



Salaries, allowances of MLAs, ex-MLAs, ministers to get big hike

State Assembly approves govt's proposal

RAJEEV RATHAN ■ Bhubaneswar

The Odisha Assembly on Tuesday unanimously approved a substantial increase in the salaries, allowances and pensions of MLAs, ministers and the Speaker proposed by the State Government through a revised set of remuneration bills. The decision marks the first major update to legislators' compensation since 2017.

Under the new provisions, the salary and pension of both sitting and former MLAs have been raised to Rs 90,000. The Speaker's monthly salary has been revised to Rs 98,000 from Rs 40,500 while the daily sitting allowance has doubled to Rs 2,000. The Speaker's car allowance has been enhanced

sharply to Rs 89,000 from Rs 17,000 and the sumptuary allowance has risen to Rs 1.81 lakh from Rs 40,000 per month. Until allotted a government quarter, the Speaker will also receive an accommodation allowance of Rs 2,000 per day.

MLAs, too, will receive significantly upgraded allowances. The sumptuary allowance has increased to Rs 96,000 (from Rs 40,000) while the constituency and Lok Seva Bhawan visit allowance has gone up to Rs 75,000 (from Rs 20,000). The committee allowance will now be Rs 3,000 (from Rs 1,500) and allowances for meetings outside Odisha have increased to Rs 10,000 (from Rs 2,000). Travelling allowance within the State has been revised to Rs 35 per km (from Rs 25) and monthly transport allowance has surged to Rs 50,000 (from

Rs 15,000). Other increases include the member's monthly allowance (Rs 10,000 from Rs 2,000), electricity charges (Rs 20,000 from Rs 5,000), medical treatment allowance (Rs 35,000 from Rs 5,000) and accommodation allowance (Rs 2,000 per day from Rs 1,000). The motor car advance has been doubled to Rs 10 lakh.

Before these revisions, MLAs received a basic salary of Rs 35,000 and Rs 65,000 in allowances while Cabinet Ministers and Ministers of State drew monthly salaries of Rs 40,000 and Rs 38,000, respectively.

After the BJP government came to power last year, Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi constituted an advisory committee headed by MLA Bhaskar Madhei to review remuneration structures. The committee recommended raising salaries and pensions

to match inflation and ease financial hardship among former legislators. Lawmakers across party lines endorsed the proposal, arguing that existing pension amounts were outdated.

Parliamentary Affairs Minister Mukesh Mahaling tabled four separate amendment bills covering the salaries, allowances and pensions of MLAs, the Speaker, Deputy Speaker and ministers. The proposals also include Rs 25 lakh assistance to the family of any sitting MLA who dies in office and a provision for revising pay, allowances and pensions every five years, including through ordinance.

The Assembly adopted all four bills and referred them to the Business Advisory Committee for further examination. Once finalised, the revised structure will extend across the legislature.

CAG flags major lapses in State's school education

Decline in Gross Enrolment Ratio pointed out

RAJEEV RATHAN ■ Bhubaneswar

The Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) of India on Tuesday sharply criticised the Odisha Government for serious gaps in planning, spending and execution in the school education sector, revealing that nearly 12% of the allocated budget between 2018-19 and 2022-23 was either saved or surrendered due to poor utilisation.

The performance audit notes that the State failed to adopt the bottom-up, participatory planning model mandated under the Samagra Shiksha framework. District and block-level planning teams were not constituted, leading to unrealistic assessments of requirements and weak programme implementation. As a result, budget utilisation under Samagra Shiksha remained low, fluctuating between 44 and 50% over



the five-year period.

The report observes that Odisha recorded a decline in Gross Enrolment Ratio at both Secondary and Higher Secondary levels, a trend that runs contrary to national growth in school enrolment. It also highlights continuing infrastructural deficiencies across many government schools. Several institutions still lack basic amenities such as boundary walls, ramps for accessibility, CWSN-friendly toilets or functional science laboratories. Some schools

continue operating from unsafe or deteriorating buildings despite repeated submissions for repair and upgrade.

Teacher shortages continue to strain the system with the audit pointing out adverse Pupil-Teacher Ratios in a significant number of schools, particularly in tribal and rural pockets. This has affected subject-specific teaching and classroom learning outcomes.

The CAG further reports slow progress in introducing vocational education. Against a target of 877 schools, the

programme could be implemented in only 646, restricting students' access to skill-based learning opportunities.

Recommending immediate corrective measures, the CAG urged the State Government to strengthen planning mechanisms, expedite infrastructure development, fill teacher vacancies on priority and widen the reach of vocational education, cautioning that without urgent intervention, the State's goal of equitable and quality education may remain out of reach.

Cold wave to continue for 4 more days in State

PNS ■ Bhubaneswar

Odisha continues to reel under widespread cold conditions with the chill expected to persist for the next four days, the India Meteorological Department (IMD) said on Tuesday.

As per the latest forecast, the State would remain under the influence of cold and dry north-westerly winds until December 12, keeping temperatures significantly low, especially during night hours.

The IMD said an active high-pressure belt over Rajasthan is pushing cold and dry winds towards Odisha. Despite the prevailing weather pattern, no major change in night temperatures is anticipated during this period. Many locations across the State are likely to record mini-

mum temperatures below 10 degree Celsius. A western disturbance is expected to affect the western Himalayan region from December 13. Following its impact, Odisha is likely to witness a gradual rise in night temperatures.

The approaching system is anticipated to modify the current wind pattern, thereby reducing the intensity of cold conditions across the State. This shift is projected to bring temporary relief after days of persistent chill.

With the expected change in wind flow post-December 13, conditions are likely to become milder. The increase in night temperatures would signal an end to the current cold wave, which has remained largely unchanged due to the uninterrupted inflow of dry north-westerly winds.

State Assembly Winter Session cut short

Opposition slams govt for 'running away from accountability'

RAJEEV RATHAN ■ Bhubaneswar

Political theatre in Odisha reached a new peak on Tuesday as the Winter Session of the State Assembly was abruptly adjourned sine die after only 11 working days, far short of the scheduled 29. The sudden shutdown sparked sharp backlash with the Opposition accusing the BJP government of "running away from accountability" at a time when the State is beset with urgent challenges.

Speaker Surama Padhy announced the early adjournment without prior indication, closing what was expected to be a month-long legislative session slated to continue till



December 31. The decision has drawn widespread criticism across party lines, especially after a promising and historic start.

The session had begun on November 27 with an unprecedented moment of President Droupadi Murmu addressing the Odisha Assembly, the first time in history that a sitting President of India has done so.

The government tabled a Rs 17,440-crore Supplementary Budget on November 28 allocating Rs 13,716 crore for programme expenditure, Rs 3,389 crore for administrative costs, Rs 171 crore for the di-

saster response fund and Rs 164 crore towards State transfers. But before opposition parties could scrutinise the proposals or challenge the government on issues such as law and order, unemployment, tribal unrest and farmer distress the Assembly was shut.

The BJD and the Congress slammed the abrupt closure alleging that the government was avoiding tough questions. "This government is running away," Opposition leaders charged, accusing the BJP of turning the Assembly into a "rubber stamp".

HC issues notice to govt over employees' strikes

PNS ■ Cuttack

The Orissa High Court on Tuesday sought a detailed response from the State Government regarding ongoing strikes by various categories of government employees in the State.

During the hearing of a public interest case filed to restrict strikes, the court issued notices to the Chief Secretary and the Revenue Secretary and instructed them to submit replies within the stipulated time.

The Odisha Administrative Service Association (OASA) and the Rajya Amala Sangha were also directed to respond to the petition. The matter has been listed for its next hearing after one week.

While examining the petition, the High Court expressed concern over the current agitation involving primary teachers across the State.



It sought clarification on how regular teaching activities are being managed when between 15,000 and 20,000 teachers have halted academic duties.

The court referred to forthcoming examinations and asked how classroom instruction is continuing during periods of widespread teacher protests.

The petitioner referred to earlier incidents, including the shutdown call issued by the OAS association during disturbances involving the Bhubaneswar Municipal Corporation (BMC) and the 15-

day strike organised by the Rajya Amala Sangha.

These examples were cited to demonstrate how prolonged strikes had disrupted official processes.

The plea also mentioned recent agitation by teachers at PMG Square in Bhubaneswar, which came up during the court's observations on the present strike situation.

The High Court, after issuing the notices, has directed all respondents to file their replies and listed the matter for further consideration after one week.

After 120 years

ASI begins sand extraction from Sun Temple

PNS ■ Puri

The Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) on Tuesday began the process of removing sand from the inner sanctum of the Konark Sun Temple.

The moment stands historic as it would mark the beginning of the first physical access into the temple's filled chamber in more than 120 years.

Sources cited ASI experts who confirmed that drilling work has already reached the sand layer placed inside the Garbhagriha (sanctum) of the temple. Moreover, by Monday evening, a nine-meter opening with a diameter of around 16 centimeters had been drilled from the western side of the structure.

Officials at the site reported that drilling has advanced up to the point where the original sand filling begins, and



measurements indicate that the sanctum wall is about eight meters thick.

The opening has been created at nearly 80 feet on the western elevation of the monument while the entire temple height is approximately 127

feet. Sources reported that the extracted material includes sand and stone fragments from the interior section, and these samples are being collected for scientific examination.

The ASI has said that mois-

ture has been detected within the sand layer, based on initial observations from the drilling zone.

A ten-member expert group initiated the core-drilling process after conducting checks on the structural condition of the

temple stones. The work has been undertaken using diamond-drill equipment and zero-vibration machinery to avoid any impact on the historic stone blocks.

The operation is positioned on the first tier of the temple's western side, identified as the direction from which a future tunnel would be developed to extract the sand from the Garbhagriha.

Measurements of the sanctum wall and surrounding stone sections were carried out using lasers, endoscopic photography and other specialised scientific tools before the drilling entry point was finalised.

Historical information shared at the site notes that the British authorities filled the sanctum with sand and stone in 1903 after concerns about structural stability.

518 State migrant workers dead since 2021

Opposition attacks govt over 'distress exodus'

RAJEEV RATHAN ■ Bhubaneswar

The death of 518 migrant workers from Odisha since 2021 triggered a fresh political flashpoint in the State Assembly on Tuesday with the Opposition accusing the BJP government of failing to curb distress migration despite repeated promises of livelihood reforms.

In a written reply to BJD MLA Arun Kumar Sahoo, Labour and Employees' State Insurance Minister Ganesh Ram Singhuntia informed that the mortal remains of 395 deceased workers were brought back to their native

places over the last three years. The figures, tabled amid uproar, reignited demands for a comprehensive migrant labour protection policy.

The data revealed that Kalahandi recorded the highest deaths at 60 followed by Brahmapur in Ganjam district with 56, Balangir (38), Nabarangpur (35), Rayagada (34) and Chhatrapur in Ganjam (26). Opposition members said the numbers expose the government's "hollow claims" of reducing vulnerabilities in backward regions.

The minister also stated that 1,107 contractors obtained licences in 2025 (till November) under the Inter-State Migrant Workmen Act facilitating the migration of

70,360 workers to other states this year alone.

Balangir once again emerged as the epicentre of mass migration with an alarming 54,581 workers leaving the district for work in 2025 followed by Nuapada (8,655), Ganjam (2,553), Bargarh (1,459) and Dhenkanal (1,064). The Opposition alleged that the figures reflect "State-sponsored neglect" and the government's inability to generate stable income opportunities.

While the government maintains that contractor licensing ensures safer and regulated migration, opposition parties demanded a whitepaper on migrant deaths and urgent intervention to strengthen welfare mechanisms.

CM hits back at Naveen’s ‘empty vessel’ remark

Questions LoP’s commitment to legislature

RAJEEV RATHAN ■ Bhubaneswar

The Odisha Assembly on Tuesday witnessed sharp political exchanges after Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi countered Leader of Opposition (LoP) Naveen Patnaik’s “empty vessel” remark with a pointed attack on his prolonged absence from this year’s winter session of the legislature.

Patnaik had criticised the

BJP government during the debate on the Appropriation Bill linked to the Rs 17,440-crore supplementary budget passed later by voice vote. But Majhi turned the tables alleging that the LoP was failing in his primary legislative responsibility.

“Nine days of the session have passed. How many days has the Leader of Opposition attended? How many debates has he participated in to hold the government accountable?” Majhi asked.

Majhi also questioned Patnaik’s political priori-

ties. “If there were health issues, it would be understandable. But when he can travel to Nuapada for campaigning, how can he avoid the Assembly when the session is underway?” he said, adding that social-media statements do not replace parliamentary participation.

“In a parliamentary democracy, every member has the right to criticise the government, but they also have the responsibility to be present in the House,” the CM remarked.

The issue escalated when

BJD members staged a walk-out during Majhi’s reply accusing the government of failing on governance and law-and-order fronts. The BJP countered that the Opposition was “evading debate” and relying on symbolism instead of scrutiny.

Naveen Patnaik’s presence in this session has become a political flashpoint. He attended only twice, once during President Droupadi Murmu’s address and again during the discussion on the Appropriation Bill.

Naveen accuses govt of ‘zero spending’

Says people at grassroots not benefitted

RAJEEV RATHAN ■ Bhubaneswar

BJD president and Leader of Opposition Naveen Patnaik on Monday launched a sharp offensive against the BJP-led State Government alleging that it has “completely failed” to utilise funds for public welfare and development.

“Sad to say that there is no expenditure being made by the State Government of Odisha for the people of this State and for their development,” Patnaik said.

He said the BJD has repeatedly urged the government to prioritise essential spending, but its concerns have been ig-

nored. “Time and again, we have told the Odisha Government that there must be expenditure for the development of the people. But they seem totally neglectful. Everyone is suffering,” he said.

Patnaik stated that the impact of the government’s neglect is widespread, affecting all sections of society. “It’s not confined to any one group, everyone is suffering. They (the government) are playing on empty vessels, and we all know empty vessels make the loudest noise. That appears to be what they are satisfied with,” he remarked.

In the Assembly’s winter session, the BJD accused the government of failing to convert financial allocations into ground-level results.

‘Vande Mataram a symbol of national unity’

CM urges citizens to contribute to nation-building

RAJEEV RATHAN ■ Bhubaneswar

Describing ‘Vande Mataram’ as an eternal symbol of patriotism, sacrifice and national unity, Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi on Tuesday urged the people to draw inspiration from the national song and actively contribute to the vision of a developed India by 2047.

Speaking in a special session of the Odisha Assembly convened to mark the 150th anniversary of Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay’s iconic creation, Majhi recalled that the British administration had once banned ‘Vande Mataram’ because it had emerged as a potent rallying cry during the freedom struggle.

Referring to Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s remarks in the Lok Sabha on Monday during a similar discussion, Majhi noted the PM’s emphasis on the song’s galvanising role in the freedom movement

and its lasting relevance in contemporary India. The 150-year journey of ‘Vande Mataram’, he said, is filled with milestones of courage and inspiration.

Calling the anniversary a “golden opportunity” to internalise the song’s ideals, Majhi said it should motivate people, especially youths and students, to participate meaningfully in nation-building.

Outlining plans for State-wide celebrations, the CM announced that collective singing sessions, cultural events and awareness programmes would be organised over the next year in all districts, schools, colleges and public and private institutions.

He added that although the song has enjoyed national status since Independence, “some vested interests” had attempted to dilute its significance in post-Independence India. “No matter what language we speak, what religion we follow or which region we belong to, without patriotism, the nation cannot progress,” he said.

MDM cooks, teachers agitate for pay hike

Govt appeals for dialogue

RAJEEV RATHAN ■ Bhubaneswar

Protests by Midday Meal (MDM) cooks and primary school teachers in Odisha entered their second day on Tuesday highlighting growing discontent among education workers over pay and service conditions.

MDM cooks gathered at Lower PMG here demanding a substantial hike in their monthly remuneration from Rs 3,000 to Rs 13,860, formal appointment letters, identity cards and timely salary disbursement. They submitted a memorandum to the Chief Minister pressing for immediate action and warned of continued agitation if their demands are not addressed. These workers serve around 42.45 lakh children across 50,618 primary and upper primary schools forming the backbone of the Pradhan

Mantri Poshan Shakti Nirman Yojana.

Responding, School and Mass Education Minister Nityananda Gond noted that the government recently enhanced the monthly honorarium of MDM cooks from Rs 2,000 to Rs 3,000 benefiting 1.12 lakh workers at an annual cost of over Rs 112 crore. “Frequent agitations disrupt government work. Let them continue their duties,” he said.

Meanwhile, primary school teachers, under the banner of Prathamika Shikshyak Mahasangha, staged a protest near the Assembly demanding upgradation of posts to Level-2, salaries of Rs 35,400 with Rs 4,200 grade pay and pension benefits. They pointed out that several other States offer higher starting salaries, leaving Odisha at the bottom with only Rs 2,200 grade pay.

The minister assured that the government is open to dialogue and urged teachers to return to duty.

IIIT BBS to host two int’l conferences this month



RAJEEV RATHAN ■ Bhubaneswar

The IIIT Bhubaneswar is set to host two high-profile international conferences this December bringing together global experts in geoscience, remote sensing, cryptography and cybersecurity, highlighting Odisha as a growing hub for advanced research and technological collaboration.

The first event, the International Geoscience and Remote Sensing Symposium (InGARSS 2025), will be held

from December 10 to 14, with Odisha Governor and IIIT Chancellor Hari Babu Kambhampati inaugurating the symposium on December 11. Over 500 paper submissions were received, and 241 authors have been selected for 90 oral presentations and 151 poster presentations. A Student Paper Competition will feature 18 finalists from 57 entries. Discussions will focus on AI-powered remote sensing, SAR imaging, climate analytics, disaster manage-

ment and environmental sustainability.

Immediately following InGARSS, INDOCRYPT 2025, one of India’s premier conferences on cybersecurity and cryptology, will be held from December 15 to 17 under the Cryptology Research Society of India (CRSI). The conference will bring together cryptographers, security researchers, industry experts and policymakers. The Valedictory Ceremony will be attended by Chief Minister

Mohan Charan Majhi, reflecting the state government’s commitment to digital security and innovation. Sessions will cover cryptography, information security, privacy technologies and emerging digital threats.

With themes ranging from sustainability and AI-driven sensing to secure digital systems, the events align with Odisha’s broader priorities of climate resilience, technological advancement and digital transformation.

In State MoUs inked to boost agri value chains, digital farm service

RAJEEV RATHAN ■ Bhubaneswar

The Department of Agriculture & Farmers’ Empowerment (DAFE) on Tuesday signed two MoUs to strengthen value chain development and accelerate digital transformation in the farm sector.

The first MoU, signed between DAFE and Heifer International, focuses on boosting the value chains of ginger, turmeric and millets (Shree Anna) in Odisha. The collaboration aims to enhance farmer income through improved production practices, capacity-building and strengthened market linkages, enabling producers to access better technologies and wider markets.

The second MoU was signed between DAFE, the Fisheries & Animal Resources Development (FARD) Department and Tatwa Technologies Ltd for operation, management and maintenance of the Krushi Samruddhi Helpline, the State’s mobile-based agricultural extension platform. The partnership seeks to expand real-time crop, livestock, weather and fisheries adviso-

ries, ensuring last-mile delivery of digital agri-services to farmers across the State.

Agriculture & Farmers’ Empowerment Minister and Deputy Chief Minister Kanak Vardhan Singh Deo and FARD & MSME Minister Gokulananda Mallik were present during the signing ceremony. Singh Deo said the MoUs would “help the government reach the unreached and ensure timely assistance to farmers”. Mallik highlighted the effectiveness of real-time livestock advisories in benefiting farmers and livestock rearers.

Agriculture & Farmers’ Empowerment Principal Secretary Dr Arabinda Kumar Padhee said the Krushi Samruddhi Helpline is a toll-free advisory platform that currently serves over 80 lakh farmers across Odisha. The system provides advisories covering 70 crop types, 11 livestock categories and three fisheries practices.

Since its inception, the platform has delivered 95.15 crore crop advisories, 40.88 crore livestock advisories, 5.32 crore fisheries advisories and 26.04 crore weather and scheme-based advisories, he informed.

CM unveils story collection ‘Murchhita Moksha’



Written by Badri Mishra

PNS ■ Puri

Writer Badri Mishra’s latest story collection “Murchhita Moksha” was officially released by Chief Minister Mohan Majhi at a special ceremony held in Puri. The event witnessed the presence of prominent literary figures, readers, and literature enthusiasts.

After unveiling the book, Chief Minister Majhi said, “Badri Mishra has carved a distinct identity in Odia short

story literature. ‘Murchhita Moksha’ will certainly offer deep reflections and meaningful messages to the new generation.”

Speaking about his work, author Mishra shared that the collection captures the struggles, emotional conflicts, search for inner liberation, and the silent conversations that occur within the human mind.

Literature lovers present at the event praised Mishra’s narrative style, social awareness, and the relevance of the themes addressed in the stories.

Leopard snare incident highlights rising threats to wildlife

RAJEEV RATHAN ■ Bhubaneswar

Odisha’s wildlife conservation challenges came under sharp focus on Tuesday with the State Assembly being informed that 136 elephants have died in the last one and a half years, even as a leopard was rescued from a poacher’s snare in Angul on the same day.

Forest, Environment & Climate Change Minister Ganesh

Ram Singkhuntia, replying to a question, said the elephant deaths occurred during 2024-25 and up to September 2025-26 due to multiple causes. Of the total deaths, four elephants were killed by poachers and four others died in retaliation killings. Electrocutation accounted for the highest toll with 42 deaths followed by 31 due to diseases.

Four elephants died in train accidents while another four were killed through poisoning. Thirty-one elephants succumbed to natural causes, and in 20

cases, the cause of death remains undetermined.

The minister informed that the government has initiated strict action against offenders leading to 92 arrests and several cases registered. Enhanced surveillance, scientific monitoring and intensified patrolling are being undertaken to reduce elephant mortality.

Even as the data sparked concern among lawmakers, a fresh incident in Angul district underscored the continuing threat posed by poachers. A leopard was found trapped in a snare laid

by hunters in Karatapata Forest Section on Monday night. The snare, reportedly intended for wild boars, caught the big cat instead.

On Tuesday morning, locals heard the animal’s distress calls and alerted forest authorities. A drone camera was deployed to locate the leopard, following which a rescue team comprising forest personnel, veterinarians and wildlife experts rushed to the spot.

The team tranquilised the leopard, freed it from the metal trap and shifted it for medical observation.

Talk by Thinkers’ Club

‘Indian Constitution is unparalleled’

PNS ■ Cuttack

A discussion on the Indian Constitution by the members of the Thinkers’ Club was held over the Zoom Platform as part of its 140th webinar.

Professor Manas Behera spoke in elaboration on the institutions under the Indian Constitution.

He said the Indian Constitution is a unique piece having nothing parallel to it. In true sense it is a testament of democracy. Referring to the reservation system, he said that it is unfortunate that, certain people with vested political interest continued the reservation till today though originally it was meant to continue for 10 years. It is definitely against democratic principles and against the



motive of the Preamble of the Constitution, he said.

Dr Santosh Kumar Mohapatra said though the Indian Constitution is the best Constitution in the world, it requires amendments to cope with the changes in the world

conditions due to emergence of new technologies and sociability of the people. Bibek Pattanaik focused on the emergence of the Artificial Intelligence. He said every scientific invention make human life comfortable and better. The present society cannot survive without adopting new technology.

There was an open house discussion on various topics related to Constitution in which Dr Nanda Nandan Das and Prof Umasankar Misra along with the three speakers participated in discussion.

The technical affair of the meeting was chaired by Vijay Malla. The meeting was moderated by Barada Das, the president of the club. Secretary of the club Prof Umasankar Misra offered the vote of thanks.

Malkangiri turning into 'mini-Manipur', claims BJD

Govt says situation under control

RAJEEV RATHAN ■ Bhubaneswar

Senior BJD MLA Ranendra Pratap Swain on Tuesday expressed serious concern in the Odisha Assembly over the worsening law and order situation in Malkangiri district, warning that the region was "slowly turning into a mini-Manipur".

Swain said the rising local tribal-bangladesi refugee tensions have created a highly volatile atmosphere, threatening constitutionally guaranteed rights and social harmony. Speaking outside the House, he urged the Speaker to direct the Chief Minister to

brief the Assembly on the situation, alleging incidents of arson, looting and murders were occurring "in broad daylight".

"The situation is extremely volatile. People are openly mobilising, and it may explode at any moment. Such acts must be controlled firmly," he said. Drawing a parallel with the recent ethnic conflict in Manipur, Swain said Malkangiri, being a remote border district, required urgent and focused attention. He demanded that the government spell out its plan to restore peace, protect lives and prevent further escalation.

Swain also called for setting up peace committees at the local level and suggested an all-party delegation, led by the Speaker, visit Malkangiri to

assess the ground situation. Responding in the House, Revenue Minister Suresh Pujari said the situation is now "fully under control". He said tribal and non-tribal groups in the area had earlier clashed over land issues, and the current flare-up appears to have similar roots.

"The DGP and the Revenue Divisional Commissioner of the Southern Division were instructed to visit Malkangiri, interact with residents and restore peace," the minister said. He added that the DGP, RDC, Collector and SP are camping in the affected area and adequate police forces have been deployed. Rejecting comparisons with Manipur, he said the situation in Malkangiri is localised and not comparable

to large-scale ethnic conflict. Tension in Malkangiri escalated after a Koya tribal widow, Lake Podiami (55) of Rakhelguda village, went missing on December 3. Her headless body was found in the Poteru river next day. Police arrested Subharanjan Mondal (45) of MV-26 in connection with the suspected land dispute-related murder.

Following the recovery of the body, violence erupted across Rakhelguda, MV-26 and neighbouring areas. Nearly 5,000 people armed with traditional weapons stormed MV-26 where about 100 Bengali families reside torching houses, vehicles and other property. Many residents fled overnight as mob attacks continued on Monday

despite police presence. The administration imposed a 24-hour internet shutdown from 6 pm Monday, later extending it until 12 pm on December 10. Prohibitory orders under Section 163 of BNS were also enforced within a 10-km radius with BSF and armed police deployed. Additional CRPF, OSAP and Odisha Police units have since been stationed in the district.

Officials conducted flag marches and held peace committee meetings in an effort to restore normalcy.

Notably, over two lakh Bengali-speaking Hindu families' migrants from Bangladesh, who settled in Malkangiri decades ago, reside across 214 villages in the district.

Niranjan laments 'decline of ideal politics' in Bhadrak

RAJEEV RATHAN ■ Bhubaneswar

Senior Congress leader and former PCC president Niranjan Patnaik on Monday expressed deep anguish over what he described as the "decline of ideal politics" in Bhadrak, a district he hailed as a historic land of freedom fighters who once guided Odisha with sacrifice and service.

Reacting to the decision of BJD MLA Prafulla Samal's family to join the BJP, Patnaik said he is "personally saddened and shocked" by the political drift. "Prafullababu is a personal friend. I cannot say what led to such a situation in his family, but today's politics, especially among the younger generation, appears rushed and without ideals," he said.

Patnaik accused the BJP of encouraging "opportunistic



politics" driven by power and financial gain. "Politics without truth and ideals has become today's norm. The BJP's efforts to expand dominance are not good for any party or the country," he remarked.

Recalling his tenure as Industries Minister, Patnaik highlighted the establishment of Barpada Engineering College during the growth of private engineering institutions in Odisha after 1995. He said

he had entrusted Prafulla Samal with responsibilities at the college "despite being from another party" with the objective of making technical education affordable for Odia youths who were spending heavily to study outside the State.

