000/-
Branch : Canara Bank, City Center, Gwalior, Ph. 79838-30415, Email: cb17781@canarabank.com			
Borrower - 1. Smt. Meena Kushwah W/o Late Sh. Harvilash Kushwah Borrower - 2. Sh. Sanjay Kushwah S/o Late Sh. Harvilash Kushwah Add- Ward No. 52, Part of Sy No. 327 To 332 Min-1, 333, To 337, 357 & 358, New Sheelta Colony, Near of Preetampuram Colony, Guda, Lashkar, Gwalior (M.P.) Pin-474001. Guarantor- Sh. Hari Singh Kushwah S/o Late Sh. Manni Singh Kushwah Add-New Sheelta Colony, 12 Bigha Transfarm Ke Paas, Ajjaypur, Guda	Rs. 21,33,316.46/- +Interest +other Charges Auction Date 29-12-2025 (SYMBOLIC)	Land and Building Ward No. 52, Part Of Sy No. 327 To 332 Min-1, 333 To 337, 357 & 358, New Sheelta Colony, Near of Preetampuram Colony, Guda, Lashkar, Gwalior (M.P.) , Area : 1800.00 Sqft., Boundaries: East - Land Mr. Hari Singh, West- Road And Plot other, North- House Kashiram Kushwah, South- House Mohan Singh Kushwah	Rs. 41,60,500/- Rs. 4,16,050/- Rs. 10,000/-
Branch : Canara Bank Nai Sadak, Ph.: 78797-34441, E-mail: cb17785@canarabank.com			
Borrower 1-Shri Rameshwar Dayal Yadav S/o Ramsaroop Yadav Borrower 2-Chandana Kala W/o Rameshwar Dayal Yadav Add: Flat No-204, 1st Floor Krishna Apartment, Jain Colony, Veerpur, Near Gandhi School, Lashkar, Gwalior (M.P.) Guarantor - Shri Dinesh Kumar Add: Laxmanpura, Padav, Gwalior (M.P.)	Rs. 14,76,543.29/- +Interest +other Charges Auction Date 29-12-2025 (SYMBOLIC)	Property Situated At Ward No-65, Flat No-204,1st Floor Krishna Apartment, Jain Colony, Veerpur,Near Gandhi School, Lashkar, Gwalior (M.P.) Area - 880.00 Sqft. Boundaries: North: Common Passage, East: Property of others, South: Balcony and other Plot, West: Flat No 203 and Property others	Rs. 12,35,000/- Rs. 1,23,500/- Rs. 10,000/-
Branch: Bank Canara Bank, Lic City Centre, Ph.: 79838-30415, E-mail : cb17781@canarabank.com			
Borrower-M/s Shri Ashirwad Group Prop. Sh. Shri Sharma Add: Pradhan Sahab Ka Bada Jiwaigani Lashkar, Gwalior (M.P) Proprietor- Sh. Sanjay Sharma Add: Pradhan Sahab Ka Bada, Jiwaigani Lashkar, Gwalior (M.P) Guarantor- Sh. Naveen Wankhede Add: H.No. 71, Jay Bagrang Nagart Near Anoop Cinema, Indore-452010	Rs. 76,58,801.64/- +Interest +other Charges Auction Date 29-12-2025 (SYMBOLIC)	Emt of Land & Building Situated at M. H. No. 30/1080 (Old), Top Gwalior Wala Mohalla, Near Pradhan Sahab Ka Bada, Jiwaigani, Lashkar Gwalior, Boundaries: North: Road Nigam, South: Remaining Plot, East: Road Nigam, West : Govt Land	Rs. 46,44,000/- Rs. 4,64,400/- Rs. 10,000/-
Branch : Canara Bank, Gole ka Mandir, Gwalior, Ph. 84483-38142, Email: cb2897@canarabank.com			
Borrower: Smt. Smrita Chaturvedi W/o Rajesh Chaturvedi Add: Ashok Colony Road, Morar- 474006 Co-Borrower: Rajesh Chaturvedi S/o Jagdish Chandra Add: Ashok Colony Road, Morar-474006 Guarantor: Jogendra Singh Bhadouriya S/o Shri Godhan Singh Add: Lala Sahab Ka Bagicha Mall Road Morar-474006	Rs. 5,66,167.37/- +Interest +other Charges Auction Date 29-12-2025 (SYMBOLIC)	Emt of Residential Building In The Name of Smt Smrita Chaturvedi W/o Rajesh Chaturvedi Near Pani Ki Tanki Shamsan Nadi Par Tal Road Morar, Gwalior Having Area: 675 Sqft. Boundaries: North: House of Others, East: Road & House of Shri Narayan Jatav, South: House of Ayodhya Mishra, West: House of Pathak	Rs. 16,73,000/- Rs. 1,67,300/- Rs. 10,000/-
Branch: Bank Canara Bank, Bhitwarwar, Mob.: 8109323374, Email: cb5445@canarabank.com			
Borrower-M/s Thakur Baba Motors Prof. Punjab Singh Parihar Add: Harsi Road, Bhitwarwar, Gwalior (M.P.) Pin-475200 Proprietor- Punjab Singh Parihar S/o Shri Khushali Ram 28, Advocate Colony, Bhitwarwar Gwalior (M.P.), Pin-475200	Rs. 28,28,246.45/- +Interest +other Charges Auction Date 29-12-2025 (SYMBOLIC)	Emt of Land & Building Residential Owned By Punjab Singh Parihar Survey No.3343/ min-1, Ward No.08 Bhitwarwar, Gwalior (M.P.) Area-800 Sqr Ft (20x40) Boundaries: North: Plot of Nawal Singh, South: Plot of Baghel East : Road West: Land or Seller	Rs. 16,43,400/- Rs. 1,64,340/- Rs. 10,000/-

Date & Time of E-Auction: 29.12.2025, 01:00 PM to 02:00 PM (With Unlimited Extension of 5 Minutes Duration Each)

