

Lakhs of people assemble in Kolkata to chant Gita	Sandesara settlement tests India's fight against financial crime	Russia is past, is the West future?	Endless opportunities in India: Israeli officials	Lando Norris clinches his first F1 title at Grand Prix
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PIONEER IN SHORT

TEN NAXALS SURRENDER IN MP

Ten wanted Naxalites, including four women, surrendered before Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister Dr Mohan Yadav in Balaghat, marking a milestone in the state's efforts to achieve a Naxal-free status by January 2026. Dr Yadav handed them copies of the Constitution and urged other cadres to lay down arms, assuring full support for their rehabilitation, safety, and development. The Chief Minister highlighted strengthened anti-Naxal operations, including 15 temporary camps, 882 special support battalion posts, and continuous surveillance, which have significantly reduced the Naxal footprint. Last year, 46 single-window centres were opened to provide employment, forest rights documents, and essential services to affected residents. Police Director General Kailash Makwana credited increased manpower and incentives for field teams with rising surrenders across Madhya Pradesh and neighbouring states. Authorities also released the names of the ten surrendered cadres from Sukma, Bijapur, Dantewada, and Gadchiroli. Senior officials and ministers attended the programme, reinforcing the state's commitment to restoring peace and connecting local youth to the mainstream.

Only three districts now most-affected by Naxalism in Chhattisgarh

RAJESH KUMAR ■ New Delhi

The number of Naxalism-affected districts in India have reduced to 38 from 46 across nine States, according to a recent Government review. An updated review by the Government now narrows down the most affected districts to three and districts of concern to four. All three most affected districts — Bijapur, Narayanpur and Sukma — remain in Chhattisgarh, the State historically at the heart of Naxal activity. The four districts of concern are Kanker in Chhattisgarh, West Singhbhum in Jharkhand, Balaghat in Madhya Pradesh, and Gadchiroli in Maharashtra, where Naxal influence is waning but targeted development is still required. Districts under the concern category are those where Naxal activity has sharply declined but continued development efforts are needed to consolidate peace and stability. The review was undertaken as part of the National Policy and Action Plan to Address Left Wing Extremism (LWE), 2015, under which the Union and State Governments work together. Officials said the subcategory of most affected districts was created in 2015 with 35 districts to ensure focused

Pioneer Special

Representative photo of a tribal village

PTI

one of the key financial support programmes for combating Naxal influence — are classified as either LWE-affected or Legacy and Thrust (L&T) districts. The latest review places 27 districts under the L&T category. These include eight districts from Odisha, six from Chhattisgarh, four from Bihar, three each from Jharkhand and Telangana, and one each from Andhra Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra and West Bengal. These districts have largely witnessed the end of Naxalism but remain prospective sites for its expansion. Hence, continued government support is required for capacity building, according to official records. The districts covered under the SRE scheme were last revised on April 1, 2025. After the review, 46 districts were listed as SRE districts — six categorised as “most affected,” six as “districts of concern” (DOC), and six as “other LWE-affected.” In the subset category of “Legacy & Thrust” districts, 28 were included. In the districts of concern (DOC) category, where Left Wing Extremist influence is waning but focused resource deployment remains necessary, eight districts were included in 2021. Subsequent reviews brought this down to six in April 2025. Now, four districts have been excluded from this category and two added, bringing the total to four. Government records also show a dramatic fall in Naxal-related violence over the past two decades. Violent incidents dropped to 7,744 in 2014-2024 from 16,463 in 2004-2014. While security personnel deaths fell from 1,851 to 509 over the same period and civilian fatalities reduced from 4,766 to 1,495. In 2025 alone, forces neutralised 270 Naxals, arrested 680, and secured the surrender of 1,225 insurgents.

As winter accidents raise alarm

STA deploys high-tech siren system at Kalinga Ghat

RAJEEV RATHAN ■ Bhubaneswar

As winter fog turns Odisha's ghat roads into danger zones, the State Transport Authority (STA) has rolled out a high-alert, sensor-activated warning siren system at Kalinga Ghat in Kandhamal, an accident-prone stretch that sees deadly spikes in crashes every year. Developed with the IIT Bhubaneswar, the system triggers loud warning sirens the moment a vehicle approaches from either direction, giving motorists crucial seconds to slow down on blind curves and steep slopes that have long been the site of tragic mishaps. Officials admitted that winter is the riskiest season on ghat roads with thick fog, holiday rush and picnic traffic pushing accident numbers sharply upward. In response, the Commerce and Transport Department has launched a four-month State-wide road safety drive combining aggressive enforcement, mass awareness campaigns and even night-time tea distribution to help sleepy drivers stay alert. But engineering challenges on treacherous ghat sections demanded more than routine policing. That is where the IIT Bhubaneswar stepped in and designed a targeted technological fix to tackle the deadly combination of fog, speed and blind turns. The siren system has been installed on a pilot basis, and authorities will closely monitor its performance before scaling it up. If successful, similar sensor-based technologies will be deployed at other critical black spots across Odisha. The government is also exploring collaborations with top national institutions to expand tech-driven safety measures State-wide. A senior Transport Department official said the priority is clear: “Every life saved is a victory. Technology will now be our strongest weapon against road fatalities.”

KIIT KALINGA INSTITUTE OF INDUSTRIAL TECHNOLOGY KIIT Deemed to be University (Established U/S 3 of UGC Act 1956), Bhubaneswar, Odisha, India

CONGRATULATIONS Making Odisha Proud

KHELO INDIA UNIVERSITY GAMES 2025

KIIT shines at KHELO INDIA UNIVERSITY GAMES (KIUG) 2025

Top Medal Holders in Eastern Region

7th among 222 Universities

3 Meet Records

KIIT MEN'S TENNIS TEAM WINS GOLD

KIIT MEN'S RUGBY TEAM WINS GOLD

KIIT WOMEN'S HOCKEY TEAM WINS GOLD

KIIT WOMEN'S RUGBY TEAM WINS GOLD

KIIT 4X100M RELAY MEN'S TEAM WINS GOLD

MAGANTI KEERTHI WINS GOLD IN WOMEN'S WEIGHTLIFTING (86KG)

SAMARDEEP SINGH GILL WINS GOLD IN MEN'S SHOT PUT

KIIT WOMEN'S VOLLEYBALL TEAM WINS SILVER

KIIT WOMEN'S SWIMMING TEAM WINS 10 MEDALS & 1ST RUNNERS UP

ISHA NEHI WINS GOLD IN WOMEN'S HEPTATHLON

KHOIROM REJIYA DEVI WINS GOLD IN WOMEN'S CYCLING INDIVIDUAL PURSUIT

RITHVIKA MITTAPALLI WINS GOLD IN WOMEN'S 50M BREASTSTROKE

21 MEDALS 10 GOLD MEDALS 3 SILVER MEDALS 8 BRONZE MEDALS

KIIT-DU, Patia, Bhubaneswar, Odisha, India 751024 kiit@kiit.ac.in www.kiit.ac.in KIIT (Deemed to be University) has only one permanent campus in Bhubaneswar, Odisha. It has no other campus / off campus anywhere else in the country and globe.



# Min launches State's Kharif paddy procurement

■ Opens several mandis in Nuapada  
■ Assures MSP payment within 48 hours

**NALINI SAHU ■ Nuapada**

Marking the formal start of the Kharif paddy procurement season in the State, Food Supplies and Consumer Welfare Minister Krushna Chandra Patra on Sunday rolled out operations at multiple procurement centres in Nuapada district.

The minister launched the first mandi at Darlimunda, joined by former Bargarh MP Pravas Singh and MLAs Jay Dholakia (Nuapada) and Dusmanta Swain (Khandapada). He said Odisha is aiming at nearly 100 lakh metric tonnes of paddy this season, a considerable jump from last year's 74 lakh MT.

He attributed the expected rise to expanded cultivation following the government's decision to offer an additional Rs 800 input subsidy over the fixed MSP of Rs 2,300 per quintal. "With more area under paddy this year, we anticipate procurement touching the 100-lakh-MT mark. Farmers need not worry; their MSP payments will be cleared within 24 to 48 hours," he assured.



Addressing longstanding complaints about katni chhatni, the deduction of about five kilograms per quintal citing moisture issues, Patra said he has already instructed officials to curb what he described as an "unfair and exploitative" practice.

The minister also flagged the need for additional storage space. The department, he said, has drawn up plans to add 20 lakh MT of storage capacity to manage the higher inflow of rice.

Patra shared a meal with farmers at the Daripali procurement centre.

His visit comes a month after the BJP's emphatic win in the Nuapada Assembly by-poll.

## 'Build modern libraries in every panchayat'

### Odisha Public Library Conference held

**PNS ■ Bhubaneswar**

The Odisha Public Library Conference 2025 organised by the USA-based Odisha Society of Americas (OSA) in Bhubaneswar on Sunday urged to establish modern digital public libraries in every panchayat of Odisha.

"Libraries play a crucial role in enhancing the knowledge of students, youths and people from every walk of life. Therefore, establishing new libraries and modernising the present library infrastructure is essential," said chief guest State Assembly Speaker Surama Padhy.

The conference marked a significant step forward in transforming libraries from traditional book hubs into dynamic centres of digital access, learning, innovation and



community empowerment to build an inclusive knowledge culture across Odisha.

Dr Uma Mahadevan, Additional Chief Secretary and Development Commissioner of Karnataka, participated as the keynote speaker through videoconference. Dr Ajay Kumar Mohanty, chairman of OSA's Odisha Public Library Initiative, and convenor Nishikant Sahoo presented key proposals and insights.

The conference engaged in extensive deliberations on how Odisha can rapidly build state-of-the-art public libraries accessible to every citizen and how a robust library movement under the leadership of the government can play a transformational role in societal empowerment.

## 'BJP a 'washing machine' for the corrupt'

**Says Congress**  
**RAJEEV RATHAN ■ Bhubaneswar**

The Congress on Sunday accused the BJP of turning itself into a "washing machine" that instantly purifies corrupt leaders the moment they join the saffron fold.

Speaking at a press conference, former MP Ananta Prasad Sethi alleged that the BJP's claims of fighting corruption stand exposed as the party continues to induct leaders facing serious allegations of scams and financial irregularities.

"Those who are branded corrupt on Monday become saints by Tuesday simply by joining the BJP," Sethi said, adding that this pattern has now become a "national joke".

Sethi accused the Central Government of weaponising



investigative agencies such as the ED and CBI to coerce opposition leaders into switching sides. "If they refuse to join the BJP, they face raids. If they join, the cases vanish. This is the real 'double engine' at work," he remarked.

Referring to the Deogarh Engineering College scam, the Congress leader alleged that BJP figures involved in the case are being actively protected.

Sethi said the BJP's increasing dependency on defectors reflects its "ideological bankruptcy" and desperation to expand its footprint in Odisha.

## CM opens State Book Fest, bats for 'gift a book' culture

**RAJEEV RATHAN ■ Bhubaneswar**

Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi inaugurated the 7th Odisha State Book Festival at the Unit-3 Exhibition Ground here on Friday and called for making book gifting a social habit to strengthen reading culture and promote Odia literature.

The 12-day festival, organised by the Department of Odia Language, Literature & Culture, features 550 stalls and a special pavilion showcasing Odisha's forgotten icons, the Baraputras.

Jnanpith Awardee Dr Pratibha Ray, attending as chief guest, described books as the foundation of human civilisation and urged youths to celebrate the coming Valentine's Day as 'Book Day'.

The Chief Minister said Odia is one of the oldest languages of India with historical imprints in inscriptions such as Hathigumpha, Dhauli and Jaugada. "Preserving, enriching and expanding our literary heritage is our collective responsibility," he said.

Majhi revealed that he has built a personal collection of 5,000-6,000 books. He appealed to children to read about Odisha's lesser-known heroes and urged writers to highlight their contributions. "Books never fade like flowers; they awaken our consciousness every day," he added.

Odia Language, Literature & Culture Minister



Surjyabanshi Suraj encouraged children to reduce dependence on mobile phones and return to reading. Ekamra MLA Babu Singh said the government has transformed a traditional book fair into a large-scale literary festival aimed at reconnecting youths with literature.

Dr Pratibha Ray praised the festival's rapid growth saying it has emerged as one of India's biggest book festivals over the past two years.

Several new titles were released during the event, including books by Colonel Sarat Mahapatra, Dr Panchanan Nayak, Badri Mahapatra, Bimala Singh and Dash Benhur and publications of the Odia Language Institute and Odisha Sahitya Akademi.

Commissioner-cum-Secretary Dr Bijay Ketan Upadhyaya delivered the welcome address while Special Secretary Debaprasad Dash proposed a vote of thanks.

## Govt reviews millet procurement drive

Senior officials including OSSC Managing Director Sudarshan Chakravarty, Agriculture and Food Production Director Shubham Saxena, representatives from the Food Corporation of India (FCI), the Odisha Tribal Development Cooperative Corporation (OTDCC) and officers from the Agriculture Department attended the meeting.

Dr Padhee emphasised that millet is emerging as a strategic crop in Odisha's climate-resilient agriculture framework. The meeting focused on ensuring a farmer-friendly procurement system at Minimum Support Price (MSP), expanding market access and preventing exploitation by middlemen. District Collectors were directed to maintain strict oversight so that unscrupulous traders do not take undue advantage of government support measures.

Officials reviewed the logistical and administrative preparations necessary to include a maximum number of farmers in this year's procurement cycle. Discussions also centred on efficient distribution of procured millet through various State welfare schemes along with supplying surplus stock to the Central Pool via FCI.

Last year, Odisha procured 7,58,000 quintals of millet, one of the highest recorded volumes under the initiative. In a significant milestone for the State's millet mission, over one lakh quintals were exported for the first time to Andhra Pradesh and the Andaman & Nicobar Islands.

Dr Padhee reiterated the government's commitment to strengthening millet cultivation as a vital response to climate challenges. "Odisha is determined to promote nutrient-rich and climate-resilient grains like millet ensuring stable income for our farmers while contributing to national food security," he said.

## State seeks Rs 4,329 cr more for food security, paddy procurement

**RAJEEV RATHAN ■ Bhubaneswar**

The Odisha Government has proposed in the State Assembly a supplementary allocation of Rs 4,329.44 crore for the Food Supplies and Consumer Welfare (FS&CW) Department for 2025-26 with a major thrust on strengthening food security and ensuring timely paddy procurement payments to farmers.

Of the total provision, Rs 3.03 crore is earmarked for administrative expenditure while Rs 4,326.40 crore has been allocated for programme expenditure.

A significant portion of the proposal supports the State's enhanced rice entitlement. The government has sought Rs 460.39 crore for providing 5 kg additional rice per NFSA and SFSS card to 70.47 lakh families in 19 districts from September to November 2025. Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi has already approved this provision. Similarly, Rs 864.59 crore has been proposed to extend the additional rice benefit to 99.25 lakh families across all 30 districts from December 2025 to March 2026.

Farmer welfare forms the backbone of the supplementary demand. For the 2025-26 Kharif season, the State has fixed the paddy procurement price at Rs 3,100 per quintal covering MSP along with input assistance. Procurement is being

prioritised for small, marginal and sharecrop farmers with payments made directly through DBT to prevent middlemen intervention and distress sale.

To ensure smooth procurement operations, the government has already provisioned a Rs 2,000-crore Revolving Fund this fiscal and now seeks an additional Rs 3,000 crore in the supplementary budget. The fund will help meet procurement costs upfront, which the State will replenish upon receiving central reimbursement. Other proposals include Rs 9.46 lakh for strengthening legal metrology labs and training facilities and Rs 1.33 crore for constructing the Civil Supplies Office (CSO) building.

## 'Strengthen State's inland navigation institutions'

Two-day talk at UCCIL concludes

**PNS ■ Bhubaneswar**

A two-day national seminar on Shipbuilding and Maritime Industrial Development concluded on December 6 here. It was jointly organised by the Utkal Chambers of Commerce and Industry Limited (UCCIL), Forum for River and Ocean Scientists Technologists (FROST), Institution of Naval Architect, and National Inland Navigation Institute (NINI).

Experts discussed issues like inland navigation, including boat designers, construction yards, operators, and shippers and movement of



passengers and freight. Besides, focus was laid on design and construction of inland vessels, particularly the smaller ones. The speakers also covered the issues on the education and training of the crew and their upgrading of the competency required for safe navigation. Besides, search and rescues, disaster management in case of any disaster, capsizing, grounding, etc., were also taken up.

In this regard, the delegation emphasized strengthening the institutions involved in the inland navigation in the State with the required capacity development for discharging the statutory mandates and responsibility for ensuring the safety in the inland navigation for safe passenger and freight with zero incidents and casualties.

Notably, the Union Ministry of Shipping, Ports, and Waterways has announced several financial support packages for the development of shipbuilding clusters in various parts of the country. Subsequently, the Odisha Government, during the recently concluded Maritime Week held in Mumbai in November 2025, declared the establishment of a greenfield shipbuilding cluster at Paradip on the Mahanadi river, at an estimated cost of Rs 25,000 crore.

It was concluded that given the increasing number of accidents, potential growth in the

IWT sector and special category vessels like adventure water sports and CNG fueled vessels etc; there is a need for development of Inland Vessel Register as an Inland Vessel Classification Society that will develop standards and procedures for the inland vessels. Further, the States lack the surveying and inspection capacity in the inland vessel sector for which it was suggested that a pool of experts is jointly developed by NINI, INA and FROST.

Moreover, to develop the crew to meet the requirements of modern vessels and efficiently operate the inland vessels, it was suggested that the States shall set up or support setting up of crew training centers at least every 200km of waterway length.

### In Sambalpur

## Police inaction in OAV records destruction decried

Civil society seeks justice

**PNS ■ Sambalpur**

The civil society and the intelligentsia under the Sasan police station limits of Sambalpur have decried the police inaction in bringing to book the culprits involved in destruction of documents of the Paramanpur Odisha Adarsha Vidyalaya although over three years have elapsed since the incident took place.

According to sources, an FIR was lodged by the in-charge Principal of the school Manjusa Mishra on September 12, 2022. As per the FIR, the admission register with some incriminating documents were found in torn and tattered condition inside the school campus.

Meanwhile, three years have passed but the police have failed to nab those who

committed the crime. Subsequently, the matter which was already submitted to the court of law in due course is now going to be permanently closed on December 8, 2025 in the Lok Adalat, as the police drew a blank so far. The local people alleged that no action was taken by the concerned authorities locally or by the OAV mandarins at Bhubaneswar, although the authorities are well aware about the serious nature of the crime.

Some parents and guardians and senior citizens believe that such repeated thefts and destruction of school records occurred in connivance with internal staff for vested interests and only a thorough police inquiry might have settled it once and for all. Conscious citizens question in whose interest the settlement of the case is going to be done?

## Energy Leaders Summit highlights Public-private push for cleaner energy



**RAJEEV RATHAN ■ Puri**

The second day of the Global Energy Leaders Summit 2025 in Puri on Sunday brought the spotlight firmly on the role of public-private partnership (PPP) in driving India's clean energy transition. The Public-Private Dialogue, themed "Partnership," underlined sustainability, investment balance and innovation as the three pillars of the country's future energy roadmap.

Deputy Chief Minister and Energy Minister Kanak Vardhan Singh Deo attended the session moderated by MetricsLed Chairman William Morrison. Energy Principal Secretary Vishal Dev stressed that India must decisively shift from fossil-fuel dependence to non-fossil energy

sources, adding that the speed and success of the transition will rely heavily on how effectively government and industry collaborate.

Panelists said India's energy transition demands strong PPP models backed by balanced, long-term investments. Odisha's distribution reforms were cited as a notable example of effective energy management under the DISCOM system demonstrating how structural reforms can strengthen reliability and efficiency.

The dialogue featured leading industry voices like Tata Power's Dr Praveer Sinha, Aurora Energy India Head Debabrata Ghosh, iForest CEO Chandra Bhusan, Renew Green Hydrogen & PMO EVP Vivek Jaswal and Avaada Group President Prashant Choubey.



# CM lays stone for Rs 313-cr Tarini Pitha redevelopment

Announces major push for a 'Golden Keonjhar'

**RAJEEV RATHAN / RAJENDRA K SAHU** ■ Bhubaneswar / Keonjhar

Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi laid the foundation stone for the long-awaited Rs 313-crore integrated redevelopment of the Maa Tarini Pitha at Ghatgaon in Keonjhar district on Sunday and said the temple would be transformed into a world-class spiritual and tourism destination.

The redevelopment project, spread across nearly 60 acres, will be completed within one year. It includes construction of a 216-bed pilgrims' accommodation facility, a pilgrim facilitation and interpretation centre, food plaza, watch-



tower, market complex, a Prasad dining hall for 500 devotees, toilet blocks, changing rooms, shoe stands, wash areas and restrooms for drivers.

Majhi also directed officials to prepare a detailed project report for additional works, particularly residential quarters for the temple's traditional servitors. He remarked that the earlier government's sanction of Rs 50 crore for the shrine was insufficient and assured that the present government would deliver a complete and lasting transformation of

the Pitha.

In a significant announcement for Keonjhar, the CM said the district would soon emerge as Odisha's third steel plant site after Rourkela and Jajpur's Kalinganagar. Nearly Rs 35,000 crore is currently available exclusively for the district's development.

The CM outlined major infrastructure projects to re-shape Keonjhar's connectivity and economic landscape. These include the ongoing eight-lane road from Paradip to Barbil, a four-lane ring road in Barbil to be developed at Rs

2,300 crore, a Rs 428-crore bypass road in Keonjhar town and a new four-lane road to the District Headquarters Hospital. Additional upcoming facilities include a Tech Park, a Data Centre under OCAC, a Textile Park at Balabhadrapur, a Data Recovery Centre at Dharanidhar University, the upgradation of the Raisuan airstrip, a new stadium and an RPRC centre at Sanaghagara.

Majhi said creation of a "Golden Keonjhar" is no longer a slogan but a planned reality.

# Ghadai turns 85, commits himself to social service

**PNS** ■ Jajpur

Senior leader and former Finance Minister Prafulla Chandra Ghadai turned 85 on Friday. It is as if age has bowed down before him. Ghadai always wears a cheerful face. Even at this age, he is very active in social programmes and public issues.



When he entered the Assembly for the first time in 1967, he was only 38 years old. After that, he never looked back. This left-wing labor leader also holds the record of presenting the maximum number of budgets as the Finance Minister of Odisha. He has presented the budget 8 times in a row.

Like every year, the Sukinda people organised a special celebration at his residence at Dhabaligiri in Jajpur district.

Ghadai said, "Sukinda is

very dear to my heart. I love the people of this area very much. I will work for these people all through my life."

Among others present on the occasion included Odia film director and actor Jhilik Bhattacharjee, Danagadi Block Chairperson Archana Das, Sukinda Block Chairman Dibyaranjan Baral, Youth leader Pradip Kumar Mohanty, Debiprasad Mohanty, Rudra Narayan Das, Pradip Nayak and Rohit Khuntia.

# 'Ambedkar's social empowerment message relevant'



## PPA observes his 69th death anniversary

**PNS** ■ Paradip

The Paradip Port Authority (PPA) observed the 69th Mahaparinirvan Diwas of Bharat Ratna Dr BR Ambedkar with a solemn ceremony at the port township on Saturday. Officers and employees gathered to honour the profound legacy of the architect of the Indian Constitution, whose ideas continue to guide the nation's democratic framework.

tary Krishna Bapi Raju G and Chief Mechanical Engineer Susil Chandra Nahak participated in the ceremony. They reflected on Dr Ambedkar's tireless efforts to uplift the marginalised communities and strengthen India's institutional framework.

The observance began with floral tributes offered by PPA Chairman PL Haranadh at the statue of Dr Ambedkar. He shared that Dr Ambedkar's vision laid the foundation for a society rooted in equality, justice and human dignity. He added that Ambedkar's message of social empowerment remains relevant as organisations work toward inclusive development.

