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PIONEER IN SHORT

INDIA REACHES SQUASH WORLD CUP FINAL

The hosts produced a fearless, all-round performance on Saturday, sweeping aside two-time champions Egypt 3-0 to storm into their first-ever Squash World Cup final. Seeded second, India will now face Hong Kong China in the title clash at Express Avenue Mall, after Hong Kong edged past Japan in the other semifinal. India set the tone early. National champion Velavan Senthilkumar blitzed past Ibrahim Elkabbani 7-1, 7-3, 7-6 to hand the hosts a flying start. The momentum only grew when India's top-ranked women's player, Anahat Singh, dug deep in a gritty five-game battle to beat Nour Heikal and double the lead. With Egypt wobbling, Abhay Singh sealed the deal. The Asian Games bronze medallist outlasted Adam Hawal in a tense four-game contest to complete the clean sweep and send the home crowd into raptures. The result marked a landmark moment for Indian squash. Having settled for bronze in 2023, this is the nation's best-ever showing at the World Cup. Joshna Chinappa's scheduled match became academic once India wrapped up the tie.

the Bystander



HIMANTA INVITES VP RADHAKRISHNAN

Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma paid a courtesy call on the Vice President of India, CP Radhakrishnan, in the national Capital on Sunday. During the meeting at the Vice President's enclave, Chief Minister Sarma personally congratulated Radhakrishnan on his assumption of the august office of the Vice President of India. The Chief Minister also extended a formal invitation to the Vice President to visit Assam and witness the state's transformation and developmental progress achieved in recent years.

FULL REPORT ON P6

US ENVOYS ARRIVE IN BERLIN

US envoys arrived in Berlin on Sunday morning for another round of talks intended to secure a deal to end the war in Ukraine. US President Donald Trump's special envoy Steve Witkoff and Trump's son-in-law Jared Kushner were spotted in downtown Berlin by a photographer for the German news agency. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said that Ukrainian, US and European officials will hold a series of meetings in Berlin in the coming days. "Most importantly, I will be meeting with envoys of President Trump, and there will also be meetings with our European partners, with many leaders, concerning the foundation of peace — a political agreement to end the war," Zelenskyy said in an address to the nation late Saturday. Washington has tried for months to navigate the demands of each side as Trump presses for a swift end to Russia's war and grows increasingly exasperated by delays. The search for possible compromises has run into major obstacles, including control of Ukraine's eastern Donetsk region, which is mostly occupied by Russian forces, and security guarantees for Ukraine.

FULL REPORT ON P12

Nitin Nabin to succeed Nadda



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi/Lucknow/Patna

In a surprising move, the ruling BJP is known for, the party on Sunday appointed Bihar Minister Nitin Nabin as the party's national working president. The BJP Parliamentary board picked Nabin for the post until the process of the

NABIN IS LIKELY TO SUCCEED INCUMBENT BJP CHIEF JP NADDA AND IS ONE OF THE YOUNGEST LEADERS TO OCCUPY THE POST

new full-time party chief is done to replace incumbent Union Minister JP Nadda. Similarly party also announced Union Minister of State for Finance Pankaj Chaudhary's name as the

new president of the BJP's Uttar Pradesh unit, who replaced Bhupendra Chaudhary. Party sources said Nabin was rewarded for exuding greater confidence as the

I am confident that his energy and dedication will strengthen our Party in the times to come. Congratulations to him on becoming the BJP National Working President

— PRIME MINISTER NARENDRA MODI

person in charge of the Chhattisgarh BJP Assembly elections. He had consistently maintained to the top leadership that the party would sweep the Assembly polls.

"Bharatiya Janata Party's parliamentary board has appointed Nitin Nabin, a minister in the Bihar Government, the BJP national working president with immediate effect," BJP national general secretary Arun Singh said in a notification.

Nabin, 45, who belongs to the Kayastha community, is likely to succeed incumbent BJP chief JP Nadda and is one of the youngest leaders to occupy the post.

Delhi-NCR chokes, GRAP Stage IV curbs imposed

ABHINAV KUMAR JHA
■ New Delhi

Acute air pollution across the National Capital Region (NCR) on Sunday compelled authorities to order stricter emergency measures, sharply impacting school schedules, office attendance and public activities as Delhi recorded its worst air quality of the season.

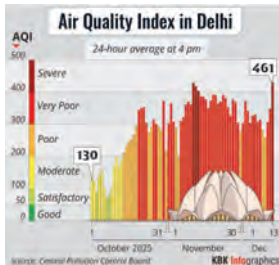
With the Air Quality Index (AQI) touches 461 firmly in the "severe" category, the Commission for Air Quality Management (CAQM) put into operation the toughest curbs under the Graded Response Action Plan (GRAP), including limits on mobility, construction, outdoor activities and physical presence in institutions.

Classes in schools across Delhi and adjoining NCR districts, including Noida and Ghaziabad, were revised with effect from Monday, 15 December, due to the aggravating pollution. As stated by a circular issued by district administrations, classes



People have tea at a roadside stall during a cold and smoggy winter morning in New Delhi

PTI



from pre-nursery to class V would continue fully online. The classes for VI to IX and XI shall be hybrid, meaning students can attend classes either physically or online, which is to be decided by the

parents of the students concerned, based on the school facilities available.

The school authorities explained that the school timings from 7.50 am to 1.50 pm would remain the same, and the school buses would ply as usual.

Classes for class X and class XII would continue in physical mode owing to the requirement for board examinations. Flexibility has been given to parents by allowing them to opt for online classes, a measure to decrease children's toxic air exposure.

Two gunmen kill 11 at Sydney Jewish event

ASSOCIATED PRESS ■ Sydney

Two gunmen shot dead at least 11 people on Sunday during a Jewish holiday celebration at Sydney's Bondi Beach, Australian authorities said, declaring it a terrorist attack. One gunman was fatally shot by police, and the second was arrested.

The suspect was in critical condition, authorities said. At least 29 people were confirmed wounded, including two police officers, said Mal Lanyon, the police commissioner for New South Wales.

The massacre at one of Australia's most popular and iconic beaches followed a wave of antisemitic attacks that have roiled the country over the past year, although the authorities didn't suggest those episodes and Sunday's shooting were connected. They said one of the gunmen was known to the security

PM MODI CONDEMNS ATTACK

Prime Minister Narendra Modi has strongly condemned the terrorist attack at Bondi Beach in Australia, targeting people celebrating the Jewish festival of Hanukkah. He expressed deep shock and extended condolences to the families of the victims, stating that India stands in solidarity with Australia in this hour of grief.

services, but that there had been no specific threat.

Prime Minister Anthony Albanese declared it "an act of evil, antisemitism, terrorism that has struck the heart of our nation."

"This attack was designed to target Sydney's Jewish community," the State's Premier Chris Minns said.

CONTINUED ON ► P4



Emergency workers transport a person on a stretcher after a reported shooting at Bondi Beach in Sydney

PTI

Arrests rise to 15

RAJEEV RATHAN ■ Bhubaneswar

Police on Sunday arrested six more persons in connection with the recent violent clash in the MV-26 area of Malkangiri district taking the total number of arrests to 15, officials said.

Earlier, nine persons had been taken into custody as part of the ongoing investigation. Authorities said the fresh

arrests were made based on evidence gathered during sustained inquiries into the incident.

Meanwhile, the district administration said the overall situation in the violence-affected areas is gradually improving with normal life slowly returning. However, security arrangements continue to remain in place at sensitive locations to prevent any recurrence of unrest.

Despite the improvement on the ground, the internet suspension across the district has been extended till 12 noon on Monday as a precautionary measure. The district Collector said the decision was taken to curb the spread of rumours and misinformation that could potentially disturb law and order.

Prohibitory orders imposed under Section 163 of the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha

Sanhita (BNSS) have been withdrawn following a review by the administration, bringing partial relief to residents who had been facing restrictions on movement.

The district administration has assessed the total damage caused during the violence at around Rs 3.80 crore with significant losses reported to both public and private property. Officials confirmed that essential services, including

electricity and drinking water supply, which were disrupted during the unrest, have now been fully restored.

Police personnel remain deployed across vulnerable pockets, and the situation is being closely monitored. The administration has appealed to the public to maintain peace and cooperate with law enforcement agencies to ensure complete restoration of normalcy in the district.

In Puri

Water seepage reported from Meghanad Pacheri

PNS ■ Puri

Water seepage has once again been reported from the Meghanad Pacheri, the outer protective wall of the Shree Jagannath Temple in Puri raising concerns over the maintenance of the historic structure.

According to sources, water has been continuously oozing from the Meghanad Pacheri near the Snana Mandap area of the temple.

Moss growth has also been noticed on the wall indicating prolonged moisture accumulation. The seepage has been

occurring in a steady flow sparking apprehension among devotees and servants.

A similar incident had been reported in 2024, following which the temple administration took note of the issue after it was highlighted. The administration swung into action and started cleaning the moss patches.

However, despite the corrective measures last year, water seepage has resurfaced at the same location this year.

The Meghanada Pacheri serves as a crucial protective



barrier of the temple, and repeated water seepage has raised questions about drainage, structural upkeep and water management around the temple complex.

Not just one or two years, the temple administration has failed miserably to stop the water leakage since 2021. Despite repeated demands for immediate repair and restoration work, the administration has yet to come up with a permanent solution for the protection of the gigantic boundary wall surrounding the 12th-century shrine.

Centre seeks more women, SC/ST officers in key positions

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

For an adequate representation of women and SC, ST in the Government machinery, the Centre has asked States to nominate women officers and those from the Scheduled Caste (SC) and Scheduled Tribe (ST) for appointment in key posts on central deputation.

In a communique issued to the chief secretaries of all State Governments, the Personnel Ministry sought nominations of only those officers who are not likely to be

recalled by them on the grounds of having availed promotion for at least two years.

The sponsored officers are to be appointed on deputation to the posts under the Central Staffing Scheme (CSS) and for the posts of Chief Vigilance Officers (CVOs) in Central Public Sector Enterprises (CPSes) and other central Government organisations. CVOs act as a distant arm of the Central Vigilance Commission to check corruption in Government departments.

"Sufficient names of women and SC and ST Officers may be



sponsored so that adequate representation can be provided to them," read the communique dated December 10. Details of any inquiry/complaints/proceedings which may affect the vigilance status of the applicant may also be forwarded, it said.

In the letter, the Ministry said that such movement of officers from the States to the Centre is crucial for building up the capabilities and contributing towards developing State perspectives in the Government of India or national perspective in the State at the decision-making levels.

"I would also like to draw your attention to the Central Deputation Reserve (CDR) data for IAS officers, which determines the extent to which officers could be sent on deputation to the Government. Proper cadre management requires an adequate number of officers to be deputed to the Centre under the Central Staffing Scheme," it said.

This will also ensure that every eligible officer has an opportunity to serve at the Centre at least once at the middle management level, the communique said.

In city

Late night raids conducted on 155 bars, pubs

2 held for attacking excise official

RAJEEV RATHAN ■ Bhubaneswar

In an enforcement drive by the Excise Department on Saturday late night, as many as 155 bars, pubs, clubs and beer parlours were raided across Bhubaneswar.

During the raids, an excise officer was allegedly assaulted

at a bar under the Chandrasekharpur police station. Police detained two persons in this connection.

The raids were carried out following inputs that several establishments were operating beyond permitted hours and violating licensing and safety norms.

During an inspection at a bar at Chandrasekharpur, a group of persons opposed the raid and attacked excise per-

sonnel despite they being in uniform. The inspection was reportedly obstructed before the situation escalated into a physical assault.

A complaint was subsequently lodged at the Chandrasekharpur police station. Police said that two persons have been detained and questioned in connection with the incident while efforts were underway to identify others who may have been involved.

The inspections focused on compliance with operating hours, licence conditions and other mandatory provisions under excise regulations. Several outlets were found to be operating late into the night and violating prescribed norms.

The intensified checks follow recent safety concerns after a major fire broke out at a bar in the Satya Vihar area on Friday morning.