Other Terms and conditions : (1) The Property will be sold in "AS IS WHERE IS" condition including encumbrances, if any. (There are no encumbrances to the knowledge of the Bank. For details of encumbrances, contact the undersigned before deposit of the Earnest Money Deposit referred to in Clause 9(d) below). Auction/ bidding shall be only through " Online Electronic Bidding" through the **website: http://baanknet.in** Bidders are advised to go through the website for details terms before taking part in the e-auction sale proceedings. (2) The Property will be sold only for a price above the Reserve Price. (3) The property can be inspected with prior Appointment with Authorised Officer, on any working day between 3.00 PM to 5.00 PM before **28.12.2025**. (4) The intending bidders should register their names at portal **http://baanknet.in** and get their User ID and password free of cost. (5) Prospective bidder may avail online training on E-auction from the service provider M/s PSB Alliance (baanknet), Mr. Dharmesh Aspher, Contact No. 98922-19848, **E-mail:support.baanknet@psballiance.com** and avp.projectmanager.2@psballiance.com though the **website: http://baanknet.in/** EMD deposited by the unsuccessful bidder shall be refunded to them. The EMD shall not carry any interest. (6) Auction would commence at Reserve Price, as mentioned above. Bidders shall improve their offers in multiples of Rs. 10,000. The bidder who submits the highest bid (above the Reserve price) on closure of 'Online' auction shall be declared as successful bidder. Sale shall be confirmed in favour of the successful bidder, subject to confirmation of the same by the secured creditor. (7) The Successful bidder shall deposit 25% of the sale price (inclusive of EMD already paid), immediately on declaring him/her as the successful bidder and the balance within 15 days from the date of confirmation of sale by the secured creditor, if the successful bidder fails to pay the sale price, the deposit made by him shall be forfeited by the Authorised Officer without any notice and property shall forthwith be put up for sale again. (8) For sale proceeds of Rs. 50 Lac (Rupees fifty Lac) and above, the successful bidder will have to deduct TDS at the rate 1% on the Sale proceeds and submit the original receipt of TDS certificate to the Bank. (9) All charges for conveyance, stamp Duty / GST registration charges etc, as Applicable and any curt, revenue/dues to any local authority au shall be burnt by the successful bidder only. (10) Authorised Officer reserves the right to postpone/cancel or vary the terms and conditions of the e-auction without assigning any reason thereof. (11) In case there are bidders who do have access to the Internet but interested in participating the e-auction, they can approach concerned Regional office or any branch who, as a facilitating centre, shall make necessary arrangements. (12) EMD Amount of 10% of the Reserve Price is to be deposited in E-Wallet after successful Registration of Ekbray Website by way of Net Banking/Debit Cards/Challan on or before **28.12.2025**. After Successfully transferred the EMD Amount in E-Wallet, Bidder can participate in the Eligible properties. For further details contact Recovery & Legal Section, Canara Bank Regional office, Gwalior **Mob.: 9981898987**

Place: Gwalior

Date : 11/12/2025

AUTHORISED OFFICER CANARA BANK

NORTH CENTRAL RAILWAY
No.: C/JHS/158/JHS/WVMs/e-Auction/2025 Dated: 04.12.2025

NOTICE INVITING E-AUCTION
On Behalf of The President of India, The Senior Divisional Commercial Manager, North Central Railway, Jhansi invites e-auction as per categories given as under:-
Category: Misc-Static-Static-Water Vending Machines
Catalogue No.: WVM-ORAI-03-25
Asset Details: Allotment of Water Vending Machines (WVMs) at Gwalior Railway Station of Jhansi Division.

Units (Station)	PF & Location
02 - Units (Oral)	(1) Between the Pillar No. 1241/26 & 1241/24 CNB end at PF-01.
Railway Station)	(2) Between Pillar No. 1241/20 & 1241/21, JHS End at PF-01.

Auction Start: Dated 24.12.2025 At 11.00 Hrs.
Auction End: Dated 24.12.2025 At 11.30 Hrs.
Note:- Prospective bidder is requested to visit **e-Auction Leasing module** on **IREPS website** (www.ireps.gov.in). The Lot-wise details are available therein under the above mentioned Catalogue Number. 2370/25 (A)
f North central railways @CPRONCR www.ncr.indianrailways.gov.in

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TRADE LOCKED



Yet another deadline seems to have gone. According to India's chief economic advisor, V Anantha Nageswaran, the India-US trade deal will most possibly be sealed by March 2026. During the summers, there was the anticipation that the agreement would be finalised by September. It did not, and the next target was the festive month of November. Several ministers and trade negotiators backtracked and voiced a belief that Christmas-New Year, or December, will mark the end of the ongoing bilateral talks. Now comes a new deadline, which is three months later, and creates new apprehensions, worries, and disruptions. It implies that Indian exports, which witnessed a slowdown due to the US tariffs, will suffer for another few months. The trade deficit for 2025-26 may increase, and if the dollar outflows do not stem, this will create a further downward pressure on the rupee. However, Nageswaran is confident that the economic and growth outlook for 2026-27 remains strong, and the current devaluation of the currency is because it is "undervalued relative to fundamentals." In effect, the tide will change soon.

Speaking to a TV channel, the economic advisor agreed that the November-December target turned out to be "elusive," but added that he would be surprised if the March deadline was not met. In the recent past, the American side has become more optimistic about the bilateral deal. The US trade representative, Jamieson Greer recently told a Senate subcommittee that the latest trade proposals from India were among the "best" that the US had received. "They (Indians) have been a very difficult nut to crack... but they have been quite forward leaning... the type of offers that they have been talking to us about have been the best we have ever received as a country," Greer said. It indicates that India has agreed to proposals that other nations did not, or that New Delhi has softened its stance over the months. One can flip the argument to believe that the US, which wanted a lot more, has decided to be content with a little less.

Farm imports from the US still seem to be the most sensitive issue on the trade agenda. Greer admitted that there were disagreements especially on American crops and meat, which include the imports of corn, soybean, wheat, and cotton. Throughout the year, the Indian side, including the prime minister and ministers have maintained that they will not allow any compromises with the interests of the local farmers. However, in the recent past, India has made a few concessions, albeit cloaked in national necessities. For example, cotton imports were eased, and allowed at zero import duties to help the textile sector, which faced shortages. The Government aimed to convince the farmers that the imports will be used by the industry, and not enter the open marketplace. Farm unions were unhappy, and voiced their concerns over low domestic prices. Similarly, there is talk to use American corn for making ethanol to blend with petrol. A 20 per cent blend is mandatory, and this time too the reason will be that the corn will be used by the refiners, and not enter the market.

Since any bilateral trade deal will logically include the import of American goods, apart from farm produce, Piyush Goyal, the industry and commerce minister, has urged the Indian business community not to be perturbed about such free trade agreements. In a public meeting, he said that Indians oppose the bilateral or regional trade deals even if they adversely impact 5-10 per cent of the market share in specific segments. He urged the industry to be strong, and resilient, and not be affected by such small changes. In effect, the policy-makers wish to prepare the business community for the concessions that India will need to give to the US as part of the trade deal. This is akin to the way the former are preparing the farmers to face the implications of higher imports from America. This explains why India is on a signing spree to ink bilateral deals so that the India-US one, when it happens, seems logical and inevitable.

Finally, Nageswaran made a telling comment in the interview with the TV channel. He maintained that the India-US trade deal was not just about economics and business, or agriculture. It was about geopolitical considerations. The trade agreement was linked to other areas such as national security, diplomacy, new world order, and regional and subcontinent security. A recent report by the White House connected economic relations with Indo-Pacific security. The study wanted closer India-US trade relations, which would logically enhance closer ties in the Indian Ocean to counter China. While India has moved towards China because of the retaliation by the US, New Delhi perceives Beijing as a long-term security threat. Hence, India wants to have a larger relation with America, even as it stays close to Russia, and inches towards a few agreements with China. But New Delhi has realised that in terms of geopolitics, and long-term view, it cannot completely isolate itself from the US. Some analysts argue that Russia is India's past, which will continue in the future. The US is India's future. The India-China destinies are interlinked.

The Pioneer

BHOPAL | FRIDAY | DECEMBER 12, 2025



BUSINESS13

India's MAGA vs Trump's MAGA

The future lies in wooing Microsoft, Amazon, Google, Apple

Like Donald Trump's MAGA, but in an unobtrusive manner, and without the theatrics and circus of the US president, India has its own business-economic weapon, which is also MAGA. In the long run, the Indian weapon of mass market will prove to be more durable and consequential than Trump's trade-tariff-investment warhead. The US republicans wish to 'Make America Great Again.' The Indian Government believes in 'Microsoft, Amazon, Google, and Apple.' Ironically, both nations' futures depend on the tech giants.