Members of the PPTSC and ST Employees Welfare Association, including Dr DP Sethi, Paresh Murmu, Er Gangadhar Sethy and general secretary Dhuna Chandra Tarai also joined the programme. They reiterated their commitment to promoting a workplace culture that respects diversity and equal opportunity.

Deputy Chairman, PPA T Venu Gopal, Deputy Conservator Capt AC Sahoo, Secre-

The gathering collectively acknowledged Dr Ambedkar's contributions to social reform, economic thought and public policy. The participants also highlighted the need to reinforce his principles through continuous community engagement, capacity-building and welfare-driven initiatives within the port ecosystem.

# In Nuapada Farmers encouraged for sunflower farming



## Seeds, inputs distributed

**AJIT PANDA** ■ Nuapada

The ICRIASAT (International Crops Research Institute for the Semi-Arid Tropics), with support from NMEO (National Mission on Edible Oils) under the Union Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare organised a farmers' awareness programme and sunflower seeds and input distribution event under the Area Expansion of Oilseeds in Rice Fallows 2025-26 at the Chief District Agriculture Office premises, Nuapada district.

The programme was inaugurated by Nuapada Collector Madhusudan Dash in the presence of Chief District Agriculture Officer Pradipta Nayak, MLA representative Bharat Ram Sahoo, Zilla Parishad member Abani Ranjan Joshi and other senior officials from the Agriculture Department, along with the teams of ICRIASAT and YAR.

The objective of the programme was to create awareness among farmers re-

garding the importance of sunflower cultivation in rice fallow lands during Rabi 2025-26 and to encourage the productive utilisation of unused agricultural land and involvement of Women FPO in market linkage establishment of sunflower oil. The dignitaries motivated farmers to adopt improved agricultural practices and avail the benefits of the Ministry's initiatives. More than 50 farmers from different blocks of the district participated and received sunflower seeds and other agricultural inputs.

Under the guidance of Principal Scientist and Global Head, Seed Systems, ICRIASAT, Dr Manzoor Dar and State Coordinator, ICRIASAT Chakradhar Panda, the programme aims to bring 1,000 hectares of unused rice fallow land under sunflower cultivation in Nuapada district.

The programme was facilitated by Pradeep Kumar Sethi and Birendra Dharua from ICRIASAT, along with Mahendra Kumar Joshi, Haridas Patel, Arun Biswal, and Champeswar Padhani from NGO YAR.

# 'IBSCs role key to safe biotech research'

## Talk for researchers held at FMU

**PNS** ■ Baleswar

The Department of Biotechnology, Fakir Mohan University, organised a special lecture for research scholars to promote responsible and safe biotechnology research, as per the regulatory framework of the Institutional Biosafety Committee (IBSC) constituted under the Department of Biotechnology (DBT), Government of India.

The DBT has mandated that all academic and research institutions engaged in biotechnology-based research must establish an Institutional



Biosafety Committee to oversee genetic engineering experiments and ensure compliance with biosafety norms. Following the first IBSC meeting held at Fakir Mohan University, the committee recommended conducting an orientation session to enhance awareness among researchers on biosafety responsibilities and regulatory procedures.

The programme was inaugurated by FMU VC Prof Santosh Kumar Tripathy,

while chairman, PG Council Prof Bhaskar Behera was present as guest. The session featured Dr Shuvobrata Majumder (MK Bhan Fellow) from Institute of Life Sciences (ILS), Bhubaneswar, as the chief speaker.

Delivering a talk on "Understanding IBSCs: Ensuring Safe and Responsible Biotechnology Research," he highlighted the critical role of IBSCs in monitoring research proposals, maintaining labo-

ratory safety standards, and fostering an environment of ethical scientific practices.

The event commenced with a welcome address by Dr Bharat Bhusan Patnaik, Head, Department of Biotechnology, who emphasized the relevance of biosafety compliance in emerging research domains.

Assistant Professor Poonam Kumari coordinated while the vote of thanks was presented by Assistant Professor Subhashree Mahalik.

# After 11 yrs, M'bhanj man returns from Bangladesh

**RAJEEV RATHAN** ■ Bhubaneswar

For 11 years, the Hembram family of Jagannathpur village lived with a question that never stopped haunting them: Where is Sudam? Their wait ended on Sunday when Sudam Hembram, missing since 2014, finally returned home thanks to a coordinated effort by Mayurbhanj Police, the district administration and Indian and Bangladeshi authorities.

Sudam, son of late Kishore Hembram, had disappeared under mysterious circumstances. Sudam had wandered across the India-Bangladesh border and ended up in the



Chapai Nawabganj region of Bangladesh, unable to find a way back.

The turning point came on October 28, 2025 when the Indian High Commission and the Bangladesh Embassy informed the Mayurbhanj Collector and Police that a man

matching Sudam's details had been located in Bangladesh. Following instructions from the Bangladesh Embassy in Dhaka, Mayurbhanj Police verified Sudam's identity and completed all necessary formalities. A joint team was immediately formed comprising

district police, administrative officials and Sudam's relatives to bring him home.

On December 6, the team travelled to the Haridaspur in Benapole land check-post on the India-Bangladesh border. Bangladeshi officials officially handed Sudam over to Indian authorities.

As Sudam crossed the border, his family rushed to him with tears, embracing him tightly as if afraid to lose him again.

For Jagannathpur village, Sudam's return is being spoken of as nothing less than a miracle, a reminder that hope, however faint, can still find its way home.

# B'pur club distributes blankets to tribal households



**PNS** ■ Brahmapur

In a bid to protect villagers from the harsh winter cold, members of the voluntary organisation, Jai Jagannath Morning Walk Club, Brahmapur distributed blankets to every household in the tribal village of Jharapalli under Kanishi Block of Ganjam district. A total of 60 families in the village received warm blankets.

Along with this, cakes were also distributed to children and elders, bringing smiles

across the community. The event was organised under the direction of Club president Nrusingha Prasad Pattanaik and chaired by working president Kamana Padhi. Club office bearers who participated in the event included secretary S Nageswar Prusty, treasurer Dr Samir Kumar Nayak, advisors Ladu Kishore Patro, Rabindra Panda, KT Rao, convenor Susanta Kumar Padhi, Ramesh Kundu, Shankar Sahu and Sibaram Panigrahi among others.

# Barrister Bijay Behura passes away



**PNS** ■ Bhubaneswar

Barrister Bijay Kumar Behura passed away here on November 30. He was 94. He died out of old age ailments. His last rites were performed at Swargadwar, Puri. His son-in-law Sahu, Finance Director of ONGC, performed his funeral rites. His nephew Lalit Mansingh, former Ambassador of India to US, Advocate Umesh Behura and many others were present at Swargadwar.

While studying Bar-at-law at London, Barrister Behura was serving in Indian Embassy under the then Ambassador to UK Late KR Ganesh. He was appointed as Railway Advocate for long years. He was also Govt Advocate at Cuttack District Judge Court. He was the

President of Lions Club of Cuttack. He was also Zone Chairperson and then Deputy Dist Governor. As Lions Club President, he conducted various service projects benefitting the downtrodden people. A monthly of Lions Club of Cuttack was edited by him and was adjudged as best bulletin in Lions District 322B comprising Odisha, West Bengal, Bihar, Tripura, Manipur, Mizoram, Arunachal Pradesh and Andaman Nicobar.

He used to write articles on legal matters in newspapers and conducted seminars especially for the benefit of young lawyers.

In a condolence meeting conducted by the High Court Bar Association, members spoke very high of his morality and dignity.

# Heritage and jurisprudence of Orissa High Court

The venerable edifice of justice in Cuttack, the judicial capital of Odisha, stands in its brick-red, Indo-Saracenic splendour, an enduring witness to the march of law through time. Its long pillars, sunlit corridors and timeless architecture echo with the hurried footsteps of lawyers and the calm, deliberate rhythm of judges who shape the legal destiny of the State. Within these walls, countless judgments, stories of pain, struggle and triumph, have been woven into the fabric of history.



**SADANANDA DAS**

The Orissa High Court's contribution to Indian jurisprudence flows from the depth and quality of its decisions from its inception to the present-day. By interpreting Constitutional and statutory provisions, the court has strengthened the tower of justice, influencing social transformation and reinforcing the rule of law.

The Orissa High Court bears a striking resemblance to the Calcutta High Court. Its construction was envisaged during the tenure of Chief Justice Satya Bhusan Barman in 1967 and received swift approval from Chief Minister Rajendra Narayan Singh Deo. Completed in 1968 under the guid-

ance of Chief Engineer Mumtaz Ali, it remains a proud symbol of heritage, dignity and judicial excellence. Its hallowed halls, adorned with the government insignia, have resonated with the voices of eminent judges delivering landmark verdicts. These judgments have introduced new principles of law, broadened interpretations and refined procedural jurisprudence for the benefit of society which contributed to the development of law.

"A judge never writes a judgment to please or displease anybody," said former Chief Justice YV

Chandrachud. The Orissa High Court embodied this ideal when it upheld the right of prisoners to legal assistance, a judgment later recognised by the Supreme Court as one of the rarest examples elevating Article 21 of the Constitution.

Similarly, the court's interpretation of the "doctrine of eclipse" aligned pre-Constitutional laws with Fundamental Rights, and its ruling brought private educational institutions within the ambit of Article 226 reaffirming their public responsibility in imparting education and making them amenable to writ jurisdiction.

Another significant judgment held that altering recruitment norms without public notice or corrigendum is impermissible, being violative of Article 16 and not sustainable in the eyes of law. In matters of natural justice, the court asserted that natural justice is the "bedrock of the rule of law to which democracy is wedded".

Since its establishment in 1948, beginning with its first Chief Justice Bira Kishore Ray, the institution has guided Odisha's judicial evolution. It holds the distinction of producing three Chief Justices of India, Justice Ranganath Misra,



Justice GB Pattanaik and Justice Dipak Misra, whose jurisprudence continues to shape the nation.

Women, too, have contributed significantly to its legacy. Justice Amiya Kumari Padhi became its first woman judge in 1988 followed by Justice Sanju Panda in 2007. At present, Justice Savitri Ratho is the lone woman on the Bench. With only 14.27% women judges in India's higher judiciary, even the Supreme Court out of the full strength of 34 judges, now has only one woman judge, Justice BV Nagarathna.

The women judges do not even reach positions of seniority as it is found that the average age of men

is 51.8 years, but for women it is 53 years. Creating gender equality will enhance the moral legitimacy of the institution. There is a pressing need for structural and policy reforms to ensure gender parity. Judicial institutions must mirror society's diversity; only then can they truly command moral legitimacy and inspire public confidence.

The Orissa High Court is revered as a sanctum sanctorum of justice guarding rights, liberties and the people's faith in the rule of law. A milestone in its history was marked recently when, on the 75th year of its establishment, Justice Sanjeeb Kumar Panigrahi delivered a judgment in Odia language, a first in the court's annals.

The High Court is a living chronicle of Odisha's legal journey. It carries the weight of its past, the pulse of the present and the promise of the future. In the Orissa High Court, the law breathes through experience, shaping society's conscience across generations. To echo Oliver Wendell Holmes Jr., "The life of the law has not been logic; it has been experience."

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## IN BRIEF

### City records very poor air; IMD predicts cold wave



Delhi recorded “very poor” air quality on Sunday morning. According to the Central Pollution Control Board’s (CPCB) Sameer app, the Air Quality Index (AQI) at 10 am stood at 302, with 26 stations across the city reporting “very poor” levels. The CPCB classifies AQI between 0 and 50 as “good”, 51 to 100 “satisfactory”, 101 to 200 “moderate”, 201 to 300 “poor”, 301 to 400 “very poor” and 401 to 500 “severe”. Meanwhile, the India Meteorological Department (IMD) has forecast a cold wave for the day. The minimum temperature settled at 8 degrees Celsius, which is 1.6 notches below normal, while the relative humidity in the morning touched 100 per cent. The maximum temperature is expected at 22 to 24 degrees Celsius later in the day, the IMD said.

### Noida: University student dies in road accident



A 22-year-old student of a private university died on Sunday after an unidentified vehicle hit his motorcycle in Uttar Pradesh’s Gautam Buddh Nagar district, police said. The deceased, identified as Vivek Kumar Sharma, was a student of Galgotias University, police said, adding that he died on the spot. The police took the body into custody and sent it for a post-mortem, a police spokesperson said. A case has been registered, and an investigation is underway, he said. After receiving information about the incident, according to the spokesperson, hundreds of students from the university reached the spot.

## CM Rekha announces ₹1.5 crore prize for cricketer Pratika Rawal

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE  
■ New Delhi

Chief Minister Rekha Gupta, who met cricketer Pratika Rawal at her residence on Sunday, announced a prize of Rs 1.5 crore for her from the Delhi government.

Rawal, who had scored 308 runs in the recent ICC Women’s World Cup, was fourth in the list of run-scorers after Laura Wolvaardt (571), Smriti Mandhana (434) and Ashleigh Gardner (328).

The cricketer from Delhi, who was injured while playing against Bangladesh in the last group league game, was unable to play the semi-final and final.

“Today, at the chief minister’s Jan Seva Sadan, we welcomed the talented young player of the Indian women’s cricket team, Pratika Rawal. Our brilliant daughter Pratika



has made Delhi proud. In recognition of her commitment to the sport and her outstanding performance, the Delhi government will award her a prize of Rs 1.5 crore,” Chief Minister Rekha Gupta said in an X post.

The chief minister said Rawal is a living embodiment of energy, courage and women’s empowerment. “Her journey shows that Delhi not only gives birth to

## You are the future: Shubhanshu tells students

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE  
■ New Delhi

Indian Air Force Group Captain Shubhanshu Shukla, the first astronaut from the country to travel to the International Space Station, on Sunday urged youngsters to contribute towards realising a ‘Viksit Bharat’ by 2047, a goal the Centre has envisaged.

Speaking at the launch of the Delhi government’s AI Grind Challenge, Shukla shared his experience in space and highlighted the role of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in space technology.

“You are the future. I am giving you a call to action. You have to work towards realising the goal of Viksit Bharat by 2047,” the astronaut told the students.

Earlier this year, Shukla became the first Indian to visit the International Space Station (ISS) as part of the Axiom-4 mission. He landed in the US and returned to India on August 17 after the 18-day mission.

“When I came here, I did not know what the programme was about. But when I saw the Education Minister



Delhi Chief Minister Rekha Gupta with the union territory’s Education Minister Ashish Sood and astronaut Shubhanshu Shukla during the launch of the government’s ‘Delhi AI Grind’ initiative across all its schools, in New Delhi

PTI

and senior leadership, it became clear where our leadership is focusing its attention. These are the areas that must be prioritised, and such efforts will take us closer to the vision of Viksit Bharat 2047,” he said.

Delhi Chief Minister Rekha Gupta said Shukla was “a

source of inspiration for the younger generation.”

She said that under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, India is forging a new global identity in the fields of AI and other technological innovations.

She claimed that the ‘AI Grind’ will bring a transforma-

tional change to the national capital’s education system.

The initiative will convert traditional classrooms into innovation-oriented labs, where students will develop AI-based projects to solve real-life problems the city faces, she said.

She said that nearly five

lakh students will benefit directly from the programme, which she called a crucial step towards the vision of a ‘Viksit Delhi’ and a ‘Viksit Bharat’. “We must all move forward together. This is the true spirit of nation-building.”

According to an official statement, the initiative will

## India’s rich civilisational heritage is rooted in spirituality, meditation: VP

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE  
■ Gurugram

Vice-President CP Radhakrishnan on Sunday emphasised India’s rich civilisational heritage rooted in spirituality, meditation and inner awakening, and recalled the contributions of sages, whose ‘tapasya’ and meditative practices have shaped the country’s timeless wisdom.

Radhakrishnan made these remarks at the launch of the silver jubilee year celebrations of the ‘Om Shanti Retreat Centre (OSRC) of the Brahma Kumaris in Gurugram.

Addressing the gathering, the Vice-President expressed happiness at joining the celebrations of the Centre, which was founded 24 years ago

with the spiritual vision of the Brahma Kumaris and has now entered its 25th year of service.

He appreciated the diversity of professionals - scientists, doctors, administrators, politicians - who are drawn to the Centre’s message of peace and meditation. Traditions such as ‘Rajyoga’ and ‘Vipasana’, he said, highlight that true strength and clarity emerge from within. Radhakrishnan lauded the Brahma Kumaris for carrying forward this spiritual legacy and guiding millions in India and abroad towards peace and purity of mind.

He commended the Brahma Kumaris for emerging as the world’s largest women-led spiritual organisation.

Radhakrishnan emphasised India’s rich civilisational her-



Vice President CP Radhakrishnan addresses the gathering during the launch of the Silver Jubilee Year of Brahma Kumaris’ Om Shanti Retreat Centre (ORC) in Gurugram

PTI

itage rooted in spirituality, meditation, and inner awakening. He noted that in the ‘Amrit Kaal’, Prime Minister Narendra Modi has envisioned a ‘Viksit Bharat@2047, where economic growth is complemented by inner stability, happiness, and peace. Meditation, he said, must be embraced as an essential life skill in today’s fast-paced world.

The Vice-President also appreciated the Om Shanti Retreat Centre’s strong commitment to environmental sustainability and alignment with Mission LIFE - an initiative encouraging individuals to adopt pro-planet lifestyles.

He praised the Centre’s green initiatives, including a 1 MW hybrid solar power plant, rainwater harvesting systems,

biogas and sewage treatment plants, green kitchens, free sapling nurseries, and large-scale tree plantation under the Kalp Taru project.

He also appreciated the Brahma Kumaris’ contribution to the ‘Nasha Mukta Bharat Abhiyaan’ and other social initiatives promoting dignity for senior citizens and the practice of Karma Yoga in all fields.

Referring to the recent inauguration of the Brahma Kumaris’ annual campaign “Rajyoga Meditation for World Unity and Trust” by President Droupadi Murmu in Lucknow, Radhakrishnan expressed confidence that the Silver Jubilee year will open new avenues of service, deeper societal partnerships, and amplified spiritual outreach.

## NCRTC launches awareness campaign on safe use of escalators

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE  
■ New Delhi

In a bid to enhance commuter safety on the high-speed Namo Bharat corridor, the National Capital Region Transport Corporation has launched a special awareness campaign on the safe use of escalators across its stations.

Under the initiative, teams from the National Capital Region Transport Corporation (NCRTC) and its operations and maintenance partner, DB RRTS India, interacted with commuters at several Namo Bharat stations, as well as with the passengers aboard trains, to spread awareness about basic escalator safety rules and responsible travel behaviour.

In the first phase, the campaign covered high-footfall stations including Anand Vihar, Ghaziabad, and Meerut South to maximise



outreach, according to a statement. During the interactions, commuters were advised to hold the handrail while using escalators, avoid rushing, refrain from mobile phone usage, and use elevators while carrying heavy or bulky luggage.

They were also informed

about the location and proper use of emergency stop buttons. Banners and posters highlighting key safety messages were displayed prominently within station premises, it said.

Special emphasis was laid on child safety, with staff sensitising commuters trav-

elling with children about necessary precautions such as holding children’s hands firmly, keeping them away from the edges, and preventing them from running or playing on escalators.

NCRTC said commuter safety remains its top priority, and awareness drives

like these play a crucial role in strengthening a culture of safe travel and ensuring a secure and reliable experience for all Namo Bharat users.

To further strengthen security, all Namo Bharat stations and trains are equipped with round-the-clock CCTV surveillance monitored from a Central Security Control Centre. Each station also has a dedicated police room for quick coordination with local authorities, while commuter screening at entry points is carried out through multi-zone Door Frame Metal Detectors (DFMDs).

At present, a 55-km stretch between New Ashok Nagar and Meerut South of the 82-km-long Delhi-Ghaziabad-Meerut Namo Bharat corridor, covering 11 stations, is operational. The remaining section is expected to be opened to the public soon, the statement said.

## Finland envoy unveils Christmas tree made from 300 kg of e-waste

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE  
■ New Delhi

Le Méridien New Delhi kicked off the holiday season in style with the unveiling of its “Consciously Festive” Christmas Tree, a 23-foot installation crafted from 300 kilograms of responsibly sourced e-waste. The initiative, executed in partnership with certified recyclers, transforms discarded electronics into a striking symbol of sustainability, creativity, and conscious luxury.

This year’s tree continues the hotel’s tradition of blending festive artistry with environmental advocacy. By highlighting the challenge of e-waste management, the installation encourages mindful consumption, reuse, and innovative repurposing of materials that would otherwise end up in landfills.

The ceremonial lighting was led by Kimmo Lähdevirta,



Ambassador of Finland to India, accompanied by the First Lady, who also joined in unveiling the hotel’s Advent Calendar. The tree and Advent Calendar reveal set the tone for a festive season focused on community, creativity, and conscious celebration.

Guests were invited to explore the hotel’s E-Waste Drop Box, aimed at promoting responsible disposal habits among visitors. Meena Bhatia, Vice President and General Manager of Le Méridien New Delhi, hosted the Advent Calendar Reveal, sharing daily

surprises that include exclusive dining offers, festive lobby moments, and seasonal treats.

“Festive installations should be more than ornamental — they should embody values. Each year, our Christmas tree becomes a canvas for sustainability, design, and craftsmanship. By upcycling materials and collaborating with artisans, we create not just beauty but meaning. This season, we are proud to once again present something unexpected, rooted in conscious luxury and shared with the city.”

## Mongoose brush complaint quashed

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE  
■ New Delhi

The Delhi High Court has quashed a complaint case for allegedly violating the Wildlife (Protection) Act against a person who was purportedly the in-charge of the management of a school where a raid in 2013 led to the recovery of seven mongoose hair brushes from its biology laboratory.

Justice Neena Bansal Krishna was hearing a petition challenging the criminal proceedings initiated against the accused, Deepesh Gupta, who was booked for keeping the prohibited wildlife articles (brushes) for educational purposes at the Bal Bhawan Senior Secondary School in Laxmi Nagar here.

Advocate Sumeet Verma, the petitioner’s counsel, said the complaint was filed against the alleged in-charge of the school, but not against

the school or society, which was in violation of the mandatory Wildlife Act provisions.

In its order dated December 1, made available with a corrigendum on Saturday, the court noted Verma’s submissions that the batches of mongoose brushes were procured before the carnivorous mammal was declared a banned species under the Wildlife Act in September 2002. It, however, said that though the brushes were acquired before possession of the animal or its articles was not legally prohibited, the school failed to disclose or provide a declaration about the lawful possession of the banned articles, in terms of the Wildlife Act. The court said the complaint was maintainable as it disclosed a prima facie offence under the provisions of the Wildlife (Protection) Act.

## Politicians, State heads attend prayer meeting held for Swaraj Kaushal

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE  
■ New Delhi

A prayer meet was held on Sunday to eulogise former governor of Mizoram, Swaraj Kaushal, who died on December 4 at 73.

His daughter, Bansuri Swaraj, shared her memories of her father and her mother, the late Sushma Swaraj, and paid her tributes to them both.

She expressed her gratitude to the dignitaries who turned up at her home, several judges of the Supreme Court and high courts, political leaders, relatives, fellow advocates, and political workers, among them.

“Your sentiments will give me the strength to bear this untimely loss,” said the current BJP MP from New Delhi. A message from Prime Minister Narendra Modi was read out at the prayer meeting.



Union ministers Shivraj Singh Chouhan, Arjun Meghwal, and Gajendra Shekhawat were among the politicians who paid their homage to the deceased.

Mizoram Governor General V K Singh, Delhi Lieutenant Governor V K Saxena, Delhi Chief Minister Rekha Gupta, Haryana Chief Minister Nayab Singh Saini, and Delhi Assembly Speaker

Vijender Gupta were in attendance.