BJP, Cong target Naveen over MLA pay hike

Call it political drama

RAJEEV RATHAN ■ Bhubaneswar

The BJP and the Congress on Sunday launched sharp attacks on Leader of Opposition (LoP) and BJD president Naveen Patnaik over his recent letter to the Chief Minister, in which he stated that he would not accept the hiked salary and allowances for his position.

Both parties accused Patnaik of indulging in 'political drama' instead of raising objections at the appropriate forum.

BJP leader Jayanarayan

Mishra said Patnaik, who remained in power for 24 years and is considered a wealthy leader, could have taken such a decision while he was the Chief Minister. Mishra recalled that Biju Patnaik had once drawn a token salary of one rupee and questioned why a similar precedent was not set earlier.

"He (Naveen Patnaik) should mention how long his family ruled the State. Naveenbabu ruled for 24 years, and what he has done in those 24 years is known well to the people of Odisha. This is just a drama, political theatrics," Mishra said.

Deputy CM Kanak Vardhan Singh Deo also questioned why Patnaik neither participated in the Assembly discussion nor raised any objections when the issue was debated. The Congress urged Patnaik to stop what it termed 'political theatrics' and accept the current government's decision.

"When the Bill on salary hike was tabled in the Assembly, BJD members, including the party Chief Whip, were present and completely supported it. Now, Naveen Patnaik wants to do a political stunt and has opposed the hike and refused to accept his

increased pay," Congress MLA Pabitra Saunta stated.

Meanwhile, Kendrapada BJD MLA Ganeshwar Behera has supported the salary hike stating that Naveen Patnaik had not asked party legislators to forgo their pay. He reaffirmed that the government's decision was logical.

"Former Chief Minister (Patnaik) has not instructed BJD MLA Ganeshwar Behera has supported the salary hike stating that Naveen Patnaik had not asked party legislators to forgo their pay. He reaffirmed that the government's decision was logical. Secondly, the party had demanded a salary hike and also supported the Bill in the House. Hence, opposing such a decision does not arise," the Behera remarked.

'Execute Kutumba Pension scheme for freedom fighters'

Utkal Sangrami Samiti urges CM

KAMAL LOCHAN DIXIT ■ Kakatpur

The unmatched contribution of India's freedom fighters whose valour, sacrifice and unwavering resolve paved the way for the nation's independence continues to inspire generations. Yet, despite 77 years of freedom many freedom fighters, underground activists and their descendants remain deprived of proper government recognition and assistance.

President, Utkal Sangrami Smruti Samiti said this in a Press statement here.

According to Pattanaik, Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi had announced the Mukhyamantri Kutumba Pension Yojana on August 9, 2024, during the Kranti Diwas celebrations with the objective of

honouring the families of freedom fighters. However, 16 months after the announcement, the scheme reportedly remains stalled with no budgetary allocation or administrative progress, a situation he described as painful and disappointing.

He remarked that while the State government has been introducing several landmark initiatives to protect Odia identity and promote Odisha's rich heritage, culture and traditions, the delay in implementing the Kutumba Pension Scheme has become a major concern among the families of freedom fighters.

Pattanaik urged the Chief Minister to issue honorary identity cards to descendants of freedom fighters and Salt Satyagrahis and to ensure that pension benefits under the scheme are provided from April 1 of the upcoming financial year.

Rly Wagon Tech Park at Sitalapalli demanded

Sasmit Patra also renews plea for Rangeilunda airport

RAJEEV RATHAN ■ Bhubaneswar

Rajya Sabha BJD MP Dr Sasmit Patra on Friday strongly urged the Union Government to set up a Railway Wagon Technology Park at Sitalapalli in Ganjam district calling it a transformative project for the industrial and employment landscape of southern Odisha. Raising the issue during Special Mentions in the Rajya Sabha, he said the park would significantly strengthen India's railway wagon manufacturing capacity and place Odisha on the national rail production map.

Dr Patra noted that India's railway manufacturing sector is witnessing rapid expansion, citing recent large-scale investments such as the railway wheelset manufacturing unit coming up in Khordha. A dedicated technology park at Sitalapalli would complement

these developments, attract ancillary industries and generate thousands of jobs for local youths.

Earlier, during Zero Hour, Dr Patra also pushed for expediting the long-pending proposal to develop a full-fledged airport at Rangeilunda in Brahmapur. He pointed out that the existing Rangeilunda Airstrip, one of the oldest in the region, operates with limited capacity and requires major upgrades to support commercial operations.

Stating that air connectivity is essential for the economic upliftment of southern Odisha, he said a modern airport would boost tourism, enable quicker medical access, support regional businesses and draw new investments, especially under the UDAN regional connectivity framework.

Dr Patra emphasised that both projects, the Wagon Technology Park and the Rangeilunda airport, are critical for balanced regional development and urged the Ministries of Railways and Civil Aviation to act without delay.

Indian Strings Meeting

IIT BBS holds lecture by Prof Ashoke Sen

PNS ■ Bhubaneswar

The Indian Strings Meeting (ISM) 2025, an international conference on string theory and high-energy physics, was jointly organised by the IIT Bhubaneswar and the NISER Bhubaneswar from December 9 to 14. The event brought together over 200 researchers from India and abroad for invited talks, discussions and poster sessions on cutting-edge developments in string theory, quantum field theory, gravity and related mathematical structures.

A major highlight of ISM 2025 was a public lecture by Padma Bhushan Awardee Prof Ashoke Sen (ICTS-TIFR, Bengaluru), one of the world's leading theoretical physicists, for college and school stu-



dents, faculty and conference participants. Speaking on "String Theory and Its Many Manifestations", Prof Sen offered an accessible overview of string theory, explaining why the subject is actively studied and how its different formulations, ranging from

perturbative strings to dualities and holography, emerge as consistent facets of a deeper underlying framework. He highlighted the unifying ideas that connect these seemingly diverse manifestations and discussed their potential implications for fundamental

physics. Prof Shreepad Karmalkar, Director of IIT Bhubaneswar, reminded the audience that "the development of scientific temper, humanism and the spirit of inquiry and reform" is one of the duties of Indian citizens as per Article 51A (h) of the Constitution. Hence, all should be aware of elements of a scientific method, namely, observation, explanation in terms of a theory and verification of the theory using an experiment. The theory reveals the unity underlying seemingly diverse observations. It has a qualitative part which involves logical reasoning using concepts and then a quantitative part which involves equations. The equations are useful for making predictions regarding various happenings.

'Energy saved is energy generated'

Nat'l Energy Conservation Day observed

RAJEEV RATHAN ■ Bhubaneswar

Odisha observed the National Energy Conservation Day 2025 with a State-level function at Lok Seva Bhawan on Sunday highlighting the importance of energy efficiency as a key pillar of sustainable development.

The event was graced by Deputy Chief Minister and Energy, Agriculture and Farmers' Empowerment Minister Kanak Vardhan Singh Deo, who underscored that energy conservation must be embraced not merely as a

habit but as a national duty.

The celebrations began in the morning with the Deputy CM flagging off an energy conservation awareness rally from Kalinga Stadium to Lok Seva Bhawan. The rally witnessed participation of students, teachers and officials of the Energy Department. Energy Principal Secretary Vishal Kumar Dev and EIC-cum-PCEI (Odisha) Manoj Kumar Tripathy were present.

Singh Deo stressed the need for proper earthing in every household and large-scale implementation of smart meters to reduce power losses. He reaffirmed the government's commitment

to promoting energy efficiency and environmental stewardship in line with national goals on climate resilience and sustainable development.

Vishal Dev said that while expanding energy generation capacity, equal emphasis must be laid on conservation, which is the cheapest and cleanest source of energy. He added that Odisha already has a pump storage policy in place and that the recently-issued floating solar guidelines would help accelerate renewable energy capacity across solar, wind and hydro sectors.

Centre for Environmental Studies, Forest, Environment

and Climate Change Department Director Dr K Murugesan urged teachers to encourage students to develop innovative ideas on energy conservation.

The Deputy CM presented the Odisha State Energy Conservation Awards to winners in various categories.

A State-Level Energy Conservation Quiz Competition was also organised witnessing participation of over 2.5 lakh students at block and district levels across Odisha. Cash awards of Rs 8,000, Rs 5,000 and Rs 3,000 were presented to the top three winners.

Speakers unanimously echoed the message that "energy saved is energy generated."

In Bhadrak

Delhi Police arrest youth for illegal SIM sale

PNS ■ Bhadrak

The Delhi Police arrested a man from Bhadrak district on Saturday for allegedly selling SIM cards illegally without relevant documents.

A team from the Shaheen Bagh police station in Delhi conducted raids in Jaipur and at Manjuri Road market in neighbouring Bhadrak district. Two mobile phone shop owners were detained for questioning in connection with the illegal sale of SIM cards.

The detained persons were identified as Santosh Khandei, who runs a mobile shop at Manjuri Road market and his associate Maheshwar Puntia from the Tarago area.

While police took Santosh to Delhi on remand for questioning, the cops released Maheshwar after interrogation.

According to reports, the two accused were activating multiple SIM cards using the Aadhaar documents of customers who came to their shop to buy new connections. While only one SIM card was handed over to the actual customer, several others were activated without the customer's knowledge. These extra SIM cards were then sold illegally.

The accused allegedly lured several unemployed youths from the Korei area in Jaipur to buy SIM cards from their shop. They paid between Rs

2,000 and Rs 3,000 per SIM card to these youths. The extra activated SIM cards were later sold to unidentified persons at higher prices.

The illegally-sold SIM cards were allegedly used for criminal activities. A case has been registered at the Shaheen Bagh police station in Delhi. Several illegal SIM cards sold by the accused have been seized from Santosh.

Investigators have also found large-scale financial transactions in the bank accounts of the two accused. Police are now examining the money trail to identify other links and determine whether more people were involved in the racket.

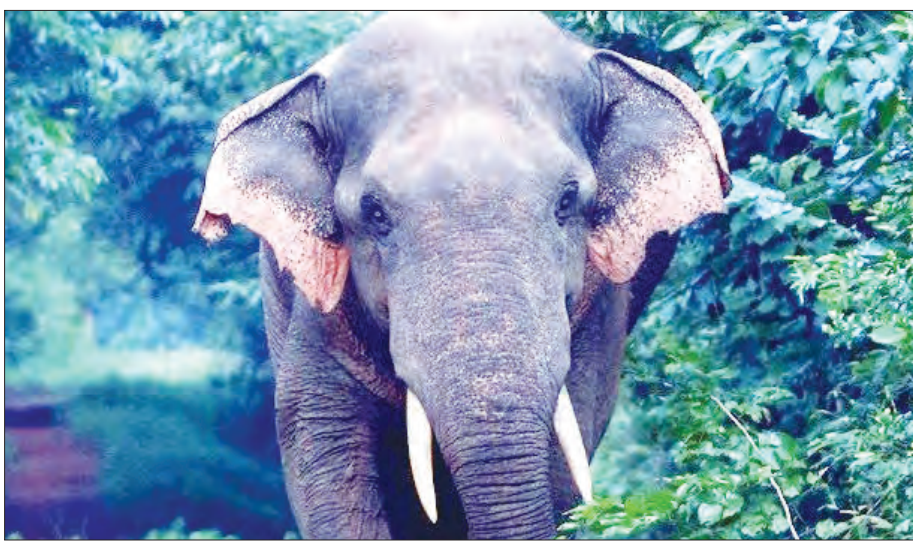
State preserves Ramu's legacy through educational display

RAJEEV RATHAN ■ Bhubaneswar

Even in death, Chandaka's gentle giant continues to teach lessons of coexistence and conservation as Odisha has begun efforts to preserve the legacy of Ramu, the much-loved elephant of Chandaka forest, by preparing his remains for a permanent educational display.

Ramu, who had become a familiar and peaceful presence around Chandaka's forest fringes, died last year at the age of 40 due to electrocution, an incident that had sparked concern over human-elephant conflict and unsafe power infrastructure in forest-adjacent areas.