He further criticised the growing trend of leaders shifting parties based solely on who is in power. "Earlier, people from different parties used to join the Congress. Now, many seeing the BJP in power are rushing to join it. Tomorrow, the same people may return to the Congress or the BJD. This is the consequence of commercialised politics where ideology holds no value," he said. "We must return to principles rooted in truth and service. We must follow the ideals of Mahatma Gandhi," he said.

In Nuapada

Road blocked over migrant worker death



PNS ■ Nuapada

A road blockade was staged on Monday at Lakhana Puruna Basti with the body of migrant labourer Banchhanidhi Kaibarta demanding the arrest of the culprits and compensation for the family.

The protesters alleged that Banchhanidhi was murdered in connection with labour trafficking. Banchhanidhi, a resident of Lakhna village in Nuapada district, had reportedly taken an advance of Rs 30,000 from Imran Khan, a labour sardar of Jhirmi village in Turekela block

of Balangir district. As agreed, he left his village last Wednesday with local labour broker Raju Sunani.

"After reaching Jhirmi, he called me and said they had arrived safely and would leave for Hyderabad on Wednesday. Later, I tried to contact him repeatedly but failed. After two days, one of the labourers travelling with him informed me that my husband had been missing since Thursday," said his wife, breaking down in tears. She rushed to Jhirmi to search for him and later filed a report at the Lakhna Police Station.

Police ASI held taking bribe in Jajpur

PNS ■ Jajpur

The Vigilance police on Tuesday caught Nanda Kishore Das, Assistant Sub-Inspector (ASI) of Jajpur Town police station while accepting a bribe of Rs 5,000 from a person.

Das had demanded the bribe from the complainant in exchange for preparing an official report in his favour for a pending land dispute. The complainant approached the Vigilance, which immediately arranged a trap operation.

Das was caught red-handed during the transaction, and the cash, along with related documentation, was seized for further investigation.

Preliminary inquiry indicated that the bribe demand



was directly linked to a land record dispute in the Jajpur Town area.

Officials said the ASI allegedly offered to influence the outcome of the report, which would have been used in administrative proceedings regarding land ownership. The incident has been officially recorded, and the Vigilance team has initiated formal procedures under anti-corruption laws.

The accused ASI is currently in Vigilance custody, and investigations are ongoing to determine if any other persons were involved.

JSpur annual Book Fair from Jan 15 to 21



Preparatory meet held

PNS ■ Jagatsinghpur

The 27th edition of the annual book fair will begin from January 15 to 21 next in Jagatsinghpur.

The Jagatsinghpur Sanskritika Parishad organises the event. This time, the Adikabi Sarala Das Manch will be set up as decided in a book fair preparatory meeting held here on Friday.

Sanskritika Parishad Chairman-cum-Collector J Sonal presided and discussed the proposed overall arrangements for the fair. For raising awareness on Srimad Bhagavad Gita, a special campaign and a discourse would be arranged and the district administration has decided to purchase books worth Rs 3 lakh from the book fair, the Collector informed.

SP Ankit Verama suggested launching a special pa-

vilion exhibiting books and epics of the great poet Sarala Das and viewed that Odisha police will launch an awareness campaign on cybercrime on the occasion.

The book fair souvenir 'Smruti Patra' will be inaugurated. Writers and scribes are asked to furnish their manuscripts by December 20, before the souvenir editor, Mahendra Kumar Acharya or the Parishad general secretary, Sarada Das.

The meeting also discussed the cultural programmes to be showcased during the fair and the literary discourse to be organised on different dates. Poetry recitation, an open quiz, and cultural performances by local troupes will be organised, Parishad working president Biplab Choudhury informed.

A few publishers, Parishad members, civil and police administration officials and mediapersons attended the meeting and gave their views.

Mahtab's contributions to nation-building discussed



Event hosted by Nimapada Sahitya Sansad

PNS ■ Bhubaneswar

A two-day national seminar celebrating the 125th Birth Anniversary of Utkal Keshari Dr Harekrushna Mahtab was held in Bhubaneswar. It was organised under the auspices of the Nimapada Sahitya Sansad, with support and assistance from the State Odia Language Literature and Culture Department and in collaboration with the Odia Research Center.

The inaugural ceremony on

December 6 was graced by Director, Odisha Research Centre, Prof (Dr) Chandni Prasad Nanda as the chief guest, along with Editor, 'Jhankar', Prof Babaji Charan Pattnaik, who participated as the chief speaker.

The session was presided over by Prof (Dr) Basant Kumar Panda, and the welcome address was delivered by Nimapada Sahitya Sansad president senior advocate Suwendu Kumar Routray who emphasised Mahtab's unparalleled contributions to nation-building, most notably his decisive role alongside Sardar Patel in integrating 26 small princely States into

Odisha.

The programme was formally inaugurated by centenarian social worker and former MLA Padmcharan Nayak.

During the event, several individuals were honored with Harekrushna Mahtab's Award for their contributions in their respective fields. The honorees included Padmcharan Nayak (Politics), Dr Babaji Charan Pattnaik (Literature), Dr Kailash Chandra Das (History), and Nabin Das (Journalism).

The First Session of the National Seminar focused on the topic: 'Literature, History

and Other Dimensions of Harekrushna Mahtab's Personality'. Main Speakers in the discussion included eminent columnist Prahlad Singh, Dr Chinmayee Mohapatra, and Dr Kunjabihari Mohanty.

The second session involved a subject-based discussion on life and legacy of Mahtab. Main speakers included the retired Principal of Nimapada College, Dr Jogendra Mishra; ex-Professor Kalikinkar Pattnaik; and Dr Pramodini Jena from the Centre of Excellence for studies in Classical Odia.

At the end of the day, there was a national level poetry recitation session.

Int'l Conf at SOA 'India's bioeconomy to reach 300-bn dollars by 2030'

PNS ■ Bhubaneswar

India's bioeconomy, which includes biotech, pharma and agriculture, officially valued at 165 billion dollars in 2024, was expected to reach 300 billion dollars by 2030, Biotech Research Society, India (BRSI) president Prof Sudhir Kumar Sopory said on Monday.

The government had launched Biopharma Mission at the national level while other programmes included Bio AI Hubs, Bioagriculture and Bioenergy, Prof Sopory said while addressing the inaugural session of the three-day International Conference on 'Biotechnology for Sustainable Development and Circular Economy' at the SOA Deemed to be University here.

The conference, which is being attended by 40 eminent scientists from 28 different countries, has been organised by the Centre for Industrial



Biotechnology Research (CIBR) of SOA in collaboration with the BRSI.

Director of Indian Institute of Information Technology (IIIT) Bhubaneswar, Prof Ashish Ghosh who graced the event as the chief guest, focused on the use of biotech for the betterment of human society.

The International Bio-processing Association (IBA)

awards were presented to Prof AA Koutinas of University of Patras, Greece, and Prof Suzana Ferreira Dias of University of Agriculture, Lisbon, Portugal.

The session was also addressed by Dr Binod Parameswaran, COE, BRSI, Prof Marina Tisma of Josip Juraj Strossmayer University, Croatia and Prof Christian Larroche of Universite

Clermont Auvergne, Clermont Ferrand, France.

Pro-Vice Chancellor, SOA, Prof Prashanta Kumar Patra presided over the event which was also addressed by Director, CIBR and Conference Chair Prof Hrudayanath Thatoi. Convenor of the conference Prof Sasmita Mohanty introduced the guests while Dr Amrita Banerjee proposed the vote of thanks.

Baladevjew issue in Assembly

Min's flip-flop on temple project irks K'pada people

RAJESH BEHERA ■ Kendrapada

The devotees, servitors and intellectual mass expressed their displeasure towards the government for Law Minister Prithviraj Harichandan misleading the State Assembly during a discussion on the beautification project of the 400-year-old Baladevjew Temple in Kendrapada.

Harichandan, while answering to a question of Kendrapada MLA Ganeswar

Behera, told that there is no information on the Rs 100 crore temple project, though in a review meeting on the temple project held in November, he had disclosed that the Government was ready to carry out the beautification works in the ongoing fiscal.

MLA Behera raised the issue in Assembly on December 6 and the Law Minister surprised everyone by saying that there is no information with the Law Department on Rs 100

crore project. "It is purely unfortunate that the BJP Government has been playing with the sentiments of people of the district," stated MLA Behera in his response, while people of the district were largely dismayed over the statement of the Minister.

Notably, Law Minister Harichandan had chaired a high-level review meeting on the Parikrama Prakaipa of the Baladevjew temple temple November 16. Later, he had

stated that the Government was all set to carry out the beautification work in the current financial year with an estimated cost of Rs 100 crore with an aim to make the Baladevjew temple a prominent heritage and religious spot, though the final DPR was yet to be completed.

The meeting was attended by Kendrapada MP and BJP national vice-president Baijayant Panda, Mahakalapada MLA Durga

Prasad Nayak, besides the Commissioner of Endowments of Odisha Lalatendu Jena, district Collector Raghuram R Iyar, ADM (General)-cum-the president of Baladevjew Temple Endowment Trust Board Nabakrushna Jena and Sub-Collector, Rabindra Kumar Pradhan, among others.

The discussion was also held related to the detailed layout of the Parikrama Prakaipa, including beautification

works and essential infrastructural developmental works. The Minister had stated that all necessary ancillary arrangements are going to be implemented to improve the temple's surroundings to boost the pilgrim experience.

"We are committed to carry out every required measures, from beautification to supporting facilities, to give Baladevjew Temple a new and improved landscape," Harichandan had told media.

In Bhapur 4 of bike lifting gang held; 15 bikes seized

PNS ■ Khandapada

Four persons of a bike lifting gang, including kingpin Netaji Sethi who belongs to Golapokhari village under Fategarh police limits, were arrested and 15 bike were recovered from them in Bhapur area of Nayagarh district.

Nayagarh SPS Susri attending a Press conference at Khandapada police station on Friday informed that two theft bikes out of 15 were handed over to their concerned own-

ers. Rest 11 will be handed over to their respective owners soon.

Khandapada SDPO Madanmohan Pradhan, Fategarh IIC Panchanan Parida, Khandapada IIC Nihar Ranjan Mahanty, SI Gopabandhu Mallik, SI Manasmita Sahoo and other police officers were present.

The bike lifting gang had been active in the Bhapur and Khandapada regions for quite some days. Still several bike theft cases are under investigation.

Use of coal, firewood in tandoors banned

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

Amid persistently high pollution levels in the capital, the Delhi Pollution Control Committee (DPCC) has issued directions mandating a strict ban on the use of coal and firewood in tandoors across all hotels, restaurants and open eateries in the city. Both actions target two major neighbourhood-level polluters: smoky commercial kitchens and dust from open construction stockpiles. The order, issued under Section 31(A) of the Air (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act, 1981, requires all commercial establishments to switch exclusively to electric, gas-based or other clean-fuel appliances. The DPCC noted that Delhi continues to record Air Quality Index (AQI) levels above prescribed standards, and coal-based cooking remains a significant contributor to localised pollution. The directions follow



earlier mandates under the Graded Response Action Plan (GRAP), which list the ban on coal and firewood use in tandoors as a stage-I action to curb emissions. Citing the June 2022 approved fuel list issued by the Commission for Air Quality Management

(CAQM) and its modified GRAP order dated November 21, 2023, the DPCC reminded authorities that enforcement agencies must ensure full compliance during the ongoing pollution control measures. Urban local bodies --

including commissioners and chief engineers of municipal agencies -- have been instructed to conduct checks and ensure that all eateries under their jurisdiction immediately discontinue use of coal and firewood. The directive states

that establishments may only run electric or gas-operated tandoors, and compliance must be enforced without exception.

The order, issued with the approval of the competent authority, has been sent via speed post and email to all relevant departments for immediate action.

In another order, invoking powers under Section 31(A) of the Air (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act, 1981, the DPCC noted that despite repeated directions from the Supreme Court, National Green Tribunal and the Commission for Air Quality Management (CAQM), roadside stocking of construction materials continues unchecked in several parts of the city.

The latest directive is aligned with the CAQM's order on the Graded Response Action Plan (GRAP) issued on November 21, 2025. The committee observed that unregulated storage, sale and transportation of

materials such as sand, bajri, bricks, cement, tiles and stones along roads and public spaces had emerged as a persistent source of fugitive dust and a major contributor to PM10 and PM2.5 pollution in the capital. Officials have been instructed to clear all roadside and footpath vendors storing or selling building materials in an unauthorised manner and to ensure that no such materials are kept or transported in the open.

The order also states that any material lying exposed on public land, or even on private land without proper covering, should be confiscated, and penalties must be imposed under the Municipal Corporation of Delhi's rules and by-laws.

The DPCC emphasised that the step is crucial to tackling neighbourhood-level dust emissions, which remain one of the largest contributors to Delhi's deteriorating air quality.

₹5,000 penalty for open burning of waste

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

Acting on the directions of the National Green Tribunal (NGT), the Delhi government has authorised field-level officers to impose a fine of ₹5,000 on anyone found burning garbage, leaves, plastic, rubber or other waste materials in the open.

The order, issued by the Department of Environment, aims to curb one of the most widespread sources of local air pollution in the capital.

The move follows a series of NGT orders in the long-running case Vardhaman Kaushik vs Union of India, in which the tribunal had prohibited open burning of all forms of waste back in April 2015.

The NGT had also specified that violators -- or anyone abetting such burning -- would be liable to pay compensation under Section 15 of the National Green Tribunal Act, 2010, with a fixed penalty of

₹5,000 to be collected on the spot, according to the order.

In its latest directive, the Environment Department has empowered deputy tehsildars and above in the district administration, as well as sanitary inspectors and senior officials of the Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD) and New Delhi Municipal Council (NDMC), to enforce the fine. The order states that the NGT's directions must be treated as a civil court decree and implemented strictly by the designated officers.

All collected compensation is to be deposited in the Delhi pollution control committee's bank account, and the authorised officers have been instructed to submit monthly action-taken reports to the DPCC without fail.

Open burning of waste remains a routine source of toxic emissions in several parts of Delhi, particularly during the winter months when air quality dips sharply.

City AQI improves marginally

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

After nine days of 'very poor' air, Delhi on Tuesday recorded a marginal improvement, with the average AQI recorded below 300, in the 'poor' category.

However, the relief may be short-lived, with pollution levels likely to rise in the coming days and the Air Quality Index (AQI) expected to plummet to the 'very poor' to 'severe' range, according to the six-day forecast issued by the Air Quality Early Warning System for Delhi.

Meanwhile, the maximum temperature on Tuesday settled at 25.5 degrees Celsius, about 0.7 degrees below normal, while the minimum temperature was 9.2 degrees Celsius, around 0.4 degrees below normal, according to the India Meteorological Department (IMD). Relative humidity stood at 79 per cent in the morning and 52 per cent in the evening.

The 24-hour average AQI

stood at 282 at 4 pm on Tuesday, compared to 314 at the corresponding hour on Monday and 308 on Sunday, according to the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB).

The last time pollution levels dipped below the 'very poor' mark was on November 30, when the city recorded an AQI of 279, after enduring 24 consecutive days of 'very poor' to 'severe' air, data shows.

Meanwhile, the CPCB's Sameer app had not updated station-wise pollution levels until 6 pm, but morning readings at 18 monitoring stations recorded 'very poor' air quality, while 20 lay in the 'poor' range.

According to the Decision Support System for Delhi's air quality management, vehicular emissions within the city contributed 17.1 per cent to local pollution on Tuesday, followed by industries in Delhi and surrounding regions at 8.3 per cent, and domestic emissions at 4.1 per cent.

For Wednesday too, the

system forecast vehicular emissions to be the prime source of pollutants -- contributing around 17.1 per cent.

Speaking about the capital's pollution, Mohammad Rafiuddin, Programme Lead at the Council on Energy, Environment and Water (CEEW), said, "Delhi's AQI improved slightly from over 300 in the last few days to around 282, due to strong winds on Tuesday."

He said, according to the IMD's weather forecast, the wind speed is expected to stay above 10 kmph tomorrow, which is favourable for dispersing pollutants.

However, the minimum temperature is likely to drop by 2-3 degrees over the next three days, with nighttime temperatures falling to around 6 degrees Celsius. This could trigger widespread biomass burning for heating, which may worsen air pollution, he said. He urged the authorities to remain vigilant to curb open biomass burning.

Two apps on fast track to battle air pollution

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

The Delhi government is fast-tracking its two digital platforms -- Dust Portal 2.0 and the upgraded Green Delhi App -- to strengthen round-the-year monitoring of air pollution.

Environment Minister Manjinder Singh Sirsa on Tuesday reviewed for "visible results on the ground" through the apps.

Sirsa assessed progress on the revamped Dust portal, which will feature GIS-based mapping, automated AI-driven alerts, real-time data integration, and QR-coded verification for all registered construction sites. The system will also sync with MCD, PWD and DDA platforms to ensure enforcement and transparency in construction management, it said.

"Technology is the backbone of efficient pollution control. With tools like Dust Portal 2.0, we can identify

violations in real time and ensure immediate corrective action," Sirsa said, directing officials to deliver the beta version within weeks.

The upgraded Green Delhi App, meanwhile, will allow citizens to report 17 categories of violations -- ranging from debris dumping and road dust to open burning and industrial emissions -- and track their resolution through the app. Departments have been instructed to clear pending cases, currently around 13 per cent of the total, in a time-bound manner.

To ensure authenticity of closures, officers will be required to mark their physical presence within a 200-metre radius of complaint sites before marking them resolved, it added.

Sirsa appealed to citizens to actively file complaints, saying their participation "forms the foundation of Delhi's clean air mission.

MCD orders citywide inspection of hotels, restaurants and bars

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

The Municipal Corporation of Delhi's Standing Committee has ordered a full inspection of all hotels, restaurants and bars across the city following the recent nightclub fire in Goa that killed several people. Chairperson Satya Sharma said the civic body will not allow any lapse in licensing or fire safety compliance and warned that establishments violating rules will face immediate action.

Sharma said the Goa incident is a reminder that public spaces must meet all safety norms without exception. "Every establishment must have valid permissions and complete fire safety compliance. Negligence will not be tolerated," she told officials during the meeting.

The Committee, chaired by Sharma, held an extended discussion on the Goa tragedy and directed officials to submit a zone-wise and ward-



wise list of all hotels, restaurants and bars in Delhi within five days. The list must include their licence status, seating capacity permissions and whether they have renewed or valid approvals. The aim is to identify establishments operating without permissions or running beyond approved limits.

Officials were told to begin inspections immediately after the lists are compiled. The Committee said illegal operations pose a direct risk to public safety and must be shut down without delay.

Sharma stressed that enforcement teams must act in a time-bound manner and ensure that records are transparent and updated.

The meeting also passed a condolence resolution expressing grief over the deaths in the Goa incident. Members observed silence and offered sympathy to the families of the victims. Councillors said the incident was a stark warning for all urban bodies to stay alert and ensure strict adherence to safety standards at commercial establishments.

Establishments lacking fire safety standards to face action: CM Rekha after Goa nightclub fire

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

Delhi Chief Minister Rekha Gupta on Tuesday directed that establishments lacking fire-safety equipment or violating prescribed standards must face action, days after a fire incident at a nightclub in Goa claimed 25 lives.

She issued a slew of directions during a high-level review meeting with the Fire Department at the Delhi Secretariat, an official statement said.

During the meeting, she expressed concern over the recent incident of a fire in a nightclub in Goa, in which 25 people lost their lives. She said such incidents serve as a warning that Delhi must remain constantly vigilant.

She emphasised that regular inspections of safety standards in large events, hotels, restaurants and clubs are essential to prevent such accidents.

Stressing that fire safety is



not solely the responsibility of the department, she said establishment owners also have a collective responsibility to ensure that all fire safety measures are in place on their premises.

The chief minister also noted that certain complaints have been received claiming that unnecessary rules and procedures are causing delays in obtaining No Objection Certificates (NOCs).

She directed officials to identify such cases, submit a

report, and prepare proposals to simplify the rules, the statement added.

The chief minister instructed the chief secretary and departmental officers to review the existing procedures, and if required, draft new guidelines so that Delhi's fire fighting system becomes swift, transparent and reliable.

Noting that the Fire Department is continuously being provided with modern equipment for fire fighting, she also instructed that if the

department still requires any resources, it should inform the government. The process of providing them will be undertaken immediately, the statement added.

The chief minister issued directions to the Delhi Fire Service to ensure that the process of issuing NOCs related to fire safety is made fully transparent and seamless so that hotels, restaurants, nightclubs, multiplexes and other commercial establishments do not face unnecessary difficulties.

The purpose of the NOC system is not to discourage business owners but to ensure public safety, she asserted. The chief minister instructed officers that if any rule is causing genuine applicants difficulty, it should immediately be brought to the government's notice so that corrective steps can be taken. She said there must be no ambiguity or unnecessary delays in the process of issuing NOCs.

LG approves change in DDA's tendering system

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

Delhi Lieutenant Governor Vinai Kumar Saxena has approved a major change in the Delhi Development Authority's tendering system, clearing the use of the Swiss Challenge Method for disposal of high-value land and long-term licence projects.

The move aims to end the long-standing problem of repeated tender cancellations caused by single bids, a hurdle that has delayed major DDA projects for years and pushed costs upward.

Under the new system, any single bid received by DDA will no longer result in automatic cancellation. Instead, that bid will be placed in the public domain and treated as the new reserve price, higher than the original reserve price before inviting fresh competing bids.

The original bidder will also be allowed to participate in the re-auction. The change ensures that DDA always receives an amount above its



reserve price while preventing projects from stalling due to lack of competition.

The Swiss Challenge Method is commonly used in public asset disposal where transparency and price discovery are essential. By opening the single bid to competitive challenge, it ensures that valuations reflect actual market demand. The system, officials said, also eliminates arbitrary awarding of projects and strengthens fairness in disposal of high-value land.

Officials said the shift will help DDA complete long-term

of time and increased costs. The new method prevents such failures and guarantees timely disposal.

Officials highlighted several benefits of adopting the Swiss Challenge Method. The biggest advantage is that it avoids the collapse of the tendering process when only one bidder applies. Instead of restarting from scratch, which takes months, the authority can quickly initiate a competitive challenge and arrive at a new, market-tested price. The method also maximises revenue for DDA by pushing bidders to outbid the original offer.

Since the licenses are for long terms up to 55 years any increase in annual licence fees has a major long-term financial impact. Counter-bids help the authority secure higher revenue and protect public assets from being undervalued. The system also adds a safety layer against low bids. If the first bid is below market value, competing bids in the challenge round reveal the true demand.

MoU signed for construction of modern DTC headquarters

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

The Delhi Transport Corporation (DTC) and the Delhi State Industrial & Infrastructure Development Corporation (DSIIDC) on Tuesday signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) for the development and construction of a modern DTC headquarters at the IP Bus Depot.

The project, estimated at ₹207 crore and spread across 26,015.78 square metres (2.6 hectares), aims to replace the existing DTC office, which has been assessed as structurally outdated and inadequate to support the opera-

tional needs of Delhi's rapidly expanding transport network. The overall site spans 26,015.78 sq. m, including an operational area of 12,234.54 sq. m and a dedicated 6,158 sq. m space for constructing the new DTC headquarters. In line with sustainable development goals, the plan also incorporates a green area of 9,681.71 sq. m, accounting for 20 per cent of the total land, ensuring an environmentally conscious and future-ready campus.

Speaking on the occasion, Delhi Transport Minister Pankaj Kumar Singh said that the existing Delhi Transport Corporation building was not in good condition. An MoU



with DSIIDC has been signed for development of DTC headquarters. Under this, 50% of the commercial usage rights will remain with DSIIDC for 30 years.

"The new complex will

include parking space for 200 buses and basement parking for more than 200 cars. A modern DTC headquarters will be developed with solar panels and other sustainable features, includ-

ing STP, ETP, rainwater harvesting, RO plant and more. As we are expanding Delhi's transport sector, introducing EV buses and undertaking multiple enhancements. That is why this proposal was initiated", he said.

Responding to a query on the project timeline, the Minister the project is expected to be completed within two and half years, and the process has been structured accordingly.

The project will be executed by DSIIDC on behalf of DTC with commercial space arrangement included in the MoU to ensure financial viability over a 30-year lease tenure.

Police bust factory producing counterfeit engine oil filters

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

Delhi Police's Crime Branch has busted a factory that was manufacturing counterfeit oil filters of leading brands Bosch, Tata and JCB.

A total of 1,917 duplicate filters, along with dyes, stickers, holograms and packaging material, were seized during the raid in the Anand Parbat Industrial Area. The factory owner, Manmeet Singh of Delhi, was arrested on the spot.

The raid was carried out on 4 December by a team of

the Crime Branch. Police officials said the factory was fully equipped for large-scale production of duplicate filters. Officers found five dyes of Tata, four dyes of JCB, one dye printing machine and hundreds of JCB stickers, holograms and cardboard boxes. "This is a major action against counterfeit manufacturing that harms consumers and companies," said DCP Crime-I Sanjeev Kumar Yadav. He said the team acted swiftly on a tip-off and recovered a large quantity of fake auto parts prepared for supply to

the market. According to the police, the information about the illegal operation reached the police earlier in the day. The tip-off had warned that a factory was secretly producing duplicate auto parts of several well-known companies.

The parts were being passed off as original and supplied in the market through different vendors. A dedicated team of officers and representatives from Tata Motors, Bosch Ltd and JCB India also joined the operation to verify the authenticity of the seized products.

Enhanced education funding shows results: Meghalaya CM



Meghalaya Chief Minister Conrad K Sangma said on Tuesday that the State education department's annual budget has been increased from ₹2,000 crore to ₹3,500 crore in recent years, the highest so far, and the impact of this investment is "becoming visible".

Navy Chief begins four-day visit to Brazil

Navy Chief Admiral Dinesh K Tripathi on Tuesday began a four-day visit to Brazil to consolidate the bilateral maritime security cooperation. Admiral Tripathi will hold discussions with Brazilian Defence Minister Jose Mucio, Chief of the Joint Staff of the Brazilian Armed Forces Admiral Renato Rodrigues de Aguiar Freire and Commander of the Brazilian Navy Admiral Marcos Sampaio Olsen.



JP Nadda to lay foundation of BJP State office in Shimla



The BJP national president and Union Health and Family Welfare minister Jagat Prakash Nadda would lay the foundation stone and perform Bhoomi Pujan of the proposed BJP State-level party office in Shimla on Saturday, a statement here said on Tuesday.

Karnataka lost ₹5,474 crore to cyber frauds in three years

Karnataka Home Minister G Parameshwara on Tuesday said that over the last three years, people in the State have lost ₹5,474 crore to cyber frauds, of which the police have managed to recover ₹627 crore so far. The minister was responding to a question from Sakleshpur BJP MLA Cement Manju in the Legislative Assembly.



Left-wing extremism districts drop from 126 to 11: Centre

RAJESH KUMAR ■ New Delhi

The Centre on Tuesday said the number of districts affected by left-wing extremism has decreased from 126 in April 2018 to 90 in July 2021, 70 in April 2024, 38 in April 2025, and further to 11 in October 2025, with only three districts now considered to be the "most affected" by left-wing extremism. The Pioneer carried a report on December 8, 2025 that only three districts are now most affected by Naxalism in Chhattisgarh.

Responding to a supplementary during the Question Hour in Lok Sabha, Minister of State for Home Nityanand Rai said the number of affected States have gone down from 10 in 2014 to five in 2025 (till October) showing a reduction of 50 per cent while the number of districts affected by Left Wing Extremism (LWE) has witnessed a sharp decline of 91 per cent from 126 to 11 during the period.

"However, to prevent the

Only three districts now most-affected by Naxalism in Chhattisgarh

RAJESH KUMAR ■ New Delhi

The number of Naxalism-affected districts in India have reduced to 38 from 46 across nine States, according to a recent Government review. An updated review by the Government now narrows down the most affected districts to three and districts of concern to four. All three most affected districts — Bijapur, Narayanpur and Sukma — remain in Chhattisgarh, the State historically at the heart of Naxal activity.

