PAGE 6 **NATION** Mamata slams SIR, urges people to protest

PAGE 7 **LAW & JUSTICE** EC can't treat voters with doubt, SC told

**PAGE 10: MONEY** Personal is the new credit norm



**PAGE 12 GLOBAL** Former Pakistan spy chief sentenced to 14 years by military court



**PAGE 15 SPORT** India names Sindhu, Lakshya for Asia Team Championships

WARNING AGAINST **FAKE JOBS ISSUED** The Indian government has alerted

Parliament about fraudulent nationals, mainly through social media, to South-East Asian countries such as Cambodia Myanmar, and Lao PDR, often to carry out cybercrime or other illegal activities. Minister of State for External Affairs Kirti Vardhan Singh stated that over 6,700 Indians have been rescued from these nations so far, with 2,265 from Cambodia, 2,290 from Lao PDR, and 2.165 from Myanmar. The exact number of Indians still trapped is unknown, as many travel voluntarily via unscrupulous recruitment agents or illegal channels. The government has engaged host country authorities and Indian Missions to facilitate rescue and repatriation. Multiple channels, including walk-ins, WhatsApp numbers, grievance portals like MADAD and eMigrate, and social media, are available for Indians seeking help. Authorities regularly issue advisories warning job seekers to verify recruitment agents and offers. The Ministry of Home Affairs' Indian Cybercrime

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

**ASHOKE RAJ** ■ New Delh

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

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

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



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

not show up at the

Consulate," an email sent

cants read. Interviews originally sched-

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

Immigration attorney Rahul Reddy warned that

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

# Luthras detained in Thailand after Delhi court rejects bail

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA New Delhi

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

#### The ByStander

Coordination Centre (I4C)

activities and coordinates

preventive and corrective

monitors related cybercrime



#### **TOXIC EGGS FLAGGED** IN J&K

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

#### ARUNACHAL ACCIDENT **CLAIMS 18 LIVES**

At least 18 labourers from Assam's

Legal Metrology to submit a report

in two days.

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

#### **ECI** extends **SIR timeline**

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE

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

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

In a statement, the ECI

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

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

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

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

# 'Vacate govt land or face eviction, cost recovery'

■Pujari warns encroachers

Commitment for 4 decimals of homestead land to all landless families reiterated

**RAJEEV RATHAN** from them." he warned Bhubaneswar

Sending a loud and unmistakable message to land mafias, Odisha has launched its toughest crackdown yet on illegal land grabbing. Revenue and Disaster Management Minister Suresh Pujari on Thursday issued an ultimatum to encroachers across the State to vacate government land immediately or face forcible eviction and pay the full cost of the operation.

Chairing a departmental review meeting, Pujari reiterated the BJP government's aggressive stance against land encroachment since coming to power. "Many influential people have encroached upon government land. There is still time to surrender the land voluntarily. If they fail to do so, not only will they be evicted but the complete expenses incurred for demolition and clearance will be recovered

The Revenue Department has directed all Tehsildars to prepare a comprehensive digital database of encroached government land. The database will include details of illegally-occupied industrial plots, revenue land, Gochar (grazing) land, forest-adjacent tracts and other public properties.

Pujari also reaffirmed the government's commitment to allot four decimals of homestead land to all landless families in Odisha.

The anti-encroachment campaign has gained momentum after Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi informed the Assembly that over 500 acres of government land have been illegally occupied in key localities of Bhubaneswar. These include Bapuji Nagar, Ashok Nagar, Kharvel Nagar, Satya Nagar, Sahid Nagar, Ganga Nagar, Surya Nagar, Bomikhal, Jharapada, Jayadev Vihar, Chandrasekharpur

# Odisha MLA salary hike draws criticism amid public hardship

parked criticism with CPI(M) MLA Laxman Munda from Bonai openly opposing the hike. While MLAs' monthly pay soared from Rs 1.11 lakh to Rs 3.45 lakh, workers and farmers continue to struggle for fair wages and timely sup-

On December 9, the State Assembly passed four bills unanimously increasing salaries for MLAs, Chief Minister,

**RAJEEV RATHAN** ■ Bhubaneswar ministers and the Speaker, ef- ASHA Workers, Anganwadi fective from June 2024. The staffs, teachers and farmers its, travel, medical expenses and communication. Odisha now leads the country in legislators' remuneration, surpassing Telangana and Maharashtra, where MLAs earn around Rs 2.5 lakh.

Critics argue that the hike

shows a disconnect from ground realities. CPI(M) State general secretary Suresh Chandra Panigrahi noted that thousands of

prices and pending dues. He demanded that lawmakers' pay increases be linked to State employee dearness allowances, prioritising citizens over self-interest.

Opposition voices also point out that while the salary hike addresses rising living costs, it raises serious questions about fiscal prudence and accountability. Laxman Munda's dissent un-

concern that legislators are Odisha's recent decision to new pay structure includes al- are still protesting for mini- prioritising personal gain triple legislators' salaries has lowances for constituency vis- mum wages, remunerative over social welfare even as Odisha grapples with delayed procurement, wage disputes and economic challenges for workers and farm-

> The debate highlights the tension between political self-interest and citizen welfare, drawing attention to how public money is allocated in a State still struggling with fundamental economic inequalities.

#### **Cold wave intensifies**

# State experiences first frost of the season

Udisha witnessed its first frost of the season on Thursday as temperatures in Kandhamal district plummeted to 5°C and coated shrubs, paddy fields and open areas in Phulbani with a thin layer of ice.

The frosty morning turned large stretches of farmland into shimmering white patches, marking one of the harshest cold spells of the winter so far.

Other interior districts, including Koraput, also saw minimum temperatures around 5°C. Bhubaneswar recorded a low of 13°C, a 9.6°C drop over the past ten

In Koraput's Rajuguda vil-

lage, frost formed on paddy fields as temperatures fell to 5°C. The cold wave has disrupted normal activities in rural and hilly areas with residents avoiding outdoor work during the early morning and evening hours.

The IMD has issued warnings that the cold wave is expected to persist across northern, western and inte-

rior districts of Odisha until Friday. Dense fog and northwesterly winds will continue to affect the State over the next 48 hours, prolonging the

Meanwhile, the winter chill has also drawn tourists to Odisha's hill and forest regions seeking to experience the seasonal frost and scenic

severe cold conditions.

# years, he can now sta

Kendrapada man's incredible comeback at AIIMS

RAJEEV RATHAN Bhubaneswar

For nearly two decades, 37year-old Biswa Bhushan Rout lived with his chin almost touching his thighs. His spine and hips had fused due to Ankylosing Spondylitis, bending his body forward at a near-150-degree angle. Walk-

ing, sitting, even sleeping became battles he fought daily.

Yet today, Biswa stands straight, walks confidently and looks the world in the eye after three life-changing surgeries at the AIIMS Bhubaneswar.

A native of Kendrapada, Biswa was just 17 when the stiffness began. Over the years, his body slowly collapsed forward forcing him to depend on family for every movement. He could barely

see ahead. Most hospitals refused to treat him because of the high risk of paralysis. Private hospitals quoted up to Rs 50 lakh, far beyond his means. At the AIIMS, under the

guidance of HoD Dr Bishnu Prasad Patro, orthopaedic surgeon Dr Deepak Neradi, assisted by Dr Gurudip Das, took up the complex case. Three major procedures, bilateral hip replacement and spinal deformity correction were planned using advanced



Neuromonitoring, Bone Scalpel and a Surgical Microscope. AIIMS Bhubaneswar Ex-

Director Dr ecutive Ashutosh Biswas ensured that all specialised equipment was available while the anaesthesia team led by Dr Satyajeet Mishra enabled a smooth, complication-free procedure.

The moment Biswa sat up after surgery was emotional for the entire team. Within independently."For the first time in 20 years, I saw my face straight in the mirror," he told doctors, tears streaming down his cheeks What would have cost Rs

25-50 lakh in private care was done free under the Ayushman Bharat scheme, giving Biswa a new life without financial ruin. Today, Biswa can sit, walk, squat and face forward, abilities he thought were lost forever.

**Symposium at IIIT BBS** 

# Guv stresses role of technology in human progress

Governor Dr Hari Babu Kambhampati, addressing the inauguration of the IEEE India Geosciences and Remote Symposium (INGAARS 2025) at IIIT Bhubaneswar, highlighted the indispensable role of technology in enhancing human life.

He emphasised that technology should always serve humanity by becoming truly meaningful only when it improves lives. Practical applications such as disaster manage-



ment in flood-prone villages, safeguarding farmers' crops, ensuring safe return of fishermen and providing clean air in cities exemplify how technology can ease daily life.

Describing science and

compassion as inseparable, the Governor stressed the need for continuous innovation with public welfare at its core. He welcomed experts from across India and abroad,

noting that such interactions

ute to building a progressive

Focusing on symposium's theme, "Better World, Bright Future", Dr Kambhampati said geoscience and remote sensing, though highly technical, have direct impacts on disaster prediction, agricultural support, forest conservation and urban planning. He lauded Odisha's achievements in disaster management, noting that satellite data, radar imaging and geospatial analysis have ening cyclones like Fani and Yaas, saving thousands of

The Governor also highlighted the growing role of artificial intelligence, especially AI-driven satellite image analysis, in climate monitoring, urban planning, water conservation and precision agriculture. He underlined the importance of sharing knowledge with grassroots communities, stressing that technology becomes truly impactful when it is accessible and inclusive.

# School health, wellness prog at DAV, K Nnagar

A two-day Capacity Build ing Programme on School Health and Wellness concluded at DAV Public School, Kalinga Nagar. As a regular initiative of the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) to enrich the school and teachers on various aspects of holistic education, the entire programme was conducted and monitored by the resource persons appointed by CBSE, Dr Jhinukdutta Ray and Jyoti Prakash Tripathy.

The event comprising eight sessions focused on various aspects of school health and wellness, sanitation, adolescence behavior, drug abuse, emotional well-being, mental prevention, parental mindset, NEP-2020's student-centric fitness, and the holistic development of learners. Over 60 approach, and national initiaparticipants attended and entives like Swachh Bharat gaged in interactive sessions Abhiyan and the National Deworming Drive. that included case studies,

> The facilitators emphasised the significant role of teachers in shaping responsible, aware, and emotionally resilient future citizens.

# Majhi attends State's 13th Nijukti Mela

Launches Adibandh Irrigation Scheme 3.0

**RAJEEV RATHAN** Bhubaneswar

Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi on Thursday addressed newly-appointed officials at the 13th Nijukti Mela (mass appointment drive) here and urged them to prioritise public service and remain free from corruption.

A total of 591 officials, including Assistant Executive Engineers (AEEs), Planning Assistants, and Accounts Officers, were appointed in Water Resources, Public Works and Urban Development Departments. Over the past 18 months, 37,916 government positions have been filled with another 30,000 posts expected to be filled in the next six months. The government aims to fill all 1.5 lakh vacant posts over the next five years and 65,000 posts within two

Majhi also launched the Chief Minister Adibandh Irrigation Scheme 3.0 with a budget of Rs 2,738 crore to construct 3,000 new check dams and restore 2,000 old ones over five years providing irrigation to around 48,000 hectares of farmland.

Other projects inaugurated include two major lift irrigation schemes in Mayurbhanj and Gajapati districts covering 4,000 hectares and a 14-km canal in Baleswar district benefiting nearly 10,000 hectares. Across 20 districts, 28,302 lift irrigation projects have been launched covering 1.55 lakh hectares and benefiting approximately 63,000 farmers.

In addition, irrigation projects worth Rs 2,488 crore were inaugurated, foundation stones for projects worth Rs 2,063 crore laid, and projects worth Rs 425 crore com-

# **Near Sainik School**

# BMC launches afforestation drive at TTS

**RAJEEV RATHAN** Bhubaneswar

The Bhubaneswar Municipal Corporation (BMC) on Thursday launched an afforestation drive at the Temporary Transit Shelter (TTS) near Sainik School and planted over 1,000 saplings across the campus. Housing & Urban Development Minister Dr Krushna Chandra Mohapatra inaugurated the newly-established Clean Canteen and formally launched the plantation initiative.

Minister Mohapatra said it is a matter of pride that Bhubaneswar now ranks fourth in the country in the Clean Air Survey reflecting the success of its sustained green efforts. Large-scale plantations under the National Clean Air Programme (NCAP) have significantly helped improve air quality.

The BMC is developing dense urban forests at several locations using scientific methods. At the TTS site, Pollution Control Board-approved species, mainly shadegiving, flower-bearing and oxygen-enriching plants have been chosen to create a sustainable green belt. Mediumsized saplings were planted to ensure faster canopy formation. No fruit-bearing trees were included, keeping the fo-



cus solely on enhancing air quality.

Minister Mohapatra noted that the TTS campus already had a considerable number of trees, and the addition of new saplings would BMC Mayor Sulochana Das highlighted

that earlier Miyawaki forests grown by BMC have now developed into dense green pockets due to consistent maintenance. "Plantation is only the first step; long-term care ensures real success," she said.

**H&UD** Principal Secretary Usha Padhee praised BMC's efforts to strengthen urban ecology, stressing that green infrastructure is as essential as physical infrastructure in a rapidly growing city.

Commissioner Chanchal Rana underlined the role of afforestation in safeguarding the city from natural disasters and maintaining ecological balance.

# 'Expedite recovery of illegal mining dues'

Supreme Court directs Orissa HC **RAJEEV RATHAN** Bhubaneswar

SWOT analysis, group discus-

sions, and activities based on

the IAM-I HAVE-I CAN

frameworks. The resource per-

sons also addressed key top-

The Supreme Court on Wednesday directed the Chief Justice of the Orissa High Court to constitute a dedicated bench to expedite disposal of cases related to recovery of illegal mining dues. The apex court has asked the High Court to take all necessary steps to resolve these cases by March 31, 2026.

The matter came up before a bench of Justices Dipankar Datta and Augustine George Masih, which noted that multiple petitions challenging recovery proceedings had been filed and numerous interim stays had delayed the process. "Since public revenue to a substantial extent is involved, we grant liberty to the state of Odisha to move an application before the Chief Justice of

the Orissa High Court by December 19, 2025, requesting assignment of all such petitions to a dedicated bench for final disposal within March 31, 2026," the bench stated.

The Supreme Court also instructed the Odisha Government to file a status report by April 2026, enabling either early disposal of main matters or modification of interim orders. The move comes in line with the 2017 apex court verdict, which had mandated recovery of compensation from lessees engaged unauthorised mining activi-

According to the latest status report submitted by the Odisha Government on October 29, over Rs 2,700 crore remains to be recovered. Officials said the directive from the Supreme Court is expected to fast-track the process and ensure that pending revenue is recovered efficiently.

# Renewable energy innovation IIT BBS signs agreement with GRIDCO, NTU

BJD forms team to probe Malkangiri violence Attacks govt over lawand-order failure

**RAJEEV RATHAN** Bhubaneswar

Stepping up its attack on the State Government over the escalating violence in Malkangiri, the Biju Janata Dal (BJD) on Thursday formed a seven-member factfinding team to assess the situation on the ground.

The move comes after reports of large-scale arson and unrest triggered by the discovery of a woman's headless body. More than 50 houses were set ablaze and over 160 damaged, forcing hundreds of residents to flee to nearby villages for safety.

The BJD's fact-finding team includes Manas Madkami, Manohar Randhari, former Ministers Ramesh Majhi and Rabi Nanda, former MP Pradeep Majhi, Ishwar Panigrahi and Laxmipriya Nayak, MLA candidate from Chitrakonda. The team has been tasked with visiting the affected areas, interacting with displaced families and submitting a detailed report to the party president.

The BJD strongly criticised the administration for its alleged failure to prevent the violence and protect vulnerable communities. The party said the scale of destruction reflects a complete collapse of the local law-and-order machinery. The BJD demanded urgent administrative intervention to restore peace in the area, ensure the safety of affected families and take swift action against those responsible for the violence.

The Indian Institute of Technology

Bhubaneswar has recently signed a research collaborative agreement with GRIDCO Ltd and Nanyang Technological University (NTU), Singapore, to advance four major deployment projects across key verticals of renewable energy, battery energy storage, microgrids, waste-toenergy and agri-photovolta-

This collaboration is poised to enable prototype development, field deployment and commercial-scale implementation marking a significant step towards strengthening India's renewable energy ecosystem, particularly in the



eastern region.