According to forest officials, the elephant's skeleton, which had been buried inside the forest following his death, has now been carefully exhumed. A 25-



member expert team led by noted zoologist Siba Prasad Parida carried out the operation, retrieving over 200 bones after a meticulous excavation process. The team included Chandaka forest ranger Dayana Tudu and Sudipta

Ranjan Singh, whose forensic expertise ensured scientific accuracy during recovery.

Officials said the recovered bones would now be scientifically assembled to recreate Ramu's full skeleton. Once completed, it would be dis-

played at the Godibari Nature Reserve, serving both educational and tourism purposes. The exhibit is expected to help students, researchers and visitors better understand elephant anatomy, behaviour and the growing conservation

challenges faced by the species.

Forest Department sources said the initiative goes beyond memorialising a single elephant. "Ramu symbolised peaceful coexistence. By showcasing his skeleton, we want to educate people, especially the younger generation about elephants, their ecological importance and the urgent need to protect them," an official said.

Wildlife experts view the effort as a meaningful step towards conservation education while also drawing attention to preventable threats like electrocution and habitat fragmentation that continue to claim elephant lives in Odisha.

By transforming a tragic loss into a tool for learning and awareness, the State hopes Ramu's story will continue to inspire empathy, responsibility and stronger commitment towards wildlife conservation.

Paddy smuggling from Ganjam to AP foiled

PNS ■ Brahmapur

A miller from Patrapur block was caught red-handed while allegedly transporting farmers' paddy to neighbouring Andhra Pradesh even as procurement mandis in the Ganjam district are yet to become operational.

The matter came to the fore after former Samantarapur Sarpanch Prasanna Kumar Pradhan received information about the paddy-laden vehicle on its way to AP. He intercepted the vehicle midway and prevented it from proceeding further.

Recognising the seriousness of the issue, Pradhan informed the Jarada police about the suspected illegal transporta-



tion. Police reached the spot and took custody of the vehicle carrying the paddy. The seizure was carried out to verify the nature of the transportation and the legality of the consignment.

The incident has once again brought the spotlight on paddy procurement delays in Ganjam district and the alleged exploitation of farmers during the interim period before mandis

become operational.

With paddy mandis still not functional in Ganjam, the interception highlights the need for stricter monitoring and timely procurement to protect farmers' interests.

The absence of an official response so far leaves several questions unanswered underscoring the urgency for transparency and accountability in the system.

Course Work on Research Ethics held at FMU



PNS ■ Baleswar

The Human Resource Development Centre (HRDC), Fakir Mohan University, conducted a five-day Course Work on Research and Publication Ethics-2 (RPE-2025) from December 8 to 12.

The programme focused on ethical research practices, scientific integrity, publication standards, and hands-on training with essential research tools. The event was inaugurated with 46 research

scholar participants from various streams, in the presence of the Vice-Chancellor Prof Santosh Kumar Tripathy, Chairman PG Council Prof Bhaskar Behera, Director-HRDC Prof Ranindra Kumar Nayak, Director- R and D Prof Pankaj Kumar Parhi, and Member-HRDC Arun Kumar Naik.

The sessions included Philosophy, Ethics and Publication Misconduct (Dec 8), Open Access Publishing and Scientific Conduct (Dec 9),

Redundancy, Predatory Publishing and Databases (Dec 10), Research Metrics, Authorship and Integrity (Dec 11) and Impact Metrics and Research Support Tools (Dec 12).

The programme concluded with a group discussion and a valedictory session by Chairman PG Council, Director HRDC, Director R and D and other dignitaries which was coordinated by Dr Rajshree Dutta with a vote of thanks by Dr Prahlad Khila.

Gop PDS scam: BJP alleges officials-dealers nexus

Those involved in corruption go scot-free

SAROJ KUMAR MISHRA ■ Puri

The BJP has alleged a tacit understanding of top officials of district administration with corrupt dealers in a massive PDS scam made in Gop block of the district.

The allegation came from State BJP Kishan Morcha secretary Prashant Swain, who said despite repeated reminders, no action on corrupt PDS dealer showed the administration is shielding the fraudsters.

Swain said no criminal action and mere cancellation of the licence of a dealer showed the administration is entangled in corrupt practices. The memorandum of BJP leader read that probe made by Joint Enforcement Squad of Sub-Collector, CSO, and ACSO between January and March 2023 found the rice had been lifted by dealer Mahendra Kumar Paikaray using Antodaya Card in the name of late Jitendra Mahanty.

From April 2023 onward, the same card was surreptitiously updated to another beneficiary, Rajesh Kumar Mahanty. From April to September 2024, several beneficiaries reported not receiving rice despite showing distributions against their names in e-PoS data.

Stock registers had also torn pages with backdated entries. Even the shop had lacked

mandatory displays such as the Citizen's Charter, Price Boards, Beneficiary lists and food grain samples. Transactions without biometric thumb impressions, tampering of ration cards, stock shortages, transaction in the names of deceased beneficiaries and discrepancies in e-PoS and misuse of supplies were also confirmed during the raid. After detection of corruption practice the licence of the dealer was cancelled.

The Sub-Collector's inquiry report in July 2025 followed by submissions from the ACSO and Chief Civil Supplies Officer had been forwarded to the District Collector, Revenue Divisional Commissioner and Food Supplies and Consumer Welfare Department Secretary.

The reports had recommended suspension and cancellation of the licence, a comprehensive stock audit, further investigation, and filing of a criminal case against the dealer. On December 1, the Chief Civil Supplies Officer (I/c) issued a letter to the BJP leader, enclosing investigation reports and updates on follow-up actions.

But the BJP leader said, despite recommendation of criminal cases from higher-ups, no action has been taken till today. Seeking intervention of CM Mohan Majhi, Swain alleged of a larger conspiracy with involvement of top officials in the mega scam racket.

Volleyball Mahakumbh ends at KIIT, KISS

FIVB announces Beach Pro Tour in Odisha from 2026

PNS ■ Bhubaneswar

The four-day Volleyball Mahakumbh concluded at KIIT and KISS here on Sunday. Organised jointly by KIIT-KISS and the Fédération Internationale de Volleyball (FIVB), the mega event was inaugurated on Saturday in a colourful ceremony which witnessed by nearly 40,000 students.

The event was graced by FIVB President Fabio Azevedo. The event was organised as part of KIIT and KISS's flagship Kanya Kiran initiative, aimed at empower-



ing women and strengthening grassroots sports development.

Addressing a press conference here, Azevedo announced that the prestigious FIVB Beach Pro Tour will be hosted in Odisha for three consecutive years-2026, 2027 and

2028-in partnership with KIIT and KISS.

As part of the Kanya Kiran initiative, a series of workshops were organised during the event for women volleyball coaches from Odisha, other parts of India, and abroad. KIIT and KISS

founder Dr Achyuta Samanta said the collaboration with FIVB has brought world-class volleyball expertise to Odisha. "Through these workshops, thousands of girls and women will get the opportunity to experience the transformative power of volleyball," he said.

'Genu was torchbearer of Swadeshi movement'

95th Martyrdom Day observed

SAROJ KUMAR MISHRA ■ Puri

The 95th Martyrdom Day of freedom fighter Babu Genu was observed on Friday in different parts of the district with participation of hundreds of activists. District unit of Swaswah Jagaran Manch convened a meeting with its cadres recalling the great contribution of Sahid Genu to Swadeshi and noncooperation movements of Gandhiji.

Manch's Bibhag coordinator Prashant Bhuyan said, at a tender age of 22 years, Genu



sacrificed his life for the sake of the country but did not bend before the British police. His martyrdom ignited a nationwide fire against the British products by giving a big boost to the Swadeshi Movement in the country. Even Gandhiji had got inspiration

from Genu and praised his unapologetic character, Bhuyan said.

Stressing a need to buy indigenous products for growth of Indian economy, State Mahila Morcha Pramukh, Laxmipriya Sahoo said Genu dedicated his rest times in freedom movement notwithstanding his poverty as small-paid worker of a cotton mill in Mumbai.

BJP Krushak Morch State secretary Prashant Swain said Genu was the first martyr of the country in protest against British products. He was the true flag-bearer of the Swadeshi movement who was

an inspiration to educated youths.

Among others, District Coordinator Biswanath Panda, Sanjay Mohanty, Manjulata Swain, Sandhyarani Rath, Tarunadiya Mishra, Jagannath Sarangi, Pradip Mohapatra, Chabirani Maharana and Debasis Pati spoke on the occasion.

The meeting was presided over by Zilla Bichar Pramukh Saroj Kumar Mishra with vote of thanks given by Sankarshan Rout. The Swadeshi Day was also observed in Swaraswati Sisu Mandira in the city including Brahmagiri, Nimapara and Kakatpur.

Thoughts to Share

Walking: Humanity's oldest path to strength, creativity

At dawn, when the world lies half-asleep, I often step out for a quiet walk. The air is cool, the birds chirp and the earth glistens with the dew drops. In those first few steps, thoughts loosen, worries soften, and a strange introspection begins to bloom. In the unhurried time, the rhythm of walking reveals itself not to be an exercise but as a solitary companion to reflection.

Walking on two legs, with those simple and deliberate steps, is one of the most distinctive traits that sets humans apart from other primates. For more than a century, scientists have recognised that bipedalism placed our ancestors on an extraordinary evolutionary path. Yet walking is not merely a physical act; it is also a quiet philosophy, a rhythm of life that builds strength, shapes thought, and broadens the mind.

Small steps lead to great strides. Walking nurtures both physical vitality and



SADANANDA DAS

mental clarity. Whether taken amid solitude or in nature's picturesque abundance, a walk becomes a unique form of pleasure, sometimes a morning constitutional, sometimes a gentle emancipation of thoughts and ideas that flow in harmony with each footfall.

Today, physical exercise has become as fashionable as it is essential. From the ancient Greek Olympics to the modern gymnasium, human society has always connected the body with discipline, self-improvement and the cultivation of character. Greek culture celebrated the ideal body, seen in their vagrant sculptures with chiselled musculature, and tied physical training to the pursuit of virtue. Plato's Theory of Forms, emerging from this intellectual and physical tradition, rested on the twin pillars of bodily training and holistic education.

Much like Plato, many Indian philosophical systems guide individuals to look beyond the transient material world toward a higher, permanent reality. Walking, within these traditions, becomes both a practical necessity and a spiritual alignment.

Peripatetic thought, the philosophy of thinking while walking, was championed by Aristotle, later echoed by Henry David Thoreau, and cherished by poets of the Elizabethan era. For them, walking was not a pastime but the very soil in which ideas took root. Eudaimonia, human flourishing, required a balance of the intellectual, spiritual, and physical aspects

of life; the body had to be nurtured just as much as the mind.

Thoreau, the great transcendentalist, considered walking a sacred gesture, a sauntering toward the "earthly paradise". Walt Whitman carried the same spirit of movement in Leaves of Grass, wandering the pavements and countryside with poetic exuberance. Wordsworth, the romantic walker of the Lake District, immortalised the joy of wandering in his line: "I wandered lonely as a cloud." Virginia Woolf, too, found clarity and emotional depth in her long London walks, shaping her novel Mrs Dalloway through the very act of walking.

In ancient India, walking was woven into the fabric of daily life, an essential physical discipline and an element of holistic well-being. The Vedas upheld the importance of a healthy body, and the Rig Veda described foundational principles of physical training. The epics Ramayana and Mahabharata celebrated mar-

tial arts and physical prowess, while the Indus Valley Civilisation left behind sculptures of robust figures and tools of early warfare, proving a longstanding culture of fitness and resilience.

Modern research echoes these ancient insights. A Stanford University study found that walking enhances creativity by an average of 60 per cent. The increased flow of oxygen and circulation to the brain fosters imagination, leading to ideas that arise effortlessly with each stride.