The four districts of concern are Kanker in Chhattisgarh, West Singhbhum in Jharkhand, Balaghat in Madhya Pradesh, and Gadchiroli in Maharashtra, where Naxal influence is waning but targeted development is still required. Districts under the concern category are those where Naxal activity has sharply declined but continued development efforts are needed to consolidate peace and stability.



Pioneer Special

Policy and Action Plan to Address Left Wing Extremism (LWE), 2015, under which the Union and State Governments work together. Officials said the subcategory of most affected districts was created in 2015 with 35 districts to ensure focused deployment of resources. Following periodic reviews, the number was reduced to six in April 2025. Districts under the Security Related Expenditure (SRE) scheme — one of the key financial support programmes for combating

Naxal influence — are classified as either LWE-affected or Legacy and Thrust (L&T) districts. The latest review places 27 districts under the L&T category. These include eight districts from Odisha, six from Chhattisgarh, four from Bihar, three each from Jharkhand and Telangana, and one each from Andhra Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra and West Bengal.

prospective sites for its expansion. Hence, continued government support is required for capacity building, according to official records. The districts covered under the SRE scheme were last revised on April 1, 2025. After the review, 46 districts were listed as SRE districts — six categorised as "most affected", six as "districts of concern" (DOC), and six as "other LWE-affected". In the subset category of "Legacy & Thrust" districts, 28 were included.

CPI (Maoist) from re-establishing itself in areas recently freed from the influence of left-wing extremism, 27 districts have been included under the Security Related Expenditure (SRE) scheme as 'Legacy and Thrust Districts,' the minister said.

He said under the leadership of the Prime Minister and the successful guidance of the Home Minister, left-wing extremism will be "eradicated by March 2026, and there is no

escape for them now".

Underlining the outcome of the zero-tolerance policy of the central Government against Naxals, Rai said that from the highest level of Maoist violence witnessed in 2010, the incidents have seen a massive decline of 81 per cent in 2024.

The minister said Maoist violence had resulted in 6,508 deaths from 2004 to 2014 (till May that year), which included 4,684 civilians and 1,824 security personnel. Rai said in

the following decade, between 2015 and 25 (till May), the number of deaths dropped by 71 per cent to 1,868, which included 1,404 civilians and 464 security personnel. He said 44 deaths have been reported between May and November this year.

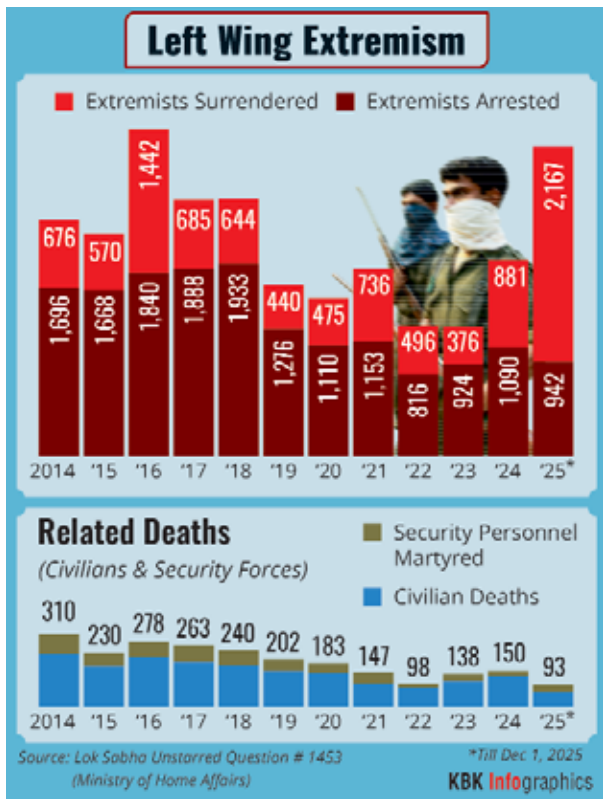
The minister added that left-wing extremists who surrender are being provided with immediate grants and other financial assistance, such as ₹5 lakh for high-

ranking cadres, ₹2.50 lakh for other cadres, additional financial incentives for surrendering with weapons, and a monthly stipend of ₹10,000 for three years for training.

He said that besides improving security infrastructure in such States, schools, ITIs, Kaushal Vikas Kendras, banks, and ATMs have been set up as part of the overall development. To ensure all-round development, the Modi Government adopted a

"Whole of Government" approach in 2015 and formulated a comprehensive policy and action plan, Rai said.

Under this plan, various security and development measures have been undertaken, with States being provided with CAPF (Central Armed Police Forces) battalions as needed, he added. "Currently, 574 companies are deployed in the Left-Wing Extremism-affected areas," he said.



No law should burden citizens, reforms to ease life: PM Modi

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Tuesday said no law should be a burden on any citizen, and rules and regulations should always be for people's convenience. Addressing an NDA parliamentary party meeting, Modi also said the country is now in a full-fledged "Reform Express" phase, where reforms are happening rapidly and with clear intent.

The Government's reforms are completely citizen-centric and not just economic or revenue-focused. The goal is to remove everyday hurdles of people so that they can grow to their full potential, the prime minister emphasised. Briefing reporters after the meeting, which was attended by all NDA MPs, Union Parliamentary Affairs Minister Kiren Rijiju said Prime Minister Modi gave very good guidelines for the lawmakers and conveyed that the most significant issue in the third term of his Government is the "Reform Express".

"I want to stress that the Narendra Modi Government's 'Reform Express' has started to move. It will not stop. This reform is to change the life of every citizen. When we talk about reform, some people will think of it as economic reform, some people will think of it as political reform,



PM Narendra Modi being felicitated by MPs for the alliance' victory in Bihar Assembly elections during the NDA Parliamentary Party meeting at Parliament premises in New Delhi on Tuesday. Union Ministers Amit Shah, Rajnath Singh, JP Nadda and others also seen

administrative reform or cultural reform. Reform means improvement in the life of every citizen.

"The prime minister has stressed that whatever law is framed, it should have no provision which is harmful or causes inconvenience to any citizen. The rules and laws should not become a burden on the life of a common citizen. Everyone must ensure

that rules and regulations are for the convenience of the common people and improve their lives," Rijiju said.

Quoting Modi, Rijiju said rules and regulations must be for improving the system, not to harass people, and there should be no law which harasses people without any reason. "Now we will work in this direction. The central Government, the State

Governments and the local self-governing bodies like the municipalities and panchayats, all should work in (this) direction," he said.

Sources said Modi urged the MPs to actively share real problems faced by ordinary people, so that the "Reform Express" can reach every household and remove day-to-day hardships. Modi also said he wants to end the

culture of 30-40 page forms and unnecessary paperwork, stressing that there is a need to provide services at citizens' doorsteps and eliminate repeated data submissions, the sources said.

The prime minister recalled that the Government trusted citizens by allowing self-certification, and this has worked successfully for 10 years without misuse.

Modi stressed that both ease of life and ease of doing business are the top priorities of his Government, the sources said.

At the outset of the meeting, Modi was felicitated for the NDA's massive victory in the recent Bihar elections. Union ministers Rajnath Singh, Amit Shah and JP Nadda, who is also the BJP president, were among those present at the meeting held at the Parliament House complex. Modi was garlanded by JD(U) leader Sanjay Jha and Rashtriya Lok Morcha chief Upendra Kushwaha — both Rajya Sabha members.

In the 243-member Bihar Assembly, which went to polls last month, the NDA secured 202 seats, paving the way for JD(U) supremo Nitish Kumar to return as chief minister for the 10th time. Among the alliance partners, BJP won 89 seats, JD(U) 85, LJP (Ram Vilas) 19, Hindustani Awam Morcha (Secular) five, and Rashtriya Lok Morcha four.

Amit Shah slams Opposition over Vande Mataram debate

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

Home Minister Amit Shah on Tuesday alleged that opposing 'Vande Mataram' is in the blood of the Congress and said had Jawaharlal Nehru not divided the song in two parts to begin appeasement, the partition of the country would not have taken place.

Initiating the debate in the Rajya Sabha to mark the 150th anniversary of Vande Mataram, he slammed the Opposition for linking the debate on the national song with the upcoming West Bengal elections. He said Vande Mataram was the "mantra" that awakened India's cultural nationalism, and remains as relevant today as it was during the freedom struggle. He stressed that the song will remain relevant in the coming days as well, in taking the country towards Viksit Bharat.

Shah also attacked Congress for questioning the need for a debate on Vande Mataram, and accused first prime minister Jawaharlal Nehru of "dividing" the poem and limiting it to merely two stanzas.

"When Vande Mataram completed 50 years in 1937, Jawaharlal Nehru ji divided it into two parts, and limited it to two stanzas," Shah said,



Home Minister Amit Shah speaking during a debate on Vande Mataram in the Rajya Sabha at the Parliament in New Delhi on Tuesday

triggering uproars from Opposition benches. He said many like him believe that the nation would not have been partitioned if the hymn 'Vande Mataram' was not "divided into two", alleging that appeasement politics began ever since.

"That is where appeasement politics started and that appeasement resulted in partition of the country. Many like me believe, if Vande Mataram was not divided into two due to appeasement politics, this nation would not have been partitioned," Shah said.

Targeting the Opposition, he said many members of the Congress were considering the discussion on Vande Mataram as a political manoeuvre or a weapon to divert attention from issues.

"We do not fear discussing

issues. We do not boycott Parliament. If Parliament is not boycotted and allowed to function, then discussion on all issues will take place. We do not fear, nor do we have anything to hide. We are ready to discuss, be it any issue," he said.

He further added that when the song completed 100 years, the country was under Emergency when opposition leaders were jailed.

Shah also accused several Opposition leaders of not according respect to Vande Mataram when sung in Parliament and alleged that "the disrespect and insult toward Vande Mataram have run in the veins of leadership of the principal Opposition party ever since the freedom struggle and continues even today".

Muslims cannot sing Vande Mataram: Maulana Arshad

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

Amid the debate on Vande Mataram in Parliament, Jamiat Ulama-i-Hind on Tuesday said it had no objection to anyone singing the national song, but the poem carries polytheistic beliefs, and Muslims cannot associate anyone else with worship.

Maulana Arshad, the outfit's president, said love for one's country is one thing, and worshipping it is another.

He said Muslims do not need a certificate from anyone to prove their love for this nation.

"We have no objection to anyone reading or singing Vande Mataram. However, we want to make it clear once again that a Muslim worships only one God, and

cannot associate anyone else with this worship," Madani said in a statement.

He said that the contents of the poem Vande Mataram are based on polytheistic beliefs and ideas, particularly four of its verses where the homeland is explicitly likened to a deity and words of worship are used for it.

This is against the fundamental belief and faith of any Muslim, he said.

The Constitution of India grants every citizen freedom of religion (Article 25) and freedom of expression (Article 19), Madani said.

Under these provisions, no citizen can be forced to adopt any slogan, song, or ideology that goes against their religious beliefs or sentiments, he said.

"The unparalleled sacrifices of Muslims and the elders of Jamiat Ulama-i-

Hind in the freedom struggle, especially their efforts against the partition of the country, are as clear as daylight."

"Their struggle for the unity and safety of this nation after independence can never be forgotten," he said.

Madani emphasised that the debate on Vande Mataram must take place within the framework of respect for religious beliefs and constitutional freedoms, not in a manner of political blame-game.

"Jamiat Ulama-i-Hind appeals to all national leaders not to use such sensitive religious and historical issues for political gain, but to fulfil their constitutional responsibility by promoting mutual respect, tolerance, and unity in the country," he said.

Allahabad HC directs UP DGP on prevention of corruption cases

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Prayagraj

Observing that matters relating to the Prevention of Corruption Act are being conducted most casually, the Allahabad High Court has directed the principal secretary (home) and the DGP of Uttar Pradesh to look into them and issue necessary directions.

The above direction was passed by Justice Samir Jain allowing a bail application of one Suresh Prakash Gautam, against whom an FIR was lodged under the Prevention of Corruption Act, 1988 in Saharanpur district. After going through the record, the court found that according to the allegations, Gautam was posted as a labour enforcement officer. He demanded a bribe from the complainant to settle his claim.

Gautam was apprehended

red-handed by the trap team and the bribe money was recovered from his possession. About ₹21.50 lakh were also recovered from his house.

The court said, "But it reflects that neither the hands of the applicant nor of the complainant were washed at the spot where the trap was made," adding that the alleged recovered bribe money was not sealed at the spot.

The court said the record also suggests that the recovery memo of the alleged bribe has also not been prepared on the spot and it appears that all these proceedings have been conducted at the police station. "Considering these facts, the argument advanced by the counsel for the applicant that the trap proceeding appears to be doubtful cannot be completely brushed aside at this stage," the court added.

Delhi car blast: NIA arrests one more doctor who harboured Dr Umar

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

The National Investigation Agency (NIA), probing the "white-collar" terror module linked to the Delhi car blast, arrested one more doctor for allegedly harbouring Dr Umar-un-Nabi, the suicide bomber, and destroying evidence in the conspiracy hatched by banned Jaish-e-Mohammed group, officials said on Tuesday.

According to a statement issued by the federal agency, Dr Bilal Naseer Malla, hailing from Baramulla in north Kashmir, has been arrested. He is the eighth person to be arrested in the case.

The NIA has alleged that Bilal was involved in the "conspiracy behind the terrorist attack" that killed 15 people and injured several others in the Red Fort area on November 10. According to NIA investi-

gations, Bilal had knowingly harboured Dr Umar-un-Nabi, the man who was driving the explosive-laden car that blasted outside the Red Fort area. He is also alleged to have provided him logistical support besides being involved in destruction of evidence related to the terror attack. Bilal was produced before a designated court of Principal District and Sessions Judge Anju Bajaj Chandna here who remanded him to NIA custody for seven days.

The court also extended the NIA custody of Amir Rashid Ali, another accused in the Red Fort blast case, who was produced alongside Bilal, by seven days.

The NIA said in its statement on Tuesday that its investigation into the conspiracy behind the deadly terror act continues with the help of various central and State

agencies to unravel all the threads of the conspiracy.

After taking over the investigation, the NIA took the custody of seven people, including three doctors Dr Muzzamil Ganaie, Dr Adeel Rather, and Dr Shaheena Sayeed and a religious preacher Maulvi Irfan.

The NIA had arrested two people Amir Rashid Ali and Jasir Bilal Wali alias Danish. Ali is the one in whose name suicide bomber Umar had purchased the car that was loaded with explosives including ammonium nitrate. The same car exploded outside the Red Fort.

The "white collar" terror module was busted by the Jammu and Kashmir Police along with their counterparts in Uttar Pradesh and Haryana and it led the investigators to Faridabad's Al Falah University where 2,900 kg of explosives was recovered.

■ States Focus ■



RAJASTHAN CM PUSHES FOR ACTION ON ILLEGAL MINING

Rajasthan Chief Minister Bhajanlal Sharma on Tuesday directed officials to strengthen monitoring of the state's mineral resources, ensure time-bound revenue collection, and take strict action against illegal mining activities. Sharma instructed officials to identify new mineral blocks using modern technology and artificial intelligence (AI). He also asked them to study best practices adopted by mineral-rich states to strengthen innovation and boost revenue. Chairing a review meeting of the mines and petroleum department at the chief minister's office, Sharma said Rajasthan's abundant mineral reserves are crucial to its economic growth, local employment and regional development.



5 FILMS FROM LATIN AMERICA TO BE SCREENED AT 30TH IFFK

A package of five Latin American films with intense themes will be screened at the 30th International Film Festival of Kerala (IFFK), starting on December 12. The curated lineup includes Laura Casabe's 'The Virgin of the Quarry Lake', Cecilia Kang's 'Elder Son', Luciana Piantanida's 'All the Strength', Verónica Perrotta's 'Quemadura China', and Francisco J Lombardi's 'Inside the Wolf', according to a release from the Kerala State Chalachitra Academy, the festival organisers, on Tuesday. Casabe's 'The Virgin of the Quarry Lake' is a Spanish coming-of-age horror film based on two stories by Mariana Enriquez, exploring the pleasures, anxieties and frenzy of teenage life.

Impeachment bid is political intimidation: Andhra Dy CM

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Amaravati

Andhra Pradesh Deputy Chief Minister Pawan Kalyan on Tuesday dubbed the INDIA bloc constituents' impeachment move against a Madras High Court Judge as "political intimidation".

The Janasena Party founder charged that it was an attempt at "silencing" the judiciary.

Several opposition MPs, led by the DMK, on Tuesday submitted a notice to Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla to move a motion for the removal of Madras High Court judge GR Swaminathan, whose order directing Subramaniya Swamy temple authorities in Madurai's Thirupparankundram to ensure that a lamp is lit at the deepathoon (pillar) sparked a row.

"Over 120 MPs from the INDIA Bloc, led by the DMK, have weaponized the Constitution to call for the impeachment of a Judge. This is not judicial accountability; this is blatant political intimidation," Kalyan



said in a post on 'X'.

Why were certain political parties going to such extreme lengths to impeach a judge for a judgement that simply upholds the right to practice the Hindu faith, he asked.

"Is this not a cynical attempt to strong-arm and silence the broader judiciary," the actor-politician said. Was this motion not a signal to all judges that they must be "careful" when ruling in cases

about Hindu traditional practices and faith, he added.

"The selective outrage and weaponisation of the impeachment process in this case expose a disturbing bias. This incident only solidifies the urgent need for a unified institutional voice," Kalyan added.

Calling for the establishment of a 'Sanatana Dharma Rakshana Board' as the need of the hour, Kalyan asserted that devotees can actively

manage their temples and religious affairs without the fear of alleged political interference or judicial overreach spurred by "political vendetta" under such as set up.

According to the deputy CM, when a constitutional bench of the Supreme Court had delivered the Sabarimala judgment overturning a "centuries-old, deeply cherished custom" regarding entry into one of the most sacred Hindu sites, no judge was impeached.

Their ruling, which fundamentally altered a core religious practice, was met only with legal review petitions, not political motions for removal, he said.

However, he alleged that the political establishment has set a dramatically different standard now and a High Court Judge is being 'targeted' just because he delivered a judgement upholding the right of believers to light a lamp and practice a long-standing ritual on property legally recognised as belonging to a religious institution.

It will be disaster if BJP comes to power in Bengal: Mamata

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ Kolkata

In what the State saffron leadership called a sign of "pre-Parivartan" (change) trepidation, Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Tuesday warned the people of Bengal against any possible takeover of power by the BJP saying, "there will be disaster if BJP comes to power in Bengal" vowing to prevent its surge at any cost.

The Chief Minister while addressing a rally at Cooch Behar in North Bengal alleged that special intensive revision (SIR) of electoral rolls would bring national cit-

izenship register (NRC) and detention camps in the State vowing to prevent it at any cost. She asked the people to remain alert about their rights and "ensure that your names do not get deleted from the voters' lists."

On why she was "forced to comply to the orders of the Election Commission of India implementing the SIR regime in Bengal she said, "it was due to the threat of President's Rule that we had to do it or else they would have allowed the time to lapse and implemented President's Rule which would be a de facto BJP rule in Bengal and then they



would have conducted and manipulated the elections."

"SIR is not a single scheme, it will bring in its trail NRC and detention camps this is all being done by the BJP to usurp power in our State and remem-

ber if Bengal goes into the hands of the BJP then there will be disaster, there will be no self-respect, no peace, no security for the people there will be only jealousy and hatred and the whole State will become a

Chandrayaan-3 reveals high electrical activity near Moon surface

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Bengaluru

The electrical environment near the Moon's surface in the south polar region is far more active than previously understood, ISRO said on Tuesday, based on an analysis of Chandrayaan-3 lander data.

The Chandrayaan-3 data, obtained between August 23 and September 3, 2023, provided critical ground truth on the Moon's plasma environment. In a statement, ISRO said, "Analysis of the Chandrayaan-3 lander data has yielded significant and first-of-its-kind results on the plasma environment near the Moon's surface at southern higher latitudes, revealing that the electrical environment near the Moon's surface in the south polar region is far more active than previously understood."

In physics, plasma is often called the fourth state of matter, consisting of a mixture of charged particles, including ions and free

electrons. Despite being electrically neutral overall, plasma is highly conductive and responds strongly to electromagnetic fields.

"The Moon's thin plasma environment, or lunar ionosphere, is governed by several major processes. Solar wind, a continuous stream of charged particles (primarily electrons and hydrogen and helium ions) ejected from the Sun's upper atmosphere, constantly impinges on the Moon's surface," ISRO said.

This, along with the photoelectric effect where high-energy photons from the Sun knock out outer-shell, electrons from atoms on the surface and in the sparse atmosphere, causing ionisation is the primary mechanism for generating plasma.

The lunar plasma is further influenced by the deposition of charged particles originating from the Earth's magnetosphere (specifically the magnetotail) when the Moon passes through that region, typically for 3 to 5 days during 28

days, resulting in a constantly changing and dynamic electrical environment near the surface, ISRO said.

The results, obtained by the Radio Anatomy of the Moon Bound Hypersensitive Ionosphere and Atmosphere Langmuir Probe (RAMBHALP) instrument onboard the Vikram lander of Chandrayaan-3, mark the first-ever direct, or "in situ", measurements of lunar plasma at such low altitudes, it added.

The agency said the electron density near the Chandrayaan-3 landing site, named Shiv Shakti Point, was measured to be between 380 and 600 electrons per cubic centimetre.

"This is significantly higher than estimates derived from observations taken at higher altitudes, which are primarily based on changes in the phase of electromagnetic signals from satellites passing through the Moon's thin atmosphere at grazing angles, a technique known as radio occultation," ISRO said.

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Thiruvananthapuram

Polling in seven districts of Kerala in the first phase of the crucial local body elections on Tuesday, viewed by many as a key indicator ahead of next year's State legislative Assembly contest, crossed the 50 per cent mark seven hours after voting commenced.

Voting began at 7 am for the local bodies in seven districts — Thiruvananthapuram, Kollam, Pathanamthitta, Alappuzha, Kottayam, Idukki and Ernakulam and by 2 pm, the polling percentage crossed 50 per cent, according to the State Election Commission (SEC) figures.

Voters of all ages and professions, including actors like Asif Ali and Renji Panicker, were seen standing in queues since early morning to exercise their franchise.

Kerala Governor Rajendra Vishwanath Arlekar also cast his vote in the local body polls in the state capital.

Leader of Opposition in the Assembly VD Satheesan, UDF convener Adoor Prakash and senior Congress



leader Ramesh Chennithala expressed confidence of a "historic win" for the UDF, claiming there was an "anti-incumbency" feeling among the people and the Sabarimala gold issue has been a setback for the ruling LDF in the state.

Party stalwart AK Antony was also confident of a huge UDF victory, saying that people were ready for a change as they were tired of the present Government. He said that the BJP was too weak and therefore, the UDF was the only front that could bring a change in the state as desired by the people.

Antony refused to comment on the Sabarimala gold loss or Rahul Mamkootathil issues, saying that hike in water and electricity charges and price rise have thrown the normal day-to-day life of the people out of gear and those are the main problems.

Congress MP from Thiruvananthapuram, Shashi Tharoor, too said that it was time for a change as the corporation in the state capital was under LDF rule for 45 years.

He said people were looking for a change due to issues like drainage and san-

MP Cabinet clears cheetah project at Nauradehi

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Bhopal

The Madhya Pradesh Cabinet meeting in Khajuraho on Tuesday approved major industrial, road, health, irrigation and fire service decisions, with a strong focus on accelerating development in Bundelkhand and creating the state's third cheetah habitat at Nauradehi. The Cabinet cleared a special incentive package for the Masvasi Grant industrial area in Sagar to draw investment and generate jobs in Bundelkhand.

Land allotment and annual lease have been fixed at ₹1 per sq metre, while development charges can be paid in 20 annual instalments. Maintenance is set at ₹8 per sq metre per year to reduce the burden on early-stage units.

The package includes full reimbursement of stamp duty and registration fees and a five-year exemption from electricity duty from the start of commercial production. The state expects ₹24,240 crore in new invest-

ment and more than 29,000 direct jobs. Large units will fall under the Industrial Promotion Policy 2025, while MSMEs will be covered under the MSME Development Policy 2025. Cement plants will not be eligible for the incentives, which will remain in force for five years.

For road infrastructure, the Cabinet approved an administrative sanction of ₹2,059 crore to widen the 76.680-km Sagar-Damoh stretch into a four-lane corridor under the Hybrid Annuity Model. The state will also spend ₹323.41 crore on land acquisition. The project includes 13 underpasses, three major bridges, nine medium bridges, one ROB, 13 major junctions and 42 medium junctions. The Government approved 990 regular and 615 outsourced posts to operate the new medical colleges at Damoh, Chhatarpur and Budhni.

It also cleared the upgradation of 12 health facilities in 11 districts, creating 345 regular posts and three contractual roles, and permitting 136 outsourced appointments to support expanded capacity.

detention camp," Banerjee said adding "we will not allow the State to turn into a detention camp, we will protect it at any cost we will not allow NRC in Bengal there will be no detention camp in our State I will prevent this at any cost."

The Chief Minister who rolled out a list old deprivation of the State at the hands of the Centre all in terms of clearance of central funds from MNREGA, rural housing and rural road construction schemes said how the Centre had the gall to find out ways to preempt the orders of the Court to prevent MNREGA dues to come to her State.

She said, that her Government received a letter from Delhi wherein a quarterly labour budget was demanded from the State Government. "Even after the Courts have ordered them to clear the funds they have imposed a restrictive condition but where is the time to show it? This is December, and the election is due early next year then they are also talking about providing training, my question is when will you train and when will you give the jobs? I say this piece of paper is valueless." Bengal did not want mercy it asked for its rights, she said.

Culture Ministry to document, conserve rare Arunachal manuscripts

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Itanagar

Union Ministry of Culture will send an expert team to Arunachal Pradesh to undertake scientific documentation, digitisation and conservation of rare manuscripts of Buddhist and indigenous faiths in five districts, an official statement said on Tuesday.

An official delegation led by state Art and Culture Secretary Manta Riba attended a workshop chaired by the ministry's Secretary Vivek Aggarwal recently, where the Arunachal Pradesh Government flagged the need for immediate support to preserve its rich manuscript heritage under the Gyan Bharatam Mission, it said.

The three-member state delegation underlined the significance of the Lik-Thai manuscripts of Namsai,



ancient Buddhist Kangyur scriptures, and other rare indigenous collections, and sought assistance for scientific conservation, systematic documentation and modern archival infrastructure.

A detailed presentation on the Gyan Bharatam Mission showcased extensive field documentation carried out in Tawang, West Kameng, Shi-Yomi, Upper Siang and Namsai districts.

The survey reported the discovery of rare manuscripts

and traditional scripts, including texts containing episodes from the Mahabharata and the Ramayana, indicating deep historical and literary linkages among the communities of Arunachal Pradesh.

The presentation also warned that age, climatic conditions and inadequate archival facilities pose serious threats to these materials and proposed a structured roadmap for preservation, digitisation, capacity-building and cultural continuity.

BJP accuses CPI(M) of fake votes via transgender voters in Kerala

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ Thiruvananthapuram

The BJP on Tuesday accused the CPI(M) of carrying out fake voting here during the first phase of local body polls through transgenders, leading to a tense atmosphere at a ward for some time.

Local BJP leaders claimed that there were no transgender voters in the electoral roll of Vanchiyoor ward, but transgender persons were seen casting their votes in the booths of the ward.

However, CPI(M) denied the claim that there were no transgender voters in the electoral roll.