The IIT Bhubaneswar is steadily positioning itself as a national renewable energy hub by developing state-ofthe-art research and development infrastructure and fos-

tering strategic international partnerships

Through this collaboration, the institute aims to spearhead transformative initiatives that will shape the country's future energy landscape while supporting the Government of Odisha's energy-transition goals.

Furthering this vision, an MoU was also signed between IIT Bhubaneswar, GRIDCO, Avaada and ReNew Pvt Ltd to establish a Centre of Excellence in green hydrogen. The centre would focus on translational research, entrepreneurship commercialisable technology development in green hydrogen and allied domains.

This initiative would catalyse innovation, create a robust research and industry ecosystem and accelerate Odisha's emergence as a leading hub for energy transition aligned with the Prime Minister's Net-Zero mandate.

#### Unclaimed parcel sparks panic on Rajdhani Exp the parcel's contents height-

**RAJEEV RATHAN** Bhubaneswar

Passengers aboard the Delhi-Bhubaneswar Rajdhani Express were thrown into panic on Wednesday after an unclaimed parcel was found in one of the coaches while the train was passing through Jharkhand. The discovery prompted an immediate response from the Railway Protection Force (RPF).

According to preli reports, travellers in the B1 coach noticed the suspicious package and alerted onboard RPF personnel. With no one claiming ownership, the officers cordoned off the area and carried out an initial assessment. The uncertainty over ened tension among passen-

The train was instructed to halt at the next major station to ensure safe handling of the item. Upon arrival, RPF officials carefully offloaded the parcel and secured it for a detailed examination before the Rajdhani was cleared to continue its journey to Bhubaneswar.

The sudden buildup and RPF presence inside the coach caused anxiety among passengers, several of whom expressed concern over the unusual situation. Authorities have yet to confirm whether the parcel contains any hazardous material.

# Dec 10 was Human Rights Day

# Human rights are fundamental to everyday life

**→** he International Human Rights Day on December 10 is being observed since Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) in 1948 by the United Nations General Assembly. Today, there are 193 countries as members of the UN who are committed to the principles of UDHR. The slogan of the day for 2025 is 'Human Rights, Our Every day Essentials.

Human rights are fundamental to every day life, not just an abstract legal concept. The UDHR is a most-trusted international document of 30 fundamental indivisible and inalienable human rights which has been translated into more than 500 languages for the member countries to disseminate widely among people for promoting awareness on human rights and for its realization by all human beings irrespective of their various identities based on race, colour, religion, caste, sex, language, political opinion, national or social



**MANAS JENA** 

origin, property, birth or other sta-

The first article of the document says that we are all born free and equal in dignity and rights. It includes a range of rights, the right to life without slavery, discrimination and torture. It says about equality before law and protection

of human rights by law. The document affirms the right to freedom, democracy, freedom of thought and expression, privacy, mobility, nationality, right to marriage and family. The rights to food and shelter, education, social security, and responsibility are interrelated for a dignified life. The end part of the document says that no one can take away your human rights.

Human rights should not be a legal document rather they need to be translated into reality. Rights are also fundamental needs that are essential in our daily life. The International Bill of Human Rights is a human rights law which includes UDHR and International Covenants on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and the International Covenants on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) produced by the UN Human Rights Commission as international law since 1976. The countries which have ratified ICCPR have agreed to allow the

human rights committee to investigate allegations by individuals and organizations of their country that have violated human rights but before that the complainants have to exhaust all legal remedies available in their own country.

The understanding and connotations of human rights have been getting widened in the changing nium Development Goals (MDG) to achieve some of the basic human rights such as food, shelter, health and education for all. In spite of progress in many fronts, today millions of people, mostly children, women, elders, PWDs, ethnic minorities, indigenous people, sexual minorities, IGBTs, race and caste discriminated communities and

# CANVAS

global context by including civil rights, peace, anti-war, terrorism, migration, refugees, racism, violence, discrimination, inequality, environment, climate change and pandemic issues. The issues of poverty and increasing inequality, discrimination and exclusion of communities and democratic insufficiency have become a global human rights concern and emerged as challenges for human rights.

castes and working class at large continue to suffer in realization of their human rights to live a life with dignity. The historical battles for human rights witnessed many stalwarts those who continue to inspire the human rights movement on many fronts and their remarkable struggles have changed the human rights discourses. The ideas and work of Eleanor Roosevelt (1884-1962) of USA who is credited

for the UDHR document, Dr

Ambedkar, Martin Luther King Jr (1929-1968), Nelson Mandela (1918-2013) and many others are a continual source of inspiration for struggle against race and caste based discrimination.

There are a series of human rights laws and dedicated institutions such as NHRC set up in the country for the protection and promotion of human rights and specially to defend the poor and weak from injustice and exploitation. But still these laws have not reached to many of the poorest and vulnerable groups and individuals suffering with miseries and injustice which need a collective commitment of all human beings.

The Constitution of India and international covenants and UDHR paved the way for the foundation for the Human Rights Act 1993 under which human rights commissions are in place to address the issues of human rights violation of people in general and

the women, children, SCs, STs,OBCs, PWDs and minorities in particular.

The Odisha Human Rights Commission(OHRC) came into operation in the year 2003. There have been reports of increasing rate of human rights violation cases. More worrying is the fact that the rate of disposal of cases is very less in comparison to cases getting registered. It is appreciated that in many cases of public interest, the OHRC has intervened on its own and passed few exemplary judgments. There should be human rights courts in each district while adequate public prosecutors from among different social groups of the State must be recruited to improve the justice delivery system with social inclusion. The State must allocate adequate funds for human rights institutions to promote rights education and for realization of rights leaving no one behind.

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The UN has set up the Millen-

#### For Odisha

# Centre clears Rs 44,771-cr road development package

State set for major connectivity boost Greenfield Corridors, 8-Lane Highways to Power Odisha's Growth Push

RAJEEV RATHAN Bhubaneswar

Odisha is set for a major infrastructure upgrade with the Centre approving road projects worth Rs 44,771 crore, marking one of the largest highway development packages for the State in recent years. The announcement came after Odisha Works Minister Prithvirai Harichandan discussed with Union Road

Transport and Highways Minister Nitin Gadkari in New Delhi on Wednesday, where several key proposals were cleared in principle.

According to official sources, the Centre has approved an 8-lane expansion of the Bhubaneswar-Puri stretch on National Highway-16, a move expected to ease traffic to the State's biggest tourist and pilgrimage destinations. A new greenfield expressway connecting Bhubaneswar to Paradip has also been cleared, aimed at improving port connectivity and cutting travel time between the capital and the State's premier maritime hub. The State Government is preparing a revised DPR for

Tangi-Puintala-Ichchapuram corridor, which links Odisha with Andhra Pradesh, will be widened to six lanes. An ambitious 8-lane economic and industrial corridor from Rourkela through

Barbil and Duburi to Paradip has also been approved, a project that is expected to significantly boost the movement of minerals and industrial cargo. The Centre has further sanctioned expansion of the Pallahara-Pitiri stretch of NH-149 into a four-lane road, strengthening the highway network in the northern

Alongside National Highways, the Centre has cleared major upgrades to State roads at an estimated cost of

Rs 13.141 crore. These include widening of the Balangir-Kesinga-Bhawanipatna road into a four-lane corridor and construction of a new Balangir-Nayagarh road to improve intra-State connectivity. A

four-lane corridor from

Kalasandapur in Aska has been approved to support southern Odisha's growing traffic load. The Mohana-Paralakhemundi stretch of NH-326A will also be widened to enhance connectivity in the tribal belt.

In addition, the Centre has provided Rs 1,500 crore under the Central Road and Infrastructure Fund (CRIF) for other critical regional links.

# NIA charge-sheet 11 Maoists for explosives loot RAJEEV RATHAN Bhubaneswar Special Operation Group

The National Investigation Agency (NIA) on Thursday has charge-sheeted 11 persons in connection with the massive theft of nearly 4,000 kg of explosives by CPI (Maoist) cadres during transportation to a stone quarry in Rourkela. The accused have been

booked under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, Arms Act, Explosive Substances Act and BNSS provisions. The NIA found that the group orchestrated the loot of around 200 explosive packets, each weighing 20 kg, intended for Maoist strongholds in the Saranda forest in Jharkhand.

The explosives were intercepted after a joint combing operation on Gandhamardhan Hill range along the Balangir-Bargarh district boundary. Odisha's

Special Operation Group (SOG), CRPF, Jharkhand Jaguars and the District Voluntary Force recovered the explosives along with Maoist uniforms and other materials.

The agency noted that the loot was part of a larger Maoist plan to attack government machinery, including police and security forces, posing a significant threat to both national and regional security.

The charge-sheeted accused include Jarja Munda alias Kulu Munda, Anmol alias Sushant alias Lalchand Hembram, Ramesh alias Pritam Manjhi alias Anal Da, Pintu Lohra alias Tigar, Laljit alias Lalu, Shiva Bodra alias Shibu, Amit Munda alias Sukhlal Munda, Ravi alias Biren Singh, Rajesh alias Mansid, Sohan alias Ranga Punem and Aptan alias Chandra Mohan Hansda.

Though the image was pre-

served with care, the inscrip-

tion engraved on its back re-

mained unnoticed, like a silent

monk guarding a sacred truth,

until its rediscovery now. His-

torians note that ancient

Jajpur, once a flourishing

nucleus of Buddhism, contin-

ues to surprise with its buried

testaments to enlightened tra-

#### <u>INBRIEF</u>

#### KIIT wins CII award for best sports infra

Bhubaneswar: KIIT-DU was conferred with the Best Sports Stadium/Arena of the Year Award at the 3rd CII Sports Business Awards 2025 here on Wednesday. The award recognises KIIT's outstanding contribution to the development of world-class



sports infrastructure and its continued commitment to promoting sports excellence in India. The university was adjudged "Best University for Promotion of Sports" at the Sportstar Aces Awards in 2022 and 2025. It was also honoured with the "Best Sports Facility" award at the CII Sports Business Awards 2023 and received the FICCI India Sports Award in 2022.

#### Beura, Mishra to receive Best Proof-Reader Award

Cuttack: The Adhyapika Niharika Das Smruti Nyasa has announced that this year's Best Proof-Reader Award in Odia will be jointly conferred on Pravat Ranjan Beura of Bhubaneswar and Biranchi Narayan Mishra of Rourkela. Nyasa convener Deepak Kumar Mahanta said the award would be presented at local Gandhi Bhawan on December 14. Former Principal of Lakshminarayan Sahu Mahavidyalaya, Dr Kamal Prasad Mohanty will grace the occasion as chief guest while litterateur Baishnab Charan Mohanty will be chief speaker. The Nyasa has been honouring the best proof-reader in Odia with a cash prize every year since 2024.

#### Grievances redressal meet held for Astaranga villagers

Astaranga: On Monday, the Puri district administration organised a grievances redressal meet for people in 15 panchayats under Astaranga block. Additional District Collector Sarat Chandra Behera led the hearing. Complaints were received regarding roads, allowances, ration cards, Indira Awas, drinking water, especially the developmental works of various panchayats. CDMO Akshay Kumar Satpathy, Tehsildar Priyanka Priyadarshini Pati, BDO Sasmita Behera, Block Chairperson Aarti Naik and Nimapada SDPO Janardhan Padhi were present. Astaranga Press Club and Odisha Karmajeevi Sambadik Sangh president Sharat Kumar Parida, secretary Brindavan Viswal and social media coordinator Alekh Biswal among others submitted a demand letter to solve the problem in the health sector in the

#### 2 college students die in road mishap in Rayagada

Rayagada: Two college students were killed in a road mishap in Rayagada district on Thursday morning. The deceased were identified as Debendra Sabar and Bishnu Sabar from Gudari. Both were Plus Two first-year students from Badisola under Kolnara block. The mishap occurred when they were travelling to college by a motorcycle and were hit by a private bus at Ramanaguda.

Malkangiri internet ban

extended amid tensions

# <u>In</u> Ganjam Teacher thrashed for 'misbehaving' with girls

 ${\cal A}$ schoolteacher in the Aska area of Ganjam district was assaulted on Thursday by villagers after he was allegedly caught misbehaving with girl students.

The teacher, identified as Surya Narayan Nahak of Balichhai Upper Primary (UP) School, allegedly behaved indecently with girl stuHe also allegedly instructed another girl to record the scene on her mobile phone.

On learning about the incident, angry parents and villagers stormed the school premises and beat the accused teacher severely. Police later rescued the teacher from the school campus and took him into custody. A formal complaint has been lodged with police. The headmaster of the school said the matter would be placed before the higher authorities for departmental

### Engraved on reverse of

sculpture **AKSHAY ROUT** Jajpur

▲n a revelation that glows like a long-lost lamp of wisdom, Jajpur district has added a new chapter to its illustrious spiritual heritage. A probable 9thcentury Buddhist inscription, engraved on the reverse of a Buddha sculpture preserved at Madhupur College, Kalana village in Rasulpur block, has come to light, quietly bridging the present with the profound meditative past of Odisha.

The priceless discovery was first sighted by Shibajyoti Parida, a young heritage enthusiast whose keen eye caught the faint tracings of ancient script. His alertness led to the involvement of independent epigraphist Bishnu Adhikari Mohan of Paralakhemundi, who meticulously deciphered the text. What emerged was a Buddhist



9th-century Buddhist inscription found in Jajpur

'dharani,' echoing the timeless doctrine of Causation and Cessation, a spiritual cornerstone in Buddhist philosophy.

The inscription reads: "Ye dharma hetu prabhava hetu ttesham tathagato, Hyavadatteshancha nirodha evamvadi, Maha shramanha." This poetic doctrinal verse, engraved over 1,000 years ago, once resonated across the monasteries and shrines of coastal Odisha, sanctifying spaces with its profound spiritual message. Epigraphist Adhikari suggests the inscription hails from Bhoumakara era, its paleography reflecting the refined strokes of the Eastern Kutila script, commonly found in Buddhist centres between 8th and 10th centuries.

His assessment places the sculpture firmly within a vibrant cultural landscape where Bhoumakara rulers nurtured Buddhist art, thought and ritual practice. According to Santosh, Lecturer in Odia at Madhupur College, the sculpture was unearthed years ago during soil

The latest epigraph not only enriches the narrative of Odisha's Buddhist past but also promises to illuminate new academic pathways. Heritage scholars have called for

through stone.

immediate conservation and detailed archaeological documentation, urging authorities to safeguard the precious artifact for posterity. As the 'dharani' resurfaces from the depths of time, it reaffirms Jajpur's place as a luminous of Buddhist cradle civilisation, where the whispers of the past still breathe

#### Human Rights Day by NMF Call for second freedom struggle to protect rights Deputy Chief Minister holds

peace talks RAJEEV RATHAN Bhubaneswar

The Malkangiri district adtended the ongoing internet shutdown by 12 hours citing concerns over the spread of violence via social media. Officials said the extension was necessary to maintain public

This is the fourth consecutive extension since the internet was first suspended on December 8.

The shutdown follows violent clashes between two villages on December 4 after the discovery of a headless body of a woman, Lake Padiami. Hundreds of families were displaced, homes were damaged, and local property destroyed. Deputy Chief Minister KV connection with the incident. Bengali community representatives also urged that no further attacks occur. In a press briefing, the Deputy Chief Minister said

Singh Deo, along with Minis-

ter Gokulananda Mallik, vis-

ited Malkangiri on Thursday.

They first held discussions

with district officials and later met tribal leaders to restore

peace. Tribal organisations

submitted an eight-point

charter of demands, including

Rs 30 lakh compensation for

the deceased's family, restitu-

tion of encroached lands and

assurance that no tribal resi-

dents would be arrested in

both communities have expressed willingness to maintain peace. He instructed the district administration to strengthen security measures and closely monitor the situation to prevent further escalation.

#### dents not only at school but also during tuition classes. According to sources, the teacher had called a girl stu-



Emphasises adequate steps address water crisis in her constituency

PNS Baleswar

In the epics, wars were fought over women and land. And days are not far off, we may witness wars over water," remarked Basta BJD MLA Subasini Jena speaking in the Assembly.