The pleasure of everyday walking refines the body, calms the soul, and opens pathways to inner energy. For poets and writers, footsteps often become a muse; the rhythm of walking mirrors the rhythm of verse, allowing thoughts to surface organically.

Friedrich Nietzsche, one of the most influential thinkers of the 19th century, asserted: "All truly great thoughts are conceived while walking." He understood that walking's

natural cadence sets the mind free. Stoic philosophers like Seneca valued physical exercise for cultivating discipline, endurance and self-control. Even Schopenhauer, the philosopher of pessimism, embraced the truth that health is the foundation of all happiness, remarking, "The greatest folly is to sacrifice health for any other kind of happiness."

Walking is humanity's oldest discipline, simple yet profound. It strengthens the body, stirs creativity, anchors the mind, and elevates the spirit. From ancient civilisations to modern thinkers, from poets to philosophers, the act of walking has shaped ideas, built resilience, and nurtured well-being. In every stride lies an opportunity for reflection, balance, and renewal. And in each measured step, a reminder that the path to wisdom often begins with walking itself.

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INBRIEF

14 OCS successful youths feted in JSPur

Jagatsinghpur: Fourteen youths from Jagatsinghpur district, who cleared the Odisha Civil Services Exam 2023 conducted by the OPSC, were felicitated. District Collector J Sonal, accompanied



by district-level senior officials, attended the felicitation ceremony on Thursday. The Collector congratulated the successful youths saying that with your hard work, discipline and dedication, you have not brought laurels to your family but also to the State and Jagatsinghpur district. The ADM and the Sub-Collector also spoke. District Public Relations Officer Pratichi Tanaya Mohanty coordinated the programme.

Lok Adalat decides 24 cases in Astaranga

Astaranga: The National Lok Adalat Day was held at the First Class Judicial Divisional Court, Astaranga in Puri district. Summons were issued in a total of 42 cases of various departments in



the court of Judge Sudhabai Agarwal. Out of which, 24 cases were tried and decided, while a fine of Rs 6.20 lakh was collected for cheque bounce. All the officers were present and cooperated in this court programme.

Tehsildar Behera takes over as Taratarini temple EO

Brahmapur: Purushottampur Tehsildar Binod Kumar Behera joined as the new Executive Officer for the Maa Taratarini Temple. He visited the temple on Saturday and performed puja. He exam-



ined the ongoing development works and held discussions with the temple sevayats. He assured them to visit the temple again within a week and expedite the development works in consultation with them. Secretary, Temple Development Council Pramod Kumar Panda, Additional Tehsildar Sangita Sethi, Purosatampur PS IIC Rajesh Nayak, Sevayats' Sangha president Tapan Kumar Rana, Bapuji Rana, other sevayats and employees of the Tehasil were present.

Vedanta distributes mobility, hearing aids

Bhubaneswar: The Vedanta Aluminium reaffirmed its commitment to inclusive community development by providing mobility and hearing assistive devices to differently-abled persons in Sundargarh and Jharsuguda districts. As part of the initiative, the company supported 20 individuals across Chattabbar,



Kudaloi, Piplimal and Banjari gram panchayats with wheelchairs and hearing aids. The company will extend support to 30 community members enabling them to lead independent lives. The assistive devices were distributed in the presence of Medical Officer, Primary Health Centre, Bileimunda Dr Abhilash and Piplimal Sarpanch Rangadhar Dila.

Adani Foundation holds Multi-Specialty Health Camp

Dhamra: Adani Foundation, the CSR arm of Dhamra Port Company Limited, conducted a Multi-Specialty Health Camp at APSPS High School, Kamaria. The camp provided free medical consultation and medicines to 332 patients from five villages of Mangalpur gram panchayat. The event was graced by Puspanjali Lenka, Sarpanch of Mangalpur, along with local dignitaries and officials from Adani Foundation.

Sadasib Memorial T20 held in Bhapur

Bhapur: An inter-State cricket tournament, Sadasib Memorial T20 tournament, organised by the Fategarh Jubak Sangh, was inaugurated at Fategarh in Nayagarh district on Sunday. Educationist Lokanath Acharya inaugurated tournament in the pres-



ence of Bhapur Vice-Chairman Benudhar Pradhan. The opening match was held between Saielleven Bhubaneswar and Uttar Pradesh Tiger teams. After winning the toss, Uttar Pradesh asked the opponent to bat first, who scored 184 in 20 overs. Chasing the target, Uttar Pradesh was bundled out with only 38 in seven overs.

Govt clears labour reforms

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

The Delhi Government has cleared a fresh set of labour reforms that allow women to work night shifts, permit most shops to operate round the clock and simplify compliance for small traders.

Chief Minister Rekha Gupta said the reforms place workers' welfare at the centre of governance while balancing economic growth and business needs. She said the government's focus is on dignified working conditions, social security and wider employment opportunities, especially for women.

Women will now be allowed to work night shifts in shops and establishments, a move expected to expand job options and increase female participation in the workforce.

The permission, however, comes with strict safe-



guards. Employers will be required to ensure workplace safety, secure transport, proper lighting, security personnel and other essential facilities.

The Government has also allowed shops and establishments to operate 24x7, except liquor shops. The decision is expected to boost economic activity, create new jobs and offer flexible work hours to employees. Officials said round-the-clock

operations will benefit sectors such as retail, services and hospitality, while also opening more opportunities for women and young workers.

The Chief Minister said labour laws in Delhi have been streamlined in line with Labour Code provisions, with an emphasis on social security and worker protection. She said the reforms aim to reduce red tape and make compliance simpler

without diluting worker rights. Registration and renewal processes for small traders have been simplified to cut paperwork and ease long-standing procedural burdens.

Under the revised framework, women can work night shifts between 9 pm and 7 am during summer and between 8 pm and 8 am during winter. The Chief Minister described workers as the backbone of the economy and said protecting their interests is both a government duty and a moral responsibility.

She said the Delhi Government is committed to aligning ease of doing business with ease of living so that workers benefit directly from economic growth. The Government believes worker-friendly reforms will accelerate commercial activity and promote inclusive development in the Capital.

Woman stabbed to death inside temple complex

ABHINAV KUMAR JHA
■ New Delhi

A 48-year-old woman was stabbed to death inside a temple complex in east Delhi's Man Sarovar Park area on Sunday afternoon. The victim, Kusum Sharma, was attacked around 12 noon inside a temple located in the DDA Park within DDA Flats, MS Park.

Police said a PCR call was received stating that two youths had attacked a woman with a knife on her head. When police reached the spot, the victim was found critically injured and was rushed to GTB Hospital, where doctors declared her brought dead. "The main accused has been detained along with the weapon of offence. Further investigation is underway to establish the motive and sequence of events," said the Deputy Commissioner of Police, Shahdara.

Prima facie investigation suggests that the woman was repeatedly attacked with a knife by an unknown man inside the temple. The blows proved fatal. Police said the attack appeared sudden and brutal, leaving little chance for the victim to escape or raise an alarm. Another woman, aged



around 68, was also injured in the incident. She had come to the temple to meet the victim and tried to intervene when the attack began. In the process, she sustained injuries and was later given medical treatment.

The incident caused panic among local residents, many of whom rushed to the temple after hearing screams. Several people gathered outside the temple as police sealed the spot for investigation. Police later confirmed that the accused has been identified as Anchal Saxena. He has been taken into custody and is being questioned. The

knife used in the attack has also been recovered.

Locals have claimed that a property dispute may be behind the murder. Residents told police that there had been tensions linked to a property matter, though officials said this angle is still being verified. Investigators are examining past disputes, personal relationships and any previous complaints linked to the victim or the accused.

Kusum Sharma was a resident of Ramnagar, MS Park. Neighbours described her as a regular visitor to the temple and said she was known in the area. Police teams are scanning CCTV footage from the surrounding area to trace the movement of the accused and reconstruct the crime. Statements of eyewitnesses and locals are also being recorded.

A murder case has been registered, and further legal proceedings are underway. Police said more details will be shared as the investigation progresses. The incident has once again raised questions for citizens about personal disputes turning violent and the need for stronger preventive policing in residential areas.

Divyangjan companions in society: CM

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

Delhi Chief Minister Rekha Gupta emphasised the importance of inclusivity and empowerment of *Divyangjan* at the Delhi edition of Divya Kala Mela 2025 at Kartavya Path, New Delhi. "Our Divyang brothers and sisters are not separate from us—they are our companions in society. No nation can truly progress by leaving anyone behind," she said.

Gupta praised Prime Minister Narendra Modi's initiatives, such as the Accessible India Campaign, skill development programmes, and scholarships, which are ensuring dignity, opportunity, and equal participation for *Divyangjan*. She emphasised that real transformation demands courage and collective thinking, where society rises above individual interests and walks together for the welfare of all.

Inaugurating the event, Union Minister of Social Justice and Empowerment, Dr Virendra Kumar, highlighted that a nation's strength is measured by its commitment to empower every citizen with dignity, equality, and opportunity. He stated that the vision of "Saksham Bharat, Samarth Bharat" can be realised only when Divyangjan are recognised as equal partners in the nation's progress.

The Divya Kala Mela has evolved into a nationwide catalyst for empowerment, generating over ₹20 crore in sales, supporting nearly 1,000 Divyang entrepreneurs, and



facilitating employment for 310 Persons with Disabilities through dedicated job fairs.

V Vidyavathi, Secretary, Department of Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities (DEPWD), reaffirmed the Government's commitment to building an enabling ecosystem of education, skilling, accessibility, assistive technology, and livelihood opportunities that ensures dignity, independence, and long-term empowerment for every Divyang citizen.

The event is a celebration of the "capability within disability," offering a national platform for Divyang artists, entrepreneurs, and performers to showcase their exceptional talent with confidence and pride. The Mela calls upon citizens to support Divyang entrepreneurship and creativity, marking another meaningful step towards building a sensitive, empowered, and inclusive India.

Since its inception in

December 2022, the Divya Kala Mela has played a transformative role in promoting entrepreneurship, visibility, and mainstream participation of Persons with Disabilities. A total of 2,274 Divyang artisans and entrepreneurs have participated so far, generating cumulative sales of ₹21.31 crore across 27 Melas held nationwide.

Under the ADIP Scheme, more than 32 lakh Persons with Disabilities have received aids and assistive devices since 2014, while 934 Divyangjan have been supported through loans amounting to ₹18.05 crore to expand micro-enterprises and livelihood activities.

Additionally, 310 Persons with Disabilities have secured employment through job fairs organised alongside the Melas.

The ongoing Divya Kala Mela 2025 at Kartavya Path stands as a vibrant tribute to the resilience, artistry, and entrepreneurial spirit of Divyangjan.

Sachdeva attacks Congress over criticism of EVMs

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

Delhi BJP president Virendra Sachdeva on Sunday launched a sharp attack on the Congress over its criticism of electronic voting machines (EVMs). He asked the party to explain how it won the Kerala municipal elections if EVMs were allegedly biased in favour of the BJP. Sachdeva said the Congress had for years accused the Centre and the Election Commission of manipulating EVMs and repeatedly demanded a return to ballot paper voting.

He said the party's stand had become contradictory after the Congress-led alliance secured victories in Kerala's local body polls

conducted using the same machines.

"The people of the country want an answer. If, as Congress leaders claim, every vote cast through EVMs goes to the BJP, then how did Congress win the municipal elections in Kerala using these very EVMs?" Sachdeva said.

He described the Congress's objections to the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) exercise as an insult to the democratic mandate of voters across states such as Haryana, Maharashtra, Delhi and Bihar. Sachdeva said questioning the credibility of electoral processes whenever results go against the Congress weakens public faith in democracy.

In his remarks, the Delhi BJP president also con-



demned slogans allegedly raised against Prime Minister Narendra Modi at a recent Congress rally. He demanded a public apology from the Congress leadership, saying such language lowered the level of political discourse

and disrespected the office of the Prime Minister.