Some transgender persons clashed with the cadres of the saffron party after it made the allegation, according to visuals on TV channels.

BJP cadres showed on TV

the electoral rolls of both booths in Vanchiyoor in support of their claim that there were no transgender voters in the lists.

Some of them even sat down on the road in protest as their leaders argued with the police.

Later, the CPI(M) contended that the draft electoral rolls were published four times in the area before the final list was published and despite that, such allegations were being made.

The local leaders of the Left party alleged that the BJP was trying to create a situation like that in UP and Bihar and they will not allow it to happen.

They rejected the BJP's claim that there were no transgender voters in the ward and said the electoral rolls were easily accessible and could be examined.

Modi-led committee likely to meet for CIC appointments

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

A three-member committee headed by Prime Minister Narendra Modi and also including Leader of Opposition Rahul Gandhi is likely to meet on Wednesday to decide the next Chief Information Commissioner and Information Commissioners for eight vacant positions at the Central Information Commission (CIC).

The Government had informed the Supreme Court on December 1 that the Prime Minister Modi-led panel is likely to meet on December 10 to select and recommend names for these posts. Under Section 12 (3) of the Right to Information Act, the prime minister is the chairperson of the committee, which also comprises

the leader of opposition and a Union minister nominated by the prime minister, that selects and recommends the names for appointment as Chief Information Commissioner and Information Commissioners.

According to the Act, the CIC has a Chief Information Commissioner and 10 Information Commissioners who adjudicate complaints and appeals filed by the applicants against the unsatisfactory orders of Government officials on their applications.

The CIC, which is staring at 30,838 pending cases, according to its website, is left with just two information commissioners Anandi Ramalingam and Vinod Kumar Tiwari with eight vacancies.

The highest appellate authority to adjudicate-related complaints and

appeals had gone headless for the seventh time since 2014 after incumbent Chief Information Commissioner Heeralal Samariya demitted office on September 13. The Commission had become headless for the first time after then CIC Rajiv Mathur demitted office in August 2014.

Samariya, who had become the Chief Information Commissioner on November 6, 2023, demitted office on attaining the age of 65 years, according to an office order issued by the Commission.

In an response to activist Commodore Lokesh Batra (retired), the Department of Personnel and Training had said that 83 applications were received for the post of Chief Information Commissioner in response to its advertisement issued on May 21.

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Order Order

CBI arrests senior passport superintendent for influencing witnesses



The CBI has arrested a senior passport superintendent posted in Mumbai in a disproportionate assets case against him for allegedly trying to influence witnesses and mislead the investigation, officials said Tuesday.

The accused officer, Deepak Chandra, was booked in March this year for allegedly amassing illicit assets worth ₹85 lakh during his tenure at the regional passport office, Ghaziabad, from July 30, 2018, to September 30, 2024.

"During the course of investigation, a search was conducted at the residential premises of the accused, which led to the recovery of huge unaccounted cash of around ₹60.00 lakh, details of investments in immovable properties as well as details of various expenses of high magnitude," a CBI spokesperson said.

The CBI arrested Chandra on Tuesday night from Mumbai, where he is currently posted, when the agency found that he was allegedly influencing witnesses and deliberately, with malafide intention, tried to mislead the investigation, she said. He was produced before a special court in Ghaziabad, which sent him to CBI custody till December 12. "On the application of CBI, Special Judge, Anti-Corruption, CBI Court, Ghaziabad vide its order dated 17.09.2025 had also issued an ad-interim attachment order for attachment of his properties, including one residential flat and one commercial shop," she said.

Shoegate fame lawyer thrashed in Karkardooma court



A lawyer who almost hurled a shoe at former Chief Justice of India BR Gavai was allegedly attacked inside Karkardooma district court premises on Tuesday. The video showed a group attacking 71-year-old Rakesh Kishore with a slipper, while the lawyer defended himself. The clip also showed the lawyer asking the attacker why he was beating him and then shouting several times, "Sanatan Dharm ki jai ho."

"There was a huge ruckus. We rushed to the spot on hearing the commotion," said advocates. On October 6, Rakesh Kishore approached the dais when a bench led by the ex-CJI was hearing the mentioning of cases by lawyers, removed his shoe, and tried to throw it at the judge. Later, the SC refused to initiate contempt action against him, though the Bar Council of India suspended him from practice.



OTS with bank no ground to quash criminal cases: SC

J GOPIKRISHNAN
■ New Delhi

In a diverse judgment within weeks, the Supreme Court's another bench on Tuesday held that One Time Settlement (OTS) with banks is not ground for quashing criminal cases. Holding that economic offences undermine public interest far beyond the immediate financial loss to a bank, the apex court has restored criminal proceedings against M/s Sarvodaya Highways Ltd and its directors in a loan fraud case involving approximately ₹52.5 crore. A Bench of Justice Vikram Nath and Justice Sandeep Mehta ruled that a one-time settlement (OTS) with the bank cannot justify quashing a prosecution where forged documents were allegedly used and a clear loss to the public exchequer is evident.

Meanwhile, in a curious development, another Bench comprising Justices JK Maheshwari and Vijay Bishnoi on November 19 allowed the fugitive Chetan-Nitish Sandesara brothers' firms to deposit ₹5,100 crore as OTS in the Registry by December 17 to avoid all cases, including criminal cases registered by various probe agencies. The apex court was agreeing to the Central Government which submitted the OTS scheme including withdrawing all cases in a sealed cover on November 18. With this order Supreme Court has allowed fugitive Sandesara brothers and their Sterling Group to go scot-free from all criminal cases filed by CBI, ED and Income Tax related to bank loan frauds by paying ₹5,100 crore, which is only 1/3 of the dues.

On Tuesday, in a diverse order, a



Justice Sandeep Mehta

Justice Vikram Nath

Bench of Justice Vikram Nath and Justice Sandeep Mehta set aside a 2022 judgment of the Punjab and Haryana High Court, which had quashed the CBI case after the company paid ₹41 crore under an OTS with the State Bank of Bikaner and Jaipur (now SBI). Allowing the CBI's appeal, the Court noted that the settlement amount was significantly lower than the actual liability and was accepted by the bank under compelling circumstances typical of recovery processes in NPA cases.

The case involved offences under Section 120B (criminal conspiracy) read with Sections 406 (criminal

breach of trust), 420 (cheating), 467, 468, 471 (forgery, fabrication etc) of the Indian Penal Code, 1860 and Section 13(2) read with 13(1)(d) of the Prevention of Corruption Act, 1988. Corruption case can't be quashed on settlement Referring to established precedents, the Bench observed that economic offences are not private disputes capable of compromise.

"There are plethora of judgments of this Court, some of which we have referred to above, which categorically hold that in cases involving economic offences, it is not merely the Bank that stands defrauded, but the society at large

is also impacted." The Court stressed that one-time settlements, by their very nature, do not represent full recovery. In this case, while the bank recovered around ₹41 crore, the outstanding liability was approximately ₹52 crore.

"One-time settlements are, as a rule, effected under circumstances where the Bank under duress is compelled to accept lesser amount in order to secure the maximum possible recovery against the defaulting account. In this background, we feel that the High Court committed error apparent in the eyes of law by quashing the proceedings." The Court also noted that

precedents such as Gian Singh "expressly prohibits quashing of proceedings of a criminal case on strength of a compromise where loss to public exchequer is evident and the offences under the PC Act, 1988 are applied.

"Fabricated Documents, Collusion Found in Probe the CBI had registered an FIR in 2015 based on a complaint alleging that the company obtained credit facilities by submitting fabricated work orders, manipulated revenue records, and false stock statements. An internal bank inquiry had declared the account an NPA and estimated a fraud of ₹52.5 crore. After investigation, the agency filed a chargesheet against the company, its directors and the then branch manager for offences under IPC provisions related to cheating, forgery and criminal conspiracy, and under Section 13(1)(d) read with 13(2) of the Prevention of Corruption Act.

Prosecution sanction had been granted against the bank manager. The High Court had quashed the FIR and chargesheet under Section 482 CrPc on the ground of settlement, noting that the bank had received payment and closed recovery proceedings. The Supreme Court held this approach to be legally unsustainable. It noted that the High Court failed to consider vital aspects, including the alleged fabrication of documents, the involvement of a bank official, the application of the PC Act, and the deficit of over 75 crore even after settlement. Restoring the chargesheet, the Court directed the trial court to proceed on merits and clarified that none of its observations should prejudice the accused.

Retired judges object to 'motivated campaign' against CJI Surya Kant

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

Several retired judges of the Supreme Court and High Courts issued a statement on Tuesday expressing "strong objection to the motivated campaign targeting Chief Justice of India Surya Kant in the wake of his remarks in proceedings concerning Rohingya migrants".

The statement noted that an open letter was issued on December 5 by some former judges, lawyers and the Campaign for Judicial Accountability and Reforms (CJAR), raising "deep concern at certain unconscionable remarks made about Rohingya refugees on December 2" by a top court bench that was hearing a plea alleging custodial disappearance of Rohingya refugees in India. Underlining that "disparagement of the Supreme Court is unacceptable", the statement said judicial proceedings should only be subject to fair and reasoned criticism.

"What we are witnessing, however, is not principled disagreement but an attempt to delegitimise the judiciary by mischaracterising a routine courtroom proceeding as an act of prejudice. "The Chief Justice is being attacked for asking the most basic legal question: who, in law, has granted the status that is being claimed before the court? No adjudication on rights or entitlements can proceed unless this threshold



Chief Justice of India Surya Kant

is first addressed," the statement said.

It said the campaign against the CJI omitted the bench's clear affirmation during the proceedings that no human being on Indian soil, citizen or foreigner, can be subjected to torture, disappearance or inhuman treatment, and that every person's dignity must be respected.

"To suppress this and then accuse the court of 'dehumanisation' is a serious distortion of what was actually said," the statement signed by more than 40 judges said.

It said if every "searching judicial question" on nationality, migration, documentation or border security is accused of hate or prejudice, judicial independence itself would be at risk.

"We therefore affirm our full confidence in the Supreme Court and in the CJI, condemn motivated attempts to distort the court's remarks and personalise disagreement into attacks on individual judges; and support consideration of a court-monitored SIT into the illegal procurement of Indian identity and welfare documents by foreign nationals who have entered Bharat in violation of law," said the statement signed by 44 retired judges.

It said the country's constitutional order require both humanity and vigilance.

"In upholding human dignity while safeguarding national integrity, the judiciary has acted in accordance with its oath. It merits principled support, not vilification," the statement said.

Curtail litigation, not generate it, SC on revenue map case

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

The Supreme Court on Tuesday stressed that any unnecessary remand of a matter for fresh consideration by a higher court should be avoided as it generates fresh round of litigation. The idea is to curtail the litigation and not generate it, a bench of Justices Rajesh Bindal and Manmohan said, as it set aside an order of the Allahabad High Court, which had remanded back a matter — related to authorities rejecting a man's application for correction of a revenue map — for fresh consideration after hearing all parties concerned.

While dealing with the appeal, the top court noted that court had taken the wrong premise and interpretation of Section 30 of the Uttar Pradesh Revenue Code, 2006, which deals with maintenance of map and the field book. The bench said this could have generated unnecessary further litigation.

"We may also add that earlier view by this court was that in case there were violations of principles of natural justice, the matter was to be remanded for affording opportunity of hearing to the party concerned. However, with the passage of time, the view changed," the bench said. It further said, "The idea is to curtail the litigation and not generate it. Any unnecessary remand by a higher court generates fresh round of litigation, which should be avoided."

Initially, the application filed before the collector seeking correction of

map for a plot was dismissed. Later, the Additional Commissioner also dismissed the appeal against the collector's order. After around 17 years, again an application was filed seeking correction of revenue map but the same was rejected by the concerned authority.

The matter had then reached the High Court which remanded the issue for fresh consideration after affording due opportunity of hearing to all concerned.

Referring to Section 30 of the Code, the apex court bench noted the collector is duty-bound to maintain, in the manner prescribed, a map and a field book for each village and any changes made in it have to be recorded annually or after such longer intervals as may be prescribed. "If the facts of this case are examined, the issue regarding the correction of map stood settled between the parties when the appeal filed by the private respondents against the order passed by the Collector was dismissed on September 4, 2001. The maps were already final," the bench said.

It said after the purchase of the land, an effort made by the private respondents to get the revenue map corrected had failed and they could not be permitted to raise the same issue after a gap of over 17 years. The bench said it was not a case where any error was found in the revenue record which deserved correction under Section 30 of the Code. While allowing the appeal, the bench set aside the order passed by the High Court.

Thirupparankundram lamp lighting row: HC asks Chief Secretary, ADGP to appear on Dec 17

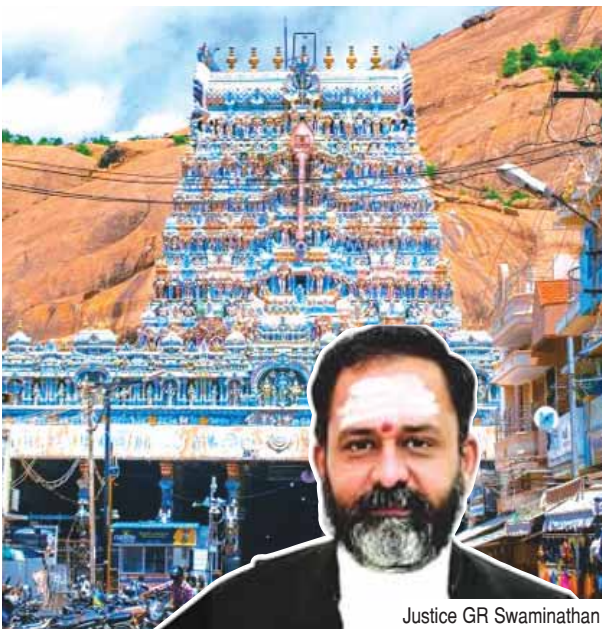
PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Madurai

The Madurai Bench of the Madras High Court on Tuesday directed Tamil Nadu Chief Secretary and ADGP (L&O) to appear before the court through video conference on December 17 in the Thirupparankundram lamp lighting row case.

The Union Home Secretary has been included as a party to the proceedings.

During the hearing of a contempt plea, Additional Advocate General Veera Kathiravan, appearing for the State, informed that a special leave petition filed by the Tamil Nadu authorities challenging the single judge order on lighting the lamp atop the Thirupparankundram hill was pending before the Supreme Court.

Justice G R Swaminathan, hearing the contempt petition filed by Rama Ravikumar, directed the Chief Secretary and Additional Director General of Police (Law and



Justice GR Swaminathan

Order) to appear via video conference on December 17.

Ravikumar, represented by Advocate MR Venakatesh had moved the court seeking proceedings against the Madurai District Collector,

Commissioner of Police, and the Executive Officer of Arulmighu Subramanya Swamy temple, Thirupparankundram, for not complying with the court's earlier orders.

The counsel for the petitioner said the authorities were "attempting to drag the case without complying with the court's order."

On December 1, Justice Swaminathan had ordered the temple management to arrange the lighting of the lamp on a stone pillar in Thirupparankundram hill during Karthigai Deepam festival on December 3.

However, when the event did not take place despite the court order, the judge permitted the petitioner and ten others to light the lamp with CISF protection on the evening of December 3.

While admitting the contempt plea on December 4, the court quashed the prohibitory order enforced by the district collector during the Karthigai Deepam festival.

Meanwhile, Opposition parties led by DMK on Tuesday filed Impeachment Notice to Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla for removing Justice GR Swaminathan.

SC examines grant of 'personal hearing' to those with bank accounts declared fraud

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

The Supreme Court on Tuesday wondered what purpose the grant of "personal hearing" would serve to the bank account holders whose accounts were declared as fraud after following due diligence prescribed by the Reserve Bank of India in 2017.

A bench of Justices JB Pardiwala and KV Viswanathan was hearing a plea of the State Bank of India challenging a decision of the Calcutta High Court which directed giving personal hearing by following the principle of natural justice to such bank account holders.

"How do you justify the grant of personal hearing to you when the banks what they are actually doing as per the RBI circular is due diligence at the back end and providing you an opportunity to put your point forward in writing after issuance of a show cause notice," the

bench told senior advocate K Parameshwar, appearing for private firm Amit Iron Pvt Ltd.

At the outset, Solicitor General Tushar Mehta, appearing for the country's largest bank SBI, said that insisting on a personal hearing causes concrete prejudice to the banks and to the integrity of the regulatory regime, while the borrower suffers no real prejudice so long as it has had a full and effective opportunity to place its case in writing and have that case duly considered.

He said the circular (Master Directions on Fraud, 2017) relating to declaration of fraud was required for two essential purposes — the sheer magnitude of the number of banking frauds in the country has shown a demonstrable rise, requiring the RBI to step in and provide a mechanism to be followed by the entire banking sector. Also, any impact on any bank or banking sector has a direct effect on the nation-

al economy; therefore, the financial strength of the banking sector is always a prime consideration.

Giving figures for banking frauds and the amounts involved from 2022 to 2025, according to the RBI's latest Annual report for 2024-2025, Mehta said the number of frauds for 2022-23 was 13,494 involving ₹18,981 crore, in 2023-24 there were 36,060 bank frauds involving amount 12,230 crore and in 2024-25 there were 23,953 bank fraud cases involving 36,014 crore.

He submitted that these increased incidences of banking fraud and malpractices led the RBI to constitute multiple committees and working groups, including the Amitava Ghosh Committee in 1991, and the NL Mitra Committee in August 2003. "Based on the recommendations of these committees and working groups, the RBI issued circulars/directions from time to time advising banks on major fraud-prone areas,

new modus operandi detected earlier, and necessary safeguards to be adopted for the prevention of fraud.

"However, despite this, there were problems, including delays in the detection of fraud, inadequate reporting to the RBI, and delays in reporting and alerting other banks on fraud by borrowers," Mehta submitted.

He said that the experience of RBI and deliberation before the expert committees revealed why such frauds take place and are perpetrated and one of the most important problems was the inevitable lack of coordination between various banks.

"This resulted in a borrower committing fraud with one bank, and they would approach another bank and avail huge finances, due to the delay in detection and fraud reporting. This would result in a chain reaction and, therefore, the RBI Directions, inter alia, elaborated on the said issues," the SBI said.

Editor's
TAKE

The politics of heritage and beyond

As parties clash over the meaning of Vande Mataram in Parliament, a deeper question emerges: should a symbol of unity be pulled into the realm of partisan politics?

Vande Mataram. Sujalam suphalam malayaja-sitalam, sasya-syamalam mataram! The first stanza of the national song translates to: "I bow to thee, Mother-rich with waters, rich with fruits, cool with the southern breeze, verdant with crops and fields-Mother!" This heartfelt ode to Mother India by the great poet Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyaya is once again at the centre of a political storm. The political class across the country agrees with and bows to its sentiment, yet it is being fiercely debated in Parliament. The debate over *Vande Mataram* in Parliament on December 8 was more than an exchange of rhetoric; it revealed the complicated intersections of heritage, nationalism, and electoral politics in contemporary India.

When Prime Minister Narendra Modi invoked Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyaya's iconic hymn, it carried enormous symbolism-drawing upon a century of collective memory, pride, and sacrifice. Yet it also raised an uncomfortable question: should such a sacred piece of India's freedom struggle become the subject of partisan debate? Should not our freedom struggle and its symbols remain sacrosanct? *Vande Mataram* occupies a sacred space in India's national imagination. Born out of Bankim's *Anandamath*, it emerged as the rallying cry of the freedom struggle, uniting Indians across communities during the anti-colonial movement. Tagore's voice at the 1896 Congress session, Bhikaji Cama's flag in Stuttgart bearing its words, and the chants during the 1905 anti-Partition protests all cemented its status as a symbol of resistance and aspiration. It was never merely a poem; it was an emotional force field. This is why its invocation in Parliament is both powerful and fraught with the danger of the song itself being drawn into political crossfire.

Prime Minister Modi's speech wove together strands of spirituality, nationalism, and cultural pride. He recalled Gandhi's admiration for *Vande Mataram* and used it to position his government as the custodian of a nationalist legacy. But, coming ahead of the 2026 Bengal elections, it can also be construed as an electoral plank. As observers noted, cultural symbolism served not just as homage but as political strategy. Bengal's pride in Bankim, Tagore, and its reformist icons makes any such invocation deeply consequential in the state's political arena. India's cultural symbols belong to the nation, not to any party-neither the Congress nor the BJP. When political actors selectively elevate one icon while denigrating others-such as the recent remarks against Raja Ram Mohan Roy-their risk distorting the pluralistic, composite spirit that animated the Bengali renaissance and the freedom movement.

Bankim, Tagore, Roy, Vivekananda, and many others did not belong to a party; they belonged to the nation at large. They represented an expanding universe of ideas that shaped modern India. Appropriating or diminishing them harms the national cause-the nation loses more than it gains. When symbols like *Vande Mataram* become contested rather than cherished, their universal appeal-and their power to unite-dissipates. That is a loss not just for politics, but for the nation.

From grid burden to green power:
Goa's solar-powered water supply

The future of India's renewable strategy will depend on striking the right balance between utility-scale projects and widespread community-level solarisation



SHRIPAD
YESSO NAIK

India stands at a defining juncture in its clean-energy transformation. Guided by the Panchamrit commitments announced by Hon'ble Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi ji at COP26, the country has set for itself some of the world's most ambitious climate goals: 500 GW of non-fossil fuel capacity by 2030, meeting half of its energy requirements from renewables by the same year, reducing projected carbon emissions by one billion tonnes, cutting carbon intensity by 45 per cent, and ultimately achieving Net Zero by 2070. These targets are not distant aspirations; they form the backbone of a nationwide movement that is steadily gathering momentum.

India's progress in renewable energy over the past few years has been nothing short of remarkable. The country has already crossed the milestone of achieving 50 per cent of its total installed power capacity from renewable sources, with the renewable energy portfolio now reaching an impressive 259 GW. Solar and wind continue to drive this growth with record annual capacity additions. The rise of ultra-mega solar parks, hybrid renewable corridors, offshore wind zones and floating solar plants reflects a sector in rapid evolution. Yet, complementing these large-scale investments is an equally important push for distributed solar, one that brings clean energy directly to households, farmers and communities.

Two flagship programmes of the Government of India underscore this vision. The PM Surya Ghar: Muft Bijli Yojana, launched by the Hon'ble Prime Minister, is propelling rooftop solar to an unprecedented scale. With a target of one crore household installations and subsidies streamlined through a single national portal, residential solar has moved from novelty to mainstream, easing electricity bills and empowering families to become producers of clean energy.

Similarly, the PM-KUSUM scheme has emerged as a transformative initiative for India's farmers. By solarising agricultural pumps, both standalone and grid-connected, and enabling decentralised renewable plants in rural areas, the scheme reduces diesel dependence, stabilises farm incomes and supports climate-resilient agriculture. Thousands of farmers across the country have already benefited, turning agricultural fields into clean-energy hubs.

However, as India accelerates renewable capacity growth, the challenges associated with bulk RE-intermittency, long-distance transmission requirements, land availability and rising grid congestion-highlight the need for innovative, decentralised energy models.



INDIA'S PROGRESS IN RENEWABLE ENERGY OVER THE PAST FEW YEARS HAS BEEN NOTHING SHORT OF REMARKABLE. THE COUNTRY HAS ALREADY CROSSED THE MILESTONE OF ACHIEVING 50 PER CENT OF ITS TOTAL INSTALLED POWER CAPACITY FROM RENEWABLE SOURCES, WITH THE RENEWABLE ENERGY PORTFOLIO NOW REACHING AN IMPRESSIVE 259 GW

The writer is the Union Minister of State for Power and New and Renewable Energy, Government of India

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 @shripadynaik

 The Pioneer

Distributed generation, especially rooftop and community-level solar, is proving to be a powerful solution. By producing electricity where it is consumed, it reduces network stress, improves voltage stability, cuts transmission losses and significantly lowers infrastructure costs for power utilities. The future of India's renewable strategy will depend on striking the right balance between utility-scale projects and widespread community-level solarisation.

This becomes particularly relevant for missions such as the Jal Jeevan Mission (JJM), which aims to ensure clean tap water for every rural household. Water supply systems depend heavily on energy-intensive pumping infrastructure. Solarising these assets offers dual benefits: substantial cost savings for departments and uninterrupted service delivery for communities. It is against this backdrop that a noteworthy clean-energy initiative has emerged from Old Goa, showcasing how renewable power can strengthen essential public utilities.

At the pumping station near Podar School in Old Goa, a pioneering solar project has been implemented under the CSR support of IREDA, a PSU under the Ministry of New and Renewable Energy. The facility, which operates 60 HP pumps to lift water from a ground-level sump to an overhead tank, generally functions between 9 am and 1 pm, coinciding perfectly with peak solar generation hours. By integrating a 45 kW solar plant with net-metering capability, the station not only meets its daytime energy needs but also exports surplus clean power to the grid.

The impact has been significant. The Drinking Water Department now saves nearly ₹4.0 lakh annually in electricity expenditure, while revenue from surplus energy generation further strengthens its operational budget. Environmentally, the system offsets close to 45 tonnes of CO₂ every year, equivalent to the

carbon absorption of more than 2,050 mature trees. Nearly 650 residents now rely on a water supply system powered substantially by renewable energy. With a project cost of ₹28 lakh, a payback period of seven years and a system life of around 25 years, the initiative will continue delivering free, clean electricity for nearly two decades after cost recovery — an exemplary model of sustainable public infrastructure.

The success of this project reflects the foresight and commitment that guide my efforts to strengthen essential public services through clean and sustainable energy solutions. These efforts are deeply inspired by the broader national vision shaped by Hon'ble Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi ji, under whose guidance India has emerged as a global front-runner in renewable energy adoption. At a time when cities across the world struggle with deteriorating air quality, such grassroots initiatives demonstrate how local innovation can drive both environmental protection and community development.

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SINCE 1865

The solarisation of the Old Goa pumping station is more than a technical upgrade; it is a blueprint for India's sustainable future. As the nation marches towards its Net Zero commitment, the next phase of growth must lie in harnessing renewable energy for unconventional, often overlooked applications such as water supply systems, government buildings, rural institutions, agricultural infrastructure and community assets. Each such project not only reduces the burden on the grid but also brings clean energy closer to the people it serves. India's clean-energy journey is ultimately a collective one. With the right blend of visionary leadership, technological innovation and community participation, projects like the one in Old Goa will become the cornerstone of a greener, more resilient and more inclusive future.

PIC TALK



Employees wearing Santa Claus costumes perform during a parade celebrating Christmas at Lotte World Adventure in Seoul, South Korea.

PHOTO: PTI

DIGITAL EXPERIENCE

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WORLD HUMAN RIGHTS DAY AND ITS GROWING GLOBAL RELEVANCE

Since 1948, the United Nations has observed 10 December each year as World Human Rights Day. The primary objective of this observance is to promote and protect the fundamental human rights of people across all nations. The theme for Human Rights Day 2025, "Human Rights, Our Everyday Essentials," highlights how basic rights such as clean air, food, shelter, dignity, and personal safety are inseparable from everyday life.

At present, the world is witnessing widespread geopolitical turbulence. Prolonged conflicts such as the Israel-Palestine crisis and the Russia-Ukraine war continue to destabilise regions, displace populations, and deprive millions of their basic rights. Tensions and internal unrest in several other parts of the world

further deepen humanitarian suffering. It increasingly appears that global peace has become fragile and uncertain.

Despite the devastation caused by two world wars, humanity continues to resort to armed conflict rather than dialogue, cooperation, and mutual respect. The consequences are borne not by leaders but by ordinary citizens, who lose their rights to life, security, health, and freedom.


