PAGE 6 **NATION BJP** claims LOP skipped PM's speech out of guilt

PAGE 7 **LAW & JUSTICE** SC orders 30% seats for women in Bar Councils

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PAGE 15 SPORT 1191 posts lying vacant in SAI: Sports minister

PIONEER IN SHORT

SENSEX FALLS OVER 600 POINTS

Indian equity markets suffered major losses on Monday as investors lost ₹7.12 lakh crore in market value, with the BSE Sensex plunging 609.68 points (0.71 per cent) to close at 85,102.69. The Nifty50 also fell 226 points to 25,961. Analysts attributed the decline to profit-booking after two days of gains, continuous foreign institutional investor (FII) selling, and cautious sentiment ahead of the US Federal Reserve's rate decision. Key Sensex laggards included Bharat Electronics, Tata Steel, Bajaj Finance, Adani Ports, SBI, Asian Paints, Larsen & Toubro, and Bharti Airtel, while Tech Mahindra, HCL Technologies Reliance Industries, and HDFC Bank were among the few gainers Sectoral indices saw broad declines, led by services (-3.7 per cent), realty (-3.5 per cent), and capital goods (-2.83 per cent), with midcap and smallcap indices falling 1.73 per cent and 2.2 per cent respectively. The sustained weakness in the rupee and ongoing FII outflows heightened concerns over inflation, rising import costs, and global contributing to the bearish market sentiment. Trading saw 3,348 stocks decline.

The ByStander



Crackdown on graft Vig arrests 271 officials in 18 months

Including 20 policemen

PNS Bhubaneswar

he Vigilance Directorate has intensified its State-wide crackdown on corruption with 20 police officials and employees caught red-handed while accepting bribes over the past 18 months, said Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi in the State Assembly on Monday.

A total of 271 government officials and employees were arrested in Vigilance-related cases during this period. Vigilance Courts also recorded 174 convictions, reflecting a significant rise in successful prosecutions and judicial action against corruption.

Administrative measures followed these legal outcomes. As per the Chief Minister's statement, 33 officials were dismissed from service while pension benefits of 65 superannuated officials were withheld due to their involvement in corruption cases. These actions underscore the government's strict stance against financial misconduct and abuse of office.

Majhi noted that the Vigilance Directorate continues to prioritise trap operations, which expose bribery at various levels of public service. He reaffirmed the government's commitment to sustained monitoring and investigation to ensure transparency and accountability across departments.

PM questions Nehru legacy

New Delhi

Prime Minister Narendra Modi Monday accused Jawaharlal Nehru for partition and echoing Muhammad Ali Jinnah. Attacking independent India's first prime minister, PM Modi said, "Instead of firmly countering the baseless statements of the Muslim League and condemning them, Jawaharlal Nehru, the then Congress president, did not reaffirm his and the Congress party's commitment to Vande Mataram, but began questioning Vande Mataram itself... Under the pressure of appeasement politics, the Congress bent and agreed to break Vande Mataram to pieces. Therefore one day, it had to bend for the Partition of India," he said.

The PM was speaking at a Parliament debate on the 150th anniversary of Vande Matram.

Initiating the debate, the PM highlighted how Vande Mataram inspired the nation, energised the freedom struggle and became a symbol of national resolve which prompted Mahatma Gandhi to liken it to the national anthem. The PM said Muslim League leader Jinnah first stepped up his opposition to Vande Mataram on October 15, 1937, from Lucknow. Nehru



PM Narendra Modi speaking in the Lok Sabha during a discussion on the 150th anniversary of Vande Mataram during the Winter session of Parliament

Chandra Bose five days later, sharing Jinnah's sentiments and observing that Vande Mataram's Anandmath background had the potential to "irritate the Muslims", PM Modi said.

The PM said it was ironic that Bankim Chandra Chatterjee's Vande Mataram underwent a review of its worth in his home State of Bengal at the Kolkata session of the Congress Working Committee in 1937, leaving the country in a state of shock and prompting patriots attempted to create

wrote to Netaji Subhash to take out processions controversies around against the decision of the Congress.

As members of the Trinamool Congress protested the PM addressing Chatterjee as Bankim da, the PM took a dig at the party saying that the Congress outsourced its decision-making process.

He asserted that the policies of the Congress and its allies have remained unchanged and they continued to resort to politics of appeasement and have

Vande Mataram.

The prime minister recalled that Mahatma Gandhi wrote in 1905 that Vande Mataram has become so popular that it has emerged as national anthem and wondered why injustice was meted out to it.

"If Vande Mataram was so popular, why was injustice meted out to it, why was it betrayed in the last century. What were those forces that were so powerful to overrule the wishes of Mahatma Gandhi on Vande Mataram,'

State faces severe police manpower crunch urban and crime-sensitive ju- has been disrupted for years, current shortfall is a "direct

Opposition recruitment scam allegations

RAJEEV RATHAN Bhubaneswar

Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi informed the State Assembly on Monday that Odisha is grappling with a major police manpower shortage with 1,784 Sub-Inspector (SI) posts lying vacant across districts.

In a written reply to Kendrapada MLA Ganeswar Behera, Majhi shared districtwise data showing that major

crisis is not confined to the SI level. Majhi noted that five Inspector posts are vacant while the State faces a massive 180post shortage in the Deputy Superintendent of Police (DySP) cadre. To partially address this, 99 Inspectors have been promoted to DySP rank, and their posting orders are under examination.

Although the government cited administrative measures to plug vacancies, the figures reignited political sparring in the House. Opposition members pointed out that Odisha's police recruitment pipeline

risdictions are among the The marred by repeated exam delays, litigation, allegations of paper leaks and controversies over transparency.

In 2022 and 2023, recruitment to several posts including SI, constable and jail warder had faced accusations of procedural lapses triggering protests from aspirants and demands for a CBI or Vigilance probe. While no largescale scam was officially acknowledged, the disruptions stalled the induction of new personnel, deepening the shortage visible today.

MLAs from the Congress and the BJD argued that the fallout of the recruitment mismanagement" and accusing the government of failing to build a steady cadre pipe-

Majhi asserted that DySP posts are filled through both direct recruitment and promotion and that the government is streamlining recruitment, expediting promotions and strengthening examination mechanisms to prevent past irregularities. He assured that filling crucial field-level posts remains a priority, especially as the State faces rising challenges in law and order, cybercrime and women's safety.

Government turns heat on IndiGo

RAJESH KUMAR ■ New Delhi

The civil aviation minister on Monday informed the Parliament that the Government has initiated a probe into aviation disruptions caused by IndiGo and warned of action against the airline to set an example for other airlines. Union Civil Aviation Minister K Rammohan Naidu was replying to a question by in the Rajya Sabha.

"We are doing an inquiry. We will take very, very strict action not only for this situation but also as an example,"

ON MONDAY, INDIGO'S CRISIS **ENTERED ITS EIGHTH** DAY, WITH 562 FLIGHTS CANCELLED **ACROSS AIRPORTS**

Naidu said adding that the disruption was a result of IndiGo failing to manage its crew and duty roster. On Monday, IndiGo's crisis entered its eighth day, with 562 flights cancelled across airports.

The revised flight duty time limitation (FDTL) was introduced after a high court order in April 2025. Of the 22 guidelines, 15 were implemented on July 1 and the remaining seven on Nov 1. The minister stressed that multiple consultations were held with all stakeholders, including IndiGo, and rules had to be followed without any compromise on safety.

"After thorough consultation and safety risk assessment, necessary variations and exemptions have been given beforehand," the minister said, adding that the crisis took place almost one whole month of operation in the

CM tells Assembly

State sees surge in crimes against women

Cyber fraud and corruption cases also on rise

RAJEEV RATHAN Bhubaneswar

Odisha has recorded an alarming rise in crimes against women, cyber fraud and corruption during the past 15-18 months, Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi revealed in the State Assembly on Monday while responding to multiple queries from MLAs Prasanna Acharya, Rama Chandra Kadam and Tara Prasad Bahinipati.

According to data presented by the CM, the State registered 3,205 rape cases between July 1, 2024 and September 30, 2025. In the same period, police recorded 202 attempted rapes, 9,851 molestation cases and 1,476 incidents of sexual harassment. Majhi said the numbers point to a "deeply disturbing trend of violence against women".

The statistics further underline the gravity of the situation: 2,310 cases of public disrobing, 152 cases of voyeurism and 556 cases of stalking were reported. Odisha also saw 4 acid attacks, 129 trafficking cases and 796 incidents of eveteasing during the 15-month



Kidnapping and abduction of women remained a major concern with 8,863 cases registered. Dowry-related violence also continued unabated with 277 dowry homicides, 5,861 cases of dowry torture, 6,773 non-dowry torture cases and 49 dowry suicides reported. Majhi said the government is working to strengthen policing, expand victim support systems and intensify local-level monitoring.

Alongside physical crimes, Odisha reported a sharp surge in cyber offences. Majhi informed that the State registered 3,486 cybercrime cases in 16 months resulting in financial losses amounting to Rs 222 crore for citizens. Police made 69 digital arrests and appre-

hended 727 suspects linked to online fraud networks. Investigators managed to freeze bank accounts worth Rs 6.74 crore while Rs 61.36 lakh was refunded to victims. The Chief Minister said cyber cells are being strengthened to counter increasingly sophisticated fraud mechanisms.

On corruption, Majhi said Vigilance sleuths had arrested 271 government officials, including 20 police personnel, for bribery and other misconduct in the last 18 months. Vigilance courts convicted 174 officials while 33 were dismissed from service and pensions of 65 others were stopped. "The government will continue its uncompromising fight against corruption," Majhi asserted.

Cold wave to intensify

IMD issues warning for 10 districts

RAJEEV RATHAN Bhubaneswar

he cold wave gripping Odisha is set to deepen over the next few days with the India Meteorological Department (IMD) issuing warnings for 10 districts, including the twin cities of Bhubaneswar and Cuttack.

The chill is forecast to intensify between December 10 and 11 affecting isolated pockets of Sundargarh, Angul, Jharsuguda, Kalahandi, Khordha, Jagatsinghpur, Koraput, Kandhamal, Subarnapur and Cuttack districts. Both Bhubaneswar and Cuttack may witness a further dip with the minimum temperature likely to settle around

11°C and 10°C, respectively. Phulbani is expected to remain the coldest with the mercury plummeting to around Jharsuguda, Bhawanipatna and Rourkela

are projected to log 7°C while Angul and Koraput may touch 8°C. Minimum temperatures of around 9°C are likely in Sundargarh, Subarnapur, Nabarangpur and Keonjhar followed by 10°C in Balangir and

The cold tightened its grip on Monday morning as G Udayagiri remained the State's coldest point for the second consecutive day at 4.3°C. Semiliguda in Koraput followed closely at 4.6°C while Phulbani recorded 7.2°C. Jharsuguda stood at 7.4°C, Daringbadi at 7.5°C, Mohana at 8.9°C, Rourkela at 7.6°C, Chiplima at 8°C, Angul at 8.8°C, Kirei at 8.9°C, Bhawanipatna at 9°C and Nabarangpur at 10°C.

In the twin cities, Bhubaneswar recorded 12.1°C-3.8 degrees below normal while Cuttack logged 12.4°C. The IMD has advised people, especially the elderly and children, to take adequate precautions as the cold wave is likely to persist through the week.

Cong memo to Assembly seeks 94% backward class quota

Congress leaders, headed by PCC president Bhakta Charan Das, submitted a memorandum to Odisha Assembly Speaker Surma Padhy on Monday urging implementation of proportional reservation for backward classes in the

The memorandum highlighted that around 94% of Odisha's population belongs to backward classes with OBC and SEBC constituting 54% and Scheduled Castes and Tribes 40%. Despite Constitutional provisions under Article 164(1) for special reservations, the Congress leaders claimed that Odisha has yet to fully realise the rights of these commu-

The proposal seeks proportional reservation in higher education (technical, medical, professional courses) and government jobs for OBC, SEBC, SC and ST communities. It also recommends inclusion of this "proportional reservation system" in the Ninth Schedule of the

The memorandum follows a resolution passed during the "Social Justice and Odisha" meeting organised by the Odisha Pradesh Congress Committee on December 6 on Babasaheb Ambedkar Mahaprayana Day. The proposal calls for urgent action by both the State and Central Governments.

The submission was supported by Congress leaders, including party legislature wing leader Ramachandra Kadam, former Union Minister Srikant Jena, former MP Anant Prasad Sethi, MLAs Ashok Das and CS Rajan Ekka, former MLA Santosh Singh Saluja, PCC vicepresident Dr Lalatendu Mohapatra, former MLA Krishnachandra Sagariya and PCC Media chairman Arvind Das.

Bhakta Das emphasised that the government should immediately implement proportional reservation in line with Articles 15(4) and 16(4) of the Constitution to ensure that backward communities receive their rightful representation in education and employment.

State reels under severe doctor shortage

Govt pushes OPSC to fast-track recruitment

RAJEEV RATHAN Bhubaneswar

Odisha's public healthcare system is under acute strain with nearly 60% of sanctioned doctor posts lying vacant across the State. Health Minister Mukesh Mahaling informed the Assembly on Monday that out of 15,774 approved posts, a staggering 9,503 remain unfilled, severely impacting service delivery, especially in rural and tribal regions.

Currently, 6,271 doctors are serving in government hospitals, 1135 on contract and 5,003 in regular positions. The minister acknowledged that Odisha's doctor-topopulation ratio stands at 1:1,735, far below the WHO norm of 1:1,000, highlighting a widening healthcare

Specialist shortages have compounded the crisis. At Community Health Centres (CHCs), over 74% of

specialist posts are vacant, undermining key services such as gynaecology, paediatrics, surgery and anaesthesia. Districts like Deogarh, Koraput, Rayagada, Mayurbhanj and Ganjam remain among the worst-affected, often forcing patients to travel long distances for essential care. The minister admitted that

chronic understaffing has resulted in long queues, overworked medical personnel, delayed treatments and non-functional departments in several district hospitals, concerns raised repeatedly by MLAs and local communities.

To bridge the gap, the government has urged the Odisha Public Service Commission (OPSC) to expedite recruitment for 5,248 vacant posts. Mahaling said ongoing hiring drives, contractual appointments and incentives are being strengthened to attract doctors to remote areas. Mining-affected districts are also using District Mineral Foundation (DMF) funds to hire additional specialists and upgrade services.

Geo-location alert helps rescue 4 missing Bengal girls

A geo-location alert from the West Bengal Police helped Odisha authorities track down four missing schoolgirls at the Khurda Road railway station late Sunday night. Railway Protection Force (RPF) personnel rescued the four 14vear-old minors from West Bengal who had mysteriously travelled more than 500 km and reached Odisha after disappearing from their homes.

The girls, all Class-IX students from Thakurnagar under the Gaighata police station in North 24 Parganas dis-

December 5. Using real-time mobile tower data, the West Bengal Police traced the movement of their phones to Khurda Road and alerted their Odisha counterparts. RPF teams later located the girls loitering at the station

A police team from Gaighata arrived in Bhubaneswar early Monday and took custody of the minors. They were taken back to North 24 Parganas and will be reunited with their families after completion of the formal

travel across States and whether they were influenced or lured online. Their mobile phones and digital communication trails are being scanned with officers suspecting possible interaction with unknown contacts on social media. School counselling records reveal that at least two of the girls had previously been cautioned for excessive mobile use and engaging with unidentified profiles online, a detail now gaining significance in the investigation.

ing how the girls managed to

The case has renewed con-

ability of adolescents in Bengal's border districts, where several minors in recent months have been found travelling long distances after being influenced through social media or messaging apps. Law enforcement agencies fear that digital grooming and trafficking networks may be targeting young girls.

Both Odisha and West Bengal Police are conducting a joint investigation stressing the need for stronger digital vigilance among parents and schools as similar incidents continue to surface.

DGP reviews 3-tier security plan at Barabati

With the Barabati Stadium here set to host the first India-South Africa T20 International on December 9, Odisha DGP Yogesh Bahadur Khurania on Friday evening carried out an on-ground inspection of the full security layout.

The DGP reviewed preparedness for player safety, spectator security and crowd regulation, noting that a three-tier security ring has been deployed across the stadium and surrounding zones. He examined traffic and parking arrangements, frisking and



access control at all gates, CCTV monitoring, anti-sabotage sweeps and police deployment plans.

Special focus was placed on

secure movement of the teams,

from arrival to departure. Khurania said the Odisha Cricket Association has made "excellent arrangements," and expressed confidence that spectators would enjoy a smooth experience. He urged fans to reach the venue 3-4 hours before the match to avoid congestion.

He further appealed for public cooperation, recalling that previous international matches at Barabati have been conducted successfully with strong crowd discipline.

Police Commissioner S Devdatta Singh, Additional Commissioner Narasingha Bhol, Cuttack DCP Khilari Rishikesh Dyanadeo and senior OCA representatives accompanied the DGP during the review.

Kidnapped man's body seized in Kendrapada

Police here retrieved the body of a 45- year-old Dalit person, identified as Balaram Sethy of Dhiapari village of Gopalpur under the Rajnagar police station limits, who had been kidnapped on November 29 for a ransom of Rs 5 lakh.

The miscreants kidnapped Balaram, who had a food stall near a local liquor shop at Gopalpur, and later affixed a poster at Gopalpur market by threatening the family members of the victim to give Rs 5 lakh as ransom for his release. They asked the family members not to inform the police. Else they threatened to kill the

Bubu Sethy, Balaram's son, lodged a missing report on December 1, but police did not take any action. The family

Rajnagar police about the past rivalry of Balaram with a family of Kankadia village. But the police neglected to inquire into the matter, they alleged.

members came across the jacket and slipper of Balaram at Kankadia village and informed police. Later, the po-

Rajnagar PS IIC Naresh Sahu said that two persons have been taken into custody in the incident and inquiry was underway. The detainees were taken to the crime spot for scene recreation. A raid is on to nab the other accused, he added. The exact reason behind the kidnap and murder is yet to be ascertained by police, but according to locals, it could be the fallout of an ex-

On Monday, the family

lice seized the body.

'Citizens' role vital in combating urban pollution'

Environmental Society holds webinar

PNS Bhubaneswar

At the current juncture, urban pollution has become a serious challenge as rapidly growing cities struggle with rising levels of smog, waste and noise. Vehicle emissions, industrial activities, construction-demolition processes and improper waste disposal worsen air, water and soil quality, threatening health of the public and the environ-

While governments and organisations introduce policies to control pollution, citizens play a crucial role in driving meaningful change at the field-level. Individuals can re-

duce pollution by choosing public transport, cycling or walking instead of relying on private vehicles. Proper waste segregation, recycling and reducing single-use plastics help keep cities cleaner. Citizens can also participate in community clean-up drives, tree plantation programmes and support eco-friendly businesses. Raising awareness through social media and local initiatives further encourages responsible behavior.

Experts expressed these views in a webinar organised on the theme 'Urban pollution challenges - Role of citizens' under the auspices of the Orissa Environmental Society (OES). By adopting sustainable habits and holding authorities accountable, citizens become active partners in building healthier, greener and The programme, held un-

der the chairmanship of OES president Dr Sundara Narayana Patro, had Er Dillip Kumar Dash, senior environmental engineer of the State Pollution Control Board (SPCB), as the chief speaker. Dash narrated the pollution monitoring mechanisms and inspection protocols adopted by the SPCB. The SPCB covers 21 cities for air quality monitoring and seven identified non-attainment cities under the National Clean Air Programme, in addition to State Clean Air Programme, for air pollution reduction by 2026. The SPCB has declared Ekamra Kshetra Bhubaneswar as a low-emission zone (LEZ). Dash emphasised on best practices such as road and parking in-

municipal and e-waste disposal and green-space enhancement. He also explained the sven themes of Mission LiFE, implemented by MoEFFCC to improve the environmental quality by changing citizen and community behaviour

While Dr Patro stressed on creating a network of citizens for keeping the urban environment pollution-free, OES working president Dr Jayakrushna Panigrahi urged the urban dwellers to reduce their carbon footprints and enhance their commitment towards environment. OES secretary Er Manoranjan Mishra presented a welcome address. Vice-president Dr Lala AK Singh introduced the guests, and joint secretary Dr Surabhi

in a year -

Rs 3.39 cr spent on minister quarters' renovation

RAJEEV RATHAN Bhubaneswar

The State Government has spent more than Rs 3.39 crore on repairing and renovating the official residences of Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi, his two deputies and 13 ministers since the BJP assumed office on June 12, 2024. The expenditure details were presented in the State Assembly on Monday in response to a query by BJD legislator Gautam Buddha Das.

In his written reply, Chief Minister Majhi stated that a total of Rs 3.39 crore was spent on ministerial quarters over the past year. Of this, Rs 73.58 lakh went towards refurbishing his two official residences. Repairs to Quarter No B-1 in Bhubaneswar's Unit-II area, where Majhi had resided as Keonjhar MLA, cost Rs 50.10 lakh while the Unit-V quarters allotted to him after taking oath as CM required an additional Rs 23.47 lakh.

Significant expenses were also incurred on the homes of Deputy Chief Ministers. KV Singh Deo's official residence underwent renovations worth Parida's quarters were refurbished at a cost of Rs 7.72 lakh. Among the ministers, renovation costs varied widely.

Rs 28.21 lakh while Pravati

Ganesh Ram Singhkhuntia's quarters recorded one of the highest expenditures at Rs 25.74 lakh closely followed by Suryabanshi Suraj at Rs 25.72 lakh. Prithviraj Harichandan's residence required Rs 20.93 lakh, and Sampad Chandra Swain's quarters saw repairs of Rs 19.60 lakh. Other ministers, including Gokulananda Mallik, Rabi Narayan Naik, Mukesh Mahaling, Suresh Pujari, Krushna Chandra Mahapatra and Pradeep Balasamanta, had refurbishment costs ranging between Rs 14 lakh and Rs 19 lakh. Minister Bibhuti Bhusan Jena's quarters were repaired for Rs 10.59 lakh while the lowest expenditure was on Minister Nityananda Gond's residence at Rs 5.11 lakh. The figures highlight a wide variation in renovation costs across ministerial residences even as the total expenditure crossed Rs 3.39 crore within the first year

Nostalgia, cultural shows mark NIFT Alumni Meet

Cops inaction in B'swar rape case: BJD meets IG **UBACHAK MOHANTY** ■ Baleswar

An alleged rape of a 21year-old married woman from Kasafal under the Singla police station has become a political issue in the area. A section of BJD leaders met the IG (Eastern Range) on Sunday and alleged that the local police were not registering a case based on the victim's complaint due to political pressure. They urged the IG to take action against the accused.

Reports said the incident occurred on November 28, and the police allegedly adopted a dillydallying approach in registering the case since the accused belongs to another political party. However, the case was registered on Monday after a group of BJD leaders like Lekhasri Samantsingar, former MLAs Swarup Das and Sukanta Nayak met IG Pinak Mishra and expressed their anguish.

Reports further added that when the complainant visited the house of the accused, Ganesh Rana of the same village, he assaulted her sexually in the presence of his wife, and a video recording of the incident was made by the accused.

The incident sparked outrage in the village after the victim disclosed her ordeal to her family members and other villagers. Efforts were allegedly made to suppress the matter.

However, following the intervention of the IG and the SP, the Singla police have registered a case under Section 64(1) of BNS and the IT Act against Ganesh Rana and his wife and began an investigation, reports added.



hosted its Alumni Meet on its campus, bringing together former students, faculty and current learners for an evening marked by nostalgia, cultural presentations and institutional pride. The event aimed at strengthening connections within the institute s creative community.

The programme opened with a felicitation ceremony led by Campus Director Rajesh Kumar Jha, who in his inaugural address, welcomed the alumni back to their alma mater and remarked that the campus takes pride in the success of its graduates. Regional Industry Coordinator Dr Goutam Saha addressed the gathering, highlighting the alumni's professional accom-



The cultural segment included a Bharatanatyam performance by Sharut Mallick and a flute recital by Suchana Senapati. Interaction sessions allowed the alumni to reconnect with students and faculty. These were accompanied by student-led performances, including a duet by Sanskruti and Riddhi, a dance by Anita and Mohima, and a solo song

by Bhagyasmita. A band performance by alumnus Aryan Srivastava added to the evening's vibrancy.

A lively Housie game and a community dinner concluded the informal segment of the event. A total of more than 50 alumni participated.

Director Jha also acknowledged a series of distinguished student achievements on the national stage. Krishangi Raj (TD Sem VII) secured first position in the All-India NIFT Chandelier Design Competition

conducted by FOS Lighting. The institute additionally felicitated its medal winners from Converge 2025 held in Kerala, whose performances contributed to NIFT Bhubaneswar securing a position among the top seven NIFT campuses nationwide. The event concluded with a vote of thanks presented by Ravi Prakash.

in Baleswarı

Fake gold biscuit racket busted; 6 held

 $oldsymbol{A}$ fake gold biscuit racket has once again surfaced in the Nilgiri area of Baleswar district, where similar cases involving counterfeit biscuits and Hanuman coins were previously reported or foiled by police. Acting on a complaint, the Nilgiri police busted the racket and arrested six per-

sons from the Iswarpur area. The accused had allegedly defrauded a teacher from Brahmagiri in Puri district of

of the new government.

ing him gold biscuits. During the raid, police seized Rs 3.29 lakh in cash, five mobile phones and two motorcycles from the possession of the arrested persons. According to reports, the victim had paid the amount as an advance after being assured that the biscuits were made of genuine gold.

Police have intensified the investigation and are searching for the remaining fake gold biscuits linked to the fraud.

Safety concern as 1K bats stay in trees in B'ngir town

And poaching rampant in area SUDHIR MISHRA Balangir

he arrival of a large number of bats and their staying in some of the big trees of the town has brought both cheers and concerns to the wildlife enthusiasts here.

Identified as Indian flying fox bats, they first arrived here five to six months ago. They left the place during Deepawali, and after that they again came and stayed here. Around 1,000 bats are staying, informed Sashi Purohit of Balangir town, in whose house's backyard trees, these bats are staying.

Bats are nocturnal animals and fly at night. They are both herbivores and carnivorous. What concerns wildlife lovers



here is their protection, as poaching of bats for their meat is common. Because of indiscriminate poaching, their number is dwindling, and the need for conservation is greater, said wildlife lovers. In the urban area, large trees are

rare. Whatever large trees were in and around the town, they were cut either for road widening or other purposes, destroying the habitat of birds, they added

Bats often carry the virus of various diseases. People

should avoid eating the halfeaten fruits of bats or their meat, they cautioned.

Meanwhile, the forest personnel have visited the spot, and steps are being taken for their protection, said Balangir Range Officer NK Panda.

Experts decode secrets behind

iconic brands RAJEEV RATHAN Bhubaneswar

The Xavier Institute of Management, Bhubaneswar (XIMB) hosted its annual media conclave 'Communiqué 2025' on Sunday. Organised by Illuminatix, the institute's Media and PR Cell, the event brought together industry leaders to discuss the theme, "Building Brands: A Deep Dive into the Stories behind Thriv-

ing Brands". The opening session featured IHCL Digital Marketing Director Arya Swayamshree, who said, "Great brands win with clarity, consistency, and emotional connection. They outlive trends because they resonate with people, not just



sell products." She cited Apple, Nike and Taj as examples of brands that have stood the test of time.

Pidilite Industries Regional Field Marketing Manager Sanjaya Kumar Sahu highlighted the power of grassroots engagement. "Enduring brands focus on ground connect and trust. Fevikwik doesn't just advertise; it engages directly with carpenters and end-users to

build loyalty," he explained.

Tata Consumer Products Senior Brand Manager (Tata Sampann Spices) Varsha Naik stressed the importance of understanding changing consumer behaviour. "Great brands don't just create ads; they engage meaningfully. Look at Ching's rise and the decline of Tata Nano; it's about connecting with people, not

just products.' Orbit8 Media Creative strategist Kalpit Mohanty spoke on the need for unconventional storytelling backed by emotional intelligence. "Skills can be mastered, but emotional intelligence differentiates a brand. Campaigns like Happydent's 'Muskurale, Jagmagale' show how emotions drive brand recall," he said.

Moderating the sessions, Professor Sumitra Mishra observed, "With shrinking attention spans, brand longevity now depends on patience, persistence and purpose. It's a marathon, not a sprint."

The conclave concluded with a panel discussion and interactive Q&A. Speakers were felicitated by Illuminatix and the Alumni Committee while Illuminatix Coordinator Nishant Barik delivered a vote of thanks.

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Amid rise in religious violence in State

Demand for Minority Commission gains momentum

Calls for a dedicated Minority Commission in Odisha have intensified as reports of attacks on religious minorities, particularly Christians, continue to surface across the State. The issue was raised in the Assembly by MLA Praful Chandra Pradhan on Monday who pointed out that no statutory body currently exists to safeguard minority interests and promote their development.

Responding, Minister Nityananda Gand said the government has recently proposed formation of a Minority Commission to focus on the welfare and protection of minority communities. However, activists and opposition leaders argue that the proposal comes decades too late following repeated incidents of communal violence.

organisations and independent fact-finding teams have documented attacks on Christian families, churches and tribal communities in districts such Nabarangpur, Malkangiri, Gajapati, Mayurbhanj and Baleswar, including forced conversions, desecration of churches, denial of burial rights and mob violence. Victims claim that law enforcement often fails to intervene or investigate adequately.

Odisha has a long history of communal flare-ups, most notably the 2008 Kandhamal violence, which displaced thousands and destroyed hundreds of churches. Critics say the absence of a Minority Commission has allowed such incidents to recur, leaving affected communities without institutional protection.