She further cautioned that if the government did not act immediately, the State might face a situation where conflicts over access to water would escalate. She reminded the Assembly that in ancient times, the Ramayana and the Mahabharata wars were linked to women and land. Today, the alarming scarcity of water demands urgent atten-

Citing various reports, Jena said nearly 33,000 villages in Odisha were facing acute water shortages, and more than 75 percent of tube wells recorded a sharp decline in groundwater levels. More so many areas have pipelines but no water supply.

She highlighted that the mega drinking water project in Baliapal block under the Basta constituency, scheduled for completion in 2023, is still pending. Besides, she also pointed out the deteriorating quality of drinking water quoting that in Patripala panchayat of Remuna block, dangerous fluoride levels have led to widespread dental and skeletal fluorosis, affecting even the younger generation.

The drinking water situation is turning critical across India, including Odisha. She

erally use an ATM to withdraw money, several States now depend on ATMs for drinking water. In Tamil Nadu, water is being transported by trains. If Odisha fails to take firm steps forthwith, a similar situation might be encountered, Jena

to explain what measures are being taken to address these

Raj system, MLA Jena said the institution was linked to thousands of years of Indian history, with references to gram sabhas in the Rig Veda around 1200 B.C. After Independence, Mahatma Gandhi's vision of Gram Swaraj revived the Panchayati Raj system. On October 2, 1959, then Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru formally introduced the modern Panchayati Raj system in India. She recalled the landmark decision of former Chief Minister Biju Patnaik, who implemented 33 percent reservation for women in the threetier Panchayati Raj system. Later, former Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik enhanced the reservation to 50 percent. She noted that to strengthen Panchayati Raj institutions, the government has emphasized Own Source Revenue (OSR) to make panchayats self-reliant. But Odisha's OSR remains only Rs 11 per capita, compared to Kerala's Rs 296 and Andhra Pradesh's Rs 209. This reflects the fragile eco-

panchayats, she said. Citing these issues, Jena urged the government to address her concerns and ensure adequate provisions in the

nomic condition of Odisha's

She urged the government

Speaking on the Panchayati

Supplementary Budget.

noted that while people gen-

Human Rights Day on December 10. The event was organised by the State Chapter of National Media Foundation (NMF), New Delhi. The panel noted that even 32 years after the Protection

of Human Rights Act, 1993 was passed the citizens continue to face challenges in accessing basic rights such as education, healthcare, justice and peaceful assembly.

ligion and duty of every human

being," emphasised speakers

at a seminar held to mark the

Addressing the gathering, senior columnist Dr Badri Mishra, who chaired the event, said that India today requires

**UHC Day 2025** 



another freedom struggle not for political independence but for the restoration and protection of human rights.

Inaugurating the programme, educationist Dr Badrinath Pattnaik said that although the Constitution guarantees food, shelter, education and health, widespread mistrust among the government, administration and public has led to systemic failure in ensuring these rights.

Secretary, Odisha Sahitya Akademi and Odisha Sangeet Akademi Chandrasekhar Hota Academy as chief guest and senior journalist Akshaya Kumar Sahu as keynote speaker highlighted the widening gap in equality and the growing absence of compassion in gover-

Other distinguished speakers included Director, Central Sanskrit University (Sadashiv

Mahapatra, Deputy Director, tions Santosh Kumar Sethi, senior media personality Shyamaprasad Mishra and head of Mission Odisha and John Ambulance Madhusudan Mishra.

Prominent journalists including Dr Sarat Chandra Behera and Radheshyam Padhi stressed the need to inculcate humanitarian values in every citizen.

On this occasion, Dr Hota was felicitated along with several notable personalities from media, education, labour welfare and social service sectors. The event was coordinated by senior advocate Rashmi Ranjan Dash.

sources for health. Digital health is essential to governance and service continuity, not a luxury. Decentralized, community

led governance strengthens system resilience. The Ayushman Bharat

Digital Mission (ABDM) is building one of the world's largest health data ecosystems. Digital health IDs, interoperable records, teleconsultations, tele ICUs, and e pharmacies are improving continuity of care and reduc-

ing delays. For a nation where 65% of people are under 35, digital platforms are expanding access to mental health support, preventive counseling, and chronic disease management—especially across remote and underserved ar-

Infrastructure alone will not deliver health for all. Targeted strategies and decentralized governance are needed to close long standing gaps like persistent shortages of specialists and diagnostic capacity in tribal and hilly regions; overcrowding, pollution, and unregulated private centres; vulnerabilities in nutrition, sexual and reproductive health, and mental well being; underdeveloped palliative services, and social support for the elderly.

India's demographic dividend depends on a health literate, prevention focused generation. The priorities include mental health awareness and timely support, nutrition and

physical fitness, preventive care and early screening, digital health adoption and responsible use, youth friendly information and advocacy on 'Decentralized Health Systems Governance'. Investing in youth health today secures economic growth and societal resilience tomorrow. India's public health spend-

just over 1% of GDP-below global benchmarks. To ensure equitable, high quality services, India must move toward 3.5-5% of GDP. (Dr Kar is Professor at School of Governance &

ing has increased but remains

Policy Affairs, XIM University (New Campus), Bhubaneswar; Email: manoj@xim.edu.in (M) 9769910766)

### Health for all: Let it be faster, fairer, future ready paying out of pocket—often easing hospital burden.

**MANOJ KAR** 

bserved on December 12, the Universal Health Coverage (UHC) Day is a global rallying point for the hundreds of millions still waiting for affordable, quality healthcare and a call to leaders to invest smarter and fairer in health systems. This year's theme, -"Unaffordable Health Costs? We're Sick of It!" The Day commemorates

the 2012 United Nations resolution that recognized health as a human right and a cornerstone of resilient, prosperous societies. Yet globally, more than half of people still lack access to essential health services, and one in four face financial hardships when

at the cost of food, education, or housing. For India, the stakes are nation building: productivity, social justice, and human dignity all hinge on getting "health for all" Since 2018, Ayushman

Bharat has reshaped India's health architecture around primary care and financial protection, advancing a continuum of care model that links prevention, treatment, and long term care. Over 1.4 lakh HWCs now

deliver expanded primary care-from maternal and child health and immunization to mental health, NCD screening, physiotherapy, and basic diagnostics—bringing services closer to people and The "PradhanMantri Jan

Arogya Yojana" provides Rs 5 lakh annual cover to nearly 56 crore people, opening access to high cost surgeries and life saving treatments that once pushed families into

The direction is right; the pace must now quicken. The UHC Day 2025 challenges India to move from incremental gains to a faster, fairer, and future ready transformation. The pandemic exposed the

vulnerabilities but also clarified what works. Strong primary health systems are the line defence. Community health workers-ASHAs, ANMs, and Anganwadi workers—are in-

dispensable to human re-



### President, PM remember Pranab Mukherjee

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE

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

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

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

cratic institutions. In a social media post, Prime Minister Modi said, "A towering statesman and a August 31, 2020.

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

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

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

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

# **UP CM assures housing for** needy, aid for treatment

Gorakhpur

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

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

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

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



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

have a pucca house.

Another woman sought financial assistance for her husband's treatment. Adityanath assured her that

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

"No one's treatment will stop for lack of money," he said, directing officials to promptly prepare estimates for high-level medical treatment for all such applicants so that funds can be released immediately. Responding to complaints about land encroachment, the chief minister instructed the police to take strict action against anyone forcibly occupying another person's land. In one case, where a woman complained of obstruction in taking possession of her own land. Adityanath directed officials to ensure she is given rightful possession.

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

# NBA releases ₹6.2 crore to five states

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE New Delhi

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

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

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

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

₹101 crore since the mech anism was operationalised.

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

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

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

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

# BEML rolls out prototype of driverless metro trainset for Bengaluru corridors

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE Bengaluru

BEML on Thursday rolled out the prototype of its driverless metro trainsets. developed for the upcoming BMRCL corridors. The 5RS-

DM project will be part of

Namma Metro's Phases 2, 2A,

and 2B, including the muchanticipated Airport Line. The prototype for the Pink Line was formally unveiled by Bangalore Metro Rail Corporation Limited (BMRCL)

Managing Director |

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

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

will supply 318 standardgauge metro cars, designed, engineered, and manufactured at its Bengaluru facility for the Blue Line (Airport Line) and the Pink Line (Kalena Agrahara in the south to Nagawara in the north), the company said. The trainsets will undergo a detailed programme of testing and commissioning

as per BMRCL's implementa-

tion schedule, followed by

comprehensive maintenance support for up to 15 years, the PSU added. "This rollout marks a sig-

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

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

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

toward delivering next-generation mobility solutions for India's growing cities." BMRCL MD Ravishankar

said the rollout of the prototype reflected BEML's commitment to supplying stateof-the-art trainsets that accessibility. would enhance the commuting experience, adding that it was a milestone toward meeting the aspirations of commuters on the upcoming R6 Line and the ORR-Airport Line.

BEML said the new driverless trainsets feature energy-

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE

The Indian Coast Guard (ICG)

has seized a Pakistani

fishing boat and apprehend-

ed 11 crew members operat-

ing illegally in the Indian

waters, officials said on

Thursday. The detainees have been handed over to

Jakhau Marine Police in Gujarat for further investiga-

The Indian Coast Guard, in

swift action on

Wednesday, "apprehended

a Pakistani fishing boat with

11 crew inside India's

Exclusive Economic Zone

(EEZ)," Gujarat Defence PRO

Wing Commander Abhishek

Kumar Tiwari said in a social

tion, they said.

efficient systems, upgraded passenger information displays, extra-wide gangways for seamless movement between coaches, USB charging ports, ergonomic seating, and improved

The trainsets also comply with advanced fire safety and crashworthiness norms and meet international safety standards.

They are compatible with Communication-Based Train Control (CBTC) for fully driverless operations.

tiers while maintaining

national laws within the

Maritime Zones of India

(MZI), he said. "Continuous

vigilance across India's mar-

itime domain remains a

cornerstone of our nation-

al maritime security strate-

intercepted and apprehend-

ed a Pakistani fishing vessel

along with 11 crew operating

illegally inside Indian

waters. This decisive action

reflects the unwavering vig-

ilance of the ICG and India's

firm resolve to protect its

maritime frontiers and

uphold international mar-

itime law within the MZI.

Relentless surveillance and

proactive operation remain

the bedrock of our mar-

itime security strategy,"

Coast Guard said in a social

"The Indian Coast Guard

gy," he added.

**Coast guard seizes Pak** boat in Indian waters

#### **Bihar Govt** initiates process to constitute **Prakrit, Pali** academies

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

#### media post. This interdiction underscores the Coast Guard's sustained maritime operations and India's commitment to securing its fron-

#### Marble sculpture adorns Bikaner House in Delhi PIONEER NEWS SERVICE

New Delhi

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

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

subjective," Gupta said.



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

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

# Odisha CM Majhi awards citizenship certificates to 35 applicants under CAA

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA Bhubaneswar

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

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



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

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

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

#### **President meets** displaced persons in Imphal

media post.

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA Imphal

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

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

#### No harm in cars from ethanol petrol, says Nitin Gadkari



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

#### **Bihar CM inspects tourist** centre in East Champaran

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



#### RS Chairman hails Deepavali's inclusion in UNESCO list



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

#### **BJP MP accuses Oppposition of** unconstitutional impeachment

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



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

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE New Delhi

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

responsible for it," he said.

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

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

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

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

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

plates.

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

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

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

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

Ramesh recalled that India's

after rotten meat scandal

Adulterated eggs hit Kashmir

first President, Rajendra Prasad, had said the same on January

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

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

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

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

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE

New Delhi

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Missions/Posts through walkin interview, email, multilingual 24x7 emergency WhatsApp numbers, numbers, grievance redressal portals like MADAD, CPGRAMS, and eMigrate, and social media etc.," he said.

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

The ministry issues advi-

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

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

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

Shah. Intervening in the debate

on election reforms in the Lok

Sabha on Wednesday, Shah

cited three instances of alleged

'vote theft" by Jawaharlal

Nehru, Indira Gandhi and Sonia

"So, 28 votes went to Sardar

Vallabhbhai Patel and two

were cast in favour of

Jawaharlal Nehru. But Nehru ji

ended up being the prime

minister," he had said, prompt-

ing an uproar in the Opposition

benches. In the video shared

by Ramesh and the Congress,

compromise. This must be treated with utmost urgency", the National Conference MLA posted Both these drugs are

plied across the valley.

in the matter.

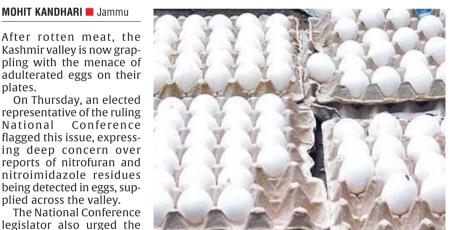
Chief Minister to intervene

strictly banned in foodproducing animals because of their carcinogenic and toxic effects.

In recent months, the enforcement agencies in the valley have seized thousands of kilograms of rotten meat, stale fish, and lowcost dressed chicken unfit for human consumption.

Responding swiftly to the health alert, the Jammu and Kashmir Government has already ordered an urgent investigation into allegations of adulterated eggs being sold in the market. According to an official

communication issued from the office of the



"For the safety of our Minister for Food, Civil being sold and, if people, there can be no Supplies and Consumer confirmed, to identify Affairs, the matter came to light through posts shared on the social media handle of Tanvir Sadiq, MLA in the J&K Legislative Assembly.

The minister's office noted that the legislator also publicly expressed concern that such adulteration could be harmful to consumers, prompting the Government to seek prompt review of the matter.

In response, the Minister for FCS&CA directed the Controller of the Legal Metrology Department to urgently examine and verify the allegations. The department has been asked to submit a detailed report within two days for the perusal of the minister.

Officials said the inquiry aims to determine whether adulterated eggs are indeed

the source and take corrective action to safeguard public health.

Raising the issue, Tanvir Sadiq, in his post on X, also claimed that the issue of adulterated eggs becomes even more serious because eggs are consumed heavily by children, senior citizens, and patients.

Doctors often prescribe eggs as a primary source of protein, making this a direct

public-health risk. "I urge the Health Minister @sakinaitoo and Food and Supplies Minister @satishsharmajnk and their Department of Food & Supplies and Food Safety authorities to immediately investigate, conduct residue testing across markets, trace the source, and take strict action against violators", Sadiq posted on X.

#### Rajya Sabha discusses medical billing, farmers' suicides, tribal

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE New Delhi

languages

Issues including standardised medical billing by private hospitals, farmers' suicide in Maharashtra and inclusion of some languages spoken by tribal communities in the Eighth Schedule of the Constitution figured on Thursday in the Rajya Sabha.

Raising the matter of billing during the Zero Hour, BJP MP K Laxman urged the Government to ensure transparent and standardised medical billing, as he raised concerns over "exploitation practices" by private hospitals.

He said in the absence of norms, many families are pushed into hardship due to medical bills. "There is a rise in exploitative practices by certain private corporate hospitals. Reports from patients, civil society and consumer bodies point to a disturbing pattern of unnecessary diagnostic tests, unwanted prolonged hospital stavs with no clinical justification, and opaque billing processes," Laxman said.

"Absence of transparent norms leaves people with little choice, pushing many families into hardship. Reports highlight they charge ₹1,500 to ₹2,000 as OPD, which is not covered under schemes like Ayushman Bharat." he said.

NCP-SCP MP Fauzia Khan said as many as 766 farmers have committed suicide in Maharashtra in the last three months, and questioned when farmers will "become dear to the Government".

#### Congress refutes Shah's vote theft claim against Nehru it exposes the "outright lie" of

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE

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

Congress general secretary

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



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

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh being given a copy of Vallabhbhai Patel's

Babele said the claim that Nehru was made PM despite Patel being the popular choice

is a "figment of imagination" of the RSS.

President on 2-day visit to Manipur CBI charges 13 in digital arrest cyber fraud scam This will be Murmu's first trip

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

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

to the strife-torn state after

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

### PIONEER NEWS SERVICE

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

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

In the chargesheet filed in

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

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

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

#### NIA files chargesheet against 11 in Odisha explosives loot Saranda jungle in neighbour-

abroad".

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE Bhubaneswar

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

an official said.