Sachdeva termed the BJP's victory in the Thiruvananthapuram municipal elections as politically significant. He said the win in the Kerala capital reflected a

High security at Arun Jaitley Stadium ahead of Messi's visit

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

In view of chaos during an event featuring Lionel Messi in Kolkata, the Delhi Police has made multi-layered security arrangements at and around the Arun Jaitley Stadium where the Argentine football icon will attend another event on Monday.

The event will be held at the stadium here between 1 pm and 4 pm, officials said on Sunday.

On Saturday, chaos erupted at the Salt Lake stadium in Kolkata as thousands of fans protested after failing to catch a clear glimpse of Messi during a

much-hyped event, prompting police to resort to lathi charge. West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee has ordered a high-level inquiry into the incident.

The Delhi Police said an elaborate and multi-layered security bandobast is being put in place for Messi's visit.

A senior police officer said comprehensive arrangements are being made to ensure the smooth conduct of the event, with a strong focus on crowd management, access control and traffic regulation.

According to the police, multiple security rings will be established around the venue, with deployment of

THE EVENT WILL BE HELD AT THE STADIUM HERE BETWEEN 1 PM AND 4 PM, OFFICIALS SAID ON SUNDAY

additional police personnel along with paramilitary forces to maintain law and order. Entry to the stadium and designated areas will be strictly regulated and no one will be permitted without a valid pass.

"Anti-sabotage checks, frisking points and surveillance through CCTV cameras will form a key part of the security plan," the officer said. The officer added that

quick reaction teams, senior supervisory officers and emergency response units will remain on standby throughout the event, and public safety will remain the top priority.

On the traffic front, Deputy Commissioner of Police (Traffic) Nishant Gupta said the traffic police have identified three main parking areas for labelled vehicles, including P1 near Vikram Nagar. Vehicles without labels should be parked at the Rajghat Powerhouse parking lot and Mata Sundari Lane, from where people can walk to the stadium, the police said.

App-based taxi users are

also advised to drop off at Rajghat Chowk and walk the rest of the way. Parking is strictly forbidden around the Arun Jaitley Stadium, and any vehicle parked there will be towed and fined, the senior officer said.

To make things easier, the public is encouraged to use the metro or buses as much as possible to reduce congestion and enjoy the event comfortably, the police advised. Around 70 police personnel have been deployed as part of the traffic and security arrangements, the DCP said. If needed, traffic diversions may be implemented from Delhi Gate Chowk and ITO.

Police launch cyber safety drive to warn senior citizens against threat of digital arrest frauds

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

Delhi Police on Sunday launched a citywide cyber safety drive to warn senior citizens against the rising threat of "digital arrest" frauds, with thousands participating in awareness sessions held simultaneously across all police stations in the Capital.

The programme was organised by the Delhi Police PRO Branch in coordination with the IFSO, SPUWAC and all district units. Sessions were held at every territorial police station and at the Senior Citizens Cell of SPUWAC, marking one of the largest single-day outreach efforts focused on cybercrime awareness for the elderly.

Delhi Police said the campaign was aimed at protecting senior citizens, who have emerged as prime targets for cyber fraudsters posing as law enforcement or government officials. "There is no such thing as a digital arrest in India's criminal justice system. Any call or message claiming this is a fraud," a senior police officer said during the session. A live discussion on cyber safety was conducted by ACP Manoj Kumar of IFSO and ACP Ranjay Atrishya of the PRO branch. The session was streamed on the official



Delhi Police YouTube channel. Large screens were installed at police stations and police units, with nearly 250 screens used across the city to ensure maximum reach. Many senior citizens also joined the programme online from their homes.

Police officials said the sessions focused on explaining how cybercriminals exploit fear, authority and technology gaps to cheat victims. Participants were briefed on common tactics used in digital arrest scams, including fake police notices, forged summons from enforcement agencies and threats of immediate legal action to force money transfers.

Senior citizens attending in person were given printed pamphlets with simple instructions on identifying cyber fraud. Posters and standees were displayed at venues, and short awareness videos were screened

before the live session began. The material stressed basic safety steps such as not sharing personal details, banking information or OTPs with unknown callers.

Police advised participants to stay calm when receiving suspicious calls or messages and to avoid acting in isolation. They were encouraged to consult family members, preserve evidence like screenshots or call recordings and report incidents without delay. Officers also explained the process of reporting cybercrime through police stations and helplines.

ACP Ranjay Atrishya added a personal touch to the session by reciting self-written poems to connect with senior citizens and encourage confidence in dealing with online threats. The gesture was well received by participants, many of whom interacted

with officers during question-and-answer segments. Officials stressed that prevention through education is critical, especially as fraudsters constantly change their methods.

The programme also aimed to complement Delhi Police's ongoing digital outreach efforts. In recent months, the force has conducted multiple cyber awareness initiatives, including two editions of "Cyber Samvaad". In the first edition, 350 computer teachers from Delhi schools were trained at Police Headquarters. In the second, lakhs of students and teachers from over 1,000 schools participated in online sessions.

The SPUWAC unit has also held dedicated programs for senior citizens, including lectures by noted cybersecurity experts on safe digital practices. Police said such efforts are necessary as more seniors use smartphones, online banking and digital services.

Officials urged citizens to share the information with elderly family members and neighbours. "Cyber criminals rely on silence and fear. Awareness is the strongest defence," a police officer said, adding that Delhi Police will continue holding similar sessions to ensure no senior citizen falls prey to digital arrest scams.

City air quality sees measurable improvement in 2025, says data

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

Delhi recorded a clear and measurable improvement in air quality in 2025, with cleaner air reported in a majority of months compared to 2024, according to a comparative analysis of Air Quality Index data available up to 9 December, 2025. The findings show fewer severe pollution days, more satisfactory air quality days and better conditions even during the critical winter months.

The analysis indicates that 2025 has seen the highest number of "Satisfactory" air quality days in the last nine years, excluding the pandemic year of 2020. This marks a significant shift for the national capital, which traditionally struggles with hazardous pollution levels, especially from October to February.

During the winter period of October to February, the number of satisfactory air quality days recorded so far in 2025-26 has already surpassed those seen during the same period in 2024-25. This improvement is significant because winter months usually witness a sharp spike in pollution due to weather conditions, stubble burning, vehicular emissions and dust.

Month-wise data from

January to November shows that air quality was better in 8 out of 11 months in 2025 compared to the corresponding months in 2024. Average AQI levels improved in January, February, March, May, June, July, October and November. In one month, air quality remained at the same level as the previous year, while only two months recorded poorer conditions.

Category-wise analysis further highlights the positive trend. From January to November, the number of "Satisfactory" days rose from 66 in 2024 to 79 in 2025. At the same time, days under the "Moderate" category declined, while a sharp reduction was recorded in the "Very Poor" and "Severe" categories.

The most notable change was seen in the "Severe" category. In 2024, Delhi recorded 11 severe air pollution days. This number dropped to just three days in 2025. This reduction is considered crucial for public health, as severe air quality levels pose serious risks to children, elderly people and those with respiratory illnesses.

While the overall number of days falling under broader clean-air and polluted-air groupings remained similar in both years, the quality within these groups improved in 2025. This indi-

cates that even when pollution was present, its intensity was lower than in the previous year.

October and November, typically the worst months for Delhi's air, showed marked improvement. In October 2025, the average AQI was 11 points lower than in October 2024. Unlike 2024, which recorded no satisfactory days in October, the city saw four satisfactory air quality days in October 2025.

November showed an even stronger improvement. The average AQI in November 2025 was 20 points better than in November 2024. Severe pollution days dropped from eight in November 2024 to just three in November 2025. Only three days fell under the "Poor" category, compared to the previous year when AQI levels stayed above 300 throughout the month, mostly in the "Very Poor" or "Severe" range.

Air pollution hotspots across the city also reflected this improvement. Delhi has 13 identified pollution hotspots. In October 2025, nine of these hotspots recorded better average AQI levels than in October 2024, while one remained unchanged. In November 2025, all 13 hotspots showed improvement compared to the previous year.

Gurugram: 453 residents attend free eye check-up camp

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

Gurugram witnessed a large public turnout on Sunday as 453 residents underwent free medical examinations at an eye check-up camp organised by the Tendishia Association at Shiv Mandir in Surat Nagar Phase-I. The camp focused on early detection of eye problems and basic health screening for people from nearby residential clusters.

According to organisers, a total of 453 people were examined during the day-long camp, including 279 women and 174 men. All beneficiaries received free eye examinations, blood sugar tests, medical consultations and spectacles.

The camp was inaugurated in the presence of Gurugram MLA Mukesh Sharma, who attended as the chief guest. Addressing residents, Sharma stressed the need for regular eye check-ups, especially among senior citizens and working adults.

He said timely diagnosis and treatment can prevent long-term vision loss and improve quality of life, particularly for those who cannot afford private healthcare.

Local councillor Surekha Chauhan of Ward 34 also attended the camp and interacted with residents.

Amitabh Bachchan’s ancestral village to get major facelift



Amitabh Bachchan's ancestral Babu Patti village in UP's Pratapgarh district is all set to get a facelift as a Maharashtra-based NGO has planned a series of development projects.

Tamil kings, leaders get due recognition: VP Radhakrishnan

Vice President CP Radhakrishnan on Sunday lauded efforts to recognise and honour Tamil kings, leaders and freedom fighters who had “not received due recognition earlier”. He made the remarks at an event here to release a commemorative postage stamp in honour of Emperor Perumbidugu Mutharaiyar II. In a social media post, the Vice President’s Secretariat said Radhakrishnan appreciated the Narendra Modi Government for its continuous support to Tamil culture and language.



Congress leader Shamanuru Shivashankarappa dies at 95



Veteran Congress leader Shamanuru Shivashankarappa passed away at a private hospital on Sunday due to age-related ailments, official sources said. He was 95 and represented the Davanagere South Assembly constituency. He had been undergoing treatment at the hospital for some time.

Suvendu Adhikari demands probe into Messi event chaos

West Bengal’s Leader of Opposition Suvendu Adhikari on Sunday demanded a court-monitored investigation into the chaos that erupted during Argentine football icon Lionel Messi’s event at Salt Lake stadium here a day ago. Adhikari said once the BJP is elected to power in the 2026 Assembly polls, the saffron party will ensure Messi comes to Bengal again and regale his thousands of fans in Yuva Bharati Krirangan with his football skills.



President Murmu urges citizens to embrace energy efficiency

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE

■ New Delhi

President Droupadi Murmu on Sunday said behavioural change in every citizen is crucial to bringing energy efficiency to all sectors in the country.

Addressing National Energy Conservation Day Function here, she said the consciousness of adopting a balanced lifestyle in harmony with nature is fundamental to India’s cultural tradition — this very sentiment forms the basis of our message to the world, “Lifestyle for Environment — LIFE”.

“Participation of every sector and citizen is essential for the success of India’s energy transition. Behavioural change is crucial for bringing energy efficiency to all sectors,” she said.

The President said energy conservation is the most environmentally friendly and reliable source of energy.

Energy conservation is not just an option, but the most crucial need of today, she said.

She underlined that saving energy doesn’t simply mean using less, but utilising energy wisely, responsibly, and efficiently.

“When we avoid unnecessary use of electrical appliances, adopt energy-efficient devices, utilise natural light and ventilation in our homes and workplaces, or embrace solar and renewable energy options, we not only save



President Droupadi Murmu, Union Power Minister Manohar Lal Khattar and others during a group photographs with awardees at the presentation of ‘National Energy Conservation Awards 2025’ and ‘National Painting Competition on Energy Conservation’ prizes in New Delhi

energy but also reduce carbon emissions,” she said.

Energy conservation is also important for maintaining clean air and safe water sources, and a balanced ecosystem, Murmu said, adding, “Every unit of energy we save will be a symbol of our responsibility towards nature and our sensitivity towards future generations.”

If the youth and children are aware about energy conservation and make efforts in this direction, the goals in this area can be achieved and the sustainable development of the country can be ensured, the President said.

Access to affordable and clean energy empowers communities, she said, adding that green energy is not limited to electricity generation; it is a powerful means of

empowerment and inclusive development.