At the national level, sev-

eral Indian States have Minority Commissions tasked with promoting welfare, protecting rights and monitoring incidents of discrimination. States like Maharashtra, Karnataka, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, West Bengal, Bihar and Uttar Pradesh already have functioning Minority Commissions with varying degrees of authority and powers. These commissions serve as advi-

ies to ensure minority interests are safeguarded.

Civil society leaders and opposition MLAs insist that a statutory Minority Commission in Odisha with investigative powers and a mandate for legal protection is essential. They argue that only a functioning commission can ensure minorities constitutional rights and provide mechanisms for justice and rehabilitation.

The government's recent acceptance of the proposal signals a step forward, but stakeholders warn that swift implementation and adequate powers will be key to addressing longstanding fears and preventing future incidents of communal violence in Odisha

College girl dies in fire tragedy in Rajgangpur

CM announces Rs 4L aid

RAJEEV RATHAN Bhubaneswar

A college student lost her life in a devastating fire at Lanjibenda on Monday exposing the State's negligence in safeguarding its youths. Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi on Monday announced a compensation of Rs 4 lakh for the bereaved family.

The tragedy occurred when the student, whose identity is yet to be disclosed, died in the fire that engulfed part of her college premises. According to local reports, the family had previously received death threats, raising questions about the adequacy of preventive measures and government oversight.

The CM assured that all nec-

essary support would be extended to the family and that authorities are investigating the cause of the fire.

BJD president Naveen Patnaik expressed shock and grief over the incident, saying, "The incident of a college student losing her life in a fire in Rajgangpur Lanjibenda is extremely heartbreaking." He criticised the government's perceived inaction, stating, "The family had already received death threats. How much more innocent lives will the government allow to burn like this? Who is the government protecting?

Patnaik further demanded that the government take strict measures to improve law and order, ensure justice for the people and hold the perpetrators accountable without delay.

<u>INBRIEF</u>

BSF ASI dies in freak accident in Brahmapur

Brahmapur: BSF Assistant Sub-Inspector (ASI) Prakash Chandra Dash died after being injured in a freak accident at his underconstruction house in Brahmapur. Dash was watering the area



in the third floor of the house when he lost his balance due to the slippery surface and fell onto an exposed iron rod, sustaining serious injuries. He was rushed to MKCG Medical College Hospital. Despite efforts by the doctors, Dash's condition deteriorated due to excessive blood loss. He passed away on Saturday.

Rs 2-cr hemp plants destroyed in Gajapati

Paralakhemundi: By the instruction of Gajapati district Collector Madhumita and Superintendent of Police Jatindra Kumar Panda, hemp plants in 10 acres of land were destroyed near Chudangapur under Adava police limits of Gajapati district, on Saturday. The joint raid was conducted by the Revenue, Excise and Forest department staff and the plants de-



stroyed were worth about Rs 2 crore

Mangala Cup Cricket Tourney from Dec 25

Kakatpur: The 36th State-level Mangala Cup Cricket Tournament will commence from December 25 at the Maa Mangala Mini Stadium, Kakatpur. The Kakatpur Mangala Athletic Association is organizing the event. A Press meet was held on Saturday here where organisers shared key highlights of the tournament. Club president Pradipta Kumar Dixit announced that the event will continue till January 4, featuring eight competitive teams. The organising committee has declared Rs 50,555 as the winner's cash prize while the runners-up will be

Indian, S African teams arrive ahead of Barabati T201

RAJEEV RATHAN Bhubaneswar

/ Cuttack

Excitement is building in Odisha as the Indian and South African cricket teams arrived in Bhubaneswar ahead of the much-anticipated T20I series opener at the Barabati Stadium in Cuttack on December

Key Indian players Suryakumar Yadav, Hardik Pandya, Shubman Gill, Shivam Dube, Axar Patel, Sanju Samson, Jitesh Sharma and Varun Chakravarthy are set to join, boosting anticipation among supporters. From the South African camp, David Miller, Reeza Hendricks, Tristan Stubbs, Donavon Ferreira and George Linde have already arrived with the

Preparations at the Barabati Stadium are in full swing. Fire Safety Director General Sudhanshu Sarangi inspected the venue along with senior officials to ensure robust fire safety measures. Commissioner S Devdatta Singh confirmed a comprehensive threetier security system, including enhanced crowd management, to safeguard players, officials

Ticket counters across Odisha witnessed heavy rush with fans queuing early to secure seats. Authorities urged those unable to enter the stadium to enjoy the live telecast on Star Sports Network. No ticket black marketing has been reported so far though police remain vigilant.

After losing the Test series but winning the ODIs comfortably. India now shifts focus to the T20I series, a critical warm-up for the ICC Men's T20 World Cup 2026. The 15member Indian squad includes captain Suryakumar Yadav with vice-captain Shubman Gill returning after a neck injury and Hardik Pandya making a comeback following a quadriceps injury. Both will participate in practice sessions at the Barabati Stadium.

> will conclude on December 19 with subsequent games in New Chandigarh, Dharamsala, Lucknow and Ahmedabad, all starting at 7 pm IST. With stringent security, smooth preparations and star players in action, the Cuttack leg promises a memorable experience for Odisha's cricket enthusiasts and sets the stage for India's World Cup campaign.

In Nabarangpur

Cong leader's public gambling sparks outrage



Police fail to take action due to ambiguity over Gaming Act

PNS Nabarangpur

A controversy erupted in Chandahandi Nabarangpur district, after senior Congress leader Khamraj Bagh allegedly conducted open-air gambling on a public road, intensifying confusion over the newly amended Odisha Gaming Act.

Bagh reportedly set up a Khudi Khudi gambling board in broad daylight, drawing

several locals to place bets. When ASI Benu Pani Majhi reached the spot and ordered the activity to stop, Bagh allegedly challenged the officer, insisting that the "amended Act prevents the police from

arrests. Locals expressed anger, warning that unclear laws are emboldening offenders and weakening police authority. The incident has triggered sharp public debate on the growing law-and-order concerns linked to the Act's amendments.

arresting gamblers." Faced with the claim, the ASI left without making any

OSRTC staff denied rejoining

Corruption alleged

A controversy over the rejoining of a staff in the Odisha State Road Transport Corporation (OSRTC) has led to allegations of corruption, arbitrary suspension and administrative defiance.

The case involves OSRTC driver Niranjan Sahu, who despite repeated directives from Commerce and Transport Department officials, most notably Principal Secretary Usha Padhee, has reportedly not been permitted to re-

The incident comes at a time when the State Government, under its 'Asmita Sarkar' initiative, has been emphasising its zero-tolerance policy on corruption.

Sahu, who joined the OSRTC on August 12, 2008, was suspended on March 31, 2025 by Assistant Transport Manager and Unit Head Prashant Hota on charges of careless driving and miscon-

Sahu refuted these allegations and claims the suspension was retaliatory, saying it stemmed from his refusal to comply with certain 'personal demands' made by the concerned official.

In Malkangir Houses torched as woman's headless body found

sory and investigative bod-

Issue highlighted in State Assembly RAJEEV RATHAN Bhubaneswar / Malkangiri

 \mathbf{M} alkangiri witnessed violent group clashes that destroyed homes and triggered heated debates in the State Assembly on Monday. Tension erupted after police recovered a headless body of a woman from the Poteru river near Dudumetla sparking confrontations between residents of Rakhelguda and MV-26 villages. The unrest left over 50 houses damaged and heightened communal fears in fied as Lake Podiami (51), a resident of Rakhelguda. Her body, discovered four days after she went missing, had her head missing, raising suspicions of foul play. Villagers blamed members of MV-26

for the murder. On Sunday afternoon, hundreds from Rakhelguda and neighbouring tribal communities vandalised homes in MV-26 and set several houses on fire. Police and BSF personnel were deployed in large numbers to restore order. District Collector Somesh Kumar Upadhyay and SP Vinod Patil visited the

assured support for affected families.

To prevent further unrest and curb misinformation, the administration suspended internet services for 24 hours from 6 pm Monday. Authorities also invoked BNS Section 153 to strengthen law and order in the region.

The violence was highlighted in the Assembly. BJD MLA Pratap Deb criticised the government for failing to maintain law and order, noting that police reportedly delayed action despite media reports. Congress MLA Mangu Khilla highlighted a related was murdered while harvesting paddy.

Both leaders urged the Chief Minister to take direct action, ensure justice for victims and prevent repeated clashes that could destabilise the district.

Officials confirmed that an assessment of damages is underway and assistance would be provided to affected fami-

The Malkangiri unrest underscores the fragile communal situation in the district and the urgent need for swift administrative intervention to restore confidence among resi-

11-day Int'l Trade Fair begins in Brahmapur

■ 1L items from India and abroad exhibited

■ Mermaid show main attraction

PRASANT DAS Brahmapur

commenced on Friday here at the UCP Engineering School Play Ground, which will continue for eleven days till December 15. The fair is being organised every year in Brahmapur by Gupta Event Management Private Limited,

This year the entire fair area has been air conditioned. Traders from 22 States and ten foreign countries are participating in the event. Here the visitors can enjoy the exhibition of more than one lakh items and also purchase the

items of their choices. The items being exhibited are sofa The 3rd International set, dining set and other fur-Trade Fair of Brahmapur niture from Kashmir, 100 varieties of dry fruits from Afghanistan, Iranian Khajoor, Thailand jewellery and footwear, Korean ornaments and home decor items, Indian handicrafts and handlooms, ancient metal and AD stone ornaments, Irani carpets,

ancient metal and brass items, Dubai dress and wall frames, leather products from West Bengal and Uttar Pradesh, Singapore items, Khadi and dress materials from Bhagalpur, Punjab, Banaras, Jeypore, Bangladesh, besides from Sambalpur,



Champaran mutton, electronics, cosmetics and consumer goods.

The organisers have informed that the main attraction of the fair is the most attractive Mermaid Show. While this show will be a paid show, Mermaids from countries like Indonesia, Barley and Philippines are participating.

Gupta Event Management directors Sujit Kumar Gupta, Payal Acharya Gupta, event coordinator Bir Bahadur Singh and Mermaid manager Mohammed Imran were present at the Press conference. remaining players joining later.

The five-match T20I series

In Kalahandi, Rayagada Vedanta launches 'Shishu Sanjeevani'

For fortified nutrition support to kids across **AWCs**

PNS Bhubaneswar

l he Vedanta Aluminium has reinforced its commitment to early childhood wellbeing with the launch of the Shishu Sanjeevani, a fortified nutritional supplement programme across 25 Anganwadi centres in Kashipur and Bhawanipatna, benefitting more than 600 children aged 3 to 6 years.

Developed by the National Dairy Development Board, the Shishu Sanjeevanis are enriched with essential micronutrients aligned with the ICMR-NIN guidelines, ensuring safe and consistent nutritional intake under the supervision of Anganwadi workers. The initiative aims to strengthen the nutritional foundation of chil-



years, reducing malnutrition supporting holistic growth.

The programme complements Vedanta's flagship Nand Ghar initiative, launched in 2015 under the aegis of the Anil Agarwal Foundation in partnership with the Ministry of Women

and Child Development. CEO, Vedanta Aluminium, Rajiv Kumar said, "This initiative reflects our commitment hood nutrition and supporting holistic community development. Through the effort, we align with the nationwide vision of Rashtriya Poshan Maah, ensuring children receive strong foundations in health and education for a brighter future." Child Development Pro-

gram Officer, Kashipur, Raygada, Jyotsana Barik said the initiative has been very helpful for the children.

K'put MP introduces 3 Private Members' Bills in LS To address historic injustices to tribals, boost growth in KBK

PNS | Koraput In an important initiative aimed at correcting historic imbalances and addressing the long-standing demands of Odisha's backward and tribal regions, Koraput MP Saptagiri Sankar Ulaka introduced three significant

Lok Sabha. The Bills focus on securing sustained development for the KBK region, rectifying omissions in the Scheduled Tribes list of Odisha, and granting constitutional recognition to two indigenous tribal languages.

Introducing the "Special

Financial Assistance to KBK

Region of State of Odisha

Private Members' Bills in the

create a statutory framework that guarantees predictable and accountable Central assistance for the Koraput-Balangir-Kalahandi region, one of the most historically disadvantaged areas in the country. The Bill covers the districts of Koraput, Rayagada, Malkangiri, Nabarangpur, Balangir, Subarnapur, Kalahandi and Nuapada. Emphasising the need for

Bill, 2024", Ulaka sought to

sustained support, he said that despite several decades of special programmes, the region continues to suffer from chronic poverty, persistent migration, low literacy, poor health indicators and inadequate connectivity. He stated that the region has contributed significantly through its minerals, forests and labour, yet its people continue to remain deprived

of basic opportunities and essential services.

The second Bill, titled the "Constitution (Scheduled Tribes) Order (Amendment) Bill, 2024", seeks to amend the Presidential Order of 1950 to correct long-standing omissions in the list of Scheduled Tribes in Odisha. It aims to ensure that deserving tribal communities, including the Jhodia or Jhodia Paroja, are properly recognised and reinstated into the constitutional framework that grants access to reservations, scholarships, welfare schemes and political representa-

Ulaka noted that for thousands of families, incorrect classification or delayed updates have meant denial of education, employment and socio-economic safeguards.

He stressed that for a

young tribal student, proper inclusion in the ST list can determine access to scholarships, college admission or job opportunities, and the Bill is intended to correct this historic injustice.

The third Bill introduced, the "Constitution (Amendment) Bill, 2025", proposes the inclusion of the Sora (Soura) and Ho languages in the Eighth Schedule of the Constitution. Sora is an endangered indigenous language with deep cultural roots in Odisha, while Ho is widely spoken across Odisha, Jharkhand, West Bengal and Assam.

Ulaka emphasised that the absence of constitutional recognition has hindered the preservation, development and promotion of the languages, which hold rich linguistic and cultural heritage. Formal recognition, he said,

is essential for safeguarding these languages and ensuring their continuity for future generations.

Calling for broad, bipartisan support, Ulaka appealed to Members of Parliament across party lines to treat the Bills with seriousness and sensitivity. He stated that the reforms proposed are not about any individual or political party but about addressing historic neglect, restoring dignity to tribal communities, protecting indigenous languages and enabling longoverdue development in the KBK region. Ulaka also urged coopera-

tion between the Union Government, the Odisha Government and local stakeholders to ensure that the proposed reforms are implemented in a timely and accountable manner.



Government notifies draft occupational safety rules

New Delhi

The Delhi Government has Occupational Safety, Health and Working Conditions Rules, 2025, to ensure a safe working environment for workers employed in hazardous and accident-prone industrial activities.

The draft rules provide for the constitution of a 10member Delhi Occupational Safety and Health Advisory Board headed by the labour commissioner, and safety committees in establishments employing 250 or more workers.

The labour department has invited suggestions and objections on the draft rules, which will be considered by the Government after 45

The draft rules state that every employer of a factory and building or other construction work will annually conduct, free of cost, medical examination of every worker aged 45 years ing of any plant or pipeline and above, within 120 days or equipment containing from the commencement of every calendar year.

Every employer in the industry involving hazardous processes will arrange to conduct free-of-cost medical examination for every worker annually, within 30 days from the commencement of every calendar year, as mentioned in the draft

Additionally, no employee will be employed in any establishment unless he has been issued a letter of appointment. Under subsection (1), Section 10 and Section 11 of the draft rules, the employer or manager of an establishment will, as early as possible, send a notice to the labour department inspector cum facilitators, about the occurrence of any accident that results in the death of a worker or results in bodily injury likely to cause death.

The dangerous occurrence will include the burstpetroleum, steam, compressed air; collapse or failure of a crane, derrick, winch, hoist or other appliances, explosion due to explosives, fire, leakage or release of harmful toxic gases and such other inci-

Under sub-section (2) of section 17 of the draft Rules, the Delhi government will constitute the "Delhi Occupational Safety and Health Advisory Board". The board members will include the chief inspector-cum-facilitator, labour department, member secretary, Delhi pollution control committee, director, Delhi health services, two representatives of employees and two members of the district crisis group having expertise in occupational safety and

Establishments involving hazardous processes and employing 250 or more workers will mandatorily

form safety committees. The draft Delhi Occupational Safety, Health and Working Conditions Rules, 2025, was notified earlier this month. The draft rules also lay down working conditions stipulating daily and weekly working hours, wages and overtime payments.

The weekly working hours under clause (b) of subsection (1) of Section 25 for each worker will not be more than 48 hours. The periods of work of adult workers in an establishment each day, including intervals and spread-overs, will be fixed by the government through notification. Under Section 27, no

worker will be allowed to

work overtime exceeding

144 hours in any quarter of a year. In calculating overtime on any day, a fraction of an hour between 15 and 30 minutes will be counted as 30 minutes, and in case of more than 30 minutes, it shall be rounded to an hour

CM, ministers pay respects at Golden Temple

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE

Delhi Chief Minister Rekha Gupta and her Cabinet ministers on Monday visited the Golden Temple in Amritsar to pay obeisance.

After paying obeisance, Rekha Gupta said she had come to offer 'shukrana' (thanks) following the successful organisation of Guru Tegh Bahadur's 350th martyrdom anniversary programme at the Red Fort in Delhi.

She was accompanied by ministers Parvesh Sahib Singh, Ashish Sood, Kapil Mishra, Ravindra Indraj and Manjinder Singh Sirsa. Gupta also cleaned utensils in the periphery of the Golden Temple along with Minister Sirsa.

The event witnessed the presence of thousands of devotees who offered their respects to Guru Sahib and participated in every programme, including Gurbani Kirtan and Sankirtan. During her spiritual visit,

the Chief Minister also paid her respects at the holy Durgiana Temple and the Valmiki Temple, offering

After bowing my head at Sri Harmandir Sahib, my mind found satisfaction. Waheguru Ji, may You keep Your hand of grace upon everyone

- REKHA GUPTA, CHIEF MINISTER

prayers for the nation's prosperity and the well-being of the people of Delhi.

Praying for continued blessing, the chief minister said in a social media post, "After bowing my head at Sri Harmandir Sahib, my mind found satisfaction. Waheguru Ji, may You keep Your hand of grace upon evervone." Sirsa wrote in a post, "Today, by visiting this sacred place, my mind found immense peace, and I also experienced the boundless presence and tranquillity of that 'Akal Purkh".

Earlier, the chief minister had described the "extraor-dinary success" of the ALSO PAID HER RESPECTS AT THE **HOLY DURGIANA** TEMPLE AND THE VALMIKI TEMPLE

'*Gurmat Samagam*' at the Red Fort as the "grace of Guru Sahib, despite an atmosphere of fear caused by a terror incident just a day before the three-day event in November". She said more than six lakh devotees attended the religious events without any disruption. During her spiritual

journey, the Chief Minister also visited the famous Durgiana Temple, which resembles the Golden Temple in appearance. She performed traditional rituals and prayed for the nation's well-being. Thereafter, she paid respects at the Maharishi Valmiki Temple (Sri Ram Tirath Temple) and received blessings.

After reaching Shri Guru Ramdas International Airport, she was received by local BIP leaders led by district president Harvinder

Agency replaces old streetlights with advanced LEDs

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE

In a major push to eliminate dark spots to improve safety across South Delhi, newly appointed agency of Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD), Esmart Energy Solutions has replaced more than 70,000 LED streetlights with advance technology between October and November this year.

The company, which formally took charge of the operation and maintenance of streetlights in the region in September under an agreement with the MCD, has also damaged during the

Saurabh Aggarwal, Business Head of Esmart Energy Solutions, said: "It is a matter of great satisfaction for us to serve the people of Delhi through this important partnership with the MCD. Our first aim is to ensure safety by removing every dark patch in the national Capital. Well-lit roads and public spaces are crucial for a Viksit Delhi and for the growth of the city's varied night life – from historic monuments to busy markets that stay alive till late."

During the recent festive carried out large-scale repair season, including Diwali and Lajpat Nagar, and Green Park,

work on existing lights Chhath Puja, the company increased its workforce and worked round the clock to keep streets, parks, and residential colonies brightly lit.

Esmart is going to replace all the existing street lights with new fittings within the next 3 years which will consume far less power than the older lamps while giving out stronger and more uniform light.

Consistent bright lighting is delivering a clear boost to the night economy while making roads safer for everyone. In markets such as Greater Kailash-I and II, Saket, Malviya Nagar, Kalkaji, Kailash Colony,

traders say customers now feel far more secure walking to their cars or taking autos late in the evening. Evening walkers and joggers have returned in large numbers to parks and residential streets. Street-food vendors, latenight eateries, and delivery

agents have extended their

working hours. Underlining the marked improvement in civic infrastructure and public safety, Chaudhary Ramakant, E-Block RWA President, South Moti Bagh, said: "The MCD's extensive drive to install bright LED street lights has completely eliminated dark spots across our lanes, parks and by-lanes. Maintenance teams are now highly efficient, faulty lamps are repaired within hours, and the public complaint redressal system has become remarkably quick and responsive."

Residents facing any problem with streetlights in the areas now handled by Esmart can report faults through a dedicated 24×7 helpline set up in coordination with the MCD. Complaints can be lodged on the toll-free number 1800-203-8500, by giving a missed call or sending a message on WhatsApp to +91 96505 57785, or by writing to southdelhi@esmartlight-

NDMC to make seven buildings disabled-friendly

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE New Delhi

From installing Braille signage to procuring 27 wheelchairs for differentlyabled people, the New Delhi Municipal Council (NDMC) has taken up a project to make seven of its buildings, including the Talkatora Stadium and Akbar Bhawan, disabled-friendly.

According to officials, the cost of the project is pegged at Rs 1.86 crore which has been approved by the NDMC. "We have floated a

tender was floated earlier too but it did not attract bids. So we have floated the tender again. The successful bidder will have four months to complete the project," Seven buildings will be

covered under the project -- the Charak Palika Hospital, Talkatora Indoor Stadium, Aashirwaad Old Age Home, Palika Bhawan, Akbar Bhawan, Chanakya Bhawan and the Yashwant Place residential-cum-office complex.

"These buildings have

phase of the project. More buildings will be made disabled-friendly in the next phase," the official said.

The project involves fixing Braille signage for toilets, staircase, and wheelchair accessibility areas along with procuring 27 wheelchairs and as many evacuation chairs.

"The evacuation chain shall be designed for safely transferring patients up and down the stairs during fire emergencies at hospitals,'

Delhi Assembly first in India to operationalise real-time digital audit monitoring portal: Speaker

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE

Delhi Assembly speaker Vijendra Gupta on Monday said that the Delhi Assembly is the first assembly in India to operationalise a real-time digital audit monitoring portal for monitoring of audit paragraphs and action taken notes (ATNs).

Gupta observed that the adoption of the Audit Para Monitoring System (APMS) marks a significant step towards transparency, procedural discipline and a more accountable audit follow-up mechanism. "APMS is now fully opera-

tional within Government of the National Capital Territory of Delhi, and Delhi is arguably the first state assembly in the country to implement such a comprehensive real-time audit monitoring portal," he

The Speaker held a



of action taken on the reports of the Comptroller and Auditor General of India. He expressed concern

while examining the status on the portal, which showed that 142 audit paragraphs had been uploaded by various departments, while only 30 ATNs had been submitted. He noted that such pendency is unsatisfactory and stressed that timely and meeting to assess the status complete responses are

essential for enabling the **Public Accounts Committee** to discharge its mandate effectively.

During the meeting, the challenges in audit follow-up were discussed extensively. It was noted that many replies uploaded by departments were not in the prescribed form and therefore could not be placed before Public Accounts Committee, said an

Gupta stressed that

incomplete or informal replies cannot be considered valid ATNs and must be returned for correction. He directed that departments must submit corrected and properly formatted notes within three weeks.

APMS is a digital platform developed by the Ministry of Expenditure Department and conceptualised by the Controller General of Accounts, based on the Public Accounts Committee's guidelines.

The system enables endto-end monitoring of audit paragraphs, Action Taken Notes and Action Taken Replies. It displays the original audit observation, the deficiencies identified by the audit, the comments recorded at each stage, the responses uploaded by departments, the acceptance or return of replies and the statutory timelines for finalisation.

Govt approves extension of Devi Bus Route 7701A **PIONEER NEWS SERVICE**

Aiming to ensure last-mile connectivity and reliable transport options in South Delhi, the Delhi government has approved the extension of Devi Bus Route 7701A from its existing terminal at South University AIIMS-CAPFIMS (Central Armed Police Forces Institute of Medical Sciences), Maidan Garhi. The decision follows a request from the Chief of AIIMS-CAPFIMS, Maidan Garhi, who highlighted the need for dependable connectivity between the metro network and the institute to address staff safety concerns, particularly during early morning and evening hours.

At present, Devi Route 7701A operates between Chhattarpur Metro Station and South Asian University with four trips in each shift. With the approved extension, the service will continue along the same corridor up to AIIMS-CAPFIMS, for which a new terminal fare stage has been added. The extended Station to AIIMS-CAPFIMS will



Chhattarpur Metro Station via Mandir, Chhattarpur Chhattarpur Village. Chhattarpur Extension, Nanda Hospital, Satbari Crossing and South Asian University before reaching AIIMS-CAPFIMS in the Up direction, and vice versa in the down direction. This extension increases the total trip length by approximately 1.5 kilometres in each direction.

The existing pattern of four morning and four evening trips in each direction will remain unchanged even after the extension. Departures from Chhattarpur Metro

continue to be around 8.30, 9.00, 9.30 and 10.00 hours in the morning and 16.00, 16.30, 17.00 and 17.30 hours in the evening. Similarly, return trips from AIIMS-CAPFIMS to Chhattarpur Metro Station will take place around 09.00, 09.30, 10.00 and 10.30 hours in the morning and 16.30, 17.00, 17.30 and 18.00 hours in the evening. The extension is expected to

significantly improve mobility for staff, students, patients and visitors by providing direct, reliable and affordable last-mile connectivity from the metro station to AIIMS-CAPFIMS. It will reduce dependence on informal transport modes and elimi-

nate the need for commuters to walk along the hilly stretch

leading to the institute. The move enhances safety

and comfort during early and late hours, supports better utilisation of the existing Devi fleet and strengthens the integration of the public bus network with major educational and medical institutions Chhattarpur-Maidan Garhi belt. It also aligns with the Delhi Government's broader emphasis on route rationalisation and improved multimodal connectivity across the city.

Speaking on the development, Delhi Transport Minister Pankaj Kumar Singh said, "The extension of Route 7701A to AIIMS-CAPFIMS is another milestone in our ongoing route rationalisation initiative, ensuring that public transport reaches areas where it is needed the most. This move will significantly improve last-mile access for staff, students and patients, while enhancing the overall public transport experience in the Chhattarpur–Maidan Garhi region."

Ugandan man held for duping man of ₹1.9 lakh

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE

A 38-year-old man, a native of Uganda, was arrested for allegedly duping a Delhi resident of ₹1.9 lakh after posing as a woman on a dating app by using pictures of his girlfriend and luring him into a fraudulent investment scheme.

The accused, identified as Micheal Iga, allegedly residing without valid documentation in Burari area, offered the complainant a "lucrative business opportunity" involving purchase of a "rare oil" from Assam, police said.

"The complainant, a resident of Kishan Garh, had connected with a woman on a dating app. She allegedly gained his confidence by claiming to work for a beautyproducts company and offered him a lucrative business opportunity involving

the purchase, and resale of a rare oil from Assam at high profit margins," Deputy Commissioner of Police (Southwest) Amit Goel said.

Trusting her assurances, he transferred ₹1,90,000 to multiple bank accounts, after which she blocked him. Police said the identity used on the dating app was fake, and the entire narrative about the oil trade was fabricated. An FIR under relevant sections of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita was registered.

Using technical surveillance, digital footprint analysis and money trail, the police traced Iga, who had allegedly been shifting locations across Delhi-NCR to evade detection. He was eventually arrested from Burari, the officer said.

Four mobile phones, a laptop, six debit cards used for routing defrauded funds, and ₹22.500 in cash were recovered from him, he added.

Taiwan Film Festival 2025 to debut first Taiwan-India co-production Odyssey, a documentary

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE

The 2025 Taiwan Film Festival is set to return to the capital on 12-13 December at PVR Priya Cinema, Vasant Vihar, bringing a curated selection of contemporary Taiwanese cinema to Indian audiences. Organised by Taiwan's

Ministry of Culture and the Taipei Economic and Cultural Center (TECC) in India, this year's edition marks a landmark moment in cultural collaboration between the two countries.

The festival's highlight is the special screening of Demon Hunters, the firstever Taiwan-India co-produced feature film. Blending Taiwanese folklore with Indian storytelling elements, the film incorporates classic Bollywood-style dance sequences and serves



as a cinematic bridge between the two cultures. The co-production is being hailed as a significant step forward for bilateral cooperation in the arts and the

The lineup also features two additional Taiwanese films showcasing the diversity of the island's cinematic landscape. A Chip

exploring the rise of semiconductor giant TSMC, offers a deep dive into Taiwan's pivotal role in global technology and the international supply chain. Meanwhile, Hunter Brothers, an Indigenous drama, examines themes of identity, tradition, and generational conflict within Taiwan's Indigenous communities. Organisers say the festival

aims to use cinematic storytelling to strengthen cultural ties and create new channels for exchange between filmmakers, producers, and institutions in Taiwan and India. Over the two-day event, audiences can look forward to an opening ceremony, film screenings, and post-screening discussions with visiting filmmakers and cultural representatives from both

countries.