All religions advocate peace, compassion, and coexistence. Yet these principles are often ignored in practice. Upholding human rights is essential for lasting peace.

Without their protection, societies may increasingly descend into conflict in pursuit of dignity and justice.

JITESH MORI | GUJARAT

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

A spiritual path to ending gender inequality



RAJYOGI BRAHMA
KUMAR NIKUNJ JI

2ND OPINION
THE PIONEER

The Constitution of India not only guarantees equality for women but also empowers the State to adopt measures of positive discrimination to offset the cumulative social, economic, educational and political disadvantages they have historically faced. Yet, despite such strong constitutional safeguards, women continue to struggle for dignity, independence and equal opportunity. This compels us to ask why gender inequality remains so deeply embedded in our society.

Although India has made significant progress over decades of reform and development, our core mindset regarding gender has remained largely unchanged. For centuries, society has believed that the roles, characteristics and status of men and women are determined solely by biological sex-natural, fixed and therefore unquestionable. Gender thus became tied to predetermined behaviours and expectations assigned to boys and girls.

From the moment a child is born, society begins the subtle but powerful process of gendering. The birth of a son is often celebrated, while the birth of a daughter is still viewed with hesitation or sorrow in many households. As children grow, boys are encouraged to be assertive, bold and independent, while girls are conditioned to be quiet, obedient and confined to domestic spaces. These distinctions are not inherent differences; they are social constructs created and perpetuated by all of us. Within this rigid framework, we overlook a fundamental truth: men and women are not meant to be adversaries. Instead, they are meant to play complementary roles that create harmony and balance in society. At the spiritual level, the human soul-regardless of whether it resides in a male or female body-possesses both sets of qualities. Courage, determination and resilience coexist naturally with compassion, nurturing and gentleness. What we often label as "male" or "female" qualities are, in reality, learned traits rather than innate ones.

True empowerment therefore requires a shift in consciousness. It calls for moving beyond body consciousness to soul consciousness, where we recognise that our identity is not confined to gendered expectations. By connecting the self with the supreme source-the highest and purest form of energy-we awaken the inherent balance within us.

This spiritual connection restores self-respect, self-confidence and self-reliance. It nurtures holistic growth, enabling individuals to embody both strength and empathy, both willpower and compassion. Our scriptures remind us that the Almighty embodies the complete spectrum of these qualities. When we anchor ourselves to this supreme source, we too receive this wholeness.

When we identify solely with the physical body and its gendered limitations, we develop only partially. Spirituality thus becomes not an escape from reality but a prerequisite for social harmony. It dissolves hostility and division, replacing conflict with integration, equality and unity. It opens the "third eye" of wisdom, allowing us to access an inner reservoir of strength and purity. The real solution to gender inequality does not lie in replacing male dominance with female dominance. It lies in freeing both men and women from the chains of gender bias rooted in body consciousness. When individuals rise to higher awareness, society becomes more just, balanced and compassionate. Let us therefore empower ourselves spiritually and work together to ensure that every individual, regardless of gender, can live with dignity, equality and purpose.

The writer is a spiritual educator & popular columnist

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Passengers deserve fair compensation

The recent IndiGo airline imbroglio exposes how reactive regulatory oversight, combined with a market duopoly, leaves passengers vulnerable and weakens confidence in the aviation sector's long-term prospects. The spillover effects of mismanagement have also cast a shadow over airline privatisation plans in the post-pandemic era. India's domestic aviation market is dominated by IndiGo and Air India, making it particularly sensitive to disruptions. Soft regulation and delayed intervention undermine operational credibility and investor confidence alike. In contrast, mature aviation markets such as the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada, and Australia enforce strict consumer protection laws. Airlines in these countries are mandated to compensate passengers for cancellations and delays.

The 2022 Southwest Airlines crisis led to legal action, government investigation, and substantial reimbursements, reinforcing accountability and consumer trust. Indian aviation, however, continues to rely on ad hoc measures during crises rather than preventive oversight.

The IndiGo episode highlights how market concentration amplifies systemic risk. India must shift from reaction to anticipation by enforcing accountability and safeguarding passenger trust.

YUGAL KISHORE SHARMA | HARYANA

Reactive regulation threatens aviation trust

The recent IndiGo airline imbroglio exposes how reactive regulatory oversight, combined with a market duopoly, leaves passengers vulnerable and weakens confidence in the aviation sector's long-term prospects. The spillover effects of mismanagement have also cast a shadow over airline privatisation plans in the post-pandemic era. India's domestic aviation market is dominated by IndiGo and Air India, making it particularly sensitive to disruptions. Soft regulation and delayed intervention undermine operational credibility and investor confidence alike. In contrast, mature aviation markets such as the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada, and Australia enforce strict consumer protection laws. Airlines in these countries are mandated to compensate passengers for cancellations and delays.

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VIJAY SINGH ADHIKARI | UTTARAKHAND

Switch off stress, switch on life

With the rapid expansion of the digital revolution worldwide-through information technology, the internet, and smartphones-the practice of employers contacting employees beyond official working hours has increased sharply. Emails, phone calls, and instant messages now intrude into personal time, blurring the boundary between work and rest. This constant connectivity has resulted in rising levels of mental and physical stress among employees. To address this growing concern, the concept of the "Right to Disconnect" was first discussed in Europe and has since gained global attention. Even after completing their daily tasks, many employees feel compelled to respond to work-related communications, often out of fear of professional repercussions.

To provide legal protection and work-life balance, discussions on this right have been underway for several years. In a Bill presented in Parliament, MP Supriya Sule proposed the establishment of an Employee Welfare Authority. The Bill grants employees the right not to respond to work-related emails or calls beyond official working hours. Its objective is to reduce stress in both personal and professional life. As work increasingly shifts online, such legislation is timely and necessary to protect employee well-being.

DATTAPRASAD SHIRODKAR | MUMBAI

Water warriors lead the water revolution in countryside

As the world is literally sitting on a hot spot, notwithstanding these CoPs, which are hilariously optimistic without any substance of change, we in India need to take drastic action at the level of civil society as well as within the government, with a bottom-up innovative approach right from village level to national level



VK BAHUGUNA

Amidst when the world climate change negotiators are busy pulling wires in Brazil at the UNFCCC CoP 30 summit, the world, especially those suffering most from climatic vagaries, is watching to see if there is a thaw between the divergent positions of developed and developing countries, especially in truly adhering to the cardinal principle of common but differentiated responsibilities. But this is a matter to be dealt with separately.

As this writer has been repeatedly warning government negotiators and policy makers about charting out South-South climate-resilient developmental planning to ward off the deleterious effects of climate change on the environment, especially on food, nutrition and water security of billions of people, Brazil's Tropical Forest Forever Facility (TFFF) climate change fund of \$125 billion to support tropical forests through government and private contributions, spending \$4 per hectare on improving forests, is a welcome move. Brazil herself has committed \$1 billion to this fund. India has supported it in principle. The fund may help in water and biodiversity conservation.

However, India should take the lead in focusing on creating a fund in collaboration with China and the Group of 77 to conserve and manage water for better climate management, as the temperature has already crossed the 1.5 degree Celsius threshold this year, as reported by Carlo Buontempo, the Director of the European Climate Agency Copernicus, and this is going to severely impact world hydrology. If India can take a lead as it did in creating the 'Solar Alliance' by creating a water conservation fund, forests will automatically be taken care of.

As the world is literally sitting on a hot spot, notwithstanding these CoPs, which are hilariously optimistic without any substance of change, we in India need to take drastic action at the level of civil society as well as in government, with a bottom-up innovative approach from the village level to the national level.

Already, the Water for Every Household scheme launched in 2019 by the Prime Minister is a resounding success with community participation and has provided



THE NATIONAL WATER AWARDS, RECOGNISING INNOVATIONS, HAVE GALVANISED ACTION, PROVING THAT LOCAL INGENUITY CAN RECHARGE ECOSYSTEMS AND EMPOWER MARGINALISED SECTIONS FACING ACUTE WATER STRESS

The writer is a former Principal Secretary and Agriculture Production Commissioner, Government of Tripura

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almost 78.58 per cent (15.56 crore out of 18 crore) households access to tap water connections, compared to around 7 crore earlier, before 2019. Let us substantiate water conservation from the examples created by our civil society.

The water availability study done by the Central Water Commission using space inputs (2019) assessed the average annual per capita water availability for the years 2021 and 2031 as 1,486 cubic metres and 1,367 cubic metres respectively. Annual per capita water availability of less than 1,700 cubic metres is considered a water-stressed condition, whereas annual per capita water availability below 1,000 cubic metres is considered a water-scarcity condition. The country's rivers run dry, aquifers deplete, and millions face seasonal scarcity, underscoring the urgency of sustainable practices.

So, we need to look into our countryside to search for water warriors beyond government programmes. The country has shown time and again that our society produces leaders from the grassroots level, from the freedom struggle to tree conservation through the world-famous Chipko Movement, to now "sow seed to get water" (pani bao pani pao) launched successfully in Uttarakhand by Mr Mohan Kandpal and others elsewhere in the country. This has become amply clear in the 2025 Water Awards announced by the

Ministry of Jal Shakti, Government of India. These water warriors brought to fame this year have shown how a public movement can change the countryside scenario drastically.

This writer, while in the Planning Commission, had in 2010 assessed the great work done by Popat Pawar in the Hiware Bazar village in Ahmednagar district of Maharashtra, turning a ghost village into one bubbling with prosperity solely due to water harvesting in adjoining forests under the Joint Forest Management programme, resulting in huge agricultural and milk production.

In this context, water conservation awards serve as beacons of hope, spotlighting grassroots innovators, communities and institutions that transform despair into resilience. These examples celebrate individual and collective triumphs but also produce scalable models, fostering a culture of stewardship. The National Water Awards, recognising innovations, have galvanised action, proving that local ingenuity can recharge ecosystems and empower marginalised sections who have been facing acute water stress.

This year's awards were announced and conferred by President Droupadi Murmu on November 18, 2025 at Vigyan Bhawan, New Delhi, and honoured 46 winners — a 30 per cent increase from prior years. These honours were backed by field

verifications from the Central Water Commission and the Central Ground Water Board.

At the heart of this narrative stands Mohan Chandra Kandpal, a 59-year-old chemistry teacher from Kande village in Uttarakhand's Almora district, whose lifelong crusade earned him the Best Individual (North Zone) award. For 36 years, Kandpal has traversed the fragile Himalayan foothills, where deforestation and erratic monsoons have rendered ancient springs and traditional stone reservoirs dry. Fate struck him in 1990 when he observed the Riskan River's tributaries dwindling amid drought coupled with soil erosion. He resolved to act and launched "Pani Bao-Pani Uggao" (Sow Water-Grow Water), a masterstroke that charged women and youth into action, blending this rhetoric with indigenous community wisdom and mobilisation.

Kandpal's strategy hinges on khals and chaals-shallow percolation pits that capture runoff, allowing rainwater to recharge aquifers. Between 1990 and 2012, he spearheaded the digging of thousands, coupled with afforestation drives planting over 100,000 saplings of native species like oak and rhododendron. People changed ploughing techniques in agricul-

tural fields to till perpendicular to slopes, creating furrows that channel water deeper into the earth rather than letting it run off. This low-cost tweak, disseminated through farmer workshops, amplified recharge efficiency. By 2025, over 5,000 such structures dotted 40 villages, reviving 27 depleted sources in hamlets like Valna, Bitholi, Kande and Ganoli. Complementing this is the "Woh Pani Hoga" (That Water Will Be There) initiative, which has bolstered the Riskan River's flow, turning seasonal streams perennial. It was purely a public programme, though MGNREGA funds might have been dovetailed.

Another well-known example is Dr Rajendra Singh, the original "Waterman of India", whose 50-year odyssey in Rajasthan's arid heartland earned the 2001 Ramon Magsaysay Award and the 2015 Stockholm Water Prize—the "Nobel of Water". Singh revived over 1,000 villages by resurrecting more than 8,600 johads (earthen check dams) and bamboo drip systems in the Aravalli hills, and by targeting the parched Alwar district he started "Pani Panchayats" — village water parliaments-thus democratising resource governance. The results are visible: five rivers now flow perennially across 6,500 sq km, enabling afforestation of 1.5 million trees and the repopulation of ghost villages.

Yet another example is from Bihar's flood-prone plains, where Kishore Jaiswal, a Munger-based activist, bagged the Best Individual (Eastern Zone) award for desilting the Ganga's tributaries. He, with the NGO Jalsrot Vikas Sansthan, mobilised 20,000 volunteers to remove five lakh cubic metres of silt from the Chandan River, restoring flow to 100 villages.

In another example of social institutions, the Art of Living Social Projects received two awards for reviving more than 50 lakes in Karnataka and Tamil Nadu through yoga-integrated clean-ups, impacting one million lives. The Barmer district administration also bagged the rainwater harvesting award, which was received by the District Collector, Tina Dabi. If each block of the country does this, prosperity and progress with climatic adaptation will be at our doors and happiness on the faces of millions of rural masses. These people have shown, in a much better manner, how to tackle climate change in tandem with communities than the big CoPs of the UNFCCC.

The Pioneer
SINCE 1865

The end does not justify the means



BALRAJ MEHTA

"Though no one can go back and make a brand new start, anyone can start and make a brand new ending": Carl Bard

A few days ago, I came across a news item about a young married woman from a prominent business family being found hanging in her room. This was utterly shocking because such an incident is least expected to occur in well-established, educated, and successful business families. I have no access to intimate details about the personalities involved or the circumstances, other than the published news reports. We will have to await the completion of investigations to know why such a drastic step was taken by this lady.

My mind went back to 1985 when, unfortunately, a young mother in our family circle died of 90 per cent burns suffered while cooking on a kerosene stove. It was a suicide-plain and simple — but this angle was deliberately not pursued by the family because she had two small children who were to be brought up by her husband. It was no small matter that a few months earlier she had expressed a strong desire to permanently return to her maternal home. Her father had not accepted this and forced her to go back and "adjust" in her marital home. She obviously could not, and found no other way out of her unhappy life.

Later, in 2004, I witnessed another tragedy unfold in our residential colony in Delhi Cantt when a schoolboy from Class 12 consumed poison and his body was found behind the complex near the railway tracks. We came to know that the boy had been forced by his father to take up the PCM stream, while his own interests lay in the arts. He was regularly shamed and harshly treated at home due to his inattention to studies and poor grades, which led to the extinguishing of a promising young life.

Globally, over 7,27,000 people die by suicide every year, as per the WHO report of March 2025. In India, the National Crime Records Bureau pegged suicides at 1,53,052 in 2020, 1,64,033 in 2021, 1,70,924 in 2022, and 1,71,418 in 2023. Some key trends and demographics are listed below:

- Gender disparity: Males account for 72-73 per cent of suicides.
- Age groups: Young adults aged 18-30 years and people aged 30-45 years account for the largest share-about two-thirds.
- Major causes: Family problems, illnesses, mental health issues, bankruptcy or indebted-

ness, and other work-related problems.

- Professional groups: Daily wagers constitute the largest group, followed by housewives and the self-employed.
- Academics: Students facing academic pressure and family expectations are the most vulnerable strata.
- Risk factors: Access to firearms, sleeping pills, pesticides, drug addiction, and/or previous suicide attempts.

It has been established by various studies that a large percentage of people with mental disorders do not receive proper treatment due to lack of awareness, attached social stigma, and an acute shortage of professionals. The WHO has assessed an ideal requirement of three psychiatrists per one lakh population, whereas availability worldwide is 1.7 and, in India, only 0.75 per one lakh.

Admittedly, the social stigma attached to mental ill health is very strong, leading to facts being hidden from society, friends, and even family members. The indicators may be visible much before full-blown symptoms appear, but are not understood, acknowledged, or accepted. In my experience, about half of us have one or another quirk or kink in our personality that needs sorting out, but we cannot see our blind spots, and even if we do, we do not accept them comfortably. Parents are often unaware of the warning signs in their children and do not realise the grave consequences of ignoring these red flags until it is too late.

If proper preventive and curative measures are taken for emerging symptoms at an initial stage, much damage can be prevented. Warning signs of an upcoming mental storm could include one or more of the following:

- Sleep or appetite changes
- Decline in personal care and hygiene
- Mood changes
- Social withdrawal and absenteeism
- Difficulty in managing bodily pain
- Unusual drop in academic or professional performance
- Unexplained problems in coherent thinking or speech
- Increased sensitivity to sound, light, touch, or smells
- Apathy towards surroundings
- Fear or nervousness
- Any other unusual behaviour

As brought out earlier, a suicidal impulse can be triggered by mental illness, physical disease, relationship stress, heartbreak, loss of loved ones, or major financial, professional, or personal setbacks. Any person behaving abnormally will usually give sufficient indications that can be picked up by a concerned friend or family member.

The American Society for the Prevention of Suicide lists the following warning signs:

1. Talk: If a person talks about

- Killing themselves
- Feeling helpless

- Having no reason to live
- Being a burden to others
- Unbearable pain

2. Behaviour: Indicated by

- Increased use of alcohol or drugs
- Online searches for ways to end their life
- Withdrawal from activities
- Isolation from family and friends
- Sleeping too much or too little
- Visiting or calling people to say goodbye
- Giving away prized possessions
- Unnatural aggression
- Constant fatigue

3. Mood:

- Depression
- Anxiety
- Loss of interest
- Irritability
- Humiliation or shame
- Agitation or anger
- Sudden relief or improvement


Admittedly, significant efforts are being made by governments and social organisations to spread awareness, but incidents do not seem to be declining. Regular sensitisation of teachers, parents, and business managers must be ensured by the concerned authorities. Dignity of labour and respect for the workforce need to be inculcated from school onwards. The newly instituted labour laws should help address issues faced by the salaried class in the private sector, but effective monitoring of remuneration for domestic staff and gig workers is essential. A grievance redressal mechanism must be established at various levels. Creating awareness about cybercrimes and the harmful effects of digital addiction also needs focused attention.


Ultimately, as a society, we must reorient our sensitivities away from material pursuits and refocus on respect for life and care for fellow human beings-especially the disadvantaged. Family units must remain cohesive while respecting individual choices. Parents must realise that a present artist son is far better than a forever-lost engineer son, and that a divorced daughter is far better than a dead daughter.


We need to talk more openly about mental health and remove the shame associated with it. When we are physically unwell, we go to a hospital for treatment, and once better, we exercise to remain fit. Similarly, to deal with day-to-day stress, we should not hesitate to seek counselling or therapy when required, treating it as joining a "mental gym". It is not a shame, but simply a set of exercises to become mentally stronger.

As someone said, "It is not weak to ask for help. It is like using a flashlight when you are lost in the dark."

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REPM: Boosting electronics



T SENTHIL SIVA SUBRAMANIAN



N MANIKANDAN

The 21st century is a promising era for India, which has achieved global recognition in attaining a meaningful economy. In fact, this year, 2025, India has touched 8.2 per cent GDP growth during the period from July to September, which demonstrates the capability of several factors, including consumer demand and the supply chain. The present need of the hour is rare earth permanent magnets. The Government of India has strongly emphasised their significant role, which has led to the launch of the Rare Earth Permanent Magnets (REPM) scheme. The scheme would revolutionise India's advanced manufacturing ecosystem. This scheme envisions the creation of a rare earth valley and manufacturing zones in India, thereby boosting the electronic economy. This initiative would bring together several stakeholders-government, industry, start-ups and academia, especially Higher Educational Institutions (HEIs) to collaborate with localised manufacturing industries and the Government of India, thereby transforming products from lab to market. REPM would encourage HEIs to partner with UGC and AICTE to develop a model curriculum on rare earth permanent magnets, minor degree programmes, electives, minor capstone projects and internships on rare earth permanent magnets. The REPM scheme would facilitate HEIs to develop MOOC courses in collaboration with industries on rare earth permanent magnets. There is ample opportunity for HEIs to partner with Sector Skill Councils under the Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship, Government of India, to develop skill enhancement courses on rare earth permanent magnets, which could be aligned with NEP 2020 and the National Credit Framework (NcrF) across different job roles from Level 4 to Level 8, fulfilling skill mission objectives.

REPM would allow and provide opportunities, especially for women students, to collaborate with the National Institute for Entrepreneurship and Small Business Development (NIESBUD) and the Entrepreneurship Development Institute of India (EDI), Gujarat, under the Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship and the Ministry of Science and Technology, Government of India, respectively, to explore and start their own ventures under the Swavalambini Programme scheme in the field of rare earth permanent magnets. The REPM scheme would drive HEIs to interface with localised manufacturing industries, with a special focus on SMEs working on rare earth magnets. This activity

would enhance community-based learning under the Government set-up known as MY Bharat.

HEIs can selectively work on different manufacturing problem ideas and concepts of local industries and thereby ideally develop:

1. Idea-to-business models
2. Proofs of concept (PoCs) for rare earth permanent magnets

The collaboration would provide a significant opportunity for HEIs to design and develop Minimum Viable Products (MVPs), which would lead to Swadeshi designs on rare earth permanent magnet products. This, in turn, would further enhance India's autonomy and self-reliance and thereby meet the objectives of "Viksit Bharat" / "Amrit Kaal". HEIs would get a platform to develop design simulation tools and technology frameworks for rare earth permanent magnet products.

Research explorations on REPM would receive a significant boost at the Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR), Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO), Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO), and Bhabha Atomic Research Centre (BARC). The scheme is expected to bring tangible and intangible investments to the nation. It would also promote HEIs to create design-thinking-based products and process solutions, simulation software tools and techniques. Additionally, REPM would add value to responsible research innovation, leading to intellectual property rights such as trademarks and copyrights in rare earth permanent magnets. These innovations would give a major push to Higher Educational Institutions to reinvent technologies using rare earth permanent magnets that could be applied across different sectors, especially the Electronic Manufacturing Services (EMS) and Electronics System Design and Manufacturing (ESDM) sector — an industry initiative under the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY), Government of India.

This will be a boon for boosting the electronic economy, leading to the development of Vocal for Local products, processes and solutions.

The products developed in laboratories will reach the market through a lab-to-market approach, achieving Technology Readiness Levels (TRL), Manufacturing Readiness Levels (MRL), Consumer Readiness Levels (CRL) and Investment Readiness Levels (IRL). Best practices in rare earth permanent magnets would strengthen partnerships with the Global South in knowledge transfer, capacity building and R&D, while enabling inclusive growth through links with rural development and women entrepreneurship.

The Pioneer
SINCE 1865

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PADDY DADDY



Whatever one may say about Donald Trump, the US president, there is no denying the fact that his politics, though random and chaotic, is theoretically calculated. Even as a US delegation wings its way to India to discuss the bilateral trade deal, which is in the making for months, Trump fires a sensitive verbal missive against India. At a meeting at the White House, he asked why India could ship large volumes of rice to the US, and those too at low prices. He wanted additional duties on rice exports, since they symptomised “dumping.” He ranted that India “cannot do that... should not be dumping.” One is not sure if it signals new tariffs, whether the statements were aimed to assuage the miffed feelings among the American farmers who complain about falling domestic prices due to imports, or whether it was a means to verbally arm twist New Delhi into granting more access, and concessions for select farm imports from America.

For a long time, India has opposed the entry of farm goods at lower duties. In fact, the prime minister, and other ministers, have repeatedly maintained that the interests of the local farmers will not be compromised, or placed at the altar of trade and tariffs. However, farm imports remain the most contentious, and possibly the last few details to be ironed out before finalising a bilateral deal. By introducing rice as another factor, and raising the fears of new duties on Indian exports, Trump hopes to influence the Indian negotiators to give in a bit more. Couple this with the fact that America recently announced a \$12 billion support package for the local farmers to “shield domestic agriculture from perceived foreign competition.” In addition, the US eased the duties on several food items like spices and tea, which are shipped from India. These did not include rice.

Stock markets react much like Trump, and are swayed by short-term, and immediate events, and non-events. The reactions in the bourses are as random, and knee-jerk, as Trump. Bu, like the case of the US president, there is a method to the madness of sock movements. For example, in the rice-Trump incident, shares of rice exporters such as Kohinoor Foods, LT Foods, Chaman Lal Setia Exports, and KRBL tumbled on the Indian exchanges. It did not matter to the investors that the US comprises a small share of the country's rice exports. Higher tariffs by America will not make a material difference to the firms' revenues, and profits. Since theoretically, it was a negative event, despite being a non-event, the practical impact was negative. Kohinoor Foods, for example, plunged nearly 10 per cent to an intraday, and a 52-week low of just over Rs 24.

Such drastic stock movements are visible in other cases. Let us take the example of H-1B visas, which has proved to be a controversial topic for several months, including during Trump's first term. Under the republican regimes, there are consistent efforts to change the visa regime to enable the hiring of more American employees in IT, and discourage the entry of low-cost, less-experienced Indians and Chinese. This year, Indian IT stocks were constantly hurt by the H-1B-related announcements, decisions, actions. A bill introduced by a senator, which had minimal chances of passing through triggered stock sales. Even when the decisions were permanent, the reactions had little links to the ground realities. Investors did not think through the ramifications, and consequences. They just sold, with the IT sector being one of the star underperformers among Indian equities this year. Experts have talked about the re-rating of IT stocks, but been optimistic over their valuations in 2026.

Consider the \$1,00,000 fee on H-1B visas. This will clearly reduce the outflow of Indian manpower to the US. Or, at least it will force the Indian IT firms to spend more to send people. If one considers that the US gives 65,000 such visas every year, and India accounts for 70 per cent of them, the annual visa bill amounts to more than \$4,500,000,000, or a massive \$4.5 billion. Of course, it is a huge hit. However, investors failed to reckon several possible scenarios, which are being, and will be, translated into reality. The first is that Indian IT firms will reduce the dependence on H-1Bs. This is happening, and data shows that Indians' share has reduced in the recent past. Second, Indian IT firms, and recruiters, may push the visa on the applicants. If you are interested to go to America, please pay the visa fees from your pockets, and do not depend on the firm.

Finally, the visa fee may hurt the American firms more than the Indian ones. A large part of H-1Bs is cornered by Indian students, who study in America, and automatically are absorbed by the American firms via H-1Bs. No firm will pay \$1,00,000 for a fresh recruit, and a rookie employee. The students, who have spent massive amounts on education, may not wish to cough out such large amounts to get the visa. Thus, the absorption of Indians in American firms is likely to reduce. This will service Trump's objective that more American are hired at the low and middle levels. But it will hurt the interests of the American firms.

The Pioneer

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BUSINESS10

China exports trump tariffs

A trade surplus of \$1 trillion offsets lower shipments to the US

OUR TAKE



Sutanu Guru

Author, Journalist and Academician

Like with most overconfident leaders, reality is difficult to swallow, especially when it stares in the face. This is precisely what is happening to Donald Trump, the US President, who thought that his theatrics, tantrums, tariffs, and trade wars would bring the Chinese economy down to its knees. He felt America could once again emerge as the undisputed hegemon in the Asia Pacific region, and the rest of the world, not just militarily but in economic terms. He probably had an inkling, which may partially explain his decision to agree to a temporary truce with the Chinese counterpart, Xi Jinping.

However, the latest China's trade data proves that Red Dragon is winning the trade war against Uncle Sam. In the first 11 months of 2025, China created a historic record, and generated a trade surplus of more than \$1 trillion. Let us put this number in perspective. The figure is 2.5 times India's nominal GDP in dollar terms. It is almost 30 times the GDP of Pakistan. This is the nature of success against all odds, and it has deep lessons for India.

If one considers the monthly numbers, the trade surplus in November 2025 was more than \$100 billion, or the highest since June 2025, and higher than the \$90 billion in October. Yes, China's exports to the US fell by 25 per cent in October 2025, and close to 29 per cent in November. These were huge blows since America is, and was, one of the largest and most promising markets for Chinese products over the past few decades. But, on an overall basis, Chinese exports grew by 5.9 per cent in November, thanks to higher non-US shipments, after a more than one per cent decline in October.