MPs Ravi Shankar Prasad, Anurag Thakur, Naveen Jindal, Manoj Tiwari, Kamaljeet Sehrawat, Aam Aadmi Party Delhi unit president Saurabh Bhardwaj, Congress National Media Head Pawan Khera, Shiv Sena spokesperson Priyanka Chaturvedi also attended the condolence meeting.



## CM Stalin: TN rising investor meet brings jobs, growth



Tamil Nadu CM MK Stalin said on Sunday that the State signed 91 MoUs at the TN Rising Investor Meet here, bringing in investments worth ₹36,660 crore and creating 56,766 jobs. The CM said that thanks to the “unshakable confidence” shown by the investors, Tamil Nadu is moving towards the goal of becoming a one-trillion-US-dollar economy.

## US Under Secretary Allison Hooker begins India visit

Allison Hooker, the US Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs, is on a five-day visit to India from Sunday to advance bilateral strategic and economic ties. Hooker's trip to New Delhi and Bengaluru comes amid increasing strain in ties between the two countries after Washington slapped a whopping 50 per cent tariff on Indian goods, including 25 per cent levies for India's procurement of Russian crude oil.



## Amit Shah predicts NDA victory in Bengal and TN



Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Sunday said the NDA will score a big victory in the upcoming elections to West Bengal and Tamil Nadu with the support of the people who have rejected the Congress and its allies in every corner of the country.

## CM Saini urges scientists to take science beyond labs

Haryana CM Nayab Singh Saini on Sunday urged scientists to take science beyond laboratories, ensuring its benefits reach every person in society. He said science brings true prosperity only when it helps a farmer increase crop yield, cures a patient's illness, and empowers an entrepreneur. Addressing the 11th India International Science Festival in Panchkula, Saini said science is not just a career, but a medium for nation-building, according to an official Statement issued.



# Nehru's reality will be exposed in Parliament: BJP

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE  
■ New Delhi

The BJP on Sunday asserted that Jawaharlal Nehru's "reality" will come out in the open during the upcoming debate on Vande Mataram's anniversary in Lok Sabha, as it played Congress leader Sonia Gandhi over her allegation that the ruling dispensation's main objective is to vilify the country's first prime minister.

The Congress tried to "end" the legacy of leaders like Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, Dr Bhim Rao Ambedkar and Subhash Chandra Bose just to keep Nehru's legacy alive, BJP national spokesperson Sambit Patra charged and asked the Congress parliamentary party chairperson to stop promoting the Nehru-Gandhi family.

"So far as the question of finishing Nehru's legacy is concerned, who best will finish his legacy other than

the present clan of the so-called Gandhis who are out on bail in the National Herald case," the BJP MP from Puri Lok Sabha constituency told reporters here, in an apparent reference to Sonia Gandhi and her son Rahul Gandhi, the Leader of Opposition in Lok Sabha.

Without naming Gandhis, Patra said that an FIR has recently been filed against them for allegedly "capturing" National Herald, which was started by Nehru.

"If they are not tarnishing the legacy of Nehru, then who else is trying to do so," Patra said, adding, "When there will be a debate on Vande Mataram in Parliament tomorrow, I feel that the reality of Nehru ji will be revealed to everyone; he will again be exposed."

Prime Minister Narendra Modi will initiate the debate on the 150th anniversary of the national song, Vande Mataram, in the Lok Sabha



“THE BJP AIMS NOT TO REWRITE HISTORY BUT TO RECTIFY IT, GIVING PROPER RECOGNITION TO THOSE WHO TRULY CONTRIBUTED TO INDIA'S INDEPENDENCE AND ITS DIVERSE HERITAGE”

On Monday, while Home Minister Amit Shah will begin the discussion in the Rajya Sabha on December 9.

The Lok Sabha has listed 'Discussion on the 150th anniversary of national song Vande Mataram' on Monday and allocated 10 hours for the debate.

On Sonia Gandhi's accusations that a systematic attempt is being made to demolish Nehru's multifaceted legacy and rewrite history, Patra hit back, saying the BJP is only trying to ensure that due recognition is given to leaders.

"The BJP is not trying to

rewrite history. The BJP is trying to rectify the history and give due recognition to the people who really contributed towards the independence of this country and to the various other facets of this country," he added.

Reacting sharply to the Congress leader's allegation that those targeting Nehru belong to an ideology that had no role whatsoever in the country's freedom movement and the making of the Constitution, the BJP said the remark is coming from a person who did not even belong to the country.

"Sonia Gandhiji, you shouldn't have raised this question.... It's because the country will ask a counter question as to what role Sonia Gandhi, who was known as Antonia Maino, and her family played in India's freedom struggle," he said.

"All of us who are here

have, in some form, directly or indirectly, contributed and participated in the freedom struggle. But you did not even belong to this country. So you don't ask this question as to what contribution we made in the freedom struggle," Patra said.

The BJP leader also targeted Gandhi over her remarks that Nehru firmly believed in secularism, alleging that he had a "false sense of secularism" because he had once said that the original version of Vande Mataram would "irritate Muslims".

For Nehru, only that definition of secularism was important in which Lord Ram does not exist, he charged.

"Tomorrow, when there will be a discussion on Vande Mataram, I feel that Nehru will again be subjected to debate and discussion, and might be exposed," Patra said.

## Chhattisgarh's Kondapalli village gets its first mobile tower

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE  
■ Raipur

A mobile tower has been installed for the first time at Kondapalli village in Chhattisgarh's Naxal-affected Bijapur district, an area long cut off from the outside world, officials said on Sunday.

The village, about 450 km from State capital Raipur and located in the dense forests along the border with Telangana, did not have roads, electricity and drinking water until recently.

The installation of a mobile tower last week was not merely a technological step forward for the local community but a symbol of getting connected with the outside world, said a Government Statement.

His Government was committed to ensure that every village and every family in Bastar region becomes part of the development mainstream, gains access to digital services, and sees new avenues of opportunity open for them, Chief Minister Vishnu Deo Sai was quoted as saying in the Statement.

This was the dawn of a new era of trust, transformation and new possibilities, he said.

Mobile network was being provided under the 'Niyad Nellanaar' (Your Good Village) scheme of the State Government which aims to bring development to remote villages close to security camps, the Statement said.

As the tower's activation was announced last week, excitement swept through Kondapalli as women, men and children marched to the tower site in a procession and performed traditional rituals. People danced to the beat of the 'mandar' drum and residents of neighbouring villages also joined in.

With mobile network, the villagers can now access banking services, Aadhaar, ration, health schemes, pension schemes and educational services, the release said.

Since a security camp was set up at Kondapalli in December 2024, the administration has been able to reach the village regularly. The long-defunct road in the area is being reconstructed by the Border Roads Organisation, and work on a 50-km stretch is currently under progress, the Statement said.

## Parliament panel to summon IndiGo, DGCA amid flight chaos

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE  
■ New Delhi

With air travel chaos continuing for the sixth consecutive day, the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Transport, Tourism and Culture is set to summon top executives of IndiGo and key officials of the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) and the Ministry of Civil Aviation to explain about the cause of disruption in air services and possible solutions.

The committee, chaired by JD(U) leader Sanjay Jha, has taken serious note of the hardships faced by thousands of passengers stuck at airports nationwide. According to a panel member, even several parliamentarians travelling to the national Capital for the Winter Session were affected by IndiGo cancellations and delays by other carriers.



Union Minister of Civil Aviation Ram Mohan Naidu Kinjarapu chairs a meeting to addressing the disruption caused by the recent IndiGo operational crisis

A member said the panel has taken serious note of the difficulties faced by thousands of passengers due to disruption in air services.

Even parliamentarians, who were in the national capital for the Winter Session, faced the brunt of flight cancellations by IndiGo and delays by other airlines,

the panel member said.

Civil aviation minister Ram Mohan Naidu, in response to Rahul Gandhi's remark, stated that the Government has consistently promoted competition in the aviation sector to promote the entry of more airlines in the market. He highlighted recent legislation aimed at

reducing leasing costs, noting that it will make it easier for airlines to expand their fleets. In his Statement, Naidu pointed out that the IndiGo crisis is an issue of public concern rather than a political issue.

Several MPs also received complaints from people about air fares shooting up due to the scenario. Meanwhile, CPI(M) Rajya Sabha member John Brittas, who is not part of the standing committee on transport, has demanded setting up of a joint parliamentary committee or a judicial inquiry into the large-scale disruption of flights.

IndiGo cancelled more than 220 flights at Delhi and Mumbai airports on Sunday, as the disruptions entered the sixth day even as efforts were on to normalise operations.

The Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) has held IndiGo's top manage-

ment accountable for ongoing flight disruptions, issuing a show-cause notice to its CEO Pieter Elbers, as the low-cost airlines cancelled more flights on Sunday amid an ongoing crisis.

The aviation regulator has sought explanation from him within 24 hours on why enforcement action should not be initiated against him after widespread IndiGo delays and cancellations disrupted air travel across the country.

The rules the airline failed to comply with are 42A of the Aircraft Rules, 1937, and Civil Aviation Requirements which pertain to fatigue management of pilots.

According to the DGCA notice, "Whereas such large-scale operational failures indicate significant lapses in planning, oversight, and resource management, and prima facie non-compliance on the part of the airline".

## Three Jharkhand migrants among victims of Goa nightclub fire

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
■ Lapung (Ranchi)

Three migrant workers from Jharkhand were among those killed in the Goa nightclub fire, their family said on Sunday.

Two brothers, Pradeep (24) and Vinod Mahto (20), from Fatehpur village in Lapung, and Mohti Manda (22) from Govindpur village in Khunti district's Karra block, died in the incident, their families said.

Phagu Mahto (32), elder brother of Pradeep and Vinod, said they learnt of the deaths around 3am after one of their relatives in Goa called.

"I lost both my brothers - Pradeep and Vinod. We came to know about it when we received a call from Nishan Kumar, one of our relatives who had gone to Goa in search of livelihood. My father Dhaneshwar Mahto is shocked."

At least 25 people were killed and six others suffered injuries in a massive fire that erupted at a nightclub in North Goa after midnight on Sunday.

The deceased included four tourists and 14 staff members, while the identities of the remaining seven were yet to be established, police said.

Six persons who suffered

injuries in the blaze and they are currently undergoing treatment at the Goa Medical College and Hospital, Bambolim.

Phagu said both the brothers had migrated to Goa around 10-12 months ago and were scheduled to celebrate Holi with family next year.

"My brothers used to send around Rs 30,000 per month to support the family here. Both were unmarried," he said. So far none of the officials or any representatives from the State Government have contacted the family, Phagu claimed.

His wife Sulanti said the family is very poor and they

depended on their meagre income from a makeshift sweets shop in the village and money sent by the brothers.

In Govindpur, the family of Mohti Munda received a similar call informing them of his death. Relatives said his father, Etwa Manda, was in shock.

His son, Mohti Manda (22) who worked in the same nightclub had also died in the blaze.

An official at the State migrant control room in Ranchi said they had contacted all affected families and efforts were underway to reach the employer in Goa.

### CONGRESS DEMANDS PROBE

**New Delhi:** The Congress on Sunday demanded a comprehensive investigation and strict accountability for the tragic fire at a nightclub in Goa that killed 25 people, with Rahul Gandhi claiming it was a criminal failure of safety and governance.

The fire broke out at Birch by Romeo Lane, a popular nightclub at Arpora village in North Goa, early Sunday, killing at least 25 people, including four tourists and 14 staff members, and injuring six others.

Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge expressed his deepest condolences to those who lost their loved ones in the blaze.

"This avoidable tragic incident is an irreparable loss, and I pray for the speedy recovery of all those who have been injured."

"Such tragedies call for a comprehensive investigation, strict accountability, and immediate steps to ensure that all fire safety norms are enforced, so that such devastating incidents are never repeated," Kharge said in a social media post.

## PM Modi gifts marble chess set to Putin

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE  
■ Agra

With Prime Minister Narendra Modi gifting a marble chess set from Agra to Russian President Vladimir Putin during his recent India visit, the local handicraft artisans said they are now hopeful of more recognition for their work.

The chessboard, crafted from stone with intricate inlay work, is similar to the traditional techniques used on marble in Taj Mahal. Handicraft artist Adnan Sheikh expressed gratitude to the Prime Minister for showcasing Agra's centuries-old crafts-

manship on the global stage.

"Today, the whole world is talking about a chess set made in Agra. After Prime Minister Modi gifted a handcrafted piece to the Russian President, the value and recognition of this art has increased. Demand for hand-made stone inlay work will grow worldwide, boosting the morale of local artisans," Sheikh said.

Artisan Zafar said the news have renewed hope among craftsmen, who were struggling for regular work. "Now that people around the world know about Agra's handicraft, employment will rise. We hope this art will flourish

again and wages will improve," he said.

Trader Ayush Gupta said nearly 5,000 artisans and merchants in Agra are associated with stone inlay handicraft, a business worth crores of rupees annually.

"Gifting a handcrafted chess set to the Russian President has energised the entire trade community. We will display the photograph of Prime Minister Modi presenting the gift to President Putin in our showrooms. We will also inform Russian tourists that the chess set gifted to their President was made right here in Agra," Gupta said.

## Rajasthan: Leopard dies under mysterious circumstances

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
■ Jaipur

A leopard that was trapped in a room following an attack on a minor boy died allegedly under mysterious circumstances in the Banswara district of Rajasthan on Sunday morning.

The incident occurred in a village under the Kalinjara police station area. According to the police, 15-year-old Shantilal was sitting outside his house when the leopard suddenly attacked him, leaving him injured. Hearing his screams, family members rushed to his aid, prompting the leopard to flee into a nearby house.

Villagers immediately closed the door from the outside, trapping the animal inside the room. A team from the forest department arrived on the scene, and officials noted that the leopard did not seem to be in normal condition.

"Before the rescue operation could begin, the animal vomited inside the room and died shortly after. No external injury marks were found on its body," the police said. The carcass has been sent for post-mortem, officials said, adding that the cause of death will be ascertained only after the report is received.



■ States Focus ■

# Gangsters in uniform: BJP's Jakhar hits at Punjab Police



## HP GOVERNOR CALLS FOR FIGHT AGAINST DRUG ABUSE

Himachal Pradesh Governor Shiv Pratap Shukla on Sunday said that coordinated and determined efforts are required to combat drug abuse in the state.

After inaugurating a workshop on 'War on Drugs – Chitte Par Chot' organised by 'Sanjeevani', a group of NGOs, the governor said the fight against drugs demands both strict action by police and a sensitive approach towards the affected individuals. Along with the NGOs, participation from religious institutions is crucial to break the drug network backed by foreign entities, Shukla said.

Appreciating the efforts of the state Government in tackling the drug menace, particularly the manner in which both the ruling and Opposition parties united on this issue, Shukla said, "Without collective political resolve, it would not be possible to save the Devbhoomi from this crisis."



## GOGOI HAILS TEZPUR STUDENTS AS SYMBOL OF NEW ASSAM

Congress leader Gaurav Gogoi on Sunday lauded the student-led agitation at Tezpur University as a symbol of "new Assam". Gogoi, the deputy leader of the Congress in Lok Sabha and chief of the party in the state, criticised the government for its handling of the unrest, which started in mid-September following the death of singer Zubeen Garg. "It is disappointing to see the manner in which Tezpur University is being tackled by the government. At the same time, I am proud of the manner in which the students and faculty of Tezpur University have conducted themselves. Firm, unbending and dignified," Gogoi said in a series of posts on X.

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE  
■ Chandigarh

In a sharp attack on the Punjab Police, state BJP chief Sunil Jakhar Sunday called it "gangsters in uniform" and alleged that certain police personnel have "bowed" to the AAP dispensation, helping in "undemocratic tasks".

Jakhar also attacked the Bhagwant Mann Government for the alleged deteriorating law and order, claiming there is a prevailing atmosphere of fear in Punjab, as he cited extortion threats and firing incidents.

He referenced AAP leader Arvind Kejriwal's warning to gangsters to leave Punjab within seven days or face consequences.

Instead of leaving, Jakhar claimed, gangsters have openly accepted this challenge, committing crimes daily, while Kejriwal has not been seen in Punjab since



making the threat.

During a media address, Jakhar cited several alarming incidents, including the murder of the son of an RSS leader in Ferozepur, two deaths during a shooting at

a marriage palace in Ludhiana, and an attack on the residence of AAP leader Daljit Raju in Phagwara.

He remarked that hardly a day goes by without a shocking crime committed by

gangsters.

Jakhar noted that despite Punjab having 17 officers with the rank of Director General of Police (DGP) and 13 with the rank of Additional DGP, crime continues to rise.

# Lakhs of people assemble in Kolkata to chant Gita

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ Kolkata

Lakhs of *sanatani* devotees led by prominent *sadhus* and *sadhvis* on Sunday assembled at the historic Brigade Parade Ground in Kolkata to participate in a mega Bhagwad Gita recital programme christened *Paanch Lakho Konthe Gita Paath* (chanting of Gita in 5 lakh voices).

While Governor CV Ananda Bose addressed the gathering — interpreted by many a critic as a pre-electoral show of strength by the pro-BJP groups — senior BJP leaders, including Union Minister and former Bengal BJP state president Sukanta Majumdar, ex-MP Locket Chatterjee and MLA Agnimitra Paul, and prominent religious figures, including Dharendra Shastri and Kartik Maharaj attend

the event.

Speaking to the media men after the programme Majumdar said "Gita is not a religion specific book, it is applicable not only to the Hindus but members of all religions."

On whether Bengal was getting split along communal lines after former Trinamool Congress MLA Humayun Kabir's laying of the foundation stone of a Babri Mosque at Murshidabad on Saturday followed by chanting of Gita by lakhs of people on Sunday, he said, it was Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee who had brought the situation to such pass.

State BJP spokesperson Sajal Ghosh said, "alarmed by the steady alienation of the Muslim votes Mamata Banerjee has fixed Humayun Kabir to unite the Muslim



A youngster during the 'five-lakh-voices Gita chanting' event, at the Brigade Parade Ground in Kolkata on Sunday

votes in the name of Babri Mosque, she knew that his suspension from the party would trigger communal sentiments more than on normal conditions after the elections if Kabir manages to

rid of them one is sure Gita chanting will cleanse the heart of people and focus them on the real cause."

Meanwhile, in a parallel Kabir said that he too would give a call to Muslim clerics to chant hymns from Quran. "I respect the Hindu sentiments and I respect their chanting of their religious scripture Gita, I too call upon the cleric to do the same and I am giving a call to chant Quran in one lakh voices the event will be decided and the date will be declared soon," he said.

Referring to the Sunday's the TMC said that it was being done to further political goals. "When religion comes out of the home and peddled in public it surely has political purpose, the BJP and its associates are doing the same with an eye on the 2026 Assembly elections."

# 10 Naxalites surrender in MP's Balaghat

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE  
■ Bhopal

Ten wanted Naxalites, including four women, surrendered before Chief Minister Dr Mohan Yadav in Balaghat on Sunday, marking a significant step in Madhya Pradesh's push to eliminate Naxal influence.

Dr Yadav handed them copies of the Constitution as they laid down their weapons and urged other cadres to return to the mainstream, saying the state is committed to achieving Naxal-free status by January 2026.

He said the government, working in line with targets set by Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Home Minister Amit Shah, will ensure the safety, rehabilitation and development of those who abandon violence. "No individual has the licence to take up arms. Those who choose the path of law will find full support in rebuilding their lives," Dr Yadav said.

The Chief Minister said anti-Naxal operations have been strengthened through new camps, increased personnel and sustained field action. Fifteen temporary camps and 882 posts for a special support battalion



have been sanctioned to reinforce the campaign. He said continuous surveillance, intensive checks and coordinated action have sharply reduced the Naxal footprint in the state.

Dr Yadav said last year's opening of 46 single-window centres in affected regions has helped provide employment, forest rights documents and essential services, aiding rehabilitation efforts. Paying tribute to policeman Ashish Sharma, he said 328 Hawk Force personnel and other officers demonstrating exceptional service have been granted out-of-turn promotions.

Director General of Police

Kailash Makwana said expanded operations, increased manpower and consistent encouragement for field teams have produced visible results, with surrenders rising in Madhya Pradesh and neighbouring states. Job and skill development initiatives, he said, are helping connect youth and residents in affected areas with the mainstream.

Transport and School Education Minister Uday Pratap Singh, senior police officials and personnel attended the programme, where authorities released the names of all ten cadres who surrendered across Sukma, Bijapur, Dantewada and Gadchiroli.

# Rajnath reaffirms push for self-reliant defence sector

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE  
■ Jammu

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh on Sunday reiterated the commitment of the Narendra Modi-led central Government to make the nation 'Atma Nirbhar' (Self-Reliant) in defence manufacturing.

Speaking during the launch of the 125 'game-changing' infrastructure projects in Leh, Singh emphasised that India, which was once dependent on imports, is today witnessing a paradigm shift in defence manufacturing, from being an import-dependent nation to an emerging producer-exporter.

He said the country once lacked a robust system to manufacture arms and equipment domestically, but sustained efforts over the last decade have reversed that situation.

"Due to our hard work in the last 10 years, our defence production, which was approximately ₹46,000 crore in 2014, has now grown to a record ₹1.51 lakh crore. Our defence exports, which were less than ₹1,000 crore 10 years ago, have now reached nearly ₹24,000 crore," Singh said.

Lauding the BRO for



Defence Minister Rajnath Singh dedicated 125 border infrastructure projects of Border Roads Organisation (BRO)

making great progress in technological innovation, Singh asserted that advanced engineering methods are accelerating the completion of infrastructure projects.

He made special mention of BRO's adoption of Class-70 modular bridges indigenously developed in partnership with Garden Reach Shipbuilders and Engineers under the Aatmanirbhar Bharat (Self-Reliant India) vision.

"The successful construction of these modular bridges at several forward locations is a powerful example of how indigenous technology is transforming infrastructure in border areas. These bridges, completely designed and manufactured in India, mark a significant milestone in India's engineering self-reliance," he said.

The defence minister also pointed out that in the financial year 2024-25, BRO

incurred a record expenditure of ₹16,690 crore, the highest ever, and a target of ₹18,700 crore has been set for FY 2025-26, which underlines the government's confidence in BRO's capabilities.

The Government has enhanced the BRO budget from ₹6,500 crore to ₹7,146 crore in the Union Budget 2025-26 in recognition of its critical role in national security and development, he added.

# New disease found: Judiciary must be shielded from political attacks



A ASHVATHAMAN

Judiciary should be protected from personal attacks and from colouring judges with wrong intentions. In a constitutional democracy, the courts stand as the final sentinel on the qui vive, always alert to protect rights. Judiciary should be free from unwanted colourings, because the faith of the judges should never be allowed to faint. Once that faith weakens, the entire edifice of constitutional governance starts to crumble.

If such colouring is allowed, if every judicial order is casually attributed to political or ideological bias, the trust

over the judiciary will fall. Recent public discourse has shown how quickly narratives spread, especially when amplified by party machinery or social media ecosystems.

What then remains for a citizen? A citizen obeys court orders because he believes the judge is neutral. When neutrality is doubted, the rule of law becomes a rule of convenience.

In the Thirupparangunram issue, for protecting the religious rights of Hindus conferred by the Indian Constitution, Justice GR Swaminathan passed an order. Around the same time, across India, debates on temple rights, minority rights, and Article 25 freedoms have become flashpoints, showing how sensitive such matters are. Whether one agrees or disagrees with the reasoning, the constitutional remedy is appeal, not slander.

Yet a DMK MP, TR Baalu, stood in Parliament and declared that they

"got an order from an RSS judge". A senior parliamentarian forgetting that the conduct of judges in their official duties generally cannot be discussed in Parliament or State Legislatures, as per Article 121 of the Constitution, undermines the very safeguard created to ensure judicial independence.

The act of TR Baalu demands action for breach of parliamentary privilege or contempt of the House. In legal tradition this is scandalising the court, an established category of contempt recognised since the Privy Council's 1899 decision in *McLeod v St Aubyn*, reiterated in Indian jurisprudence from *Brahma Prakash Sharma* (1953) to *Arundhati Roy* (2002).