Police nab member of Bawaria gang

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE New Delhi

The Delhi Police has arrested a wanted member of the Bawaria gang, who is an alleged interstate criminal and was on the run in more than a dozen cases. The accused, identified as Sanjay alias Jhallu, a resident of Shamli in Uttar Pradesh, was traced to Mandi Gobindgarh in Punjab, where he had been hiding to evade

arrest, police said. Sanjay, a proclaimed offender, is involved in 34 criminal cases across Delhi and Uttar Pradesh, including attempted murder, robbery, snatching, burglary, theft and Arms Act violations. He had also been convicted earlier in a snatching case registered at Adarsh Nagar police station, Deputy Commissioner of Police (Crime) Harsh Indora said.

The accused had been actively running an organised

ciates while frequently shifting between UP, Haryana and Punjab to avoid detection. The Uttar Pradesh Police had also declared a cash reward for his arrest, he said. Police tracked Sanjay's movements for nearly two weeks. A raid was conducted on Sunday at his hideout in Mandi Gobindgarh, where he was apprehended, the DCP said. During interrogation, Sanjay told police he began commit-

ting robberies and snatching incidents over a decade ago, along with associates from his village, operating across several states, including Delhi, Uttar Pradesh, Punjab, Chandigarh and parts of southern India. Police said he repeatedly resumed criminal activities after securing bail and stopped appearing in court, leading to multiple non-bailable warrants and proclaimed offender proceedings.

1.11 crore PMAY houses sanctioned: Khattar



The Centre has sanctioned 1.11 crore houses under two schemes of Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana, with 95.54 lakh of those houses having already been completed and handed over to beneficiaries, Minister of Housing and Urban Affairs Manohar Lal Khattar informed the Rajya Sabha on Monday.

Attacks on ECI part of conspiracy: Rajnath Singh

Defence Minister and senior BJP leader Rajnath Singh on Monday accused the opposition parties of attacking bodies such as the Election Commission of India as part of a conspiracy to weaken the institutions of Interjecting in a discussion on 150 years of Vande Matram in Lok Sabha, Singh said constant migration, deaths and rapid urbanisation lead to



Revanth targets 10% national GDP for Telangana by 2047



CM A Revanth Reddy on Monday said he wanted Telangana to contribute 10 per cent to the national GDP by 2047. Speaking at the Telangana Rising Global Summit 2025, he also said the state Government wants to replicate the model of Guang-Dong province in China whose economy is the largest of any province in China.

Patna airport runway needs expansion: Aviation Minister

5.17 lakh Waqf properties

on UMEED portal uploaded

The runway at Patna airport needs expansion, and the Government has been repeatedly requesting additional land from the Bihar Government while operating the airport based on all safety risk assessments, Aviation Minister K Rammohan Naidu said in the Rajya Sabha on Monday. According to Naidu, the current runway at Patna airport is not suitable for operating many types of aircraft due to load penalties.



Siddaramaiah to follow high command on turmoil

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE Belagavi (Karnataka)

Karnataka Chief Minister Siddaramaiah on Monday reiterated that he will abide by the Congress high command's decision on the leadership change issue in the state. The CM has been repeatedly stating for the last few days that he and Deputy CM DK Shivakumar will go by what the high

command decides on the

chief minister change. "Will abide by whatever the high command decides," Siddaramaiah told reporters in response to a question on his son and Congress Member of the Legislative Council (MLC) Yathindra Siddaramaiah's statement that there is no question of leadership change as of now, and that he believes that the former will continue as CM for five years. Earlier in the day, Yathindra claimed that the Congress high command has said that there is no lead-

which is not new. I feel that, as of now, there is nothing like leadership change. I hope that he (Siddaramaiah) will complete his five-year term," Yathindra told reporters at the Suvarna Vidhana Soudha.

uation in the state, he said.

Yathindra also admitted that there was confusion over the leadership issue because, "the Deputy Chief Minister was asked whether he wants to be the CM. There are aspirants in all the political parties. The high

ership change in the state. "I have been saying this,

To a question that Siddaramaiah had been asked to come to Delhi in January, Yathindra said the Congress high command calls the chief minister for various issues. So he will go there and discuss. He will also talk about the prevailing sit-

> command has said that they will not decide it now.' According to Yathindra. the Congress Legislative Party (CLP) elects a candidate for a

Karnataka Chief Minister Siddaramaiah

definite period. It is the CLP which decides who should be the chief minister. He claimed that, "The Congress high command has made it clear

that there is no leadership change as of now." Yathindra further claimed that high command had a meeting recently where they said they

have not taken any decision and postponed it. "So, as of now, there is no talk on the change of leadership in Karnataka," he claimed.

The power tussle within the ruling party had intensified amid speculation about a change in chief minister in the state, after the Congress Government reached the halfway mark of its five-year term on November 20.

The speculation was fuelled by an alleged " power-sharing" agreement involving Siddaramaiah and Shivakumar in 2023. However, both CM and Deputy CM had recently held breakfast meetings at each others residences, on the instructions of the high command, which is seen as a move to pause the leadership tussle between the two and to signal Siddaramaiah's continuation as the CM for the time being. especially ahead of the Belagavi legislature session.



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE New Delhi

A total of 5.17 lakh Waqf properties were initiated on the UMEED portal while 2,16,905 properties were approved by the designated approvers during the sixmonth window provided, according to the data provided by the Ministry of

Minority Affairs. The UMEED Central Portal for management of Waqf Properties in India, launched by Union Minister of Minority Affairs Kiren Rijiju on June 6, 2025, officially closed for uploads on December 6, 2025, completing its sixmonth window, as per the UMEED Act, 1995 and the clear directions of the Supreme Court.

In the final count, the momentum significantly accelerated as the deadline approached, the ministry said in a statement.

Many review meetings, training workshops, and high-level interventions even at the secretary-level injected renewed pace into the process, making the upload surge in the last hours, it said.

According to the data provided by the ministry, 5,17,040 Waqf properties were initiated on the portal with 2,16,905 properties approved by the designated approvers. A total of 2,13,941 properties have been submitted by makers and remain in the pipeline as of the deadline, the ministry said, adding that 10,869 properties stood rejected during verification

To support this massive national exercise, the Ministry of Minority Affairs conducted continuous workshops and training sessions with State/UT Waqf Boards and Minority Departments," the statement said. A two-day master trainer

workshop was also conducted in Delhi to equip Waqf Boards and State/UT officials with hands-on training for the uploading process, the ministry said.

Senior technical and administrative teams were deputed across states, and seven zonal meetings were

held nationwide. A dedicated helpline was also set up at the Ministry office for technical support

and quick resolution of issues arising during the uploads. Since the launch of the

portal, secretary, Ministry of Minority Affairs, Chandra Shekhar Kumar took 20 plus review meetings, consistently guiding, motivating, and monitoring States/UTs to ensure timely and accurate uploading of existing Waqf property details, the state ment said.

The conclusion of this phase marks a significant milestone in bringing transparency, efficiency, and unified digital management to Waqf properties across India under the UMEED framework, it said.

22 MLAs close to Fadnavis, may cross over: Aaditya

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA Nagpur

Shiv Sena (UBT) legislator Aaditya Thackeray on Monday claimed that 22 MLAs from a Mahauti ally have "grown close" to Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis and are ready to switch sides, an oblique reference to Deputy CM Eknath Shindeled Shiv Sena.

In June 2022, the Shiv Sena split following a rebellion led by Shinde, resulting in the collapse of the then Uddhav Thackerayled Maha Vikas Aghadi Government.

Later, in January 2024, assembly speaker Rahul Narwekar held that the Eknath Shinde-led faction was the "real" Shiv Sena, which is a constituent of the ruling Mahayuti in the state along with the BJP and Deputy CM Ajit Pawar's NCP. Shiv Sena.



Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis at Vidhan Bhavan on the first day of the Winter session of State Assembly in Nagpur

"There is one party and two factions on the treasury side. Twenty-two MLAs from one faction have grown close to the CM. They have good funds and they have started dancing to the tune of the CM,"a Aaditya Thackeray claimed, without naming the Shinde-led

The 22 MLAs are "ready to switch (sides)," he further claimed while talking to reporters in the Vidhan Bhawan premises here.

The Worli MLA also said that someone from these 22 legislators calls himself "vice-captain", a veiled reference to Industries Minister Uday Samant.

Actress assault case: Kerala Govt to appeal against verdict

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Kerala Government on Monday said it will appeal against the verdict in the actress assault case in which Malayalam actor Dileep was acquitted while six others were found guilty.

Announcing the decision, State Law Minister P Rajeev said the survivor didn't get complete justice through the present verdict.

"Though those who were directly involved in the were found not the verdict everyone reporters, shortly after the court acquitted the actor in the case.

"The state Government has always stood strongly with the survivor, and that will be continued," Rajeev satisfactory, Leader of is released.

■ New Delhi

& Training.

stand taken by the prosecution, he said it had even submitted a five-volume argument note at the court with regard to the case. "The Government has decided to go on appeal against the verdict. I have already talked to the chief minister and the DGP in this regard. The prosecution has been directed to initiate further proceedings in this regard," he added.

State Cultural Affairs and Cinema Minister Saji Cheriyan also said the Government has always guilty by the court, it was supported the survivor, and its stance is to ensure the guilty are punished, however high-profile they are.

While KPCC chief Sunny Joseph said the verdict pronounced by the principal sessions court was not

Opposition VD Satheesan said declaring those who had direct involvement in the crime as guilty was a relief. Joseph, in a video message, accused the prosecution of completely failing in proving the conspiracy part in the case and assuring justice to the survivor.

Meanwhile, speaking to reporters in Kozhikode, Satheesan said what the survivor went through is a tragedy that should never happen to any woman. This judgment finding six accused directly involved in the crime guilty will help prevent such incidents from recurring. When asked whether the

prosecution has failed to prove the conspiracy angle in the case, he said that will be clear only when the detailed judgment

Over 8,700 to gather as Rajasthan hosts first Pravasi Rajasthani Diwas

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE Jaipur

Rajasthan will celebrate its first-ever Pravasi Rajasthani Diwas at the Jaipur **Exhibition Convention** Centre (JECC) on 10th December, bringing together more than 8,700 Non-Resident Rajasthanis and industrialists who have registered to be part of this landmark occasion organised under the leadership of Chief Minister Bhajanlal Sharma. The event has been envi-

sioned to strengthen the bond between Rajasthan and its global diaspora by inviting them to Connect, Collaborate, and Contribute to the state's ambitious goal of becoming a \$350 billion economy by 2030, a vision that CM Sharma has been championing through diaspora outreach pro-Hyderabad, Surat, and Kolkata ahead of main event, where he declared, "We have drawn up an action plan towards becoming a 350 billion dollar economy in the next five years, and I invite you all to

growth story of Rising Rajasthan." To translate this vision

be a part of this historic

THE EVENT HAS BEEN ENVISIONED TO STRENGTHEN THE BOND BETWEEN RAJASTHAN AND ITS GLOBAL DIASPORA

into action, the programme will feature sectorial sessions engaging diaspora members, industry leaders, and policymakers across Tourism, Industry, Education, Healthcare, and Water Resources, while an exclusive NRR Roundtable will provide an interactive platform for Non-Resident Rajasthanis to discuss investment opportunities and share their global expertise — an initiative aligned with Prime Minister Narendra Modi's 'Viksit Bharat' vision that aims to transform Rajasthan's diaspora network into a strategic force driving sustainable development.

Laying the institutional foundation for this engagement, the state cabinet recently approved the Non-Resident Rajasthani (NRR) Policy-2025, which establishes an NRR Investment Facilitation Cell along with Investment Liaison Officers and Advisory Councils comprising overseas experts December 11-12.

and business leaders, complemented by a dedi-Non-Resident cated Rajasthani Department with the Additional District Collector appointed as nodal officer in every district to assist NRR families, while the Rajasthan Foundation now operates 26 chapters worldwide including in New York, London, and Riyadh to maintain this global connect. The event will also be

witnessing the annou-ncement of Pravasi Rajasthani Samman Awards honouring distinguished diaspora members for their achievements in business, science, art, philanthropy, and social service, with thirty-three eminent personalities attending as state guests at a venue thoughtfully designed to reflect Rajasthan's rich culture and heritage through a 'Progress Path' showcasing the state Government's achievements and folk artinspired souvenirs that will ensure Pravasi Rajasthanis carry home fond memories of their home land before the celebra-

tions continue with

the Rising Rajasthan Partnership Conclave on

The Third Australia-India **Education and Skills Council** meeting (AIESC) held in New Delhi on Monday was chaired by Dharmendra Pradhan, Union Minister of Education, Government of India and Jayant Chaudhary, Minister of State for Skill Development & Entrepreneurship and Education, from the Indian side. From Australia, the meeting was chaired by Hon Jason Clare MP, Minister for Education, Government of Australia and Hon. Mr. Andrew Giles MP, Australian Minister for Skills

The meeting was also attended by Dr Sukanta Majumdar, Minister of State for Education and DoNER; Hon Julian Hill MP, Assistant Minister for International Education, Govt of Australia. Sanjay Kumar, Secretary, School Education, Dr. Vineet Joshi; Secretary, Higher Education; Ms. Debashree Mukherjee, Secretary, Skill Development & Entrepreneurship, senior Government officials from both the sides and Vice-Chancellors & representatives of Australian universities.

The third AIESC meeting reviewed the ongoing initiatives under school education, higher education, research, and skill develop-



Australia-India education, commitment to deepen institutional linkages, expand mobility pathways, and strengthen regulatory cooperation. AIESC is a binational body that guide the strategic direction and strengthen the partnership between the two countries global priority. in the fields of the education, training, research and skill ecosystem.

Speaking on the occasion Pradhan said that the 3rd AIESC served as a great opportunity to build upon the progress made since the inaugural meeting of AIESC, break new ground in

skills and research partnership, open wider avenues for India's youth, and further deepen our bilateral engagements across the full spectrum of education and skill development as well as in areas of national and He appreciated the

Australian Ministers and the delegation for the substantive discussions on the agenda items-school education, higher education and research and skills and also for their vigorous efforts to elevate the AIESC platform to a higher-level.

Pradhan further said that education, skills and research are the key pillars of India-Australia Strategic Partnership. Both India and Australia remain committed to working together and collaborating more in Early Childhood Care and Education, technology adoption, sports education, building institutional capacities, empowering teachers, preparing youth for critical and emerging areas, like AI, advanced materials, semiconductors, MedTech,

energy, and sustainability

and also for innovative

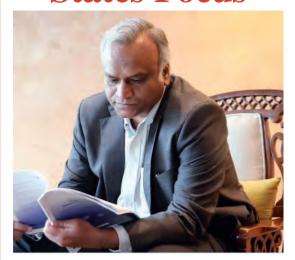
skilling partnerships, he

Taking forward the spirit of collaboration and ambition, the Minister urged all stakeholders to successfully implement the outcomecentric and in-depth discussions held today across school, higher and skill education and to ensure that the bridges built today continue to grow stronger in the years to come. Speaking on the occasion,

Hon Jason Clare MP, Austrálian Minister for Education, said "This is a win-win. It is good for Australia and it is good for India. "It is a great sign of the strength of the relationship between India and Australia. There is no such collaboration with any other country in the field of education and skill development. This shows deep trust and faith between India and Australia".

Highlighting the depth and uniqueness of the India-Australia skilling partnership, Jayant Chaudhary stated that the two countries share a one-of-its-kind institutional platform that is translating discussions into tangible outcomes through structured frameworks, such as, the Mutual Recognition of Qualifications (MRQ) 2023, a dedicated Skills Mapping Framework for demand assessment, and the signing of three key MoUs to strengthen cooperation.

States Focus



PRIYANK KHARGE SLAMS BJP FOR **NEGLECTING OPPOSITION DUTIES**

Karnataka Minister Priyank Kharge on Monday hit out at the BJP ahead of the Assembly session, alleging that the party has abandoned its responsibilities as an opposition and was instead focusing only on trivial issues. Speaking to reporters on the premises of Suvarana Vidhana Soudha, Kharge took a dig at the BJP for remaining silent on matters that fall under the purview of the central government.

Responding to a question that the BJP was going to target the Congress government in the session, Kharge said, "Let them do it. They have abandoned their responsibilities as an opposition."



PM MODI URGES BIHAR NDA MPS TO SHOULDER 'GREATER RESPONSIBILITY

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Monday told the NDA MPs from Bihar to work with more vigour for the welfare of the people after the ruling alliance's resounding victory in the recent Assembly elections, saying "with great victory comes great responsibility".

Lok Janshakti Party (Ram Vilas) MP Shambhavi Choudhary said the prime minister conveyed the message to a delegation of NDA MPs when they called on him here to congratulate him for the NDA's massive victory in the Bihar polls.

J&K Police raid hotels over Form-C violations

MOHIT KANDHARI

The Jammu and Kashmir police conducted a massive drive against several hotels and a homestay for violating the mandatory Form-C reporting norms required under the Immigration & Foreigners Act in Srinagar on Monday.

The drive was conducted close on the heels of the detention of a Chinese national who had entered Ladakh and Jammu and Kashmir without permission and later stayed in an unregistered guest house in Srinagar in the last week of November 2025. The drive was conducted across several 'hot spots' of Srinagar frequented by foreign tourists.

Official sources claimed that after the Pahalgam terror attack, over 2500 foreign nationals have visited the valley along with domestic travellers.

The Chinese national was detained by the security forces after he was allegedly found using a social media app for chatting.

cials are trying to join the dots and figure out the purpose of his visit to Ladakh and Jammu and Kashmir, especially when, as per his tourist VISA, he was only permitted to visit Buddhist religious places in Varanasi, Agra, New Delhi, Jaipur, Sarnath, Gaya and Kushi Nagar.

According to a police spokesman, in the Rajbagh area, Hotel Blossoms, Hotel Grand MS, and Hotel Golden Forest had allowed foreign nationals to check in without submitting Form-C to the Foreigners Registration Office (FRO). Accordingly, FIR No. 65/2025 U/S 8 & 23-B of the Immigration & Foreigners Act was registered at Police Station Rajbagh. Similarly,in the Khanyar area, Hotel Khyber, located in Khayam, was also found violating Form-C reporting requirements. Despite repeated instructions, the management failed to produce any proof of Form-C submission. As a result, FIR No. 57/2025 was registered under relevant sections of law at Police Station Khanyar, the police



REPRESENTATIVE PHOTO

spokesman said.

In the busy Lal Bazar area, IMY Home Stay, Nowabagh Bagwanpora, owned by Mohammad Aslam Baktoo S/o Late Habibullah Baktoo, was found operating without Form-C compliance for Starobinsky Lior, a foreign national from Israel, along with others. The manage-

ment had deliberately concealed the stay of the foreign guest and failed to submit the mandatory online Form-C reporting. Accordingly, FIR No. 60/2025 U/S 8 and 23(b) of the Immigration & Foreigners Act was registered at Police Station Lal Bazar.

Nishat area, a house owner, namely Mohammad Ashraf Zargar S/o Mohammad Ramzan Zargar R/o Vakeel Colony, Brein was found in non-compliance with the mandatory reporting of Form C to FRO. In this connection, FIR No. 101/2025 U/S 8-23(b) of the Immigration and Foreigners Act was regispied by foreign nationals during their brief stay in the valley were found to be violating the norms. According to a police spokesman, Floating Castle owned by Farooq Ahmad Guroo S/o Late Gh Nabi Guroo R/o Ghat No 15 Nehru Park, boarded by Lee Ya Hui of Taiwan, Best View Houseboat owned by Faroog Ahmad Kutroo S/o Ali Mohd Kutroo R/o Ghat No 09 Da Lake, boarded by Maistruik Sergel of Russia, House Boat Crystal Palace, owned by Gh Hassan Karnai S/o Haji Gh Mohammad R/o Abi Karpora Dal lake, boarded by Naum Silviu of Romania and Houseboat Lake Palace, owned by Mohammad Altaf Gunna S/o Habibullah Gunna R/o Abi Karpora Dal Lake, boarded by Eduardo Tejerina Gonzalee of Spain, was found in violation of the norms for mandatory reporting rules. In this connection, FIR no. 94/2025 U/S 7.14, and 16 of the Immigration and Foreigner Act was registered in Police

In RamMunshi Bagh,

several houseboats occu-

Odisha records 40,947 crimes against women: Report

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE Bhuhaneswar

A total of 40,947 cases of crimes against women, including 3,205 rapes, were registered in Odisha in 15 months till September, according to data provided by Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi in the assembly on Monday.

These cases were reported since July 1, 2024, Majhi said, in reply to a written question by BJD legislator Prasanna Acharya.

The BJP came to power in the state in June 2024, ending the 24-year rule of the Naveen Patnaik-led BJD government. The opposition has been regularly criticising Majhi's government, ed by the CM, 202 cases of napping of women, 796



alleging that crimes against women have increased after the BJP came to power in the state.

According to data provid-

attempted rape, 1,476 cases of sexual harassment, 9,851 cases of molestations, 2,310 cases of public disrobing of women, 8,863 cases of kideve-teasing and 556 stalking cases were registered in the state during the period.

Among the other cases registered were 129 trafficking, 277 dowry homicides, 49 dowry suicides, 5,861 dowry tortures, 6,773 non-dowry tortures and 152 voyeurism. Four cases of acid attack were also lodged during the period.

Majhi said several steps have been taken to improve the quality of investigation, fast-tracking of the cases and improving the conviction rate. Investigative Units on Crime Against Women (IUCAW) are functioning in 29 districts. These units take up investigation of important and sensitive cases, he said.

BJP claims LoP skipped PM's speech out of guilt



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE New Delhi

The BJP on Monday alleged that both Leader of Opposition (LoP) Rahul Gandhi and Congress MP Priyanka Gandhi Vadra remained absent from the Lok Sabha out of a "sense of guilt" during Prime Minister's speech on the 150th anniversary of Vande Mataram because he exposed their party and the Gandhi family. Initiating the discussion in the Lower House, Prime Minister Modi spoke about how the original version of the Vande of appeasement. Mataram was "truncated at the behest of" Jawaharlal Nehru to "appease" Muhammad Ali Jinnah and

partition of India later to "appease minorities", BJP MP and national spokesperson Sambit Patra said. "Perhaps this is the reason why the Leader of Opposition, Rahul Gandhi, and Priyanka Gandhi Vadra were absent from the House on such an important day when it is the 150th anniversary of

Vande Matram and the

prime minister is speaking,"

"this seed of division" that he

sowed at that time led to the

Patra charged.

Station RM Bagh.

They were absent because of the sense of guilt they had in their hearts because their own family cheated, deceived and betrayed the Vande Mataram. They knew that they wouldn't be able to bear it," he told reporters in the Parliament House complex.

Initiating the discussion on Vande Mataram in the Lok Sabha, Prime Minister Modi accused the Congress of breaking into pieces the national song under the guise of social harmony, and said it was still following the politics

He also targeted Nehru for 'agreeing" with the suggestion that Vande Mataram could antagonise Muslims. Modi cited a letter written by Nehru to Subhash Chandra Bose and claimed the former prime minister had said that the background of Vande Mataram could antagonise Muslims. He said the letter was written following a protest by Mohammad Ali

Jinnah in Lucknow. Terming Modi's speech "historic", Patra said the prime minister exposed the Congress and its betrayal towards Vande Mataram.

Bengal CM Mamata slams centre over IndiGo crisis SAUGAR SENGUPTA | Kolkata interests of the people at

HARYANA NOW Bengal Chief Minister

"OVER 90% OF

FIRES IN PUNJAB.

monitoring systems as farmers are shifting stubble-

burning activities to late

afternoons, according to a

new analysis published on

Monday. The Stubble Burning

Status Report 2025 by the

International Forum for

Environment, Sustainability

and Technology (iFOREST)

said this led to major under-

estimation of the contribu-

tion of stubble burning to

Delhi's air pollution this year. IFOREST said the govern-

ment's current monitoring

protocol, run by the Consortium for Research on

Agroecosystem Monitoring

and Modeling from Space

(CREAMS) of the Indian

Agricultural Research Institute, is unable to detect

most farm fires as it

relies mainly on polar-orbit-

ing satellites that observe India only between 10.30 am

This narrow time window

At the same time, the

report finds real progress on the ground, with burnt areas

in Punjab and Haryana falling

by 25-35 per cent over recent

years. IFOREST said burnt-

area mapping provides a

more accurate picture than

active fire counts, which cur-

rently suggest a much larger

decline. Chandra Bhushan,

CEO of iFOREST, said, "Our

analysis provides incontro-

vertible evidence that India's

current stubble-burning

monitoring system is struc-

turally misaligned with

ground realities. "Farmers

have shifted burning to the

late afternoon, while our

monitoring relies on satellites

that capture active fires

only during a narrow

time window (10:30 am to

1:30 pm).

no longer matches farmers' burning practices, it said.

and 1.30 pm.

LARGE FARM

Mamata Banerjee on GO UNDETECTED" Monday slammed the Centre for mishandling the PIONEER NEWS SERVICE IndiGo crisis and asked the government to arrange for special train services as an More than 90 per cent of alternative to ferry stranded large farm fires in Punjab passengers back to their and Haryana are now going destinations. undetected by the official

"Thousands of passengers are stranded at airports. so what is the alternative for them? This is a travel disaster as maximum number of flights has been stopped," Banerjee told in Kolkata even as the crisis involving India's largest air service provider entered its seventh day.

Alleging that the BJP-led Centre was only concerned about its votes and not the

large, Banerjee asked "the Government of India to make a plan to resolve the issue," adding, "it seems that the BIP is only concerned about capturing the institutions and not the interests of the people.

Speaking on the issue of Prime Minister Narendra Modi addressing to Bengali Novelist — and the creator of the coinage "Vande Mataram" — Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay, as "Bankim Da" Banerjee attacked the former for being "unaware of the history of Bengal." This, though the Prime Minister corrected himself the next moment naming the pre-Independence writer as "Bankim Babu.'

Attacking the saffron lead-



ership she said, "they not only do not know history of Bengal but also they have been in the habit of Bengali icons like Netaji Subhas

Chandra Bose, Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay, Rabindranath Tagore, Vidya Sagar." She said "things have come to such a pass that

Bangladeshi which is humiliation of the Bengali culture." Referring to Special Intensive Revision of electoral rolls the Chief Minister also attacked the Election Commission of India for thrusting it on the people of Bengal in "most unplanned manner." She said, "it is difficult to understand why SIR was imposed in such an unplanned manner to be completed in a matter of mere two months why was there such a hurry.'

today anyone who speaks

the Bengali language is

promptly dismissed as a

The Chief Minister was likely to begin a two-day trip of Cooch Behar in North Bengal where she would take up the SIR issue in public rallies, Trinamool Congress sources said.

Randhawa slams Navjot Kaur's ₹500 crore CM chair claim

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE New Delhi

After her " 500 crore for CMs chair" claim, Congress general secretary Sukhjinder Randhawa on Monday said it was "unfortunate" that Navjot Kaur Sidhu made such a remark and asked how much was paid when her husband Navjot Sidhu was made a minister and then the Punjab Congress president.

Randhawa, the former deputy chief minister of Punjab, also said the Congress faces threat from no one in the state but from such people within.

"It is unfortunate that Navjot Kaur Sidhu has made such a statement. Navjot Sidhu joined the Congress from the BJP, and he was made a minister. They should tell how much was paid for Sidhu to become a minister. He was made the number 2 minister. How much was paid?

"Then he was made the Congress



They should reveal how much was paid then," Randhawa told reporters outside Parliament. He also said they all worked with Sidhu and stayed with him when he was made the minister and then the PCC president.

"The party is supreme, the party president is supreme. The chief minister remains under him and leader claimed.

"My sister Navjot Kaur should tell how much money was paid for Sidhu to become the PCC president. For three-and-a-half years, Congress workers in Punjab have been beaten up and facing action from the ruling dispensation in Punjab. Why were they (Sidhus) silent for all this

Jharkhand migrants killed in Goa nightclub fire cremated

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA Ranchi

The last rites of the three migrant workers from Jharkhand, killed in the fire at the Goa nightclub, were performed at their native places on Monday.

Pradeep Mahto (24) and Binod Mahto (20), two brothers from Fatehpur village in Lapung in Ranchi district, and Mohit Munda (22) of Govindpur village in Khunti district died in the inferno that ravaged the North Goa club post-midnight on Sunday.

A total of 25 people, including 14 staff members of the nightclub, were killed in the fire.

The bodies of Pradeep, Binod and Mohit, who used to work at the nightclub, were brought back to the state in the morning by a flight.

The mortal remains of Pradeep and Binod were cremated on the bank of the Karo river in Lapung, around 60 km from the state capital, in the presence of villagers and block officials.

The brothers had migrated to Goa about a year ago and



Family members and relatives of Mohit Munda, who was killed in the fire at a nightclub in North Goa mourn during his last rites in Khunti district of Jharkhand

used to send around ₹30,000 per month to their family.

"Both were unmarried. They were scheduled to celebrate Holi with us next vear." their elder brother Phagu Mahto said.

Mohit's last rites were performed as per tribal customs

at his native village. Agriculture Minister Shilpy Neha Tirkey, who coordinated with the Goa government to bring back the bodies,

said all three belonged to her

Mandar constituency.

'The bodies were sent to their native villages in special ambulances. I will request Chief Minister Hemant Soren for some welfare provisions for the families of the

victims," she told PTI. The Labour Department has handed ₹50,000 each to the families of the victims as

immediate assistance. Disaster Management Minister Irfan Ansari said compensation of ₹4 lakh

each would be provided to the kin of the workers.

"There is no such particular provision in this regard. However, as it is a very propeople government led by Chief Minister Hemant Soren, we have decided to give the compensation," he told reporters outside the assembly.