But before we go down that road, a trip down the nostalgia lane first. Scrolling down the India-US news on diverse digital platforms, I had a flashback from the past, some three decades ago. I recalled a similar political schizophrenia coupled with business mania, a kind of parallel track in the relations between India and the US. Back then, Robin Raphael, the US assistant state secretary in the Department of State, caused diplomatic tremors and waves in India.

Raphael, a South Asia expert who was subsequently investigated by the FBI on charges of being an ISI mole with leanings towards Pakistan, claimed that a genuine dispute existed between Pakistan and India, and Kashmir was not an inalienable part of India. This caused considerable agitation among the Indian leaders. Yet, while Raphael hectorated India, the American soft-drinks icon, Coke, made grand announcements about coming back to India with a bang. Other well-known American brands were also enthusiastic about the vast, untapped, and growing Indian consumer market.

Fast forward a few years, and the US did what even India had never anticipated. The former compelled Russia to stop the supplies of cryogenic engines to India, which could have aided the latter in its space and missile programme. It is a different matter that India managed

without Russian help. But around the same time that diplomatic hostilities with the US were on the rise, McDonald's announced that it would open thousands of fast-food stores across India. Mac-D realised the potential of the Indian market.

A similar kind of schizophrenia-excitement is visible today. After imposing a 50 per cent tariff on Indian exports, hankering about H-1B visa regime, and targeting pharma shipments, Trump recently instructed his aides that there were complaints about India dumping rice in the US. He hinted at new tariffs on rice imports. His tariff war against India seemed unabated. Do remember that after new sanctions were imposed by the European Union, and others against two Russian crude oil exporters, Indian importers stopped, or curtailed purchases from Russia. Or at least publicly announced it.

However, the likes of Microsoft, Amazon, Google, and Apple, the Indian MAGA, announced major investment plans for their Indian operations. This was despite Trump's threats to reduce their exposures to the subcontinent, and invest more in the US. The tech giants did both. Satya Nadella, the CEO of Microsoft, said that he had a wonderful meeting with the Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, and that his firm will commit \$17 billion to promote, develop, and encourage AI (Artificial Intelligence) in India.

Nadella added that this was the largest investment by Microsoft in Asia. Not to be outdone, within no time, Amazon, which is the largest e-commerce platform in India, claimed that it would invest a much-higher \$30 billion until 2030 to improve, develop, and upgrade the AI capabilities in India. The firm stated that it saw endless potential and possibilities in the Indian market.

Some weeks ago, if you recall, Sundar Pichai of Google said that the firm would invest \$17 billion in Andhra Pradesh to set up a massive data centre, the largest of its kind in Asia, and develop AI capabilities in India.

Now, we come to Apple. Until November 2025, iPhone exports and shipments from India to the US broke previous records, despite the US' tariffs, and Trump's antics. Total iPhone exports may cross the \$25 billion in 2025 (calendar year), or surely in 2025-26 (fiscal year). Apple is committed to manufacturing 25 per cent of iPhones meant for global sales within India, and the process is under way. This completes the quartet of India's MAGA, which will counter Trump's MAGA, and maybe come out trumping America.

What India needs to do is something quite simple. It needs to ride out the Trump threats, and the hostility of the US administration. This is not something new. We have done it before, after the two nuclear tests, and during the 1980s. India has experienced hostile US administrations for the last six decades, but since the 1980s the negatives were accompanied by business-investment positives. Remember, it is not charity, sympathy, or altruism that is forcing India's MAGA weapon to pay attention to India.

We have a population of 1.6 billion, who are the future and potential testing guinea pigs for the AI geeks, who work for the global tech giants to tweak their algorithms. Where else in the world can they find such a large captive consumer base? This is precisely the business key to unlock the diplomatic shackles. Back in the 1990s, China used the power of its consumers, selectively dangled access to the US firms, and extracted huge concessions. India may not be as ruthless, but can use MAGA wisely, patiently, and strategically.

However, we need to be careful so that we are not carried away by rhetoric, and posturing. For example, when Pepsi entered India in the 1980s, it spoke eloquently about how it could instantly transform Indian farming through the exports of processed food (read potato wafers). The change happened but over a longer period. The US and European pharma giants were cagey to transfer research knowhow. The same slowness, laziness, or apprehensions can propel the MAGA tech giants to promise much more than they wish to chew.

Let me give you a recent example. While Amazon promised to pump in \$30 billion, it claimed that it had already invested \$40 billion in India. A closer look revealed that the latter figure included salaries paid to the Indian employees for decades. Recurring expenses, which are funded by local and export revenues cannot be deemed as investment. Only capital expenditure on infrastructure, and other heads can. More importantly, for an outsider, foreign investment inflow is crucial. If Amazon reinvests the profits and cash flows it earns from the Indian operations, it is capex but not FDI.

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A Contrarian Investor

Personal is the new credit norm

Going crazy on credit cards, loans to buy cars and appliances

per cent year-on-year. Fresh sanctioned limits rose 13 per cent quarter-on-quarter, after three quarters of decline, which subdued the annual growth. The market remains concentrated, and the top four issuers raised their collective share from 70 per cent to 72 per cent. Average credit limits increased, and the portfolio health strengthened, which was backed by an improvement in delinquency from two per cent to 1.8 per cent.

Two-wheeler financing registered robust growth, with the assets under management touching ₹1.8 lakh crore, or 18 per cent year-on-year rise. New loan sanctions grew nine per cent year-on-year in Q2-FY26. The NBFC dominance continued, aided by higher sourcing from the first-time borrowers. Higher-ticket loans in the Rs 1-2 lakh bracket gained traction, reflecting a shift towards premium vehicle purchases. The delinquency rate reduced from 6.2 per cent to 5.4 per cent, although the longer-duration stress remained elevated.

Consumer durable loans posted the fastest growth among the unsecured products, with

the assets under management rising 16 per cent year-on-year to ₹1 lakh crore. New sourcing expanded 22 per cent year-on-year, supported by aggressive NBFC participation, and strong retail penetration. Loans under ₹20,000 accounted for nearly 65 per cent of the volumes, which aligned with the country's expanding small-ticket digital EMI ecosystem.

As India's credit ecosystem evolves with stronger underwriting, digital enablement, and rising consumer confidence, unsecured lending appears well-positioned for sustained, responsible expansion. The Reserve Bank of India recently cut the repo rate by 25 basis points to 5.25 per cent, which will offer relief to several sections of the borrowers, especially those considering personal loans. As the overall cost of borrowing drops, banks and NBFCs are expected to gradually reduce the interest rates on personal loans. The impact may not be visible immediately, but may see marginally lower rates in the coming weeks. The lenders will slowly realign pricing to reflect the revised repo rate. This bodes well for the unsecured lending

segment. Recently, at a press briefing, the central bank's deputy governor, Swaminathan J, said that it remains confident about the sustainability of the credit growth, supported by stable asset quality, and a measured rise in unsecured lending, which so far shows no signs of stress. He noted that apart from monitoring year-on-year credit expansion, the regulator evaluates how each loan segment is growing relative to the others, along with slip-page trends across the portfolios. The earlier regulatory measures on unsecured credit, he explained, were introduced when such loans were expanding at nearly twice the pace of the rest of the loan book.