Even more disturbing is that the High Court Registrar has not taken cognisance of this grave breach. Is this allowed? By remaining passive, the institution risks letting a dangerous precedent take root.

If this passes without action, every judge becomes vulnerable. Anyone unhappy with a judicial order will simply pour colour, attach a political label, and escape accountability. A State Government may claim political rhetoric as free speech, but freedom of speech ends where intimidation of the judiciary begins.

When a citizen sees a Member of Parliament openly attacking a judge in this manner, and the institution not responding, what confidence will he have to follow a court order? This silence sends the wrong signal, that judicial orders can be selectively obeyed. The message becomes dangerous: "Obey if it suits you; defy if it doesn't." That is the death of constitutional morality.

This attitude resurfaces when a Commissioner of Police is shown declaring publicly, "We are not following the order; we will face the conse-

quences", and this defiance is projected as heroism of the Chief Minister.

In legal language this is nothing but executive overreach dressed as bravery. Across India, debates on police non-compliance, from Delhi to Tamil Nadu, have raised the same concern: politicians celebrating disobedience erodes public discipline. In the concept of the rule of law, heroism lies in obedience to the Constitution, not rebellion against it. The police commissioner says he has no fear of consequences, it is the duty of the court to ensure that disobedience of a court order will ensue in consequences not only for a layman, but also for a police commissioner. That "ensure" is a real equality.

Due to the disease that an "accepted vengeance towards Hinduism" in the common mind of India, the Thirupparangunram incident has been allowed to pass as if it were normal.

That silence has given birth to a new disease, attacking the judiciary as the new normal. Attacking Hindus is old normal; attacking the courts is becoming the new normal. If the judiciary is targeted, constitutional morality is weakened at its root. If this continues, the greatest casualty will not be a judge or a political party but the very idea of justice.

A democracy must protect its judges from personal attacks, ideological branding, and institutional silence. The courts have always been described as temples of justice; their sanctity cannot be compromised by political mudslinging. Otherwise, the people will lose their last refuge, an impartial courtroom. And when that refuge collapses, nothing remains to protect the citizen.

The author is Tamil Nadu BJP State secretary; Founder, Project Tamil AI and Integral Humanism Foundation



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### Order Order

## SC to hear wife's plea challenging Sonam Wangchuk's detention on Monday



The Supreme Court will on Monday hear a plea filed by Gitanjali J Angmo, wife of jailed climate activist Sonam Wangchuk, terming his detention under the National Security Act "illegal, and an arbitrary exercise violating his fundamental rights". A bench of Justices Aravind Kumar and NV Anjaria is likely to hear the matter.

On November 24, the top court had deferred the matter after Solicitor General Tushar Mehta, appearing for the Centre and the UT of Ladakh, sought time to respond to the rejoinder filed by Angmo. On October 29, the top court sought responses from the Centre and the Ladakh administration on an amended plea of Angmo.

According to the amended plea, "The detention order is founded upon stale FIRs, vague imputations, and speculative assertions, lacks any live or proximate connection to the purported grounds of detention and is thus devoid of any legal or factual justification." Angmo said the unfortunate events of violence in Leh on September 24 cannot be attributed to the actions or statements of Wangchuk in any manner.

Wangchuk was detained under the stringent National Security Act (NSA) on September 26, two days after violent protests demanding statehood and Sixth Schedule status for Ladakh left four people dead and 90 injured in the Union territory. The Government had accused him of inciting the violence. The NSA empowers the Centre and states to detain individuals to prevent them from acting in a manner "prejudicial to the defence of India". The maximum detention period is 12 months, though it can be revoked earlier.



Bihar Home Minister Samrat Choudhary

## Bihar Govt to constitute 100 fast-track courts to expedite criminal cases

**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE**  
■ Patna

Bihar Home Minister Samrat Choudhary on Sunday announced that the State Government will establish 100 fast-track courts (FTCs) to ensure the swift disposal of pending cases. He said that the move also aims to ease the burden on regular courts for them to accord due attention to sensitive cases.

Choudhary said the decision in this regard has been made considering that over 18 lakh cases are pending before different courts in the State. The constitution of FTCs will "bring in a big relief" to the judicial system and litigants, he said.

"To operationalise 100 FTCs across 38 districts and sub-divisions, the Government will undertake large-scale recruitment," the home minister asserted in a statement.

He said that a total of 900 posts, including those of bench clerks, office clerks, stenographers, deposition writers, data entry operators, drivers, process servers and peons, will be filled.

Choudhary also announced that 79 courts will be designated as 'act courts' to fast-track cases related to the Arms Act. Swift resolution of such serious cases, he said, will strengthen law and order in the State.

The minister said that Patna alone will get eight fast-track courts, while four courts each will be set up in Gaya, Muzaffarpur, Darbhanga and Bhagalpur. Three FTCs each are planned for Nalanda (Bihar Sharif), Rohtas (Sasaram), Saran (Chhapra), Begusarai, Vaishali (Hajipur), East Champaran (Motihari), Samastipur and Madhubani.

Similarly, two courts each will be established in West Champaran (Bettiah), Saharsa, Purnea, Munger, Nawada, Jehanabad, Arwal, Aurangabad, Kaimur (Bhabhua), Buxar, Bhojpur (Arrah), Sitamarhi, Sheohar, Siwan, Gopalganj, Supaul, Madhepura, Araria, Kishanganj, Katihar, Banka, Jamui, Sheikhpura, Lakhisarai and Khagaria. One FTC each is also proposed for the sub-divisional courts of Naugachia and Bagaha.



# Sandesara settlement tests India's fight against financial crime



**RANJIT  
KUMAR  
SINHA**

A recent decision by the Supreme Court to quash all criminal proceedings against the Sandesara brothers — Nitin and Chetan Sandesara, promoters of the Sterling Biotech group — has seized national attention. The order, based on a One-Time Settlement (OTS) of ₹5,100 crore, carries significant implications for the prosecution of fugitive economic offenders and large-scale bank fraud.

The case originated from allegations of a multi-crore bank fraud (initially pegged at over ₹5,383 crore in the FIR) involving loan defaults and money laundering, following which the Sandesara brothers fled India in 2017.

The Apex Court's November 19, 2025, order is strictly conditional. The Supreme Court agreed to drop all parallel actions by a host of investigative agencies, including the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI), the Enforcement Directorate (ED), the Serious Fraud Investigation Office (SFIO), the Income Tax Department, and all proceedings under the Fugitive Economic Offenders Act, 2018.

This sweeping quashing is entirely contingent upon the Sandesara brothers depositing the sum of ₹5,100 crore as a "full and final settlement" with the Supreme Court Registry on or before December 17, 2025. This figure was proposed by the Solicitor General, representing the Government and agencies, after consultation with the lender banks.

The Apex Court's primary objective was the recovery of public money, noting that continuing criminal prosecution would serve little purpose if the defalcated amount is substantially returned to the banks.

Crucially, the Supreme Court explicitly clarified that these directions were based on the "peculiar facts of this case" and "shall not be treated as a precedent" in future matters, limiting the order's potential use by other offenders.

In a nutshell, the Supreme Court's extraordinary order is a trade-off where the Government and banks accepted cash over jail. This decision has generated a significant and sharply divided reaction across the legal, financial, and political spheres.

The core of the reaction centres on the tension between the immediate recovery of public money versus the long-term goal of deterrence and penal justice for economic crimes.

Critics believe that despite the warning, this order creates a powerful road map for any wealthy economic criminal to negotiate



**Nitin Sandesara**

**Chetan Sandesara**

their freedom if they can settle their debts, potentially weakening laws meant to punish fugitives and major fraudsters. The order has generated keen interest and intense legal scrutiny, particularly when considering the complex background against which the Sandesara saga reached the Apex Court around 2020, resulting in the definitive quietus of all criminal litigation.

This is more so when the Sandesara case has been connected to several politicians, bureaucrats, and other influential people, leading to a political controversy that ran parallel to the financial fraud investigations.

The connections primarily involve allegations of corruption, kickbacks, and the use of influence to facilitate the fraud and impede investigations. Consequently, the quashing of the proceedings against the brothers automatically shields their alleged co-conspirators and facilitators, who were also under investigation.

In the Sandesara case, another noteworthy feature was that the brothers had secured an order of protection from arrest or any coercive action from the Supreme Court. They were also at an advantage as the Government agencies failed in their effort to bring them back from a foreign land.

In this background, a question arises regarding the existence of back-channel negotiations before the matter formally reached the Supreme Court for settlement. While clarity on these discussions rests with the Government, it appears that this back-channel consensus was formally presented to the Supreme Court in a crucial, non-public manner. The Solicitor General, representing the Government and the investigating agencies, submitted the final proposal of ₹5,100 crore demand in a sealed cover — a figure the Sandesaras then accepted. The Supreme Court order immediately

raises another question: why must the Sandesara matter be brought under the category of 'peculiar facts' — to be not treated as a precedent for other fugitive economic offenders of nearly equal magnitude?

Does the existence of an extradition treaty or deportation provisions with the countries of refuge deprive them of the same legal remedy?

The quashing of all criminal proceedings also suggests that the Sandesaras will escape any finding of criminal intent (mensrea).

The settlement guarantees the recovery of money, but it simultaneously ensures that the accused are never found criminally guilty of fraud or money laundering, thereby undermining the foundational principle of criminal law — punishment based on intent.

Further, agencies like the ED and SFIO spent years building their cases (money laundering, corporate fraud). The ultimate resolution, being a cash-for-freedom deal, could demoralise investigators and incentivise them to focus solely on asset attachment rather than conviction.

Giving an insight about the order, noted jurist and senior advocate AK Ganguli, said it is true that the Apex Court has not referred to Article 142 of the Constitution, but it is evident that the Top Court has invoked it's inherent powers for quashing the FIRs and the related proceedings that were pending against the petitioners in various fora for violation of several provisions of PMLA, FEOA (Fugitive Economic Offenders Act, 2018), Black Money (Undisclosed Foreign Income and Assets) and Imposition of Tax Act, 2015, Section 447 of the Companies Act, 2013, Prevention of Corruption Act read with Section 120B (Criminal Conspiracy), 420 (Cheating), 467 (Forgery), 468 (Forgery for the purpose of Cheating) and 471 (Using as genuine a forged document) IPC etc.

Ganguli said it is also evident from the Order passed by the Court that all the proceedings pending against the petitioners in various courts and tribunals were in relation to complaints of serious offences being committed by them that attracted penal provisions of several statutes.

The Writ Petitions filed by the petitioners sought the quashing of all proceedings listed in the Order. It is also evident that the prosecuting agencies agreed that if the petitioners pay a lump sum of ₹5,100 crores, which includes liabilities of overseas companies, the pending proceedings would be all quashed. The Court has accepted that proposal given by the parties, including the proposal given by the prosecuting agencies in a sealed cover. However, Ganguli is of the view that it appears that none of the parties brought to the notice of the Court the legal position applicable to the case.

The Senior Advocate said it is well settled that an agreement to stifle prosecution is not enforced by the courts on the ground that the consideration for such an agreement is opposed to public policy and is a violation of Section 23 of the Contract Act.

He said way back in 1962, the Supreme Court in *B NarasimhaRaju v. V GurumurthyRaju*, 1963 (3) SCR 678, had ruled that "the principle underlying this provision (Section 23 of the Indian Contract Act) is obvious. Once the machinery of the Criminal Law is set into motion on the allegation that a non-compoundable offence has been committed, it is for the criminal courts and criminal courts alone to deal with that allegation and to decide whether the offence alleged has in fact been committed or not.

"The decision on this question cannot, either directly or indirectly, be taken out of the hands of criminal courts and dealt with by private individuals. When, as a consideration for not proceeding

with a criminal complaint, an agreement is made, in substance it really means that the complaint has taken upon himself to deal with his complaint and on the bargaining counter he has used his non-prosecution of the complaint as a consideration for the agreement which his opponent has been induced or coerced to enter into."

Ganguli said that the Supreme Court further held that 'In dealing with the question as to whether the consideration for the agreement is opposed to public policy or not, it is immaterial that the debt in respect of which an agreement is made for the illegal consideration was real, nor was it necessary to prove that a crime in fact had been committed.

All that is necessary to prove in such a case is "that each party should understand that the one is making his promise in exchange or part exchange for the promise of the other not to prosecute or continue prosecuting."

Clarifying further, the noted jurist said that the Supreme Court held that "it is clear that if the appellant proves that the consideration for the arbitration agreement was the promise by respondent not to prosecute his complaint, then the said consideration would be opposed to public policy and the agreement based on it would be invalid in law."

Citing certain Privy Council decisions, Ganguli said that the Apex Court further held that "In dealing with the question as to whether the consideration for the agreement is opposed to public policy or not, it is immaterial that the date in respect of which an agreement is made for the illegal consideration was real, nor is it necessary to prove that a crime in fact has been committed.

All that is necessary to prove in such a case is "that each party should understand that the one is making his promise in exchange or part exchange for the promise of the other not to prosecute or continue prosecuting"."

One is not certain as to how the Court would have concluded the case, had this clear, unequivocal legal position been brought to its notice, Ganguli said.

Regardless of the uncertainty over whether the Supreme Court was fully apprised of the legal position on stifling prosecution, the resulting order in the Sandesara case is clear. While it is not a formal legal precedent that grants a right to settlement, it has created a powerful institutional signal that economic criminals with the financial capacity to make a significant repayment can negotiate a "cash-for-freedom" deal at the highest judicial level.

The writer is a senior journalist covering legal affairs

## Faced criticism from my own community on creamy layer principle: Ex-CJI Gavai

**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE**  
■ Mumbai

Former Chief Justice of India BR Gavai has said he has been "widely criticised" by people from his own community for stating in a judgement that the creamy layer principle should be applied to reservation for the Scheduled Castes. In Dr BR Ambedkar's view, affirmative action was like providing a bicycle to someone who is lagging behind, Gavai said, asking whether Ambedkar thought that such a person should never give up the bicycle. Ambedkar did not think so, he claimed.

Gavai, who retired as CJI recently, was delivering a lecture on "Role of Affirmative Action in Promoting Equal Opportunity" at Mumbai University on Saturday.

Paying tributes to Ambedkar on his death anniversary, Gavai said the iconic leader was the architect not only of the Indian Constitution but also of the affirmative action enshrined in it.

"Babasaheb, in so far affirmative action is concerned, was of the view that it is like providing a cycle to those who are lagging behind.... Suppose somebody is at tenth km and somebody at zero, he (the latter) should be provided a cycle, so that he reaches faster till the tenth km. From there, he joins the person who is already there and walks along with him. Did he (Ambedkar) think that the person should not leave the cycle and carry forward and thereby ask the people who are at zero km to continue to be there?" he asked.

"In my view, that was not the vision of social and economic justice as contemplated by



Former CJI BR Gavai

Babasaheb Ambedkar. He wanted to bring social and economic justice in the real sense and not in a formal sense," the former CJI added. The Indra Sawhney and Others Vs Union of India case enunciated the creamy layer principle, and in another case, he himself held that the creamy layer should also be made applicable to the Scheduled Castes, said Gavai.

The principle demands that those who are sufficiently advanced economically and socially should not get the benefit of affirmative action, even though they are members of the backward community for which it is meant.

He was "widely criticised" by the people of his own community for this judgement, Gavai said, adding that he was accused of taking benefit of the reservation himself to become a Supreme Court judge and then advocating the exclusion of those who fell in the creamy layer. But these people did not even know that there is no reservation for the constitutional office of High Court or Supreme Court judge, Gavai said. Can applying the

same yardstick to the son of a chief justice of India or chief secretary and the son of a labourer who has studied in a gram panchayat school satisfy the test of equality as enshrined in the Constitution, he asked. Gavai, however, emphasised that in the last 75 years "no doubt affirmative action has played a positive role".

"I have travelled across the country, travelled across the world, I have seen many people belonging to the Scheduled Caste becoming chief secretary or director general of police or ambassadors and high commissioners," he said. Maharashtra is a land of social reformers, and the "region can truly be described as the birthplace of the idea of modern India", Gavai said. "We are all aware of Jyotirao Phule and Savitribai Phule's pioneering work in the eradication of inequalities in society," he said.

When women were among the most oppressed in society, it was the Phule couple who opened the door of education for them, he noted.

## Unrest in Jharkhand HC over judges' appointments

**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE**  
■ Ranchi

Jharkhand High Court is facing a silent unrest over the recommendations on the appointment of judges. The conflict focuses on the Collegium, comprising the Chief Justice and the two most senior judges of the High Court. According to individuals aware of the development, the Collegium has ignored certain names that were previously under active consideration for elevation. Lawyers assert that for more than eight years, not a single name from the local Bar (advocates practising at the High Court) has been successfully recommended for elevation to a High Court judge post.

Sources claim that the selection process is being driven by personal interest and nepotism, rather than merit, preventing the appointment of the most competent advocates. They maintain that this is the reason for the continuous failure to fill posts from the local Bar.

Facing an extreme shortage of judges and impending retirements in December 2025 and January 2026, the Collegium is reportedly sending names of seven Advocates to the Supreme Court for elevation, as mandated. However, sources contend that this new list was deliberately prepared to include candidates who are over the age of 55 and have little to no actual legal practice.

The purpose of recommending these aged and less-practising candidates, according to sources, is to ensure the Supreme Court rejects the list. This rejection would then stall the process until other favoured lawyers, who currently do not meet the eligibility criteria, become eligible for recommendation at a later date. Additionally, some of the can-

didates being recommended are reportedly close to a Collegium member, highlighting a pattern of internal politics and favouritism. This current unrest echoes past conflicts. Sources recall that when the previous Chief Justice recommended six lawyers for elevation, one Collegium member dissented.

The actual concern, according to the Bar, was the inclusion of an advocate who was not a regular Jharkhand High Court practitioner but was made to appear in a few cases just prior to the recommendation.

In addition, sources said the aforementioned Collegium member had in fact given his dissent for all six recommended names in the absence of the names of his favourites, and this time he has ensured, except for one all the previously recommended names have been removed in the current recommendation. It is noteworthy that the earlier panel had the names of eminent and able lawyers with impeccable integrity, whose age profile was excellent.

Lawyers argue that this "dirty politics" scuttled the elevation of several other very able advocates. These procedural issues are occurring while the court operates with a crippling shortage of judges.

The sanctioned strength for the Jharkhand High Court is 25 judges (20 Permanent and 5 Additional). The current working strength stands at just 15, leaving 10 crucial vacancies. This represents a 40 per cent shortfall, and the entire quota of five Additional Judges remains unfilled.

This persistent gap places immense pressure on the serving judges, exacerbating the backlog of cases and severely compromising the efficiency of the justice system in Jharkhand.



Editor's

TAKE

## India's moment in an uncertain world

Prime Minister Modi's recent remarks offer both a reflection on how India has navigated recent crises and a vision of where the nation must head next

When Prime Minister Modi asserted on Sunday that India is shining in a world of uncertainties, he was largely on the mark. The phrase neatly captures India's current growth trajectory. At a time when global volatility has become the new normal – marked by economic disruptions, geopolitical tensions, technological upheavals and rising environmental concerns – his remarks sought to position India as an island of stability and a country with clear purpose. Yet the address went beyond optimism; it attempted to outline both the architecture of India's present momentum and the roadblocks that remain. The first quarter of the 21st century has tested nations in unprecedented ways. A global financial crisis, a pandemic, supply-chain breakdowns, wars and deepening political polarisation have shaken the international order to its core. Modi rightly noted that India has weathered these storms through a deliberate shift in its governance culture. There was a time, he said, when reforms were reactionary – driven by crises rather than conviction. Today, reforms are calibrated to national goals rather than global panic. This, he argued, is the essence of being “constant, consistent and nation-first”. There is truth in the narrative of India as a strong and resilient economy, somewhat insulated from the vagaries of international push and pull. Much of the Prime Minister's confidence stems from India's macroeconomic trajectory. Despite global slowdowns, India remains among the fastest-growing major economies. Investment activity has strengthened, and inflation is relatively under control compared with many advanced economies. India is also benefiting from shifts in the global trade environment, including the new tariff regime of the United States.

As South-South cooperation becomes increasingly important, India is well placed to emerge as a leading force. As a manufacturing base, a digital partner and a diplomatic stabiliser, India is positioning itself as a contributor to global stability. However, not all is rosy. Where exactly does India stand today, and where is it headed? Modi's speech implicitly portrayed a country in transition – from a service-heavy model to a more balanced economy, from welfare delivery to welfare empowerment, and from being merely a large market to becoming a global player shaping norms and supply chains. This moment of confidence, however, demands clarity about unresolved challenges. Job creation must accelerate, particularly in high-productivity sectors. Skilling needs to keep pace with rapid technological change. The manufacturing push still requires smoother regulation, deeper logistics reform and faster dispute resolution. Social challenges – urban stress, recurring rural distress and climate vulnerability – require sustained, long-term planning rather than episodic responses. Externally, India must navigate carefully. Conflicts in the Middle East and shifting trade alignments could unsettle even the most resilient economies. What the Prime Minister's address captured well is a vital balance: confidence is warranted, but complacency would be costly. India may be shining – but sustained effort will be essential to keep it that way.



BHOPINDER SINGH

The visit of the Russian President, Vladimir Putin, to India in the midst of the Russia-Ukraine war and the ensuing peace talks mediated by the United States is reflective of “multilateralism” and “strategic autonomy”, as opposed to the bulldozing and unilateral ways of superpowers. In earlier days, the two “blocs” (USA-led and USSR-led) insisted on pre-defined and conformist tendencies.

However, the end of the Cold War with the implosion of the Soviet Union in the early 1990s led many to prematurely posit the USA as the sole, definitive, and unchallenged superpower. Commentators in the 1990s, such as the former US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, noted, “We are the indispensable nation”, while Charles Krauthammer claimed, “The centre of world power is the unchallenged superpower, the United States, attended by its Western allies”, and the political scientist Samuel P Huntington thundered, “The United States is the sole state with pre-eminence in every domain of power-economic, military, diplomatic, ideological, technological, and cultural.”

Ironically, the concurrent diminishment of multilateral platforms such as the United Nations added to the misplaced superiority of the USA. Even though history has repeatedly taught that global dominance is never permanent, the ostrich-like behaviour of the USA debarred it from recognising the sudden emergence of an expansionist China, or the more measured rise of India. Unipolarity was a seductive idea that lulled the USA into a false sense of invulnerability and hubris as it imperiously (and selectively) launched its War on Terror. However, it took twenty years of the longest, most inconclusive, and most expensive war against a ragtag militia, namely the Taliban, for the USA to be humbled. In recent times, the US has been made to eat humble pie in various other interventions across the globe – yet many within the corridors of power in Washington DC still harbour dated notions of grandiosity, imperiousness, and authority.

US President Donald Trump's rallying cry of MAGA (Make America Great Again) is born from that same fount of presumed invincibility, which routinely leads to open threats, coercion, and even bullying. This unrestrained lust for power in Washington DC does not spare any friend or “ally”, as the likes of India, Canada, Mexico, or even NATO countries (North Atlantic Treaty Organisation) are fair game for arm-twisting, as far as Trump is con-

## Why we fail at control: The Gita on surrender



AJIT KUMAR BISHNOI

### 2ND OPINION

THE PIONEER




We all wish to be in control, yet we fail repeatedly – and often miserably. The simple reason is that control never truly rests in our hands. Lord Krishna explains this with crystal clarity in the Bhagavad Gita: “The place of action, the doer, the instruments, the efforts, and providence these five are the causes of all action.” (18.14) He adds, “Whatever action a person performs through body, speech, and mind, these five are its causes.” (18.15)

We are constantly acting-physically, verbally, and mentally. Speech and mind are mentioned separately in the Gita because they shape our lives more deeply than other senses. Consider a simple accident where both parties are at fault. If both apologise, the matter ends peacefully. If harsh words are exchanged, a brawl erupts.