Ansari urged the Centre to provide compensation of ₹1 crore to the families of each



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HC adjourns hearing on plea seeking ASI survey of Gyanvapi's wazukhana



The Allahabad High Court on Monday adjourned hearing on a plea seeking an ASI survey of the 'wazukhana' area, excluding the structure described by the Hindu side as shivling, inside the Gyanvapi mosque at Varanasi till January 16. When the case was taken up on Monday, the court was informed that a related matter is pending before the Supreme Court. Subsequently, the court adjourned the hearing.

Justice Rohit Ranjan Agarwal is hearing the civil revision petition filed by Rakhi Singh, one of the plaintiffs in the Gyanvapi case. The petition has been filed challenging an order of a Varanasi judge passed on October 21, 2023 which refused to direct the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) to survey the wazukhana (ablution) area except for the structure which the Hindu side calls a shivling and the Muslims describe as a fountain inside the Gyanvapi mosque located adjacent to the Kashi Vishwanath temple.

In her revision, Rakhi Singh has pleaded that the survey of the wazukhana area is necessary in the interest of justice. It shall benefit the plaintiff(s) and defendants alike and help the court arrive at a decision in the suit, the plea said.

Red Fort blast case: Delhi court extends NIA custody of 3 doctors, preacher by 4 days

A Delhi court on Monday extended the NIA custody of three doctors and a preacher, who were arrested in connection with the November 10 Red Fort blast case, by four days. All four accused - Dr Muzammil Ganai, Dr Adeel Rather, Dr Shaheena Saeed and Maulvi Irfan Ahmed Wagay - were produced before Principal and Sessions Judge Anju Bajaj Chandna on the expiry of their 10-day NIA custody granted on November 29.

Mediapersons were barred from covering the court proceedings, which were held under tight security in and around the Patiala House district court premises.

Till now, the National Investigation Agency (NIA) has made seven arrests in the case, which is linked to a 'white-collar' terror module busted by the Jammu and

"The agency continues to pursue various leads in connection with the suicide bombing, and has been conducting searches across states in coordination with the respective police forces to identify and track the others involved in the gruesome attack," the agency said in a statement earlier.





SC orders 30% seats for women in bar councils

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE

The Supreme Court on Monday directed that 30 per cent seats in State Bar councils, where the election process has not been set in motion, be kept for women advocates.

A bench of Chief Justice Surya Kant and Justice Joymalya Bagchi said for the current year, the State Bar councils where elections are yet to be held should fill 20 per cent seats with women candidates and 10 per cent by cooption if there are not many desirous lawyers to contest.

The top court directed that a proposal for co-option shall be placed before the court in regard to the State Bar councils where the number of contesting women lawyers are inadequate.

At the outset, senior advocate Manan Kumar Mishra, who is also the chairperson of the Bar Council of India (BCI), informed the bench that the election process as per court's earlier direction has commenced in six Bar bodies with notification of the poll.

He submitted that the BCI, in principle, is of the view that

there should be at least 30 per cent women's reservation in the State Bar councils, and suggested that for the present year, the councils should be permitted to fill up

women candidates. He also proposed that 15 per cent of seats be filled by way of co-option of women members.

the posts by co-opting

However, the bench said it

would be appropriate if cooption is restricted to only 10 per cent seats.

The bench said it would not be prudent to reserve seats for women in the Bar councils, where the election process has already commenced.

It said in the Bar councils of Andhra Pradesh, Punjab and Harvana, Uttar Pradesh and Telangana, where elections

women members who are contesting the polls shall contest with full spirit, and the voters shall also make endeavours to ensure that adequate representation is provided to female advocates

in the councils.

It made a similar appeal to the voters of the Bar councils of Bihar and Chhattisgarh, where elections have been notified. For the remaining be undertaken so that

Bar councils, the bench said 30 per cent seats shall be represented by women advocates out of which 20 per cent shall be by election and 10 per cent by co-option.

It said, "Wherever the women members of the Bbar are reluctant to come forward and contest the 20 per cent seats, the process of co-option in such Bar councils shall

cent representation in the

executive council." The top court was hearing pleas filed by advocates Yogamaya M G and

Shehla Chaudhary seeking reservation of one-third of seats for women in all State

Bar councils. Senior advocate Meenakshi Arora, appearing for the petitioners, said that a blanket order for 30 per cent women's reservation across all state Bar councils may not be practical, as many states have very low percentages of practising

women advocates.

On December 4, the top court asked the BCI to ensure 30 per cent reservation for women in the upcoming state Bar council elections. The pleas filed by Yogamaya and Chaudhary also sought that at least one office-bearer post be reserved for women lawyers on a rotational basis.

The pleas were filed relying upon the May 2, 2024, order of the top court, in which it was directed that one-third of seats in the executive committee of the Supreme Court Bar Association, including one office-bearer post, be reserved

Land-for-jobs scam: CBI seeks time to verify status of accused persons



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE

The CBI on Monday sought time from a Delhi court to verify the status of various accused persons in the alleged land-for-jobs scam involving RJD chief Lalu Prasad, his family members and others.

Special CBI Judge Vishal Gogne is hearing the case on whether there is sufficient evidence to frame charges

The judge had, on December 4, directed the Central Bureau o f Investigation (CBI) to file a report after verifying the status of the accused in the case. Of the 103 accused, four have died. "Some time is sought on behalf of the CBI to verify the status of various accused persons in terms of the previous order. List on December 10," the judge said on Monday.

On November 10, the judge had deferred the order on framing charges against the accused till December 4.

The CBI had filed chargesheets against Lalu Yadav, his wife and former Bihar chief minister Rabri Devi, their son and former deputy chief minister Tejashwi Yadav and others in connection with the alleged scam.

The prosecution has alleged that appointments in the Group-D category of

the Indian Railways' West Central Zone based in Jabalpur, Madhya Pradesh, were made during Lalu Yadav's tenure as the railway minister from 2004 to 2009 in return for land parcels gifted or transferred by the recruits in the name of the Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD) supremo's family members and associates.

The CBI has also claimed that the appointments were made in violation of norms and that the transactions involved benami properties, amounting to criminal misconduct and conspiracy. The accused have denied the charges and claimed that the case is politically motivated.

Court acquits actor Dileep, convicts six in 2017 actress sexual assault case

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE

A Kerala court on Monday acquitted Malayalam cinema star Dileep in the sensational 2017 actress sexual assault case, in which six people, including the main accused charged with committing the crime, were pronounced guilty. In a case that made national headlines while sending shockwaves over the top actor's alleged involvement in the matter, three others, including Dileep's close friend Sarath, were also acquitted.

Coming out from the court, Dileep said that there was a "real conspiracy" by some police officials and a section of media to implicate him in the case earlier with an eye on destroying his career.

Dileep also said that his first wife and actress Maniu Warrier started a conspiracy to tag him in the case. The Left Government in Kerala said it would prefer an appeal against the lower court verdict while reiterating its support to the survivor, a multi-lingual female actor who has worked in a number of Malayalam, Tamil and Telugu movies.

Apart from Dileep (57), the eighth accused in the case, the court also acquitted three others — Charley

IndiGo crisis serious matter, says SC,



Thomas (A7), Sanil Kumar alias Mesthri Sanil (A9) and Sarath (A15). The verdict was pronounced by Ernakulam District and Principal Sessions Judge Honey M Varghese, in a tightly packed courtroom here.

Judge Honey M Varghese began by substantiating the offences charged in the case and then declared the first six accused — Sunil, Martin Antony, Manikandan B Vijesh VP, Salim H, and Pradeep, guilty.

"Since the offenses are grave and serious in nature and perpetrated against a woman, accused not entitled to get benevolence the Probation of Offenders Act.

cancelled and remanded to custody," the court ordered. They were charged under Sections of the then IPC and IT Act, including criminal conspiracy, wrongful confinement, gang rape, kidnapping or abducting a woman and criminal force to a woman with an intent to outrage her modesty. Later, after reading out the charges against Dileep, the cour

Bail bonds of A1 to A6 are

found him not guilty. Dileep was acquitted after the court ruled the prosecution failed to substantiate the charges, including criminal conspiracy, wrongful confinement, assault, gang rape, and related IPC offences.

SC seeks ED's response on journalist bail plea

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE New Delhi

The Supreme Court on Monday asked the Enforcement Directorate (ED) to file its response within three days on a bail plea of journalist Mahesh Langa in a money laundering case linked to an alleged financial fraud. A bench comprising Chief Justice of India (CII) Surva Kant and Justice Joymalya Bagchi also asked senior advocate Kapil Sibal, appearing for the jailed journalist, to file rejoinder, if needed, to the ED's response within two days of it

The top court fixed the

case for further hearing on December 15.

During the brief hearing on Monday, Sibal said a journalist has been facing as many as six cases. "The journalist is accused of extortion," the counsel for the ED said and sought a short Tuhar Mehta was unavailable at the moment.

September 8 sought responses from the Gujarat Government and the ED on Langa's bail plea. While issuing the notices on Langa's bail plea, the bench asked, "What kind of a jour-

adjournment on the ground that Solicitor General The top court on

nalist is he?" "With due

genuine journalists. But there are also people who on their scooter say we are 'patrakar' (journalists) and what they actually do everybody knows," the bench told Sibal.

Sibal replied that these are all allegations. "In one FIR, he gets anticipatory bail, then a second FIR is lodged and again anticipatory bail is granted but now he is booked under a third FIR for income tax evasion. There are other things also against him," Sibal submitted. He added that there is a background to the case also.

On July 31, the Gujarat High Court rejected Langa's

respect, there are some very bail plea in the money laundering case on the grounds that if released on bail, prejudice would be caused to the prosecution case. On February 25, the ED said it arrested Langa in a money laundering investigation linked to an alleged financial fraud. He was first arrested in October 2024 in a GST fraud case.

The money laundering case against Langa stems from two FIRs filed by Ahmedabad police on charges of fraud, criminal misappropriation, criminal breach of trust, cheating and causing wrongful loss of lakhs of rupees to certain people.

New Delhi Woes of flyers hit by mass flight cancellations by IndiGo found a compassionate ear in the Delhi High Court, which agreed to hear one of the pleas on December 10, while the Supreme Court termed the consequent chaos a "serious matter", but stopped short of intervening.

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE

Chief Justice of India Surya Kant said lakhs of people are stranded at the airports, even though the apex court refused to accord an urgent hearing to a plea seeking judicial intervention into the matter, saying the Centre had taken steps to address it. IndiGo cancelled 500 flights and

plans to operate 1,802 services on Monday, the civil aviation ministry said. The airline has delivered 4,500 bags

out of a total of 9,000 to the passengers, and will deliver the rest in the next 36 hours, the ministry said in a statement. When a plea concerning the cancel-

lation of flights by IndiGo was mentioned in the top court, a bench headed by the CJI said, "It is a serious matter. Lakhs of people are stranded at the airports. We know that the Government of India has taken timely action and cognisance of the issue.' The CJI, who was heading a bench

comprising Justice Joymalya Bagchi, added, "We know people may have health issues and other important

Over the day, a separate petition seeking directions to the Centre to provide support and refunds to affected passengers was mentioned in the Delhi High Court. A bench of Chief



Justice Devendra Kumar Upadhyaya and Justice Tushar Rao Gedela listed the matter for hearing on December 10.

Before the apex court, a lawyer mentioned the issue and said there have been a lot of flight cancellations by IndiGo over the last few days, and the passengers were suffering.

"The cancellations are not informed to the flyers," he said, adding that around 2,500 flights were delayed and flyers were hit at 95 airports across the country. In the High Court, the counsel for the petitioner said they had filed a PIL on the crisis with the airline.

"Several people are stuck. The ground situation at airports is inhumane. We are expecting the court to pass orders to IndiGo and ground support staff for people stranded at the airports.

When the High Court pointed out that

refunds," he said.

There is no proper system for

celling hundreds of flights since December 2, citing regulatory changes in the pilots' flight duty and regulations norms. The disruptions have left lakhs

the Government had already passed

some directions in the matter, the

counsel responded in the affirmative.

for hearing on December 10.

The bench said the PIL will be listed

IndiGo has been facing heat from both

the Centre and the passengers for can-

of passengers stranded at airports across the country. Over 250 IndiGo flights were cancelled

from Delhi and Bengaluru airports on Monday as the disruptions of the airline's flight operations entered the seventh

At the Delhi airport, 134 flights were cancelled - 75 departures and 59 arrivals -- while at the Bengaluru airport, the carrier cancelled 117 services — 65 arrivals and 62 departures, they said.

SC seeks response from Rajasthan on plea challenging validity of anti-conversion law

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE New Delhi

The Supreme Court on Monday issued notice to the Rajasthan Government seeking its response on a petition challenging the validity of the State's 2025 law against illegal religious

A bench of Justices Dipankar Datta and Augustine George Masih tagged the plea filed by 'Catholic Bishops Conference

pending petitions challenging the validity of the provisions of the Rajasthan Prohibition of Unlawful Conversion of Religion Act, 2025. The top court had earlier

of India' with separate

agreed to hear some separate pleas raising similar issues and sought replies from the During the hearing on

state Government. Monday, Solicitor General women, Scheduled Castes, Tushar Mehta told the bench Scheduled Tribes, and persons with disabilities that similar matters are pending consideration before

the apex court. The a jail term of 10 to 20 years petitioner has urged the apex court to declare the 2025 Act "ultra vires and unconstitutional". The Rajasthan law has a provision of imprisonment for 20 years to life for mass conversions through deception and a jail term of seven to 14 years for conversions by fraudulent means. Conversion of minors,

through deceit would attract

and a fine of at least ₹10 lakh. In September, another bench of the apex court

had sought the stand of several states on separate pleas seeking a stay on their respective anticonversion laws. The top court had then

made it clear that it would consider the prayer for staying the operation of such laws once the replies were filed.





Why India needs a legal right to disconnect

A nation cannot build a future on depleted minds and exhausted bodies. Supriya Sule's Bill offers not just legal protection but a cultural reset

Stress has become endemic in the corporate world, and "burnout" is now the widely accepted term for it. Burnout is a state of intense physical, emotional, and mental exhaustion caused by prolonged and excessive work-related stress. These two words capture the reality of today's corporate workforce on a massive scale. The death of 26-year-old chartered accountant Anna Sebastian Perayil, whose death was linked to severe work-related stress, is a case in point.

The irony is that most people do not even realise they are experiencing it, seeking treatment is a far cry. Reports of suicides and worsening mental health due to work pressure are increasingly common. Both mental and physical health deteriorate sharply, leaving individuals drained, cynical, and exhausted. Fatique, insomnia, headaches, detachment, and disturbed sleep have become alarmingly routine.

The constant ringing of the smartphone and the rise of hybrid digital work culture have erased personal boundaries, making it difficult for many to have any "me time". Being available 24×7 has turned into a modern form of slavery that takes a heavy toll on lives.

To restore work-life balance, Supriya Sule has taken an important initiative. If her proposal succeeds, it may soon become law, introducing penalties for employers who overstep time boundaries and encroach on workers' personal lives. Supriya Sule's Right to Disconnect Bill, 2025, is a longoverdue intervention, seeking to restore a basic but endangered human need: the right to switch off and relax.

The core premise of the Bill is simple yet transformative. It states that employees should not be penalised for choosing not to respond to work-related communication after office hours. The bill sets to end the culture of checking messages throughout the day, during dinner, on weekends, and even on holidays. Studies have repeatedly shown that such constant pressure to check phone leads to sleep deprivation, chronic stress, emotional burnout, and a slow erosion of family life.

The Bill recognises that mental health is not separate from productivity; it is its very foundation. Importantly, the legislation does not ignore the realities of India's competitive and diverse business landscape. Sule's proposal allows companies to set their own after-hours communication norms through Employees' Welfare Committees. Companies that disregard these provisions could face penalties equivalent to one per cent of their total employee remuneration, ensuring that compliance is mandatory and damages are for real.

Yet the path ahead is not without challenges. India's workforce is vast and varied, and cultural attitudes often equate overwork with dedication. Smaller firms may fear compliance burdens, while multinational companies may worry about servicing their offshore clients. Besides, enforcement remains a perennial weakness in India.

Despite these obstacles, the direction is clear and the move is a step in right direction. For India to continue its progress, it must safeguard the well-being of its workers.

SAARC@40: An idea that refuses to die

As the world reorganises around regional blocs and shared vulnerabilities, South Asia cannot afford to remain disconnected. SAARC may be dormant, but its spirit endures, waiting for a political moment that restores its relevance



SANTHOSH MATHEW

Forty years ago, on a December morning in 1985, South Asia embarked on an ambitious experiment. Seven neighbours — united by shared histories yet separated by borders, suspicion and political complications — met in Dhaka to outline a collective vision for peace, prosperity and cooperation. The South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) emerged from that hope, designed to transcend bilateral tensions and forge a regional identity grounded in development. Four decades later, that optimism feels remote. The organisation has been effectively frozen since 2014, its institutional vitality drained by enduring political hostilities. Yet, paradoxically, the idea of SAARC is more essential today than ever. The phrase "SAARC is dead, long live SAARC" captures this duality: the institution may be dormant, but the logic of regional cooperation remains compelling.

South Asia itself embodies profound contradictions. It is home to nearly 40 per cent of the world's democracies, each with its strengths and complexities. Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka together represent one of the most diverse political landscapes on earth. Bangladesh's strides in poverty alleviation, Bhutan's pioneering Gross National Happiness framework, Sri Lanka's social indicators, Nepal's federal evolution. Maldives' climate resilience, Pakistan's active civil society, Afghanistan's enduring cultural heritage and India's unmatched electoral scale all testify to a region rich in innovation and vitality.

To see South Asia only through the prism of conflict is to overlook its immense civilisational, demographic and strategic advantages. This potential, however, has been consistently undermined by geopolitical mistrust, particularly between India and Pakistan. SAARC's stagnation is rooted in this unresolved hostility. Without political trust at the highest level, regional structures lose momentum. The cost of this paralysis has been significant. South Asia remains among the least economically integrated regions in the world. Intra-regional trade hovers around a mere 5 per cent, compared with ASEAN's over 25 per cent. High tariffs, rigid borders and bureaucratic obstacles have stifled the movement of goods, services and ideas that could dramatically uplift the region.

Against this backdrop, the South Asian Free Trade Area (SAFTA) deserves renewed focus. Operational since 2006, SAFTA was designed to dismantle tariff and non-tariff barriers and build a seamless regional market. Fully implemented, it could transform South Asia economically by strengthening supply chains, reducing logistics costs and opening vast new opportunities for employment and investment. The stakes are large: nearly 736 million South Asians still live in



extreme poverty. Global comparisons illustrate what is possible. The African Continental Free

Trade Area is projected to raise Africa's region-

al income by 7 per cent and lift 30 million people

out of extreme poverty by 2035. With its larger

consumer base and energetic private sector,

South Asia could achieve even more if SAFTA

were revived with genuine political commitment.

South Asia's civilisational heritage — Hinduism,

Buddhism and Sufi traditions — offers a reser-

voir of cultural connections that can be har-

nessed to rebuild trust even when politics stag-

nates. India's soft power initiatives, such as the

But cooperation must extend beyond trade.

TO SEE SOUTH **ASIA ONLY** THROUGH THE PRISM OF **CONFLICT IS TO OVERLOOK ITS IMMENSE** CIVILISATIONAL, **DEMOGRAPHIC** AND STRATEGIC ADVANTAGES. THIS POTENTIAL,

BETWEEN INDIA

AND PAKISTAN

Santhosh Mathew is a

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SAKSHI

SETHI

Buddhist Circuit, the revival of University, the International Solar Alliance and HOWEVER, HAS the International Big Cat Alliance, **BEEN** create platforms that transcend **SINCE 1865** CONSISTENTLY political divides. These efforts draw UNDERMINED BY on the ethos of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam — the **GEOPOLITICAL** world is one family — and demonstrate that meaningful regional collaboration does not MISTRUST, always require formal institutional momentum. **PARTICULARLY**

India's neighbourhood-first policy has, in many ways, kept the idea of SAARC alive. The South Asia Satellite exemplified technological cooperation, supporting communication and disaster management across the region. India's vaccine diplomacy during the COVID-19 pandemic further highlighted its role as a regional first responder. When global supply chains collapsed, India supplied vaccines and essential medical aid to Nepal, Sri Lanka, Maldives, Bangladesh and other neighbours. More recently, India's rapid assistance during the Sri Lankan floods under Operation Sagar Bandhu reaffirmed its consistent commitment to regional humanitarian support. Such gestures cannot replace formal diplomacy, but they help rebuild trust and demonstrate the tangible value of cooperation.

Every member of SAARC, however, must recognise what is lost by leaving the organisa-

tion dormant. South Asia faces shared, transnational problems - climate change, water scarcity, terrorism, cybercrime, unemployment and migration — that no country can solve alone. The Shanghai Cooperation Organisation's Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure provides a useful example of how coordinated security cooperation strengthens collective resilience. A comparable mechanism within SAARC could enhance intelligence-sharing and counter-terrorism efforts at a moment when radicalisation and cyber threats are growing.

Equally significant is the demographic challenge. South Asia has the world's largest youth

population, with nearly 100,000 people entering the labour force **Jioneer** each day, yet UNICEF estimates that more than half will lack the skills needed for employment by 2030. Without regional frame-

works for mobility, innovation, skilling and academic exchange, this demographic dividend could be squandered, even though instruments such as the dormant SAARC Youth Charter offer a ready framework for collaboration.

A reimagined SAARC must also prioritise mobility. Visa liberalisation, academic exchanges, cross-border tourism and digital corridors can revive cultural linkages and unlock economic potential. Drawing on Europe's multiple-entry visas or ASEAN's reciprocal arrangements, South Asia could adopt Mutual Favourable Access to facilitate travel, study and business with transformative impact.

Ultimately, SAARC's future may lie in redefining it as a flexible development platform focused on digital public goods, climate resilience, health networks and research collaboration. India's digital governance tools — UPI, Aadhaar architecture, e-governance and tele-health could anchor such a partnership, reaffirming a shared South Asian destiny rooted in cooperation, connectivity and collective prosperity.

PIC TALK



Artists from Punjab perform at the National Craft Fair in Prayagraj.

DIGITAL EXPERIENCE

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a scarce commodity. Screens glow from dawn to midnight; alerts blink with the insistence of tiny sirens; content arrives in bursts designed to captivate and distract. In this environment of continuous cognitive stimulation, a troubling behavioural pattern has entered educational conversations: Popcorn Brain Syndrome. Though not a medical diagnosis, the term vividly expresses a growing reality-minds conditioned to crave rapid, high-intensity digital input, much like kernels bursting unpredictably in hot oil. For educators, this is no passing metaphor but a looming crisis. Increasingly, teachers observe shrinking attention spans, heightened restlessness, and an erosion of the ability to engage in deep, sustained thinking. The modern student,

IndiGo disruptions signal deeper crisis

There has been widespread chaos at several airports

as turbulence in IndiGo's operations continues unabat-

ed, leaving passengers anxious, exhausted, and strand-

ed for over a week. Mass cancellations and delays have

transformed terminals into scenes of distress, with trav-

ellers sleeping on floors and, in some cases, near oper-

ational areas. Many passengers missed job interviews,

family emergencies, and long-planned commitments,

despite tickets being reissued multiple times only to

face repeated cancellations. While IndiGo has stated

that operations will stabilise by December 15, this assur-

ance rings hollow for those still marooned without

clarity or support. The situation reflects not merely oper-

ational failure but a deeper issue of regulatory oversight.

Both IndiGo and the DGCA ignored early warning signs

ND OPINION

THE PIONEER

In the relentless pulse of our digital era, silence has become

equipped with limitless access to information, is paradoxically losing the capacity to grapple with it meaningfully. When the brain becomes accustomed to the quick bursts of dopamine offered by fast-paced media, slower, more reflective tasks-reading, writing, analytical reasoningbegin to feel burdensome. The very founda-

tion of real learning is compromised. The signs are subtle yet unmistakable. A student where depth is celebrated over speed, where observation matters as much as reaction. sits in class, eyes fixed on the teacher, but their attention flickers. A phantom notification tugs at their mind; an impulse to check

Confronting popcorn brain in the digital age

a device momentarily derails focus. This mental hopping mirrors popcorn in motion-bright, brief, and directionless. What suffers in the process is not merely academic performance, but the deeper capacities that shape intellectual maturity: critical thinking, creativity, emotional steadiness, and the ability to connect ideas in meaningful ways. Reflection, that slow and steady cultivator of insight,

Teachers now carry a dual mandate: to deliver curriculum content and to rebuild the cognitive stamina necessary to absorb it. It is a daunting task-almost like teaching a child to find stillness while surrounded by whirlpools of distraction. Yet it is not an impossible one. Recognising that Popcorn Brain is a cultural construct-not a personal failing-is the first step. Our digital environment is designed to hook, stimulate, and fragment; young learners are simply

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

responding to the architecture around them. The solution, therefore, is not to reject technology but to reintroduce balance. Classrooms can become places where deliberate pauses are woven into the learning fabric. Slow reading exercises, device-free discussions, and moments of reflec-

tion can act as anchors.

Teachers can cultivate an atmosphere observation matters as much as reaction. Simple routines-journalling, mindful breathing, silent thinking-can gently retrain wander-

ing minds. Parents, too, play a pivotal role. Children absorb what they see, not what they are told. A home where conversation, play, and unstructured time coexist with digital tools helps restore natural rhythms of attention. The partnership between school and family is essential to recalibrating young minds. The broader education system must recognise this phenomenon as a silent disruptor of learning outcomes. As curricula grow more rigorous, attention has become a critically limited resource, making investment in executive function, emotional regulation and digital discipline urgent. Without intervention, Popcorn Brain will continue to fragment focus across classrooms, undermining deep engagement and sustained understanding that are essential for shaping thoughtful, purposeful thinkers.

The writer is an educator and counsellor

THE NAMAMI GANGA PROGRAMME: GANGA **GHATS REVEAL ADMINISTRATIVE LAPSES**

The front-page report of 8 December on the deteriorating condition of Ganga ghats exposes a grim and deeply troubling account of man-made neglect. The collapse of ghat infrastructure across Uttarakhand and along the Gangetic plains is the result of multiple failures, foremost among them weak municipal accountability compounded by persistent local political

interference. Ghats are often sanctioned to serve constituency interests, even when locations are ecologically fragile or geographically

The Namami Ganga programme was conceived as an ambitious and essential initiative to conserve the river and protect surrounding plains from floods during the monsoon. Yet, crores of rupees have been squandered

due to poor planning, inadequate supervision, and indifference on the ground. Public apathy has further aggravated the problem, with citizens frequently neglecting their responsibility to maintain cleanliness and preserve environmental assets created for their benefit.

Ganga ghats are sensitive environmental interventions requiring expert design and sustained oversight by conservation architects and geological scientists, yet serious consultation with such specialists appears largely absent, Local municipal authorities must therefore be held fully accountable for maintenance and for regulating public access during vulnerable periods to prevent further degradation.

VINOD JOHRI | DELHI

arising from new pilot duty norms. Instead of adjusting manpower to meet regulatory requirements, IndiGo expanded its winter schedule, fully aware of its staffing limitations. It is deeply concerning that regulatory authorities appeared to yield under pressure, easing norms to manage public inconvenience. Such short-term relief undermines aviation safety and accountability. This crisis must serve as a moment for corrective action, not quiet compromise.

BHAGWAN THADANI | MUMBAI

Goa tragedy highlights safety failures

Apropos "Goa nightclub blaze kills 25" (Dec. 8), the devastating incident once again exposes how routine disregard for safety norms turns leisure spaces into sites of avoidable tragedy. Reports indicate a convergence of structural violations, inadequate exits, and delayed emergency access-conditions that make disaster inevitable rather than accidental. More troubling is the apparent awareness of these violations by multiple authorities, followed by delayed or diluted action.

As Goa's tourism economy expands, the need for professional oversight becomes critical, especially in venues with high crowd density and limited evacuation options. Safety cannot depend on goodwill or postincident outrage. Mandatory clearances, transparent licensing, and regular inspections must be strictly enforced. Officials who ignore violations must be held as accountable as operators who commit them. Infrastructure issues such as narrow access roads and informal expansions further compound risk and must be addressed urgently. A coordinated emergency protocol involving municipal bodies, fire services, and police should be standard, not reactive. A time-bound review of all public entertainment venues would be a constructive first step toward preventing future tragedies.

A MYILSAMI | TAMIL NADU

Aviation regulation under scrutiny

It takes years to build a reputation, but only days to destroy it. The ongoing IndiGo crisis appears less accidental and more self-inflicted, aided by regulatory inertia. Despite being aware of revised pilot duty norms, both the airline and the DGCA failed to act in time. IndiGo's decision to expand its winter schedule without adequate crew strength reflects corporate arrogance rather than operational prudence.

Equally culpable is the regulator's delayed auditing and passive oversight, which allowed the situation to escalate into a national disruption. When the crisis peaked, the DGCA appeared compelled to dilute enforcement to ease passenger hardship, effectively allowing the airline to escape accountability. Such precedents are dangerous in a safety-critical sector like aviation.

This year has already witnessed tragic incidents, including an aircraft crash in Ahmedabad, helicopter accidents in Uttarakhand, and an ATC systems failure

Together, these point to systemic vulnerabilities. The current disruption offers the aviation ministry a crucial opportunity to conduct a comprehensive review and

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institute reforms. **BAL GOVIND | NOIDA**

Misuse of FRA: Undermining forest rights framework

From recognising ineligible encroachments to manipulating community forest rights, the law meant to protect vulnerable groups and safeguard forests is being bent and exploited. This misuse now threatens both conservation goals and the long-term credibility of India's forest rights framework







ARVIND **SINHA KUMAR JHA**

Although the Forest Survey of India, in its 2023 report, indicates an increasing trend in the country's forest cover, a major undisclosed ailment is affecting the heart of India's forest conservation efforts: the alleged widespread misuse of the Forest Rights Act (FRA), 2006. Apart from procedural irregularities and misreading of provisions noticed in the implementation of the FRA, the major and substantive issues are the recognition of post-2005 encroachments on forest land as Individual Forest Rights (IFR) for habitation or cultivation, and the massscale grant of management rights (named Community Forest Resource Rights, or CFRR, under the FRA Rules amended in 2012) in cases of grossly ineligible claims.