At present, the overall credit growth stands at about 10-11 per cent. Lending to the large industries is growing at 10 per cent, home loans are expanding at 11 per cent, and personal loans are rising at 14 per cent. "The growth has been seen more in secured segments like gold loans or home loans, and unsecured loans have significantly moderated. So, there are no indicators at this point in time which are creating a concern for us," Swaminathan said. Unsecured lending at this stage forms less than 25 per cent of the retail book, and accounts for only 7-8 per cent of the total banking system credit.

However, experts contend that there are several pitfalls in unsecured credit. Although the current delinquency rates indicate borrowers' discipline, and ability to pay the loans, the situation can quickly go out of control. In the past, the robust trends in unsecured loans led to over-borrowing, largely driven by over-spending, and an inability among the borrowers to pay the EMIs, or settle the credit card bills. This is especially relevant as the central bank warns borrowers of cyber-crime, and online loan frauds. In the recent past, aggressive loan pitches by Chinese apps created havoc in the credit system.

Debt traps, when overextended loan payments constitute 30-40 per cent of monthly incomes, can lead to spiralling debt, impact savings especially for emergencies and crucial expenses, and lead to bankruptcy-like situations. Hence, individuals need to be careful, and calculate their loan payment outgoes, before opting for fresh loans. Never forget that unsecured credit is more expensive.

The Pioneer

SINCE 1865

Trade agreement to enhance bilateral ties: Huizenga

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ New York / Washington

A new trade deal between India and the US under President Donald Trump and Prime Minister Narendra Modi would further enhance the bilateral relationship, a top US official has said, underlining that Washington's partnership with New Delhi is critical.

These remarks were made by House Foreign Affairs South and Central Asia Subcommittee Chairman Bill Huizenga on Wednesday at a subcommittee hearing titled 'The US India Strategic Partnership: Securing a

Free and Open Indo-Pacific'.

"The US-India relationship is no longer just important. It is a defining relationship of the 21st century. If America wants a free Indo-Pacific, resilient supply chains and a world where democracy, not authoritarianism, sets the rules, then our partnership with India is critical," Huizenga said in his opening remarks.

The hearing heard from witnesses, Director of Asian Studies Centre, Heritage Foundation, Jeff Smith, Executive Director of the Observer Research Foundation America, Dhruva Jaishankar and External Senior Advisor, Special

Competitive Studies Project, Senior Fellow, Indo-Pacific Programme, German Marshall Fund of the United States, Sameer Lalwani.

Describing India as one of the fastest-growing major economies in the world, Huizenga said American companies increasingly see India not just as a market but as a partner to innovation, especially in AI, communications, and advanced technologies, where collaboration already exists. "American companies are eager to enter the Indian market on a level playing field. A new trade deal with India under

President Trump and Prime Minister Modi would further realise this goal and enhance the relationship. Open markets, strengthening supply chains and driving innovation, all of which would chart a new beginning in our storied partnership," he said.

Huizenga stressed that every American administration, whether Republican or Democrat, has "strengthened ties, or certainly at least attempted to, making clear that the United States does not see India as a temporary or transactional partner."

Referring to Russian President Vladimir Putin's recent visit to

India and Prime Minister Modi's participation at the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation summit in China in September, Huizenga said, "we must view this moment with clear eyes."

"President Putin's warm visit to India last week and India's participation in China's Shanghai Cooperation Organisation summit this September raised some understandable concerns."

"Moreover, authoritarian powers like China and Russia are redrawing borders by force, undermining democratic norms and coercing their neighbours. Nowhere is this more evident

than in the Indo-Pacific, where an increasingly aggressive China threatens regional stability, global prosperity and the open flow of commerce," he said.

"China's string of pearls ideology is no longer just a theory, but rather an overt attempt to encircle and control the Indian Ocean, its sea lanes, and expand the militarisation of these strategic ports and trade routes. We cannot allow this to happen. India knows these risks firsthand," Huizenga said.

He also noted that India has agreed to purchase more American energy, thereby signif-

icantly reducing its reliance on Russia. Huizenga underscored that US-India cooperation today spans defence, technology, counterterrorism and trade.

On counterterrorism cooperation, which he described as "significant", Huizenga noted that organisations responsible for the heinous April 22 Pahalgam attack — Lashkar-e-Tayyiba (LeT) and The Resistance Front (TRF) - were designated by the Trump administration as foreign terrorist organisations in July this year. The designation reflected "our shared commitment to fighting terror wherever it occurs".

If happy with India’s offer, US should sign trade deal: Goyal

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Mumbai

The US should sign the free trade agreement with India on the "dotted lines" if Washington is happy with what has been offered by New Delhi, Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal said on Thursday.

Goyal welcomed the Trump administration's views on India's offer, but refrained from giving a deadline for the signing of the long-awaited free trade agreement between the two nations.

The minister was reacting to a comment by US Trade Representative Jamieson Greer in Washington, who said that the US has received the "best ever" offer from India.

"His happiness is very much welcome. And, I do believe that if they are very happy, they should be signing on the dotted lines," Goyal told reporters here.

He, however, declined to specify India's offer to the US.

The minister said there have been five rounds of negotiations with the US on the trade deal, and added that US Deputy Trade Representative Rick Switzer's ongoing visit to India is not centred around negotiations.

Switzer's visit to India, his first since taking over three months back, is an effort at getting to know each other well, Goyal said, adding that he had "substantial discussions" with the visiting official.

The two-day talks between the US delegation led by Switzer in New Delhi were concluded on Thursday. They have held talks with the Indian team led by Commerce Secretary Rajesh Agrawal.

The two sides have exchanged views on matters related to India-US trade and economic ties, including on the ongoing negotiations for a mutually beneficial bilateral trade agreement (BTA).

Meanwhile, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Thursday held a telephonic conversation with US

President Donald Trump that focused on enhancing economic ties at a time when the two countries are eyeing a trade deal.

The two leaders exchanged views on expanding cooperation in trade, critical technologies, energy, defence and security, officials said.

Further, when asked about Chief Economic Advisor V Anantha Nageswaran's assertion that the pact with the US would be signed in March next year, Goyal said he is not aware of the comment and refrained from putting any timeline.

"A deal is only done when both sides stand to benefit. And I don't think we should ever negotiate with deadlines or hard stops because you tend to make mistakes then," Goyal said, limiting himself to saying that negotiations with the US are progressing well.

Speaking at a Senate Appropriations Subcommittee hearing on Tuesday in Washington, Greer said there is resistance in India to certain row crops and

other meat and products. Row crops in the US include corn, soybeans, wheat and cotton.

"They have been very difficult nuts to crack... but they have been quite forward leaning... the type of offers that they have been talking to us about ...have been the best we have ever received as a country, so I think that is a viable alternative market," he said.

These remarks are important as both sides are trying to conclude the first phase of the proposed bilateral trade agreement.

The talks are important as the Trump administration has imposed steep 50 per cent tariffs on Indian goods entering American markets. The outcomes will also have a positive influence on the trajectory of the rupee, which has depreciated to lifetime lows lately and also breached the psychologically important 90-to-a-dollar mark.

The Indian industry and exporters are eagerly waiting for the conclusion of the negotiations

and announcement of the deal, as the high import duties are hurting their shipments to America.

Though they are exploring other markets to maintain their export profits, the US is a key destination for them as it accounts for about 18 per cent of the country's exports.