IN RECENT TIMES, THE US HAS BEEN MADE TO EAT HUMBLE PIE IN VARIOUS OTHER INTERVENTIONS ACROSS THE GLOBE — YET MANY WITHIN THE CORRIDORS OF POWER IN WASHINGTON DC STILL HARBOUR DATED NOTIONS OF GRANDIOSITY, IMPERIOUSNESS, AND AUTHORITY

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cerned. During his first presidency, he targeted Delhi for its civilisational relations with Iran, seeking to debar them from trading with each other, as Iran was unfairly and unilaterally sanctioned by Trump after reneging on the Iran nuclear deal. Similarly, deep displeasure was expressed with India as it sought the S-400 missile systems from Russia-even though the US had not done anything substantial to support India against China during the tense 2020 face-off.

Today, in his second presidency, Trump has further derailed and vitiated relations with allies as he has pursued patent tariff wars without any care or consideration for their sensitivities and urgencies. The ham-handedness of Trump has led to some unthinkable portents, as was optically captured in the surreal moments of bonhomie between the troika of Vladimir Putin, Narendra Modi, and Xi Jinping, chatting on the sidelines of a meeting and giving a loud thumbs-down to Trump's unilateralism. While there may be too much bloody history between Delhi and Beijing to suggest anything beyond symbolism at this stage, the fact remains that the persistent unreasonable-ness of the USA under Trump can lead to the stitching together of counter-intuitive alliances (which may be tactical rather than strategic) as a rebound effect of the pressures exerted by Trump.

India hosts its long-time and dependable ally, Russia, as it juggles multiple balls in the air to avoid attracting further punitive tariffs from the US, while still extracting the necessary wherewithal from Russia, which has his-

torically been forthcoming, accommodating, and reasonable in commercial terms. This forms part of India's new-found “strategic autonomy”, which affords it the dignity to pursue diplomacy and relationships that are favourable to its own citizens, first and foremost. India is simply too large a sovereign state-and even too significant an “idea”-to act like a vassal state of the USA that must kowtow to all its dictates.

This is not to suggest that India should sever its growing and natural ties with the USA, but rather to nuance and assert itself to levels that are mutually beneficial, not exclusively skewed towards one side. Russia under Putin has demonstrated an accommodating template, having not insisted upon India or imposed conditionalities even as India went into overdrive to build relations with the “West”, especially the US. Meanwhile, India reciprocated in kind by not militating against Russian interests (Delhi took a muted stand on Ukraine that was not anti-Russia) wherever it could.

It is this lack of reciprocal accommodation and respect that blinds the policies of the Trump administration and could translate into alternate pressure groupings, potentially composed of the unlikeliest partners. While visits by a Russian head of state have always warranted a high-profile welcome, this time the warmth, pomp, and display reflect a sense of defiance, independence, and an inherent sovereign pride and dignity in the face of pettiness and pressure exerted ungracefully by the Trump administration.

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Krishna says, is God. All circumstances originate from Him, all instruments arise from His creation, and the fruits of action operate under His moral order. Even our free will exists within the boundaries of the divine system.

What, then, should we do? Krishna instructs: “In all respects, take shelter of Me alone. By My grace, you will achieve supreme peace and the eternal abode.” (18.62) Where Krishna and Arjuna stand together, the Gita promises opulence, victory, righteousness, and unwavering success. (18.78) Yet most of us resist surrender. Ego whispers: “I will succeed this time. I know better.” But Krishna warns: “You have a right only to action, never to its fruits.” (2.47) Those who try to predetermine outcomes, He says, are “pitiable.” (2.49) My own experience is no different. Whenever I try to control situations-especially in emotional matters such as a loved one's illness-I find myself anxious and frustrated. Even when I pray sincerely, peace does not immediately follow. I still expect God to act according to my timeline. Slowly, I am learning that acceptance, not control, is the lesson; past karmas must play out, and God acts when the time is right. The journey from understanding to realisation is long. But the Gita assures us that surrender-not control — is where true freedom lies.

The writer is a spiritual teacher

## PAKISTAN'S CHIEF OF DEFENCE FORCES ESTABLISHES MILITARY SUPREMACY

Pakistan's President, acting on the “advice” of the Prime Minister, has announced the appointment of General Asim Munir as the country's first Chief of Defence Forces for a five-year term under the 27th Constitutional Amendment. Officially, the move seeks to establish a unified command and accelerate decision-making across land, air, sea, space and cyberspace, projecting coherence in Pakistan's security apparatus. The amendment centralises operational, administrative and strategic authority in a single office, which Islamabad has described as a historic reform.

In reality, however, the development surprises few. Pakistan's power structure has long been dominated by the military, regardless of constitutional labels or civilian

endorsements. Many observers believe that General Munir was not merely the beneficiary of the decision but its principal architect, with civilian authorities providing formal approval rather than genuine direction.

Supporters will argue that a consolidated command could improve coordination and modernise defence management. Critics, however, see the appointment as further institutionalising military predominance at the expense of civilian oversight. In a system where elected governments operate under persistent constraints, the creation of the CDF post reinforces an existing reality rather than altering it. The announcement therefore represents continuity dressed up as reform.

RS NARULA | PATIALA

## Cess alone cannot end pan masala

The Lok Sabha's decision to impose a 40 per cent cess on pan masala, with proceeds directed towards public health and national security, invites deeper reflection. While taxation is often promoted as a deterrent, the reality is that habitual users of addictive substances rarely abandon them due to higher costs. Instead, they adjust by cutting down on other essential household expenses, which undermines the intended health benefits. Oral cancer and related diseases caused by pan masala remain a major public health crisis, and taxation alone cannot solve it. A more effective approach would be to gradually phase out pan masala manufacturing altogether, while ensuring that workers and small businesses dependent on this industry are provided with alternative livelihoods. Moreover, linking cess revenue from pan masala to national security appears misplaced.

Defence requires stable and predictable funding, not revenue streams tied to harmful consumption patterns that may decline over time. It would be far more prudent to channel pan masala cess exclusively towards health initiatives, while securing national security funding through broader, assured sources. Such a calibrated approach would strengthen both public health outcomes and national priorities in the long run.

O PRASADA RAO | HYDERABAD

## Putin and Russia's power paradox

Russian President Vladimir Putin, who recently undertook a whirlwind tour to India, has been at the helm of the “new Russia” since 1999 and is currently in his fifth term. Termed the “king” or “emperor” by loyalists, Putin is seen by many Russians as a saviour who restored stability after inheriting a fractured legacy from the erstwhile Soviet Union. Over the years, he has grown in stature in a manner only he could manage.

Alongside this, the master strategist has held the Kremlin together through turbulent times. His bitter critics, however, spare no criticism, describing him as authoritarian and arrogant. His near-absolute control over institutions and suppression of dissent have become defining features of his leadership.

Putin is poised to steer Russia's fortunes until 2036, being constitutionally entitled to contest another election in 2030. His firm outlook, quick decision-making, risk-taking ability, keen eye for detail and unwavering focus are frequently cited as strengths.

Admirers also credit the former KGB officer with raising living standards and shaping a broad economic vision. While corruption concerns persist, the 73-year-old leader's commitment to his country is rarely questioned.

GANAPATHI BHAT | AKOLA

## RBI signals growth over inflation

Apropos “RBI cuts interest rate”. The Reserve Bank of India has opened a new monetary cycle with its first rate cut since mid-2025, signalling a shift towards supporting growth as inflation shows clearer signs of moderation. By lowering the repo rate to 5.25 per cent, the central bank has laid the groundwork for softer lending rates, particularly benefiting home buyers. Banks are expected to bring housing loan rates close to 7.1 per cent, among the lowest levels outside the pandemic period, offering meaningful relief to both new and existing borrowers. What distinguishes this move is the strong liquidity support accompanying the cut. The RBI plans to inject nearly ₹1.45 lakh crore into the financial system through bond repurchases and a sizeable three-year dollar swap. This is aimed at stabilising credit flows amid global financial volatility.

The RBI has also presented a more optimistic outlook, raising its FY26 growth forecast to 7.3 per cent while sharply revising down inflation expectations, citing easing food prices and resilient domestic demand. Despite the rupee's weakness, robust foreign exchange reserves have provided policy comfort. Markets responded with cautious optimism, reflecting confidence in the central bank's calibrated approach.

VANDANA | CHANDIGARH

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# Jihadi radicalisation: A growing threat to national security

As extremist narratives move seamlessly from religious spaces to peer groups and online platforms, India confronts a challenge that is psychological, ideological and social in equal measure.

FIRST  
Column



KARNAL  
SINGH

Radicalisation today stands as one of the most serious challenges to India's national security. Modern terrorism does not begin with the gun or the bomb — it begins with the mind. No terror attack is possible unless someone is first convinced, manipulated and mentally prepared to commit violence. The recent arrests in Faridabad, the recovery of explosives and detonators, and even the involvement of highly educated individuals such as doctors in the Delhi blast demonstrate how deep and sophisticated the radicalisation machinery has become. These cases show that the threat is no longer confined to the poor, the uneducated or those living on the fringes of society.

The new targets are educated, urban youth — young men seeking identity, purpose and belonging in a complicated world. Radicalisation generally begins in two key environments. The first is the religious space — madrasas and mosques — where a small number of preachers with Salafi or extremist leanings deliver emotionally charged, misleading interpretations of religion. They twist noble concepts such as Ummah, Zakat and Jihad to create a sense of grievance, victimhood and moral justification for violence.

The radicalisers deliberately misuse verses and stories to convince young minds that their "religious duty" lies in fighting or opposing the State. Over time, these false interpretations become the ideological entrance gate for deeper radicalisation. The second environment (peer group radicalisation) is far less visible but equally dangerous: quiet street corners, small tea shops, college hostels, student groups, parks and closed conversations among friends.




In these informal spaces, long discussions take place on religion, alleged injustices, communal grievances and global events. Slowly, these conversations become an echo chamber. Anger is reinforced, isolation develops, and extremist ideas begin to appear reasonable. Peer-group radicalisation is especially powerful. Once a few individuals in a college or locality adopt extremist thinking, they can easily influence others through trust, friendship and emotional



PTI

RADICALISATION IS A PSYCHOLOGICAL WEAPON DELIBERATELY DESIGNED TO MANIPULATE EMOTIONS, DISTORT RELIGION, EXPLOIT GRIEVANCES AND PROVIDE A FALSE SENSE OF IDENTITY AND HEROISM

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bonding. Young people do not want to lose their place in the group and, therefore, begin accepting ideas they would otherwise reject.

This pattern has been seen in Indian Mujahideen modules, PFI circles and sleeper cells of Lashkar-e-Taiba and Jaish-e-Mohammed. After these initial stages, many youths are sent for several months of training to Pakistan or Pakistan-occupied Kashmir.

There, they are taught how to handle weapons, assemble IEDs, communicate secretly, avoid surveillance and maintain operational discipline. When they return, their behaviour changes in noticeable ways. They withdraw from family, become serious or secretive, avoid normal conversations, express rigid religious views or cut themselves off from their old lifestyle. These behavioural changes are visible to parents and neighbours. A disturbing example of structured radicalisation comes from the confession of an Indian

Mujahideen leader. He described how he radicalised educated youth through a step-by-step psychological process. He would begin by discussing the meaning of life and the concept of life after death. Gradually, he introduced manipulated beliefs — such as that real life begins after death, that paradise is full of pleasure, and that martyrdom in jihad guarantees entry into heaven. He claimed that a jihadi receives "72 hoorein" and that his parents will also enter jannat because of his sacrifice. According to him, one act of jihad was more valuable than lifelong namaz, roza or charity.

This kind of spiritual poisoning creates a false sense of moral superiority. Then he would show videos of global conflicts and alleged atrocities against Muslims — in Palestine, Iraq, Afghanistan and Kashmir. He repeatedly displayed photographs of the Gujarat riots, the Babri Masjid aftermath, Israeli-Palestinian clashes and alleged US operations. The aim was to fill

young minds with anger, helplessness and the feeling that "someone must take revenge". To intensify this emotional impact, he distributed radical literature — books like Maidan Pukarate Hain, Salah ad-Din Ayuubi, Sayyid Qutb's Milestones and biographies of Osama bin Laden. Graphic magazines showing dead bodies and destroyed villages were used to bypass logic and directly trigger emotions. He also used PowerPoint presentations and motivational jihadi songs to create a charged atmosphere. Radicalisation by Abdul Karim Tunda — Madrasa Setting Another major example is Abdul Karim Tunda, the dreaded Lashkar-e-Taiba bomb-maker. Tunda used a madrasa-linked method of recruitment. He targeted poor, uneducated and semi-educated youth, especially those who were frustrated or carrying emotional wounds from communal events. He portrayed himself as a fatherly guide.

Through fiery speeches, he misquoted religious texts, glorified violent jihad and

## Time to bid adieu to the Macaulay mindset and restore cultural confidence



GEETA  
BHATT

As the Dharma Dhvaj rose high into the sky during the flag-hoisting ceremony marking the completion of the Ram Temple Complex in Ayodhya, Prime Minister Narendra Modi remarked that nearly 190 years ago, Macaulay had sown the seeds of uprooting India from its civilisational roots. The very questions raised about the existence of Shri Ram and the prolonged struggle and delay in the construction of the Ram Temple after Independence were, he said, consequences of the "Macaulay mindset." This mindset was cultivated through the "Minute on Education" introduced and authored in 1835 by Thomas Macaulay in his capacity as a member of the Executive Council of the then Governor-General William Bentinck. It fostered an attitude of apathy towards Bharat's native knowledge systems and languages, shaping generations under a framework that devalued their own cultural, religious and intellectual heritage.

The conviction and self-belief of a nation are rooted in the socio-cultural footprints of its history. Yet, in the decades following Independence, India's education and administrative systems continued to bear deep colonial imprints. The language, curriculum and work culture remained largely unchanged even as white sahibs were replaced by brown sahibs. Macaulay ultimately succeeded in advancing what he had envisioned: the establishment of an intrinsic superiority of the Western model and the English language, while Sanskrit, Arabic and other classical traditions were sidelined. Our ancient knowledge systems-ranging from science and mathematics to philosophy-were dismissed as outdated, irrational or merely religious, weakening the confidence of posterity in their own cultural and intellectual heritage.

The Charter Act of 1813, passed by the British Parliament to renew the East India Company's mandate in Bharat, introduced a significant clause that provided for the allocation of one lakh rupees annually for the revival and improvement of education among its Indian subjects. In the decades that followed, the debate over how this fund should be used intensified. Thomas Macaulay vigorously campaigned for directing this financial support exclusively towards English-medium education and Western literature, arguing against the continuation of funding for classical Sanskrit, Arabic and Persian learn-

ing. Macaulay prevailed, and state patronage for Oriental texts and traditional learning centres declined sharply, marking a decisive shift in education policy. Macaulay's education policy was not confined merely to creating "brown sahibs" to serve as a British-oriented workforce. It carried a deeper, concealed objective: to undermine and ultimately displace the existing socio-cultural foundations of Bharatiya society.

A letter written by Thomas Macaulay to his father on 12 October 1836, published in The Life and Letters of Lord Macaulay by his nephew George Otto Trevelyan, clearly reveals how a larger ideological agenda was being embedded into Bharatiya society through British education policy. In this letter, Macaulay candidly states:

"Our English schools are flourishing wonderfully. We find it difficult indeed, in some places impossible to provide instruction for all who want it. At the single town of Hoogly, fourteen hundred boys are learning English. The effect of this education on the Hindoos is prodigious. No Hindoo who has received an English education ever remains sincerely attached to his religion. Some continue to profess it as a matter of policy; but many profess themselves pure Deists, and some embrace Christianity. It is my firm belief that, if our plans of education are followed up, there will not be a single idolater among the respectable classes in Bengal thirty years hence. And this will be effected without any effort to proselytise; without the smallest interference with religious liberty; merely by the natural operation of knowledge and reflection. I heartily rejoice in the prospect."

It is rather ironic that while Macaulay dismissed the traditional knowledge systems and culture of this land, the very foundations of national schooling in England and several European countries were inspired by Indian educational practices-particularly the methods of "monitor", "slate", and "group learning." Dr Andrew Bell, a chaplain with the British Army, arrived in Madras in 1787. During his stay, he observed local children learning their alphabet by drawing letters in sand, guided by the brighter students in the class. Struck by the efficiency of this method, he adapted it into what he called the "New Schooling System" and introduced it in England. The model became highly popular and soon spread across Europe. Known as the "Madras Monitorial System," it offered an economical and scalable approach to mass education. Dr Bell later established a college in Scotland, naming it "Madras College," which still exists, in recognition of the system's origin. His student, Mr Lancaster, promoted a similar method, which became widely known as the "Bell and Lancaster Model." Yet neither Bell nor Lancaster acknowledged the Indian traditional schooling practices that inspired their innovations. Brigadier-General Alexander Walker, who served the British admin-

istration in Bharat between 1780 and 1810, offered a remarkable testimony on the indigenous education system in the Malabar region. He observed: "The children are instructed without violence and by a process peculiarly simple. The system was borrowed from the Brahmans and brought from India to Europe. It has been made the foundation of National Schools in every enlightened country. Some gratitude is due to a people from whom we have learnt to diffuse among the lower ranks of society instruction by one of the most unerring and economical methods which has ever been invented." Walker further noted that "no people probably appreciate more justly the importance of instruction than the Hindus." His account stands as a powerful acknowledgment of the effectiveness of traditional modes of education that later inspired key models of mass schooling in Europe, even as they were undermined by the colonial education policy imposed on us.

Dr S. Radhakrishnan, as Chairman of the first University Education Commission constituted after Independence, stated in its 1949 report that higher education should be imparted through

the regional languages, and that English as the medium of instruction in higher education should be replaced by an Indian language as early as practicable. The challenge is not English as a language, but its long-standing dominance as the primary marker of intellect and academic success in the seven decades since Independence. Had the recommendations of this Commission been implemented earnestly in the early decades after Independence, the "Macaulay syndrome" that continued to shape our intellectual and cultural outlook might well have faded away by the twenty-first century.

The National Education Policy 2020 has acknowledged and endorsed the traditional Bharatiya Knowledge Systems, integrating them with the contemporary global knowledge ecosystem that has evolved through experimentation, innovation and cross-cultural exchanges. For the first time, Bharatiya languages have been given a level playing field in education, and the vision and ingenuity of an education policy have begun to reverse the long colonial practice of undermining our native knowledge, sciences and skills — a practice that left a lasting dent in the foundation required to strengthen our national consciousness. Rebuilding this confidence demands that we reclaim and restore the intellectual traditions that once nurtured a vibrant, self-assured civilisation. It is time to bid adieu to the Macaulay mindset.

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## ‘On-Time, Every Time’: Tagline IndiGo can’t hide behind



CHAITANYA  
K PRASAD

For years, IndiGo has lived off the reputation of being the airline that rarely slips. "On-Time, Every Time" wasn't just advertising; it became part of its personality, the shorthand for discipline in a country where delays, long queues, and fraying tempers at airports were almost a given. But today, that tagline feels like a relic from another era. It hangs awkwardly over a crisis that has unfolded in slow motion, then all at once, leaving passengers stranded, confused, angry, and wondering how a crisis of this magnitude blindsided the country's largest carrier.

What we are watching is more than a scheduling mishap. It is far bigger than pilots being unavailable or duty-time rules tightening. This is a communications collapse, one that exposes the hollowness of a brand that has long believed efficiency alone was enough to secure loyalty. The trouble with IndiGo right now isn't just that flights are being cancelled; it's that the airline seems strangely detached from the chaos it has created. The #Manmade #AviationCrisis dominating timelines and airport lounges is the direct result of an organisation that underestimated the new Flight Duty Time Limitation rules, miscalculated crew requirements, and then appeared genuinely shocked when the entire system buckled.

The DGCA's assessment was blunt: IndiGo simply didn't plan. It didn't forecast enough pilots for Phase 2 of the FDTL rollout, even though the norms were public knowledge for months. How does a carrier with over 400 aircraft, thousands of crew members, and a 60 per cent domestic market share stumble on something so fundamental? Perhaps this is what happens when a company begins to operate as though competition is merely decorative. When you behave as the marketplace's default airline, you stop imagining worst-case scenarios. And then, when the cracks appear, you act surprised.

But IndiGo's bigger failure, and the reason public anger feels so visceral, is the vacuum in communication. People can understand delays. They can forgive the occasional cancellation. What people can tolerate, sometimes even with grace, is a delay. What they cannot stomach is the feeling of being dismissed. That is what has cut deepest in this crisis. Passengers have been treated as though their time, their plans, their money, and, in many cases, their simple dignity,

are just footnotes in IndiGo's larger story. At airports across the country, travellers have been left to piece together their own understanding of what's going on. No proper announcements. No clear updates. No realistic timelines. No explanations that sound like they come from a place of honesty rather than corporate defensiveness. Social media has become the only functioning bulletin board in this mess, an accidental newsroom where stranded families are sharing videos of toddlers asleep on cold floors, elderly passengers leaning against walls after hours of standing, and frantic travellers being forced into last-minute, overpriced bookings simply to get home. Even the staff, who are often the first to face the public's fury, look lost, overwhelmed, under-prepared, and painfully unaware of what's happening behind the scenes. IndiGo hasn't just lost control of its operations; it has surrendered control of the story.




And this is where a brand's true nature surfaces. IndiGo, for all its scale and swagger, has looked strangely hollow during these last few days. Distant. Unfeeling. Robotic. As if admitting to the chaos would somehow bruise the pristine corporate image it has been polishing for years. What we got instead of clarity were stitched-together apologies that felt photocopied. Instead of a leader taking charge publicly, we got templated statements with all the warmth of an automated receipt. Instead of empathy, we got... nothing. Silence has its own tone, and in the service industry, it always sounds like indifference.

It is impossible not to think of Vistara in moments like these, an airline that understood something fundamental: people don't remember the aircraft; they remember how they were made to feel. Vistara wasn't faultless. No airline is. But it carried a kind of emotional intelligence in the way it engaged with passengers. There was a warmth, a steadiness, a transparency that said, "You matter." Even today, long after operations merge and brands evolve, people speak of Vistara with an affection they don't extend to most airlines. That's what IndiGo is missing in this moment: the simple humanity that travellers cling to when things go wrong.

In today's world of reels, instant outrage, and hyper-amplified experiences, that human layer isn't a luxury; it is survival. If anything, this crisis has exposed a hard truth: communication is not a box to tick; it is the backbone of public trust.

Please read the complete article online at <https://www.dailypioneer.com>

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HUMAN AI



If a recent survey is to be believed, it is humans who may derail the growing use of Artificial Intelligence (AI). A software firm concludes that while senior management and executives love it, the mid-managers and lower employees shun it, or pay lip-service to it. Almost 90 per cent of the first section use AI at workplaces, and senior management sings praises in earnings calls. In recent times, according to an article in 'The Economist,' "two-thirds of executives at S&P 500 companies mentioned AI. At the same time, the people actually responsible for implementing AI may not be as forward-thinking, perhaps because they are worried about tech putting them out of a job." So, less than 60 per cent of the mid-managers, and less than 30 per cent of the employees use AI on the job. This implies that while these two categories happily go ahead with the AI-related efforts to please their seniors, they quietly refuse to use the tools.

A similar thing happened with desktops, laptops, and mobiles. In India, for instance, desktops inundated the state-owned banks and finance firms, as they did in progressive and forward-thinking private firms. Employees used them mostly to play games in the late 1980s, and early 1990s. In some cases, especially at the banks, desktops were purchased because of the top management's decisions, but remained wrapped in original packaging for months, and years. The same happened with the laptops, and mobiles, when they became office tools to work, and communicate. Only over time, when there was no escape, and the Internet and web became a necessity did employees and mid-managers upgrade skills to handle the new tools, and new ways of working. Hence, AI may go through the same learning tech curve before the bulk of the employees adopt it actively, and adapt to its social and job disruptions at workplaces.