The pattern of misuse of the FRA was initially highlighted by the 2011 NC Saxena Committee Report. The Committee, an inter-ministerial body, raised serious concerns about the recognition of ineligible claims. It found evidence that "fresh encroachers, with business interests in forest lands", were manipulating the Act in states such as Maharashtra and Assam. The Committee pointed to specific instances of forest land being cleared after the cut-off date of December 13, 2005 in protected areas such as Kawal Sanctuary and Yaval Sanctuary, stressing that the FRA was never intended to be a "ploy to distribute national wealth of forest land to all claimants irrespective of their real legal eligibility". The FRA is meant exclusively for Forest Dwelling Scheduled Tribes (FDSTs) and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (OTFDs).

The Maharashtra Forest Department launched a detailed study in 2012 covering 35,044 finally approved Individual Forest Rights (IFR) cases, encompassing over 60,000 hectares of forest land across

The Department established a system using Cartosat-1 satellite images from 2005, 2007, and 2011, overlaid with GPS polygons delineating land parcels for each claim. Data on granted cases was available on the website of Maharashtra's Tribal Research and Training Institute (TRTI), which had developed and utilised a robust, transpar-



THE FACT ALSO REMAINS THAT **GENUINE** COMMUNITIES AND ELIGIBLE LANDS, SUCH AS SACRED **GROVES AND** COMMUNITY-OCCUPIED. **CUSTOMARILY AND RULE-BASED** MANAGED AREAS **AWAITING** FORMALISATION OF **THEIR** MANAGEMENT AND **GOVERNANCE** UNDER THE FRA, HAVE SIMPLY BEEN

> **BKP Sinha is Former PCCF.** UP and Arvind Kumar Jha is

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ent, and technology-driven verification system for comparing land-use status before and after the December 2005 cutoff date, documenting approximately 2.9 lakh polygons under IFR claims.

Despite this technological safety net based on satellite imagery, it was found that about 16 per cent of the studied cases were granted IFRs on lands that were clearly ineligible-being fully barren, treecovered, or a mixture of both, as seen in satellite images. More than 3,000 cases showing land-use change, specifically conversion to cultivation after the 2005 cut-off date, were also found to have been cleared as valid claims. Additionally, approximately 4 per cent of cleared claims exceeded the

maximum permissible limit of The Ministry of Tribal Affairs SINCE 1865

(MoTA) amended the FRA Rules in 2012, effectively downgrading the evidentiary value of satellite imagery. Such imagery, as well as other uses of technology, could thereafter be used only to "supplement" other forms of evidence and not as a replacement. Critics argue that this move prioritised subjective claims over reportedly discontinued their use, local governance envisioned by the FRA

Maharashtra's well-grounded system was not only derailed but the invaluable dataset of 2.9 lakh GPS polygons embedded in satellite imagery also reportedly became untraceable. Notably, in response to a requirement from the Forest Survey of India (FSI) for analysis in compliance with the Hon'ble Supreme Court's February 2019 order in Writ Petition (C) No. 109/2008, Maharashtra did not make the data available. With regard to eviction of encroachers, no state has initiated proceedings against those with rejected claims, and even the Hon'ble Supreme Court, on February 28, 2019, stayed its own eviction order within fifteen days.

The right to minor forest produce is mandated to be limited to the quantity traditionally collected The Pioneer by beneficiaries. However, the recognition process has been

misused to grant rights over the entire commercial MFP output and trade, often to Gram Sabhas, disregarding the heterogeneity and occupational diversity of their members. As a result, new intermediaries are emerging in states such as Maharashtra and Odisha. They operate as contractors in league with tendu leaf objective science. As a result, while many traders, while the intended empowerment states, including major ones such as of FDST and OTFD communities for Madhya Pradesh and Andhra Pradesh, resource conservation and democratic

is subverted. A similar atmosphere is being created in Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh to dismantle their federationbased systems

With regard to CFRRs, these are being illegally recognised almost unabated on government forest lands (such as Reserved or Protected Forests under working plans), even though their specified location is statutorily limited to "customary common forest land" or "community forest resource" as defined in the Act. Further, CFRRs are being granted to ineligible communities that do not meet the criteria under Section 3(1)(i), which requires proof of a traditional role in protection and conservation of the land under claim. Such grants to ineligible entities have been facil itated by amendments to the FRA Rules themselves, whereby the presence of even a few Scheduled Tribes or OTFDs qualifies a Gram Sabha to submit a claim. Shockingly, scrutiny of 80 randomly selected sanctioned cases from districts in Maharashtra and Chhattisgarh reveals that all are illegal recognitions. Meanwhile, genuine communities and eligible lands, such as sacred groves and customary rule-based managed areas awaiting formalisation under the FRA, have been excluded.

Unfortunately, misuse of the FRA has been continuously and systematically

ignored despite repeated complaints. Foresters objecting to ineligible claims in Sub-Divisional and District-level Committee meetings are often branded anti-tribal and persecuted. Pressurised, and frequently backed by political authorities and civil society, Committees tend to exceed the Act's provisions with impunity, without recognising that the long-term sustenance of forest rights depends on the sustainability of forest resources. While the MoTA issues regular instructions for reconsideration of rejected claims, it has never mandated scrutiny of approved claims, even on a sample basis. By reiterating that implementation responsibility lies with States and Union Territories, it overlooks the implication that reviewing rejected cases while ignoring illegally granted ones amounts to implicit permission for continued misuse.

Objective and verifiable scientific evidence must be treated as the primary defence against fraudulent claims, not merely a supplement to easily manipulated traditional evidence. The FRA Rules must therefore be amended to restore the high evidentiary value of satellite imagery and GPS data. The government, in accordance with Section 13 of the FRA, must demonstrate a genuine commitment to enforcing all existing laws.

Prosecution of powerful individuals misusing the FRA for land speculation or for harming the interests of genuine beneficiaries can act as a strong deterrent. While the Central Empowered Committee's recent action regarding alleged irregularities in IFRs granted to Podu cultivators in Telangana is welcome, rectifying errors requires significant resources and political neutrality. Comprehensive retraining must therefore be provided to Committee members to ensure strict implementation of the Act, and they must be held accountable for permitting demonstrably false claims.

The government should prioritise the establishment of a National Audit Mechanism for technology-based scrutiny of approved cases and cancellation of all illegally recognised rights. The MoTA, in collaboration with the FSI and the National Remote Sensing Centre (NRSC), must develop and maintain a centralised database to securely store GPS polygons and records of recognised claims nationwide. Given the scale of potential error, the FRA must not be allowed to undermine conservation laws or the rights of genuine. eligible forest dwellers.

Towards a home-grown knowledge ecosystem







KUNTALA

KARKUN India's Viksit Bharat aspiration by 2047 transcends traditional capital investment. While tangible infrastructure remains critical, the primary constraint to sustained, high-quality growth is the

knowledge ecosystem deficit. To successfully transition from a middle-income economy to a fully developed nation, India must aggressively cultivate a robust, home-grown intellectual infrastructure; one encompassing R&D, credible think tanks, advanced data infrastructure, and scalable domestic innovation capacity.

India's gross expenditure on R&D (GERD) remains persistently low at just 0.65 per cent of GDP; far below advanced economies such as the US and Germany (3 per cent), as well as emerging markets like China (2 per cent). This places India well under the global average of approximately 1.8 per cent, reflecting a structural underinvestment in innovation. This structural weakness is compounded by a profound imbalance: only about 5 per cent of India's R&D spending comes from the private sector, compared to

approximately 70 per cent in the US. While the 2025-26 Union Budget increased national R&D allocations to ₹61,028 crore, representing only 1.28 per cent of the Central Budget, the scale is still insufficient to trigger the kind of innovation acceleration India needs. The government's announcement of a ₹1 lakh crore Research Development and Innovation (RDI) Fund in 2025 could be transformative, but its impact will hinge on execution discipline and meaningful alignment with private-sector investment. For the fund to succeed, execution discipline must include transparent governance, mandated industry cofunding, and a focus on measurable outcomes tied to national priorities.

This chronic underinvestment depresses innovation output, technological absorption, and productivity growth. OECD studies show that a 1 per cent rise in business R&D increases productivity by approximately 0.13 per cent, and an equivalent increase in public R&D yields about 0.17 per cent productivity growth. If India does not correct its R&D deficit, it cannot realistically close its productivity gap with peer economies

India's innovation output has improved. Patent grants have grown fourfold, from 7,509 (2010-11) to 28,391 (2020-21), and patent applications have risen from approximately 39,400 to 58,500 (Economic Survey 2022). In 2023, India was among the fastest-growing patent origins globally (WIPO). The gap, though, remains large. India's patent portfolio is still only a small fraction of of high-quality publications come from fewer than 200 institutions, signalling an ecosystem that remains narrow, institutionally shallow, and highly concentrated. Yet India has proven that strategic investments

programme, built on modest budgets and indige-partnerships. nous capabilities, has delivered world-class missions such as Chandrayaan and Mangalyaan at a The Pioneer fraction of global costs. India's digital

public infrastructure (DPI) has revolutionised financial inclusion and service delivery and now serves as a model for developing nations worldwide. These successes demonstrate that when India invests in knowledge systems with clarity and commitment, the results can leapfrog conventional development paths. Talent

is not the constraint. Institutional depth is. A successful knowledge ecosystem requires more than isolated R&D labs; it needs the systemic translation of research into actionable policy and practice. Strong, independent domestic think tanks, policy centres, and data institutions are crit-

ical for: Contextualisation: Bridging the gap between academic research and on-the-ground implementation, generating timely, governance, which global firms often lack.

 Diffusion: Ensuring technology and best practices are adapted and diffused to MSMEs and lagging regions, mitigating the concentration of innovation within a few large firms or urban

 Intellectual sovereignty: Protecting India's development agenda from being shaped by foreign-funded or non-contextual research, and offering a cost-efficient alternative to large, protracted global consulting engagements for struc-

India's current policy research landscape remains fragmented. While NITI Aayog plays an important role in policy formulation, the broader ecosystem of independent think tanks and research institutions operates at a limited scale with constrained resources. Many rely heavily on external grants, limiting their ability to pursue long-term, strategic research agendas.

Global studies show that a 1 per cent increase in R&D intensity typically delivers a 0.13-0.17 per cent annual boost in productivity growth (OECD). Raising R&D spending could help India break into upper-middle-income bracket, strengthen industrial competitiveness, and power high-skill job creation in digital technology, biotechnology, artificial intelligence, and clean technology

To realise this vision, policymakers must act with long-term focus. Key steps should include: Raising R&D investment to globally compet-China's or the United States', and over 70 per cent itive levels. Set a clear national target for R&D

intensity; for example, gradually increasing from approximately 0.65 per cent to at least 2 per cent of GDP by 2047, with an increasing share from the private sector. This will require not only higher government outlays but also incentives yield transformative outcomes. ISRO's space such as tax credits, grants, and public-private

> Institutionalising long-term funding for domestic think tanks and policy research bodies. Create a dedicated Viksit Bharat Knowledge Fund or similar endowment, allowing multi-

year grants, seed funding for new institutions, and stable operating resources.

 Building a National Knowledge Ecosystem. Link universities, research institutes, think tanks, industry, and government into a network that facilitates research, innovation, technology transfer, policy formulation, and diffusion of knowledge, especially to MSMEs and lagging regions. Promoting technology diffusion beyond large firms. Provide support for smaller firms and regional enterprises to adopt or adapt technologies through subsidies, incubation, outreach, and technical assistance.

• Expanding the notion of a "domestic Big Four" beyond consulting firms. Encourage the emergence of large, credible, Indian-owned knowledge institutions and think tanks that can compete granular, India-focused participal foundation globally in consultancy, policy research, data for evidence-based Putting India First to Make India First data analytics, design, and technology transfer.

> India's CSR spending has grown sharply, from ₹26,278 crore in FY22 to ₹34,909 crore in FY24 (Bharat CSR Performance Report, 2024), yet less than 3 per cent of this pool supports research, policy, or knowledge infrastructure. Redirecting even 5-10 per cent of CSR funding towards knowledge creation-such as think tanks, public data systems, applied research labs, and digital public goods-would significantly strengthen India's intellectual capacity. In parallel, industry must deepen its own R&D investment by leveraging fiscal incentives, building in-house research capabilities, and expanding industry-academia collaboration. Together, these shifts would reduce dependence on imported technologies and external consulting, while building the longterm competitiveness required for India's inno-

> For India to become a developed nation, it must invest as much in brains, ideas, and institutions as in roads, ports, and industrial parks. Countries that mastered the knowledge game-South Korea, Germany, and Japan-used it to leapfrog into highgrowth, high-productivity, high-innovation economies. India's story must now follow that path. Viksit Bharat requires Viksit Buddhi; a developed nation needs developed minds. The time to build is now.

at Pahle India Foundation

Director at Pahle India @dailypioneer Foundation & Kuntala



KUMAR SINGH

Understanding the Yogi factor

The figure of Yogi Adityanath, Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh, invariably triggers a familiar, polarised debate. To his supporters, he is the 'Hindu Hriday Samrat', a decisive administrator who has restored order and pride. To his detractors, he is a deeply divisive communalist and a symbol of majoritarian assertion that undermines India's secular fabric. This binary, however, is a lazy and inadequate framework — a relic of an older political vocabulary that fails to capture the complexity of his political project. To understand Yogi Adityanath's enduring influence, one must look beyond the simplistic communal-versus-secular

His politics represents a far more sophisticated and potent synthesis: a unique blend of spiritual authority from the Gorakhnath Peeth, a strategic project of "subaltern Hindutva", and a governance model framed around "Lok Kalyan" (public welfare). This model is rooted in a politics of labharthi (beneficiary) and a law-and-order situation unimaginable in Uttar Pradesh before 2017. It fulfils a public craving not just for a normal life but for a quality of life that many felt was sacrificed under the previous guise of social justice. These elements converge into a powerful form of identity politics that is fundamentally reshaping the

At the core of Yogi Adityanath's identity is his role as the Mahant, or head priest, of the Gorakhnath Peeth.

This is not merely a religious title; it is the bedrock of his philosophical outlook and an autonomous source of political legitimacy. The Peeth, belonging to the Nath Panth tradition, carries a legacy of spiritual and temporal influence that predates modern political parties by centuries. This role grants him an authority insulated from the whims of party politics, setting him apart from career politicians. Crucially, the Peeth's ideology provides a philosophical bridge connecting the spiritual to the material.

The principle of 'Lok Kalyan' is central here. Adityanath articulates a vision in which spiritual values are not antithetical to material progress but are its very foundation. He has often stated that India's spiritual traditions provide a "moral compass to humanity", rooted in compassion and the principle of 'live and let live'. He argues that "spirituality, cultural advancement, and material development all require a safe, civilised, and clean environment". This philosophy allows him to seamlessly frame the construction of a temple and the building of an expressway as complementary, not contradictory, acts-both presented as sacred duties in the larger project of national reju-

venation. This refutes the Western-inspired dichotomy that separates the sacred from the profane, offering a holistic vision in which development is imbued with cultural and spiritual

Perhaps the most politically astute element of the Yogi model is its project of 'subaltern Hindutva'-a conscious effort to broaden the social base of Hindu nationalism beyond its traditional upper-caste anchor. This is a strategic move to dismantle the caste-based political fortresses of parties such as the Samajwadi Party and the Bahujan Samaj Party, whose politics of social justice gradually converted into fiefdoms of specific families and castes. This re-engineering operates on multiple fronts. First, there is the radical inclusivity historically associated with the Gorakhnath Peeth itself, an unorthodox institution known for its openness to lower castes.

Second, and more crucially, was the founding of the Hindu Yuva Vahini, an organisation that gave prominent positions and a sense of agency to youth from OBC and Dalit communities, alongside their mobilisation in the Ram Janmabhumi Andolan by his guru, Mahant Avaidyanath. This created a populist, often aggressive, form of 'non-Brahmin Hindutva'. It empowered non-dominant castes by tapping into their "anxieties and aspirations" — their desire for recognition and a share of power that they felt was denied to them by established 'social justice' parties. By offering a platform within a pan-Hindu identity, the Yogi model convinced a significant section of the subaltern electorate that their interests were better served by aligning with a majoritarian project than by remaining within caste-specific silos. This strategic inclusion is not about erasing

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caste but about subsuming it within a larger religious-political identity positioned against a perceived common 'other'.

This leads to the third pillar of his strategy: a distinct form of identity politics that constructs a pan-Hindu social coalition while positioning itself as a corrective to the "politics of appeasement", a term used to critique policies aimed at Muslim minorities. His discourse consistently contrasts this alleged appearement with his government's commitment to 'Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikas', reflected in his labharthi politics. The implicit-and often explicit-message is the dawn of a new era in which the majority community receives its due. This is identity politics on a grand scale, appealing to a sense of historical grievance and majoritarian entitlement. The success of this strategy is starkly evident in electoral outcomes. The BIP, under his leadership, secured a massive majority in the 2022 State Assembly elections without fielding a single Muslim candidate.

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

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index fell by 600 points. It was kind of unexpected since it had turned around its southward movement over the past few sessions. Once, the pundits began to explain the reasons behind the fall, there was a feeling of hollowness, and inexplicability about them. For example, one of the factors was the two-day meeting of the US Federal Reserve Board, which was expected to announce another minor rate cut. But then this was expected for weeks, and one thought that the stock markets, like it does with future expected events, had discounted it. Indeed, one of the reasons for the earlier rises was that the minor rate cut was unlikely to change things materially in the form of foreign outflows, which are turbo-charged when the US interest rates seem attractive, and the money flies to a safer less-risky

Another factor that the experts harped on was the fall of the rupee, and it having crossed the ₹90 mark against the dollar. One can partially accept it. But then again, the rupee breached ₹90 days ago, and has firmed up since then, or at least has not gone down further, as the Reserve Bank of India stepped in to support the currency. One thought that the investors would be enthused by the intervention. No one can say. Maybe they believe the doomsayers, who contend that it is a matter of when, and not if, for the rupee to fall to ₹100 a dollar. Maybe the investors were more concerned by the central bank's opinion, which chimed with that of the finance minister, rather than the former's actions. In the recent past, both maintained that they have no target for the rupee, and the currency needs to find its stable, steady, and appropriate level.

The stock markets are uncertain about the India-US trade deal, which has been delayed. Thus, they reacted to the growing apprehensions. One can flip this argument, and contend that an American delegation is on its way to New Delhi to discuss the tariffs. This is good news as it shows an urgency among the two nations. Indian ministers have repeatedly claimed that an agreement will be in place by December 2025 since most of the issues are finalised, and the two sides need to dot the i's, and cross the t's. Of course, the investors are peeved that the earlier deadline was November 2025. But that one passed more than a week ago. Why should the Sensex and Nifty crash on December 8? This factor seems to be a non-factor that was cooked up by some of the experts as a reasonable factor to provide some logic to the market madness on Monday.

Several analysts reiterated a view that the Indian valuations were overstretched. For several months, in fact this entire year, valuations were raised as a worry. This is one of the major reasons why the markets behaved so erratically during 2025, and Indian equities were among the worst performers among Asian peers, and emerging markets. Hence, a concern about a persistent past concern, which has shaken up investors for more than 11 months, cannot be a legitimate one to explain a one-day fall of 600 points. Another twisted logic: Same analysts say in the same breath that steady (domestic) inflows, and long-term retail participation suggest continued optimism. In addition, high valuations may persist, supported by investor confidence, and consistent domestic equity inflows. Please explain clearly whether valuations are stretched or not, whether investors will sell to book profits or not, or whether the high valuations do not matter because of the steady inflows. We are suitably confused.

To add to the confusion and uncertainty, the stock markets went down on Monday because of the steady outflows by foreign investors. For months, and throughout this year, the foreigners have proved to be net sellers in the secondary market. Yet, they have aggressively participated in the IPOs (Initial Public Offerings), which provides clear hints that they feel the listed stocks are overvalued, and there are chances to earn higher returns on new stocks. But again, this trend is evident for the past several months, and is nothing new. It is not that on Monday the foreigners dumped the stocks. One can add this as a factor if the Indian equities had consistently gone down due to this regularly-occurring trend. But stocks went up in the past few sessions, and the same analysts remarked that this was the great turnaround, which would push the Sensex past 1,00,000 points by December 2026. Moreover, one is unsure which section is more important, foreigners or domestic investors.

At one level, the net selling by the foreigners pulls down the market indices. At another, there is a feeling that valuations will remain stretched because of huge domestic inflows. There is a tussle between the two, and one is not sure who will win. Both cannot, or maybe they can. The foreigners will book profits, and the locals will take valuations to higher levels to book profits later. A clear win-win.



Marathon, steeplechase & sprint

In the third global business race, India is fast losing to China

It was a manufacturing marathon. While India and China were the favourites, South Korea, \$1.25 billion to a Chinese biotech firm for the Taiwan, and Brazil were the dark horses. India lost, China won, and the smaller Asian nations stood on the podium. In the steeplechase in the software and hardware space, India and China are the joint winners. The former vaulted over the oceans to emerge as the world's IT leader, and China overcame the obstacles to directly compete with the US in chips, and Artificial Intelligence. In the ongoing healthcare sprint, while China is about to touch the tape, India has not even left the blocks.

Until a few years ago, 'Big Pharma' in the West focused on the discovery and launches of billion-dollar blockbuster drugs, India became the global supplier of generics (off-patent medicines), and China mastered the science of Active Pharma Ingredients (APIs). Today, after America, China is the world's largest developer of new molecules and drugs. According to a recent article in 'The Economist,' Chinese firms conducted a third of the global clinical trials last year and, in the first six months of 2025, they were responsible for a third of the licensing deals signed by 'Big Pharma.'

Over the next decade, the battles in areas such as biosciences, medical research, and discovery of life-saving medicines (cancer) will be aggressively fought between China and America. India is more likely to pursue its generics journey, and take advantage of the steep 'patent cliffs,' "as drugs expected to generate more than \$300 billion in total revenues over the next six years will lose their patent protection by 2030. Yet again, India will be left behind in this third global race. Americans and Europeans, who will intensify their global searches for new molecules, will

rights to make-and-sell a new cancer drug. GlaxoSmithKline of Britain paid \$500 million to another Chinese firm for lung-disease treatment, and unbelievably committed a further \$12 billion for 11 drugs in the pipeline. China's share in global licensing has gone up four times in four years. In comparison, except for a small oasis of new discoveries, India is way behind despite a slew of ongoing clinical trials.
Like the Indian market, the

Chinese one is rugged, and difficult. Both are price-sensitive, with political and social pressures to enable the poor to access the medicines. In **SINCE 1865** China, "state insurance covers most

purchases," which forces private firms into "bidding wars." Drugmakers need to "slash prices by half or more to reach a wide patient pool." Hence, it made sense for the Chinese, as well as Indians, to work with generics, which are cheaper. India extended the business model in the overseas markets, either by exporting, or setting up generics' plants in the West. China chose differently.

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In conjunction with the policy-makers, Chinese firms looked at America and Europe as "big prizes," or markets where they could sell new drugs, rather than continue to export generics or APIs. They decided to boost research, and ink licensing agreements with 'Big Pharma' to boost profits, and margins. According to the article in The Economist,' "A growing model is the 'New-Co,' under which a biotech company sets up a legally distinct company in America, often backed by foreign investors, and spins off promising assets into it." Since 'Big Pharma'

Governance models make a huge difference. In the recent past, India has struggled with clinical trials due to irregularities, even illegality, which were highlighted by the judiciary, and activists. These rightfully delayed, and derailed them. In China, the period to secure human trials shrank from more than 500 days to less than 90. Unlike India, the workforce at China's regulator quadrupled, and cleared a backlog of 20,000 drug applications within two years. Despite reforms, Indian drugmakers continue to complain about

red tape. In a sense, China has reinvented regulation. One is not sure if it is for better or worse, but it has speeded up the approval processes. Of course, given the existing secu-

rity, economic, energy, business, defence, and trade tensions between China and the West, China's regulatory framework is being questioned and scrutinised. The US drug regulator is stricter when it deals with medicines based on clinical trials only in China. There are concerns about data security, and data privacy. The US halted trials that exported American genetic data to China. The US policy-makers, states the piece in 'The Economist,' "fret about

This explains the Indians' penchant to make generics in America through the inorganic M&A route. China innovated to produce "fast followers," which enhance the safety and/or delivery of the existing drugs. The next step was to move on to the "first-in-class" medicines, which have proteins or genes, or mechanisms to boost functions. The first, according to experts, provided the firms with the courage to do the second. This led to the making of new drugs. For example, according to a media report, of the 160 obesity drugs in development across the world, a third are being made in China.

the security risks at the junction of pharmaceuticals and biotechnology." India faces some of

these challenges as the US questions its drug-effi-

India has the potential for drug discoveries. The skills, management, and research were evident during the pandemic, when India emerged as a leading drugmaker, and a low-cost exporter. But this was due to the help from the Government, which cajoled and pushed the private sector. Similar impetus lacks in other cases, and Indian firms are generally happy with their march in the generics segment. They are low-hanging fruits, with ample margins, especially when they are sold in the US and Europe. In most cases, Indian firms lack the risk-taking abilities to spend billions on a new discovery.

However, as of now, China, which won the manufacturing race comfortably, and raced ahead in chips and AI, is comfortably placed in healthcare and biosciences. India needs to build an efficient ecosystem to achieve similar results. It has the right ingredients such as scientific temper, cheap manpower, research and manufacturing units, and government support. What it requires is access to foreign capital, and a change in entrepreneurial mindset so that producers switch from off-patent mentality to new-patent one.



The Cynical Optimist

Even as IndiGo Airline grounds flights, passen gers go crazy, regulators take refuge behind inquiries, pilots blame managers, and the country's civil aviation sector goes for a six, the central minister, K Rammohan Naidu claims that this is the best "time to start an airline in India." He adds that the country needs "five big airlines," and the ministry encourages competition, and wants "more airlines to join the industry" with the Government's support. He predicts that the demand is likely to grow at a rapid pace in the future. While the desires are noble, the in-air realities are turbulent.

Of course, there is a difference between a need, desire, or wish, and what the market dynamics can accommodate. In the past three decades, each time, the Indian skies became competitive, airlines either nosedived, and crashed, or found it difficult to take off, and were forced into a competitor's lap. Despite the growing demand, competition curtailed ticket prices, and profitability which, in turn, ended up killing competition. Thus, closures, mergers, and acquisitions became the regular norms in the aviation sector. Higher the number of airlines, the more the pressures that grounded them.

Not just this but each time an airline attained a dominant position vis-à-vis domestic market share, the cost structures ate into its financials, which bankrupted it, or forced it on the auction block. Look at Jet Airways, which ruled the skies, and was sold under the insolvency laws. Sahara and Deccan aimed big, and flew into competitor's hangars. The state-owned Indian Airlines, and Air India were prisoners of their monopolistic successes, until they were merged, and then sold to the Tata Group. Today, the largest airline, IndiGo, faces a similar situation, and critics blame its seemingly-successful business model as the reason for its problems.

Globally, airlines grapple with volumes, costs, market shares, apart from the impact of policies and regulations on them. Volumes are obviously critical but they cannot be universal, national, or international. The trick is to acquire passengers on select, highly-profitable, and fast-churning routes. For example, domestically, Delhi-Mumbai, Bangalore-Delhi, and local regional routes are more coveted given the number of passengers who travel to these cities. Internationally, Delhi-London, Delhi-Hong Kong, and India-US journeys are crowded, and desired by the airlines. Getting overall volumes, as national share is irrele-

However, volumes imply huge one-time investments, and capital costs to buy and

India goes, India grounded

Why does competition invariably crash in the aviation sector?



acquire aircraft. In most cases, the planes are purchased before the demand increases, which create a lag time before the investments pay off. Despite the lucrative financeand-lease deals offered by the manufacturers, airlines can find themselves in a tailspin, and get stuck in financial air-pockets. Several airlines are in trouble because either they buy too many planes, and are forced to operate them on low-profit routes, or buy too less, and lose volumes, and market shares on highprofit ones. It is a delicate balance that keeps changing, and needs to be tweaked.

Thus, the levers to control and manage costs fall on manpower since most other expenses are necessary, and continuous. This

forces even the dominant and successful airlines, or rather only these ones, to short-circuit salaries and benefits. This implies that they understaff certain areas,

overwork others, and underpay most. This creates a vice-like cycle of safety concerns combined with apathy and unhappiness among the employees. Morale is down, even as the senior management claims profitability over a few years. The medium-term for another nine per cent of the revenues.

impact is quite like what happened to IndiGo. Policies, regulations, and external non-controllable factors play a part. For instance, the global prices of crude oil and, hence, aviation fuel fluctuates, and eats into profits. In several quarters, IndiGo went from profits to losses, largely because of the prices of aviation fuel. Sudden policy changes impact operational and business models, especially for low-cost airlines. Regulations can create havoc, and force the planes to fly off the radar. The flight-schedule rules imposed by the regulator after the recent crash in Ahmedabad apparently forced Indigo's delays, and cancellations. The low-cost structure spun out of control, which was blamed

on management errors. According to experts, aviation fuel accounts for 20-30 per cent of the total costs, and the prices can be highly-volatile. Leased engines, and aircraft result in "significant

charges, and navigation fees, which account

fixed monthly rent payment," which is around 16 per cent of the revenues. Add the various taxes such as landing fees, gate Under such a rigid structure, regular socalled fixed expenses can account for almost 60-70 per cent of the costs, not revenues. There is little leeway for the airlines

to immediately counter shifting changes. Profit margins are wafer-thin despite high volumes, or market shares. During competition, there are downward pressures on ticket prices. This happens even when there is minimal competition as the airlines scamper to sell more seats on relatively-low traffic routes. Unexpected events like wars and pandemics, policy and regulation changes, and economic slowdowns can rapidly change things. "This pushes down profit margins to low levels, typically 2-5 per cent globally, which makes it different to absorb financial shocks, or support high capital investments." It is a typical catch-22 situation. You need to spend more to grab volumes. This creates cost pressures.