This is indeed a phenomenal achievement. No country in the world, no global economy has ever achieved it in history. To do it despite lower

exports to the US implies, maybe proves, that China has clearly and decisively won the trade war. Trump can huff and puff. He can threaten more action, despite the so-called trade truce. He can yell and scream some more. But China has demonstrated that even the most powerful nation cannot beat the Red Dragon in a trade war. You can dub this as famous or infamous depending on ideology.

What are the reasons for Trump's failure to contain China economically via excessively high tariffs? One, unlike India and other nations, China had prepared for this situation, and scenario for a long time. Most nations were blindsided during Trump's second term, and his ever-increasing, and ever-changing trade-tariff threats. Even allies like Europe, Japan, South Korea, and others felt the heat of the president's anger and actions. These nations capitulated because they were very dependent on the US for military and economic support. In different ways, they quietly surrendered.

Not China, which refused to blink. Since Trump took oath for the second time, it launched a strategy to diversify the export basket. The results are clear. Exports to the European Union, which is a counter to the American market, increased by 15 per cent. There were similar spectacular increases in shipments to Latin America, despite Brazil's opposition, Southeast Asia, and Africa. Even with a partner-adversary nation like India, the bilateral trade went up to \$115 billion, and India stares at a trade deficit of more than \$100 billion. Clearly, China knew what it was doing.

Two, the Chinese economy is too strong for any nation to bully it. There are more than 150

economies in the world, whose largest trading partner is China. Thus, any attempts to stall, stop, or dissuade these nations from dealing, negotiating, and trading intensively with China, are bound to fail. China offers cheap, competitive, and good quality products, something that the US cannot do. Chinese trade partners realise that the Red Dragon's manufacturing juggernaut will benefit them. Despite the American fears, they negotiated decent, though defeatist, trade terms with the US, even as they enhanced the links with China.

The third reason for Trump's failure is perhaps the president's ill-conceived notions that his opinions can sway the world. Perhaps, if he really wanted to contain Chinese manufacturing, he

could have focused on creating a practical China+1 consensus among the nations. Instead, he hector, threatened, and got angry with the allies. Nations such as Vietnam, India, and Malaysia, which could have emerged as potential counters to China's manufacturing, were antagonized by the theatrics, arrogance, and tantrums of Trump. The US president can still turn things around, but it will take more time, more effort, and better negotiations to create a consensus.

Of course, one needs to watch whether the November trade performance is sustainable, and carries momentum. This is because China's exports were more than two percentage points higher than a poll survey among experts by a news agency. Similarly, imports were lower than predicted. This pushed up the monthly trade surplus, and resulted in the over \$1 trillion figure in the first 11 months. Thanks to America's inability to ink bilateral trade deals, some nations like India were forced to buy more from China in the recent past.

However, one can safely assume that China has decisively won this round of the trade wars and, even in the future, there is not much that Trump can do. Indeed, by recently meeting Xi at a summit in South Korea, the US president gave the indication that he is no longer able to absorb the economic and political costs of the trade wars with several nations, especially China. For India, it is a sobering wake-up call that manufacturing needs to be a priority. If the economy does not produce globally-competitive world class products, and in volumes, it is likely to be in trouble, sooner or later.

Let us take a few lessons from the China example. Even today, Chinese experts, quoted in the western media, contend that the trade surplus will not come down, but widen in the next year. Exports were “likely to remain resilient” due to three reasons. First, China has re-routed products to increase its share in other nations and regions. Second, it offers more attractive prices to non-US buyers, including America's allies. Finally, deflation has pulled down the currency's real effective exchange rate. Still, the growing surplus may result in a backlash. Already, France has threatened higher tariffs if the bilateral surplus is not balanced.

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The Tech Wrecker

When big shareholders say No

Investors oppose CEO pays, royalties, and anti-climate moves

allocations, expanded low-carbon investments, and adopted a more restrained tone on the growth of fossil fuels. While it remains deeply rooted in the exploration and marketing of hydrocarbons, the episode fundamentally altered how energy boards think and act. More oil firms directed more efforts towards green energy, and energy savings. Diversification into renewable sources became the norm, and experts contend that several fossil-fuel players are likely to morph into the producers of solar, wind, and hydrogen energy.

Shareholders question diversifications, and even straight-forward linear but exponential, growth. In 2023, activist-investor Starboard Value built a near-two per cent stake in Salesforce, and pressed for aggressive cost controls, and margin expansion. This was a time when most enterprise-software firms believed in frenetic growth, rather than profitability. Salesforce had to respond with a 10 per cent work-force reduction, tighter expense management, and sharper revenue-to-profit conversion. The stock rallied, as investors rewarded the new focus on operational efficiency, and profits. Indian IT noticed that capital efficiency mattered as much as innovation.

In 2019, Elliott Management, which had a \$3.2-billion stake in AT&T, launched a public

attack on the telecom major's strategy to diversify into media, and emerge as a conglomerate. The acquisitions of Time Warner and DirecTV, Elliott argued, destroyed shareholder value, and distracted AT&T from its core communications business. Within three years, the Telco unwound its M&As. It spun off WarnerMedia, which was merged with Discovery, and became a focused telecom operator. The divestment was widely seen as an admission that the activist-investor's critique was valid.

What emerges from these examples is not a single theory of shareholder activism but a widening set of outcomes that Indian and global boardrooms need to contend with. Investor opposition does not follow a single script. It can take on various forms, tackle several subjects, and end in public ruptures, strategic retreats, regulatory and judicial intervention, and corporate resets. In some cases, as with Microsoft, shareholders' dissent may be symbolic to begin with, but can gather steam over time. The vote against Nadella did not alter the leadership structure. Yet the signal is on record.

Over time, such signals may shape the boards, and the design of executive pay packages. Even when a vote fails, it results in internal and external conversations and debates, especially when the media highlights them.

Norway's \$1.7-trillion sovereign wealth fund, a large shareholder of Microsoft, recently voted against CEO Satya Nadella's dual posting as chairman of the board, and his nearly \$100 million pay package. The fund did this due to its stance against large salaries, and dual responsibilities. However, the majority of the shareholders supported Nadella, and backed his appointment, and compensation. The Norway fund's anti-vote fits into a larger pattern of shareholder activism, which involves institutional and small investors, cuts across several issues, and is seen across continents, and nations.

Asset sales, buybacks of shares, strategy, leadership, capital efficiency, climate change, and corporate ethics are increasingly coming under scrutiny. From Silicon Valley to Mumbai, big oil to tech, investors are no longer content to remain silent partners, and rubber-stamp the decisions of the promoters and boards. In 2021, the US-based Invesco and the UK-based Abdn, which together held nearly 18 per cent in Zee Entertainment, sought the removal of CEO Punit Goenka, along with an overhaul of the board. This led to a sustained proxy war between the global investors, and promoter family, which spilled into court-rooms and regulatory forums.

Although Goenka continues to be the CEO, the shareholder activism forced Sony to walk away from a proposed \$10-billion merger with Zee in early 2024. The potential buyer cited issues like unresolved governance, and leadership uncertainty. Between 2017 and 2019, Maruti's shareholders repeatedly voted against proposals to increase royalty payments to Japan's Suzuki Motor. Investors argued that the proposed hikes, which were cleared by the board, were excessive. The board renegotiated the terms. The case proved that even the small, and minority shareholders can push for excessive changes.

Even small, seemingly-inconsequential institutions can make a difference. In 2021, a little-known activist fund, Engine No.1, which held a mere 0.02 per cent of ExxonMobil, achieved what decades of environmental protests did not. The fund led a movement that ended with the election of three dissident directors on the board of the world's largest listed oil company, and defeat of the management-backed candidates. Of course, the victory was possible due to the coalition-building among the different shareholders, as Engine No.1 secured the backing of giant pension funds.

Subsequently, Exxon's strategy reflected climate transition risks, not just quarterly profits. The oil giant recalibrated capital

The Pioneer

SINCE 1865

IndiGo messed up, but so did the IBC

The spectacular failure of airline bankruptcy proceedings in India has perversely crippled the start-up airline market in India



KUSHAN MITRA

IndiGo's spectacular meltdown in the first week of December left people stranded across the country. I was attending the media drive of the Tata Sierra in Chandigarh last weekend and many of my friends had severely delayed flights or cancelled flights. And stories of weddings and holidays being ruined filled social media.

But airlines can have meltdowns, earlier this year when operations were severely restricted at Delhi Airport due to fog, planes and passengers found themselves all over the country. And this is not just an Indian thing, across the world, every so often an airline has a massive flight meltdown. Sometimes triggered by weather, sometimes by strikes or sometimes by software.

It is possibly true that IndiGo's poor planning of the Flight Duty Time Limitations (FDTL) issue was a major factor in the meltdown. But it is also true that the meltdown impacted an abnormal number of people simply because of IndiGo's massive network and the fact that they have nearly two-thirds of the Indian aviation market.

I am a well-wisher of the airline, not only because I take 15-20 flights with the airline every year, I am a shareholder in the airline and have been one ever since the Initial Public Offering. I also believe that IndiGo is an important instrument for the Indian Government because I feel that it is India's interest as a major global economy to have an airline, actually multiple airlines with global reach. We surrendered our aviation industry to middle-eastern carriers such as Emirates in particular, whose global dominance was achieved with Indian rupees.

But it will take a few years for Tata Sons to stabilise things at Air India and IndiGo's growth over the past few years, particularly in the short and medium haul international sectors, has been stunning. Just look at connectivity to countries like Thailand, Cambodia, Vietnam and now China.

Early next year when IndiGo gets their first Airbus A321neo XLR aircraft with a much longer range, they will start flights between Delhi/Mumbai and Athens in Greece. India has



become extremely close to Greece over the past few years, especially if you look at projects like the Indian Middle-East Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC) where Greece plays a pivotal role. Whether you like it or not, IndiGo plays a role in India's diplomacy.

There is also the fact that IndiGo has been adversely impacted by the high rate of failure of the American Pratt and Whitney 1100G Geared Turbofan engine and over 40 IndiGo aircraft are still grounded for no fault of the airline. The failure of the American company to make 'dependable engines' as they promise on their logo was a major reason for the collapse of Go First.

This neatly brings me to the fact that the bankruptcy proceedings of Go First airlines. This was a completely and totally botched process. The airlines promoters and then administrators abused the process to not return the leased aircraft operated by the airline. While the Resolution

Professional of Go First tried to argue that without planes the airline is worthless, it was nothing short of stealing assets.

The leasing companies stopped supporting the aircraft, many of which couldn't fly anyway thanks to Pratt and Whitney. It is true that Go First had severe financial issues before the engine failures, but that was truly the straw that broke the camels back. And even when some engines were repaired, the aircraft lessors refused, rightly, to give them to Go First.

But here is where the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) did not deregister the aircraft and did not allow leasing companies to take back their assets. A similar situation also occurred with Spicejet which has been taken to court in India and the United Kingdom for not returning or paying leasing firms.

While Spicejet still survives today, many of their aircraft are still grounded and they are mainly operating wet-leased aircraft. This is not

the only story, the botched bankruptcy process of Jet Airways is well known. Many planes owned by the Naresh Goyal promoted airline are still gathering dust on the tarmacs of Delhi and Mumbai airport, assets that at one point of time worth almost two billion dollars and withering away.

A similar story played out with Kingfisher airlines, although all Airbus aircraft owned by the airline managed to be ferried out before the gory end and one plane, VT-VJM, Vijay Mallya's personal private jet is believed to have been taken over by the Indian Air Force. That said, many ATR turboprops rotted away at Chennai airport and when the airport flooded they were not areworthy anymore.

The reason I am mentioning botched airline bankruptcies and the legal issues faced by Spicejet here is that India's reputation among global leasing companies is pathetic. Only IndiGo backed by its vast scale and Air India

backed by the financial muscle of Tata Sons and Singapore Airlines can lease aircraft at globally competitive rates. Other airlines can only grow slowly, Akasa for example has been holding off on taking deliveries of ready aircraft allegedly because they are still negotiating leasing deals at globally competitive rates.

The other airlines in the Indian market such as Star Air and Fly91 are small and other start-up airlines are finding it impossible to lease new planes unless they either pay usurious monthly rentals or have massive deposits. Starting up with older, less economical planes is the only option some have but even then, the amount that they pay is higher than start-up airlines in most parts of the world. This will not allow them to be economically competitive with the likes of IndiGo.

Let us face the facts, while business passengers prioritise timings and frequency over fares, tourists prefer cheaper flights. And on both these sides, no start-up can compete with IndiGo and Air India to an extent, unless they are willing to burn money for half a decade.

And if a well-capitalised conglomerate and promoter like Bombay Dyeing and the Wadia family can't keep an airline going, what hope do startup airlines have? Even if the Government gave startup airlines breaks on landing and navigation fees, if they cannot get planes at competitive rates, or at all for that matter, how will they fly and compete.

The only solution is if Indian financial institutions get into the business of aircraft leasing. Given Indian aviation's massive growth and continued prospects, this actually makes sense, if the Finance Ministry gave some incentives to Indian leasing companies, some breaks are being provided through GIFT City in Gujarat. Indian financial institutions might be better placed to deal with the Indian legal and bureaucratic system, especially the IBC.

To blame IndiGo for 'becoming' a monopoly is unfair, it was enabled to become a quasi-monopoly. And likely due to no intention of theirs but thanks to the circumstances listed above, India needs globally-competitive airlines and IndiGo is important towards that end, but India also needs a few more large airlines because we cannot be so reliant on one airline alone. How and when that will happen, remains to be seen.

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China's surplus surpasses \$1 trillion

ASSOCIATED PRESS

■ Bangkok

Higher tariffs have dealt a "severe blow" to the world economy, China's premier said on Tuesday, even as China's own trade surplus has surged past \$1 trillion. Premier Li Qiang made the remarks at a forum of top international organisations held in Beijing while top Chinese leaders are attending an annual economic planning meeting.

"Starting from the beginning of this year, we've seen the stick of tariffs being wielded around the world with growing restrictive measures on the economy and trade, which have dealt a severe blow to the global economy," Li said, without mentioning US President Donald Trump and his tariff hikes specifically.

"As the situation has unfolded, the damaging consequences of tariffs hurting both others and oneself have become increasingly evident, and calls from all sides to uphold free trade have grown ever stronger," Li told the gathering of top representatives from the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank and the World Trade Organisation. Trump's sharply higher tariffs on imports from China and other countries have dented Chinese exports



to the US, but that has been offset by higher shipments to other global markets. Chinese customs figures reported Monday showed exports to the United States plunged 29 per cent in November from a year earlier in the eighth straight month of declines.

Meanwhile, China's trade surplus in dollar terms for 2025 had already exceeded \$1 trillion as of November, while exports rose 5.9 per cent from a year earlier.

Trade friction between Beijing and Washington has eased somewhat after Trump and Chinese President Xi Jinping met in late October during a regional economic summit in South Korea. The two sides agreed to dial back earlier steps and extend a truce in retaliatory measures for a year. With investments in technology rising, outpacing

overall investments, Li called for "collaborative innovation," saying "we need to embrace an open mind and work hand in hand to pursue openness and cooperation." The Central Economic Work Conference, the annual planning meeting held this week, follows a top-level meeting in October to draft China's plan for 2026-2030.

It focused on China's aim to remain a global manufacturing power and build a stronger domestic economy that is more reliant on consumer spending and technological advances. China's economy grew at a 4.8 per cent annual pace in the last quarter, the slowest pace in a year. However, economists expect growth to hit the official 2025 target of about 5 per cent, thanks partly to strong exports.

Stock markets fall for 2nd day on profit booking

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

■ Mumbai

Stock markets closed lower for the second straight day on Tuesday, with benchmark BSE Sensex declining by 436 points as investors booked profit ahead of the US Federal Reserve's policy decision.

The 30-share BSE Sensex dropped 436.41 points, or 0.51 per cent, to close at a nearly two-week low of 84,666.28. During the day, the barometer plunged by 719.73 points, or 0.84 per cent, to hit an intraday low of 84,382.96 as blue-chip private banks, oil and IT shares retreated.

The 50-share NSE Nifty dropped by 120.90 points, or 0.47 per cent, to settle at 25,839.65. In the intraday session, it depreciated by 232.55 points, or 0.89 per cent, to hit a low of 25,728. Analysts said persistent foreign fund outflows and weak global cues weighed on the investor sentiment.

Among the Sensex constituents, Asian Paints, Tech Mahindra, HCL Technologies, Tata Steel, Maruti Suzuki India, Sun Pharmaceuticals, Tata Consultancy Services, ICICI Bank, Bajaj Finance, UltraTech Cement, Mahindra & Mahindra and Tata Motors Passenger Vehicles were the laggards.

However, Eternal, Titan, Adani Ports, Bharat Electronics Ltd, State Bank of India, Bajaj Finserv, NTPC and Bharti Airtel were among the gainers. "Domestic equities opened lower, extending profit booking amid caution ahead of tomorrow's US Fed policy decision, rupee weak-



ness, persistent FII outflows and ongoing uncertainty over the US-India trade deal. IT stocks led the decline, while PSU banks, realty and consumer durables gained, with small caps outperforming other indices," Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geojit Investments Ltd, said. The US Federal Reserve is set to begin its two-day policy meeting later on Tuesday, where the central bank's Federal Open Market Committee (FOMC) will decide on key benchmark interest rates for the world's largest economy.

"The equity benchmarks staged a partial rebound on Tuesday after a steep sell-off at the open, with value buying helping the indices trim losses through the afternoon. The Sensex recovered nearly 450 points from its intraday low, while the Nifty climbed back above 25,900, though both remained in negative

territory," Gaurav Garg, Research Analyst at Lemonn Markets Desk, said. Broader markets rebounded with BSE midcap gauge rising by 0.60 per cent and smallcap index advancing 1.27 per cent.

Among sectoral indices, Focussed IT declined the most by 1.18 per cent, Information Technology by 0.89 per cent, Teck by 0.72 per cent, Auto by 0.63 per cent, Metal by 0.34 per cent, and Consumer Durables and Energy fell by 0.16 per cent each.

On the other hand, Capital Goods, Power, Industrials, Telecom, Consumer Discretionary, FMCG, Utilities were among the gainers. As many as 2,550 stocks advanced, while 1,625 declined and 156 remain unchanged on the BSE.

"Fresh tariff concerns on Indian rice exports weighed on agri-related stocks, while persistent FII outflows and the rupee's slide past 90 contin-

ued to add to investor anxiety," Ajit Mishra — SVP, Research, Religare Broking Ltd said.

In Asian markets, Hong Kong's Hang Seng index, Shanghai's SSE Composite, South Korea's KOSPI settled lower while Japan's Nikkei 225 benchmark ended in the green territory. European markets are trading higher. Wall Street ended lower in overnight deals on Monday.

Nair added that global sentiment was further pressured by surging Japanese bond yields and expectations of the Bank of Japan (BoJ) tightening monetary policy at its upcoming December meeting.

While the markets largely anticipate a 25-basis-point rate cut by the Fed and a rate hike by the BoJ, forward guidance for 2026 will be critical.

Meanwhile, Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) offloaded equities worth `655.59 crore on Monday, while Domestic Institutional Investors (DIIs) bought stocks worth ₹2,542.49 crore, according to exchange data. "In the near term, central bank commentary, currency movement and FII flows will steer sentiment, while domestic macro resilience is expected to provide a cushion against downside risks," he said.

Brent crude, the global oil benchmark, fell 0.27 per cent to \$62.33 per barrel. On Monday, the 30-share BSE Sensex plunged by 609.68 points to close at 85,102.69. Snapping a two-day gaining streak, the 50-share NSE Nifty declined by 225.90 points to settle at 25,960.55.

Many Indian professionals want to work for themselves: Report

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

■ New Delhi

A significant percentage of professionals in the country said they want to work for themselves in the near future, with factors like AI adoption, a strong skilling appetite and the power of trusted professional networks making it easier to start and scale their business, says a LinkedIn report.

According to LinkedIn's latest Small Business Work Change India Report, the number of Indian members adding 'founder' to their profiles has increased by 104 per cent in a year, as more than 7 in 10 professionals in the country say they want to work for themselves in the near future. The report

noted that three factors will fuel this shift: AI adoption, brand credibility and networks. "AI is becoming part of everyday operations for India's small businesses. Eightytwo per cent of SMB leaders here say it has made starting and running a business easier, and 97 per cent already use it in some form. For 83 per cent, AI has become critical for business growth," the report said.

To keep pace, SMBs (small and medium businesses) are building skills as quickly as they adopt new tools. AI literacy has risen 52 per cent year-on-year among companies with 11-200 employees, as 81 per cent of SMBs admit they are investing in AI capabilities.

Around 95 per cent of

Indian SMBs are already investing in or planning AI adoption, outpacing the global average (83 per cent). "India's small businesses are moving with extraordinary speed and ambition. What sets India apart is the combination of rapid AI adoption, a strong skilling appetite and the power of trusted professional networks. Together, these forces are reshaping how businesses build, scale and succeed," Kumaresh Pattabiraman, India Country Manager, LinkedIn, said.

As we enter 2026, India's SMBs aren't just keeping pace with global change—they're setting the direction. LinkedIn is committed to helping them build credibility, find talent and unlock opportunity at

every stage of their growth, Pattabiraman added. Globally, 61 per cent of small business owners are creating content themselves and 71 per cent said showing up authentically online matters. This focus on connection is also witnessing a rise, with 88 per cent agreeing that people skills are even more important in the age of AI.

Moreover, in India, 85 per cent of marketers say audiences now follow real voices such as customers, employees, partners and creators, because they help people make smarter decisions.

"With AI-generated content rising, SMBs are treating relationships as essential infrastructure for insight, opportunity, and resilience," the report said.

Fertiliser import likely to jump 41 % in FY26: FAI

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

■ New Delhi

India's fertiliser imports are estimated to jump 41 per cent to 22.3 million tonnes in the 2025-26 fiscal year due to a surge in domestic demand following good monsoon rains, the Fertiliser Association of India (FAI) said on Tuesday. The world's second-largest fertiliser consumer has imported 14.45 million tonnes during April-October, up nearly 69 per cent from 8.56 million tonnes a year earlier, the industry body said.

"There has been an increase in imports of fertilisers because of a sudden spurt in domestic demand because of good rains," FAI Chairman S Shankar Subramanian told reporters ahead of the association's three-day annual seminar. Fertiliser stocks stood at 10.2 million tonnes by end-November versus 9.97 million tonnes a year earlier, including 5 million tonnes of urea, 1.7 million tonnes of DAP and 3.5 million tonnes of NPK fertilisers, he said. Shankar Subramanian, who is also managing director of Coromandel International, said India has contracted large volumes in the last two months and there are no supply constraints. While there were iso-



lated shortages during the kharif season, overall supplies remained adequate, he added. Domestic fertiliser production rose marginally to 29.97 million tonnes in April-October from 29.75 million tonnes a year earlier, FAI data showed.

Production included 17.13 million tonnes of urea, 2.32 million tonnes of DAP, 7.04 million tonnes of NPK fertilizers and 3.48 million tonnes of SSP. Over 150 companies meet nearly three-quarters of India's nutrient needs, with imports covering the rest, the association said. India, serving

more than 140 million farming households, consumes close to 70 million tonnes of fertiliser annually, second only to China. The Government provided more than ₹1.9 lakh crore in subsidies through urea and nutrient-based frameworks in 2024-25.

India has forged strategic partnerships with resource-rich nations, including Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Morocco, Qatar and Russia to strengthen supply security, FAI said. The seminar starting December 10 will be inaugurated by Fertiliser Minister J P Nadda.

FROM THE WORLD

MEXICO

Ex-Governor

taken into custody

Mexican federal authorities took a former governor of the northern border state of Chihuahua into custody in preparation for charging him with laundering money diverted from state coffers while in office, the Attorney General's Office said Monday. Ex-Chihuahua Gov. César Duarte – identified in a statement only as “César N” in keeping with rules over the protecting the identity of the accused – was extradited by the United States three years ago to face state charges of embezzlement and was under house arrest. Juan Carlos Mendoza Luján, a lawyer representing Duarte, told the newspaper El Heraldó de Chihuahua that Duarte had been detained and that his lawyers were still gathering information, but that his detention appeared unlawful.

PAKISTAN

Hindu woman, daughter abducted

A Pakistani Hindu woman and her minor daughter have been reportedly kidnapped by unknown gunmen in Pakistan's Sindh province, officials said. The incident took place on Saturday in the Sindhi Mohalla in Sher Shah, Karachi. According to initial accounts provided by the family, the woman was taken away by three armed individuals who forced her into a white Alto car moments after she stepped out of her home. The case has sparked a wave of fear and concern within the local community. Shiva Kaachi, a civil rights activist for the Hindu community in the Sindh province, said Rani and her minor daughter were still missing, and her family feared she would be forcibly converted to Islam and then married off to one of the abductors.

Pakistan, Indonesia ink seven MoUs to bolster cooperation

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Islamabad

Pakistan and Indonesia on Tuesday inked seven agreements to further bolster bilateral cooperation in diverse fields as Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif held “productive” talks with Indonesian President Prabowo Subianto here. This is Subianto's maiden visit to Pakistan. The last presidential visit from Indonesia to Pakistan was undertaken by President Joko Widodo in 2018. According to State-run Radio Pakistan, the MoUs include cooperation in higher education, a grant program for Indonesian state scholarships, and facilitation of business development for small and medium enterprises. It also includes collaboration between national archives, narcotics

Cambodia vows fierce fight against Thailand

ASSOCIATED PRESS ■ Surin

Cambodia's powerful Senate President Hun Sen on Tuesday vowed that his country would carry out a fierce fight against Thailand as a second day of widespread renewed combat between the Southeast Asian neighbours drove tens of thousands of people to flee border areas. Fighting broke out following a skirmish in which one Thai soldier was killed on Sunday night, despite a cease-fire that ended fighting in July over competing territorial claims. The five days of fighting then left dozens dead on both sides, and forced the evacuation of over 100,000 civilians. In a sign that neither side was willing to back down, Thai Prime Minister Anutin Charnvirakul said Tuesday that Cambodia had not yet contacted Thailand about possible negotiations and the fighting would continue. “We've got to do what we've got to do,” he said. “The Government will support all kinds of military operations as planned earlier.” He had said on Monday that military action



Local people taking refuge in Prey Chamkar Ta Doak market in Banteay Meanchey province in Cambodia, near the border with Thailand

PTI

was necessary to safeguard the nation's sovereignty and ensure public safety. In a statement posted to Facebook and Telegram, Hun Sen claimed that his country had refrained from retaliating on Monday, but overnight began to fire

back at Thai forces, saying Cambodia would “weaken and destroy enemy forces through counterattacks.” Thailand's military said Cambodia attacked Thai positions with artillery, rocket and drone attacks on Tuesday. Thailand says that

Cambodian forces also fired at its troops Sunday and Monday, but each side blames the other for firing the first shots. “Cambodia wants peace, but Cambodia is forced to fight back to defend its territory,” Hun Sen wrote. He was Cambodia's long-

serving prime minister until 2023, when he was succeeded by his son Hun Manet, but is still widely seen as the country's de facto leader. Cambodia's military announced on Tuesday that the new fighting had killed seven civilians and wounded

20. A Thai military spokesman announced Tuesday that three soldiers have been killed in the new fighting. Thailand on Monday carried out airstrikes along the frontier, which it said were a defensive action targeting military installations. Thai military spokesperson Rear Adm. Surasant Kongsiri said Tuesday that such operations would continue “until attacks stop.” Ordinary citizens, meanwhile, had to deal with life after being relocated from the danger zones. An evacuation shelter at a university in Thailand's northeastern city of Surin is hosting more than 3,600 people. Evacuees sit or lie on thin mats spread across the floor, and several have set up small tents in their allotted areas as sleeping spaces. At lunchtime, some line up with their own plates to receive cooked rice, while others wait in place to be served ready-to-eat meals packed in small plastic bags. An army band plays for their entertainment. Portable fans cool them during the day. Blankets, in piles beside them, keep them warm at night, when temperatures can fall to as low as 18°C

(64°F). “We were preparing to evacuate. We hadn't left yet. But when we heard shots, we hurried out immediately,” cassava farmer Pan-ngam Kanchangthong told. “I was scared. Who wouldn't be scared of shelling?” The Thai army said almost 500 temporary shelters have been set up in four border provinces, accommodating 125,838 people. Additional refugees from the fighting are expected to stay with relatives in safe areas. Evacuees on the Cambodian side had similar experiences. “I felt terrified when I heard the sound of the explosion from the shelling. At that time, I was working at the garment factory,” said 44-year-old Vach Neang, a father of seven. “I called my wife and my kids but couldn't reach them, and by that time the sound of explosions was getting louder, so the factory owner let us go home,” said Vach Neang, speaking at a former market in Cambodia's northwestern province of Banteay Meanchey that has been repurposed as a shelter. He added that he packed just a few clothes before leaving his home.