The President noted that initiatives, such as Pradhan Mantri Surya Ghar Muft Bijli Yojana and the National Green Hydrogen Mission, are reducing dependence on fossil fuels.

The Government is also promoting renewable energy adoption and energy efficiency through the Renewable Consumption Obligation and Production-Linked Incentive schemes. She noted that India’s energy efficiency efforts in 2023-24 resulted in energy savings of 53.60 million tonnes of oil equivalent.

She said these efforts are leading to significant economic savings annually and have also resulted in a substantial reduction in CO2 emissions.

The President said the par-

ticipation of every sector and citizen is essential for the success of India’s energy transition.

She appreciated all stakeholders working in the field of energy conservation and said their contribution will ensure a healthy and bright future for coming generations.

She expressed confidence that with the spirit of collective responsibility, partnership, and public participation, India will continue to play a leading role in energy conservation and achieve its goals towards a green future.

She presented the National Energy Conservation Awards 2025 and National Painting Competition on Energy Conservation prizes in New Delhi on Sunday on the occasion of National Energy Conservation Day.

BJP alleges Congress rally aims to protect infiltrators

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE

■ New Delhi

Ahead of the Congress’s rally over the “vote theft” issue, the BJP on Sunday alleged that the main Opposition party was holding the event in its bid to “protect infiltrators” from being removed from the electoral rolls.

The ruling BJP asserted that the Congress will not succeed in its design of misleading people as well as “insulting and defaming” constitutional institutions, because the entire world knows that India’s democracy is “very robust”.

Stepping up its campaign against the alleged “vote theft” by the BJP in elections, the Congress has organised a rally at the



Ramlila Maidan here on Sunday that will be attended by the party’s top leaders, including general secretaries Priyanka Gandhi Vadra, KC Venugopal, Jairam Ramesh, and Sachin Pilot.

Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge and former party chief Rahul

Gandhi are expected to address the gathering. Former Congress president Sonia Gandhi is also likely to be present at the event.

Ahead of the event, BJP national spokesperson Sambit Patra said the Congress was holding the rally even as Union Home Minister Amit Shah “exposed” the Opposition through his point-by-point rebuttal to their “fabricated” allegations during a debate on electoral reforms during the ongoing Winter Session of Parliament.

“This shows that you do not have truth in your hand, yet you are trying to create an atmosphere of confusion. The Congress’ rally is an exercise to protect ‘ghus-paithiyas (infiltrators)’. This is

what the Congress is doing,” the BJP MP told reporters.

“The Congress party may try all it wants to mislead the people as well as insult and defame our constitutional institutions. But, the entire world knows that India’s democracy is very robust and it cannot be shaken,” he added.

The BJP leader accused the Congress of holding the rally to pursue its “appeasement politics” and dared Rahul Gandhi to challenge the Bihar assembly polls if he felt that there was any irregularity.

“Rahul ji, you still have perhaps 10 days left in your hands. You can still file a complaint if you feel that there was any irregularity (in the poll process) in any of the seats in the Bihar assembly polls,” Patra said.

Mata Vaishno Devi Shrine sees drop in pilgrim numbers

MOHIT KANDHARI ■ Jammu

As the Kashmir Valley looks forward to a resurgence in winter tourism in the weeks ahead, authorities at the Shri Mata Vaishno Devi Shrine Board are grappling with a sharp drop in pilgrim numbers compared to previous years.

At the time of the launch of the Vande Bharat Express connecting the Kashmir valley with the rest of the country by Prime Minister Narendra Modi in June this year, the Shrine Board authorities had expected a rise in the pilgrim traffic.

According to Yatra statistics available on the official website of the Shrine Board,



65.03 lakh pilgrims have visited the cave shrine this year. The pilgrim traffic was adversely affected due to the Pahalgam terror attack. Operation Sindoor and devastating flash floods in August, leading to the death of over 30 pilgrims along the

yatra track. The yatra remained suspended for over three weeks due to repair works and prevailing inclement weather conditions.

Ahead of the New Year celebrations, the Shrine Board authorities are now gearing

up to welcome the pilgrims and hoping the yatra figures to cross the 70 lakh mark. During the last week of December, around 3 to 4 lakh pilgrims offer prayers inside the cave shrine located in the Trikuta hills. To further boost pilgrim traffic, the Shrine board has made concerted efforts to attract pilgrims by providing improved infrastructure facilities. Last year, 94.84 pilgrims visited the cave shrine. In 2023, the pilgrim traffic crossed 95 lakh. In 2022, 91.25 lakh pilgrims performed the yatra. For the first time, the pilgrim traffic crossed the 70 lakh mark in 2007.

Sharad Pawar urges support for talent beyond privileged families

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE

■ Mumbai

NCP(SP) president Sharad Pawar on Sunday said talent and leadership are not limited to persons with privileged backgrounds and stressed the need to identify and support capable individuals from ordinary families to bring positive change in society.

Speaking at the Sharad Pawar Inspire Fellowship award ceremony held at Yashwantrao Chavan Centre here, he said the fellowship programme has been designed keeping in mind the life and values of Yashwantrao Chavan, Maharashtra’s first chief minister.

“Many people succeed in life because they have a strong background and support system, but there are many others who lack such support yet have the ability and vision to work for society. They need opportunities and encouragement,” Pawar said.

Recalling Chavan’s journey, Pawar said he came from a very modest background and yet went on to become not



President Sharad Pawar addressing the gathering during the award ceremony of the Sharad Pawar Inspire Fellowship in Mumbai

only the chief minister of Maharashtra but also served the country as defence minister, finance minister and external affairs minister.

“This shows that ability is not the monopoly of a few. It exists among common people as well,” the NCP (SP) chief said while praising the work of Yashwantrao Chavan Pratishthan for identifying such individuals across Maharashtra through the fellowship programme and giving them a platform to grow.

Referring to rapid changes across sectors, Pawar highlighted the growing role of artificial intelligence (AI), particularly in agriculture. “AI-based technologies can significantly improve crop productivity while reducing the use of water and fertilisers. With the right use of technology, agricultural output can increase by 25 to 30 per cent while lowering costs,” he said.

Pawar cited the example of the Sahyadri Farmers Producer Company in Nashik

district, saying it had successfully transformed young farmers into entrepreneurs through collective efforts and confidence-building.

Pawar congratulated the fellowship awardees and expressed confidence that the knowledge and experience gained through the programme would help bring change at the village, taluka and district levels. He urged the participants to focus not only on good work but also on building strong institutions to sustain long-term impact.

Talking to reporters later, Nationalist Congress Party (SP) working president Supriya Sule said the Sharad Pawar Inspire Fellowship will be launched exclusively for women from next year. The fellowship was started by the Yashwantrao Chavan Centre to mark the ‘Sahasrachandra Darshan’ celebrations of party president Sharad Pawar and has now entered its fifth year.

Sule said the fellowship will focus on women interested in areas such as agriculture, education and social transformation. Commenting on the recently concluded

Winter session of the State legislature, Sule said its duration was very short and it failed to meet expectations. “Even as the Opposition, we look at the larger interest of the State. However, there was no positive or meaningful discussion on key issues facing Maharashtra,” the Baramati MP said. Raising concern over crimes against women, Sule said incidents of atrocities and dowry deaths are increasing in the State and should have been discussed in the House.

She said Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis needs to take strong policy decisions to address the issue. She also called for unity across party lines to bring about social change, adding the ruling dispensation should take the lead in working with the Opposition on such issues. Referring to the proposed Shakti Act, Sule said the Modi-led Government has been in power for the last 11 years but the legislation has not yet been brought before Parliament. “If the Shakti Act is introduced in Parliament by the Centre, we will strongly support it,” she added.

AIIMS study finds no link between COVID vaccines and deaths

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE

■ New Delhi

A comprehensive, one-year autopsy-based observational study conducted at AIIMS, Delhi, has found no evidence linking COVID-19 vaccination with sudden deaths among young adults, reaffirming the safety of Covid vaccines.

Sudden death in young adults is a significant concern requiring targeted public health strategies, the study said, underlying coronary artery disease remains the leading cause and that respiratory and unexplained deaths warrant further investigation.

The study, titled “Burden of Sudden Death in Young Adults: A One-Year Observational Study at a Tertiary Care Centre in India”, has been published in the Indian Journal of Medical Research (IJMR), the flagship journal of the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR).

The research involved a detailed evaluation of sudden death cases through

verbal autopsy, post-mortem imaging, conventional autopsy, and histopathological examination, carried out by a multidisciplinary team of experts. The study examined sudden deaths among adults aged 18-45 over a one-year period. No statistically significant association was found between COVID-19 vaccination status and sudden deaths in the young population, the study said. Cardiovascular system-related causes constituted the most common cause of death in young, followed by respiratory-related causes and other non-cardiac conditions, the study said.

The COVID-19 illness history and vaccination status were found to be comparable between younger and older age groups, with no causal link identified.

The findings are consistent with global scientific evidence affirming the safety and effectiveness of COVID-19 vaccines.

Dr Sudheer Arava,

Professor at AIIMS, New Delhi, asserted that the publication of this study assumes particular significance in light of misleading claims and unverified reports suggesting a connection between COVID-19 vaccination and sudden deaths.

He highlighted that the findings do not support such claims and emphasised that scientific, evidence-based research must guide public understanding and discourse.

Health experts reiterated that sudden deaths in young individuals, while tragic, are often related to underlying, sometimes undiagnosed medical conditions, especially cardiovascular diseases, and require focused public health interventions such as early screening, lifestyle modification, and timely medical care.

Dr Arava added, “Citizens are advised to rely on credible scientific sources and avoid misinformation that may undermine public confidence in proven public health interventions.”

Fadnavis launches Project Mahadeva to nurture football talent

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

■ Mumbai

Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis on Sunday said the State Government’s football development initiative ‘Project Mahadeva’ aims to identify and nurture talented young players who could represent India in the 2034 FIFA World Cup.

The project was formally launched at Wankhede Stadium by Fadnavis in the presence of football icon Lionel Messi, and prominent personalities, including footballers Luis Suarez and Rodrigo De Paul.



The programme is part of Maharashtra’s ‘Mission Olympic 2026’, which targets improved sporting performance and increased medal

tally at national and international events.

Under Project Mahadeva, 60 under-13 footballers, including 30 boys and 30 girls, select-

ed from across Maharashtra, will receive specialised training and mentoring. The selected players will get a residential scholarship for five years, along with world-class coaching, including training by foreign coaches.

“Project Mahadeva is a crucial initiative of the Maharashtra Government to scout football talent at the grassroots level and develop high-quality players. We are confident that this project will produce players capable of competing at the highest global level, including the FIFA World Cup,” Fadnavis said.

Tamil Nadu to expand welfare scheme for women: CM

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE

■ Dharmapuri (Tamil Nadu)

Tamil Nadu Chief Minister MK Stalin on Sunday said even if some more eligible persons had been left out of the ₹1,000 per month assistance scheme for women, they will be brought under the welfare initiative.

Addressing a function here, Stalin, referring to the RBI data, said Tamil Nadu has topped the GSDP growth at a rate of 16 per cent and this was achieved despite obstacles.

The number of beneficiaries under the ‘rights’ scheme for women that pro-



vides ₹1,000 per month assistance has increased to 1.30 crore with the inclusion of 17 lakh beneficiaries days ago, Stalin said.

The CM said: “If even some more eligible persons had been left out, if they make a

representation, they will be provided the assistance under the scheme; I have also said that the assistance amount too would be increased.”

On SIR, the CM said, “We have to protect our right to

vote and we have done our work vigilantly.” However, “we have work till such time the Assembly election is held (due by March-April next year) and the result is announced. You must not forget it.”

Furthermore, the chief minister said that the party functionaries should reach out to the people highlighting the Government’s achievements and welfare measures.

The party must get the honour of forming the Government for the seventh time and the State’s growth should continue.