Consider the case of Southwest Airlines, which faced a huge crisis during the winter holiday season in the US in 2022. While other airlines recovered from the severe winter effect within days, Southwest went south for days and weeks. It was its unique and, till then, highly successful business and operational model that was unable to react to the new unusual challenges. According to a case study (2024), the IndiGo-like crisis, which led to the cancellations of thousands of flights, "provides an opportunity to dig deeply into the need for scalability, challenges of risk management... and the wide variety of challenges of managing airline supply chains.'

Concludes the same case study, "Airlines are not easy businesses to run. They are capital and labour intensive, they are subject to impact from weather, politics, public health, and other unexpected issues. And they are competitive, seeking not only to provide good price and performance for customers but also an appropriate yield for every seat on the plane, and to keep planes in the air, and generate revenues." Thus, competition, and five airlines, as the civil aviation minister desires, may be the wrong solution for the wrong pinpointed problems. IndiGo did not crash because of lack of competition. It could not take off because of its straitjacketed business model.

The Pioneer Bhubaneswar | Tuesday | December 9, 2025

The real AI revolution in banking: Decision packs, not algorithms



SUNDAR SUNDARARAJAN

Rethinking the race in banking

For nearly a decade, the financial industry has been obsessed with the wrong race. Banks have focused on who can deploy the smartest models, the fastest algorithms, or the most advanced AI platforms. Yet the real transformation underway is not about faster predictions or more complex math. It is about making better decisions.

The competitive frontier is shifting. Success is no longer determined by model accuracy alone. Predictions only hold value when paired with context and alerts only matter when they contribute to decisions that are consistent, defensible and trusted. In banking today, AI is no longer a race for speed-it is a race to prevent breakdowns before they occur.

The limits of model-only thinking

Banking operates in deeply interconnected environments. Every customer interaction, exception case and transaction activates a web of operational decisions that must work seamlessly. Models can detect anomalies at scale, but without institutional context, they rest on assumptions that can quickly unravel under real-world pressures

The risk is rarely a single bad decision. It is the gaps between systems, where incomplete or contradictory information can slip through unnoticed. A customer's cash flow in the core system may suggest stability, while transaction history hints at stress. Branch notes, call-center transcripts and chat interactions add further fragments, rarely reconciled. When AI is applied on top of unchanged processes, it magnifies inconsistencies rather than correcting them, making operational cracks increasingly costly as pilots

Al works-but only with context

Modern AI excels at pattern recognition, anomaly detection, document interpretation, and structured data triage. McKinsey estimates generative AI could unlock between 200 and 340 billion dollars annually for global banking-but only where context already exists. Early successes are seen where structured data is available, single-customer views are real and workflows are intentionally redesigned to integrate AI inputs, rather than patched superficially.

A striking example comes from HSBC. Their Alpowered transaction-screening engine now



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processes more than 900 million transactions per month, identifying more suspicious activity while reducing false positives. The real breakthrough was not the algorithm itself, but pairing detection with structured decision packs and audit-ready trails. By consolidating history, evidence, exceptions and reason codes into a sequenced context pack, analysts can focus on informed decision-making instead of unraveling contradictions. This approach also addresses regulatory concerns over undocumented overrides a systemic weakness that decision packs directly resolve.

The enduring role of human judgment

Even the most sophisticated AI models stumble when faced with intent, ethical considerations, rare events, market shocks or adversarial behavior. Humans, however, excel at interpreting nuance and cross-domain context. Yet humans alone cannot sustain consistent. auditable decisions at scale. Judgment becomes evidence, transparent lineage and clear or routing anomalies. The human officer adds at the right moment.

operational controls-the very artifacts AI can provide at speed and volume.

The emerging hybrid model blends both capabilities. Al aggregates, alerts, summarises, and contextualises information, while humans are routed to the right decision at the right moment, applying ethics, accountability and experience. Automation does not replace judgment; it restores the conditions for good judgment to prevail.

Decision packs: engineering context into workflows

Leading banks are moving beyond delivering raw alerts to analysts. They are creating decision packs-structured, sequenced bundles of information delivered precisely when a decision is required. These packs weave together customer history, channel behavior, transaction patterns, risk flags, documents, prior actions and reason codes into a coherent, actionable view.

In trade finance, for example, AI might flag reliable only when supported by structured irregular document signatures, sanctions-list hits,

trends, geopolitical insights and country risk into the decision-making process. The resulting decision is informed, defensible, timely and aligned with policy. Context-aware banking transforms the question from "What does the model say?" to "What does the model say within the full context the institution can recover and verify?" This shift closes the gaps that historically caused inconsistency, omission and operational fragility.

Operating models matter more than models

Across the industry, there is growing consensus: the operating model-how decisions are designed, governed, and executed-delivers far more value than the model architecture itself. Banks that extract the most value from AI maintain auditable override controls, human-inloop workflows, strong data lineage cross-channel decision rights and scalable accountability. In practice, a model contributes perhaps ten to twenty percent of value, while the remaining eighty to ninety percent comes from how decisions are operationalized. Al cannot fix broken workflows, but effective workflows make Al meaningful.

Fewer contextless decisions, not faster decisions

Banks do not simply need faster decision-making. They need fewer decisions made in the absence of context. The purpose of Al is not to replace bankers but to remove the breakdowns that force decisions to be made using incomplete fragments.

Forward-looking institutions are designing systems where ledgers record not only the model output, but also the decision pack, the human override and the governance trail. This creates a future where decisions are explainable, repeatable and trusted at scale.

The future: Al-assisted, context-rich, human-governed banking

The real revolution is subtle but profound. It is not AI replacing bankers; it is AI replacing the conditions that constrained them for decades. Banks that embrace decision packs will achieve consistent decision-making at scale, strengthen regulatory defensibility, reduce operational fragility, unlock deeper predictive intelligence, and build enduring trust with customers and regulators.

The path ahead is clear. The banks that will thrive in the AI era will not be those with the fastest algorithms. They will be the ones capable of making the best decisions, armed with context, evidence and human judgment

Labour codes: Legally accurate, socially transformative, and politically defining. A landmark reform of the Modi era



ASEERVATHAM **ACHARY**

India, that is Bharat had long been burdened by laws created during the British regime, shaped by a colonial mentality that openly viewed Bharatiyas as their slaves and servants. Those laws were never meant to empower the people of this land.

They were crafted only to safeguard the interests of foreign rulers and to keep the native population dependent, restricted and voiceless. For decades, Bharat waited for a Government with the conviction to break free from these outdated colonial structures. This long pending transformation became possible only under the Modi Government, which has consistently delivered bold decisions, structural reforms and governance that truly serves the nation.

In the past decade, the Modi Government has brought a historic reform package that has reshaped the governance landscape of India, making it simpler, transparent and friendly for innovation and growth. More than 40000 unnecessary compliances have been abolished, around 1500 obsolete laws have been repealed and several existing regulations have been streamlined to reduce the burden on citizens, businesses and startups.

Through legislative action, more than a dozen laws have been simplified. Around 280 provisions have been removed to make governance more accessible and citizen centric. These reforms are fully aligned with the vision of Atmanirbhar Bharat and the goal of making India a developed nation by 2047.

Taking this reform journey to the next level, the Modi Government has now implemented the four Labour Codes from 21 November 2025. These Codes replace 29 scattered and confusing laws with one modern, clear and worker friendly framework. For the first time, India has a labour system that supports today's economy, today's workforce and tomorrow's aspirations. It gives workers better protection, ensures fair wages, improves safety and strengthens industries so India can compete globally.

This change was long overdue. Most of our old labour laws were written even before Independence viz., Workmen's Compensation Act, 1923, Indian Trade Unions Act, 1926, Trade Disputes Act, 1929, Industrial

Act, 1946, etc. The economy changed, industries changed, technology changed, but those laws remained frozen in the past. Workers suffered. Employers struggled. Compliance became a maze. The new Labour Codes finally break

Employment (Standing Orders)

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this cycle and bring India into a new era of simple rules and honest governance.

A broad range of benefits across sectors

The new Labour Codes bring clear, future ready protections for workers across every sector of the economy. Fixed term employees now receive the same benefits as permanent staff including leave, medical cover and social security, with gratuity eligibility reduced from five years to one. Gig and platform workers get formal recognition for the first time, with aggregators contributing to their social security and Aadhaar linked UAN ensuring portable benefits

Contract workers gain transparent protection, social security and health coverage from principal employers, along with annual free health check-ups. Women workers are assured equal pay, protection from discrimination and the freedom to work night shifts and in all sectors with full safety and consent. Youth workers benefit from guaranteed

minimum wages, mandatory appointment letters and wages during leave.

The Labour Codes mark a historic step in modernising India's workforce by aligning with international standards on wages, gender equality and occupational safety. Over 2.78 million workers die globally each year from occupational accidents and diseases, highlighting the relevance of OSH

provisions in the Codes. MSME workers receive minimum wages, safe working conditions, double overtime wages and timely salary payments. Beedi and cigar workers are protected with fixed working hours, double overtime rates and bonus eligibility after thirty days. Plantation workers receive mandatory safety training, medical facilities for families and

education support for children. Audio visual and digital media workers including journalists and artists get clear wage structures, appointment letters and social security. Mining workers are protected under national safety standards, receive free annual health including transgender persons.

check-ups and regulated working hours. In hazardous industries. annual medical tests and safety committees are mandatory. Women are empowered to work safely even high-risk environments.

Textile and migrant workers receive equal wages, PDS portability and protection for pending dues. IT and ITES workers get timely salaries, equal pay, social security and strong grievance redressal. Dock workers gain formal recognition along with provident fund, pension, insurand workplace facilities.

Additional transformative reforms under the labour

A national floor wage now guarantees that every worker receives a dignified minimum earning ensuring uniform protection across the country. Gender neutral job opportunities and wages have been emphasised extending equal rights and safeguards to all workers

To replace outdated inspection systems an inspector cum facilitator model has been introduced focusing on guidance and compliance support rather than fear and harassment. Disputes will now be resolved in a time bound manner through two member calling it an important Industrial Tribunals giving step toward stronger social workers and employers faster and predictable outcomes.

Paperwork has been simplified through single registration, single licence and single return replacing the earlier system of multiple overlapping filings. Workplace safety has also been strengthened with the creation of a National OSH Board to ensure uniform safety standards across sectors. Mandatory safety committees in major establishments further enhance accountability and on site protection.

Higher factory applicability limits ensure that smaller units are not overburdened by excessive regulations while core safeguards for workers remain fully intact. These reforms collectively reflect a clear commitment to worker dignity, workplace safety and smoother industrial operations.

Labour codes: modernising workplaces and empowering MSMEs

The new Labour Codes bring clarity, transparency and digitisation to India's labour framework. Clear rules on contract labour, retrenchment and fixed-term employment will reduce disputes and help MSMEs formalise previously informal arrangements. Mandatory appointment letters, wage linkages to the national floor and timely payments encourage proper records and digital payroll adoption.

Recognition of fixed-term employment provides flexibility for project or seasonal work while ensuring wage and benefit parity, including gratuity after one year. Expanded ESIC, EPF and insurance coverage for casual, fixed-term, gig, platform and hazardous sector workers strengthens social security for all.

Provisions on safety, welfare and timely wages are expected to improve workplace conditions, raise morale and create a more motivated workforce. Experts note that these reforms will lead to structured, predictable and cooperative labour management, benefiting both workers and businesses.

Global backing for India's labour codes

The Director General of the International Labour Organisation praised India's decision to implement the four Labour Codes, protection and fair wage systems. He emphasised that social dialogue between the Government, employers and workers will play a key role in ensuring positive outcomes for both labour and industry.

The International Social Security Association also welcomed the reforms, stating that India's Labour Codes add powerful momentum to global efforts for building stronger and more inclusive social security systems. ISSA highlighted that India's initiative strengthens global progress toward wider coverage, better protection and stronger institutional capacity.

Opposing for the sake of opposing

The Opposition's stand against these reforms is baseless and unjustified. Their poster marches and dramatic protests are nothing more than political theatrics designed to manufacture issues where none exist. These reforms have been thoughtfully drafted to protect workers' interests and to strengthen Bharat's workforce. It is difficult to comprehend why the Opposition is resisting measures that clearly benefit the nation.

Do they not want Bharat's workers to have stable and secure employment? Do they not want gig workers, platform workers and contract workers to receive the protections they deserve?

Do they not want women and youth to receive equal pay for equal work? Do they not want workers to access gratuity, health support and social security?

Do they not want our labour force to become more skilled and our economy to grow faster? What exactly are they protesting? Only they can answer, because their objections clearly do not align with national interest.

Despite the opposition raised by the Left supported Trade Unions, Modi Government has delivered reforms that will protect workers, will formalise jobs and will strengthen the workforce while enabling businesses to grow, proving its commitment to a modern and prosperous India.

FROM THE

Coup leader missing

The apparent leader of a failed coup in Benin was on the run and the fate of hostages remained unclear a day after a group of soldiers attempted to overthrow the Government of the West African nation. The soldiers calling themselves the Committee for Refoundation stormed the national television station early Sunday morning. Led by Benin army officer Lt. Col. Pascal

Tigri, eight soldiers

appeared in a broadcast

announcing the removal of

President Patrice Talon, dissolution of the Government and suspension of all state institutions. By Sunday afternoon, the coup was foiled by Benin's military, supported by Nigerian air and ground forces, which launched a series of attacks against fleeing mutineers. At least a dozen soldiers were arrested while others

TURKEY

remained at large Monday.

Officer killed in drug raid

A police officer died on Monday after being shot and seriously wounded during an early morning drug raid in Istanbul, Turkish officials said. Officer Emre Albayrak died of his wounds in a hospital. He was part of a special operations team carrying out the raid in the Cekmekoy district on Istanbul's Asian side. "Our police officer Emre Albayrak, who was

seriously injured in a narcotics operation in the Cekmekoy district, could not be saved despite all interventions in the hospital to which he was taken and became a martyr," the Istanbul Governor's Office said in a statement.

The man who opened fire on police was killed, and two other suspects were detained, the office said. Turkiye has experienced a rise in drug-related crime in recent years. There was a 23 per cent rise in drugrelated incidents last year.

Zelenskyy hasn't read US peace proposal: Trump **ASSOCIATED PRESS** ■ Kyiv

President Donald Trump on Sunday claimed Ukrainian Volodymyr President Zelenskyy "hasn't read" a US-authored peace proposal aimed at ending the Russia-

Trump was critical of Zelenskyy after US and Ukrainian negotiators completed three days of talks on Saturday aimed at trying to narrow differences on the US administration's proposal. But in an exchange with reporters on Sunday night, Trump suggested that the Ukrainian leader is holding up the talks from moving forward.

"I'm a little bit disappointed that President Zelenskyy hasn't yet read the proposal, that was as of a few hours ago. His people love it. But he hasn't — Russia's fine with it.' Trump told reporters on the red carpet at the Kennedy Center Honors. "Russia is, I believe, fine with it, but I'm not sure that Zelenskyy's fine with it. His people love it, but he hasn't read it."

Putin also hasn't publicly expressed approval for the White House plan. In fact, Putin last week had said that aspects of Trump's proposal were unworkable, even though the original draft heavily favoured Moscow.

Trump has had a hot-andcold relationship with Zelenskyy since riding into a second White House term insisting that the war was a waste of US taxpayer money. Trump has also repeatedly urged the Ukrainians to cede land to Russia to bring an end to a now nearly four-year conflict he says has cost far too many lives. Zelenskyy said Saturday

he had a "substantive phone call" with the American officials engaged in the 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

"Ukraine is determined to keep working in good faith with the American side to genuinely achieve



peace," Zelenskyy wrote on social media.

Trump's criticism of Zelenskyy came as Russia on Sunday welcomed the Trump administration's new national security strategy in comments by the Kremlin spokesman published by

Russia's Tass news agency. Dmitry Peskov said the

updated strategic document, which spells out the administration's core foreign policy interests, was largely in line with Moscow's vision.

"There are statements there against confrontation and in favour of dialogue and building good relations," he said, adding that Russia and that ending the war is a hopes this would lead to

"further constructive cooperation with Washington on the Ukrainian settlement."

The document released Friday by the White House said the US wants to improve its relationship with Russia after years of Moscow being treated as a global pariah core US interest to "reestablish strategic stability with

Speaking on Saturday at the Reagan National Defense Forum, Trump's outgoing Ukraine envoy, Keith Kellogg, said efforts to end the war were in "the last 10 meters."

He said a deal depended on the two outstanding issues of "terrain, primarily the Donbas," and the Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power

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

The Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant is in an area that has been under Russian control since early in Moscow's invasion of Ukraine and is not in service.

It needs reliable power to cool its six shutdown reactors and spent fuel, to avoid any catastrophic nuclear incidents.

Kellogg, who is due to leave his post in January, was not present at the talks

Separately, officials said the leaders of the United Kingdom, France and Germany would participate in a meeting with Zelenskyy in London on Monday.

As the three days of talks wrapped up, Russian missile, drone and shelling attacks overnight and Sunday killed at least four people in Ukraine.

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"

Ukraine President visits London for peace talks ASSOCIATED PRESS ■ London

President Volodymyr Zelenskyy was meeting the French, German and British leaders in London on Monday as Kyiv's European allies try to strengthen Ukraine's hand in thorny talks on a USbacked plan to end the Russia-Ukraine war. Prime Minister Keir Starmer

was due to gather with Zelenskyy, Emmanuel Macron and Chancellor Friedrich Merz at the British leader's 10 Downing St. Residence. Zelenskyy said late Sunday

that his talks with European leaders this week in London and Brussels will focus on security, air defence and longterm funding for Ukraine's war effort. The leaders are working to

ensure that any ceasefire is backed by solid security guarantees, both from Europe and the US, to deter Russia from attacking again. US and Ukrainian negotia-

tors completed three days of talks on Saturday aimed at trying to narrow differences on the US administration's peace proposal. Zelenskyy said in a post on

Telegram that talks had been



British Prime Minister Keir Starmer (left), Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy (centre) and French President Emmanuel Macron (right) meeting at 10 Downing Street in London

"substantive" and that National Security and Defence Council Secretary Rustem Umerov and Chief of the General Staff Andrii Hnatov were travelling back to Europe to brief him.

A major sticking point in the proposal is the suggestion that Ukraine must cede control of its eastern Donbas region to Russia, which illegally occupies most but not all of the territory. Ukraine

and its European allies have baulked at the idea of handing over land.

Starmer said he "won't be putting pressure" on Zelenskyy to accept a peace settlement. "The most important thing

is to ensure that if there is a cessation of hostilities, and I hope there is, it has to be just and it has to be lasting, which is what we will be focused on this afternoon," he told broadcaster ITV.

In an exchange with reporters on Sunday night, US President Donald Trump appeared frustrated with Zelenskyy, claiming the Ukrainian leader "hasn't yet read the proposal.'

"Russia is, I believe, fine with it, but I'm not sure that Zelenskyy's fine with it,' Trump said before taking part in the Kennedy Centre Honours in Washington.

Top EU official warns US against interfering in Europe's affairs

ASSOCIATED PRESS Brussels

A top European Union official on Monday warned the United States against interfering in Europe's affairs and said only European citizens can decide which parties should govern them.

European Council President Antonio Costa's remarks came in reaction to the Trump administration's new national security strategy, which was published on Friday and paints European allies as weak while offering tacit support to far-right political parties.

It's "good" that the strategy depicts European countries as an ally, but "allies don't threaten to interfere in the domestic political choices of their allies," Costa

"What we can't accept is the threat of interference in European political life. The United States cannot replace European citizens in choosing what the good or the bad parties are," he said in Paris at the Jacques Delors Institute, a think tank. The strategy was critical of

European free speech and



migration policy. US allies in Europe face the "prospect of civilizational erasure," the document said, raising doubts about their longterm reliability as American partners.

But Costa, who chairs summits of the 27 national EU leaders, said Europe's "history has taught us that you can't have freedom of speech without freedom of information.

The former Portuguese prime minister also warned there will never be free speech if the freedom of information of citizens is

sacrificed for the aims of the tech oligarchs in the United States.' The security strategy is

the administration's first since President Donald Trump returned to office in January. It breaks starkly from the course set by President Joe Biden's Democratic administration. which sought to reinvigorate US alliances.

It comes as the US seeks an end to Russia's nearly 4year-old war in Ukraine, a goal that the national security strategy says is in America's vital interests.

Nepal's Home Minister Aryal seeks cooperation to conduct free, fair elections

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA < Kathmandu

Nepal's Home Minister Om Prakash Aryal on Monday said that the Government is committed to institutionalising democracy as he sought cooperation from all stakeholders to conduct the next year's general elections in a free, fair and fearless manner.

"The effective implementation of human rights is possible only when democracy is strengthened, as democracy and human rights are interdependent," Aryal said while addressing the inaugural ceremony of the 17th Human Rights National Magna Meet 2025 in Lalitpur district.

In the present context, the Government is committed to institutionalising democracy, he said.

The minister sought cooperation from all stakeholders to conduct the upcoming



general elections in a free, fair and fearless manner.

Aryal underscored the need for a logical conclusion to the Transitional Justice Process, both relating to the decade-long Maoist insurgency and the recent Gen Z movement that toppled the KP Oli-led Government in September.

As human rights are the backbone of any civilised, inclusive and democratic society, the first duty of the Government is to ensure

freedom, equality and security of the people, he said.

Since the Gen Z organised protests in September against impunity, corruption and lack of good governance, it is the duty of the caretaker Government formed as per the mandate of the Gen Z group to crack down on corruption, impunity and nepotism, besides holding the general election on March 5, 2026, said human rights activist Charan Prasai.

Greenland holds Annual talks with US after takeover buzz

ASSOCIATED PRESS ■ Nuuk (Greenland)

Greenland is hosting annual meetings with US officials to discuss bilateral ties at the end of a year in which US President Donald Trump ramped up talk of a US takeover of the mineral-rich island that is a semiautonomous territory of Denmark.

The meeetings starting Monday will include a bilateral "joint committee" meeting between Greenland and US officials that will discuss cooperation "in a number of important areas," according to a statement from Greenland's Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Science.

A separate "permanent committee" meeting will involve the Danish Government. Similar meetings were held last vear in the United States.

ASSOCIATED PRESS ■ Cairo

The head of the World Health Organisation said on Monday that the death toll from drone strikes on a kindergarten and other sites in Sudan's Kordofan state last week is now at 114 people killed, including 63 children.

WHO said there were three separate drone strikes on Kagoli last Thursday. The first targeted the kindergarten, and the subsequent strikes targeted paramedics as they were transporting the survivors to a hospital. The death toll was not immediately clear at the time, in part due to communications outages.

Dr Tedros Ghebreyesus, the director of the WHO, said on X that the organisation "deplores these senseless attacks on civilians and health facilities, and calls again for an end to the violence, and increased access



114 people were killed, including 63 children,

to humanitarian aid, including health."

The Sudan Doctors' Network and Emergency Lawyers, groups that track violence against civilians in Sudan, blamed the Rapid Support Forces paramilitary, also known as the RSF, for the strikes.

In a statement Saturday, Emergency Lawyers called the attack "a flagrant violation of international humanitarian law, including the protection of civilians, especially children, and vital civilian infrastructure."

The strikes come amid a two-year war between the RSF and the Sudanese military. More than 40,000 people have been killed to date, according to the World Health Organisation, and 12 million displaced. However, aid groups warn that the true death toll is likely far higher.

The battle is now concentrating on the oil-rich Kordofan region, after the RSF took over the last military stronghold, el-Fasher, in Darfur, in western Sudan.

The takeover of el-Fasher by the RSF has been marred by violence. There have been reports of executions of civilians, rapes and sexual assaults, and other atrocities. Over 100,000 people have fled since the takeover, according to the UN

Migration agency. The UN human rights chief, Volker Turk, warned last week that Kordofan could face new atrocities like those in el-Fasher.

The humanitarian situation in the Kordofan region is worsening as famine is also spreading after more than two years of the devastating

Famine was declared last month in the capital of South Kordofan, Kadugli. Dilling, also in South Kordofan, has reportedly experienced the same hunger conditions

as Kadugli.



2 men found alive as 17 dead found on migrant boat near Crete

ASSOCIATED PRESS ■ Athens

Two men found alive among 17 dead bodies in a partially sunken migrant boat south of the island of Crete over the weekend told Greek authorities the vessel had been carrying a total of 34 people, and that 15 had fallen overboard and were missing, Greece's coast guard said Monday.

A search and rescue operation was underway, the coast guard says, but strong winds and rough seas have been hampering efforts. The survivors' revelation could mean the death toll might increase to 32. On Saturday, the coast guard said a passing Turkish merchant vessel had come across the half-sunken migrant boat 36 nautical miles southwest of the town of Ierapetra in southern Crete. Seventeen of the passengers on board, all men, were already dead, and there were only two survivors, the coast guard said, revising its initial count of 18 bodies.



Israeli Police forced entry into refugee compound: UN agency

ASSOCIATED PRESS ■ Jerusalem

Israeli police forcibly entered the compound of the UN agency for Palestinian refugees in East Jerusalem early on Monday, escalating a campaign against an organisation that has been banned from operating on Israeli territory.

The UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees in the Near East, or UNRWA, said in a statement that "sizeable numbers" of Israeli forces, including police, trucks and forklifts, entered the compound in the Palestinian neighbourhood of Sheikh Jarrah and cut communications to the compound. "The unauthorised and forceful entry by Israeli security forces is an unacceptable violation of UNRWA's privileges and immunities as a UN agency," the agency said. Police said in a statement they entered for a "debt-collection procedure" spearheaded by Jerusalem's municipal Government, which did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

Earthquake triggers tsunami on

northern coast of Japan

450000000000

ASSOCIATED PRESS ■ Tokyo

A powerful 7.6-magnitude

tsunami of up to 40

Agency said.

centimetres in coastal

Japanese Meteorological

The agency said the

east of Aomori, the

magnitude quake struck just

northernmost prefecture of

Japan's main Honshu island,

and just south of Hokkaido

island. It said a tsunami of 40

earthquake struck off northern

Japan on Monday, triggering a

communities in the region, the

Thailand strikes Cambodia as border tensions flare

ASSOCIATED PRESS Bangkok

Thailand launched airstrikes along the disputed border with Cambodia on Monday as both sides accused the other of breaking a ceasefire that halted fighting earlier

Longstanding border disputes erupted into five days of combat in July that killed dozens of soldiers and civilians. US President Donald Trump pushed the Southeast Asian neighbours to sign a truce agreement in October, but tensions have continued to simmer.

The Thai army said that more than 50,000 people have left areas near the border for shelters, while Cambodia's Information Minister Neth Pheaktra said that residents of several villages near the border have been evacuated.

The latest round of clashes has killed at least one Thai soldier and four Cambodian civilians, officials said

Thai Prime Minister Anutin Charnvirakul said in a televised speech that military operations would be carried out as necessary to defend the country and protect public safety.

"Thailand has never wished for violence. I'd like to reiterate



A wounded Thai soldier is carried to be transferred to a hospital in Sisaket province Thailand on Sunday after, according to a Thai army spokesperson, Cambodian troops fired into Thai territory

that Thailand has never initiated a fight or an invasion, but will never tolerate a violation of its sovereignty," he said.

Fighting followed the exchange of fire on Sunday The ceasefire was strained in early November after Thai troops were injured by land mines, leading Thailand to

announce that it would indefinitely suspend implementation of the agreement. Both sides continue to trade accusations over responsibility, even as they are supposed to be cooperating in getting rid of the mines.

Trump said in mid-November that he'd inter-

vened to preserve the ceasefire as tensions simmered between the two countries.

But another brief episode of fighting took place along the border Sunday, after which both sides said the other fired first. The Thai army said Cambodian fire injured two Thai soldiers, and Thai troops exchange of fire that lasted around 20 minutes. Cambodia said that the Thai side fired first and that its own troops did not retaliate.

On Monday, Thai army pokesperson Maj. Gen. Winthai Suvaree said the Cambodian troops fired first into Thai territory in multiple areas. He said at least one Thai soldier was killed and about eight other soldiers were wounded, and civilians were being evacuated from the affected areas.

Thailand used aircraft "to strike military targets in several areas to suppress Cambodian supporting fire attacks," he said.

The Thai army said artillery rounds landed near residential areas on the Thai side, but reported no civilian casualties so far. Cambodian Defence Ministry spokesperson Maly Socheata said the Thai military attacked the Cambodian troops first on Monday, and that Cambodia did not retaliate during the initial attacks.

"Cambodia urges that Thailand immediately stop all hostile activities that threaten peace and stability in the region," she said.

Neth Pheaktra, the Cambodian Minister of

Thai forces killed four Cambodian civilians and injured about nine others.