Sri Lanka bids farewell to 2 IAF choppers involved in relief work

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Colombo

Sri Lanka Air Force bid farewell to two IAF helicopters after they ended their rescue mission in cyclone-hit island nation, even as INS Gharial reached Trincomalee with 700 tonnes of essential relief material from Tamil Nadu. The Indian Air Force (IAF) choppers, which departed on Monday, were involved in airlifting immediate relief supplies to distressed communities, evacuating those affected and providing air cover for those involved in rescue missions in the aftermath of havoc caused by Cyclone Ditwah and adverse weather conditions. “Their contribution significantly enhanced Sri Lanka's national disaster response during a period of urgent need,” the Sri Lankan Air Force said in a statement issued on their official website on Monday. The Indian High Commission in Colombo said the helicopters evacuated



264 survivors and airlifted about 50 tonnes of relief material, adding that more Indian relief action was due. Meanwhile, the Indian Navy Ship (INS) Gharial reached Trincomalee On Monday, with 700 tonnes of food items, essentials and clothing from Tamil Nadu. “The consignment was formally received by Deputy Foreign Minister Hon Arun Hemachandra, who appreciated India's swift and sustained assistance,” the

mission posted on social media on Tuesday. Tamil Nadu has sent about 1,000 tonnes of essential food items and clothes to Sri Lanka under Operation Sagar Bandhu. Of these, about 300 tonnes reached Colombo in 3 Indian Naval Ships on Sunday. Additionally, the fully operational Indian field hospital Mahiyanganaya near Kandy, is delivering life-saving treatment to flood-affected communities. “Equipped for trauma care,

surgeries, ambulance support and critical medical services, the facility ensures urgent healthcare reaches where it matters most,” it added. Indian Army's Engineering Task Force is also working alongside Sri Lankan authorities to restore connectivity along the main road arteries of Sri Lanka in the wake of devastation caused by Cyclone Ditwah, it said. Indian High Commissioner Santosh Jha on Monday met Nalinda

Jayatissa, Minister of Health and Mass Media and discussed the ongoing efforts to bolster healthcare in Sri Lanka. The two discussed “deployment of field hospitals and BHISHM Cube, providing urgent and quality health care to the people of Sri Lanka in the wake of #CycloneDitwah. They also discussed next steps to strengthen these efforts,” it said. As of Tuesday, 9 am, 638 people have been killed, with 191 missing, in catastrophic floods and landslides caused by extreme weather conditions since November 16. India was the first country to respond to Sri Lanka's international appeal for assistance under its Operation Sagar Bandhu. A UNDP analysis released on Sunday said out of the estimated 2.3 million affected by Ditwah, more than half were women, and it hit 1.1 million hectares or almost 20 per cent of the island's land area. The cyclone triggered 1200 landslides in the hill country, where the impact of devas-

tation was severe. “The floodwaters reached nearly 720,000 buildings, about one in every twelve buildings in the country. Over 16,000 kilometres of roads, enough to circle the island's coastline more than twelve times, were exposed to flooding. Similarly, over 278 km of railway tracks and 480 bridges were located in flooded areas,” Azusa Kubota, UNDP Resident Representative in Sri Lanka, said. Cyclone Ditwah struck regions already weakened by years of economic stress, he added. “After one of its worst economic crises and a slow but steady recovery underway, Sri Lanka cannot shoulder more debt to cover the costs of a rebuild from this massive natural disaster,” he said. International partners must step up with affordable financing and innovative instruments that enable a rapid recovery and rebuilding with greater resilience, without the country falling off the debt cliff, he added.

UN to grant \$4.5 million to help cyclone-hit Sri Lanka

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Colombo

The United Nations on Tuesday announced the release of \$4.5 million from its Central Emergency Response Fund to assist Sri Lanka in recovering from the devastation caused by Cyclone Ditwah. “Cyclone Ditwah has upended lives across the country, and many families are still struggling to meet their basic daily needs,” said Marc-André Franche, United Nations Resident Coordinator in Sri Lanka. He said that the UN is working closely with the Government, civil society partners and the humanitarian community in Sri Lanka to ensure a coordinated response guided by evidence and priority needs. “This emergency funding will help us reach those most severely affected with the support they urgently need,” he added. Sri Lanka's Minister of Foreign Affairs Vijitha Herath thanked the UN for the contributions. “The impact of the disaster on all sectors, including daily livelihood, economy, and agriculture, requires continued international support for the rebuilding process,” Herath posted on social media. The funds will enable the UN to rapidly scale up emergency food assistance, shelter support, and water, sanitation and hygiene services for the severely affected. Communities across Sri Lanka are continuing to grapple with the widespread impacts of the cyclone, with thousands of families still displaced after extensive damage to housing and infrastructure. Even as response efforts are underway, latest assessments indicate that the effects of the cyclone are broader and more severe than initially understood, leaving many communities in urgent need of sustained support to fully recover from Cyclone Ditwah. Over 1.7 million people from over 500,000 families were affected by the cyclone-triggered extreme weather, with 638 deaths and 191 missing.

Lithuania Govt declares national emergency

ASSOCIATED PRESS ■ Vilnius

Lithuania's Government on Tuesday declared a national emergency over security risks posed by meteorological balloons from Russia-allied Belarus that have violated its airspace in recent weeks. Tensions between Lithuania and Belarus have escalated after the balloons forced Lithuania to repeatedly shut down its main airport, leaving thousands of people stranded. “In combating the Belarusian hybrid attack, we must take the strictest measures and defend the areas most affected by this attack,” Prime Minister Inga Ruginiene said. The announcement followed a Cabinet meeting of the Baltic state, which is a NATO member and strong backer of Ukraine in its fight against the Russian forces who launched a full-scale invasion in February 2022.

TENSIONS BETWEEN TWO NATIONS ROSE AFTER BALLOONS FORCED LITHUANIA TO SHUT DOWN ITS AIRPORT

Interior Minister Vladislav Kondratovic said that the state of emergency means the army would be given the possibility to patrol in the border area, together with police and other uniformed services or alone, in order to detect the balloons. He promised the impact on civilians would be limited. While the balloons are used to smuggle cigarettes into Lithuania, officials in Vilnius see their numbers and trajectories as deliberate acts of disruption orchestrated by Belarus. Kondratovic said Lithuanian prosecutors launched an investigation into the balloons and that the secret services would provide

information about the connection with the Minsk regime. “I have no information that the Belarusian side is trying to curb the senders of the balloons,” the minister said. “And this is one of the proofs that this is a hybrid attack.” In October, Lithuanian authorities closed two border crossings in response to the airspace violations by the balloons. Belarus' authoritarian President Alexander Lukashenko denounced Lithuania's move to close the border as a “mad scam” and part of a “hybrid war” against his country. He suggested that Vilnius itself needs to combat the smuggling of contraband. Lithuania, Poland, and other European Union countries in the region have in recent years accused Belarus of other activities aimed at triggering instability, including with cyberattacks. They also accuse Minsk of direct-

ing a large influx of migrants from the Middle East and Africa to their borders to create a migration crisis. “Belarus is signalling to Lithuania that it can raise the price at any moment,” Linas Kojala, head of the Geopolitics and Security Studies Centre in Vilnius, told. “Yesterday with weaponised migration, today with balloons that are hardly separable from regime control.” Europe overall has been on high alert since drone intrusions into NATO's airspace reached an unprecedented scale in September and the Russian invasion of Ukraine nears its fourth year. However, smuggling balloons is a challenge unique to the Baltic states bordering Belarus. Representatives of the EU and NATO have expressed support but offered scarce concrete information about what could be done.



Mexican National Guardsman kills 3 fellow service members

ASSOCIATED PRESS ■ Mexico

A Mexican National Guardsman shot and killed three fellow service members at a barracks over the weekend in the western Mexican state of Michoacan, where the Government has surged security forces in the wake of recent high-profile killings. A federal official confirmed the shooting Monday to The Associated Press, requesting anonymity because they were not authorized to discuss it publicly. The shooting, which wounded a fourth service member, was under investigation, the official said. The suspect was in custody in Michoacan. The shooting occurred Saturday hours after a car bomb exploded in Coahuayana, Michoacan, killing five people outside a local police station. President Claudia Sheinbaum declined to give more details Monday.



ICC sentences Sudanese militia leader for Darfur crimes

ASSOCIATED PRESS ■ The Hague

Judges at the International Criminal Court (ICC) sentenced a leader of the feared Sudanese Janjaweed militia to 20 years imprisonment Tuesday for war crimes and crimes against humanity committed in the catastrophic conflict in Darfur more than two decades ago. At a hearing last month, prosecutors sought a life sentence for Ali Muhammad Ali Abd-Al-Rahman, who was convicted in October of 27 counts of war crimes and crimes against humanity that included ordering mass executions and bludgeoning two prisoners to death with an axe in 2003-2004. “He committed these crimes knowingly, willfully, and with the evidence shows, enthusiasm and vigour,” prosecutor Julian Nicholls told judges at the sentencing hearing in November.

India-Russia Summit 2025: A quiet reset in a noisy world



BHASKAR
JYOTI
MAHANTA

When Vladimir Putin stepped down from his aircraft in New Delhi on the afternoon of December 4th, 2025, the moment felt almost symbolic. The world today is anything but settled - Europe still burns with conflict, the United States continues to tighten sanctions, Beijing expands its strategic ambitions, and global alliances are beginning to look like the chessboard of a new Cold War. Yet, there on Indian soil, two leaders greeted each other with familiarity, not caution. Prime Minister Narendra Modi's decision to personally receive President Putin, and later accompany him in the same vehicle, was a message written not in language but in gesture: India and Russia still trust each other, despite the storm outside.

We have watched the India-Russia relationship evolve for decades - from the days of Soviet camaraderie when every defence

installation in India seemed to carry Cyrillic markings, to the more uncertain period after the Soviet collapse, and now into this new era where India is no longer a passive customer, but an assertive nation charting its own destiny. This summit, the 23rd India-Russia Annual Summit, did not simply acknowledge that relationship - it renewed and reshaped it.

The defence discussions were among the most consequential. Russia remains one of India's oldest and most dependable military partners. The MiGs and Sukhois that roar over our skies, the T-90 tanks that guard our borders, and even the S-400 systems now protecting our strategic installations - all of these are reminders of how deeply intertwined the two nations' security frameworks are. What made this summit different was a new tone: the shift from buyer-seller to co-developer. I am told Russian officials privately reassured their Indian counterparts that Moscow is willing to open access to technologies that were once held back, and that Russia sees India as a long-term defence partner capable of building, not merely purchasing. On energy, Putin's



calm but firm declaration that Russia will continue to supply India with oil "without interruption" stood out. It was a direct counter to the pressure India has faced from Washington and European capitals ever since the war in Ukraine escalated. The truth is simple: India cannot compromise energy security because another part of the world is at war. Cheap Russian crude stabilized India's energy market when global oil prices went wild - a fact ordinary citizens may not realize,

but policymakers cannot forget. Equally significant were the discussions on building a diversified economic roadmap. In the closed-door interactions, Indian negotiators emphasised the imbalance in trade: India imports far more than it exports.

For the first time in years, both sides agreed that the economic basket must expand - into sectors such as heavy engineering, manufacturing, fertilizers, skilled labour mobility, ports, shipping lanes, and even digital payments.

The idea of a payment system insulated from sanctions - using local currencies - was not just economics. It was strategy.

Another moment worth noting came during the leaders' joint statement at Hyderabad House. Modi did not explicitly mention Ukraine, yet his reminder that "peace and diplomacy remain the only viable path" was not lost on anyone in the room.

Putin, for his part, responded not with defensiveness, but with controlled pragmatism - signalling that Russia understands India's diplomatic balancing act and respects it.

For the United States, this summit will be read carefully. Washington has grown accustomed to India's partnership - be it in the Indo-Pacific, QUAD, defence cooperation, semiconductor supply chains, or intelligence sharing.

But India's relationship with Russia predates many of its modern partnerships. It is built on decades of reliability, shared technology, and geopolitical trust that did not disappear even when Moscow grew closer to Beijing. That continuity matters - especially for a nation like India, which seeks strategic autonomy and

not alliance dependency.

Does this visit change the trajectory of the Russia-Ukraine war? Not directly. It does, however, weaken the Western attempt to make Russia a pariah state. For Moscow, having India publicly reaffirm the partnership at a time when many nations are cautious is not a minor achievement - it is geopolitical oxygen.

Looking ahead, what does this summit mean for India?

If both sides follow through, India could emerge not just as a military and economic partner of Russia, but as one of the pivotal powers shaping the emerging multipolar order. The infrastructure corridors discussed - from the Northern Sea Route to the Chennai-Vladivostok maritime link - could reshape India's access to the Arctic, East Asia, and Eurasia. Co-manufactured defence platforms could strengthen India's capabilities and reduce dependence on Western suppliers vulnerable to sanctions and political conditionality. Continued access to Russian energy, nuclear cooperation, and joint technical research could bolster India's long-term capacities - especially as its population and economy continue to expand.

Yet, caution is necessary. Implementation - not headlines - will define the true legacy of this visit. Agreements must become factories, production lines, shipping routes, training programs, and operational military assets.

India must also ensure it remains balanced: no one partnership - Russian, American, or otherwise - should become a strategic crutch. In many ways, this summit tells us something deeper about India's foreign policy evolution. India is no longer choosing sides - it is choosing itself. And nations that choose themselves are the ones that shape history. Years from now, when scholars and diplomats revisit this moment, they may conclude that this was not just another leader-to-leader visit. It was an inflection point - when India proved, not through rhetoric but through action, that it will steer its path based on sovereignty, national interest, and long-term vision. The world may be dividing into camps again. India, instead, is building corridors.

The author is the Former Director General of Police, Assam and General Secretary of the Think Tank Society to Harmonise Aspirations for Responsible Engagement-SHARE

Bangladesh EC to announce poll schedule in next 2 days



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
Dhaka

Bangladesh Election Commission (EC) has completed all preparations to hold the 13th general elections in February and will announce the schedule in the next two days, a top official said on Tuesday. "After a meeting with the President (Mohammad Shahabuddin), the schedule would be announced tomorrow evening or the day after," Election Commissioner Abdur Rahmani Masud told reporters.

He said that the meeting is scheduled for Wednesday at the Bangabhaban presidential palace.

Meanwhile, the EC officials said that Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) AMM Nasir Uddin was expected to announce the schedule in a nationwide address.

The CEC met Chief Justice Syed Refaat Ahmed on Tuesday at the Supreme Court ahead of the announcement of the date for elections and a referendum to seek public opinions on a series of reform proposals rolled out by the Muhammad Yunus-led interim government.

Former prime minister Khaleda Zia's Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) has emerged as the frontrunner, with its former ally Jamaat-e-Islami and its right-wing Islamic allies being the main

rival in the absence of deposed premier Sheikh Hasina's disbanded Awami League. Both parties have announced their nominees in the election for the 300-seat parliament.

Masud said that special emphasis will be given to ensuring the cooperation of all, including political parties, in the announcement of the election schedule. He also said that the symbols of any banned or suspended parties will not appear in the final postal ballots, in a veiled reference to the Awami League. A special tribunal last month sentenced Hasina to death on charges of crimes against humanity. She is currently in India. Most of her senior colleagues and activists in the party and Government were in jail awaiting trial on identical charges, while many of them are on the run at home and abroad.

The scenario made it difficult for Awami League leaders to contest the polls as independent candidates despite having a large support base. Meanwhile, tension between Jamaat-e-Islami and the BNP over election campaigning in the Sirajganj-1 constituency erupted into violence Monday night, injuring around 15 Jamaat activists, party sources said.

The BNP has denied involvement, blaming locals for the clash.

Zelenskyy refuses to cede land to Russia as he rallies European support

ASSOCIATED PRESS
Rome

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy has reaffirmed his firm refusal to cede any territory, resisting US pressure for a painful compromise with Russia as he continued to rally European support for Ukraine. "Undoubtedly, Russia insists that we give up territories. We, clearly, don't want to give up anything. That's what we are fighting for," Zelenskyy said in a WhatsApp chat late Monday in which he answered reporters' questions.

"Do we consider ceding any territories? According to the law, we don't have such a right. According to Ukraine's law, our constitution, international law, and, to be frank, we don't have a moral right either." In an interview with Politico released Tuesday, US



Ukraine President Volodymyr Zelenskyy and Pope Francis waving to journalists during their meeting in Castel Gandolfo AP

President Donald Trump again pressed Zelenskyy to accept the US proposal that Ukraine cede territory to Putin, arguing that Russia retains the "upper hand" and that Zelenskyy's Government must "play ball."

Zelenskyy met on Tuesday with Pope Leo XIV at Castel Gandolfo, a papal residence

outside Rome, and is to have talks with Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni later in the day. The Vatican said the pope "reiterated the need for the continuation of dialogue and expressed his urgent desire that the current diplomatic initiatives bring about a just and lasting peace." The Holy See has tried to

remain neutral in the war while offering solidarity and assistance to what it calls the "martyred" people of Ukraine. Leo, who has met three times with Zelenskyy and has spoken by telephone at least once with Russian President Vladimir Putin, has called for a ceasefire and urged Moscow in particular

to make gestures to promote peace. On Monday, Zelenskyy held talks in London with British Prime Minister Keir Starmer, French President Emmanuel Macron and German Chancellor Friedrich Merz to strengthen Ukraine's hand amid mounting impatience from Trump.

US and Ukrainian negotiators completed three days of talks on Saturday aimed at trying to narrow differences on the US administration's peace proposal.

A major sticking point in the plan is the suggestion that Kyiv must cede control of the Donbas region of eastern Ukraine to Russia, which illegally occupies most but not all of the territory. Ukraine and its European allies have firmly resisted the idea of handing over land. "You know, a lot of people are dying," Trump told Politico, claiming that other unnamed

Ukrainian officials agree with the US administration. "His people loved the proposal. They really liked it. His lieutenants, his top people, they liked it, but they said he hadn't read it yet."

Russia, Trump reasoned, remains too powerful for Ukraine to continue fighting. "I give the people of Ukraine and the military of Ukraine tremendous credit for the, you know, bravery and for the fighting and all of that," he said. "But you know, at some point, size will win, generally." Trump also amplified his calls for Ukraine to hold national elections even though the martial law doesn't allow it. And Zelenskyy, elected in 2019, had his five-year term extended because of the war. "They're using war not to hold an election, but, uh, I would think the Ukrainian people would. Should have that choice," Trump said.

22 people killed in office building fire in Indonesia

ASSOCIATED PRESS
Jakarta

A fire ripped through an office building in Indonesia's capital, Jakarta, on Tuesday, killing at least 22 people, including a pregnant woman, police said.

Flames engulfed the seven-story building, sending thick black smoke billowing into the sky and causing panic among nearby residents and workers in a neighbourhood in central Jakarta. The fire, which broke out around midday, is believed to have started on the first floor of the building in the Kemayoran neighbourhood before spreading to other floors, Central Jakarta police chief Susatyo Purnomo Condro said.

Hundreds of personnel and 29 fire trucks were deployed to try to contain the blaze. The cause of the fire is still under investigation. Many workers in the building, which was used as a sales and storage office for a drone company, were out for lunch when a battery started sparking in a storage and testing area, said Condro, citing several witnesses. The fire was extin-



guished after three hours of intense effort. At least 22 bodies - seven men and 15 women, including a pregnant woman - were recovered from the building and taken to the police hospital in East Jakarta for identification.

A resident, Intan Puspita, whose home is close to the building, told The Associated Press that the fire started with a loud bang and workers running outside. "When asked, they said that there was an alleged short circuit in one of the batteries during the charging process," Puspita said. The fire spread quickly, and she saw workers on the upper

floors trying to escape by moving to the rooftop.

"I saw about 20 victims in the body bags being evacuated from inside," Puspita said. "It was tragic."

Television reports showed the tense evacuation of more than a dozen trapped workers, including many women, from the sixth floor using an emergency ladder extended by firefighters. Each person had to be lowered one by one from the building, and several struggled to breathe because of the thick smoke while waiting for their turn. Authorities said most of the victims died from smoke inhalation. Firefighters managed to rescue at least 19

trapped workers, some of whom suffered minor injuries, but were in a weak and traumatised condition. A police officer and a firefighter also experienced breathing difficulties.

"We will comb through the entire building again," Condro said when asked about the possible rise in the death toll. "Firefighters are cooling down the scene because the smoke is still thick, and it is not yet possible for us to enter the structure."

Jakarta Governor Pramono Anung called on company leaders to foster a workplace safety culture and to have emergency action plans for evacuation. "This case obviously shows the company does not provide emergency access' from fire in the direct physical sense," Anung told reporters when visiting the site. Families anxiously awaited news at hospitals or near the building occupied by PT Terra Drone Indonesia, a company that provides unmanned aerial vehicle technology for various industrial sectors such as construction, mining, oil and gas, energy, plantations and urban planning.

Macron faces backlash for using slur against feminist protesters

ASSOCIATED PRESS
Paris

Brigitte Macron was facing criticism on Tuesday after a video emerged of her using a slur to denounce feminist protesters. The scene filmed Sunday showed France's first lady in discussion backstage at the Folies Bergere theatre in Paris with Ary Abittan, a French actor and humorist previously accused of rape, before a performance he was about to give. The previous night, feminist campaigners had disrupted his show with shouts of "Abittan, rapist!"

Before Sunday's performance, Brigitte Macron asked him how he was feeling. When he said he was feeling scared, she made a derogatory and sexist reference to the women, adding: "We'll toss them out." Her office said in a statement that she'd been trying to calm his nerves: "As the video shows, Mrs Macron's only intention was to reassure an artist who, in his dressing room before going on stage, had just told her, 'I'm scared,' because his show had been disrupted the previous

evening." "In no way is she attacking a cause. She does, however, disapprove of the radical methods used to prevent an artist from performing on stage, as was the case on Saturday night."

The feminist campaign group "Nous Toutes" ("All of Us") said its activists disrupted Abittan's show to protest what it described as "the culture of impunity" around sexual violence in France.

Magistrates terminated the investigation of the 2021 rape allegation against Abittan for lack of evidence in 2024, a decision then confirmed on appeal in January this year, according to French media. In a statement on Instagram, Nous Toutes said: "We denounce venues that roll out a red carpet for men accused of rape, normalising sexist and sexual violence. It is a public insult to the victims. Victims, we believe you. Rapists, we do not forgive you!"

Opponents of President Emmanuel Macron on the left wing of French politics criticised his wife's use of a sexist slur, and some said she should apologise.

Military transport aircraft crashes in Russia

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
Moscow

An Antonov An-22 military transport aircraft with seven people on board crashed in Russia's central Ivanovo Region on Tuesday during its first flight after repairs, the defence ministry said. "The aircraft crashed in an unpopulated area. A search and rescue crew has left for the accident site to determine the fate of the aircraft's crew," the ministry said. TASS reported that fragments of the An-22 were found on the shore and in the water. The An-22 is a heavy transport aircraft used by the Russian Aerospace Forces (VKS) to transport heavy weapons. The aircraft has a maximum takeoff weight of 225 tonnes and a payload capacity of 60 tonnes. With a total cargo weight of up to 40 tonnes, the An-22 can fly over 5,000 km, according to Russian TV channels.



Hamas wants pressure on Israel before next phase of ceasefire

ASSOCIATED PRESS
Jerusalem

A Hamas leader on Tuesday threatened to not move forward into the next phase of the Gaza ceasefire agreement until more pressure is placed on Israel to open up a key border crossing, cease deadly strikes and allow more aid into the Palestinian territory. The accusation came as Israel's Government says it's ready to move into the next, more complicated phase of the ceasefire deal - even as it has called on the militant group to return the remains of the last Israeli hostage held in Gaza. Husam Badran, a member of Hamas' political wing, called for the "full implementation of all the terms of the first phase" before moving forward, including an end to what he called the continuing demolition of Palestinian homes in the part of the territory still controlled by Israel.

PROSPECT

Sudha Murty to grace
Andhra University’s
‘WAVES-2025’ alumni meet



The Andhra University annual alumni meet 'WAVES-2025' is scheduled to be held on Saturday, the 13th December, under the auspices of AU Alumni Association (AAA) with the support and association of Andhra University. Sudha Murty, Member of Parliament, Rajya Sabha and founder chairperson, Infosys Foundation and Chairperson, Murty Trust, will be the Chief Guest. Dr GM Rao, founder Chairman, AAA, an eminent industrialist and an illustrious alumnus of AU, will preside. The theme of WAVES-2025 is women's empowerment. This Meet aims to bring Alumni from various affiliated colleges, Alumni from various countries, campus colleges, academicians, researchers and members from the University community. The program will include reflections from the Alumni on the centennial journey of the Institutions and felicitations to the distinguished Alumni. This year, alumni from overseas, Delhi, Hyderabad, Amaravathi and Godavari chapters are expected to participate. Andhra University Alumni are committed to supporting their Alma mater and fostering relationships with the Industry. Alumni bond with Alma mater, strengthening the AU journey of excellence and heritage. Alumni will extend their support to make AU a Global University of par excellence. The University shall be a place of learning for students across the Globe.

Sahaj gets corporate agency
licence from IRDAI

Sahaj Insurance Services Pvt Ltd, which recently received a corporate agency licence from IRDAI, aims to sell about 10 crore insurance policies designed to suit the rural population. Sahaj Insurance Services Pvt Ltd, a subsidiary of Sahaj Retail Ltd, operates a network of about 4.5 lakh digitally enabled rural centres serving over 70 crore people. In a statement, the Kanoria Foundation company said the new vertical is designed to make insurance, long characterised by low awareness and limited access in rural regions, simple, affordable and accessible at the last mile. Sahaj Centres will offer a full suite of insurance products, with trained Sahaj Mitrs facilitating customer onboarding, support and claims assistance, it said. “Customers will be able to access assisted digital enrolment, paperless processes, multi-lingual support and help with filing claims. These features are essential for first-time insurance adopters in rural markets. The services will also integrate Government-backed insurance and social-security schemes to deepen financial inclusion,” Sahaj Retail Ltd CEO Biswajit Chatterjee said.