States Focus



CORRUPTION CAUSED CONGRESS DOWNFALL: RAJASTHAN CM

Rajasthan Chief Minister Bhajanlal Sharma on Sunday asserted that those involved in graft would not be spared under any circumstances and pointed at the Congress to assert that corruption led to the “downfall” of the party that once ruled from Parliament to panchayats. Addressing a state-level cleanliness awareness and labour donation programme held at Jal Mahal here, he said that public money should be used for the welfare of the people. “Public funds are not meant for corruption; they should serve the interests of the common people, including farmers, labourers, and the poor.” Targeting the Congress, Sharma said, “The party once ruled from Parliament to Panchayats, but its corruption, appeasement, and lies have brought it down.”



VAJPAYEE'S VISION GUIDES SELF-RELIANT INDIA: CM DHAMI

Uttarakhand Chief Minister Pushkar Singh Dhami on Sunday said that former Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee's values, governance model and national vision continue to inspire India's journey towards self-reliance under the leadership of PM Narendra Modi. Addressing a public meeting as the chief guest at the Atal-Modi Good Governance Yatra here, Dhami spoke after unveiling a statue of Vajpayee at Annamayya Circle, Madanapalle in Annamayya district. “Vajpayee's values, governance framework and national vision continue to guide India's march towards self-reliance under Prime Minister Modi's leadership,” Dhami said.

MP leader sparks Ladli Behna scheme controversy

GIRISH SHARMA ■ Bhopal

Senior Madhya Pradesh Cabinet Minister Kunwar Vijay Shah has triggered a fresh political storm after remarks made during a district-level meeting in Ratlam were widely interpreted as linking benefits under the Ladli Behna Scheme to the participation of women beneficiaries in a proposed felicitation programme for Chief Minister Mohan Yadav.

The controversy has erupted at a time when Shah is already facing legal and political scrutiny over an earlier objectionable comment related to an Indian Army officer, further intensifying pressure on the BJP leadership.

Madhya Pradesh Congress president Jitu Patwari launched a scathing attack, accusing the BJP of insulting women beneficiaries and displaying an ‘anti-women mindset’. Former chief min-

ister Kamal Nath also weighed in, alleging that the minister's remarks treated Ladli Behna beneficiaries as bonded labour and amounted to an attack on the civil rights and dignity of women in the state.

The latest row stems from Shah's comments while chairing the District Development Advisory Committee meeting in Ratlam on Saturday evening. Referring to the Ladli Behna Scheme — a flagship women-centric programme credited with playing a decisive role in the BJP's victory in the 2023 Assembly elections — Shah said the district had around 2.5 lakh beneficiaries and suggested that at least 50,000 of them should come forward to felicitate the Chief Minister for completing two years in office. He proposed that the event be organised in the New Year and asked officials to make arrangements accordingly.



However, a video clip of the meeting that later went viral sparked controversy. In the footage, Shah is heard telling officials that beneficiaries who fail to attend the proposed programme could face scrutiny of their documents, including Aadhaar verification, and that their applications could be kept pending. The remarks were quickly

seized upon by the Opposition, which accused the minister of using a welfare scheme as a tool for political mobilisation and intimidation. The Ladli Behna Scheme was launched in June 2023, a few months ahead of the Assembly elections, and currently provides monthly financial assistance of Rs 1,500 to more than 1.26 crore women.

The state Government has promised to increase the amount to Rs 3,000 per month by 2028, making the scheme a central pillar of its welfare and political strategy.

As the controversy escalated, speaking to The Pioneer on Sunday, Shah asserting that his remarks had been ‘twisted and misrepresented’. He denied any suggestion that women were being threatened or coerced and said there was no ill intent behind his comments. Emphasising the Government's commitment to women's empowerment, Shah said the objective of the scheme is to make women self-reliant and economically secure.

He explained that during an informal discussion at the meeting, concerns were raised about reports of ineligible women allegedly availing benefits under the Ladli Behna Scheme, which had caused resentment among

sections of the public.

According to Shah, the discussion focused on the need for proper verification to ensure that only eligible beneficiaries continue to receive assistance and that ineligible names are filtered out in a transparent manner. He maintained that the intent was administrative correction and accountability, not pressure on beneficiaries.

Despite the clarification, the episode has added to a growing list of controversies surrounding the senior minister, reviving debate over the language and conduct of public representatives. With the Ladli Behna Scheme occupying a central place in the BJP's political narrative, the controversy has also sharpened the Opposition's attack, setting the stage for a prolonged political confrontation over welfare, accountability and the dignity of beneficiaries.

CM Himanta invites VP to witness Assam's progress

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma paid a courtesy call on the Vice President of India, CP Radhakrishnan, in the national Capital on Sunday.

During the meeting at Vice President's enclave, Chief Minister Sarma personally congratulated Radhakrishnan on his assumption of the august office of the Vice President of India.

The Chief Minister also extended a formal invitation to the Vice President to visit Assam and witness the state's transformation and developmental progress achieved in recent years.

The Vice President appreciated the gesture and interact-



ed warmly with the Chief Minister during the meeting which lasted for around 30 minutes.

Later taking to X, formerly Twitter, Chief Minister Sarma wrote, “Honoured to call upon Vice President of India,

CP Radhakrishnan in New Delhi today.

I personally congratulated him on assuming the august office of @VPIndia and invited him to visit Assam to witness the State's transformation in recent years.”

Arunachal sets stage for panchayat and civic polls

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Itanagar

The stage is set for elections to panchayat raj institutions and civic bodies of Itanagar and Pashighat in Arunachal Pradesh with the deployment of over 40,000 personnel to ensure the smooth conduct of polls on Monday, officials said. Polling will begin at 7 am and continue till 4 pm, State Election Commissioner (SEC) Rinchin Tashi said.

The ruling BJP won 58 zilla parishad constituencies unopposed, and the National People's Party (NPP) bagged one seat, while four saffron party candidates were elected to the Itanagar Municipal Corporation (IMC) without any contest.



Altogether 5,037 BJP candidates for gram panchayat seats have also been declared elected unopposed.

In total, 440 candidates are in the fray for 186 zilla parishad seats, while 39 are contesting for 16 IMC wards and 21 for eight wards in Pasighat Municipal Council (PMC). The SEC said 13 gram panchayat constituencies

received no nominations, while all nominations in 14 gram panchayat constituencies were rejected during scrutiny.

Polling in the Dumba Singhpo gram panchayat seat has been countermanded following the death of a candidate. Altogether 8,31,648 voters, including 7,59,210 for panchayat bodies and 72,438

for municipal elections, are eligible to cast their ballots. There will be 2,171 polling stations for panchayat elections, 67 for IMC and 12 for PMC, the SEC said.

“In the panchayat polls, female voters outnumber male voters,” Tashi said.

Upper Subansiri district has the highest number of panchayat voters at 58,764, while Dibang Valley has the lowest at 3,854 electors.

In the municipal polls, Itanagar's Ward 19 has the highest number of voters at 5,106, whereas Pasighat's Ward 6 has the lowest with 812 voters.

The SEC has deployed over 40,000 personnel, including 15,000 polling staffers, to ensure the smooth conduct of the polls.

NMA frames rules for conservation of Sher Shah Suri's tomb

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Patna

Bylaws have been made for the 480-year-old tomb of Sher Shah Suri, an Afghan king who ruled parts of north India, to help the authorities resolve the problem of protecting the monument in Bihar's Sasaram, and developing the locality in its vicinity at the same time.

The National Monuments Authority (NMA) has enacted the legislation after obtaining objections and suggestions from various stakeholders of the memorial of the Afghan ruler, who was also known for his exceptional administrative skill.

Built between 1540 and 1545 CE, the tomb stands in the middle of an artificial lake



at Sasaram, a historical town in the south-western district of the state. Designed by Mir Muhammad Aliwal Khan, it is popularly referred to as the ‘second Taj Mahal of India’.

According to experts, the bye-law will bridge the gap between managing the ambient environment near a protected site and the requirements of the populace inhabiting immediate

vicinity of such monuments. It is expected that with a site-specific bye-law, common people as well as administrative and local stakeholders would find it easy to meet their construction, repair and other development-related requirements.

However, according to the bylaw, new constructions should be in harmony with the existing architectural

style and compatible with the surrounding historic character and streetscapes.

No intrusive materials like cladding or use of panelling on the exterior facade should be permitted, it said, adding that the use of coloured glazing should also be discouraged.

OP Jaiswal, former Professor in the Department of Ancient History and Archaeology, Patna University, welcomed the bye-laws for the tomb of Sher Shah Suri in Sasaram.

“The Central Government and other authorities must come out with such bye-laws for other protected monuments in the state. Protection of such monuments is important for our next generation,” Jaiswal said.

BARC plans 3,000-acre research, development campus in Andhra

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Amaravati

Bhabha Atomic Research Centre (BARC) is planning to set up a new Research and Development campus spread over 3,000 acres in Anakapalli district.

The premier multi-disciplinary nuclear research centre has approached the Andhra Pradesh Government for the diversion of 148.15 hectares (0.366 acres) of land for the new campus, according to sources from the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change.

An Expert Appraisal Committee (EAC) under the ministry examined the proposal earlier this month and recommended it for ‘in-principle’ approval for the diversion of the first land parcel.

“Bhabha Atomic Research Centre is setting up a new campus on the east coast near Visakhapatnam for strategic reasons. The selection of the site was based on recommendations from the Site Selection Committee and approved by the Atomic Energy Commission,” the EAC noted in the minutes of the meeting.

Over 1,200 hectares (about 3,000 acres) of revenue land

have already been acquired for the project.

The 148.15 hectares of forest land proposed for diversion is adjacent to this acquired land and lies between the project site and the sea, the EAC added.

The project is a strategic initiative of the central Government, and hence, the Detailed Project Report is protected from disclosure.

The proposal involves the construction of a perimeter compound wall, zonal security fencing, patrolling roads, a pump house, watch towers, drains, service lines, and area development works, according to the minutes, without specifying the nature of the activity.

As many as 1,722 of the 21,244 trees on the land will be felled. However, those located in areas close to the sea will not be cut, and the EAC said this will not affect the general ecosystem. “This centre will contribute to nation-building by conducting research in the nuclear field with applications in energy security, health, agriculture, water, and other strategic areas as mandated by the Centre,” the EAC said.

BNHS trains staff ahead of vultures release in MTR

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Mumbai

Ahead of the release of vultures in Maharashtra's Melghat Tiger Reserve (MTR), the Bombay Natural History Society (BNHS) has conducted a workshop to sensitise forest staff and other personnel on bird conservation and post-release management.

As part of the reintroduction programme, 15 long-billed vultures were brought from Pinjore in Haryana in April 2025 and housed in a pre-release facility in Melghat (in Amravati district).



The birds have undergone training over the past eight months to feed independently and acclimatise to local environmental conditions and are expected to be released in the reserve soon, a BNHS release said.

Indian Coast Guard carries out medical evacuation

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Kochi

The Indian Coast Guard became a lifesaver for a 75-year-old by carrying out an urgent medical evacuation from Lakshadweep to Kochi, officials said on Sunday.

A statement by the Coast Guard said that the patient diagnosed with acute subacute subdural hematoma on oxygen support was airlifted from Agatti in Lakshadweep and shifted to a private hos-

pital in Kochi in an operation that started late Saturday night and was completed by Sunday early morning.

The urgent request, received post-closure of runaway operations at Agatti airfield, activated the ICG distress and HADR response mechanism, the Coast Guard said. “To facilitate the medical evacuation, ICG launched a Dornier aircraft from ICG Air Enclave at Kochi Airport at 10 pm”.

The aircraft landed at Agatti island at 11.20 pm,

where the patient, along with the medical support team and spouse, was embarked swiftly considering the urgency of distress,” the statement said.

According to the Coast Guard, the aircraft took off within 25 minutes and landed safely at Kochi airport at about 1.10 am on Sunday.

Subsequently, the patient was shifted to Amrita Hospital and is receiving advanced medical care and support, it said.