The prime minister of regional neighbour Malaysia, Anwar Ibrahim, called for restraint in a statement posted to social media and said that his country is ready to support efforts to avert further fighting.

"Our region cannot afford to see long-standing disputes slip into cycles of confrontation," he wrote.

Centuries of rivalry lie beneath the territorial dispute Thailand and Cambodia have a history of enmity going

back centuries, when they were warring empires. Their modern territorial claims stem largely from a 1907 map drawn when

Cambodia was under French

colonial rule, which Thailand

has argued is inaccurate. The International Court of Justice in 1962 awarded sovereignty to Cambodia over an area that included the 1,000year-old Preah Vihear temple,

which still rankles many Thais. The ceasefire does not spell out a path to resolve the underlying basis of the dispute, the longstanding differences over where the border should run.

'One Battle After Another' leads **Golden Globe nominations**



ASSOCIATED PRESS Beverly Hills (US)

Paul Thomas Anderson's "One Battle After Another" scored a leading nine nominations to the 83rd Golden Globe Awards on Monday, adding to the Oscar favourite's momentum and handing Warner Bros. A victory amid its deal to be acquired by Netflix.

'One Battle After Another" landed nominations for its cast Leonardo DiCaprio, Teyana Taylor, Sean Penn and Chase Infiniti – along with nods for Anderson's screenplay and

direction. It's competing in the Globes' category for comedy and musicals.

centimetres struck the

Hokkaido prefecture town of

Ogawara. Several people were

Urakawa and the Aomori

prefecture port of Mutsu

injured at a hotel in the

public broadcaster NHK

Aomori town of Hachinohe

Prime Minister Sanae

damage. "We are putting

people's lives first and doing

everything we can," she said

Takaichi, in a brief comment to

reporters, said the government

set up an emergency task force

to urgently assess the extent of

Close on its heels was Joachim Trier's "Sentimental Value," a Norwegian family drama about a filmmaking family. The Neon release's eight nominations included nods for four of its actors: Stellan Skarsgard, Renate Reinsve, Elle Fanning and Inga Ibsdotter Lilleaas.

The Globe nominations, a tattered but persistent rite in Hollywood, are coming on the heels of a potentially seismic shift in entertainment

UK care home agency boss jailed for hiring **Indian migrants**

PRESS TRUST OIF INDIA

illegally

A director of a care home agency based in south-east England has been jailed for two-and-a-half years after being found guilty of repeatedly employing immigrants from India with no right to work in the UK.

Benoy Thomas was convicted after a trial at Lewes Crown Court in July and sentenced on Friday, the UK's Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) said.

The 50-year-old was found to have recruited Indian nationals to work as care assistants through his A Class Care Recruitment Ltd at Bexhill-on-Sea in East Sussex, despite being aware of their illegal migration status.

"Benoy Thomas knowingly breached immigration laws by employing people who had no right to work in the Katie Samways, Specialist Prosecutor for CPS South East, said in a statement.

"Many of those he illegally employed were working with some of the most vulnerable people without adequate training or medical expertise, putting the safety and wellbeing of those who needed care at significant risk.

"The Crown Prosecution Service will continue to prosecute those who exploit our immigration system,'

An investigation by

Immigration Enforcement, an agency of the UK Home Office. determined that Thomas assisted the "unlawful immigration" of 13 individuals between 2017 and 2018.

UAE-backed separatists tighten grip of southern Yemen with its light blue chevron and

ASSOCIATED PRESS ■ Aden

The airspace of war-torn Yemen was briefly closed Monday, an official said, as tensions escalated in the country's south after a separatist group, backed by the United Arab Emirates, took over of an oil-rich region in a rift that could fracture the anti-Houthi alliance.

A Yemeni government official said that the Saudiled coalition didn't issue required permissions for flights to or from Yemen, briefly halting flights to and from the southern city of Aden — the seat of the internationally recognized government.

move as a "Saudi message" to the separatist Southern Transitional Council's latest clashes across southern Yemen, including its seizure of much of the sprawling oilrich province of Hadhramaut, which borders Saudi Arabia. The move was later

reversed, allowing flight operations in Aden airport, where hundreds of passengers were stranded for hours, said the official, who spoke on condition of anonymity because he wasn't authorised to brief the media.

An Associated Press journalist at the airport said workers have begun processing passengers of a Cairo-bound flight that was supposed to take off early Monday.

Since the entry of a Saudiled coalition into Yemen's war in 2015, the coalition has controlled the country's airspace. Saudi Arabia didn't acknowledge closing Yemen's airspace on Monday.

The Southern Transitional Council (STC) — an umbrella of armed groups trained and financed by the UAE has expanded its control over Yemen's south earlier this month.

They seized control of Seiyun in Hadhramaut, including crucial oil fields and energy installations following brief clashes with

the Yemeni military, and allied tribes. Forces of the secessionist

group were deployed across strategic Wadi the Hadramout area, which includes major urban centres and military bases, according to STC-allied media. They took over the presidential palace and the international airport in Seiyun last week, and advanced to the province of Mahra, which borders Oman, the group said.

STC hoisted the flag of South Yemen over government buildings across the country's south including on the border crossing with Oman. Images circulated on STC-allied media showed the South Yemen flag,

a red star, flying over government buildings and schools in the south. The separatists enjoy

loyalty through much of southern Yemen and have repeatedly pushed to break up Yemen into two countries, as it was between 1967 and 1990. Hundreds of STC support-

ers took to the streets in Aden to call for the establishment of an independent state in the south.

The demonstrators raised the flag of South Yemen, and pictures of Aidarous al-Zubaidi, the STC leader, who is also vice president of the

Rubio, Hegseth meet Australian counterparts on Indo-Pacific security

ASSOCIATED PRESS

Pete Hegseth are meeting their Australian counterparts Monday in Washington for annual talks expected to focus on Indo-Pacific security and countering China's increasing assertiveness in the region. including in the South China Sea and directed at Taiwan.

Rubio, Hegseth, Australian

Foreign Minister Penny Wong and Defence Minister Richard Marles gathered at the State Department, with many eyes also on the Russia-Ukraine war, fragile ceasefire in Gaza and US military strikes against alleged drug traffickers in the Western Hemisphere that have raised questions about the use of force there.

"This is a very strong partnership, it's a strong alliance, and what we want to do is continue to build on it. We tum behind this alliance," erals, defense production and troop deployments.

None of the four mentioned China by name in their brief comments to reporters before the formal meeting began, but the challenges posed by Beijing throughout the Pacific and elsewhere for years have been a central theme of the US-Australia relationship.

President Donald Trump and Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese signed a critical minerals deal at the White House in October after China imposed tougher rules on exporting its own critical minerals, used in technology from cellphones to fighter jets and of which Beijing is the

top producer and processor. After Trump and Chinese leader Xi Jinping met later Kingdom," Wong said.

think we have a lot of momenthat month, Beijing said it would pause those rules for Rubio said, hailing coopera- a year. "We have to have crit-Secretary of State Marco tion between Washington ical mineral supplies and and Canberra on critical min-supply chains that are reliable, and that are diverse and not overly invested in one place where they can be used as leverage against us or our partners of the world,"

Rubio said Monday. One element of that is the AUKUS pact, a Biden administration-era agreement under which the US, Britain and Australia committed to building an Australian fleet of submarines powered by US nuclear technology.

Rubio is to meet later Monday with British Foreign Secretary Yvette Cooper. "The alliance has always been to ensure it delivers concrete benefits for our security and prosperity and for that of the US. And AUKUS is central to that: a win for Australia, a win for the US and a win for the United

China positive on Putin's India visit; calls for stronger trilateral cooperation

PRESS TRUST OF IDNIA Beijing

China on Monday reacted positively to Russian President Vladimir Putin's visit to India, framing the three countries as an important part of the Global South and saying that sound trilateral ties are conducive to regional and global peace and stability, besides their own national interests.

"China, Russia and India are emerging economies and important members of the Global South," Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Guo Jiakun told a media briefing here, reacting for the first time to Putin's high-profile visit to New Delhi last week and his interactions with Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

Guo said that the "three countries maintaining sound relations is not only in line with their own interests but also conducive to regional



and global peace, security, stability and prosperity". Putin's visit was watched

here closely, considering Beijing's close and strong ties with Moscow.

Responding to a question about Putin's comments about New Delhi and Beijing ahead of his visit, Guo said that "China stands ready to work with Russia and India to continue advancing the bilateral relations". In an interview ahead of his

China are our closest friends we treasure that relationship deeply.

On India-China relations currently on a path of normalisation after the Eastern Ladakh confrontation, which resulted in a freeze in ties from 2020 until last year -Guo said China wants to promote sustained and strong ties with New Delhi with a long-term perspective.

"On China-India ties, China stands ready to work with visit, Putin had said, "India and India to view and handle the

bilateral relationship from a strategic height and longterm perspective, promote the sustained, sound and steady development of China-India ties, so as to better benefit the two countries and two peoples and make due contributions to peace and prosperity in Asia and beyond," he said.

Besides terming New Delhi and Beijing as close friends of Moscow, Putin, in the interview with an Indian news channel, also expressed confidence that the leaderships of India and China are committed to finding solutions to their issues, and Russia has no right to interfere in their bilateral affairs.

Chinese official media highlighted Putin's comments on India-China relations.

The state-run Xinhua news agency carried his remarks refuting US accusations over India's purchases of

Corío Deepwater Port: India's strategic gateway to South America



JAVIER PAULINICH

As India accelerates its global economic expansion, the need for diversified and resilient supply chains has become central to long-term national planning. With nearly 90 per cent of global trade dependent on maritime routes, India's future industrial growth, food security, and energy transition hinge on access to strategic ports around the world.

In this context, the Corío Deepwater Port in southern Peru emerges as a rare geoeconomic opportunity-an asset capable of shaping India's commercial and strategic trajectory for the next 30 to 50 years.

Its 28-metre natural depth and scalable capacity of over 100 million tonnes position it as one of the deepest and

coast of South America, offering India an unprecedented gateway into a resourcerich continent.

Peru's importance to India is rooted in both mineral security and agricultural diversification. As the world's thirdlargest copper producer, Peru holds the key to India's rising demand for critical minerals essential for renewable energy, electric mobility, data centers, and advanced electronics.

With India projected to import more than 90 per cent of its copper needs by 2047, securing steady access to Peru's southern mining corridor becomes strategically indispensable. At the same time, Peru's \$24 billion agricultural transformation has positioned it as a global powerhouse for high-value agroexports such as avocados, blueberries. quinoa, grapes, and speciality grains.

By 2040, Peru's agro-exports are expected to triple to \$40 billion, creating new avenues for India to diversify food imports and build integrated coldchain and logistics networks.

What makes Corio uniquely valuable is its ability to serve as a continenmost future-ready ports on the Pacific tal gateway. The port connects India not Andean, Amazonian, and Southern Cone



South American economies-Bolivia, Brazil, Argentina, and Chile-each with substantial reserves of minerals, lithium, agricultural commodities, and industrial products.

This single-entry platform allows Indian companies to access the broader

land routes. For example, Bolivia and Argentina provide strategic lithium access, Brazil's western states offer soy and protein exports, and northern Chile adds further copper and mineral capacity. Corío thus becomes India's multicountry springboard into South America.

A dedicated Corío-Visakhapatnam

(Vizag) maritime axis can further transform trade flows between India and South America. Vizag, one of India's leading deepwater ports, is already a major industrial and export hub on the eastern coast.

A direct corridor linking Vizag with Corío would create predictable, highvolume trade routes for copper, lithium, grains, and fresh produce outbound from South America, while enabling inbound shipments of Indian pharmaceuticals, fertilizers, heavy machinery, engineering goods, and digital infrastructure solutions. Such balanced cargo flows reduce empty return voyages and improve shipping economics, making the corridor attractive for private investment, Indian shipping lines, and long-term logistics planning.

Realising this opportunity requires proactive strategy. India should consider forming a public-private investment consortium, initiating government-level engagement with Peru, and commissioning an Indian-led pre-feasibility and ESG baseline study tailored to India's long-term needs.

Aligning Corío with India's critical

mineral plan and maritime strategy would ensure sustained national benefits. Ultimately, Corío is far more than a port-it is a strategic bridge to South America's natural resources, agricultural strength, and industrial potential.

For long-term investors, it represents a rare infrastructure platform capable of delivering commercial viability, supply-chain resilience, and geopolitical value for decades to come.

The Corío Deepwater Port is a rare, next-generation infrastructure asset. Situated in Peru's Arequipa region, it offers a natural depth of 28 metresamong the deepest on South America's Pacific coast-making it capable of accommodating Very Large Bulk Carriers (VLBCs). This depth, coupled with a scalable capacity exceeding 100 million tonnes per year, positions Corío as a long-term maritime platform that can evolve in tandem with India's expanding industrial and logistical requirements.

This article has been written by Amb. Javier Paulinich, the Ambassador of the Republic of Peru, presently stationed in New Delhi.

▼ PROSPECT



Nandil Biswa Sarma from Assam participates in the 'Ironman 70.3' in Baharain. Nandil is son of Assam Chief Minister

15 CRORE PM JAN DHAN ACCOUNTS ARE INOPERATIVE



As many as 15 crore, or 26 per cent of the total 57.07 crore Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana (PMJDY) accounts, are inoperative, Minister of State for Finance Pankaj Chaudhary said on Monday. "The data regarding number of inoperative accounts vis-a-vis women, rural and semi-urban areas that are closed under the Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana (PMJDY), is not centrally maintained. However, there are about 15.09 crore inoperative PMJDY accounts out of the total 57.07 crore PMJDY accounts in the country," he said in a written reply in the Lok Sabha.

Replying to another question, Chaudhary said as on September 30, 2025, banks have a total of 7.81 crore KCC accounts with an outstanding amount of ₹10.39 lakh crore, of which public sector banks (PSBs) have a total of 2.22 crore KCC accounts with an outstanding amount of ₹4.19 lakh crore.

Under Stand-up India Scheme, he said, banks have sanctioned 2.75 lakh loans amounting to ₹62,791 crore, of which PSBs have sanctioned 2.28 lakh loans amounting to ₹51,191 crore.

Further, under Pradhan Mantri Mudra Yojana, banks have disbursed ₹2.54 lakh crore till October, 2025 during the current FY 2025-26, out of which PSBs have disbursed ₹1.03 lakh crore.

Replying to another question, he said the International Monetary Fund (IMF) report on 'Growing Retail Digital Payments (The Value of Interoperability) dated June 2025 had recognised Unified Payments Interface (UPI) as the world's largest retail fast-payment system (FPS) by transaction volume.

Further, as per ACI Worldwide report on 'Prime Time for Real-Time' 2024, UPI has around 49 per cent share in the global real-time payment system

PSU banks write off ₹6.15 lakh cr over 5.5 years

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE

Public sector banks have written off loans worth ₹6.15 lakh crore in the last five and a half years, Parliament was informed on Monday. "As per Reserve Bank of India (RBI) data, PSBs have writtenoff an aggregate loan amount of ₹6,15,647 crore, during the last five financial years and the current financial year till September 30, 2025 (provisional data)," Minister of State for Finance Pankaj Chaudhary said in a written reply in the

There has been no capital infusion in Public Sector Banks (PSBs) by the Government since FY2022-23, he said, adding, PSBs have significantly improved their financial performance,

turning profitable and strengthening their capital position. PSBs now rely on market sources and internal accruals to meet their capital requirements and they have raised ₹1.79 lakh crore capital from market through equity and bonds since April 1, 2022 till September 30, 2025, he said. He further said, banks

write-off NPAs, including those in respect of which full provisioning has been made on completion of four years, as per RBI guidelines and policy approved by banks' board. Such write-off does not result in waiver of liabilities of borrowers to repay, he said. Further, he said, recovery in written-off loans is an ongoing process and banks continue pursuing their recovery actions initiat-

OSBI सेन्ट्रल बैंक ऑफ़ इंडिया

ed against borrowers under the various recovery mechanism available to them, such as filing of a suit in civil courts or in Debts Recovery Tribunals (DRT), action under the Securitisation and Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of

Act 2002, filing of cases in the National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT) under the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code, 2016 etc.

As provisioning for bad loans has already been done and the write-off process does not entail any actual Security Interest (SARFAESI) cash outflow, the bank's liq-

uidity position remains intact, he said. Moreover, banks evaluate/consider the impact of write-offs as part of their regular exercise to clean up their balance-sheet, avail tax benefit, optimise capital base, enhance lending capacity and boost investor senti-

ments, he added. Replying to

said, banks and financial Institutions have traditionally been the primary source of export finance in India. The total export credit disbursed by Public Sector Banks, SIDBI and Exim Bank in the last five years (FY 20-21 to FY 24-25) stood at ₹21.71 lakh crore, he said.

In another Chaudhary said, 5,83,291 fraud cases were registered in the last four and a half years till September 2025 amounting to ₹3,588.22 crore. Of this, he said, ₹238.83 crore have been recovered.

With increasing digital payment transactions in the country, incidence of cyber frauds including digital payment frauds have also gone up in the last few years,

Attorney General inaugurates State-of-the-art Club House in Noida

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE

Noida

The newly constructed Club Housecum-Community Centre at Heart Beat City, Sector-107, Noida, was inaugurated on Monday, marking a significant step in delivering fully serviced residential ecosystems to the residents. The facility was officially opened by the Chief Guest, R. Venkataramani, Attorney General for India and Learned Court Receiver for Amrapali projects.

He was present alongside Ravi Bhatia and DK Mishra, Court Committee Members, KP Mahadevaswamy, CMD, NBCC and Suman Kumar, Director (Commercial), NBCC, as well as officer bearers of the Apartment Owner's Association and residents.

The Club House stands as a testament to NBCC's (National Buildings Construction Corporation) commitment to completing and upgrading amenities for the erstwhile Amrapali projects, which it took over under the guidance of the Learned Court Receiver and Committee members. NBCC has successfully completed all residential units in Heart Beat City.

Spread across 5,200 square metres of built-up area, the Club House is a ground plus two-storey structure equipped with three lifts. It is designed to be a vibrant social



Dignitaries present during the inauguration of Club House-cum-Community Centre at Heart Beat City, Sector-107, Noida

comprehensive suite of amenities experience.

and recreational hub, offering a to enhance the residents' living

Key features include a 400-sqm Community Hall capable of accommodating 350-400 persons, a squash court, crèche, kitchen and multi-purpose hall. The first floor houses a well-equipped gymnasium along with yoga and aerobics rooms, while the second floor features six guest rooms, a library, an indoor games area, a reception, a kitchen-cum-restaurant and an open terrace. During the occasion, residents acknowledged the efforts of the Learned Court Receiver Committee and the NBCC team in bringing the Club House into service, which will significantly foster community engagement and offer high-quality lifestyle amenities.



Under the divine presence of Pujya Dwarkeshlalji Maharajshree and the esteemed inauguration by Home Minister Amit Shah, the iconic Narsinh Mehta Lake

Assam Govt to hand over 992 acres to AAI for Silchar greenfield airport

TONY DAS Guwahati

The Assam Government decided to hand over 3,000 bighas (nearly 992 acres) of land at Doloo Tea EState in Cachar district to the Airports Authority of India (AAI) for the construction of a greenfield airport, Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said. Addressing a press conference after a cabinet meeting on Sunday, Sarma said the panel approved an increase of 500 bighas from the earlier decision to allocate 2,500 bighas (826.45 acres) for the proposed airport near Silchar.

'The cabinet approved the transfer of 3,000 bighas at Doloo Tea EState in Silchar to the AAI for the construction of a greenfield airport," Sarma said, adding that the decision will pave the way for obtaining the Union Cabinet's nod for the project. The State Government had proposed a new airport in Silchar spread over 2,500 bighas as the existing facility at Kumbhirgram is a defence airport and expansion of the facility to had distributed financial assistance to 1,296 ment of land to 1,200 families under flagship



media after Cabinet meeting

accommodate the increasing demands of air traffic is not possible.

families living at Doloo Tea EState "as a good-will gesture". Earlier that year, a controver-sy had arisen over the State Government's efforts to acquire land for setting a greenfield airport with the then Civil Aviation Minister Jyotiraditya Scindia claiming that no such proposal was received for the facility from the BIP-led State. It was later clarified that the land was being acquired at AAI's request.

Because of the confusion, land acquisition at the tea eState for the airport had led to protests by the garden workers, but the Government assured that no worker would be evicted from their homes and there would be no job loss.

The State Government had previously announced a compensation of ₹50 crore for the acquisition of land at Doloo, Lalbagh and Mainagarh tea gardens for setting up the greenfield airport.

Talking about other cabinet decisions, the In November 2022, the Assam Government CM said the Government has approved allot-

scheme Mission Basundhara. The cabinet also approved a joint project to be set up at Staterun Assam Engineering College and Dassault

Systems India Pvt Ltd. "The project, to be established over 5,000 sq ft at a cost of ₹243 crore, will offer courses related to aerospace and defence, automotive and electric vehicles." Sarma said. Of the total cost, the Assam Government will contribute ₹43 crore, while Dassault Systems will

invest Rs 200 crore, he added. Sarma further said the cabinet granted administrative approval for the construction of Assam's second Sainik School at Longvaku

in Karbi Anglong district. "The school will be built at a cost of ₹335 crore, of which 80 per cent will be borne by the Ministry of Defence and the remaining 20 per cent by the Assam Government," he added. Besides, the cabinet approved compensation to 884 families for land acquired during the construction of the four-lane National Highway in Dima Hasao district.

RInfra setting up integrated solar manufacturing ecosystem

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE New Delhi

Anil Ambani-led Reliance Group on Monday said its arm Reliance Infrastructure is setting up one of India's most advanced, fully integrated solar manufacturing ecosystems spanning ingots, wafers, cells and modules.

According to an investors presentation of Reliance Infrastructure, the manufacturing facility will have nextgen technology.

The facility will bridge large demand-supply gap as India will need 55–60 GW of solar modules annually by 2030, while upstream capacity remains significantly short.

It will be a high-value, vertically integrated platform ty. It is establishing an endto-end battery manufacturing ecosystem covering cell manufacturing, pack assembly and grid-scale containerised BESS (battery energy storage system) As per the presentation,

to reduce import depen-

dence and strengthen India's clean energy securi-

India's installed stationary storage base is less than 1 GWh today and will rise to 250 GWh by 2032. Domestic manufacturing currently meets less than 10 per cent of expected demand.

Reliance Group's another firm Reliance Power said in its investor presentation that Reliance NU Energies is powering the shift from plain-vanilla solar to hybrid and firm, round-the-clock (RTC) renewable energy.



Trident Group to invest ₹1500 Crore in modernising sustainable paper manufacturing and terry towel production in Punjab

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE New Delhi

Trident Group, one of India's leading agro-based and environmentally responsible paper manufacturers, has announced a ₹1500crore investment to upgrade its sustainable paper operations and Terry Towel production at its Punjab unit. The move strengthens the company's commitment to eco-friendly manufacturing and futureready technologies.

announcement follows Trident's strong presence at PaperEx 2025, where it showcased its expanded range of sustainable, wheat-straw-based paper-produced without ing its portfolio with new



cutting a single tree. The company also highlighted its shift toward automation, digitalisation and circular manufacturing, aimed at improving efficiency, reducing waste and enhancing production accuracy.

Trident is further expand-

book variants designed to meet evolving consumer and institutional needs. Speaking on the

announcement, Rajnish Kumar Gera, CEO - Paper & Chemicals, Trident Group, said: "This investment marks a new phase of transforma-

tion for Trident. It reinforces our commitment to sustainable, zero-tree paper manufacturing while accelerating our shift toward a technologically advanced, resource-efficient ecosystem. By strengthening automation and expanding our eco-smart product portfolio, we are preparing for the next generation of sustainable solutions for our customers."

With this investment and technology-driven transformation, Trident Group is poised to further strengthen its position as a leader in sustainable manufacturing, delivering high-quality, environmentally responsible products to markets in India and across the world.

across 1,450 km long-haul network PIONEER NEWS SERVICE Constl India's first digital infrastructure provider to achieve a 1 Tbps transmission

■ New Delhi

Capitalising on India's burgeoning digital economy, digital infrastructure provider Constl has successfully tested and deployed a record-breaking 1 terabit per second (Tbps) line rate on a single optical channel across the 1,450 km Mumbai-Chennai route.

breakthrough, achieved in collaboration with global networking leader Ciena, utilised Ciena's Wave Logic 6 Extreme (WL6e) solution on one of Constl's most critical corridors, without the need for regeneration. Constl is a subsidiary of the Space World Group.

This milestone makes

rate over a long-haul distance. The WL6e upgrade is set to significantly boost Constl's ambition to become the network of choice for hyperscalers operating in India.

The deployment effectively doubles the fibre wavelength capacity from 800 Gb/s to 1.6 Tb/s compared to its earlier WaveLogic 5 Extreme deployment, delivering a strong competitive edge by increasing capacity while simultaneously reducing cost per bit, improving spectral efficiency and low-

ering power consumption. "Since inception in 2023 just two years ago—Constl

has deployed over 12,000 km of fibre and connected around 100 data centres across 13 Indian cities, powered by Ciena's industryleading optical technology," said Ankit Goel, Chairman and Founder, Space World Group. "This milestone positions us to expand our terrestrial fibre network and deliver high capacity 800GbE services for the AI era."Constl's successful trial is also seen as a testament to the high-quality fibre infra-

Constl, Ciena achieve 1 Tbps transmission

laying across the country. Amit Malik, Vice President and General Manager, Asia Pacific, Japan and India, Ciena, reinforced the partnership's focus on future-ready connectivity. "Constl is com-

structure the company is

mitted to developing networks tailored to hyperscaler requirements and Ciena's coherent optics are recognised as the best-inclass platform for high-capacity Al services. Together, we are driving next-generation connectivity to support India's digital future and AI ambitions.' Constl specialises in deliv-

ering advanced digital infrastructure solutions purposebuilt for hyperscalers, telcos and OTT/CDN providers, operating a pan-India highspeed network. Ciena is a global leader in

high-speed connectivity, known for building adaptive networks to support exponential growth in bandwidth demand.

▼ BRIEFLY

The Dioneer Bhubaneswar | Tuesday | December 9, 2025

DORTMUND BEATS HOFFENHEIM 2-0 IN BUNDESLIGA



Former Tottenham defender Mauricio Taricco will resign as assistant coach of South Korean champion Jeonbuk Hyundai Motors after receiving a five-match ban for an alleged racist gesture during a K League game, the club said on Tuesday. On November 8 as Jeonbuk faced Daejeon Hana, the Argentine assistant was sent off by referee Kim Woo-seong for vehemently protesting a penalty decision. Subsequently, Taricco placed his index fingers besides the corner of his eyes – a gesture the referee interpreted as racist and reported to the league's disciplinary committee. On November 19, the committee banned Taricco for five games and fined him 20 million won (\$13,646). The 52-year-old, who featured for Tottenham between 1998 and 2004 and also played for Ipswich Town, West Ham and Brighton in England, denied any racist intent, insisting that he was asking the official if he had seen the incident.

HORNBILL E-SPORTS FESTIVAL KICKS OFF IN KOHIMA



The Hornbill Esports Festival 2025, the second edition of Nagaland's premier competitive gaming showcase, will feature competition in three categories including E-chess. The event that began Monday is being organised by the Esports Association of Nagaland (ESAN) in collaboration with the Department of Youth Resources and Sports.

Speaking at the inaugural session, Abu Metha, advisor to the Chief Minister and Vice President of the Athletics Federation of India (AFI), said, "E-Sports is a modern-day trend and a billion-dollar industry that cannot be ignored." He emphasised that Nagaland does not want its youth to miss opportunities in this fast-growing sector.

India beat Wales in FIH Junior Women's World Cup

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA Santiago (Chile)

Out of quarterfinal contention, India defeated Wales 3-1 to remain in the hunt for a ninth-place finish at the FIH Junior Women's World Cup.

Hina Bano (14'), Sunelita Toppo (24'), and Ishika (31') scored for India, while Eloise Moat (52') netted the lone goal for Wales. India had logged two wins and a loss to finish outside the top eight in the pool stage.

In Sunday's match, India began with a penalty corner in the first 30 seconds. They were playing between the lines to carve out opportunities on regular occasions, but couldn't find the opening

Wales had the opportuni-



ty to surge ahead with a penalty stroke, but were a sharp stop to keep the towards the end of the first

scores level. India eventually managed denied by Nidhi as she made to break the deadlock

work by Sakshi Rana. Looking to double their

quarter, courtesy a tap-in from Hina after some neat penalty corner at the start of the second quarter.

They continued to create chances regularly, and were rewarded for their persistence after Rana's initial shot fell in the way of Sunelita, who made no mistake from close range. With 14 circle penetrations in the first half, India held a deserving 2-0 lead at the break.

India extended their lead to 3-0 early in the second half as Ishika found the back of the net after a rebound from the Welsh goalkeeper fell in her way.

Jyoti Šingh's side controlled the tempo of the game, stretching the Welsh defense by playing between the lines and pressing high, while remaining disciplined and

advantage, India maintained compact at the back. India continued to create chances pushing Wales back in their own half to close out the

third quarter. With the lion's share of possession, India remained in pursuit of more goal-scoring

opportunities to further increase their advantage in the final quarter. Wales had an opening on the other end and Eloise Moat (52nd) made it count,

pulling one back for her side. However, that only proved to be a consolation goal as India held firm to secure a welldeserved 3-1 win. India will next play

Uruguay on Tuesday and the winner of this match will progress to the ninth place showdown. The losing team will fight for the 11th spot in the overall standings.