RRB rejects
question paper
compromise claims

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

The Railway Recruitment Board (RRB) has categorically refuted claims circulated in a section of the media, particularly in the Dehradun region, suggesting that the Level-1 question paper for the ongoing recruitment process against Centralised Employment Notice (CEN) 08/2024 has been compromised. The RRB issued a statement following reports of a candidate malpractice incident detected on 2 December 2025 during the second shift of the Computer Based Test (CBT) at the iCreate Solutions Test Centre in Dehradun. During live CCTV surveillance, a candidate named Vivek was observed consulting a handwritten chit. Examination officials immediately intervened and recovered the slip. Upon questioning, the candidate confessed that the chit had been provided by external individuals who had misled him into believing it contained correct answers. The RRB confirmed that the recovered chit merely listed numerals from 1 to 4 and bore no relevance to the examination, as the questions and answer options are uniquely and randomly shuffled for every candidate. The Board emphasised that the slip could have provided no advantage, concluding that the candidate had been deceived by external miscreants. Following established protocol, a First Information Report (FIR) has been registered at the Patel Nagar Police Station in Dehradun and the matter is currently under police investigation. The RRB reiterated that its digital system for generating, storing and administering question papers is fully secure and encrypted, asserting that the incident was one of isolated individual misconduct and did not constitute a breach of the secure examination process.

Waqf Boards’ ‘Umeed’ shows strong results

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

After the launch of the UMEED Portal on June 6, 2025, the Ministry of Minority Affairs worked tirelessly with States and Waqf Boards to train and prepare them for data upload. Seven zonal review-cum-training meetings were conducted with all States/UTs and capacity-building funds of nearly Rupees 10 crore were released in tranches to 30 States/UTs and 32 Waqf Boards.

Helpline support, VC-based training sessions and Master Trainer workshops were also organised. Yet, despite these extensive efforts, most Waqf Boards failed to utilise the first four months of the six-month upload window. They became active only in November, when over 2.42 lakh properties were initiated on the Portal. In contrast, June saw only 11 uploads, July

50, August 822 and September a little over 4,000, showing how casually the Boards treated the process



initially. The following table is self explanatory to understand the seriousness of Waqf Boards in uploading existing properties on the UMEED Portal.

UMEED Act, 1995 came into effect on 8 April 2025 and the window for uploading existing Waqf properties on the Central Portal closed on 6 December 2025.

A total of 5,17,082 properties were initiated for upload, with the main surge occurring only in the final weeks, particularly in the last six

days, when more than 2,43,582 properties were initiated on the Portal. This shows the robust nature of the UMEED Portal.

The data shows that almost all Waqf Boards, barring a few exceptions, remained inactive for the first five months and moved only when the deadline neared. Even then, the UMEED Portal handled the sudden spike smoothly, with many States ultimately completing uploads at exceptionally high level.

Those Mutawallis who could not upload their Waqf properties before the 6 December deadline are not without recourse. The UMEED Act provides a clear remedial mechanism: they may approach their respective Waqf Tribunals for resolution.

Recent media reports claiming that “only 27 per cent of Waqf properties have been uploaded” are based on

MONTH-WISE WAQF PROPERTY INITIATIONS ON UMEED PORTAL	
MONTH (2025)	PROPERTIES INITIATED
June	11
July	50
August	822
September	4,327
October	25,827
November	2,42,463
December (till 6th)	2,43,582
GRAND TOTAL	5,17,082

a fundamentally flawed and outdated premise. They rely entirely on old WAMSIs figures, numbers that today have no official relevance.

WAMSIs had long been recognised as unreliable: thousands of entries contained errors such as zero-area properties, mismatched

or duplicate codes, inflated land areas without proof and significant data-entry inconsistencies.

Several State Boards themselves acknowledged these defects. The Ministry repeatedly directed States to correct the data; the matter was placed before both the JPC and the Hon'ble Supreme Court. Ultimately, due to persistent inaccuracies, WAMSIs was formally disabled on 8 May 2025 and stands closed for all official purposes.

Using this defunct dataset as the denominator for any percentage calculation is misleading and factually untenable.

Unlike WAMSIs, UMEED is built on fresh, authenticated data captured through a maker-checker-approver workflow, with documentary evidence at every stage. Comparing this verified dataset with WAMSIs's error-ridden numbers is an apples-to-stones comparison.

Himanta launches distribution of PMAY-G letters to 3.25 lakh beneficiaries

TONY DAS
■ Guwahati

Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Tuesday ceremonially launched the distribution of sanction letters to 3,25,234 beneficiaries under the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana–Gramin (PMAY-G) at a significant state-level event held at Gandhi Maidan, Boko, in Kamrup district.

Addressing the gathering, the Chief Minister affirmed that the Government aims to ensure that every family currently residing in a kutcha house is provided with a pucca home. He highlighted that Prime Minister Narendra Modi launched the PMAY-G scheme specifically to ensure housing for economically weaker families across the nation, a goal which

Assam has been working continuously to fulfil.

Sarma recalled the State Government's sustained efforts, including the distribution of sanction letters to five lakh beneficiaries on May 19, 2022.

This was followed by the release of the first instalment to two lakh beneficiaries in May 2022 and another three lakh beneficiaries in February 2023. He further noted that the Government had facilitated the 'Griha Pravesh' (housewarming) ceremony for more than three lakh PMAY beneficiaries in the state on a single day in July 2023.

The Chief Minister highlighted recent milestones, including the inauguration of a PMAY-G colony with 113 houses at Namchang Tea Estate cluster in Naharkatia



in March 2024. He also referenced the historic dedication of 5,67,083 completed PMAY homes by Prime Minister Modi from Meleng–Meteli

Pathar in Jorhat on March 9, 2024. He stressed that today's approval of 3,25,234 new beneficiaries, following the distribution to

3,88,358 beneficiaries in March this year, marks yet another crucial achievement for PMAY in Assam. Reiterating the

Government's commitment to welfare, he stated the goal is to create a system where poor families can easily access all welfare schemes without corruption. He cited the monthly Orunodoi assistance of ₹1,250 and subsidised ration supplies, which together provide benefits worth nearly ₹3,000 per month to every poor family in Assam. The event was attended by Panchayat and Rural Development Minister Ranjeet Kumar Dass, MLAs Hemanga Thakuria and Nandita Das, GMC Mayor Mrigen Sarania, Additional Chief Secretary B Kalyan Chakravarty, P and RD Commissioner Keerthi Jalli, Kamrup District Commissioner Deva Kumar Mishra and several other senior officials.

Darrang district distributes PMAY-G
sanction letters to over 11,700



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Guwahati

In a major push towards the Assam Government's "Housing for All" mission, the Darrang district administration on Tuesday conducted the ceremonial distribution of Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana–Gramin (PMAY-G) sanction letters to 11,753 beneficiaries.

The district-level distribution was held concurrently with the Central Programme held at Boko in Kamrup district, which was attended by Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma. The Chief Minister reaffirmed the Government's commitment to providing secure and permanent homes to all eligible rural families,

with the State-level programme being live-streamed across the three Legislative Assembly Constituencies of Darrang. The distribution drive was executed simultaneously in Mangaldai, Sipajhar and Dalgao to ensure broad outreach.

At the Mangaldai Boys' HS Field, 1,487 beneficiaries received their letters in the presence of Mangaldai MLA Basanta Das and Gurujyoti Das, Chairman of the Assam Fisheries Development Corporation (AFDC) and former MLA. In Sipajhar, 2,592 beneficiaries were handed their sanction letters at the Sipajhar CDC Field by MLA Paramananda Rajbongshi.

The largest contingent

of 7,674 beneficiaries received their letters at the Dalgao Town Field. The distribution here was overseen by MLA Mazibur Rahman and Krishna Saha, Chairperson of the Kharupetia Municipal Board.

The coordinated execution across all venues was ensured by District Commissioner Parag Kumar Kakaty, CEO Zilla Parishad Karabi Saikia Karan, Darrang Zilla Parishad President Sewali Goswami Kalita, Darrang Municipal Board Chairperson Nirmali Devi Sharma and other dignitaries. The initiative marks a significant step in the district's implementation of the flagship housing scheme.

Bintin media announces revolutionary
documentary *Bharat Ek Vishwaguru*



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

Bintin Media, a youth-driven Indian production house on Tuesday announced the release of its groundbreaking documentary "Bharat Ek Vishwaguru", a powerful investigation into the gradual decline of India's ancient education system and a clarion call to revive the Gurukul model and introduce the Bhagavad Gita as a compulsory subject in the

modern curriculum. Directed and produced by Nitin Vashisth, the documentary traces India's journey from the era of world-renowned Gurukuls and universities such as Nalanda and Takshashila, to the cultural destruction under foreign invasions and finally to the impact of modern Westernized education on today's Indian youth. Speaking about the documentary, Director Nitin Vashisth said "India has the

world's largest youth population. If our youth loses its cultural foundation, India loses its future. This film is not just a project - it is a national movement to bring back values, identity and purpose into Indian education." "Bharat Ek Vishwaguru" will soon be screened for policymakers, cultural leaders, educational institutions and youth organisations across the country. Public release details will be announced shortly.

GURU NANAK DEV
UNIVERSITY,
AMRITSAR

Advertisement No. 12/2025
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PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Bhopal

ICICI Prudential Life Insurance has reported an industry-leading claim settlement ratio of 99.33 per cent for the first half of FY2026—the highest among the top life insurance companies in the country.

The company's average claim settlement turnaround time during this period was just 1.1 days for non-investigated claims. It settled death claims worth ₹893.38 crore in total during the

same period. Amish Banker, Chief Operations Officer, ICICI Prudential Life Insurance, said, "Our claim settlement process is designed to deliver an enhanced customer experience and we handle every claim with utmost sensitivity. "In H1-FY2026, we achieved a claim settlement ratio of 99.33per cent and our average turnaround time for non-investigated claims was only 1.1 days. We also settled death claims amounting to over ₹893.38 crore during the period," he said. "Our customer-first approach



and strong focus on digitalisation empower us to deliver quick claim settlements, providing timely financial relief when families need it most. With convenient digital platforms such as our mobile app, WhatsApp, chatbot and website, claimants can easily

lodge and track their claims," he added.

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"In H1-FY2026, we had a claim settlement ratio of 99.33per cent

and our average claim settlement turnaround time for non-investigated claims was just 1.1 days. Besides, we settled death claims totalling over ₹893.38 crore in the same period", he said.

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BRIEFLY

DEMBELE, CHEVALIER TO MISS MATCH AGAINST ATHLETIC



Ballon d’Or winner Ousmane Dembele and goalkeeper Lucas Chevalier will both miss Paris Saint-Germain’s trip to Athletic Bilbao in the Champions League on Wednesday. PSG said Dembele is sick while Chevalier is still recovering from a right ankle injury. It’s another setback for Dembélé, who returned from a left calf injury against Tottenham at the end of November and only made two more appearances in the French league. Before that, Dembele had been sidelined several weeks by a right hamstring injury sustained while playing for France in September. PSG will also still be without Morocco right back Achraf Hakimi, who has a sprained left ankle and faces a race against time to recover before the Africa Cup of Nations in his home country from December 21. Matvei Safonov is expected to start in goal in the absence of Chevalier, who was injured in a loss against Monaco after a violent tackle from Lamine Camara on November 29.

J&K: HUNDREDS PARTICIPATE IN ARMY-SPONSORED MARATHON



Hundreds of enthusiastic youth on Tuesday took part in an Army-sponsored marathon near the Line of Control (LoC) in Jammu and Kashmir’s Poonch district, officials said. Commander of Bhimber Gali Brigade, Brigadier Rahul Kumar, flagged off the marathon and encouraged the youth to adopt fitness as a way of life and consider a future in the armed forces. An Army official said the marathon was part of the second edition of Mendhar festival, which commenced on November 23 and is scheduled to end on December 11. Despite the challenging terrain and sensitive location, the event witnessed participation of more than 1,500 runners from across the region, the official said.

AC Milan win 3-2 over Torino in Serie A

ASSOCIATED PRESS
■ Turin

A second-half double from substitute Christian Pulisic gave AC Milan a come-from-behind 3-2 win over Torino and swept it back to the top of Italy’s Serie A.

Weekend wins for title rivals Napoli and Internazionale left Milan in third and it knew three points were required to return to the summit.

However, it was 2-0 down after 17 minutes on Monday.

Nikola Vlastić gave the home side the lead with a penalty after nine minutes, and then made the second goal eight minutes later when he powered forward to feed Duvan Zapata, whose powerful angled drive beat Mike Maignan from 12 meters.

Milan got back into the game seven minutes later, Adrien Rabiot lashing in a shot from 35 meters that will feature in many goal of the season competitions



come May. It fell to American forward Pulisic to turn the game around with two second-half goals.

After 67 minutes, one minute after replacing Davide Bertesaghi, he found himself unmarked in the box and made no mistake from close range.

Ten minutes later Pulisic put Milan ahead for the first time in the match when he swept home a low cross from the right.

Milan avoided what would

India eye podium finish in FIH junior WC

SAUMJOJYOTI S CHOUDHURY
■ Chennai

The dream of reclaiming the FIH Men’s Junior World Cup title might have been over, but hosts India will hope to at least finish on the podium and give the home fans something to cheer when they take on Argentina in the bronze medal match on Wednesday.

India, who won their last title nine years back in 2016 in Lucknow, lost 1-5 to seven-time champions and title holders Germany in the semifinals on Sunday.

Heartbroken at missing out the title yet again, India would look to regroup, make amends of their mistakes and at least finish with a medal in the home tournament.

Two-time champions Argentina will, however, be a tough customer for India and they have already showed their prowess in the tournament. Argentina, who won the title in 2005 and 2021, lost 1-2 in a closely contested semifinal against Spain and



they too are hurt and desperate to finish the tournament on a high.

The Indians were simply hammered by the ruthless Germans in the semifinals. The home team simply buckled under pressure and conceded soft goals, which

they can’t afford on Wednesday against Argentina if they want to stand on the podium.

The Indian backline was guilty of giving away possession easily, resulting in goals, while the forwards cut a sorry figure in front of the Germans

after a superb show in the pool stages against lowly opponents.

The likes of Dilraj Singh, Arshdeep Singh, Sourabh Anand Kushwaha, Gurjot Singh and Ajeet Yadav created a lot of chances but simply failed to convert them into

goals against the Germans.

India’s chief coach PR Sreejesh too admitted that his side failed to execute their plans and committed silly mistakes that ultimately put paid to their tile hopes.

“We committed silly mistakes, conceded goals and it is quite hard for these guys after conceding easy goals in a Junior World Cup semifinal. If you fail to execute your plans then that definitely is going to hurt yo,” Sreejesh had said after the loss against Germany.

“Winning and losing matters a lot, it doesn’t matter if you lose 1-0 or 10-0, it’s the same but the problem is how we concede the goals. We need to focus on that first.

“It’s all about collective effort. You need to defend well first and then you need to attack and create opportunities. We are not converting our opportunities,” he added.

The Indian defence, led by skipper Rohit, will have to raise their game by leaps and bounds to control the Argentines.

The midfield too lacked cohesion against Germany the other day and the likes of Rosan Khujur, Ankit Pal, Manmeet Singh, Adrohit Ekka and Thounaojam Ingalemba Luwang will have to be more proactive and cohesive to create chances for the strikers.

Penalty corner is another area which continues to be India’s perennial problem.

Anmol Ekka scored India’s lone goal against Germany through a penalty corner, but skipper Rohit, India’s best bet from drag-flicks, simply couldn’t make his mark in the tournament from set pieces.

There is no question about his solid defensive skills but India expected more from Rohit from penalty corners.

Princideep Singh has been the stand-out performer at the Indian goal and the hosts will expect the young Punjab goalkeeper to continue his fine showing.

Meanwhile, Germany will be looking for their eighth title when they take on Spain in the summit clash, also on Wednesday.

Goalkeeping stints in football shaped Princideep’s hockey career

SAUMJOJYOTI S CHOUDHURY
■ Chennai

What began as a stint at full-back eventually turned into a career between the posts for Princideep Singh, whose early goalkeeping experiences during football training sessions played a pivotal role in shaping his journey in hockey.

The 21-year-old custodian from Batala in Punjab, who has been one of India’s standout performers at the ongoing FIH Junior World Cup, idolises two-time Olympic medallist and current junior men’s team captain PR Sreejesh.

“I started my career with the Cheema Academy in Batala, Punjab, as a full back. That time I used to be a goalkeeper in football during training sessions but used to play hockey as full back,” Princideep said.

“I used to make good saves then and from there it started. The coaches told me to



become a goalkeeper in hockey.” Princideep credited Sreejesh for shaping his mindset.

“I started my hockey career in 2015 and in 2016 I saw Sreejesh bhai playing in the Olympics. I idolise coach sir only, got to learn a lot of things from him. He was himself a goalkeeper and he knew how to handle pressure,” he said.

Princideep made crucial

saves against Belgium in the quarterfinal, including two in the shoot-out, to take India into the semifinal, where they fell short against Germany, losing 1-5.

Princideep admitted that playing in front of a packed stadium can test nerves but stressed the importance of internal communication. “We get so support from the crowd and it increases your confidence,” he said.

ASSOCIATED PRESS
■ Madrid

Rubén García made one goal and scored another as Osasuna beat Levante 2-0 to ease the club’s relegation worries and condemn its rival to a fifth consecutive Spanish La Liga defeat.

The game on Monday pitted fourth-bottom Osasuna against last-place Levante. The home side controlled the game from the kick off, with García in commanding form against the club where he played much of his career. It was his cross from the right that brought Osasuna the lead after 13 minutes, Victor Muñoz expertly heading down and into the net.

García was fortunate 23 minutes later when he got his name on the scoresheet. His shot from just outside the box was cruelly deflected past the Levante keeper Mathew Ryan.

García refused to cele-



brate but acknowledged it was a vital win for his side.

“I’d have preferred it not to be against Levante, but I have to be happy because of what we were playing

for,” said García. “(These three points) feel necessary.” Osasuna is up to 15th in the 20-team table, three points clear of the drop zone.

Messi, Suarez to reunite on Mumbai ramp for a cause

TAPAN MOHANTA
■ Kolkata

Argentine football icon Lionel Messi will walk the ramp in Mumbai “for a cause” during his India tour, the organisers of which have requested him to bring select memorabilia from their 2022 World Cup triumph for an auction.

The sole promoter of the ‘GOAT India Tour 2025’, Satadru Dutta, said on Tuesday that Messi, along with long-time strike partner Luis Suarez and Argentina midfielder Rodrigo De Paul, will feature in a 45-minute fashion segment on the night of December 14. It will be a “philanthropic fashion show for a cause”, Dutta said.

“It’s a fully reserved night. There will be celebrity models, celebrity cricketers, Bollywood celebrities, millionaires, founders. Tiger and Jackie Shroff, John Abraham among others,” he said.

Suarez will also be part of a Spanish music show, while



the organisers have “made a formal request” for Messi to bring “some memorabilia of the 2022 World Cup which will be auctioned” during the Mumbai leg of the tour.

The Mumbai event starts at 5pm at Wankhede Stadium, preceded by a Padel Cup at 3.30pm at Cricket Club of India.

Kolkata leg: Statue unveiling switched to virtual mode In the Kolkata leg, the unveiling of Messi’s “biggest

ever statue” — a 70-feet structure — will be done virtually from his team hotel owing to security concerns.

“Police has not given permission so he will do it from the hotel. It will be done virtually in the morning,” a Kolkata Police source said.

Earlier, the eight-time Ballon d’Or winner was scheduled to visit Sreebhumii in person for the inauguration.

Kolkata Police sources confirmed Messi will land in the

city at 1.30am in the wee hours of Saturday and will stay at a five-star hotel on the EM Bypass.

A sponsor-exclusive meet-and-greet programme will run from 9.30am to 10.30am.

A special Argentine-Indian fusion food festival will be held on the sidelines, keeping in mind Messi’s love for ‘mate’ (Argentine herbal tea).

It will showcase Argentine herbal tea infused with Assam flavours, along with a spread of Bengali fish delicacies — including hilsa — and an assortment of local sweets. A 25ft x 20ft Messi mural, planned for the upcoming Durga Puja season, will also be unveiled.

“Not only will he unveil his biggest-ever statue, we will have a huge mural, which will be kept at strategic Durga Puja pandal-hopping locations so that all his fans will have an opportunity to paint and post messages in a nearby message box,” Dutta said.

Manchester United beat Wolverhampton 4-1 in premier league

ASSOCIATED PRESS
■ Wolverhampton

Bruno Fernandes scored two goals and made another as Manchester United beat Wolverhampton 4-1 to move into the top six of the English Premier League.

Fernandes’ first-half goal was cancelled out on the stroke of half time by Jean-Ricner Bellegarde but Bryan Mbeumo restored United’s lead early in the second half on Monday. Mason Mount added a third in the 62nd minute before Fernandes rounded off a comprehensive victory with an 82nd-minute penalty.

It was the eighth defeat in a row for Wolves and saw sixth-place United move on to 25 points, level with Chelsea, which is fifth.

Wolves remains bottom of

the table with two points, eight adrift of the team above it, Burnley.

“We got ourselves back in the game but, with the goals we conceded, you’re never going to get anything out of a game of football,” Wolves coach Rob Edwards said.

“There’s a nervousness and I can understand it but, in the big moments in the game, we insisted on giving the ball back to them. We’re getting punished and we’ve got to try and improve and be consistent – but it’s not going to be a quick turnaround.”

Although United has been consistently inconsistent all season, it came into the game as heavy favourites against a team that has one of the worst starting records of any Premier League side at this stage of the campaign.



Thousands of Wolves fans boycotted the first 15 minutes in a coordinated protest at the ownership of the club by Chinese conglomerate Fosun International. They had barely sat down when United took the lead with a goal that typified Wolves’ season. The Brazilian player Andre lost the ball in midfield

and a counter attack led to Fernandes racing inside the Wolves box.

He fought off the attentions of Emmanuel Agbadou and, even though he lost his footing, he still managed to get in a shot that the goalkeeper Sam Johnstone got a hand to but couldn’t stop from rolling into the net.

United failed to capitalize

on its pressure and it paid a price seconds before half time.

David Moller Wolfe crossed from the byline and Wolves’ standout performer Bellegarde whipped his volley past Senne Lammens into the United net.

It was Wolves’ first league goal since a 3-2 loss at home to Burnley on Oct. 26, and the 13th league game in succession United has failed to keep a clean sheet.

Nevertheless, United out-classed Wolves in a second-half blitz.

Ruben Amorim’s men were 2-1 up after 51 minutes, Mbeumo tapping in Diogo Dalot’s neat pass to complete a fine counter attack.

Mount converted Fernandes’ lovely chipped assist 11 minutes later before Fernandes added the fourth.

First transgenders’ football league kicks off in Jamshedpur

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ Jamshedpur

In a landmark development in Indian football, seven transgender teams made debut in an exclusive tournament under the umbrella of Jamshedpur Super League (JSL). The Transgenders’ League, which began here on Sunday, features seven teams —Jamshedpur FT, Chaibasa FC, Chakradharpur FC, Jamshedpur Indranagar FC, Naomundi FC, Saraikela FC and Kolhan Tiger FC — in a five-a-side format.

Initially, only four teams were to compete in the transgenders’ league but later three more sides were added. The tournament forms a part of the Jamshedpur Super

League, which also has other competitions such as age-group leagues.

In the inaugural match of the Transgenders’ League on Sunday, Jamshedpur FT trounced Chaibasa FC 7-0, while Kolhan Tiger FC notched 3-0 win over Chakradharpur FC, and Jamshedpur Indranagar FC and Naomundi FC played out a goal-less draw.

For Jamshedpur FT’s Puja Soy, scoring four goals in the opening match of the Transgenders’ League was the beginning of a new identity, not as a transgender, but as a footballer finally recognised on the stage she had long dreamt of.

“Football is such a beautiful sport, and for the first time, I felt like I wasn’t being

seen for my gender, but for my game,” she said.

“This is the first time we are playing in a proper professional environment,” said Aliya, another participant in the league.

“The support from the club and the fans makes us feel like we truly belong to the football family.” For many of these players, participation itself is a liberation.

“We are thrilled to be part of this ground-breaking initiative, India’s first Transgender League,” said Pyari Hessa, captain of Jamshedpur FT.

“It gives us a platform we never had before and will hopefully inspire other states to create similar spaces. We’re very grateful to Jamshedpur FC for making this possible.”

India went upstairs for the



He struck a six and four off Lutho Sipamla (2/38) in the 19th over, and reached his half-century in 25 balls with

His brief stay of 17 off 12 balls ended just as he began to find rhythm with back-to-back boundaries as India soon slipped to 48/3 in 6.3 overs.

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Mumbai



Three-time winners KKR will go into the auction with the biggest purse of ₹64.3 crores, followed by five-time champions CSK with ₹43.4 crores. Sunrisers Hyderabad, who have won the IPL once, have the third highest purse of ₹25.5 crores.

ASSOCIATED PRESS
 Brisbane

He is set to be recalled as captain when the match squad is announced Wednesday. Steve Smith has been leading the Australia XI in the absence


ASSOCIATED PRESS
 ■ Brisbane (Australia)

Matt Fisher, who made his only test appearance in the Caribbean in 2022, was drafted into the test squad as cover. In an Instagram post, Wood said he was "gutted to be out the remainder of the Ashes. After extensive surgery

England must win the third test starting Dec. 17 in Adelaide to have any chance of reclaiming the Ashes. England hasn't won a test in Australia since 2010-11, and losing Wood makes matters worse for a bowling attack that has struggled in the last month.

Struggling at 209 for nine in pursuit of a mammoth

"As they say, promises are meant to be kept. I feel I'll go a step further and say that promises are meant to be kept, but also meant to be delivered... And that is what is our DNA," Tendulkar recalled at an Aegaeas Federal Life Insurance event here.


PANCHAYAT RAJ & DRINKING WATER DEPARTMENT
GOVERNMENT OF ODISHA
OFFICE OF THE EXECUTIVE ENGINEER, RWS&S DIVISION, NABARANGPUR
 Tel: (068582)222643, E-Mail: esrwsnmp@gmail.com
INVITATION FOR BIDS
No: RWSS_NGP_ONLINE_01/2025-26 DATED:- 01/12/2025

The Executive Engineer RWS&S Division Nabarangpur on behalf of Govt. Of Odisha invites percentage rate bid through e-procurement in **Single** cover system according to norm of E- Procurement system in on-line mode.

1. Name of Works 2. No. of Works 3. Estimated Cost 4. Tender Paper Cost 5. Class of Contractor 6. Period of Completion 7. Critical Dates procurement Portal	: As mentioned in Table "A" which includes Construction of Protection wall for RWS&S Colony of RWS&S Division, Nabarangpur. : (One) No. (Detailed in Tender Call Notice available in the website) : As mentioned in Table "A" : As mentioned in Table "A" : As mentioned in Table "A" : As mentioned in Table "A" : *Further details can be seen in the bidding documents, which is available in the - https://www.tendersodisha.gov.in : * Publication of this tender can be seen in the web portal : https://odisha.gov.in/state-tenders-advertisement : *Subsequent corrigendum if required shall be appeared in the web site. : *Authority reserves the right to reject any or all tenders without assigning any reason thereof.
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Procurement Officer	Bid Identification No.	Availability of Tender Online for Bidding	Last Date of Seeking tender Clarification	Last date of receipt/ confirmation letter & other	Date of opening of Bid
		From To			
Executive Engineer, RWSS Division, Nabarangpur	RWSS_NGP_ONLINE_01 of 2025-26	10.12.2025 at 05.00PM To 12.12.2025 at 05.00PM	17.12.2025 up to 5.30 PM	18.12.2025 up to 05.00PM.	19.12.2025 at 11.00 A.M.

OIPR-25028/11/0014/2526

 Superintending Engineer,
 RWS&S Division, Nabarangpur