Yet another piece of insight lies in perception and imagination, which is subjective. New technology, whether it is hardware, Internet, or AI initially may lead to extra work, lower productivity, and lesser efficiency. In the case of desktops, and laptops the employees needed to learn new skills, which were more easily acquired by the youngsters. In the case of mobile-as-moving-offices, it was excruciating to work with the small screens to read, write, and monitor work. AI leads to such delays. Rewiring offices, as was the case with desktops, and making them wireless (Internet and mobile) takes time. Processes and workflows need to be re-defined. Employees need to get used to the newer ways. This may take months, or years. Erik Brynjolfsson of Stanford University dubs it the 'J-curve' of technology. Yvonne Chen, and others of ShanghaiTech University refer to it as "gen-AI's mediocrity gap." AI helps the weak workers, and does the opposite with the better ones, who may decide to work less since they can get the same work done faster.

When it comes to small and mid-sized firms, tech-led gains in productivity and profitability do not come naturally and logically. A recent poll by a global think tank finds that 45 per cent said that the returns from the use of AI were below their expectations. Only 10 per cent agreed that their expectations were exceeded. The same goes for profits, as most entities conclude that tech has not "significantly affected enterprise-wide profits." This may be due to a dual strain of human nature. In most cases, we overestimate returns, and thus find that the benefits are not adequate. In addition, since we need to rewire the workflows, the transition takes more time than expected, and we get frustrated with tech. The small things matter, which change our subjective perceptions. For example, in the early period of desktops in India, it took a minute or two for the machines to start. This was deemed to be a waste of time compared to the old days when one could start work as soon as one sat at the desk.

For the experts, this translates into either non-adoption of AI, or delays in adoption. Some surveys hint that this is indeed the case in the US. "John Hartley of Stanford University and colleagues found that in September (2025) 37 per cent of Americans used generative AI at work, down from 46 per cent in June.... Ramp, a fintech firm, finds that in early 2025 AI use soared at American firms to 40 per cent, before leveling off. The growth in adoption really does seem to be slowing," states 'The Economist' article. But there can be human-related reasons for this slowdown. When new tech arrives, there is the initial excitement to try, and experiment with it. Top management forces managers, and employees to try it out. Within a few months, many of the users get frustrated, and the number of new people opting for it begins to wane. This may explain why the adoption percentages have come down steeply within months.

Even if the adoption is accelerated due to internal and external pressures, 'The Economist' piece gravely concludes that the "pause suggests that the economic pay-off from AI will arrive more slowly, more unevenly, and at a greater cost than implied by the current investment boom." Yet, until adoption accelerates, the "revenues required to justify \$5 trillion in AI capex will remain out of reach."

The Pioneer

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BUSINESS10

# Russia is past, is the West future?

*New Delhi needs to balance ties with Moscow and Washington*

OUR TAKE

**Sutanu Guru**  
Author, Journalist and Academician

Last week, New Delhi was enveloped, as usual, in a terrible smog. Last week, the city was shrouded by a surreal sense of romantic eco-diplomacy nostalgia, which paraded as modern-day realpolitik. Informed pundits on TV channels squawked in hoarse voices about a new world order, even as their throats and lungs were impacted by the severe air pollution. Still, the mood seemed ecstatic and jubilant. The reason: During the grand visit of Vladimir Putin, India and Russia reaffirmed their long and historical ties, which seemed to grow higher than Mt Everest, and deeper than the Indian Ocean.

One was left with no doubts that the two nations, beginning from the times when Russia was a much-larger Soviet Union, enjoy enduring relations related to defense, geopolitics, economic cooperation, energy, among others. It is a form of partnership rarely seen in history, and perhaps unmatched in the modern times. While eloquence that reached fever pitch on the bilateral links were unique, even esoteric, and strong, my mind asked a delinked question: Is New Delhi looking at the glorious past towards Moscow, and ignoring its lucrative future that seems centred in Washington?

Look at a simple assumption. The primary goal of India, as stated by everyone from policy-makers to experts, economists to opposition political parties, is to grow economically, possibly at double-digits. In other words, the aim is for the country's GDP to grow as fast as possible. How can India achieve this objective? One way to ascertain which way to lean, and which direction to look at is to compare the West with Russia. The G-7, which constitutes the US, and its key allies in western Europe, has a combined GDP of nearly \$50 trillion, or 20 times larger than Russia, which is a \$2.5-trillion economy.

If India's priority is to grow rapidly, is it not better to be closer to the West? I am not talking about friendships and partnerships. Russia was, and will always be, a friend, and partner. I am talking about relationships that include transactional ones that will propel India to become a \$10-trillion economy by the mid-1930s. Being allied more to Russia rather than the US may not provide the solution. Only Europe and North America have the economic and technological heft, and the fire power and might to help India along this journey.

To be sure, many Indians, including the policy-makers and others, are extremely angry with the antics and tactics of the US president, Donald Trump. And legitimately too. In a few months, Trump's administration has destroyed two-and-a-half decades of carefully-nurtured trust between the two hitherto hostile nations. For some strange reasons, even though the US and India are the two largest democracies in the world, the bilateral relationship has always been testy, to say the least. Only after the 1998 nuclear tests by India was there more active engagement between the two nations.

Over the past 25-odd years, the two became close, and links developed into a crucial and significant strategic relationship. Quite clearly, Trump, with his own tantrums and peculiar behavior, has more-or-less diluted the level of trust that was assiduously built over the decades. While Indians may rave and rant at Trump, and his loyalists, can India do without the US? My short answer: Absolutely not. This is the harsh reality of today. Like it or not, New Delhi needs Washington, and Brussels. Trump is likely to remain in power for another three years, unless things go against him.

Russia can offer things that allow India to

strengthen its present, through the connections of the past. Of course, a large part of our defence equipment and systems are driven by Russian technology. We need to diversify energy sources from the West, and Middle East to add new ones like Russia and Central Asia. Our agriculture, as the anchor piece on this page shows, can benefit from Russian inputs and products. Hence, the dependence on Russia will only grow, and is unlikely to come down, over the next decade or two.

But pause for a moment, and think about the future. Think about 2047, and beyond. The future belongs to adoption and adaptation of Artificial Intelligence, robotics, and other modern tech that are changing the world, and will drive the global economy over the next several decades. While Russia will remain a steadfast partner, it is no match to the West when it comes to these new-age tech areas. The tech we need, innovations-led processes that our economy demands, and the massive amounts of capital required can come from western Europe and North America. It is time for Indians to get out of their ivory towers, and face the bites of this harsh reality.

Consider another factor, which is not just a geopolitical and national security threat, but can derail India's dreams and ambitions in business, economy, and tech. The US has openly acknowledged China as a competing and equal superpower. Over the next decade, China is likely to aggressively compete with the US in areas such as AI, robotics, biosciences, and consumer electronics. Since India will be unable to partner actively with China, although we will need to keep alive the economic links, it needs to look elsewhere. The future of India lies not towards Russia, but the West to take on China.

Hence, while there is no harm in praising India-Russia ties, claiming that the bilateral partnership will be eternal, the focus needs to be on the future. Let me leave you with another insightful, and critical, thought: India's trade imbalance with Russia is enormous; of the \$70 billion trade, India exports \$5 billion worth of goods and services, or seven per cent of the total. The opposite is true in the case of the US, which runs a more than \$40 billion deficit with India. India sells more goods to the US, with some semblance of a balance in services.

Hence, New Delhi has the trade levers to push Washington to part with its tech and capital. It can increase exports, and buy more. In the case of Russia, although there is talk of higher Indian exports, and Russian businesspersons claim that they were asked to buy more Indian goods, the opportunities are limited. We can go from \$5 billion to \$10 billion. By then, the total trade will be more than \$100 billion, and our percentage share a shade higher at 10%. Maybe it is time to accept the new normal. There is little need for an unending celebration of Putin and Russia as India's strongest friend.

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"Russian President Vladimir Putin and Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi have laid the groundwork for boosting the economic partnership between the traditional allies, with the countries signing a series of pacts to raise bilateral trade to \$100 billion by 2030." This is an excerpt of the media reportage from Russia's state-sponsored RT, earlier known as Russia Today, on the day Putin wrapped up his two-day visit to India. RT commemorated a special edition to the 23rd India-Russia Annual Summit, a tradition that dates to 2000, as President Putin launched RT India on December 5.

The point is not about the RT's report as much as the optimism and euphoria that emanated from the short visit, and which was reflected in voices, opinions, and media coverage in Russia and India. The summit led to a detailed joint statement, and clutch of business deals that foregrounded economic resilience and agricultural security. It included a joint urea plant in Russia, which is expected to produce 1.8-2 million tonnes annually, and ease India's fertiliser supply constraints. The joint declaration "welcomed steps to ensure long-term supply of fertilisers to India, and discussed the potential establishment of joint ventures in this area."

One of the major steps, which was committed earlier, but inked during Putin's visit, was the joint venture between Russia's Uralchem, and three Indian fertiliser firms, Rashtriya Chemicals and Fertilizers, National Fertilizers, and Indian Potash. Incidentally, Indian farmers have faced recurring fertiliser shortages driven by global supply disruptions, rising demand, and logistical bottlenecks. In Madhya Pradesh, long queues were witnessed at the distribution centres, with reports of unrest in some places. The Government consistently denied the reports about shortages.

Demand has grown due to higher cropping intensity, and good monsoons, while domestic production and imports have not kept pace. This has led to periodic shortfalls in key nutrients such as urea and potash. India is the second-largest consumer, and third-largest producer of fertilisers globally. According to the official data, in 2023-24, the country's annual consumption was 601 lakh metric tonnes, with 503 lakh metric tonnes produced

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Senior Journalist

# Fertilising Hindi-Russi bhai-bhai

*India-Russia JV to make urea may be a boon for farmers*

domestically, and the remaining being imported. Fertilisers play a crucial role to enhance farm productivity, and are essential for self-reliance in production.

The Government has tried to increase domestic production, but depends upon external supplies for feedstock like natural gas and ammonia. Global disruptions, including trade curbs, shifting trade flows, and higher feedstock prices affect the availability of competitively-priced imports. It pushes procurement into the expensive spot markets, and increases the costs for suppliers and farmers. Reports from several states indicate that the central allocations fell short of requirements for the Kharif season, leaving farmers waiting in long queues in some states.

Even when imports arrive in time, delays in port handling, inland transport, and state-level distribution networks create uneven availability across districts. While urea is heavily subsidised, shortages force the governments and private buyers to opt for emergency purchases at the higher prices, which strain the Budgets of the states and Centre. This translates into delayed or uneven subsidy flows that complicate timely access for smallholders. In the recent past, New Delhi inked deals with Saudi Arabia, Nepal, Bhutan, and Sri Lanka to secure long-term supplies.

According to a report in Tass, Russian news agency, Moscow "increased its fertiliser supplies to BRICS countries by 16 per cent this year, with India leading the increase." It

quoted the head of the Russian Association of Fertilizer Producers, Andrey Guryev, who said that India accounts for more than half of the Russian mineral fertiliser exports. The share of Russian fertilisers in India's imports grew to 26 per cent in the first nine months of 2025, he added. The planned joint-plant's scale is expected to increase the steady flow of urea to India, which will reduce dependence on spot purchases, and ease seasonal shortages that led to the recent price spikes.

Russia is interested in expanding the farm input trade, but feels restricted by India's import duty. Hence, the Russians wish that the "negotiations on a free-trade agreement between the Eurasian Economic Union and India must be intensified." They want the duty to be abolished to reduce costs to the farmers, or official subsidies. According to the Russian side, "India has become the locomotive for the growth of our supplies to BRICS countries." Hence, New Delhi can take advantage of the changed position, which is imposed on Moscow due to the growing and continuing global sanctions.

The new urea unit will assure cost stability by anchoring production to Russian ammonia, and long-term offtake arrangements. India can insulate the farmers from volatile global freight and commodity cycles, lowering procurement costs for public and private distributors. Locating a plant in Russia leverages abundant feedstock in that nation, diversifying supply away from source-related risks that previously exposed agricul-

ture to curbs or logistical shocks. The deal will possibly follow a co-production and joint-venture model, where the Russian producers supply ammonia, and Indian firms provide capital and guaranteed purchases. It will align incentives to ensure continuous exports to India once commercial operations begin.

According to media reports, the three Indian firms will together hold 50 per cent in the venture, and the Russian entity the remaining 50 cent. If this is the case, the Russian firm will be the largest shareholder, but the decision-making process will be equally shared between the two nations. The model is the same as India's fertiliser venture in Oman, which operates successfully. The objective: Bag long-term supply stability, rather than seasonal purchases.

This arrangement will reduce upfront capital risks for Russian operators, and provide Indian fertiliser agencies a secured share of output, and pricing leverage during the procurement cycles. Russia's regional and industry outlets have framed the project as a natural fit to tap the abundance source of Russia's potash and ammonia reserves to serve a large, nearby market, and emphasised export potential and industrial cooperation beyond fertilisers, including pharmaceuticals and energy projects mentioned in the joint statement. Moscow's messaging highlights mutual economic benefit, and the logic of linking Russian feedstock with Indian demand.

What remains to be seen in the urea project are the further details such as project timelines, feedstock pricing clauses, logistics, and regulatory clearances. Monitoring the investment decision, offtake contracts, and phased delivery schedule will indicate how quickly the Indian farmers may see the tangible on-ground benefits. The summit's joint statement therefore marks a pragmatic approach with strategic diplomacy converted into industrial partnerships aimed at securing agricultural inputs. If implemented on schedule, the urea plant may become a durable hedge against fertiliser volatility, and a meaningful supply-side relief for India's farm sector.

(The author has more than three decades of experience across print, TV, and digital media)



## Prompts to perception: The next leap in human-AI interaction

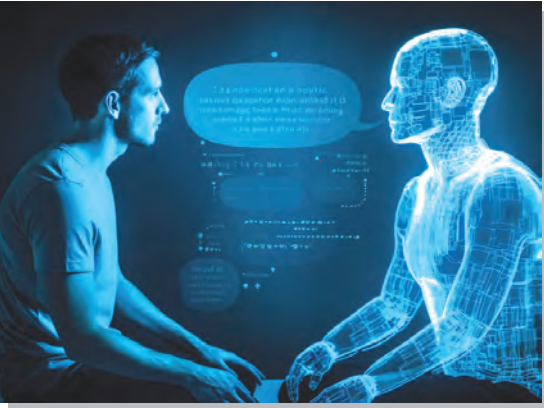


XI ZENG

As artificial intelligence advances, the relationship between humans and machines is evolving, moving from simple typed commands and algorithmic responses toward a deeper, more intuitive level of human perception and interaction. This paper explores how the human-AI relationship is shifting from straightforward prompts (“tell me ...”, “show me ...”) to more complex perceptual interactions — how systems understand context, adjust to human signals, and become collaborators in meaning-making rather than mere tools.

### 1. The era of prompts: controlling AI through language

Historically, human-AI interaction has been dominated by prompt textual instructions or queries that instruct an AI to perform a task. With the rise of large-language models (LLMs) and generative AI, the prompt became the primary interface: users write or speak a directive, and the model responds.



As Olla et al. observe, “prompts serve as the primary language for communicating with these models” and mark the transition from traditional command interfaces to more open-ended predictive systems.

Prompt engineering has emerged as a discipline focused on crafting concise, precise and layered inputs to elicit desirable outputs. However, this prompt-based approach has limitations: it assumes users know what to ask and that AI can respond correctly. This places the burden of meaning-making largely on humans, often requiring trial and error, refinements and domain expertise.

### 2. Enter perception: beyond the prompt

The next leap moves from prompts to perception, transitioning from what we say to how the system sees, senses and interprets context, human intent, non-verbal cues, and richer modalities. Research shows humans interacting with AI already treat these systems as social actors. McKee et al. found people attribute warmth and competence to AI systems — judgments shaping their willingness to cooperate.

Similarly, users' mental models of AI affect engagement: perceiving a system as intentional, independent, or aligned with human interests changes trust and interaction dynamics. This shifts the interface from text-prompting toward a face-to-face-like relationship, raising significant design, ethical and cognitive questions.

Additionally, evidence shows human — AI interaction influences human perception and decision-making: a recent study found biased AI systems create feedback loops, increasing bias in human judgments over time. This indicates that as AI perceives and responds, so does the human side, not just in outputs but in perception, judgment and

decision — making.

At Chance AI, we have witnessed firsthand how the shift from prompts to perception reshapes user experience in profound ways. Our app, Chance, is built as the world's first visual agent — a platform where users simply point their camera at anything that sparks curiosity and receive instant, contextual understanding without typing a single word.

One of our core features- AI Decode demonstrates this perceptual leap: when users upload an image, our multi-agent visual reasoning model doesn't just identify what's in the frame — it reverse-engineers the creative and contextual DNA of that image, generating a precise, model-agnostic prompt that captures its essence. This process, compact yet powerful, exemplifies how AI can move beyond responding to commands and instead become an intuitive collaborator that sees, interprets and acts, turning sight into insight seamlessly.

### 3. Why perception matters: richer collaboration, greater challenges

Richer collaboration: When AI understands more than prompts — interpreting context,

## India's HR transformation: How AI, AGI and quantum technologies are redesigning foundations of work



YATINDRA DWIVEDI

India has entered a period in which human resource management is no longer characterised by paperwork, checklists or rigid administrative routines. Instead, it is increasingly shaped by intelligent systems — machines that can interpret context, generate insights, collaborate with humans and increasingly operate with a level of autonomy once unimaginable.

As companies seek to retain competitiveness in a technology-driven economy, HR is quietly moving through its most significant shift since economic liberalisation. What once functioned as a support department is evolving into a digitally amplified and strategically influential system — built on Generative AI (GenAI), emerging Artificial General Intelligence (AGI) capabilities, agentic AI frameworks, Retrieval-Augmented Generation (RAG), the Model Context Protocol (MCP) and early signals from quantum innovation.

This transformation aligns closely with India's current policy ecosystem. Initiatives such as Digital India, the IndiaAI Mission from MeitY, the National Quantum Mission and the Ministry of Labour and Employment's Labour Codes are collectively steering the country toward a labour environment where digital infrastructure and public policy reinforce one another. Research from global advisory firms describes this moment as a move from traditional workforce administration to an environment where human capability is enhanced and scaled by intelligent systems.

The earliest wave of change was driven by Generative AI. Its significance for HR is not limited to drafting documents or automating communication. Instead, GenAI brings analytical and creative intelligence into routine decision-making. Indian organisations are learning that GenAI can model cultural attributes, forecast talent gaps, design multilingual learning pathways and adapt communication to diverse regional contexts. For the first time, creativity, analytics and cultural understanding are fused — transforming HR from a repository of forms into an adaptive talent engine.

Beyond this, the early contours of AGI are becoming noticeable. While true AGI remains in research territory, emerging systems that can



reason, interpret uncertain human inputs, and offer higher-order insights hint at what is to come. Within HR, such intelligence could one day integrate economic indicators, workforce sentiment, external skill-market data and internal performance patterns to propose future organisational designs. Instead of responding to what employees do, these systems could analyse the motivations behind behaviour — enabling proactive workforce shaping



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grounded in advanced reasoning. As India's economy becomes increasingly knowledge-centric, AGI may guide everything from leadership pipelines to nationwide skill strategies.

Agentic AI takes this transformation further. Unlike rule-based chatbots, agentic systems combine planning, memory, reasoning and autonomous execution. These agents can independently run multi-step HR processes — from talent sourcing and compensation benchmarking to employee experience monitoring and workflow coordination. They behave less like software tools and more like operational partners. Indian public-sector enterprises and large corporates can leverage such agents to continuously scan labour markets, manage hiring cycles, identify learning trajectories or oversee organisational health with minimal manual intervention. This mirrors global predictions that autonomous AI systems will become deeply embedded in business operations within the decade.

Accuracy and contextual relevance in these systems are rooted in RAG, which grounds AI in an organisation's internal knowledge base — policies, compliance records, case archives, labour advisories, audits, and skill frameworks. This is crucial in India, where labour regulations differ across states and HR must adhere to directives from entities such as MoLE, EPFO, ESIC, and SEZ authorities. When RAG indexes these sources, HR gains something akin to a highly precise institutional memory — always accessible and free from interpretive ambiguity.

The Model Context Protocol (MCP) extends this intelligence into real-world action by connecting AI with HR and enterprise platforms such as HRIS, ERP, payroll, compliance tools, and IT systems. MCP enables automated onboarding, adaptive role changes, workload balancing and seamless internal mobility. It effectively closes the gap between insight generation and operational execution, turning HR into an always-engaged, intelligence-driven system rather than a reactive service unit.

Another emerging dimension is “vibe coding” — the effort to develop AI systems capable of understanding emotional tone, cultural nuance and collective organisational mood. Unlike conventional sentiment analysis, vibe coding uses multimodal AI to recognise psychological patterns across interactions. In a country as diverse as India — with its broad linguistic, cultural, and interpersonal variations — emotionally aware AI systems can provide leadership with a clearer view of organisational wellbeing. In an era of hybrid work and digital overload, such systems could become essential tools for empathetic, people-centric management.

Quantum computing represents the next frontier. Supported by India's National Quantum Mission, the country is positioning itself among global contenders preparing for quantum capabilities. Quantum technology will not simply speed up HR tasks; it will address optimisation problems that classical computers struggle with — scenarios involving vast combinations of variables. HR planning fits precisely into this category. With qubits that can store

multiple states simultaneously, quantum systems can evaluate millions of workforce arrangements at once. Quantum entanglement could allow these systems to quickly identify relationships between employee attributes, performance outcomes, cultural alignment and future skill potential. This could revolutionise team design, long-term workforce planning, capability forecasting, pay structuring and even diversity modelling. Quantum-driven HR tools may eventually allow Indian enterprises to simulate entire organisational futures — something beyond the limits of today's analytics.

This technological shift coincides with a historic redesign of India's labour ecosystem. The new Labour Codes — covering wages, industrial relations, social security and workplace safety — signal India's most comprehensive labour reforms since Independence. These codes emphasise consistency, digitisation and transparency. Organisations will need HR systems that can interpret regulatory changes in real time and adapt instantly. AI-driven HR environments become essential here. Autonomous systems can track compliance exposure, interpret state-level variations and align company policies with evolving Government notifications. Complementing this is India's developing Labour Stack — a digital public infrastructure envisioned to create portable worker identities, authenticated skill records, digital career histories and integrated social security data. When combined with AI, this infrastructure could enable frictionless talent movement across industries, employers and regions — unlocking India's demographic potential more efficiently than traditional reforms alone.

The convergence of AI, agentic intelligence, RAG-enhanced accuracy, MCP-enabled execution, and advancing quantum computing is steering HR toward a role far more strategic than administrative. With India's digital-policy foundation and the scale of its enterprises, the country is uniquely positioned to adopt these technologies at national scale. The future of HR in India will belong not to organisations that simply automate tasks, but to those that design intelligent systems capable of continuous learning, reasoning and workforce orchestration. As India prepares for the next phase of economic growth, this augmented HR function could emerge as one of the most influential engines of institutional and national transformation.

## AI is teaching a generation to sound smart. That's not the same as being informed

As students worldwide turn to AI for learning, the divide isn't between users and non-users — it's between those who can question algorithmic output and those who must accept it - education systems aren't prepared for the consequences.