1191 posts lying vacant in SAI: Sports minister

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi

Sports Minister Mansukh Mandaviya on Monday acknowledged that over 1,000 posts are currently lying vacant in the Sports Authority of India (SAI), a concern that was highlighted in a recent Parliamentary Standing Committee report which had described the body as "critically" under-funded and under-staffed.

The minister was responding to a question from Congress MP Adoor Prakash. who represents Kerala's Attingal constituency, in Lok Sabha. Asked whether the government has noted the concerns raised by the Parliamentary Standing Committee over severe shortage of funds and staff in SAI, Mandaviya said, "The Government has taken note of the observations."

"A total of 1,191 posts are lying vacant in the SAI. The recruitment process of certain posts has already been initiated," he added.

In its report in August, the Parliamentary Standing Committee on sports, headed by Congress' Rajya Sabha MP Digvijaya Singh, observed that about 45 per cent of sanctioned posts in the SAI are



Union Minister Mansukh Mandaviya speaks in the Lok Sabha during the Winter session of Parliament in New Delhi

presently vacant.

'The fact that these shortfalls in staff are being managed through contractual appointment may at best be only an ad hoc arrangement," it had pointed out. The Committee. which also includes cricketer and AAP Rajya Sabha MP Harbhajan Singh, and BJP MPs Sambit Patra and Bansuri Swaraj, among others, expressed "grave" concern over the shortage of staff and low funding of SAI.

The panel "heard the views" of Sports Secretary, and SAI representatives in its meeting held on June 6 this year. It commended the recruit-

ment drive to fill up these vacancies but asked the Sports Ministry to complete the process in the next six months and "furnish an Action Taken Report (ATR)."

In its annual budget this year, the government allocated ₹3,794 crore to the Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports. Of this ₹830 crore were earmarked for SAI.

"The budget allocation to SAI is based on the proposals submitted by them for the respective financial year. Any additional requirements that arise during the year are examined at the RE stage and, where appropriate, considALLOCATED ₹3,794 CRORE TO THE MINISTRY OF YOUTH **AFFAIRS AND** SPORTS. OF THIS ₹830 CRORE WERE EARMARKED FOR SAI

THE GOVERNMENT

ered through supplementary grants," the minister stated in Lok Sabha.

Dealing with sexual harassment

To another question on whether the government has a consolidated record of sexual harassment complaints filed by sportspersons, the minister reiterated that no such dedicated database exists. He, however, listed the measures that have been in place to "ensure a safe and positive environment".

"In order to provide a safe environment in sports, the SAI also runs a 24x7 helpline for the players," he said.

In addition, National Sports Federations have been told to mandatorily have women coaches in contingents that feature female athletes during camps and competition exposures. They have also been asked to increase the strength of women Coaches and Support Staff in camps.

Santos stuns Cruzeiro

ASSOCIATED PRESS Sao Paulo

Nevmar's Santos secured its survival in Brazil's Serie A on

Sunday with a 3-0 win over Cruzeiro, and the 33-yearold soccer star later confirmed he will undergo surgery on his left knee. Playing its last league match of the season, Santos

 which achieved a global following with all-time great Pelé - avoided what would have been the club's second relegation in its history. Santos was relegated in 2023 for the first time almost a year after the death of Pelé. Neymar struggled to

recover from a torn ACL in October 2023 during a World Cup qualifier against Uruguay. But he proved key for Santos in its successful fight to avoid relegation in the Brazilian championship after its promotion last year.

Neymar, who returned to Santos in January, was decisive for the club where he started his professional career. In the last three rounds of the league, Neymar scored a goal against Sport Recife in a 3-0 win, netted a hat trick against Juventude on Wednesday in another 3-0 victory, and on Sunday was an effective playmaker.

RETURNED TO SANTOS IN JANUARY, WAS DECISIVE FOR THE CLUB WHERE HE STARTED HIS **PROFESSIONAL CAREER** Thaciano (26th and 28th

NEYMAR, WHO

minutes) and Ioão Schmidt (60th) scored against Cruzeiro at Vila Belmiro Stadium as Santos finished 12th with 47 points. Neymar played only 19 of the 38 rounds of the league, which started in April. He scored eight goals. "I came for this, to try to help the best way I can. These

have been tough weeks for me," Neymar said after the game. "I thank those who were with me to lift me up. If it weren't for them, I wouldn't have played these matches because of these injuries, this knee problem. I need to rest and then we will have this knee surgery." Neymar did not give more

details about the knee injury and surgery. He still hopes to be included in Brazil's final squad for the 2026 World Cup, though coach Carlo Ancelotti is yet to pick the former captain since he took over in May.

Napoli beat Juventus 2-1 in Serie A ASSOCIATED PRESS

Luciano Spalletti's return to the team he led to the Serie A title was spoiled by Rasmus Højlund's brace as host Napoli beat Juventus 2-1 on Sunday. The result also lifted Napoli back to the top of the Italian league. The defending champion moved a point above Inter Milan and three points above AC Milan, which visits Torino on Monday.

It was Juventus coach Spalletti's first time at Napoli as opposition manager since he led the southern team to its first scudetto in more than 30 years in 2023.

Napoli coach Antonio Conte was also facing his former team. He steered Juventus to three Serie A titles during his time in charge and also played for the Bianconeri for 13 years,

winning numerous trophies. Adding to the occasion, it was the first time the two coaches had faced each



other. Napoli got off to a great start as the in-form David Neres got away down the right before rolling the ball across for Højlund to tap it in with less than seven

minutes on the clock. Napoli had the better of the chances but Juventus leveled in the 59th minute as the Bianconeri went on the counterattack and Kenan Yildiz played a one-two with Weston McKennie before placing an angled drive into the far bottom corner.

McKennie inadvertently also played a role at the other end in what proved to be the winner for Napoli in

The United States international tried to head away a cross for Neres but his attempt was rather weak and went to Hojlund to head in from four yards (meters).

Roma loses ground Roma lost ground in the title race as it fell to a 1-0 defeat at Cagliari after playing most of the match

Roma remained fourth but slipped four points below Napoli. It was Cagliari's first win since September and lifted the Sardinian team four points above the drop zone.

The match turned in the 49th minute when Roma defender Zeki Çelik brought down Cagliari midfielder Michael Folorunsho right on the edge of the area.

The referee initially awarded a penalty but realized the foul was just outside the area after reviewing the incident. He revoked the spot kick but showed Çelik a straight red card for denying a clear scoring occasion.

Roma goalkeeper Mile Svilar pulled off a number of impressive saves but Cagliari broke the deadlock in the 82nd minute.

Gianluca Gaetano was left completely unmarked to chest down a corner and fire the ball in off the inside of the far post.

Abu Dhabi

La Liga: Real Madrid lose 2-0 to Celta Vigo

ASSOCIATED PRESS

Real Madrid had two players sent off in its 2-0 home defeat to Celta Vigo on Sunday and lost more ground to Spanish league leader Barcelona.

Madrid conceded early in the second half and then saw red cards for Fran García and Álvaro Carreras in its first defeat of the season at the Santiago Bernabeu stadium in all competitions. Unused Madrid substitute Endrick also was shown a red card for complaining.

Williot Swedberg scored for the visitors with a nice flick from near the penalty spot in the 54th.

Madrid lost García with a second yellow card in the 64th and Carreras in stoppage time. Swedberg sealed Celta's victory in a breakaway shortly after Madrid was reduced to nine players.

"We are all upset. It wasn't the game or the result that



Xabi Alonso said. "The referee's decisions threw us off balance. I didn't like the refereeing.

Madrid has won only two of its last seven matches across all tournaments. It next hosts Manchester City in the Champions League on Wednesday.

Madrid's only other league loss this season was a heavy defeat at Atletico Madrid in September. It also lost at we wanted," Madrid coach Liverpool in the league phase

of the Champions League in November.

Sunday's setback left Alonso's team four points behind Barcelona. The Catalan club won 5-3 at Real Betis on Saturday. Madrid is only one point ahead of thirdplaced Villarreal, which has a game in hand.

Vinícius Júnior and Kylian Mbappé both had good chances to equalize for Madrid but couldn't capitalize on their opportunities.

Militão had to leave the game Celta moved to 10th place

with its second win in three league games. Goalkeeping mistakes

Girona goalkeeper Paulo

Gazzaniga had an afternoon to forget in Girona's 3-0 loss to Elche at home. The Argentine goalkeep-

er's mistakes led to two Elche goals, including one after he passed the ball straight to an opponent inside the area while trying to send it to a defender. Earlier, he had failed to make a routine save on an angled shot by the near post.

Gazzaniga also had a nightmare game in Girona's opening league match, when his blunders led to a goal and a penalty and his ejection in a 3-1 loss to Rayo Vallecano.

Girona, sitting inside the

relegation zone in 18th place, has only one win in its last six games in all competitions.

catching "zero-pod" aerody

namic concept was a bust when the last regulation

period began in 2022. Get

both aspects right this time

and George Russell could be

a title contender after two

Another team to watch is

Aston Martin, which has its

first car created with design

great Adrian Newey in

charge, and is hoping it can

make two-time champion

Fernando Alonso an F1 race

winner for the first time in 13

wins in 2025.

Nice fans boo team during 7th loss

ASSOCIATED PRESS Nice (France)

Nice was booed on the field a week after its players were attacked by supporters. The French team's crisis on and off the pitch deepened as it lost 1-0 at home to Angers in Ligue 1 on Sunday for a seventh straight loss across all competitions.

After last week's defeat at Lorient, Nice players were confronted by a large number of their supporters when they returned to the club's training and academy centre.

Players and staff were reportedly assaulted and fans shouted insults and demanded greater commitment from the squad. Jérémie Boga and Terem Moffi took multiple blows,

including to the head and groin. Those two players were absent against Angers and their teammates took the field with the names of either Boga or Moffi on the backs of their jerseys instead of their own.

The jeers rang out right from the start.

Yassin Belkhdim scored for Angers in the 33rd minute and Nice's hopes of ending its losing streak diminished early in the second half when Tom Louchet was sent off for a foul on Jacques Ekomié.

Surprise win Lorient upset fifth-placed

Lyon 1-0 to move up to 13th. Lyon had to play the entire second half with 10 men after Ainsley Maitland-Niles was sent off in the 42nd minute following two quick yellow cards.

Lorient had taken the lead three minutes before the dismissal with a goal from Pablo Pagis.

Off the bottom Auxerre moved off the

bottom of the table with a 3-1 win over Metz, which took its opponent's spot. The result ended a ninematch winless run for

Auxerre. Lassine Sinayoko's penalty and a goal by Oussama El-Azzouzi three minutes later put Auxerre 2-0 ahead before Gauthier Hein halved the deficit on the stroke of halftime.

But Kévin Danois scored his first Ligue 1 goal late on to secure the win.

Le Havre forward Issa Soumaré failed to convert a penalty as another relegation fight, against Paris FC, ended in a 0-0 draw.

F1 in 2026: Key dates, new title hopefuls and Cadillac's debut **ASSOCIATED PRESS**

Say goodbye to DRS, and hello to a battery power boost. Sunday's Abu Dhabi Grand Prix marked the last time Formula 1 uses the Drag Reduction System overtaking aid, introduced in 2011.

Next year, drivers will have to manage the car's systems more closely than ever with a more visible role for aerodynamic and electrical technology

After a season-long title battle ended with Lando Norris' first title, here's what to expect in 2026: Smaller, lighter, more electric The biggest regulation

electrical power to make up half of total output along changes in years make cars with a traditional V6 turbo shorter, narrower and lighter, engine. Instead of DRS, with movable "active aerodynamics" — X-mode for straight-line speed, Z-mode drivers can deploy extra electrical power at key moments. That makes driving even

for cornering — and more more strategic but could lead to drivers lifting off the power reliance on electric hybrid and coasting on some The FIA's target was for straights to allow the electrical systems to harvest energy.

The FIA claims the rules emphasize driver skill but there have been mixed reviews from those who've tried 2026 designs in their teams' simulators.

could help overtaking but the fastest and slowest cars may be up to four seconds per lap apart on pace, tire supplier Pirelli has reported. In F1 terms, that's an eternity. Expect to see more engine failures as teams balance reliability with performance. Mercedes, Aston Martin aim for more

Smaller, more agile cars

Could this be the year Lewis Hamilton finds his form again at Ferrari and chases an

eighth title? Maybe not. Even though he never got on with the 2022-25 cars, Hamilton told the BBC he

was "not looking forward" to 2026 after the Las Vegas Grand Prix last month, yet another disappointment since he joined Ferrari. Mercedes has designed

engines before, but its eye-

years. Williams too could make a step forward after abandoning its 2025 projects early to focus on 2026. New Cadillac team, old faces

The F1 grid expands to 22

cars for the first time since 2016 as Cadillac becomes the some of F1's most dominant 11th team with backing from General Motors.

The Dioneer Di

India begin official T20I WC build-up against South Africa

The return of Shubman Gill and Hardik Pandya will lend fresh sheen and muchneeded completeness to reigning world champions India when they begin their official march towards the home T20 World Cup with the opening match of a fivegame series against South

Africa on Tuesday. This series marks the start of India's formal build-up to the February showpiece, where they will play 10 T20Is – five against South Africa followed by another five against New Zealand before opening their title defence against the USA at the Wankhede on February 7.

The defending champions will look to enter this phase with clarity of intent as they refine roles, streamline combinations and settle the XI that will carry the weight of expectations in front of home crowds.

India have been a formidable T20I unit post their World Cup triumph in the format last year, where they won Since then, they have

extended their tally to 26

including a seven-match streak during their Asia Cup victory in Dubai.

They have not lost a T20I series in this period, and with only minor tweaks needed, they will be hoping to sharpen the edges against the side they defeated in the T20 World Cup final.

Gill's return comes after he missed almost a month of cricket owing to a neck spasm suffered while attempting a slog sweep during the opening Test against the Proteas.

Having played non-stop cricket since the last IPL and with India facing a packed season ahead, his workload management will be closely

But for Gill, who has 837 runs from 33 T20Is at an average of 29.89, this series also doubles up as vital preparation heading into the ICC event.

His reunion with Abhishek Sharma brings back a highimpact opening pair that marries brute force with clean, classical strokeplay.

Abhishek, fresh from a standout tour of Australia where he topped India's scoring charts with 163 runs return in style with a 42-ball in the 2-1 victory, has been in 77 not out for Baroda in the monstrous domestic touch. SMAT before bowling four



India's Shubman Gill during a practice session on the eve of the first T20 cricket match of a series between India and South Africa at Barabati Stadium in Cuttack, Odisha

In the Syed Mushtaq Ali T20s, the Punjab left-hander hammered 304 runs at an average of 50.66 and a staggering strike rate of 249plus, including a breathtaking 52-ball 148 against Bengal as Punjab posted 310/5.

Hardik Pandya's comeback is equally significant.

Out for more than two months after a quadricep injury during the Asia Cup, the all-rounder marked his

overs at full tilt for 1/52.

He arrived here a day ahead of the squad, trained solo at the Barabati Stadium, bowled for 20 minutes and went through an extended physical routine.

His presence not only deepens India's batting but restores the balance of a bowling attack built heavily on flexibility. One of the central conversations ahead of the series has been skipper Suryakumar Yadav's prolonged lean patch.

The contrast between his

dazzling IPL 2025, where he amassed 717 runs for Mumbai Indians, and his underwhelming T20I returns have been striking.

Since taking over as fulltime T20I captain in July last year, his form has dipped to an average of 15.33 with 184 runs in 15 innings, he has not scored a fifty in the last 20 games, and his strike rate has reduced to 127.77 from the 187-plus he clocked in 2022. Even in the SMAT this season, he failed to reach a fifty, scoring 165 runs from **India vs South Africa T20 Series 2025** Dec 17 Dec 19 Dec 14 3rd T20 4th T20 5th T20 Narendra Mod Head-to-Head in T20s South India: 283/1 South Africa: 227/3

five matches. Any drastic move before the World Cup looks unlikely, but the next 10 T20Is will add fodder to conversations surrounding

The wicketkeeper-batter debate — Sanju Samson or Jitesh Sharma — remains

both his form and captaincy.

equally tantalising.
India's handling of the pair during the Australia series raised eyebrows, with Samson batting only once, promoted to No. 3, before Jitesh was backed for the last three T20Is.

KBK Sports Graphics Since India's World Cup triumph, Samson has been the team's third-highest rungetter, flourishing as an opener with three centuries, including two in South Africa. But Gill's return as vice-captain pushed Samson down the order into a role he rarely occupies in T20 cricket. In the recent SMAT,

Samson looked in excellent

touch with two fifties, two 40s and a 56-ball 73 not out

against Andhra, while Jitesh

managed modest returns

for Baroda with a top score

South Africa, for their part, welcome back tearaway pacer Anrich Nortje for his first international appearance since last year's T20 World Cup final.Marco Jansen's evolution as a genuine all-rounder adds heft to the visitors; his blistering 93 in the Guwahati Test and 70 off 39 balls in Ranchi underscored a renewed authority with the bat to go with his established potency with the ball.

Teams (from):

India: Suryakumar Yadav (c), Shubman Gill (vc), Abhishek Sharma, Tilak Varma, Sanju Samson (wk), Jitesh Sharma (wk), Hardik Pandya, Axar Patel, Shivam Dube, Washington Sundar, Jasprit Bumrah, Arshdeep Singh, Harshit Rana, Kuldeep Yadav and Varun Chakravarthy.

South Africa: Aiden Markram (captain), Ottineil Baartman, Corbin Bosch, Dewald Brevis, Quinton de Kock, Tony de Zorzi, Donnovan Reeza Hendricks, Marco Jansen, George Linde, Keshav Maharaj, Kwena Maphaka, David Miller, Lungi Ngidi, Anrich Nortje, Tristan Stubbs.

No major changes in T20 squad before World Cup: Skipper Salman

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA Karachi

Pakistan's T20 skipper Salman Ali Agha has ruled out any major changes in his squad for the Men's T20 World Cup next year, saying the side has shown a marked improvement after the players were given specific roles in recent months.

Pakistan, who had made big changes to its side following the Asia Cup final defeat to India earlier this year, bringing in Abdul Samad, Babar Azam, Usman Khan and Naseem Shah, defeated South Africa at home in a three-match T20I series and then won the Tri-series, also involving Zimbabwe and Sri Lanka,

"In my personal opinion, don't see any major changes in the national T20 Cup," Salman said on a

one we will have in the World Cup. Every player had been given a specific role in recent months and with that the team had moved forward," he added.

Pakistan are scheduled to play six T20 games before the World Cup, scheduled to be co-hosted by India and Sri Lanka from February 7 till squad before the World March 8 next year, and Salman said the limited Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) number of matches will der surgery in London, is make it difficult to make "I think the current com- major changes.

to play before the World Cup and I don't think we can make any big changes now in these remaining matches. We have to show consistency and move forward with the current combination,"

Experienced allrounder Shadab Khan, who was the vice-captain of the side before he got injured in May and underwent a shoulnow rehabilitated and is set to make a comeback in "We have six T20 matches the Big Bash in Australia.

Hardik gives us lot of options: Suryakumar

TAPAN MOHANTA

India captain Suryakumar

Yadav believes Hardik Pandya's return will restore the tactical depth and balance that shaped the team's Asia Cup surge when the world champions take on South Africa in a five-match T201 series starting here on Tuesday. The ace India seam-

sustained a left quadriceps injury and missed the Asia Cup final, is fully fit and in fine form after making his comeback in the Syed Mushtaq Ali Trophy. His timely return ahead of next year's T20 World Cup

bowling all-rounder, who

has brought back the muchneeded flexibility and balance, with his new-ball spells offering India the cushion to field three, even four spinners. "I think what you saw in

the Asia Cup also, when he was bowling the new ball, he opened a lot of options, 'That's what he brings to

the table. His experience, the way he has done really well in all the matches, all good games also, all bigger games in ICC events. "I think that experience

will count a lot. His presence will definitely give a good balance to the side. Incidentally, Pandya, who

landed a day early in Cuttack and trained solo at Barabati Stadium, skipped the optional session on Monday, but the skipper confirmed that both he and Shubman Gill returning from a neck spasm are available.

"Right now, both of them look healthy and fit," he For India, this series is

the start of a 10-match run into the home T20 World Cup in February, but Suryakumar said the groundwork was laid long

"Our 2026 T20 World Cup preparation began right after we won the T20 World lot of combinations for us Cup in 2024... Our prepara- have not changed too flexible. He was ready to bat with respect to playing tion is similar. The prepara- much... Everything is going XI," Suryakumar said on tion started after the T20 well. We wanted to continthe eve of the series- World Cup 2024 got over. ue the same way."



He underlined that India's recent success stems from

consistency of selection. "I feel in the last 5-6 series which we have played, we have tried and played with

a similar combination. We

On the conversation around Sanju Samson and Jitesh Sharma, Suryakumar reiterated that flexibility is key. "In terms of Sanju, yes, when he came into the circuit, he batted higher up the order. Now, the thing is, other than the openers, I feel everyone has to be very

at any number." He insisted

CRUSH ABU DHABI KNIGHT RIDERS IN ILT20 PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

DUBAI CAPITALS

Dubai

struck a stunning unbeaten half-century as Dubai Capitals crushed Abu Dhabi Knight Riders by 83 runs to notch their first win in ILT20 Season 4. Dubai Capitals recovered from a shaky start thanks to Powell's 96 not out off 52 balls and Jordan Cox's 52 runs (32 balls) to set the opponents a target of 187 runs.

In response, the Knight Riders were bundled out for 103 runs in 15.3 overs as the Dubai Capitals secured an easy win. Dubai Capitals did not have the best of starts with openers Toby Albert (8) and Sediqullah Atal (8) going cheaply with the team ending the powerplay at 43 for 2.

Piyush Chawla, playing in his 300th T20 match, struck with his first ball to get rid of the USA batter Shayan Jahangir (14) to leave the Dubai Capitals reeling at 43 for three.

Cox and Powell took control

of the match as they stitched a 119-run stand off 76 balls. While Powell smashed eight fours and four sixes in his innings, Cox hit four fours and one six in his stay.

Delhi end SMAT campaign with win over Uttarakhand



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA Ahmedabad

Yash Dhull and skipper Nitish Rana scored fine halfcenturies as Delhi ended their Syed Mushtaq Ali Trophy campaign with an 18run win over Uttarakhand on Monday.

With their third win in seven games, Delhi finished third in Group D, behind Iharkhand and Rajasthan who advanced in the premier domestic T20 competition.

Both Dhull (52 off 37) and Rana (51 off 29) had a productive tournament but the team failed to qualify for Super 8 stage after a disappointing first leg of the Ranji Trophy.Delhi made 162 for seven in 20 overs before limiting Uttarakhand to 144 for seven. Prashant Chopra (54 off 50 balls) top scored for Uttarakhand.

Leg-spinner Suyash Sharma and Digvesh Singh Rathi took two wickets each for Delhi that stemmed the flow of Jharkhand topped Group D

after a 36-run win over Raiasthan, maintaining their unbeaten run in the group stage.

Jharkhand hammered 215 for five courtesy quickfire contributions from Virat Singh (69 off 36), captain Kushagra (55 off 37 and Robin Minz 58 off 27). Rajasthan could only manage 179 in 19.2 overs.

Brief scores:

Delhi 162/7 in 20 overs (Yash Dhull 52, Nitish Rana 51; Agrim Tiwari 2/18). Uttarakhand 144/7 in 20 overs (Prashant Chopra 54; Suyash Sharma 2/27, Digvesh Rathi

Jharkhand 215/5 in 20 overs (Virat Singh 69, Robin Minz 58; Kukna Ajai Singh 1/23). Rajasthan 179/10 in 19.2 overs (Karan Lamba 52; Sushant

Yash Thakur stars as Vidarbha beat Andhra by 19 runs

Vidarbha pacer Yash Thakur halted

Andhra in its tracks by grabbing four wickets to guide his side to a 19-run victory in a Group A final-round match of the Syed Mushtaq Ali Trophy here on Monday.

Andhra, who have already qualified for the next stage along with Mumbai from the group, failed to overhaul Vidarbha's 154/8, with the 26-year-old right-hand bowler returning excellent figures of 4/22 to restrict the opponents to 135/9.

Thakur, who also had a fivewicket haul in an earlier match, ended his SMAT campaign with 18 scalps.

Vidarbha's innings revolved around Aman Mokhade's 50 and keeper-batter Akshay Wadkar, who scored a 33-ball 41 with Andhra



playing a big role in restricting the opponents to a below-average

However, Andhra fared even worse when they came out to bat, losing three wickets for 31 runs

including India player Srikar Bharat for a golden duck. Pyla Avinash scored a 37-ball 44 but that was not enough as seven players could only manage single-digit scores. In another match, young Assam pacer Sadek Hussain returned a

four-wicket haul on way to defeat-

ing Kerala by five wickets.

Brief scores:

Vidarbha 154/8 in 20 overs (Aman Mokhade 50, Akshay Wadkar 41; Satyanarayana Raju 4/26) beat 135/9 Andhra (Pyla Avinash overs 44; Yash Thakur 4/22) by 19 runs.

Kerala 101 in 19.4 overs (Sadek Hussain 4/19, Abdul Ajij Kuraishi 2/16, Avinov Choudhury 2/15) lost to Assam 105/5 in 18.5 overs (Pradyun Saikia 41 not out; KM Asif 2/22) by 5 wickets.

Bihar humble UP by 6 wickets a wicket each in their full eventually got.

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA Kolkata

India's T20 specialist Rinku Singh failed to fire with the bat as Bihar humbled fancied Uttar Pradesh by six wickets in their Syed Mushtaq Ali Trophy Group B match on Monday.

Opener Piyush Singh shone with a 54-ball 57 to help Bihar complete a chase of 145 with four balls to spare after Mangal Mahrour returned excellent figures of 3/12 in four overs to help his team restrict UP to 144 for six in the allotted 20 overs. Mahrour, who bowls medium pace, was well supported by skipper Sakibul Gani (1/20) and Sakib

Hussain (1/31), both picking up

quota of overs but Amod Yadav was expensive as he leaked 50 runs for a solitary success. Batting at number seven, Prashant Veer topscored for UP with an unbeaten, counter-attacking 40 off 26 balls after IPL star Rinku was dismissed for a 25-ball 19 by Mahrour at the Jadavpur University Campus ground.

Middle-order batter Sameer Rizvi was shown the door by Mahrour after a 17ball 22, while pacer Shivam off 12 balls.

would have probably ended

up with less than what they

Mavi remained not out on 13 Had it not been for the 50run seventh-wicket stand between Veer and Mavi, UP

Replying with the bat, Bihar

were off to a great start as the opening du of Piyush and wicketkeeper Ayush Loharuka (36 off 36 balls) added 83 runs in 11.3 overs to lay the foundation for a successful chase. Piyush hit four boundaries

and a six during his stay in the middle, before Bipin Saurabh provided the finishing touches with a breezy, unbeaten 26 off 16 balls. Prince Yadav was the most

successful bowler for Uttar Pradesh, finishing with figures of 3/24 in four overs.

Bihar won the toss and opted to bowl first, a decision that worked well for them.

Uttar Pradesh 144/6 in 20 overs (Prashant Veer 40 not out; Mangal Mahrour 3/12) lost to Bihar 145/4 in 19.2 overs (Piyush Singh 57; Prince Yadav 3/24) by 6 wickets.

Maharashtra 161/7 in 20 overs (Rahul Tripathi 83; Vasuki Koushik 3/20) beat Goa 146 all out in 19.3 overs (Lalit Yadav 49; Jalaj Saxena 3/22, Tanay Sanghvi 3/23, Vicky Ostwal 3/27) by 15 runs. Hyderabad 146/8 in 20

overs (Pragnay Reddy 43; Jagjit Singh 3/36, Chiragvir Dhindsa 2/18, Sandeep Sharma 2/33) lost to Chandigarh 147/6 in 19.5 overs (Arjun Azad 63, Shivam Bhambri 42; Chinntla Rakshan Readdi 2/36, Chama V Milind 2/27) by 4 wickets.



The Municipal Commissioner on behalf of Municipal Corporation, Sambalpur invites tenders Single Cover System. Bid documents consisting of specification the Schedule of Quantities and the set of erms and conditions of contract and other necessary documents can be seen the Govt. Website i.

2. Estimated Costs: 3.03 lakhs & 42.27 lakhs

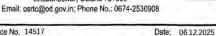
3. Period of completion: As per NIT

 Date and time of availability of the bid documents in the portal: From 11.00 AM. of 09.12.2025
 To 05.00 PM of 18.12.2025 Last Date/Time for receipt of bids in the portal: 05.00 PM of 18.12.2025

Bids will be opened on: 11.00 AM of Dt. 19.12.2025

Sambalpur Municipal Corporation

Paribahan Bhawan, Sachivalaya Marg, Bhubaneswar, Odisha 751009



Notice No. 14517

REQUEST FOR PROPOSAL (RFP) FOR EMPANELMENT OF AGENCY/ OPERATOR

Odisha State Road Transport Corporation (OSRTC) invites Proposal from interested agencies for the above-mentioned RFP. Please refer to the RFP document for details.

FOR SELECTION OF AN AGENCY TO SUPPLY AND DELIVER BULK FUELS TO

The RFP document shall be available from 08/12/2025 onwards in the following web porta www.osrtc.org and https://tendersodisha.gov.in. Any further intimation (i.e Corrigendum/ Addendum/ Responses to the queries/ Clarifications) shall be uploaded

Applicants are required to submit a duly filled RFP Proposal as per the prescribed formats ine on or before 26/12/2025 by 05:00 PM. The RFP Proposals recei

In case of any queries/clarifications, E-mail at osrtc@od.gov.in

OSRTC reserves the right to accept or reject bid process without assigning any reason General Manager (Operation)