First, the US imposed a 25 per cent duty on Indian goods, stating trade deficit concerns with India, which stood at around USD 46 billion in 2024-25. An additional 25 per cent penalty was imposed later on India for buying Russian crude. India has stated that the resolution of these tariffs would be key to firming up the first phase of the trade deal.

As part of the pact, the US is seeking duty concessions on agri products like almonds, corn and apples, and industrial goods. India has strongly opposed any concessions on the agri and dairy sectors. India has stated that it will not compromise the interests of farmers and MSMEs.

Unilever sees ‘massive opportunities’ in India

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ New Delhi

India, with a high GDP growth and recent GST reduction, presents "massive" opportunities for British multinational consumer goods maker Unilever and its Indian arm Hindustan Unilever, according to a top company official.

The companies believe they will be the main beneficiaries of a much more dynamic economic environment in India, said Unilever Chief Executive Officer Fernando Fernandez.

Indian consumption was significantly affected over the last three years due to double-digit food inflation, said Fernandez in a JP Morgan Fireside Chat.

"I feel the government in India has taken very relevant measures lately. So, GST reduction, that is the VAT of India, personal income tax reduction, interest rate reduction, when the government does something like this, it's because things in the economy are not right, and really that's what's happening the last couple of years," he said.

Moreover, there is some food deflation and have seen immediately in the Indian GDP growth.

"I think in the last quarter it was 8.2 per cent. So I see a lot of opportunities in India. This GST reduction affects 40 per cent of our portfolio," he said, adding, "I believe the GST reduction, the impact on the whole economy will be very, very significant."

Unilever has recently made

changes in the top leadership of HUL by appointing Priya Nair as the new CEO.

"We have brought also another two CEOs into our Indian leadership team, the CEO of Hero MotoCorp, as the CFO of the company, the CEO of Britannia, as a head of our Food business. They have the mission of really putting our volume growth in similar level to the one of GDP growth, it will take some time, but I'm very confident of the opportunity," he said.

Fernandez, who was in India recently on an official visit, said, "Opportunities there are massive", noting that India has 60 million people with a per capita income comparable to France.

"You have 700 million with income per capita of Indonesia, Thailand, Philippines and another 700 million with the income per capita of East Africa and West Africa. There is growth for everyone in India. And we believe that we will be the main beneficiaries of what will be a much more dynamic economic environment in India," he said.

He said: "Our brands are perfectly suited to really take advantage of what will be an explosion of wealth expansion. So I'm super excited with India."

Hindustan Unilever (HUL) is consistently ranked as Unilever's second-largest market globally by revenue, after the United States, with India contributing around 12-14 per cent of total sales.

Manufacturing to contribute 25 pc of GDP by 2047: Report

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ New Delhi

The manufacturing sector's share in the Indian GDP will rise to 25 per cent from approximately 17 per cent at present, and the country is poised to become a global industrial powerhouse by then, said a joint report from the Boston Consulting Group (BCG) and Z47.

Flagship programmes, such as Make in India, Atmanirbhar Bharat, and production-linked incentive (PLI) schemes, are rapidly expanding domestic capacity, said the report 'Digitizing Make in India 3.0'. The report outlines five sectors — electronics, defence, automotive and EV, energy, and pharmaceuticals — that could anchor a USD 25 trillion industrial opportunity by 2047.

"Multiple priority areas emerge for India's growth vision in the manufacturing sector going forward, such as Electronics and Semiconductors, Defence, Automotive and EV, Energy Manufacturing and Transition, and Pharmaceuticals — as they combine strong growth, industry push and a clear policy investment runway," the report said.

The report also mentioned that India's next manufacturing leap could revolve around four poten-

tial pillars — fostering innovation, strengthening strategic depth, enhancing competitiveness and driving efficiency through technology adoption.

"Each pathway represents a set of options for policymakers and industry participants to consider in enabling India's manufacturing transformation," it added. To realise its 2047 vision, India is leaning on regional manufacturing clusters across defence, EV, and semiconductors.

"Corridors like Noida-Chennai-Hosur and Dholera are already showing results. These clusters enable co-location of suppliers, shared labs, logistics, and skilled talent. They reduce cost, increase speed, and foster innovation," it noted.

In sectors as electronics and semiconductors, India's end-market was at USD 33 billion in 2022 and is projected to reach USD 117 billion in 2030.

In defence, the allocated budget of '6.81 lakh crore for (FY25-26), doubled over a decade, with a clear Make-in-India push. "Imports have declined 9.3 per cent (vs 2015-19), 92 per cent of FY25 contracts were awarded to the domestic industry. Exports have reached Rs 23,000 crore and over USD 160-190 billion domestic pipeline currently exists across 75+ platforms," it said.

Italy's Deputy Prime Minister Antonio Tajani on Thursday expressed hope that the India-European Union Free Trade Agreement (FTA) will be signed in the next six months.

Speaking on the sidelines of the Italy-India Business Forum here in the presence of Union Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal, Tajani said the deal between the fourth-largest economy and the 27-country bloc is very important as it will help his country's exports.

"I want to be optimistic, if during the first six months of next year, it is possible to achieve the goal (of signing the deal)," Tajani said.

Goyal, however, declined to give a timeline by which he expects the deal to be signed, but opined that all the issues will be resolved to have a fair, balanced and equitable deal which will be a win-win for all.

The minister said the deal between two economies of a size, scale and growth potential as India and the European Union will be a "defining agreement" of the 21st century.

"Obviously, it takes time. Obviously, we have a lot of things to consider. You need to crystal gaze into the future, you need to ensure that sensitivities on both sides are protected, and you need to grab the low-hanging fruit so that businesses and people on both sides can benefit," Goyal said, adding that negotia-

tions are with a sense of urgency, but never in haste or with a deadline.

"Every issue is important, and no issue is such that it cannot be resolved to mutual satisfaction. There are issues under discussion," Goyal said.

The minister said countries, like Italy, will be able to export their wines and automobiles to India and in turn, India will be able to export whiskies, textiles and auto components to the 27-country bloc.

Teams are putting in their best efforts to deliver a good agreement, leaving no stone unturned.

Both Goyal and Tajani stressed the need for cooperation between democracies for the smooth supply of

raw materials in the global market, while the Indian minister also flagged concentration risks amid the weaponisation of trade.

Tajani said one country cannot play a "kingmaker" in deciding the raw material prices, which are critical for production.

The Italian Deputy PM said there is a need for a "political agreement" between Italy, Europe, India, Japan, and the US on this aspect.

Goyal also said that given the deepening ties between Rome and New Delhi, India-Italy ties will be a defining relationship of the 21st century.

Tajani marked pharma, maritime security, technology and defence as among the sectors where India and

Italy can cooperate, and also stressed the important role that the bilateral partnership will play in making the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor a reality.

"We (Italy and India) are paving the way for strong action in favour of trade and in favour of infrastructure. This corridor is very, very important also for peace," the visiting minister said.

Goyal said both countries have discussed setting up a "startup bridge", where both budding enterprises and talent can interact with each other, and also exhorted focused work on waste-to-energy, which can focus on making access to technologies cheaper for India.



Union Minister Piyush Goyal during a meeting with the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs of Italy Antonio Tajani in Mumbai on Thursday. PTI

Tajani hopes EU-India FTA in next 6 months; Goyal hopeful

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
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Federal Reserve cuts key rate

ASSOCIATED PRESS
■ Washington

The Federal Reserve reduced its key interest rate by a quarter-point for the third time in a row on Wednesday but signalled that it may leave rates unchanged in the coming months.