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

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

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

ing Jharkhand. The NIA took over the case from the local police in June this year. The statement said that

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

#### President Droupadi Murmu being welcomed by Manipur Governor Ajay Kumar Bhalla on her arrival in Imphal on Manipur PIONEER NEWS SERVICE the British colonial rule, and

Imphal

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

women's struggle against

may offer prayers at the renowned Shree Govindajee temple, officials said. Security has been beefed

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

afternoon, they said.

officials said.

becoming the President of



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

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

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



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

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

Majhi made the remarks while handing over appointment letters to 591 newly recruited officers and employees in three departments - Water Resources (252), Housing and Urban Development (142) and Works (197).

Majhi said, "Our Government has promised to fill all the 1.5 lakh vacant posts in five years and to fill 65,000 Government posts in two years."

# States Focus - Arunachal: 18 dead, 3 missing as truck falls in gorge

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

■ Tinsukia/Dibrugarh (Assam)

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

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

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

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

remains," he said.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

**GUWAHATI FIRE RAGES FOR OVER 38 HOURS; MULTIPLE AGENCIES CALLED** 

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

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

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

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

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

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

**MOHIT KANDHARI** ■ Jammu

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

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

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

On November 15, 2004, SPO Sanjeet Kumar was murdered along with his friend by two terrorists in Balan Tundwa, Kishtwar, while they were

preparing for a neighbour's wedding. On Thursday, Next of Kins (NoKs) of

North East India Festival

A Special Investigation

Team (SIT) under the

Criminal Investigation

Department (CID) of the

Assam Police is probing

Garg's death case after more

than 60 FIRs were lodged

across the State.

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

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

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

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

Earlier, on July 28,2025, the



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

denied justice for decades.

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

#### **Govt flags nearly** 2.000 aircraft **GPS** spoofing incidents

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

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

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

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

in airspace. **Global Positioning System** (GPS)/ Global Navigation Satellite System (GNSS) spoofing and jamming refers to attempts to manipulate a user's navigation system by

Organisation identifies GNSS spoofing as a form of International Frequency Interference and Wireless Organisation is investigating

#### Justice will be delivered: Himanta ahead of Mamata slams SIR, urges people to protest charge sheet filing in Zubeen's death case **SAUGAR SENGUPTA**

■ Krishnagar

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

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



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

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

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

and asked the people particularly women to get prepared for a sustained struggle on the streets. Continuing her diatribe

mighty dharna (sit in demon-

stration) "if a single name is

deleted from the voters' lists

against the BJP Government particularly Union Home Minister Amit Shah called him a dangerous person whose eyes emitted the "villainy" of Duryodhana and Duhshasana — the two antiheroes of epic Mahabharata.

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

## giving false signals. According to Mohol, International Civil Aviation

Monitoring the matter.

#### Goa, Israel boost tourism ties as Khaunte meets IMOT team

(NEIF).

ASHOKE RAJ ■ New Delhi

TONY DAS Guwahati

Appealing to people to have

faith in the judicial process,

Assam Chief Minister

Himanta Biswa Sarma on Thursday said he believes

justice will be delivered in

the death case of singer

Sarma made the state-

ment as the police are

scheduled to file the charge

sheet in the sensational case

"The SIT will submit its

chargesheet, and the court

will examine it. The culprit

will be punished by the

"From tomorrow, the

police job will be over, and

the court's role will start. I

believe that the court will

court," the CM said.

on Friday.

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

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

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



with operational requirements.

definitely deliver justice,"

he said, exuding confidence

under mysterious circum-

stances in Singapore on

September 19 while swim-

ming in the sea. He had

gone to that country to

attend the 4th edition of the

in the entire process. The celebrated singer died

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

engaging key travel trade

route, including assistance

'Goa welcomes everv

The meeting also saw discussions on hosting a tourism roadshow in Goa, aimed at spotlighting Israel's diverse tourism offerings and

stakeholders across the State. Expressing appreciation

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

Khaunte.' Goa remains one of the most preferred Indian destinations for Israeli visitors, known for its beaches, culture, and warm hospitality. Each year, around 50,000 Israelis visit India, with a significant share opting for Goa - reflecting a deep cultural affinity and strong traveller interest.

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

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

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

### BJP MPs flag Yamuna River pollution, highway woes PIONEER NEWS SERVICE

New Delhi Two BJP members on

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

Speaking during Zero Hour, Tejveer Singh from Uttar Pradesh acknowledged infrastructure improvements in Mathura and Vrindavan, but highlighted challenges, particularly Yamuna river pollution, faced by pilgrims and locals.

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

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

Union Rural Development

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

"This will not only make the journey of crores of devotees comfortable but will also reduce traffic in the entire Vrindavan area, help in environmental protection and provide global recogni-

tion to pilgrims," he said. He also suggested smart traffic management systems. e-shuttle bus services, multilevel parking facilities, and a

special package for local vouth in tourism-related

Sadanand Shet Tanavde

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

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

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

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE

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

Bihar Rural Development Minister Sharwan Kumar met

Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan in New Delhi and requested the release of the second part of the first instalment and the entire second instalment of PMAY-G funds amounting to ₹4,491 crore for the completion of the puccahouses for poor in the rural areas. He also sought the immediate release of ₹3,257.49 crore for the payment of labourers

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

of these schemes was being

engaged under MGNREGA.

It said the implementation

ministry's procedures. The progress of each scheme and the status of pending dues were reviewed during the meeting.

hindered due to the non-

release of funds as per the

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

released so far.

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



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

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

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

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

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

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





# ECI can't treat voters with doubt, SC told

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

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

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

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

He said initiating an inquiry

effectively amounts to "suspending citizenship".

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

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

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

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

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

Offering a broader view, Justice Bagchi said, "Migration virtually auctioned and by the



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

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

The CII added a stark reality check regarding labour migration and said, "In North India, trains are full of farm workers from Bihar... They are time they come to Punjab, they are in tears.'

He noted that many such workers have settled in Punjab, their children have mixed with the culture, yet their roots remain in Bihar or West Bengal.

The CJI also cited a recent visit to Havelock Island, noting that out of a population of 25,000, approximate-22,000 were migrants.

While the petitioners argued against the arbitrary nature of the SIR exercise, the bench said, "The SIR cannot evoke responses rather than

be seen too much on procedural aspects.

Let us keep in mind that they are doing something after 20 years and the SIR cannot become an annual feature. That is why we cannot intervene too much on the technical procedural aspects.'

When the petitioners pressed on the "inquisitorial" nature of the process, Justice Bagchi clarified that the court's queries were "dialectical" in nature, intended to

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

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

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

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

The matter will continue on December 16.

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

# SC refuses Prajwal Revanna plea for transfer of cases

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE

The Supreme Court on Thursday refused to entertain a plea of former Janata Dal (Secular) MP Prajwal Revanna to transfer the trial of two criminal cases before the special MP/MLA court in Bengaluru to another court in the city on the ground of bias. A bench of Chief Justice Surya Kant and Justice Joymalya Bagchi told Revanna's counsel that observations of the judge cannot be a ground of bias as it dismissed his plea.

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

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



requires expunction.

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

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

CJI Kant said that Revanna's apology before the high court as it is the most unethical thing to allege bias just because some observations were made by the presiding evidence," the CJI said.

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

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

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

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

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

"Sometimes, errors happen as we deal with such a large volume of cases and

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

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE New Delhi

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Former police inspector IB Vyas had



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

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

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

# 'Humanitarian grounds can't override punishment'

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE New Delhi

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

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

appeal, a bench of justices punishment mandated by Sanjay Karol and Vipul M the legislature," the bench

Pancholi noted that the appellant, who was 24-yearold at the time of the incident in 2019, has urged the court to consider her age, lack of prior criminal history and responsibility towards her minor child.

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

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

to the prosecution, the appellant and her husband were intercepted in September 2019 and after the police searched the vehicle, 23.5 kg of 'ganja' was seized.

An FIR was registered and later, a trial court convicted them for the offences under the NDPS Act and imposed 10-year sentence along with fine. Both the convicts

approached the high court, which confirmed the conviction and sentence imposed by the trial court. woman approached the apex court challenging the high court

verdict. Before the top court,

her counsel argued that the

prosecution's case suffers

from multiple infirmities

said. It noted that according and though the seizure took place in a residential locality, yet no independent witness was secured. Arguing that the high

court order was liable to be set side, her counsel in the alternative said the appellant was a first-time offender and was the sole caregiver of her minor child. Her counsel urged for

remission or reduction of the sentence to the period already undergone, which was over five years and nine months.

Dealing with the submissions, the bench said the apex court has consistently held that non-examination of independent witnesses was not, by itself, fatal to the prosecution, particularly in prosecutions under the NDPS Act where operations

often take place under challenging circumstances.

"In the present case, upon careful evaluation, the evidence of the official witnesses stands out as consistent and coherent," it said.

The bench said absence of independent witnesses cannot be said to weaken the prosecution case in any manner. It said the prosecution has proved beyond reasonable doubt that the appellant was in conscious possession of 23.5 kg of 'ganja', which is a commer-

cial quantity. While upholding her conviction and sentence, the bench said, "The appellant, however, is at liberty to pursue any remedy available in law for statutory remission before the appro-

priate authority.' 

#### Widow gets railways compensation after 23 yrs her pro bono ensured that tion and the police. In heavy rush inside the ing Justice Joymalya Bagchi,

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE New Delhi

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

in 2002 after the Supreme Court's nudge.

said it was a difficult task to trace the elderly women, who had changed her residence in a far-flung village of Bihar and her last contact was lost as her local lawyer passed away, lauded the efforts of Railways and advocate Fauzia Shakil, who represented the widow pro bono (without any fees) to

ensure she gets the financial relief. 'This young lawyer The bench, also compris- (Shakil), who represented

she gets the compensation after 23 years. We had to trace her with

the help of local police and administration and finally railways managed to pay her. A smile on a poor person's

face is what we want to earn nothing else," CJI Surya Kant said. The railways in its affidavit said that in compliance with the October 6 order, it managed to trace the woman Sanyokta Devi with the help of local administraOctober, the top court walked an extra mile to ensure that the widow is duly compensated by the Railways after years of struggle. Devi's husband Vijav

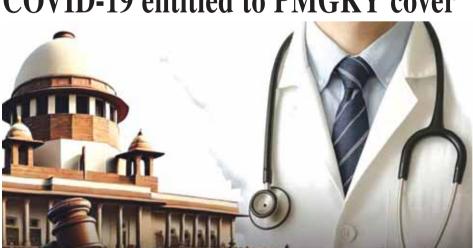
Singh had a valid railway ticket from Bakhtiyarpur station to go to Patna by the Bhagalpur-Danapur Inter-city Express on March 21, 2002, but he accidentally fell down from the running train at the originating station itself, due to

compartment and died instantly. What followed was a legal

battle for next two decades, as Devi's claim for compensation was turned down by Railway Claims Tribunal and the Patna High Court on the ground that the deceased was of unsound mind.

Aggrieved by the high court's order denying her claim, she, through her lawyer Shakil, approached the apex court.

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



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE New Delh

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

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

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

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

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

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

The top court was hearing a plea moved by

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





### Should India ban social media for kids?

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

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

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

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

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

# The SC's push for CCTV accountability

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



**HASAN KHURSHID** 

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

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

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



THE REAL TEST NOW IS WHETHER STATES WILL FINALLY ACT — OR **WHETHER CUSTODIAL DEATHS WILL** CONTINUE TO BE

TREATED AS TRAGIC BUT **INEVITABLE STATISTICS** 

The writer is a legal

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action has allowed custodial violence to fester. India's struggle with custodial brutality is not new. In 1997, the Supreme Court in D.K. Basu recognised custodial torture as an assault on the rule of law. In later cases-Shafhi Mohammad (2018) and Paramvir Singh Saini (2021)-the Court expanded guidelines, with Justice Rohinton Nariman stressing that installing

necessity rooted in Articles 21 and 22. Yet, the implementation remains **SINCE 1865** to change their uniforms twice half-hearted, largely because custodial violence thrives in opacity, and the state machinery shows little urgency to disrupt this culture. The judiciary's frustration draws from a long history of ignored reform efforts. From the National Police Commission reports (1977-81) to the Ribeiro and Padmanabhiah Committees, from the Malimath Committee to the landmark Prakash Singh judgment of

2006, India has been inundated with recom-

mendations for transforming the police from

a "force" to a "service."

that failure to provide full CCTV coverage in any

police station would be treated as contempt

of court. This, however, has done little to

change the ground reality. The disconnect

between judicial directives and executive

Despite this, real change has remained elusive. Justice AN Mulla's searing 1961 remark that no group in India matches the police force's record of lawlessness-though later expunged-continues to resonate with uncomfortable accuracy. Recent events have only reinforced these concerns. During the COVID-19 lockdowns, countless videos surfaced showing policemen mercilessly beating civilians, including pregnant women and elderly citizens. Such images laid bare the deep-seated culture of unrestrained power. One of the most horrifying examples remains the 2020 Sathankulam case in Tamil Nadu, where the CBI charge sheet revealed the savage torture of 59-year-old P. Jeyaraj and his 31-year-old son, J. Bennicks. Over seven hours, police personnel stripped, beat, and humiliated the father-son duo, forcing them to clean their own blood from the floor. Despite Jeyaraj's pleas, citing diabetes and high blood pressure, the brutality continued until

both men succumbed to their injuries. Their clothes were CCTV cameras was a constitutional

The pioneer drenched in blood to such an extent that police officers had extent that police officers had before presenting them in

court. The investigation also exposed medical negligence-Dr Vinila, who examined them, failed to document their injuries or provide medical support that might have saved their lives. This case stands as a grim reminder that custodial torture is not an aberration but a structural crisis embedded in policing culture CCTV cameras alone cannot eradicate it, but they can act as a crucial deterrent-if the system allows them to function. The Supreme Court's recent intervention is not merely a legal exercise; it is a moral reckoning. India cannot claim to be a constitutional democracy while allowing citizens to be brutalised behind closed doors. The real test now is whether states will finally act-or whether custodial deaths will continue to be treated as tragic but inevitable statistics. The nation's conscience demands more than compliance affidavits; it demands genuine accountability.

# PIC TALK



A camel stands in the glow of the sunset light, in Pushkar, Rajasthan.

# DIGITAL EXPERIENCE

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## Why educating girls is not enough: Bridge the skill gap structural issue: literacy and academic qualifications,



**DEVENDRA KUMAR** 

#### ND OPINION THE PIONEER

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

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

although essential, do not automatically translate into employability. Many graduates lack the practical, digital, and workplace skills demanded by contemporary industries. Compounding this are entrenched social norms and cultural expectations that often

overshadow the benefits of education. For many girls, familial restrictions, gender stereotypes, and ideas about "appropriate"

The plioneer vides this bridge.
When women stereotypes, and ideas about "appropriate" work limit their ability to turn education SINCE 1865 into financial independence.