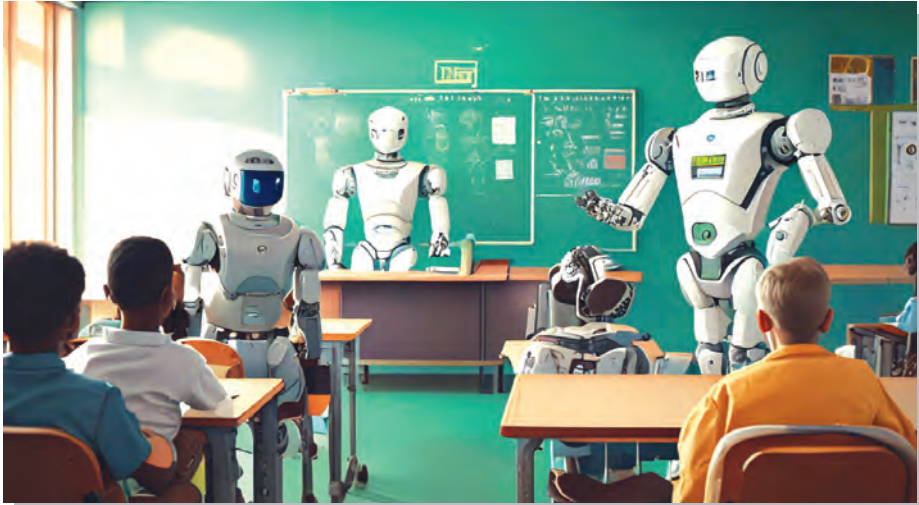
NISHANT SAHDEV

Artificial intelligence didn't storm into education. There was no grand moment when classrooms suddenly changed. Instead, AI arrived slowly — through shortcuts during late-night study sessions, through apps that explained equations more patiently than tutors, through quick rewrites before a deadline. Over time, these small interactions added up. What once felt novel became routine. For many students today, AI is simply part of how thinking happens.

A final-year engineering student in Delhi said something recently that captured this shift perfectly: “Sometimes I'm not sure where my thinking ends and where the AI's suggestion begins.” She wasn't admitting guilt. She was trying to describe a new intellectual experience — the sense that the boundary between her own reasoning and digital assistance is fading.

The numbers across India and globally show just how quickly this shift has taken root. In the US, surveys of teens show that one in four now uses generative AI for schoolwork, double the number from 2023.

Adults, too, are interacting with AI at unprecedented rates, with more than 60 per cent saying they use it several times a week. In India, AI adoption in schools and colleges is accelerating even



faster. A national survey reported that over 70 per cent of Indian teachers already use AI tools for creating lesson plans or automating administrative work, with the figure even higher among experienced teachers.

In higher education, more than half of Indian universities now permit students to use AI tools and many institutions are incorporating generative AI into curriculum design and learning materials.

The Indian market shows this momentum. AI in education here was valued at roughly \$196 million in 2024 and is projected to cross \$1.1 billion by 2030 — a compound annual growth rate of more than 30 per cent. That growth is driven by scale: India has over 40 million higher-education students and one of the world's largest school systems, with 260 million schoolchildren and more than 8.5 million teachers. When a technology

touches this system, even quietly, the effects ripple widely. But numbers only tell part of the story. What matters more is what AI is doing to the inner life of education — the process of thinking itself.



For centuries, education relied on a simple assumption: the work that mattered happened inside the student. The essay or the problem set was just evidence of that internal struggle. Learning meant grappling with ideas, wrestling with confusion, taking wrong turns and correcting course. It was slow, often frustrating work, but it built the kind of understanding that stays with a person for life.

AI scrambles this logic. It can produce clean, fluent,

confident answers instantly. A student need only provide the prompt.

Studies from leading universities have found that AI-generated essays now match or outperform undergraduate writing in structure, clarity, and argumentation. Students who use AI to improve their essays often submit stronger work — but when asked to explain the same ideas orally, their understanding is noticeably weaker. The surface looks polished, but the depth is missing.

Students feel the difference. Surveys in India and abroad show increasing anxiety: many students worry that AI is dulling their ability to think independently. A large majority say they often cannot tell how much of their work reflects their own reasoning. And this isn't laziness; it's human psychology. When a system gives a smooth, immediate answer, it's difficult to resist trusting

it, especially under academic pressure. The trouble is that AI is not always correct. Large language models still generate fabricated information — so-called “hallucinations” — with surprising confidence. Depending on the question, error rates can range from a few percent to nearly a quarter. But students rarely have the time or context to verify every detail. When uncertainties are wrapped in fluent language, they blend into the student's mental model without detection.

This challenge is magnified in countries like India, where access to high-quality teaching remains uneven. UNESCO reports that hundreds of millions of students globally lack regular access to trained teachers and India alone faces a massive shortfall at multiple levels. In such environments, AI sometimes becomes a substitute for human instruction.

That can be a powerful equaliser — AI can deliver explanations anytime, in multiple languages, tailored to a student's pace. But it also carries risks. When students rely on AI without the conceptual framework to evaluate it, they may absorb inaccuracies that weaken their foundations. This creates a new kind of inequality. In well-resourced institutions — elite engineering colleges, private universities, top public universities — students often use AI thoughtfully.

They test ideas, refine drafts, or explore alternative approaches. In under-resourced settings, students may use AI as a primary teacher. The difference is not

access; it is epistemic resilience — the ability to question the information a system gives you.

Meanwhile, universities are struggling to respond. Some tried banning AI, but detection tools remain unreliable and risk penalising honest students. Other institutions welcomed AI but did not rethink how assignments are designed, even though many traditional tasks no longer measure what they once did. If a machine can produce a persuasive answer in seconds, what does an essay or a problem set really test?

International organisations have begun sounding alarms. Analysts warn that without assessment reform, countries could see a decline in deep literacy, reasoning skills, and independent thinking. These warnings apply strongly to India, where millions of students will interact with AI daily long before institutions fully adapt.

### So what would meaningful change look like?

First, we need to redesign assessments so that they capture reasoning, not just results. Oral exams, in-class analytical tasks, multi-stage assignments with required reflections and reasoning logs bring the cognitive process back into view. These practices won't eliminate AI use, but they make it harder for AI to replace thinking.

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Please read the complete article online in [www.dailypioneer.com](http://www.dailypioneer.com)

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A senior Indian government official arrived on Sunday to review Nepal's election preparations and assess progress in India-funded development projects, officials said. Munu Mahawar, Additional Secretary in the Ministry of External Affairs, will hold a series of high-level meetings during his four-day visit, foreign ministry officials here said. He is expected to call on Prime Minister Sushila Karki and meet Finance Minister Rameshwar Khanal, Commerce Minister Anil Kumar Sinha and Home Minister Om Prakash Aryal on Tuesday, they said. Mahawar's discussions in Kathmandu will focus on India's support and cooperation for the March 5 elections, the officials said, adding that he will also assess progress in India-funded development projects in Nepal.



# Endless opportunities in India: Israeli officials

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
■ Jerusalem

The ties between Israel and India are “very strong” and there are “endless opportunities” for collaboration between the two countries, Israeli officials have said while describing the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC) project as a “very good” initiative.

They also said the two countries can work together, along with partners in the international community, to encourage states to assert their authority over all activities within their borders and ensure that non-state actors do not play a significant role.

“The ties between Israel and India are very, very strong and getting even stronger. Both civilian and I think also in terms of military cooperation, defence cooperation,” a senior Israeli foreign ministry official said while talking to a group of Indian journalists. Another official from the foreign ministry said there are “endless opportunities” for the two countries to work together.

Speaking about the IMEC project, the official said that for Israel, it’s a “very, very good initiative”.

“It’s something that we are really looking into. At the moment, there are two countries which are not part of the signatory - Jordan and Israel. And for the first stage, this is what we’re looking to see: these two countries are



part of the larger framework,” the official said.

The IMEC, a transformative initiative aimed at boosting connectivity, trade, and sustainability across three regions, was formed on the sidelines of the G20 Summit in Delhi in September 2023.

An agreement was signed by India, Saudi Arabia, the European Union, the UAE, the US and some other G20 partners for the corridor.

Less than a month after the IMEC launch, Hamas launched a multi-front attack on Israel on October 7 that impacted the project.

“It’s true that the 7th of

October attack actually put a lid for the moment on all these initiatives. There’s a lot of hesitation for other countries as to how they should be included when there’s still a war going on. And even though there’s a ceasefire, there’s a

peace plan by (US President Donald) Trump, there’s still hesitation. What if a war breaks out again?” said the senior diplomat.

“So, I think it would still take time. There’s nothing at the moment Israel can do to persuade or to progress unless Saudi Arabia sees some kind of progress in

Gaza, because Saudi Arabia clearly said that it has to give something to the Palestinians. Any gesture that can pacify the Palestinians before it goes on and normalises relations with Israel,” the official said.

“Until that happens, we don’t see how we can move forward, but we are laying the foundation with Americans, with the Emirates. With other neighbouring countries. So when the time comes, we can pick up from where we left off,” the official added.

The senior diplomat described the IMEC as an “amazing project”, saying it

would stabilise the area and the regional countries could gain from it.

Many strategic affairs watchers have described the IMEC as perhaps an answer to China’s Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), a multi-billion-dollar infrastructure and connectivity project that involves dozens of countries.

The official also said Israel is pushing India, as well as the rest of the world, to designate Hamas as a terror outfit.

“Is there a doubt that Hamas is a terrorist organisation after the October 7 (attack)? Is there doubt about what they have (done)? Their

actions. The way they operate. Their activities?” the official asked.

The official said that India’s listing of Hamas would have a “strong global impact”.

It will send a “very strong message” to the world, because there are a lot of neighbouring countries that look up to India, and when India declares something, it has a great impact.

“It sends a message that India has clearly seen what Hamas is doing, and no operative should step on Indian soil,” the official said.

On the two-state solution, the official said India has a very clear understanding of policy, promoting the two-state solution, seeing the two nations living side by side, and it has never neglected this policy.

“We respect that. We don’t see the vision at the moment of this happening, especially when you don’t have the right reforms and conditions from the Palestinian side,” the official added.

Speaking on condition of anonymity, another official said that there was a thought in Israel that possibly Iran would shift its approach and maybe stop the proxy war after what happened to Hezbollah, Hamas and the Operation Rising Lion.

“But the understanding now is that there was no shift, and Iran is doubling down and reinvesting in the proxy system with slight changes as to where to put the emphasis,” the official said.

## Security forces foil attack on Jaffar Express in Pakistan



ASSOCIATED PRESS  
■ Mexico City

Security forces foiled an attempt to attack the frequently-targeted Jaffar Express passenger train in Pakistan’s Balochistan province, according to a media report on Sunday. Unidentified insurgents planted an improvised explosive device (IED) on the track used by the Peshawar-bound train in the Nasir-abad area of the province on Saturday, the Dawn newspaper reported. Law enforcement agencies cordoned off the area after receiving information about the device and defused it, the report said, quoting a police official. The attack attempt comes almost a month after the train narrowly escaped an explosion in the same area. Months before that, it came

under a deadly insurgent attack that left 26 people dead. Meanwhile, the Peshawar to Quetta Jaffar Express was stopped at Jacobabad due to security reasons. Another train was also halted there. According to the report, services for these trains will be resumed after the situation is assessed. It is not the first time insurgents have attacked the Jaffar Express, and its service has already been hit multiple times this year. The most devastating attack came on March 11, when the banned Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA) hijacked the Jaffar Express with 380 passengers on board, triggering a two-day standoff in a mountainous area and claiming 26 lives. Security forces later rescued around 354 passengers, while 33 insurgents were killed.

## Sri Lanka’s Kandy: A lesson in climate change, human error

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
■ Colombo

Cyclone-struck Sri Lanka’s Kandy district – the seat of the last Royal Kingdom of Ceylon – suffered extensive damage and was the worst-hit by the Ditwah disaster, which has claimed a total of 618 lives in the island nation. Surrounded by three mountain ranges and set in a basin-like valley, Kandy city escaped direct damage except for disruptions to its road network, electricity, and communication. However, the devastation in the district’s outer areas in the rural heartland was disastrous. Till Saturday night, Kandy district had accounted for 232 of the 618 deaths verified so far. It leads with 91 disappearances and 1,800 fully destroyed homes. Rescue teams are still struggling to reach some of the villages cut off from road access there. An expert indicated that “unplanned and haphazard

settlements” were a cause of the disaster. One such village is in the Minipe administrative division, 75 miles east of the city, 145 feet above sea level. Here unfolded the tragic tale of the village of Nelummala (the lotus flower). Around 5:30 in the evening on November 27, boulders came descending from a nearby range, burying all 21 houses in the village, along with the people inside. “I managed to save six of them,” Rev Pallettan Chandrananda, 34, a Buddhist monk who ran a Buddhist school in the village, told PTI on the phone. He believes over 30 people are dead while the search is still on. Once a beautiful, quaint village amidst acres of paddy fields, it now stands as a site of boulders and loose earth with not a trace of the happier times. A female villager who did not want to be identified said she was thankful to the monk for her survival.

## Man held over pepper spray incident at UK airport



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
■ London

A man was arrested on suspicion of assault at the Heathrow Airport on Sunday after police were called to reports of a number of people being attacked with pepper spray, with the incident causing major travel disruptions.

The Metropolitan Police said the morning incident was not terrorism related and that the injuries to the victims were not thought to be “life-threatening or life changing”.

The force believes the incident involved an argument between a group of people known to each other.

“A number of people were sprayed with what is believed to be a form of pepper spray by a group of men who then left the scene,” the Met Police said in a statement.

“Armed response officers attended and arrested one man on suspicion of assault. He remains in custody and enquiries continue to trace further suspects,” the statement said.

The incident caused major disruption to flights, with the airport advising passengers to allow extra time for their journeys.

“Our teams are current-

ly responding to an incident involving the emergency services in the Terminal 3 multi-storey car park,” Heathrow Airport said.

“Passengers are advised to allow extra time when travelling to the airport and to check with their airline for any queries,” it added.

Armed police rushed to the airport and London Ambulance Service also attended the scene as the victims were taken to hospital. “At this stage, we believe the incident involved a group of people known to each other, with an argument escalating and resulting in a number of people being injured,” said Commander Peter Stevens of the Met Police.

“Our officers responded quickly and there will be an increased police presence at Heathrow Airport throughout the morning, to continue enquiries and ensure the safety of those in the area.

“We are not treating this incident as terrorism. I understand the public’s concerns and would like to thank those in the area for their cooperation this morning,” he said.

The police are also appealing for anyone with information about the incident.

## Russian strike kills 1 as US-Ukraine talks end day three

ASSOCIATED PRESS  
■ Kyiv

Russian missile and drone attacks overnight into Sunday killed at least one person in Ukraine, after US and Ukrainian officials wrapped up a third day of talks aimed at ending the war. A man was killed in a drone attack on Ukraine’s northern Chernihiv region Saturday night, local officials said, while a combined missile and drone attack on infrastructure in the central city of Kremenchuk caused power and water outages. Kremenchuk is home to one of Ukraine’s biggest oil refineries and is an industrial hub.

Kyiv and its Western allies say Russia is trying to cripple the Ukrainian power grid

and deny civilians access to heat, light and running water for a fourth consecutive winter, in what Ukrainian officials call “weaponising” the cold.

The latest round of attacks came as Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said Saturday evening he had a “substantive phone call” with American officials engaged in talks with a Ukrainian delegation in Florida. He said he had been given an update over the phone by US and Ukrainian officials at the talks.

“Ukraine is determined to keep working in good faith with the American side to genuinely achieve peace,” Zelenskyy wrote on social media.

Speaking Saturday at the Reagan National Defence



Forum, US President Donald Trump’s outgoing Ukraine envoy, Keith Kellogg, said efforts to end the war were in “the last 10 metres.”

He said a deal depended on the two outstanding issues of “terrain, primarily the Donbas,” and the

Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant.

Russia controls most of Donbas, its name for Donetsk and neighbouring Luhansk, which, along with two southern regions, it illegally annexed three years ago.

## Benin’s interior minister says coup announced earlier has been foiled

ASSOCIATED PRESS  
■ Cotonou (Benin)

A coup that was announced in Benin on Sunday has been “foiled,” the interior minister said in a video on Facebook.

“In the early morning of Sunday, December 7, 2025, a small group of soldiers launched a mutiny with the aim of destabilising the state and its institutions,” Alassane Seidou said. “Faced with this situation, the Beninese Armed Forces and their leadership, true to their oath, remained committed to the republic.”

Earlier, a group of soldiers had appeared on Benin’s state TV Sunday to announce the dissolution of the government in an apparent coup, the latest of many in West Africa.

The group, which called itself the Military Committee for Refoundation,



announced the removal of the president and all state institutions. Lt Col Pascal Tigri was appointed president of the military committee, the soldiers said.

Following its independence from France in 1960, the West African nation witnessed multiple coups, especially in the decades following its independence. Since 1991, the country has been

politically stable following the two-decade rule of Marxist-Leninist Mathieu Kérékou.

There has been no official news about President Patrice Talon since gunshots were heard around the presidential residence. However, the signal to the state television and public radio which was cut off has now been restored.



## Nobel laureates arrive for Stockholm, Oslo events

ASSOCIATED PRESS ■ Stockholm

Nobel week was underway in Stockholm and Oslo with laureates holding news conferences and lectures before they will be awarded the prestigious prizes. Hungarian László Krasznahorkai, who won the Prize in literature for his surreal and anarchic novels that combine a bleak world view with mordant humour, was expected to give a lecture in Stockholm on Sunday in one of his rare public appearances. When the Nobel judges announced the award in October, they described the 71-year-old as “a great epic writer” whose work “is characterised by absurdism and grotesque excess.” “Krasznahorkai’s work can be seen as part of a Central European tradition,” the Nobel Prize organisation said.



## 4.6 quake hits western Nepal; no damage reported

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Kathmandu

A 4.6-magnitude earthquake hit western Nepal’s Sudurpashchim province on Sunday morning. There were no immediate reports of damage. The earthquake was recorded at 8:28 am with an epicentre located in the Ghusha area of the Darchula district, according to the National Earthquake Monitoring and Research Centre. Tremors were felt in the neighbouring districts as well. However, there were no immediate reports of any damage caused by the tremor. Western Nepal is frequently hit by earthquakes. On November 30, an earthquake measuring 4.4 magnitude was recorded in the Saipal mountain region in the Bajhang district of the province.



A group of officials, including the Union Minister, are standing in front of a plaque for the ICC Bridge Over Ganga. The plaque is inscribed with the name of the bridge and the names of the officials involved in its construction.

At the time of the crisis, the IL&FS Group comprised 302 entities as of October 15, 2018 in which 169 entities are/were domestic group entities, while the remaining were offshore group entities. IL&FS Group, as of October 8, 2018, had availed aggregate external fund-based debt of ₹94,215 crore, of the total external debt outstanding of ₹99,355 crore. Of this ₹48,000 crore (almost 51 per cent) was availed by four key holding companies IL&FS IFIN, ITNL and IEDCL.



BRIEFLY

VIRAT KOHLI OFFER PRAYERS AT SIMHACHALAM TEMPLE



Indian cricketer Virat Kohli, his family members, all-rounder Washington Sundar, and others offered prayers at the Sri Varaha Lakshmi Narasimha Swamy temple here on Sunday, an official of the temple body said.

Team India defeated South Africa by nine wickets, sealing the series 2-1 with a dominant win in the final match at the Andhra Cricket Association-Visakhapatnam District Cricket Association (ACA-VDC) Stadium in Visakhapatnam on December 6.

Temple officials received Kohli and his family and escorted them for darshan. They first took part in the traditional Kappasthambham Alinganam (embracing the sacred pillar) ritual before proceeding to the deity's *darshan*.

CHINNASWAMY STADIUM TO HOST IPL: DK SHIVAKUMAR



Karnataka Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar on Sunday announced that Chinnaswamy Stadium will continue to host future IPL matches.

The announcement comes amid doubts over hosting the event in Karnataka following the June 4 stampede at the stadium, which occurred when a large crowd had gathered to celebrate the Royal Challengers Bangalore's victory in IPL 2025.

Speaking to reporters after casting his vote in the Karnataka State Cricket Association (KSCA) presidential elections, Shivakumar said a new large stadium will also be constructed in the future.

Saraswat clinches maiden super 100 title at Guwahati Masters

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
■ Guwahati

India's Sanskar Saraswat clinched his maiden Super 100 title after eking out a three-game victory over compatriot Mithun Manjunath in the men's singles final of the Guwahati Masters on Sunday.

The 19-year-old from Jodhpur showcased grit and firepower while unleashing a barrage of smashes to outwit former national champion Manjunath 21-11, 17-21, 21-13 in an all-Indian final that lasted 50 minutes.

However, Tanvi Sharma, a world junior championships silver medalist, registered a runner-up finish in women's singles after losing 18-21, 18-21 to Tung Ciou-Tong of Chinese

Taipei in the finals. The 16-year-old from Punjab had reached the semi-finals at the Syed Modi International Super 300 last week. She had reached the Odisha Masters final last year and finished runner-up at this year's US Open Super 300 and the World Junior Championships as well.

Indian men's doubles pair of Pruthvi Krishnamurthy Roy and Sai Pratheek K also finished second best after losing 13-21, 18-21 to Malaysia's sixth seed Kang Khai Xing and Aaron Tai in a lop-sided final.

Saraswat, who trains at the National Centre of Excellence in Guwahati, has been making rapid strides on the domestic circuit. He won his maiden senior national doubles title alongside Arsh

Mohammad in Bengaluru last year and had earlier claimed a junior singles crown. The duo also finished runners-up in the under-19 event at the 31st Smit Krishna Khaitan Memorial Badminton Tournament in September last year.

Playing with his right leg heavily taped, Saraswat stayed marginally ahead at the outset before Manjunath clawed back to 7-7 in the opening game. While the rallies lacked prolonged exchanges, both players capitalised on each other's errors.

Saraswat carried a slim 11-9 lead into the interval before stretching it to 14-10 with a burst of attacking shots. Manjunath struggled to read his opponent's cross-court and down-the-line smashes as Saraswat surged to nine game points and



closed out the opener comfortably.

The second game saw Saraswat continue on the offensive, racing to an 8-2 lead with his steep smashes leaving Manjunath under pressure. However, the Karnataka shuttler staged a strong comeback, reeling off five consecutive points to level at 7-8 and edging ahead 11-10 at the interval. Momentum then swung decisively as Manjunath overturned a deficit to grab an 18-16 advantage before Saraswat's errors handed him three game points, which he converted to force a decider.

In the third game, Saraswat came out firing, storming to a 7-0 lead with aggressive intent. Manjunath managed to close the gap briefly, but Saraswat maintained control to take an 11-5 lead at the interval.

Gary Kirsten appointed consultant for Namibia men's team

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
■ New Delhi

World Cup-winning former India head coach Gary Kirsten has been appointed consultant for Namibia's men's national teams and will work alongside head coach Craig Williams in the build-up to next year's T20 World Cup.

The global showpiece is scheduled to be held in India and Sri Lanka in February-March 2026. "It is indeed a privilege to work with Cricket Namibia. I have been thoroughly impressed with the



dedication and determination to create a high-performance cricket environment," Kirsten said in a Cricket Namibia statement.

"Their new state-of-the-art cricket stadium is a testament to their commitment to making sure their national teams are competing with the best cricket countries in the world. "Their senior men's national team is performing well, and I look forward to adding value to their preparation for the T20 World Cup in February next year."

A former South Africa opener, Kirsten took to coaching

after retiring in 2004 and was appointed India's head coach in 2007. Under his tenure, India famously won the 2011 ODI World Cup.

He later served as head coach of South Africa and has worked with several teams in T20 franchise leagues around the world. Most recently, Kirsten had a brief stint as head coach of Pakistan's men's team in 2024. "Kirsten's appointment as consultant reflects Cricket Namibia's commitment to strengthening its high-performance environment and supporting the existing

coaching structure," a statement from the board said.

"His blend of international playing experience, coaching success, and passion for player development brings valuable insight and added depth to the Eagles [men's national team] setup."

Namibia have qualified for each of the last three T20 World Cups in 2021, 2022 and 2024 and is also in contention for the upcoming edition. They will be one of the three host nations for the 2026 tournament, along with South Africa and Zimbabwe.