Chair Jerome Powell signalled at a news conference that the Fed would likely hold off on further rate cuts in the coming months while it evaluated the health of the economy. And in a set of quarterly economic projections, Fed officials signalled they expect to lower rates just once next year.

Wednesday's cut reduced the rate to about 3.6 per cent, the lowest it has been in nearly three years. Lower rates from the Fed can bring down borrowing costs for mortgages, auto loans, and credit cards over time, though market forces can

also affect those rates.

Fed officials "will carefully evaluate the incoming data," Powell said, adding that the Fed is "well-positioned to wait to see how the economy evolves." The chair also said that the Fed's key rate was close to a level that neither restricts nor stimulates the economy.

Three Fed officials dissented from the move, the most dissents in six years and a sign of deep divisions on a committee that traditionally works by consensus. Two officials voted to keep the Fed's rate unchanged, while Stephen Miran, whom Trump appointed in September, voted for a half point cut.

December's meeting could usher in a more contentious period for the Fed. Officials are split between those who support reducing rates to bolster hiring and those who would prefer to keep rates unchanged.

Sonowal flags off India’s first indigenous hydrogen fuel-cell vessel in Varanasi

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ Varanasi

Union Minister Sarbananda Sonowal on Thursday flagged off India's first indigenous hydrogen fuel-cell vessel in Varanasi, marking a key milestone in the country's push towards clean, and sustainable inland water transport.

At a ceremony held at Namo Ghat, the Ports, Shipping, and Waterways minister inaugurated the vessel's first commercial operations.

Sonowal said the hydrogen-powered vessel reflects India's growing technological capabilities and its commitment to sus-


tainable energy. "This is not just technological progress, but a sign that we are advancing confidently towards green energy and indigenous solutions," he said.

The minister said it was a matter of national pride that India has now joined the list of countries such as China, Norway, the Netherlands, and Japan that operate hydrogen-powered vessels.

"This proves that our technical capabilities are ready for the future. This has been made possible due to the Prime Minister's visionary leadership. The speed and approach with which every sector has been advancing has

ensured that inland waterways now play an important role in India's development journey," he said in Varanasi, Prime Minister Narendra Modi's parliamentary constituency.

Uttar Pradesh's Minister of State for Transport (Independent Charge) Dayashankar Singh, Minister of State for Ayush, Food Safety and Drug Administration (Independent Charge) Dayashankar Mishra, and Minister of State for Stamp and Court Fees and Registration (Independent Charge) Ravindra Jaiswal were among the public representatives present on the occasion.



Sonowal said the development marks a major step in India's shift towards green energy and indigenously developed clean-technology solutions.

He noted that hydrogen engines are an emerging technology offering clean, sustainable energy with near-zero emissions, though research and testing are still underway

before full-scale commercial adoption.

Highlighting the sector's expansion, the minister said the number of national waterways has increased from five to 111 in the past decade. Cargo traffic on inland waterways rose from 80 million tonnes in 2014 to over 145 million tonnes at present, while tourism activities are operational on 13 waterways.

He added that the foundation for this transformation was laid by the Jal Marg Vikas Project, which created a modern navigation corridor from Haldia to Varanasi on National Waterway-1, with multimodal terminals, advanced

equipment, and community jetties.

"Projects worth more than `300 crore have already been completed in Uttar Pradesh for waterway development, while schemes worth around `2,200 crore will be launched in the coming years," the minister said.

According to an official statement, the hydrogen vessel initiative is part of the ongoing modernisation of India's inland waterways under the leadership of PM Modi, who has prioritised clean transport, improved connectivity and enhanced public convenience.

In recent years, the Central

government and the Inland Waterways Authority of India (IWAI) have expanded navigation channels, launched modern terminals, and operationalised new passenger and cargo routes to strengthen water-based communication and reduce logistics costs, it stated. These efforts align with long-term strategic frameworks, including the Maritime India Vision 2030 (MIV 2030) and Maritime Amrit Kaal Vision 2047 (MAKV 2047), which outline the roadmap for greener transport, smart infrastructure, and increased use of alternative fuels on inland waterways, it added.

PROSPECT



Ahead of PM Narendra Modi's visit, Assam Minister Pijush Hazarika attended a preparatory meeting with Assam Chief Secretary Dr Ravi Kola and other senior officials of the Govt of Assam to review all arrangements at new terminal of Lokpriya Gopinath Bordoloi International Airport at Guwahati PM will inaugurate the new terminal on 20th December

Regional PR talent to shine as IRPRA 40 under 40 returns this January

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

The fourth edition of India's Regional PR Awards (IRPRA) 40 Under 40 will be held virtually on January 10, 2026 and registrations are now open for participants.

Like its previous editions, the awards will recognise and honour PR professionals from regional India who, through their dedication and consistent efforts, continue to raise the standards of communication excellence. The last date for submitting nominations has been extended to December 25.

According to Pawan Tripathi, Organiser of IRPRA, "The inaugural edition of IRPRA 40 under

40 received an overwhelming response from across the country, re-affirming our belief in the power of regional PR. Building on that success, we are thrilled to launch the fourth edition, which continues our mission to celebrate the next generation of PR and communication leaders who are redefining regional storytelling through creativity, innovation and impact."

Registrations and fulfillment of nominations for IRPRA 40 under 40 are free of cost. Criteria for applicants should be 40 years or below as of the event date and should be practicing PR and Corporate communication within the geographical territory of India.

ICAI clears new global networking guidelines

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

Chartered accountants' apex body ICAI has approved new global networking guidelines as well as changes to advertising guidelines, a significant move that will help create large homegrown domestic chartered accountant firms and compete at the global level.

The ICAI Central Council, during its meeting held on December 10 and 11 in the national capital, approved the ICAI (Global Networking) Guidelines, 2025 and changes to the Code of Ethics under which advertising norms are being eased.

At a briefing in the national capital on Thursday, ICAI (Institute of Chartered Accountants of India) President Charanjot Singh Nanda said the Council has

cleared the global networking guidelines, which have been a long-pending demand of CAs. The revised Code of Ethics, which also provides for limited advertisements, will help Indian firms to compete globally, he added. The approvals assume significance against the backdrop of larger Government efforts to have homegrown big accounting firms that can help create more opportunities in the country's growing economy and also compete at the scale of global players.

The guidelines have been formulated with the objective of facilitating global networking opportunities for Indian Chartered Accountant (CA) firms, domestic networks of CA firms and management consultancy services companies registered with ICAI.

Ambani calls for tech, industry self-reliance

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Gandhinagar

Billionaire Mukesh Ambani on Thursday said India must become self-reliant in critical technologies and industries to tide over geopolitical situations that may pose challenges to the country's future progress. Speaking at the 13th convocation of Pandit Deendayal Energy University here, he contrasted India's "sprinting" 8 per cent economic growth with "erosion of confidence all around."

"There is erosion of confidence all around. In contrast, India is bubbling with hope and self-confidence," he said.

"A decade ago, the rest of India was talking about Vibrant Gujarat. Today, the rest of the world is talking

about a Vibrant India."