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

The reality becomes even harsher in India's vast informal sector, where more than 90 percent of working women remain concentrated. Most are unskilled and engaged in low-paid, insecure jobs-domestic work, agriculture, tailoring, construction, home-based production, or micro-enterprises. In rural areas especially, women face severe skill deprivation and remain trapped in unstable jobs with little chance of mobility. Skill development can change this trajectory. Training in digital literacy helps women shift from low-productivity work to stable, betterpaying opportunities. Today's industries-whether healthcare, manufacturing, hospitality, technology, or retail-

demand a blend of theoretical knowledge and practical ability, and skill training pro-

When women acquire skills, the impact extends far beyond employment. Skilled

women strengthen economic productivity, innovation, and inclusive growth. Within families, a working daughter or mother enhances financial security and decision-making power. Moreover, skilled

workers are better positioned to negotiate fair wages, resist exploitation, and move into formal employment. The next step for India must be to integrate skill devel-

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

The writer is the founder of the Ladli Foundation

#### **AUSTRALIA'S SOCIAL MEDIA BAN SPARKS CALL FOR VIGILANCE**

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

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

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

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

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

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# LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

#### **Urban India needs coordinated reform**

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

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

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

A. MYILSAMI | TAMIL NADU

## Diwali's heritage glows anewx

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

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

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

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

VIJAY SINGH ADHIKARI | UTTARAKHAND

### Reimagining a song for India

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

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

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# India redraws its strategic lines with Putin's Delhi visit

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





**NILANTHA ILANGAMUWA** 

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

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

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

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



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

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AND WASHINGTON

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

Historically, the Indo-Russian relationship has oscillated between strategic necessity and opportunism. Declassified CIA documents from the 1980s reveal the delicate dance India played with the USSR during the Cold War. Indira Gandhi's approach, as the CIA observed, was staunchly nationalist and fiercely protective of India's regional supremacy. The per cent secondary tariff imposed on United States feared that

India's policies towards its neighbours, coupled with its Soviet alignment, could destabilise South Asia while simul-

foothold. Today, the echoes of that era reverberate: New Delhi remains Moscow's top arms buyer, leases nuclear-powered submarines, and maintains energy ties that have drawn ire from Washington, while ensuring that its engagement with Russia does not fully alienate the United States or Western partners.

economic metrics. India-Russia trade in FY metrics, its diaspora injects substantial

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SINCE 1865

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

> India's purchases of Russian oil. It is also worth noting that India recorded a goods trade surplus of about USD 41.18 billion with the US in FY 2024-

taneously granting Moscow a strategic 25, with exports of USD 86.51 billion and imports of USD 45.33 billion, reflecting strong bilateral trade despite earlier concerns over tariffs. Remittances provide a partial counterweight: total remittances to India reached roughly USD 135.46 billion, including USD 25-30 billion from the US, while Russian remittances are negligible in comparison. This indicates that What is important to note here are the while India faces challenges in trade

financial resilience into the economy.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



**ANIL ANAND** 

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

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

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

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

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

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

With his closest aides and former Minister Mr GM Saroori, credited with having backed Mr Azad to walk out of Congress and float a new Congress, the new setback for him came when tinuing the process, under pressure particularhis two more trusted aides Mr Jugal Sharma and Mr Abdul Majid Wani, both former ministers, announced their plans to rejoin Congress. Suddenly, the mysterious posts appeared on social media about the possibility of a fresh J&Kcentric assignment for Mr Azad.

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

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

even one year after the assembly

The discontent in the DPAP had started simmering a few months after the party came into being.

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

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

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

political outfit, having already joined the done, despite their earlier jubilation on disconly from people in BJP's stronghold of Jammu which has been under economic stress due to wrong and anti-Jammu policies of the Centre and the UT governments.

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

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

his political career?

To be fair to Mr Azad, all through his political association with Congress-during which he was always, within the government and

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

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

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

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# A sustainable sporting future for new India



**NASIR** 

**ALI** 

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

The rapid development in remote regions underscores this change. When a multi-purpose indoor hall opens in Arunachal

Pradesh's Kamle district or when The Pioneer Himalayan states receive hundreds of crores for sports facilities, it reflects a deeper reorientation of develop-

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

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

reaching even difficult terrains. Private innovators are ensuring these facilities are built using sustainable materials that reduce long-term costs and environmental impact. CSR support from corporates is further enhancing the reach and quality of sports infrastructure across communities. Together, these collaborations are building a model that is scalable, eco-conscious, and socially impact ful. The future demands more than just building more fields; it demands facilities that are greener, smarter, and longer-lasting. With rising environmental concerns, the sports sector too must move towards responsible innovation. Materials like Nike Grind contribute to a circular economy by reducing waste and repurposing discarded material into high-perfor-

mance surfaces. Gallant Bounce installations reflect this mindset, prioritising accessibility, safety, and longevity. These facilities become inspirational spaces where

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

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

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# **India's MAGA vs Trump's MAGA**

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## **BLASÉ CAPITAL** TRADE LOCKED



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

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

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

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

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

destinies are interlinked.

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

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

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

Fast forward a few years, and the US did what even India had never anticipated. The former compelled Russia to stop the supplies of cryogenic engines to India, which could have aided the latter in its space and missile programme. It is a different matter that India managed that diplomatic hostilities with the US were on the rise, McDonald's announced that it would open thousands of fast-food stores across India. Mac-D realised the potential of the Indian

A similar kind of schizophrenia-excitement is visible today. After imposing a 50 per cent tariff on Indian exports, hankering about H-1B visa regime, and targeting pharma shipments, Trump recently instructed his aides that there were complaints about India dumping rice in

The Pioneer

the US. He hinted at new tariffs on rice imports. His tariff war against India seemed unabated. Do remember that after new sanctions were **SINCE 1865** imposed by the European Union,

and others against two Russian crude oil exporters, Indian importers stopped, or curtailed purchases from Russia. Or at least publicly announced it.

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

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

Like Donald Trump's MAGA, but in an unobtru- without Russian help. But around the same time Some weeks ago, if you recall, Sundar Pichai of Google said that the firm would invest \$17 billion in Andhra Pradesh to set up a massive data centre, the largest of its kind in Asia, and develop AI capabilities in India.

Now, we come to Apple. Until November 2025, iPhone exports and shipments from India to the US broke previous records, despite the US' tariffs, and Trump's antics. Total iPhone exports may cross the \$25 billion in 2025 (calendar year), or surely in 2025-26 (fiscal year). Apple is com-

mitted to manufacturing 25 per cent of iPhones meant for global sales within India, and the process is under way. This completes the quartet of India's MAGA, which will counter Trump's MAGA, and maybe come out

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

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

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

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

> The author has worked for leading media houses, authored two books, and is now Executive Director, C Voter Foundation



Author, Journalist and Academician



### A Contrarian Investor

#### India's unsecured credit landscape is going through a structural transformation, which is driven by stronger borrowers' discipline, broader credit penetration, and renewed lenders' confidence. According to Experian's latest report, 'Credit Insights: Unsecured Loans (September 2025),' the country is seeing sustained momentum across personal loans, credit cards, and loans for cars and consumer durables. The report notes that "fresh sourcing of loans in Q2-FY26 remained strong," due to larger ticket sizes, expanding participation from non-banking finance companies (NBFCs), and better repayments. This marks a maturing credit environment nationally, which is shaped by the rise of digital lending platforms.

The study underscores a shift in consumer behaviour, and lender strategy as credit flows go beyond the metros to smaller cities, and semi-urban markets. Manish Jain, Country Managing Director of Experian India, says, "Demand continues to rise, consumers are moving towards higher ticket sizes, and repayment behaviour is steadily improving. The improvement in early delinquencies... shows that both consumers and lenders are making more responsible, informed choices, indicating positive trends." He adds that the analytics-driven approach enables lenders to expand responsibly.

Personal loans continue to anchor the unsecured credit segment. Assets under management reached nearly Rs 16 lakh crore, or a 13 per cent year-on-year increase. Major lender categories such as private banks, public sector banks, and NBFCs reported higher fresh sourcing. NBFCs strengthened their grip in the sub-₹1 lakh ticket-size category, which indicated their expanding reach in the smaller markets. A notable shift is the rise in average ticket sizes, which hints at higher consumer confidence. Early-stage delinquencies improved, signalling healthier repayment

In November 2025, CRIF High Mark, a part of the global network, published its quarterly edition of the report, 'How India Lends.' It too showed that the personal loan portfolio grew 12 per cent year-on-year, and 2.9 per cent quarter-on-quarter. It was supported by a sharp rebound in fresh originations, which surged to nearly ₹3 lakh crore, a 32 per cent quarter-on-quarter rise. Loans above ₹10 lakh account for 37.4 per cent of total value. This segment was dominated by the PSU banks, even as the NBFCs captured the smallticket segment, accounting for nearly 90 per

cent of the overall volumes. The credit card segment recorded ₹3.4 lakh

# Personal is the new credit norm

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



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

Two-wheeler financing registered robust growth, with the assets under management touching ₹1.8 lakh crore, or 18 per cent yearon-year rise. New loan sanctions grew nine per cent year-on-year in Q2-FY26. The NBFC

dominance continued, aided by higher sourcing from the first-time borrowers. Higher-ticket loans in the Rs 1-2 lakh bracket The Pioneer gained traction, reflecting a shift

delinquency rate reduced from 6.2 per cent to 5.4 per cent, although the longer-duration stress remained elevated.

Consumer durable loans posted the fastest crore in assets under management, up nine growth among the unsecured products, with

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

As India's credit ecosystem evolves with stronger underwriting, digital enablement, and rising consumer confidence, unsecured lending appears well-positioned for sustained, responsible expansion. The Reserve Bank of India recently cut the reporate by 25 basis points to 5.25 per cent, which will offer relief to several sections of the bor-

rowers, especially those considering personal loans. As the overall cost of borrowing drops, banks

and NBFCs are expected to gradtowards premium vehicle purchases. The ually reduce the interest rates on personal loans. The impact may not be visible immediately, but may see marginally lower rates in the coming weeks. The lenders will slowly realign pricing to reflect the revised reporate. This bodes well for the unsecured lending

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

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

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

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

# Trade agreement to enhance bilateral ties: Huizenga

New York / Washington

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

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

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

The hearing heard from witnesses, Director of Asian Studies Centre, Heritage Foundation, leff Smith, Executive Director of the Observer Research Foundation America, Dhruva Jaishankar and External Senior Advisor, Special Senior Fellow, Indo-Pacific Programme, German Marshall Fund of the United States, Sameer

Describing India as one of the fastest-growing major economies in the world, Huizenga said American companies increasingly see India not just as a market but as a partner to innovation, especially in Al. communications. and advanced technologies, where collaboration already exists. "American companies are eager to enter the Indian market on a level playing field. A new trade deal with India under Minister Modi would further realise this goal and enhance the relationship. Open markets, strengthening supply chains and driving innovation, all of which would chart a new beginning in our storied partnership," he said.

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

Referring to Russian President Vladimir Putin's recent visit to

participation at the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation summit in China in September, Huizenga said, "we must view this moment with clear eves.'

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

"Moreover, authoritarian powers like China and Russia are redrawing borders by force, undermining democratic norms and coercing their neighbours. Nowhere is this more evident increasingly aggressive China threatens regional stability, global prosperity and the open flow of commerce," he said.

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

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

Russia. Huizenga underscored that US-India cooperation today spans defence, technology, counterterrorism and trade.

On counterterrorism cooperation, which he described as "significant", Huizenga noted that organisations responsible for the

 Lashkar-e-Tayyiba (LeT) and The Resistance Front (TRF) - were designated by the Trump administration as foreign terrorist organisations in July this year. The designation reflected "our shared commitment to fighting terror wherever it occurs".

heinous April 22 Pahalgam attack

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

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA | Mumbai

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Meanwhile, Prime Minister

Narendra Modi on Thursday held a telephonic conversation with US focused on enhancing economic ties at a time when the two countries are eveing a trade deal.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The Indian industry and exporters are eagerly waiting for the conclusion of the negotiations and announcement of the deal, as the high import duties are hurting their shipments to America.

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

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

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

# Unilever sees 'massive opportunities' in India

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi

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

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

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

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

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

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

Unilever has recently made

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

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

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

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

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

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

# Federal Reserve cuts key rate

**ASSOCIATED PRESS** Washginton

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

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

Wednesday's cut reduced the rate to about 3.6 per credit cards over time, also affect those rates.

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

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

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

government and the Inland

(IWAI) have expanded naviga-

Waterways Authority of India

voted for a half point cut.

# Manufacturing to contribute 25 pc of GDP by 2047: Report

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

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

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

nity by 2047. "Multiple priority areas emerge for India's growth vision in the manufacturing sector going forward, such as Electronics and Semiconductors, Defence, Automotive and EV. Energy Manufacturing and Pharmaceuticals — as they combine strong growth, industry push and a clear

runway," the report said. The report also mentioned that India's next manufacturing leap could revolve around four poten-

policy/investment

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

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

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

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

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

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

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

"Every issue is important. and no issue is such that it cannot be resolved to mutual satisfaction. There are issues under discussion,' Goval said. The minister said coun-

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

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

Both Goyal and Tajani stressed the need for cooperation between democraraw materials in the global market, while the Indian minister also flagged concentration risks amid the weaponisation of trade.

Tajani said one country

cannot play a "kingmaker" in

deciding the raw material prices, which are critical for production. The Italian Deputy PM said there is a need for a "politi-cal agreement" between

Italy, Europe, India, Japan, and the US on this aspect. Goyal also said that given the deepening ties between Rome and New Delhi, India-Italy ties will be a defining relationship of the 21st

century. Tajani marked pharma, maritime security, technology and defence as among cies for the smooth supply of the sectors where India and

also stressed the important role that the bilateral partnership will play in making the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor a reality. "We (Italy and India) are

paving the way for strong

action in favour of trade and

in favour of infrastructure.

Italy can cooperate, and

This corridor is very, very important also for peace,' the visiting minister said. Goyal said both countries have discussed setting up a "startup bridge", where both budding enterprises and talent can interact with each other, and also exhorted focused work

on waste-to-energy, which

can focus on making access

to technologies cheaper

for India.

cent, the lowest it has been in nearly three years. Lower rates from the Fed can bring down borrowing costs for mortgages, auto loans, and though market forces can

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

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA Varanasi

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

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

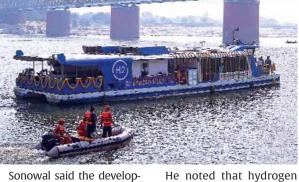
Sonowal said the hydrogenpowered vessel reflects India's growing technological capabilities and its commitment to sustechnological progress, but a sign that we are advancing confidently towards green energy and indigenous solutions," he said. The minister said it was a

matter of national pride that India has now joined the list of countries such as China, Norway, the Netherlands, and Japan that operate hydrogenpowered vessels.

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

tainable energy. "This is not just ensured that inland waterways now play an important role in India's development journey.' he said in Varanasi, Prime Minister Narendra Modi's parliamentary constituency. Uttar Pradesh's Minister of

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



ment marks a major step in India's shift towards green energy and indigenously developed clean-technology solu-

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

adoption. Highlighting the sector's

before full-scale commercial

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

operational on 13 waterways.

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

equipment, and community jetties. "Projects worth more than

`300 crore have already been completed in Uttar Pradesh for waterway development, while schemes worth around `2,200 crore will be launched in the coming years," the minister According to an official state-

ment, the hydrogen vessel initiative is part of the ongoing modernisation of India's inland waterways under the leadership of PM Modi, who has prioritised clean transport, improved connectivity and enhanced public convenience. In recent years, the Central

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

# FROM THE

### Migrant boat capsizes, 3 dead

A boat carrying migrants overturned early on Thursday on the Sava river in eastern Croatia, killing at least three people and injuring eight, officials said. The accident happened in the eastern town of Slavonski Brod, by the border with Bosnia. Migrants were apparently trying to cross the Sava River in dense fog when their boat capsized, rescuers told HRT State television.

Firefighter Ivan Vuleta said emergency services received a call around 5.30 am. That people were in the river and they rushed to the scene in rescue boats. Police said a man from Bosnia is suspected of people smuggling. He has been hospitalized. The migrants' nationalities have not been specified. People fleeing violence or poverty in the Middle East, Asia or Africa often face perils as they try to reach Western Europe.

#### **PAKISTAN**

#### Two children killed in blast

Two children were killed and 16 others injured when a mortar shell exploded inside a seminary in Pakistan's northwestern Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Province, local police said on Thursday. The incident occurred in the Esuri area of Mirali tehsil, North Waziristan district bordering Afghanistan, on Wednesday. Some students brought an abandoned mortar shell they had found outside the seminary, Madrassah Shams-ul-Quran, in Sher Mohammad Kot village, which later exploded. According to initial reports, the children mistook the device for a toy and were playing with it when it went off. The explosion left two young children dead on the spot, while 16 others sustained injuries. The wounded were shifted to hospitals in Bannu and nearby areas for treatment.

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

The exercise showcasing joint Japanese-US air power came a day after Chinese and Russian bombers flew together around western Japan, prompting Tokyo to scramble fighter jets, though there was no airspace violation. It also follows China's military aircraft locking radar on Japanese jets Saturday, another incident that has caused Tokyo-Beijing relations to further deteriorate. Japan's Air Self Defence-

Force and the US military conducted the joint exercise Wednesday as "the security environment surrounding our country is becoming even severer," the Japanese Joint Staff said.

It said the allies "reaffirmed the strong resolve to prevent unilateral attempts to change the status quo by force and the readiness

bombers and three Japanese F-35 stealth fighter jets and three F-15 jets conducted their joint flight drills near Japan's western airspace, the waters between the country and South Korea, officials said.