Smriti Mandhana, Palash Muchhal announce end of relationship; urge privacy

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
■ New Delhi

India batter Smriti Mandhana on Sunday announced that her wedding had been called off and urged fans and media to stop the speculation, while music composer Palash Muchhal confirmed that he had "decided to move on" from the relationship.

Muchhal also warned of legal action against those spreading defamatory rumours.

Mandhana, one of India's most prominent women cricketers, issued her first public statement on social media after rumours about

her personal life had intensified over the past month.

She was supposed to marry Muchhal on November 23 but the wedding was postponed after Mandhana's father, Shriniwas was hospitalised due to a heart ailment.

"I need to clarify that the wedding is called off. I would like to close this matter here and implore all of you to do the same," she wrote.

"Over the past few weeks there has been plenty of speculation around my life and I feel it is important for me to speak out at this time," she said in an Instagram post.

Calling herself a "very

private person", Mandhana said the need to set the record straight compelled her to speak.

She requested fans and the public to "respect the privacy of both families" and allow them the "space to process and move on".

Mandhana, who is preparing for India's upcoming international season, said her focus remains firmly on cricket.

"I believe there is a higher purpose driving us all and for me that has always been representing my country at the highest level. I hope to continue to play and win trophies for India for as long



as possible," she said. Soon after Mandhana's post, Palash Muchhal issued his own statement, confirming that he had "decided to move on" and expressing anguish over what he described as baseless online chatter.

"I have decided to move on in my life and step back from my personal relationship. It's been very difficult for me to see people react so easily on baseless rumours about something which has been most sacred to me.

"It's the most difficult phase of my life and I will deal with it gracefully holding on to my beliefs," he wrote.

He urged the public to

reflect before amplifying unverified claims.

"I truly hope we, as a society, learn to pause before judging someone based on unverified gossip, whose sources are never identified. Our words can wound in ways we may never understand," he added.

Muchhal also said his team would take legal action against those spreading defamatory content.

"My team will be taking strict legal action against those spreading false and defamatory content," he said, thanking those who had supported him with "kindness" during this period.

Rohit, Kohli experience important: Gambhir

G UNNIKISHANAN  
■ Visakhapatnam

At this moment, the Indian think tank is doing a tough balancing act of building the team around a new set of players without completely cutting ties with the old guard.

In that context, head coach Gautam Gambhir, who oversees this process, was a delighted man to see both parties chipping in with handy contributions.

Giving heft to the senior side, Virat Kohli emerged player of the series in the ODIs against South Africa, scoring two hundreds and a fifty — a quick ride back to his incredible peaks of 2015 onwards.

Rohit Sharma helped himself to a couple of fifties to underline his fine touch.

Gambhir hoped the two stalwarts would continue to churn out such perfor-

mances, which would keep the ODI outfit in good shape.

"Look, they're quality players. I've said it many times as well that they're world-class players. They are quality players in this format, and their experience is really important in the dressing room," said Gambhir at the press meet after India beat SA by nine wickets to bag the one-day series 2-1.

"They're doing what they do. They've been doing it for such a long time for Indian cricket. Hopefully, they can continue doing the same, which is always going to be important come the white ball format and the 50-over format," he added.

The rest given to seniors Jasprit Bumrah and Mohammad Siraj, and the injury-enforced absence of Shubman Gill and Hardik Pandya, gave India a chance to test the skillsets of some young tyros.



Gambhir was particularly delighted with the growth of Harshit Rana as a bowling all-rounder.

"That's one of the reasons why we are trying to probably develop someone like

Harshit, who can actually bat at Number 8 and contribute with a bat.

"That's how we need to find the balance, because come the South Africa in two years (2027 ODI WC), we

would be needing three proper seamers as well. And if he can continue to develop as a bowling allrounder, it's going to give us a massive boost," he said.

Similarly, Gambhir was also

impressed by the outings of seamers Arshdeep Singh and Prasidh Krishna in the series.

"With Jaspreet Bumrah coming back and what we saw of Arshdeep, Prasidh and Harshit in this series was incredible because all these three guys do not have a lot of experience, especially in the 50-over format. They've hardly played, what, less than 15 ODIs. But they've done a fabulous job," he said.

Gautam Gambhir's penchant for shuffling cricketers has often come under sharp scrutiny, but the head coach insisted that "batting order is overrated" in white ball cricket, strongly hinting of him sticking to his trusted ways.

Forced by the combination, Rituraj Gaikwad, a genuine opener, had to bat at Number 4 in the just-concluded ODI series, while all-rounder Washington Sundar has been a perennial floater in the line-up. (PTI)



Smith's propels Australia to a victory in 2nd test

ASSOCIATED PRESS  
■ Brisbane

Steve Smith took a brilliant reflex catch to swing momentum, got into a heated exchange with Jofra Archer and then slogged the winning runs Sunday as Australia beat England again to take a 2-0 Ashes lead.

prospects. England had resumed Sunday at 134-6, and took an hour and 36 minutes — 18.2 overs — to erase the first-innings deficit.

The Australian attack bowled a tight line and length and mixed it up with some short-pitch deliveries in an attempt to entice the usually aggressive England batters to have a go.

Set a target of 65 for victory in the second test after dismissing England for 241 in the second innings, Australia raced to an eight-wicket win late on Day 4 as storms brewed in and around the stadium. Archer was bowling around 150 kph (93 mph) under the lights, and it only fired up Smith.

"The adrenaline was pumping at the end of the end, yeah. Jofra was bowling pretty quickly," Smith said. "It was a huge win. Great to go 2-nil up."

Stokes (50) and Will Jacks (41) resisted the temptation for the entire first session, knowing that a wicket would expose the tailenders. It was a completely different approach to England's usual attack-at-all-costs mentality that has attracted wide criticism in the first two Ashes tests so far.

There were some theatrics involving the Australia captain and England's strike pace bowler, with Smith ducking under a short ball and then critiquing Archer for bowling "fast when nothing is going on, champion." He then hit a four and a six to bring up 1,000 test runs at the Gabba.

With Australia at 63-2 and needing just two runs to win the day-nighter, Smith hit a six to seal it and finished unbeaten on 23 from nine deliveries.

The seventh-wicket pair put on a 96-run stand to get England to the brink of the night session, but that ended when Smith — Australia's stand-in captain — took a stunning one-hander diving to his left at slip off Michael Nesar's bowling to dismiss Jacks. That was the momentum changer. The subsequent slide happened quickly, with England losing its last four wickets for 17 runs and Nesar finishing with a five-wicket haul.

Smith scored an unbeaten 135 to guide England to a one-wicket Ashes victory.

This time, he didn't go on. The 34-year-old was incredibly caught behind by wicket-keeper Alex Carey standing up to the stumps to Nesar (5-42).

Stokes twirled his bat in the air in disbelief before striding back to the pavilion. Smith took two more catches as England's lower-order crumbled.

Bazball shelved

Day 4 was a tale of two captains. England skipper Stokes curbed his attacking instincts, dispensing with Bazball and pragmatically setting about reviving England's Ashes



# Simranpreet wins 25m pistol gold in ISSF World Cup

Aishwary Tomar wins 3P silver

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
■ Doha

Young Simranpreet Kaur Brar overcame a challenging field to win the women's 25m pistol gold, while men's 50m rifle 3-position exponent Aishwary Pratap Singh Tomar bagged a silver on ISSF World Cup Final debut on Sunday, completing a full set of medals at all possible world and continental championships in the sport.

Simranpreet, whose father left his Government job to support his daughter, did her parents proud with the biggest achievement of her career by shooting a superb 41 in the final, equalling the World junior record in the process. The other Indian to qualify for the eight-shooter final, Esha Singh, finished seventh. Double Olympic bronze medallist Manu Bhaker could not make the final after finishing ninth in the qualification round with a score of 581.

In the qualification round, 21-year-old Simranpreet, who had won a silver at the World Cup in Lima earlier this year, shot 585, while Esha tallied 585 to finish fifth and fourth, respectively and make the final. Simranpreet began slowly, missing three targets in the first series of five shots to slip to eighth and last position. But she rallied thereafter and fired three perfect 5s in the competition to jump to the China's ace shooter and



Simranpreet Kaur Brar (centre)

reigning 10m air pistol world champion Yao Qianxun, who finished a distant second with 36 points, and former world champion Doreen Vennekamp of Germany, who took the bronze.

In men's 50m rifle 3-positions, Aishwary finished 0.9 points behind Czechia's Jiri Privratsky, who shot 414.2 in the final played in the new ISSF format of 40 shots. Olympic champion Liu Yukun won bronze. Aishwary, who is a double Olympian, former junior world champion, and reigning Asian champion, has also won a silver medal in the World Championship last month.

Aishwary shot 595 in qualification to finish second behind China's Tian Jiaming, who blazed the Lusail shooting ranges with a world record 598. Athlete of the Year Jon-Hermann Hegg of Norway and Hungarian ace

Istvan Peni were the other top guns in the top eight, which again saw three Chinese go through.

Aishwary was fourth with a score of 102.8 after the 10 shots in the first kneeling position, shot over two series of five shots each.

The next 10 shots of the second prone position are where Aishwary found his momentum and climbed up to second on the leaderboard with a strong series of 52.9 and 52, respectively.

Privratsky, meanwhile, was charting a course of his own, 3.3 ahead of Aishwary at the stage. Olympic champion Liu was third with 20 standing position shots still to be played. Aishwary then outgunned Privratsky over the next 10 shots to bring the difference down to 1.5. After the 31st, it went down to 0.5 as Privratsky was finding it difficult to get into the 10-ring.

Peni and Tian were first to exit the final as Aishwary went into the lead after the 33rd shot. The young Frenchman Romain Aufrere then lost the battle for bronze with the Olympic champion, as Privratsky caught up with Aishwary and went 0.5 ahead again after the 37th shot with a couple of high 10s, as the Indian faltered a bit.

The gap was, however, a mere 0.3 ahead of the final two shots, and Aishwary fired a 10.1 to the Czech's 10.3 and then a 10.6 for his 40th, putting Privratsky decisively ahead to land gold, his third ISSF yellow metal of the year.

Aishwary, too, ended the year on a strong note after a barren first half. It was also India's fourth medal of the event in Doha. Sift Kaur Samra in the women's 3P shot 584 in her relay to finish 10th and failed to qualify for the final.

## Sepp Straka surges past Scottie Scheffler to lead in Bahamas

ASSOCIATED PRESS  
■ Nassau

Sepp Straka made three birdies and two eagles on the par 5s for an 8-under 64 and seized on some late misses by Scottie Scheffler to take a one-shot lead going into the final round of the Hero World Challenge. Straka chipped in for eagle on the par-5 sixth and played great golf just to keep pace with Scheffler, who had five straight 3s on his scorecard to start the third round and was 9 under for his round through 15 holes.

Scheffler, going for a third straight win at Albany Golf Club, has stumbled over the final three holes every day this week — a double bogey on the 16th on Thursday, a bogey on the 16th on Friday, and then a bogey-par-bogey finish. He still had a 65 and will be in the final group with Straka on Sunday.

Straka seized on the par 5s. Along with his chip-in on the sixth hole, he holed an 18-foot eagle putt on the downwind, par-5 15th. He also hit a 3-wood that landed perfectly in front of the green at the par-5 ninth that rolled out to 15 feet for a two-putt birdie. He trailed Scheffler by three shots through five holes, and by two shots with four holes left. But Straka was bogey-free on the day and finished at 18-under 198.

"He definitely got it going quick," Straka said of the world's Number 1 player. "It didn't look like he was going to miss a putt there for a little bit. But it's golf, it usually evens out a lot and I just tried to focus on my own game."

## Neergaard-Petersen claims first major title at Australian Open

ASSOCIATED PRESS  
■ Melbourne

Rasmus Neergaard-Petersen won the Australian Open for his first major professional title Sunday when his scrambled par on the final hole crushed the hopes of hometown favourite Cam Smith, who was chasing his first win in more than two years.

Smith and Neergaard-Petersen came to the 72nd hole tied at 15-under after a thrilling contest over the last nine holes. Neergaard-Petersen shanked his drive into difficult rough on the right with a bunker between his ball and the green.

Smith found the green with his second, but with a long, sloping putt to the hole. Matter of fact, as he has been throughout the week, Neergaard got up and down for par while Smith missed his difficult putt for birdie, then a 1.5-meter return putt to force a playoff.

The 26-year-old Danish player won by a single shot at 15-under 269 after rounds of 67, 66, 66 and 70. Smith started the last round two shots behind the leader, drew level by the turn and led outright after sinking a three-metre put for birdie on the 10th hole.

After a birdie at the 11th, Smith bogeyed the 12th and was level with Neergaard-Petersen at 13 under. The pair stayed locked together until the final hole, when Smith missed a par putt, handing his opponent a career-changing victory.

"It's hard. I'm really at a loss for words. It's been a battle all day," Neergaard



said. "Even from the outside, you can look calm, but it was a storm inside (for me) all day. "But I managed to keep battling and to get it up and down to make that putt on the last. I don't know what to say, to be honest."

Smith, the 2022 British Open champion who ended his streak of missing seven consecutive cuts this year on Friday, shot 66 Saturday and was tied for second, two strokes off the lead.

After all his missed cuts, Smith said that it was "nice being in contention" entering the final round.

"It's been a while since I've had this feeling, to be honest," he said. "I love that it's the Australian Open. I couldn't think of a better place to get back into form. It would shut a few people up." Smith has won the Australian PGA twice but has yet to win the Stonehaven Cup as the champion of his national open.

His last tournament victory came at the LIV tournament in Bedminster, England, in August 2022, and his previous top-10 finish was in July.

Rory McIlroy's 11 bogeys over four days, including an unfortunate encounter with a banana peel on Saturday, kept him out of contention. On Sunday, the Northern Irishman had a final round 69, with five birdies and three bogeys, to finish in a tie for 10th.

## McIlroy calls for better slot for Australian Open

McIlroy, the Race to Dubai winner and who completed his career Grand Slam when he won the Masters this year, was making his first appearance at the Australian Open since 2015. He won it in 2013. Speaking after his final round on Sunday, the world Number 2 called for a more favourable schedule to attract more of the game's top players.

While he thought the sandbelt courses held massive appeal, the scheduling didn't help the tournament attract the top overseas players.

# Messi leads Inter Miami to first MLS Cup title



Inter Miami's Lionel Messi, centre, carries the trophy to celebrate with his teammates after defeating the Vancouver Whitecaps during the MLS Cup final soccer match in Fort Lauderdale

ASSOCIATED PRESS  
■ Fort Lauderdale

Thomas Müller has often enjoyed the upper hand in his longtime rivalry with Lionel Messi. The German star has come out on top in seven of 10 head-to-head matchups between the two, and his teams have twice eliminated Messi and Argentina in the World Cup.

But on Saturday, in the latest marquee showdown between the two stars, it was Messi's turn. The Argentine super star capped his third Major League Soccer season with the 47th trophy of his career, guiding Inter Miami to a 3-1 win over Müller's Vancouver Whitecaps in the MLS Cup final.

"Three years ago, I decided to come to MLS, and today we are MLS champions," Messi said in a quote

distributed by MLS. "We reached the semifinals of the (CONCACAF) Champions Cup. Last year we went out early in the league and were eliminated in the first round. This year, winning MLS was one of our main objectives."

Messi set up the go-ahead goal — a feed to Rodrigo De Paul in the 72nd minute — then added another assist in stoppage time to deliver Inter Miami its first championship in franchise history.

"The team made a huge effort — it was a very long year, with many matches — and we were up to the task all season," Messi said. "This is the moment I had been waiting for, and that we, as a team, were waiting for. It's very beautiful for all of us. They deserved it."

Both Messi and Müller had already secured their soccer legacies long before

Saturday's match. Each is a World Cup and Champions League winner. And both are Club World Cup winners.

They arrived in MLS with a similar goal: to add a league title to their already overflowing resumes. And even with little left to prove in their careers, it was evident how much the chance to lift the MLS Cup mattered to both veterans.

During the ensuing trophy ceremony, Müller smiled, clapped and gave a thumbs up as Messi was crowned the match's most valuable player.

Müller, who led Germany past Messi and Argentina in the 2014 World Cup final and 2010 World Cup quarterfinal, slammed his hand against the turf in frustration at one point in the match, which Vancouver trailed 1-0 after an early own goal before tying it in the 60th.

## Lando Norris clinches his first F1 title at Grand Prix



ASSOCIATED PRESS  
■ Abu Dhabi

McLaren driver Lando Norris clinched his first Formula 1 title at the season-ending Abu Dhabi Grand Prix on Sunday. Red Bull driver and defending champion Max Verstappen won the race with Norris placing third behind his McLaren teammate Oscar Piastri in second, which allowed Norris to finish two points ahead of Verstappen in the season-long standings.

Piastri was also in contention for his first F1 title and finished third in the standings, 13 points behind Norris. The 26-year-old Norris became the first British champion since Lewis Hamilton in 2020, and he also denied Verstappen a fifth straight title. Norris entered the three-way battle 12 points ahead of Verstappen and 16 ahead of Piastri.

Verstappen started from pole position for Red Bull with Norris on the front row beside him and Piastri third on the grid. Verstappen needed Norris to be fourth or lower and Norris had to finish outside the top five if Piastri won. Verstappen's astounding late-season charge

came close to unseating both McLaren drivers after they had shared the lead throughout the season and then were undone by driver and team-strategy errors.

But even Verstappen's season-leading eighth win and 71st of his career could not stop Norris, who kept his composure on Sunday having been under severe pressure in recent weeks.

The McLaren motorhome erupted with joy and CEO Zak Brown congratulated Norris on the team radio in his usual jovial manner.

"Lando, this is Zak from McLaren. Is this the world champion hotline? You did it! You did it! Awesome," Brown said.

Norris didn't know whether to laugh or cry. He did both.

"Oh my God, thanks so much. I love you guys. Thanks for everything," Norris said and then broke down in tears.

After crossing the line, Norris stayed in his car for a few moments, visibly emotional. His parents were on the side of the track and he went over to hug them before celebrating with his McLaren engineers and mechanics.

## Thauvin shines as Lens keeps top spot in France with win at Nantes

ASSOCIATED PRESS  
■ Paris

Lens remained atop Ligue 1 after Florian Thauvin proved decisive once again, scoring the opening goal in a 2-1 win at Nantes.

Defending champion Paris Saint-Germain stayed one point behind after thrashing Rennes 5-0 at Parc des Princes.

Wesley Saïd scored the winner in the 81st minute as Lens extended its winning streak to five matches. Youssef El-Arabi leveled the scoring for the host.

Lens moved to the top of the standings for the first time in 21 years last weekend after Thauvin's brace in a 2-1 win at Angers. The 2018 World Cup winner is enjoying a revival since his return to the league from Italian side Udinese this summer.

The 32-year-old winger has five goals and two



assists in 15 league matches. His performances have earned him a recall from France following a six-year absence.

Mbaye lights up Parc des PrincesAfter suffering its second Ligue 1 loss of the season at Monaco, PSG rebounded in style at Rennes' expense ahead of next week's Champions League trip to Athletic Bilbao. PSG initially strug-

gled to find space in the five-man Rennes defense and the visitor had the first big chance. Goalkeeper Matvei Safonov kept PSG afloat, stretching to tip Esteban Lepaul's shot onto the post.

PSG broke the deadlock seconds later on the break with a slick move concluded by Khvicha Kvaratskhelia. The Georgia winger scored twice, adding another in the second half after Senny


Mayulu doubled PSG's lead.

Ibrahim Mbaye, who is just 17, made it 4-0 in the 88th minute with the goal of the night — a superb strike from outside the box into the top corner. Gonçalo Ramos capped the win in added time.

In Nantes, Lens dominated early and Thauvin put the visitors ahead in the 34th minute with a header from Ruben Aguilar's excellent cross. Lens could not hold onto its lead for long, though, as Matthis Abline was fouled in the box, giving El-Arabi the chance to level from the spot. Goalkeeper Robin Risser parried away his effort but the 38-year-old forward scored from the rebound.

Lens pushed hard toward the end and finally broke the stalemate when Saïd cut a cross from Matthieu Udol to bag his sixth league goal. Marseille lags five points behind Lens in third place after losing to Lille 1-0 on Friday. Fourth-placed Lille tied third-placed Marseille on points in the table.

Other resultsBrazilian striker Emersonn scored the only goal as Toulouse ended a six-match winless run and prevailed against Strasbourg in their mid-table clash.



GOVERNMENT OF ODISHA  
PANCHAYATIRAJ & D.W. DEPARTMENT

i-411

OFFICE OF THE PANCHAYAT SAMITI, ERSAMA

e' mail ID : [ori-ersama@gramsat.nic.in](mailto:ori-ersama@gramsat.nic.in)

e' Procurement Notice No.BDO-EPS-03 of 2025-26

1	Number of the work	5 (Five) Nos.
2	Tender Amount (Approx.)	Rs.22.20 Lakh to 69.49 Lakh
3	EMD (online)	As per DTGN
4	Tender Paper Cost (online) (Non-Refundable)	Rs.6,000/- to Rs.10,000/-
5	Class of Contractor	"C" & "B" Class Contractor
6	Period of Completion	06 (Six) Calendar Months

Procurement Officer

BLOCK DEVELOPMENT OFFICER, ERSAMA

Bid Identification No.

BDO-EPS-03 / 2025-26

Availability of Tender

From 08.12.2025 at 10.00 Hours To 22.12.2025 at 17.30 Hours

Last date & time for seeking tender/clarification

19.12.2025 upto 1.00 P.M during office hours on working days

Date & Time of opening of Bid

23.12.2025 upto 11.00 AM during office hours

Place of opening of Bid

On the Panchayat Samiti ERSAMA

Further details can be seen from the Govt. web site "

<https://tendersodisha.gov.in>


"

All corrigendum / cancellation of tender if any, will only be uploaded in the above web site


BLOCK DEVELOPMENT OFFICER, ERSAMA

OIPR-19286/11/0006/2526

Researcher Satyaprakash Mishra  
Awarded Ph.D. in Civil Engineering



Mr. Satyaprakash Mishra, who is currently associated with the Research and Development department of the renowned Bhubaneswar-based drone company IG Drones, known for providing drone support to Operation Sindhur, has been awarded the Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.) degree in Civil Engineering. He pursued his doctoral research under the supervision of Dr. Arjun Sil (Associate Professor) and Dr. Amit Kumar Das (Assistant Professor) at the National Institute of Technology (NIT) Silchar, Assam. His Ph.D. thesis, titled "Comprehensive Seismic Hazard Assessment of Odisha State with Emphasis on Bhubaneswar City and Port Areas," has been evaluated and highly appreciated by Prof. Dr. Deepankar Choudhury of IIT Bombay and Prof. Dr. G. Madhavi Latha of IISc Bangalore. Dr. Mishra hails from Palara village in Dharmasala block of Jaipur district, Odisha. He is the younger son of Smt. Sabita Mishra, a noted poet, and Sri Nrusingha Charan Mishra, a retired BSNL employee. He is also the grandson of Pandit Narayan Mishra, a distinguished educator of the Dharmasala region. Expressing his heartfelt gratitude, Dr. Mishra dedicated his achievement to Lord Jagannath, his family, mentors, and friends for their constant blessings, guidance, and support throughout his academic journey.



GOVERNMENT OF ODISHA  
OFFICE OF THE EXECUTIVE ENGINEER  
RURAL WORKS DIVISION: BONAI

O-3724

CANCELLATION OF TENDER

Order No. 1222 Date. 05.12.2025

Under unavoidable circumstances the tender invited by this office vide Bid Identification No. ONLINE-EEBNI-05 of 2025-26 Letter No. 1142 Dtd.29.11.2025 is hereby cancelled.

Executive Engineer  
Rural Works Division, Bonai

OIPR-25200/11/0010/2526