Ambani, chairman of Reliance Industries Ltd and president of PDEU, Stated that the geopolitical situation has created certain challenges for India's future progress. "India must become Atma Nirbhar — self-reliant — in critical technologies and industries," he said.

While he did not identify the global geopolitical challenges, China's tightening grip on global supply chains and critical minerals has emerged as a major strategic concern for economies worldwide.

As the dominant supplier of rare earths and a key processor of lithium, cobalt, graphite and other essential inputs for batteries, renewable energy and advanced electronics, Beijing wields



significant leverage over industries central to the energy transition and future technologies.

Its export controls on gallium, germanium and other strategic minerals — coupled with supply-chain

consolidation in sectors like solar manufacturing, EV components and electronics — have triggered a global push for diversification.

Countries are now accelerating efforts to secure alternative supply routes, invest in domestic processing capacity and forge mineral partnerships to reduce dependence on China's tightly managed, State-backed ecosystem.

Ambani urged graduating students to harness curiosity, courage, perseverance and gratitude as guiding principles in a world of rapid technological change, telling them they represent the "unstoppable spirit of New India".

He said India was at a defining moment, growing at nearly 8 per cent amid global economic uncertainty and

stressed that the country must achieve self-reliance in critical technologies such as AI, new energy, space, biotechnology and life sciences.

"In this race, jo jeeta wohi sikandar. Under PM Modi's leadership, Bharat jeetega," he said, calling on PDEU to strive to become one of the world's best universities in green energy, green materials and green economy.

Addressing students, Ambani said their graduation comes at a time of unprecedented opportunity. Encouraging them to ask better questions in the age of AI, he said curiosity keeps individuals relevant, courage enables big dreams, perseverance ensures long-term success and gratitude keeps achievers grounded.

BSES launches campaign to promote cleaner air – #CleanAirWithBSES

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

As Delhi's skyline fades behind layers of haze, BSES has rolled out a high-impact social media campaign that transforms concern into collective responsibility. Launched across digital platforms—Facebook, X (formerly Twitter), LinkedIn and Instagram—under the hashtag #CleanAirWithBSES, the campaign comprises multiple sets of evocative creatives and short-format videos, each spotlighting how everyday choices directly impact the air we breathe.

Through a series of powerful visuals depicting Delhi's iconic landmarks, neighbourhoods and streetscapes increasingly



enveloped in smog, BSES urges citizens to rethink mobility and energy habits. Several creatives make a compelling case for switching to electric vehicles, highlighting how EV adoption can reduce dependence on fossil fuels and significantly cut vehicular emissions. Other posts champion rooftop solar and clean energy choices, reinforcing the role of decentralised green power in lowering pollution levels.

Health and safety form a key pillar of the campaign narrative. Dedicated creatives advise citizens to plant trees, grow indoor plants, seal homes to prevent polluted air from entering and limit outdoor exposure during severe AQI periods. Other posts highlight the

importance of regular vehicle servicing and promote the use of energy-efficient appliances, underscoring that informed choices can be as critical as long-term solutions.

Equally central are behaviour-led messages encouraging cleaner commutes—walking, cycling, car-pooling and public transport—to reduce vehicular congestion. The campaign also promotes responsible waste practices based on Reduce, Reuse and Recycle, linking everyday habits with sustained improvements in air quality.

With its strong visuals and clear calls to action, BSES's digital campaign positions clean air not as an abstract ideal, but as a shared responsibility that will help Delhiites breathe cleaner.

From conflict to development: Govt grants financial assistance to former BLT cadres

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Guwahati

In a special programme held at the Srimanta Sankardev Kalakshetra, financial assistance was ceremonially distributed to former BLT cadres residing outside the BTC region, in the presence of BTC Chief Executive Member Hagrama Mohilary and Minister for Housing and Urban Affairs, Jayanta Mallabaruah.

Minister Baruah, alongside CEM Hagrama Mohilary, distributed the grants as part of the State Government's continued efforts to support the rehabilitation and reintegration of individuals returning to the mainstream.

Speaking at the programme, Minister Baruah conveyed gratitude on behalf of Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma and the State Government. He thanked the former cadres for choosing the path of rehabilitation and development and for realising that armed struggle could not fulfil their aspirations. "Today we celebrate your homecoming and we hope you begin a self-reliant and peaceful life ahead," he said.



The Minister noted that since 2020 the Government of Assam and the Government of India have signed five historic Memorandum of Settlements, including the NDFB Accord, Karbi Peace Accord, Adivasi Peace Accord, DNLA Agreement and ULFA Peace Agreement, paving the way for lasting peace in the region.

These agreements have brought 9,022 cadres of peace signed groups back

into the mainstream, in addition to more than 2,000 members of smaller groups rehabilitated under State schemes.

Reflecting on the past, Minister Baruah said Assam had suffered for decades as young people were compelled to take up arms due to neglect and lack of opportunity. "Your return to the mainstream is honourable.

For the first time in many years, development is reaching people in a way that

earlier Governments could not ensure," he said.

He recalled how Assam once had to revolt to defend its natural resources. "Forty years ago, Assam protested

crude oil being taken out without benefiting the State. Today, under the NDA Government, pipelines are being built to bring oil into Assam to run our refineries. This turnaround reflects the vision of Prime Minister Narendra Modi who has brought long-awaited cor-

rection to decades of imbalance," he said. Minister Baruah said that armed revolution only prolonged insecurity and delayed growth. "Today, under Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma, we finally have a leadership that delivers solutions where earlier Governments left gaps.

Industries are coming, peace prevails and communities feel included in the development journey," he said. He added that investments which once seemed unimaginable are now becoming reality. "Through Advantage Assam, five lakh crore of investment is coming to the State, with more than one lakh crore already invested. This was never possible in earlier years, when instability overshadowed progress," he said.

Minister Baruah informed that 442 former BLT cadres, residing outside the BTC region were granted financial support of two lakh rupees each to begin a dignified new life today. "We warmly welcome you to this new journey. The State today values peace and empowers those who contribute to development,"

he said. He urged beneficiaries to pursue skill development programmes and commended BTC Chief Executive Member Hagrama Mohilary for initiatives that have strengthened peace in the region. "We must move from being consumers to becoming producers. The Government is committed to supporting every step of this transformation," he said.

Concluding his remarks, Minister Baruah said, "Assam today is moving with confidence under the leadership of Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma who is working tirelessly to place the State among the top five in India.

His decision to extend Scheduled Tribe status to six communities while protecting the rights of existing ST groups reflects a fair and progressive approach. Together, let us build a peaceful and prosperous Assam that earlier generations could only hope for."

The programme was also attended by Director General of Police Harmeet Singh, Additional Chief Secretary Ajay Tewari and Special ADGP Hiren Chandra Nath.

Himanta launches bicycle scheme to boost school attendance

TONY DAS
■ Guwahati

In a significant move to enhance student safety and attendance, Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma inaugurated a bicycle distribution scheme under the Chief Minister's Special Scheme for Class IX students from Government and provincial schools. The launch, held in Dibrugarh, will benefit 3,10,031 pupils, particularly those residing in rural and interior areas, making their daily commute quicker and safer.

The initiative, which includes tea garden model schools and Adarsha Vidyalayas, aims to significantly increase school enrolment and curb the student drop-out rate. Of the beneficiaries, 1,34,432 are male students and 1,75,608 are female students. Speaking at the event, Sarma highlighted the critical issue of school dropouts, noting that forty per cent of students leave education by the higher sec-



ondary level. He stressed that a suitable environment nurtures talent, which educational institutions are uniquely placed to provide. To combat poverty-related dropouts, the Government has already introduced free textbooks, uniforms and midday meals.