Exercises held as the security environment grows more tense. The Joint Staff denied that the exercise was conducted in response to a specific incident, but acknowledged Chinese military aircraft's recent radarlocking on Japanese jets and the China-Russia joint bomber exercises Tuesday as examples of a worsening security environment around Japan. Relations between Japan and China have deteriorated after Japan's Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi said in early November that Japan's military could get involved if China were to take action against Taiwan, the self-governing island that Beijing claims as its own.

The row escalated over the weekend when separate Chinese drills involving a carrier near southern Japan prompted Tokyo to scramble jets and to protest that



between the SDF and the US Japanese aircraft were target- Japan Air Self-Defense Force's F-15 fighters holding a joint military drill with the US B-52 bomber in the vicinity of Japanese airspace

- a move considered as pos-

sible preparation for firing. Tokyo protested to Beijing, asking for an explanation and preventive measures.

China denied the allegation

and accused Japanese jets of

interfering and endangering the Chinese exercise. Washington stressed its "unwavering" alliance with Japan, saying the incident

was not "conducive to region-

al peace and stability." The exercise came one day after Chinese and Russian strategic bombers conducted joint long-distance flight from the waters between Japan and South Korea down to the Pacific, the Joint Staff said.

Two Russian strategic bombers Tu-95 that flew down from the airspace east of the Korean Peninsula joined a pair of Chinese H-6 bombers over the East China Sea for a joint flight down to the Pacific off the southern coast of Japan's Shikoku island. The four bombers were also joined by four Chinese J-16 fighters as they flew back and forth between two Japanese southwestern islands Okinawa and Miyako, the area where China is expanding its

# Former Pakistan spy chief sentenced for 14 years by military court

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA Islamabad

A military court on Thursday sentenced Pakistan's former spy chief Faiz Hameed to 14 years in jail after his conviction on multiple charges, including violating the Official Secrets Act and engaging in political activities. According to a statement by the army, the process of Field General Court Martial (FGCM) against Hameed was initiated on August 12, 2024, under provisions of the Pakistan Army Act, and continued for 15 months.

He was tried on four charges related to engaging in political activities, violation of the Official Secrets Act in a manner "detrimental to the safety and interests of the State", misuse of authority & Government resources, and causing wrongful loss to individuals. "After lengthy and laborious legal proceedings, the accused has been found guilty on all charges and sentenced to 14 years rigor-



court," the army said. It is for the first time that a former chief of the powerful Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) has been convicted and sentenced. He served as the Director General of the ISI from 2019 to 2021.

He last served as Commander of the XXXI Corps before taking premature retirement in December 2022 after Asim Munir took over as the army chief. Hameed was considered

The army said that the Court-Martial complied with all legal provisions and that the accused was "afforded with all legal rights, including (the) rights of (a) defence team of his choice." It said that the convict has the right of appeal at a relevant forum after conviction.

"Involvement of the convict in fomenting vested political agitation and instability in cohorts with politi-

other matters is separately being dealt with," the army said.

US, Japan hold joint flight drills amid Chinese military activity

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

Speaking to Geo News, Information Minister Atta Tarar described the verdict as a "historic", saying the decision strengthens the rule of law and accountability mechanisms in Pakistan.

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

accountability mechanisms. He added that the trial was fair, saying Hameed was given a full opportunity to defend himself, including the chance to present evidence and witnesses in his favour. Tarar said that investigations into Hameed's alleged involvement in political matters were still ongoing and would continue. Defence Minister Khawaja Asif was more cautious in his reaction. He said the nation will face the consequences of decisions made under Gen (retd) Bajwa and the ex-spymaster.

"The country will keep reaping the harvest of seeds sown by Faiz Hameed and General [retd] Bajwa for years," he wrote on X. "May God forgive us. May those in power recognise that authority is a divine trust and use it for the welfare of His (God's) creation (people)! May the

Senator Faisal Vawda, considered to be close to the army, told Geo News that the conviction marks "just the beginning," adding that the May 9-related cases are expected forward next.

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

He said that a foundation has now been laid for a system of accountability and justice in the country and stressed that "no one is bigger than Pakistan.'

The senator said that Hameed had caused harm to the country, its institutions, politics, and judiciary through misuse of authority.

Hameed made headlines for the first time after he played a vital role in an agreement signed between the Government and the radical Islamist party Tehreek-e-Labbaik Pakistan (TLP) to end the 21-day sit-in at Faizabad in

# Choi Sang-mok faces charges over Yoon's martial law declaration

South Korea's former acting leader Choi Sang-mok was indictedon Thursday on charges related to the brief imposition of martial law in December 2024 by then-President Yoon Suk Yeol, becoming the latest highprofile figure embroiled in legal troubles over the case.

Choi is one of three top Yoon administration officials who served as caretaker presidents after Yoon was impeached and removed from office over the martial law declaration that plunged South Korea into massive political turmoil.

Yoon is now in jail while facing a high-stakes criminal trial on rebellion charges. Dozens of high-level officials and military commanders of the Yoon administra-



tion have also been arrested, indicted or investigated over their roles in Yoon's martial law debacle and other allegations.

On Thursday, an investigation team led by independent counsel Cho Eun-suk charged Choi with dereliction of duty for not fully restoring the three vacant seats at the nine-member Constitutional Court, which was deliberating whether to unseat Yoon. Reinstating

the court to full strength was seen as a move that could increase prospects for Yoon's ouster because a court ruling to dismiss him needed support from at least six court justices.

Choi, who was Yoon's prime minister and finance minister, appointed two new justices but left a ninth justice seat vacant, citing a lack of bipartisan agreement when he became interim president.

# Indian envoy meets Canadian Speaker

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Toronto

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

In January, India will be welcoming a delegation led by the Speaker Francis Scarpaleggia at the 28th Conference of Speakers and Presiding Officers of Parliaments

Commonwealth Countries (CSPOC). "High

Commissioner @DineshKPatnaik met with the Speaker of the House of Commons @HoCSpeaker Honourable Francis S c a r p a l e g g i a @ScarpaleggiaLSL today to discuss advancing India-Canada parliamentary ties. meeting with Minister



Productive exchange on shared democratic values and future collaboration.

India looks forward to welcoming a delegation led by the Speaker at the 28th CSPOC next month," the Indian High Commission in Ottawa posted on X on Thursday. On Wednesday, Patnaik had a productive

of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Lena Metlege Diab which focussed on enhancing bilateral cooperation between India

and Canada. "Productive meeting held between High Commissioner @DineshKPatnaik and Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship

@LenaMetlegeDiab focused on enhancing bilateral cooperation between India and Canada. The discussions covered immigration processes, student-related issues, and a deeper understanding of our respective systems, emphasis on strengthening people-to-people ties," the post on X read.

### military presence. UN TO MOBILISE \$35 MILLION

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CYCLONE-HIT

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA Colombo

The United Nations is set to mobilise \$35 million grant for cyclone-hit Sri Lanka in the next four years as the island nation is unable to afford debts after the economic crisis and the debt default, a UN official said on Thursday.

The UN and humanitarian partners launched post Humanitarian Ditwah Priorities Plan (HPP) for Sri Lanka, which covers immediate life-saving assistance in education, food security, agriculture and nutrition, health, protection, shelter, non-food items, camp coordination, water, sanitation and hygiene and early recovery. Marc-Andre Franche, the UN Resident Coordinator, told reporters. At least 638 people have died, and 193 are missing as of Sunday, 6 am, due to the catastrophic floods and landslides caused by extreme weather conditions since November 16.

"Cyclone Ditwah has hit the poorest and the most vulnerable the hardest", Franche said. "The disaster has confounded the impact after Sri Lanka's economic crisis, where 25 per cent of the population is living in poverty", he added. The UN called on the international community to contribute towards HPP. The UN has already received \$9.5 million for the initiative with the support extended by Australia, Canada, the European Union Switzerland, the United Kingdom and the United States, Adaderana quoted Franche as saying.

He noted they are seeking to mobilise a further \$26 million in the coming months with a coordinated programme. "While initial contributions from bilateral partners and 4.5 million dollars from the UN Central Emergency Fund are enabling rapid assistance, significant gaps remain," he said. Franche said protection risks are increasing with crowded shelters and limited facilities.



#### Maduro Govt did not know where she was hiding: María

ASSOCIATED PRESS ■ Oslo

Opposition leader María Corina Machado said on Thursday that she doesn't believe the Venezuelan Government knew where she was hiding for most of this year, as she met Norway's leader a day after her daughter received the Nobel Peace Prize on her behalf. Machado arrived in Oslo hours after Wednesday's prize ceremony and made her first public appearance in 11 months in the early hours of Thursday, emerging from a hotel balcony and waving to an emotional crowd of supporters. She had been in hiding since January 9, when she was briefly detained after joining supporters in a protest in Caracas. Machado was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in October after mounting the most serious peaceful challenge in years to the authoritarian Government of Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro



#### **ICIMOD** transfers **HUC** to **Kathmandu University**

**ASSOCIATED PRESS** ■ Kathmandu

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

# Airstrike on hospital leaves 34 dead in Myanmar

ASSOCIATED PRESS Bangkok

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

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

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

Rakhine-based online media posted photos and videos showing damaged buildings and debris, including medical equipment. The hospital has been the main source of health care for people in Rakhine, where most hospitals have closed because of



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

Myanmar's ongoing civil war, said after doctors gathered in Mrauk-U to provide much-needed medical services. Mrauk-U, located 530 kilometres northwest of

Yangon, the country's largest city, was captured by the Arakan Army in February last year. The Arakan Army is the well-trained and wellarmed military wing of the Rakhine ethnic minority move- tant regional army headquarters

ment, which seeks autonomy from Myanmar's central Government. It began its offensive in Rakhine in November 2023 and has seized a strategically impor-

Rakhine, formerly known as Arakan, was the site of a brutal army counterinsurgency operation in 2017 that drove about 7,40,000 minority Rohingya Muslims to seek safety across the border in Bangladesh.

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

Myanmar's shadow National

Unity Government, established elected lawmakers who were barred from taking their seats in 2021, condemned the airstrike.

The organisation urged the international community to pressure the military to end its actions, take action against perpetrators and provide humanitarian assistance as soon as possible.

Myanmar has been in turmoil since the army took power in 2021, triggering widespread popular opposition. Many opponents of military rule have since taken up arms, and large parts of the country are now embroiled in conflict. The military Government has stepped up airstrikes ahead of planned December 28 elections against the armed pro-democracy People's Defence Force, which is closely associated with the National Unity Government. Opponents of military rule charge that the polls will be neither free not fair, and are mainly an effort to legitimise the army retaining power.

**Ex-PM Khaleda is responding** to treatment: Doctor



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA Dhaka

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

terms, she is responding to the

past," he added, noting that foreign doctors are involved and medical-board decisions are being taken in nighttime meetings. Hossain said the three-time prime minister is receiving care in the hospital's intensive care unit (ICU). He said while a transfer abroad remains a possibility, no date has been fixed, urging people not to give in to speculation. "The time has not yet come to give a definite date," the doctor said. A medical board led by cardiologist Shahabuddin and including specialists from Bangladesh, the UK, the US, and China, is supervising Zia's treatment. Her daughter-inlaw, Zubaida Rahman, a doctor by profession, has been attending the medical board's meetings in person since returning to Dhaka from

London on December 5.

#### Justice department can unseal **Epstein records: US Court**



**ASSOCIATED PRESS** 

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

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

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

Ghislaine Maxwell. The judge

Department asked the judges to lift secrecy orders after the Epstein Files Transparency Act, passed by Congress and signed into law by President

### Pragmatic engagement with Taliban: India at UN



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA United Nation

India told the UN Security Council that it calls for a "pragmatic engagement" with the Taliban as New Delhi underlined that a focus on only punitive measures will ensure a 'business as usual' approach.

Addressing the UN Security Council meeting on the Situation in Afghanistan on Wednesday, Permanent Representative to the UN Ambassador Parvathaneni Harish said India calls on the United Nations and the international community to adopt nuanced policy instruments that help bring sustainable benefits for the people of Afghanistan.

"India calls for a pragmatic engagement with the Taliban. A coherent policy of engagement should incentivise positive actions. A focus on only punitive measures will only ensure that a 'business as usual'

approach continues as we have been seeing now for the last four and a half years," Harish said. He reiterated India's com-

mitment to meeting the development needs of the people of Afghanistan. Harish said the recent

decision by the Indian Government to restore the status of Delhi's Technical Mission in Kabul to that of an Embassy "underscores this resolve.

"We will continue our engagements with all stakeholders to augment our contribution

Afghanistan's comprehensive development, humanitarian assistance, and capacity-building initiatives, in keeping with the priorities and aspirations of Afghan society," he said.

Afghan Foreign Minister Amir Khan Muttaqi was in New Delhi on a six-day trip in October, the first senior Taliban minister to visit India after the group seized power in Kabul in 2021. External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar held wideranging talks with Muttaqi, announcing the upgrading of Delhi's technical mission in Kabul to the status of an embassy and pledging to renew its development works in Afghanistan.

India had withdrawn its officials from its embassy in Kabul after the Taliban seized power in August 2021.

In June 2022, India reestablished its diplomatic presence in the Afghan capital by deploying a "technical team". India continues to closely monitor the security situation in Afghanistan, Harish said.

He emphasised that the international community must coordinate efforts towards ensuring that entities and individuals designated by the UN Security Council - the ISIL and Al Qaida and their affiliates, including the Lashkar e Tayyiba and Jaish-e-Mohammed and proxies of LeT such as the Resistance Front, along with those who facilitate their operations no longer indulge in cross border terrorism, a thinlyveiled reference to Pakistan.

# Bangladesh to hold elections on February 12

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Bangladesh will hold the general elections on February 12, its first since the ouster of the Sheikh Hasina-led Awami League Government in a violent student-led protest in August 2024.

"Voting will take place on February 12, 2026, from 7.30 am to 4.30 pm," Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) AMM Nasir Uddin said in an address to the nation on Thursday. A referendum will simulta-

neously be held on the voting day, February 12, to elicit public opinion on a series of reform proposals of the Chief Adviser Muhammad Yunusled National Consensus Commission. The announcement came a day after the CEC met President Mohammed Shahabuddin, who assured him "optimum support and cooperation" to conduct the general elections in a "free. fair and meaningful" manner.



schedule, the last date for submission of nomination papers is December 29, and scrutiny of nominations will be held from December 30 to January 4. The last date for withdrawal of candidature is January 20. The final list of candidates will be published on January 21.

on January 22 and continue until 7.30 am on February 10, Nasir said.

The last general elections were held in January 2024. Hasina won the elections marred by controversy and boycott by major parties.

Six months after Hasina's

street protests forced Hasina to leave for India on August 5, 2024. Three days later, Yunus took over as chief adviser of the interim Government.

Government. The violent

The interim Government has disbanded Hasina's

# According to the election Election campaigns will begin victory in the 2024 election, Awami League Winter storm rips through Gaza, exposing failure to deliver enough aid

Jerusalem

Rains drenched Gaza's tent camps and dropping temperatures chilled Palestinians huddling inside them Thursday as storm Byron descended on the war-battered territory, showing how two months of a ceasefire have failed to sufficiently address the spiralling humanitarian crisis there.

Children's sandaled feet disappeared under opaque brown water that flooded the camps. Trucks moved slowly to avoid sending waves of mud toward the tents.

Piles of garbage and sewage turned to waterfalls. "We have been drowned. I don't have clothes to wear and we have no mattresses left," said Um Salman Abu Qenas, a mother displaced from east of Khan Younis to a tent camp in Deir al-Balah. She said her family could not sleep the night before because of the water in the tent. Aid groups say not enough



Palestinians crossing a flooded street following heavy rain in Khan Younis, southern Gaza Strip

shelter aid is getting into Gaza during the truce. Figures recently released by Israel's military suggest it has not met the ceasefire stipulation of allowing 600 trucks of aid into Gaza a day, though Israel disputes that finding. "Cold, over-crowded, and unsanitary envi-

UN agency for Palestinian refugees, UNRWA, in a terse statement posted on X.