Sarma pointed out that the bicycles address the challenge of long travel distances to secondary schools. This scheme complements other student-centric measures, such as free college enrolment and financial aid like the Nijut Moina scheme,

which provides monthly stipends to girl students at the higher secondary, undergraduate and post-graduate levels. A similar scheme for boys is reportedly forthcoming. The Chief Minister affirmed the Government's relentless efforts over the past five years to improve the academic environment, citing the construction of new school buildings, colleges, medical and engineering institutions. He also encouraged students to utilise their mobile phones for educational purposes,

stating, "The mobile phone in our hands should not be used only to scroll through Facebook or Instagram.

We should use it to learn about geography, history, science, sports and new events around the world." Education Minister Ranaj Pegu, Indigenous and Tribal Faith and Culture Minister Jogen Mohan, Power Minister Prasanta Phukan, Cultural Affairs Minister Bimal Borah, MLAs Chakradhar Gogoi, Binod Hazarika, Terosh Gowala and Taranga Gogoi, Dibrugarh Municipal Board Chairman Saikat Patra, Sonowal Autonomous Council Chief Executive Member Tonkeswar Sonowal, Moran Autonomous Council Chief Executive Member Saroj Gohain, Dibrugarh Zila Parishad Chairperson Pushpanjali Sonowal, Chairman Assam Tourism Development Corporation Ritupomo Baruah, Secretary and host of other dignitaries were present on the occasion.

Power grid cyber security on shaky ground as critical upgrades stall

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

India's national power grid is facing renewed scrutiny as major cyber-security gaps and stalled upgrade plans raise concerns over the country's energy resilience.

With the power sector moving rapidly toward digital and smart-grid technologies, experts warn that inadequate cyber defences leave the grid exposed to potentially catastrophic attacks.

Insiders confirm that several key transmission substations across the country still lack Next-Generation Firewalls (NGFWs) and other advanced protection systems. Despite a rise in cyber threats globally — many of them targeting critical infrastructure — these vulnerabilities remain unresolved, prompting alarm among security agencies.

A major cyber-security tender floated by Power Grid Corporation earlier this year, aimed at strengthening the grid's defences, was cancelled in August. Sources indicate that a company allegedly backed by certain officials failed to meet eligibility requirements, leading to pressure for the tender's withdrawal. The cancellation has raised questions about the corporation's preparedness during a time when global



grids are frequently targeted by sophisticated cyber actors.

The matter has now reached Parliament. An unstarred question scheduled for response on December 9 seeks detailed clarification from the Union Power Minister on substations identified as cyber-security weak points, facilities requiring urgent intervention, whether a comprehensive audit has been conducted within the past year and the roadmap for upgrades following the cancelled tender. MPs have also asked whether any national agency is assisting in real-time grid monitoring.

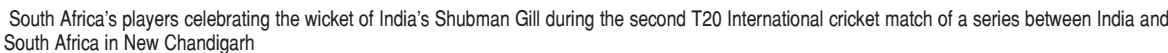
Cyber-security specialists warn that the power grid remains a high-value target for adversaries. They caution

that a single breach could trigger widespread outages affecting homes, industries and essential services. Given the surge in State-sponsored cyber-attacks worldwide, experts say India cannot afford delays in strengthening its power infrastructure.

Analysts argue that urgent central intervention is required to break the current impasse. They recommend immediate installation of multi-layer cyber defences, expedited security audits and strict compliance with global standards such as NERC-CIP and ISO 27001. Without decisive action, they warn, the national grid remains dangerously exposed at a time of escalating cyber risk.

■ Mullanpur

Abhshek was caught



a high tempo but lack of

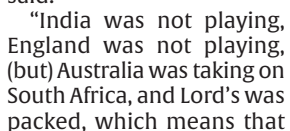
When in full flow, De Kock is among the most attractive batters in the game and he flaunted his special skills on a true pitch. He was mainly dealing in sixes in the middle and majority of his seven maximums came in the deep

An innings like this just less than a week before the mini auction will also create the buzz among the franchisees, who might indulge in a bidding war for the multi-left-arm pacer for a maximum over deep mid-wicket. Jasprit Bumrah too conceded 16 runs in his second over after being disdainfully pulled for six by Reeza Hendricks.

Arshdeep Singh, who had De Kock caught behind in the series opener, was at the receiving end on Thursday. De Kock began the assault with a pick up shot for six off Arshdeep before pulling the left-arm pacer for a maximum over deep mid-wicket. Jasprit Bumrah too conceded 16 runs in his second over after being disdainfully pulled for six by Reeza Hendricks.

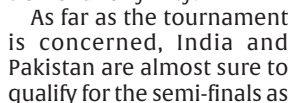
■ Mumbai

“That was the endeavour with which the World Test Championship was launched and what we’ve



"The other thing that it did was, in the six months leading up to the World Test Championship final, the entire narrative was around who will feature and that gives additional meaning, context, and significance to the bilateral Test cricket that's being played in the lead-up to that World Test Championship final," he added.

■ Dubai



■ Melbourne

a group with complementary skill sets that provide the best chance of success in tournament," head coach Tim Nielsen said in a release.



Australia Men's U19 Squad:
Oliver Peake, Kasey Barton,
Naden Cooray, Jayden
Draper, Ben Gordon, Steven
Hogan, Thomas Hogan, John
James, Charles Lachmund,
Will Malajczuk, Nitesh
Samuel, Hayden Schiller,
Aryan Sharma, William
Taylor, Alex Lee Young.

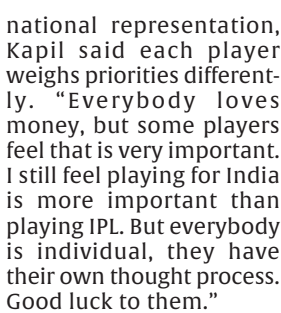
Following India's 2-1 ODI series win against South Africa, Gambhir had said that he thought batting orders are overrated in the ODI format. "I do agree with him to a certain extent. I've always enjoyed a floating batting lineup in ODIs. But it's a fine line because you can't really play around too much with the players' roles," De Villiers said on his YouTube channel. "It's the top three, four to six and then your tailenders who can hold the bat. It's almost like three segments, and you can really be creative with that. "Play with right and left hand combinations and in certain situations of the game." India won the first T20I against South Africa to extend their winning run to 27 victories out of 31 games.

■ New Delhi

Earlier this year, she also won a bronze at the Australia Open Taekwondo

She is the only Indian in the top 100 of the world rankings across categories.

■ New Delhi



He also offered a light-hearted remark on Virat Kohli and Rohit Sharma

that gives hope. One day our kids will go and win Olympics or US Cup. In tennis, if you win Wimbledon, it makes a difference; the same is in golf."

■ Dubai

Also finishing tied second was Pukhraj, the winner of IGPL Jamshedpur. He shot 2-under 70, and like Ganapathy, was left at 8-under and one behind the winner. Pranavi Urs, the

Four players, Sachin Baisoya (67), Harendra Gupta (68), Kartik Sharma (70) and Gaurav Ghei (72), were tied for 12th place.