"This suffering could be prevented by unhindered humanitarian aid, including medical support and proper shelter."

ronments heighten the risk of Sabreen Qudeeh, also in the illness and infection," said the Deir al-Balah camp, said her family woke up to rain leaking from their tent's ceiling and water from the street soaking their mattresses.

"My little daughters were screaming and got shocked when they saw water on the floor," she said. Ahmad Abu Taha, a Palestinian man in the camp, said there was not a tent that escaped the flooding. "Conditions are very bad, we have old people, displaced, and sick people inside this

camp," he said. In Israel, heavy rains fell and flood warnings were in effect in several parts of the country but no major weather-related emergencies were reported as of midday.

The contrasting scenes with Gaza made clear how profoundly the Israel-Hamas war had damaged the territory, destroying the majority of homes. Gaza's population of around 2 million is almost entirely displaced and most people live in vast tent camps stretching for miles along the beach, exposed to the elements, without adequate flooding infrastructure and with cesspits dug near tents as toilets. The Palestinian Civil Defence, part of the Hamas-run Government, said that since the

storm began they have received more than 2,500 distress calls from citizens whose tents and shelters were damaged in all parts of the Gaza Strip. Aid groups say that Israel is not allowing enough aid into Gaza to begin rebuilding the territory after years of war. Under the agreement, Israel agreed to comply with aid stipulations from an earlier January 2025 truce, which specified that it allow 600 trucks of aid each day into Gaza and an agreed-upon number of temporary homes and tents. It maintains it is doing so, though Associated Press has found that some of its own figures call that into question. COGAT said December 9, without providing evidence, that it had "lately" let 260,000 tents and tarpaulins into Gaza and over 1,500 trucks

The Shelter Cluster, an international coalition of aid providers led by the Norwegian Refugee Council, sets the number lower.

of blankets and warm clothing.

#### **Bulgaria's Govt resigns** amid public protests

ASSOCIATED PRESS Sofia

Bulgaria's Government resigned on Thursday as mass protests gripped the country just weeks before it's due to join the eurozone. The resignation of the minority coalition, led by the centre-right GERB party, was announced minutes before parliament was scheduled to vote on a no-confidence motion tabled by the opposition over economic mismanagement and supported by growing public anger with widespread corruption. "Ahead of today's vote of no confidence, the Government is resigning," Prime Minister Rosen Zhelyazkov told reporters in parliament. "The decisions of the National Assembly are meaningful when they reflect the will of the people. We want to be where society expects us to be," Zhelyazkov said, referring to the anti-Government protests.



#### **Washington State under** emergency due to heavy rain

ASSOCIATED PRESS ■ Mount Vernon

Washington state was under a State of emergency Thursday from a barrage of torrential rain that has sent rivers flowing over their banks, caused a mudslide to crash down on a highway and trapped people in floodwaters. Tens of thousands of residents could face evacuation orders. Heavy rain continued to fall over parts of the state Thursday morning, prompting road closures, water rescues and suspension of Amtrak trains between Seattle and Vancouver. Rainfall intensity increased in several counties in Washington's Cascade Mountains, which had seen up to 6 inches of rain in a 24-hour period. One area, Snoqualmie Pass, picked up an additional 1.7 inches of rain in six hours, the National Weather Service said.



attended a preparatory meeting with Assam Chief Secretary Dr Ravi Kota and other senior officials of the Govt of Assam to review all arrangements at new terminal of Lokpriva Gopinath Bordoloi International Airport at Guwahati PM will inaugurate the new terminal

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

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE

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

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

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

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

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

#### participants. Like its previous edithrough creativity, innofrom vation and impact." Registrations and

# Ambani calls for tech, industry self-reliance

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

Its export controls on gallium, germanium and other strategic minerals coupled with supply-chain solar manufacturing, EV components and electronics have triggered a global push for diversification

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

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

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

must achieve self-reliance in critical technologies such as Al, new energy, space, biotechnology and life sci-

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

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

# BSES launches campaign to promote cleaner air – #CleanAirWithBSES

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE

New Delhi

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

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



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

Health and safety form a key pillar of the campaign narrative. Dedicated creatives advise citizens to plant trees, grow indoor plants, seal homes to prevent polluted air from entering and limit outdoor exposure during severe AQI periods. Other posts highlight the importance of regular vehicle servicing and promote the use of energy-efficient appliances, underscoring that informed choices can be as critical as long-term solutions.

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

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

## ICAI clears new global networking guidelines

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE

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

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

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

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

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

## From conflict to development: Govt grants financial assistance to former BLT cadres **PIONEER NEWS SERVICE** Guwahati

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

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

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



since 2020 the Government of Assam and the Government of India have signed five historic Memorandum

Settlements, including the NDFB Accord, Karbi Peace Accord, Adivasi Peace Accord, DNLA Agreement and ULFA Peace Agreement, paving the way for lasting peace in the region.

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

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

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

For the first time in many years, development is reachearlier Governments could not ensure," he said.

He recalled how Assam once had to revolt to defend its natural resources. "Forty years ago, Assam protested crude oil being taken out without benefiting the State. Today, under the NDA Government, pipelines are being built to bring oil into Assam to run our refineries. This turnaround reflects the vision of Prime Minister Narendra Modi who has ing people in a way that brought long awaited cor-

Baruah said that armed revolution only prolonged insecurity and delayed growth. "Today, under Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma, we finally have a leadership that delivers solutions where earlier Governments left gaps. Industries are coming,

rection to decades of imbal-

ance," he said.Minister

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

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

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

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

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

tions could only hope for." The programme was also attended by Director General of Police Harmeet Singh, Additional Chief Secretary Ajay Tewari and Special ADGP Hiren

# Himanta launches bicycle scheme to boost school attendance

Guwahat

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

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



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

Sarma pointed out that the bicycles address the challenge of long travel distances to secondary schools. This scheme complements other student-centric measures, such as free college enrolment and financial aid like the Nijut Moina scheme, stipends to girl students at the higher secondary, undergraduate and postgraduate levels. A similar scheme for boys is reportedly forthcoming. The Chief Minister affirmed the Government's relentless efforts over the past five years to improve the academic environment, citing the construction of new school buildings, colleges, medical and engineering institutions. He also

encouraged students to

utilise their mobile phones

for educational purposes,

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

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

# Power grid cyber security on shaky ground as critical upgrades stall

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE New Delhi

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

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

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

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



grids are frequently targeted by sophisticated cyber actors.

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

assisting in real-time grid monitoring. Cyber-security specialists warn that the power grid remains a high-value target for adversaries. They caution paredness during a time when global

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

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

Bembem, Ashalata named

in AFC All-Time Dream XI

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Bembem Devi and Ashalata

for the AFC Women's Asian

Cup All-Time Dream XI

football team in recognition

of their stellar perfor-

mances in the continental

Former captain Bembem,

the only Indian woman

footballer to have been

conferred the Padma Shri, is

one of the 12 midfielders

nominated for the Dream

Both Bembem and

Ashalata belong to Manipur,

the women's football pow-

"During an international

career spanning over two

decades, Bembem Devi was

the true leader of a gener-

ation of Indian women's

footballers," the Asian

Football Confederation

the Blue Tigresses during

their AFC Women's Asian

Cup appearance in 2003

and has been adjudged the

AIFF Women's Player of the

Year twice. India's third

most capped player has won several domestic and

international honours

laying the foundation for the rise of women's football

"She was the captain of

erhouse in the country.

New Delhi

showpiece.

XI team.

(AFC) said.

### **▼ BRIEFLY**

#### WOMEN'S FOOTBALL LEAGUE TO START ON DECEMBER 20



The Indian Women's League 2025-26 will kick off on December 20 at the National Centre of Excellence (NCoE) in Kolkata, with Sethu FC taking on Kickstart FC in the

The IWL will be played in two phases, with the first one stretching from December 20 to January 9, 2026, during which the eight teams will play 28 matches, the All India Football Federation (AIFF) said on Thursday.

The NCoE in Kolkata and the Kalyani Municipal Stadium in Kalyani are the two venues for the league, which is being held in two centralised venues this season.

The second phase of the IWL is set to be held from April 20 to May 10, 2026, thus allowing player availability for the senior and U20 women's national teams, which will participate in their respective AFC Women's Asian Cups categories next year.

# CHANDIGARH STADIUM HONOURS



World Cup winners Yuvraj Singh and Harmanpreet Kaur were on Thursday immortalized at the New Chandigarh Stadium with stands named in their honour. Yuvraj, player of the tournament for the 2011 ODI World Cup, and Harmanpreet, who recently captained India to their first ever Women's World Cup trophy, were surrounded friends, family and Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann on the occasion. Yuvraj was also seen giving a pep talk to the Indian team in a huddle before the second T20 International against South Africa. His longtime teammate Harbhajan Singh has a pavilion named after him at the stadium and Harmanpreet joined him on the other side of the sightscreen on Thursday.

# India names Sindhu, Lakshya for Asia Team Championships

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA New Delhi

Two-time Olympics medallist PV Sindhu, Lakshya Sen and the star pair of Satwiksairaj Rankireddy-Chirag Shetty will form the core of Indian squad to take part in the Badminton Asia Team Championships to be played in Qingdao, China from February 3-8.

India are defending champions in the women's category of the competition, whereas the men's team had won two bronze medals in the past.

"Selected on the basis of ranking, performance, and experience, the women's team will once again be led by former world champion and two-time Olympics medallist, PV Sindhu," the Badminton Association of India said in a release.

The world No 13 Sen will be the top ranked men's singles player in the squad which also features Kidambi Srikanth, HS Prannoy, US Open winner Ayush Shetty, and Tharun Mannepalli.

Satwik-Chirag will be lead the doubles unit along with Gopichand and Treesa Jolly Guwahati Masters runners- will lead India's charge in

up Sai Pratheek K and Pruthvi Krishnamurthy Roy, as well as Hariharan Amsakarunan. In the women's category, Sindhu will be supported by world

Malvika Bansod in singles, Syed Modi International champions Gayatri

junior championships silver

medalist Tanvi Sharma,

Unnati Hooda, Rakshita Sree

Santhosh Ramraj and

the doubles while Priya Konjengbam, Shruti Mishra, and Tanisha Crasto complete the squad.

BAI secretary Sanjay Mishra said, "Over the last few years, Indian teams have consistently been medal contenders at the Asian and World level and this squad has the right mix of form and experience and is capable of challenging for the crown in both cate-

ngbam, Shruti, Tanisha.

Men's: Lakshya Sen, Ayush Shetty, Kidambi, Prannoy HS, Tharun Mannepalli, Satwiksairaj Rankireddy, Chirag Shetty, Pruthvi Krishnamurthy, Sai Pratheek K, Hariharan Amsakarunan

Women's: PV Sindhu, Unnati Hooda, Tanvi, Rakshitha Sree Santhosh Ramraj, Malvika Bansod, Treesa Jolly, Gayatri Gopichand, Priya Konje-

> in the South Asian nation." India could not get past the group stage in the 2033 Women's Cup, after winning against Uzbekistan

eventual runners-up China (0-12) and Vietnam (1-2).

Ashalata captained the Indian football legends India in the 2022 edition of the Women's Asian Cup Devi have been nominated hosted by the country.

In a fateful tournament, several Indian players contracted COVID-19 despite being inside the bio-bubble. Hosts India played out a 0-0 draw against Iran in their first group match and then could not assemble team for the match against Chinese Taipei.

"Ashalata Devi is one of the Indian women's national team's most accomplished defenders. A commanding centre-back, she made her AFC Women's Asian Cup debut in 2022. In 2019, she was named the AIFF Women's Player of the Year in recognition of her consistency and leader-

ship," the AFC said. "Known for her strength aerial ability, and calmness under pressure, Ashalata has been instrumental in guiding and inspiring a new generation of Indian footballers.'

Ashalata is one of the 12 defenders nominated for the Dream XI.

Five goalkeepers and 12 forwards were also nominated for the Dream XI, for which voting opened on November 21 and will continue till January 10, 2026.

The 2026 edition of the Women's Asian Cup will be held in Australia from March 1-21





# Aston Villa faces Basel in Europa League

**ASSOCIATED PRESS** 

Basel

Boosted by a victory over the Premier League leader, in form Aston Villa meets Basel in the Europa League on Thursday.

After a slow start to the season, Villa bounced back to be currently on a sevengame winning streak in all competitions, including a 2-1 victory over Arsenal on

Beside a top-three place in the English top flight, the Villans are tied with Lyon and Midtjylland atop the standings of the second-tier European competition on 12 points with four wins from

thing is how we are building the team, how we are Emery said ahead of the



achieving in our process during each competition, "The most important our stronger mentality in

match at St. Jakob-Park in Basel. Emery has won the Europa League trophy four times during stints in charge of Sevilla Genk at home The top eight teams after eight games go directly to

Lyon hosts Dutch new-

comer Go Ahead Eagles

while Midtjylland faces

the round of 16 in March. At the other end of the 36team table, struggling Nice

will look to earn the first points against Braga. Teams placed ninth to 24th advance to the knockout playoffs in February.

other games, Nottingham Forest is away at Utrecht, Celtic and Roma meet in Glasgow and Maccabi Tel Aviv travels to Stuttgart.

Conference League, Crystal Palace plays Shelbourne in Dublin and Fiorentina hosts Dynamo Kyiv.

#### **REAL MADRID** TRIO BANNED FOR 2 MATCHES FOR REFEREE

MISCONDUCT

**ASSOCIATED PRESS** 

Real Madrid players Dani Carvajal, Álvaro Carreras and Endrick were suspended for two games for their behavior toward the refereeing crew in a Spanish league match last weekend.

Defender Carreras was sent off in stoppage time in Madrid's 2-0 home loss against Celta Vigo, a match in which the hosts finished with nine men as Fran García had already been shown a red card. Forward Endrick, an unused substitute, was sent off for complaining from the bench. Carvajal, who was on the bench but was not dressed for the game because of an injury, was accused of disrespecting the referees in the tunnel after the game at the Santiago Bernabeu stadium. García, sent off with two yellow cards, was handed

### Salmon makes Arsenal debut in Champions League

Marli Salmon became the sixth youngest player to feature in the Champions League when brought on as a late substitute in Arsenal's 3-0 win at Club Brugge.

Salmon is 16 years, 103 days and came on for Ben White at Jan Breydelstadion on Wednesday, with manager Mikel Arteta saying: "We knew that at some point we had to use him.'

"He's so young, 16 still, and he's playing in the Champions League," Arteta said.

But Salmon is not even the youngest player that Arsenal has fielded this season. That distinction goes to

Max Dowman, who was 15 years, 308 days when he entered as a second-half substitute against Slavia Prague last month.

According to UEFA, Salmon is the third player 16 or younger that Arsenal has fielded in the Champions League after perform.'



Dowman and former midfielder Jack Wilshere.

"That's why we put so much work and everybody in the academy puts (in) so much enthusiasm and work," said Arteta. "And for a long time, you have to prepare those talents. So, thanks to them, because when we need them, they are there, they are ready to

Dowman is the voungest player ever to play in European club soccer's top competition — taking that record from Youssoufa

Moukoko, who was 16

years, 18 days when he

Dortmund in 2020. Barcelona superstar Lamine Yamal is the third

the age of 16 years, 68 days in 2023.

Wearing No. 89, Salmon is described by Arsenal as a gifted, ball-playing center back. He first joined the club's academy playing for the Under-11 team.

appeared for Borussia His first Champions League appearance came before he's even played a youngest, having made his senior domestic league or debut in the competition at cup game for Arsenal.

# Alonso feels Real Madrid will overcome rough patch

**ASSOCIATED PRESS** Madrid

Xabi Alonso thanked his players for their attitude after another defeat and said he was positive Real Madrid would overcome its slump soon.

Madrid lost 2-1 to Manchester City in the Champions League on Wednesday, remaining with only two wins in its last eight matches in all competitions.

"The players gave it everything they had, and I have nothing to criticize today. I really value their attitude. We have to keep going," Alonso said. "Right now the results aren't as good as we'd like.

"We're critical, we demand a lot of ourselves, and we understand the fans. We have to keep working hard. We believe we'll get through this because everything passes, and I'm convinced we can



The result increased criticism against Alonso and prompted some jeers by the crowd at the Santiago Bernabeu stadium.

"We can understand why they whistle, and we have to accept it as normal because the demands here are so high," Alonso said. "We want to turn things around, improve our mental and physical condition, and get the injured players back. There's still a long way to go." Spanish

media has been reporting there's a split between Alonso and part of the squad, but players were quick to come out support-

ing him after the defeat. Goalkeeper Thibaut Courtois and defender Raúl Asencio were among those saying the team was united and everyone was behind Alonso. Rodrygo hugged Alonso by the sideline after scoring and admitted it was to show that the players are together with the coach.

# a one-game suspension.

# Bastar Olympic opens with 3,500 participants; new team comprises surrendered Naxalites

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA Jagdalpur (Chhattisgarh)

Chhattisgarh Chief Minister Vishnu Deo Sai on Thursday asserted that his government is committed to taking development to every village in the Bastar division, which he said is steadily moving towards peace,

harmony and prosperity. Addressing the 'Bastar Olympic 2025' at Indira Priyadarshini Stadium in Jagdalpur, the headquarters of Bastar district, he said the massive participation of youth, including the surrendered Naxalites and victims of Maoist violence, has made the event historic.

Indian boxing legend MC Mary Kom was also present on the occasion.

Sai said the government is determined to connect the youth from tribal-dominated Bastar with the mainstream and ensure their active contribution to the region's development.

Winners of the Bastar Olympic would become role models and would be provided advanced training and opportunities to compete at international levels, he said.

The government will provide better opportunities and training to the youth of Bastar, preparing



Chhattisgarh CM Vishnu Deo Sai, back right, Deputy CM Arun Sao, center, Olympic medalist and Padma Vibhushan awardee boxer Mary Kom, back second left, Mayor Sanjay Pandey, left, and others holding the torch during the opening ceremony of Bastar Olympics at Jagdalpur in Bastar district Chhattisgarh

them for global competitions, said Sai.

Those winning gold, silver, and bronze medals in the international Olympic Games will be awarded honorariums of ₹3 crore, ₹2 crore, and ₹1 crore, respec-

tively, he said. Deputy CM Vijay Sharma, who also holds the Home portfolio, called the Bastar Olympic an important initiative to integrate youth from interior regions into the mainstream.

The government has been encouraging the youth from the remote areas of Bastar by providing them with more opportunities, and this initiative will continue in an even more robust form in the future, he

Mary Kom met the participants and encouraged them.

State's Sports and Youth Welfare Director Tanuja Salam said around 3,500 athletes from all seven districts of Bastar division and 761 participants from the

'Nua Bat' team are competing in the division-level events (finals) in Bastar Olympic this year.

The Nua Bat (a term in local Halbi dialect which means a 'new path') team comprises surrendered Naxalites and victims of Maoist violence as particiLast year, the event saw

1.65 lakh participants in division, district and block levels. The number has surged to over 3.92 lakh, including more than 2.27 lakh women, this year, she The final stage of the

Bastar Olympic, featuring

11 sporting disciplines, including athletics, archery, badminton, football, karate, kabaddi, kho-kho, volleyball and tug of war, will be held from December 11 to 13. Union Home Minister

Amit Shah will attend the closing ceremony on December 13, officials

# SA beat India by 51 runs in second T20I

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA Mullanpur

The lean run of Shubman Gill and Suryakumar Yadav was extended as Indian batters stumbled on a good batting surface to lose the second T20 against South Africa by 51 runs here on Thursday.

Quinton de Kock made an effortless 90 of 46 balls, pushing South Africa to a challenging 213 for four after India opted to field.

India were expected to chase down the steep target but South Africa removed Indian trio of Abhishek Sharma (17), Gill (0) and Suryakumar Yadav (5) inside the powerplay to put the hosts on the backfoot. India were eventually bowled out for 162 in 19.1 overs with Tilak Varma (62 off 34) playing a lone hand..

The five match series now stands at 1-1 with the third match scheduled in Dharamsala on December 14. The local crowd was expecting their home heroes. Gill and Abhishek, to fire but it was not to be. Yet to realise his potential in the shortest format, vice-captain Gill, facing his very first ball, got a beauty from Lungi Ngidi that seamed away from length to take a thick outside edge.



South Africa's players celebrating the wicket of India's Shubman Gill during the second T20 International cricket match of a series between India and South Africa in New Chandigarh

behind in the following over from Marco Jansen. Next to depart was skipper Suryakumar who too got a faint edge after Jansen angled it away from the India skipper.

Batting at three, Axar Patel (21 off 21) was pouched at cover with Reeza Hendricks just about managing to have his fingers under the ball. From thereon, Tilak batted at Abhshek was caught a high tempo but lack of

partnerships and soaring run rate pushed the game out of India's reach..

Earlier, de Kock entertained the crowd with his remarkable strokeplay.

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

square leg region.

De Kock, who recently reversed his ODI retirement and was not sure about his T20 future post the World Cup last year, is back with a renewed purpose and remains on top of his game.

An innings like this just less than a week before the mini auction will also create the buzz among the franchises, who might indulge in a bidding war for the multi-

skilled cricketer.

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

# Two Indian origin players named in Australia U-19 World Cup squad

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA Melbourne

Two Indian origin players — Aryan Sharma and John James — have been named in Australia's 15-member squad for the men's U-19 World Cup scheduled to be held in Namibia and Zimbabwe from January 15 to February 6.

Aryan, a handy batter and slow left-arm spinner, and James, a right-arm medium pace all-rounder, were both part of the squad that played against India in the youth Tests and one-dayers in September.

Besides cricketers of Indian heritage, the squad features two players of Sri Lankan (Naden Cooray and Nitesh Samuel) and one of Chinese Origin (Alex Lee Young).

Australia enters the tournament as defending champions, with Oliver Peake as captain.

"We're delighted to announce a strong and wellbalanced squad for the ICC Under-19 World Cup. Our focus has been on selecting a group with complementary skill sets that provide the best chance of success in tournament," head coach Tim Nielsen said in a release.

"The players named have impressed with their performances during the U19 series against India in September and at the recent National

U19 Championship in Perth. "It's an exciting group, some have already experienced senior training environments, while others are progressing rapidly through our pathway.

Australia is placed in Group A alongside Ireland, Japan, and Sri Lanka. The team will reach Namibia in early

matches from January 9-14. "The World Cup is a fantastic opportunity for these young cricketers to showcase their talent and test

themselves against the best

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

# WTC finals now the pinnacle of Test cricket: ICC CEO Sanjog

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA Mumbai

The three World Test Championship (WTC) finals held so far have "definitely delivered" on the aim of creating a pinnacle event for the traditional format of the game, said ICC CEO Sanjog Gupta on Thursday.

New Zealand, Australia and South Africa have each won the WTC once with India finishing runners-up twice. Gupta highlighted that a packed Lord's during the previous edition's final between Australia and South Africa, despite the absence of India and hosts England, was a landmark moment for the global governing body."What the World Test Championship attempts to do, beyond just being a five-plus-one-day event where the two best teams compete for the greatest prize in the format, is to give context to the two years of Test cricket that Championship final was precedes that final," Gupta said during the announcement of ICC's global partnership with AB InBev India (Budweiser 0.0) here.

"That was the endeavour with which the World Test Championship was



seen with three editions past us now, is that the World Test Championship final has definitely delivered on the goal of providing a pinnacle event for Test

He said the turnout at Lord's showed that the WTC final has stirred interest among fans, who now look forward to it just as they do with other flagship events.

ine last world lest played between Australia and South Africa in England, and Lord's was packed," he

"India was not playing, England was not playing, (but) Australia was taking on South Africa, and Lord's was launched and what we've packed, which means that

we now have a pinnacle event in Test cricket which the world waits for, or the world that enjoys Test cricket waits for.

Gupta added that the growing anticipation among fans in the months leading up to the final also strengthens the broader storytelling around Test cricket.

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

# Suryavanshi, Mhatre to head India's U-19 Asia Cup

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

India's Asia Cup U-19 campaign will be fronted by Gen Z batting sensations Vaibhav Suryavanshi and Ayush Mhatre, but equal focus would be on whether the BCCI allows the youngsters to exchange handshakes with their Pakistani counterparts, in what would be construed as maintaining sporting civility at the junior level. While the India U-19 side,

under the able leadership of dashing Mumbai and CSK opener Mhatre start its campaign against UAE on Friday, it is the match against Pakistan on Sunday that will certainly gain the most traction in the junior continental championship seen as a dress rehearsal for the World Cup early next year. In the senior men's Asia

Cup, followed by the Women's ODI World Cup and Rising Stars Asia Cup T20 tournament, Indian players nave refused to snake nands with Pakistani players as a mark of solidarity with the Indian Army and victims of the Pahalgam terror attack.However, when it comes to the U-19 cricketers, it is believed that even the ICC wants politics to be kept away from it and the normal protocol of sports-



to be informed in advance. "We know for a fact that ICC doesn't want politics to take front seat when it comes to junior cricket. So it is a case of both bad optics and public sentiment," a BCCI official in the know of things told PTI on the condition of anonymity.

then match referee will have

As far as the tournament is concerned, India and Pakistan are almost sure to qualify for the semi-finals as



the top two teams from group A. Apart from India and Pakistan, the other two sides are Malaysia and UAE, and they don't have a lot of experience of playing 50 over cricket. Both Suryavanshi and

skipper Mhatre are coming into the tournament following a great run of form in the ongoing Syed Mushtaq Ali Trophy, while Mhatre played a massive role in the group league stages with back-toback centuries and a fifty, Survayanshi became the youngest player in SMAT history to hit a century, against Maharashtra.

In India's squad of 15, these are two boys, who have played more than 30

the three formats and cumulatively scored nine centuries. That, in fact, is the most number of senior level centuries when all the other seven teams are combined and it does make India the runaway favourites in the

India U19 squad for Asia **Cup:** Ayusn Mnatre (C) Vaibhav Sooryavanshi, Vihaan Malhotra (vc), Vedant Trivedi, Abhigyan Kundu (wk), Harvansh Singh (wk), Yuvraj Gohil, Kanishk Chouhan, Khilan A. Patel, Naman Pushpak, D. Deepesh, Henil Patel, Kishan Kumar Singh, Udhav Mohan, Aaron George.

junior continental champi-

#### **CAN'T PLAY AROUND WITH** ROLES, ABD **RESPONDS TO GAMBHIR**

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA New Delhi

Former South Africa captain AB de Villiers said he agrees "to a certain extent" with India head coach Gautam Gambhir's belief that ODI batting orders are "overrated", but stressed the need for teams to balance flexibility with clearly defined roles.

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

### Whatever is good for cricket, BCCI should do it: Kapil on split coaching

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

Former India captain Kapil Dev on Thursday steered clear of endorsing the idea of split coaches after the team's recent 0-2 Test series loss to South Africa at home, saying the BCCI should adopt whatever coaching structure best serves Indian cricket.

coaches for red-ball and white-ball formats could be an answer to end India's recent run of reverses in Tests at home, Kapil said: "I don't know... I can't answer that. You have to really work something like that in your mind and say what should happen. Whatever is good for cricket, I think they should do it.'

Asked whether separate

Kapil, the 1983 World Cup-winning captain, rejected the notion that it is tougher to be an athlete in the social-media era during than his playing days.

"No, it's always the same. It was difficult then, it is difficult now. It was easy then and it is easy now. Your mindset is more important," he said.

On whether the growing financial pull of T20 leagues has overshadowed national representation,



Kapil said each player weighs priorities different-"Everybody loves money, but some players feel that is very important. I still feel playing for India is more important than playing IPL. But everybody is individual, they have their own thought process. Good luck to them." Asked if he preferred any particular format. Kapil said he simply enjoys the game in all its forms. "I just love cricket. Doesn't matter even two balls cricket or 100 balls or 100 overs or 10 overs... Cricket is cricket. See golf is golf, whatever

format you play, end of the day you enjoy golf." He also offered a lighthearted remark on Virat Kohli and Rohit Sharma when asked about their

performances. "Good luck, they should play golf also," quipped Kapil, who is currently the president of Professional Golf Tour of India (PGTI).

Kapil was speaking at the launch of '72 The League', a city-based golf event announced by the PGTI and scheduled for next year. The former skipper said India needs golfers who can win big global titles to trigger a mass shift in how the sport is perceived nationally. "We have to produce world champions.

Once they go and win a European Cup or US Cup, or win at the Olympics, it will change the entire scenario," he said. On what could be golf's "1983 moment", Kapil said: 'These boys go and win a European Cup or US Open, something like that... That will be the cherry on the cake.

"At the Olympics we just missed a medal. When only a handful of people are playing in our country and still we reached there, that gives hope. One day our kids will go and win Olympics or US Cup. In tennis, if you win Wimbledon, it makes a difference; the same is

By virtue of an Affidavit No. 2726. Dt. 10.12.2025 sworn before the Notary Public Jajpur Road, Jajpur, I, SK ZABIR ALI, S/o-SK SAYED Aadhaar At-Chan 495928318280.

P.O-Brahmabarada dapur, P.S- Dharmasala, Dt. Jajpur Odisha declare that my name had been wrongly mentioned in my Aadhaar Card as "SK JAVIR", S/o-SK SAYED. But my Correct name is SK ZABIR ALI, S/o- SK SAYED ALI which has mentioned on my Resi-Certificate & Class-VII School Certificate For rectification of my name & my Father's name in the above said Aadhaar Card, I made this Affidavit

- SK SAYED AL

CAD-2641

### **PUBLIC NOTICE**

I, Mohammad Imran S/o- Late Abadul Gafar, R/o - Vill/Po/Ps-Boden, Dist- Nuapada Odisha, Pin- 766111, declare by this affidavit No-1703, that the original ROR vide Khata No.386/128 Mouza/Ps

Boden, Dist-Nuapada, was lost/misplaced in between my residence and SBI, Boden on dt-01/12/2025, that after several attempt the same was not traceable and if the property ROR was not found in 15 days, the property ROR certified copy will be obtained from the Tahsil office, which will be considered as the origina document. Anybody, who finds it requested to contact Hrsushikesh Biswal (Advocate) 7749957783

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Renovation of Officers' Club, HHEP, Burla	1175919/-	Rs. 7080/- (Rs. 6000 /- + GST 18%)	11800/-	'D & C'
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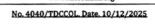
Receipt of tender paper: 23.12.2025 upto 03.00PM

Date & time of opening of tender: 23.12.2025 at 04.00PM Further details can be seen from  $\underline{\text{https://tendersodisha.gov.in}} \ / \ \underline{\text{www.ohpcltd.com}}$ 

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OIPR-26005/11/0013/2526

**Managing Director** INVITATIONS FOR BIDS (IFB)



**ODISHA STATE CASHEW DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION LIMITED** KAJUBHAWAN, GHATIKIA BHUBANESWAR

e- Procurement Notice

Bid Identification Number: OSCDC- 06 of 2025-26

Tender Call Notice No: 25'() Date: 11-12-75 .2025

Name of the work:

1. Construction of Administrative-cum-Labourshed Building at Nursery, Rambha, Ganjam.
2. Construction of C.C. Road at Kathagada Nursery, Rambha, Ganjam.
3. Installation of Bore Well & Construction of Water Sump at Total No. of Projects: Varies from Rs.6.84 lakh to Rs. 39.73 lakh(Excluding GST) For the work at sl.no. 1- "C" & "B" Class and Estimated cost of projects: for the works at sl.no. 2 & 3 -"D"& "C" Class (of Odisha PWD) or equivalent Class of other licensing authorities. Period of Completion : Other details: : As per TCN

Procurement Officer	Bid Identification Number		of Tender r bidding To	Submission of Original Documents	Date & Place of Opening of tender
1	2	3	4	5	6
MANAGING DIRECTOR, OSCDC LTD BHUBANESWAR	OSCDC- 06 of 2025-26	12.12.2025 from 11.00 A.M.	26.12.2025 up to	During office hours of working days from dt 15.12.2025 from 11.00AM to 29.12.2025 upto 05.00 PM in the Office of Executive Engineer, OSCDC, Kajubhawan, Bhubaneswar, 751029 (To be dropped in the sealed Box)	Dt. 30.12.2025 at 11.30 AM in the conference hall, OSCDC, Kajubhawan, Bhubaneswar 751029

Further details can be seen from the website www.tendersodisha.gov.in Managing Director