Jharkhand to procure 60 lakh quintals of paddy

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Ranchi

The Jharkhand Government has set a target to procure around 60 lakh quintals of paddy and will begin the exercise from December 15, an official said on Sunday. Altogether 783 procurement centres have been set up across the state to carry out the exercise, he said.

State Food, Public Distribution and Consumer Affairs Minister appealed to his cabinet colleagues, MPs and MLAs to visit the procurement centres in their respective areas and inaugurate the initiative.

He said the Government will purchase paddy at ₹2,450 per quintal from farmers.

The authorities have set a target to procure around 60 lakh quintals of paddy, according to the state's e-uparjan portal.

The Jharkhand Cabinet had on December 8 decided that farmers of the state will get a bonus of ₹81 per quintal of paddy in addition to the Centre's minimum support price (MSP) for the crop in the 2025-26 fiscal.

The state council of ministers also approved ₹48.60



crore as a bonus against paddy procurement from the farmers.

The MSP and a bonus have been fixed at ₹2,450 per quintal, the official said. The farmers will also receive a one-time payment for paddy to be purchased by the Government, and not in instalments as was the practice earlier, he said.

The BJP, however, accused the Government of delaying the paddy procurement and forcing farmers to sell their produce at a minimal price.

Leader of Opposition and Jharkhand BJP chief Babul Marandi, during the winter

session, which concluded on Thursday, had alleged,

“Farmers are forced to sell their paddy at a meagre price of ₹1,500 and ₹1,600 per quintal in the open market, as Government procurement has not yet started.”

In 2024-25, the Government had procured the highest 40.08 lakh quintal of paddy against the target of 60 lakh quintals.

However, in 2023-24 and 2022-23, the procurement was 17.02 and 17.16 lakh quintals, respectively. The state had faced drought situations during the period, as per the e-uparjan portal.

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Order Order

Unauthorised coke plants demolished in Meghalaya's East Jaintia Hills



The East Jaintia Hills district administration on Sunday demolished unauthorised coke plants operating in the area, an official said.

Deputy Commissioner Shivansh Awasthi said a joint team comprising officials of the Meghalaya State Pollution Control Board and police under the supervision of Sub-Divisional Officer Manish Kumar was constituted to carry out the demolition drive.

He said 16 coke plants were identified in the district as having been set up without mandatory authorisations under Government norms, of which five had been demolished earlier. Notices were issued in October 2025 to the remaining 11 units, directing their owners to submit compliance documents for regularisation, but no response was received, the deputy commissioner said.

Following this and in pursuance of the Meghalaya High Court's directions, the demolition drive was launched on December 13.

As of the latest report, seven of the 11 coke plants were demolished by the authorities, while the remaining four were found to have already been dismantled by their owners. "All 11 unauthorised coke plants are now non-operational," Awasthi added.

SC to hear plea on protection of persons with autism today



The Supreme Court is scheduled to hear on December 15 a plea seeking the constitution of a national expert committee to formulate comprehensive guidelines for care, rehabilitation and protection of persons with autism and other intellectual disabilities.

The petition has also sought directions to the Centre and others to establish population-based residential facilities for persons with autism and other intellectual disabilities in every district, and to frame comprehensive and binding standard operating procedures (SOPs) for their establishment, regulation and monitoring.

According to the Supreme Court's cause list of December 15, the plea is slated to come up for hearing before a bench of Justices BV Nagarathna and R Mahadevan. The plea has sought directions "to constitute a national expert committee comprising representatives of autistic persons, parents' associations, disability-rights experts and medical professionals to formulate and finalise comprehensive guidelines for the care, rehabilitation and protection of such persons across the country". The plea has also sought directions to the authorities to ensure proper medical facilities, regular health check-ups and continuous access to qualified doctors, therapists and trained caregivers for persons with autism and other intellectual disabilities residing in residential homes. The plea has urged the Supreme Court to issue appropriate directions for regular audits, monitoring and accountability mechanisms to prevent abuse, neglect or exploitation in such facilities.

Kerala Governor questions SC, says institutions must know, respect their limits in democracy

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Thiruvananthapuram

Days after the Supreme Court decided to go ahead with the selection of Vice Chancellors, Kerala Governor Rajendra Vishwanath Arlekar on Sunday said that in a democracy, every institution has its limits and that the health of democratic functioning depends on knowing and respecting those limits.

The Governor was speaking after conferring the Justice VR Krishna Iyer Award on former Chief Justice of India and former Kerala Governor Justice (retd) P Sathasivam.

The award was instituted by the LAW Trust (Legal

Assistance and Welfare Trust). Arlekar's remarks come in the backdrop of a recent Supreme Court direction appointing a committee headed by Justice (retd) Sudhanshu Dhulia to recommend one name each for the appointment of vice chancellors to two technical universities in Kerala, in an attempt to resolve the deadlock between the Governor and the Kerala Chief Minister over the issue.

The Governor moved the top court challenging the order of the division bench of the Kerala High Court disposing of a plea filed against a single judge's order setting aside the November 27, 2024, notification appointing



Supreme Court's conflicting decisions on bank fraud settlements creates dilemma



RANJIT KUMAR SINHA

In November 2025, two decisions of the Supreme Court garnered nationwide attention. Both of them were on the issue of quashing criminal proceedings related to bank fraud on the basis of One Time Settlement (OTS).

The first was the Supreme Court judgment in Central Bureau of Investigation versus M/s. Sarvodaya Highways Ltd and Others (Nov 11, 2025), and the second was the order in the Sandesara brothers (Sterling Biotech Ltd) cases (Nov 19, 2025).

The two decisions were contradictory on the application of the principle of OTS. While in the Sandesara case, the Supreme Court proposed to quash all criminal proceedings on the condition of ₹5,100 Crore deposit, the Apex Court restored the criminal proceedings in the Sarvodaya Highways Ltd case, explicitly holding that an OTS is not a ground to quash charges of fraud and corruption.

Although the Sarvodaya judgment by a Bench of Justices VikramNath and Sandeep Mehtawar delivered a week before the Sandesara order by a bench of Justices JKMaheshwari and Vijay Bishnoi, the latter was widely reported as unprecedented. It is only now that the Sarvodaya judgment is gaining attention, as critics question how there can be two standards when the ultimate relief sought was identical.

The reading of the two decisions makes it clear that the Sandesara case reached the Supreme Court through an Article 32 petition, in which, without mentioning, the bench concerned applied the inherent power under Article 142 in the peculiar facts of the cases to do complete justice and made it clear that it cannot be cited as a precedent.

In the Sarvodaya case, the Supreme Court set aside the Punjab and Haryana High Court's order, which had quashed the criminal proceedings against the company based on OTS with the bank. The Supreme Court essentially held that a one-time settlement does not erase criminal liability for serious economic offences like fraud and corruption under Section 482 of the Criminal Procedure Code (CrPC).

Besides other findings and observations, the bench concerned emphasised that serious economic offences, especially those involving financial fraud against a nationalised/public sector bank, are not merely private disputes between the bank and the customer. They constitute a public wrong



because they impact the public exchequer and harm society at large.

Further, the Supreme Court, in its judgment, specifically noted that the settlement amount of ₹41 crore was significantly lower than the actual outstanding liability of approximately ₹52.50 crore, resulting in a deficit, a loss to the public exchequer, even after the settlement. This was a key factor in the Supreme Court's decision to restore the criminal proceedings. A notable feature in which the two decisions have come is that one case involves a smaller company (M/s. Sarvodaya Highways Ltd) and the other involves a large, fugitive-run conglomerate (Sandesara brothers — Nitin and Chetan).

While the Sandesara brothers had fled the country in 2017, reports do not indicate that the accused/offenders in the Sarvodaya case are out of the reach of law enforcement agencies, rather, the judicial process is actively moving forward against the named individuals (Gurinder Kumar Garg, ArunaGarg, AashutoshGarg, AayushGarg, and the then Branch Manager of the Bank, NishanLal).

Also, there is no explicit report linking the accused or the fraud itself in the Sarvodaya case to any specific politician or established political connection. In contrast, the Sandesara case has been connected to several politicians, bureaucrats, and other influential people, leading to a political controversy that ran parallel to the financial fraud investigations. Consequently, if the proceedings are quashed against the Sandesara brothers, this may automatically shield their alleged co-conspirators and facilitators, who

were also under investigation, raising further concerns about the full scope of the investigation being curtailed. Comparing the outcome of the two cases at the highest court in no way means siding with any party, but the contradictory nature of the two Supreme Court decisions creates several serious issues within the legal system and public domain.

Do the conflicting judgments from the Benches of the Supreme Court shake the public's confidence in the stability and uniformity of the law? Does it not create a perception that justice depends on the bench rather than the established law?

Further, critics raise the question of two standards — one for minor offenders or small amounts and another for high-profile, high-value offenders, where cases can be settled for a price, as proposed in Sandesara. Does it not suggest that serious economic offences can be resolved by wealth, not by law?

Another question arises that when two Benches of equal strength pass contradictory rulings on the same principle (OTS vs Criminal Liability), it creates an impossible dilemma for High Courts and Trial Courts. Subordinate courts are left confused about the correct legal position, stalling trials and increasing the burden of litigation as they await clarification.

The contradiction creates a serious challenge to the stability, predictability, and integrity of the judicial system, particularly in the critical area of combating large-scale economic fraud. Irrespective of the public perception of the outcome of two bank fraud cases, Supreme Court advocate

Madhumita Bhattacharjee prefers to provide a purely legal perspective.

She stated that in the Sandesara case, it is apparent that since its inception, this Court has been of the view that if the petitioners are willing to deposit the amount as settled in OTS and public money is returned to the lender banks, the continuation of the criminal proceedings would serve no useful purpose.

"The tenor of the proceedings apparently indicates peculiarity, with intent to protect the public money and interest and to get deposited the defalcated amount. In furtherance, the consensus has been arrived at as indicated above. In this view, in the peculiar facts and situation of the present case, discretion as prayed, deserves to be exercised for granting the relief, as prayed and to direct for quashment of all the proceedings," Bhattacharjee opined.

She said this observation in the judgment would show that there has been no deliberation on the settled position of law and in the peculiar facts and circumstances of the case, which means that it shall not form any precedent, and without going into the merits, the relief has been granted as the case proceeded from the very beginning on this basis.

Whereas the judgment written by Justice Mehta in the Sarvodaya case deals with the legal position of law and is a judgment under Article 141 of the Constitution of India, and hence, both cannot be compared, as the previous one (Sandesara) is only based on the facts and in the peculiar facts and circumstances of the case.

Bhattacharjee, who is Advocate-on-Record in the Supreme Court, said she had gone through both the judgments in extensive detail. She said in her view, the judgment in the Sarvodaya case also lays down the correct position of law, as upholding the sanctity of law is the primary duty of the constitutional court. Section 482 is an inherent power which was designed to ensure that there is no abuse of the process of law. Therefore, before invoking this provision, a glaring abuse of the process of law is mandatory.

On the contrary, she accepted that in the Sandesara case, a huge financial fraud committed with an intention was being settled on the basis of the power of money, which, if permitted, would send a very wrong message to society at large. "Therefore, in my view, this (Sarvodaya) judgment lays down the correct position of law. However, with two divergent views of concurrent benches, the final settled position can be enunciated by a larger bench only," Bhattacharjee said.

The writer is a senior journalist covering legal affairs

ED aims to end legacy FERA cases by early 2026

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

The Enforcement Directorate (ED) has decided to bring to a conclusion cases registered under the Foreign Exchange Regulation Act (FERA), which was repealed by the country more than 25 years ago in 1998. The criminal sections-loaded FERA of 1973 was replaced in June 2000 by the Foreign Exchange Management Act (FEMA) of 1999, a civil law.

Officials told media that the federal probe agency has begun identifying about 400-500 cases in which adjudication proceedings pending before various courts under the FERA can be fast-tracked for closure, as the individuals under prosecution have either died or gone untraceable, or the assets under question have been liquidated or have ceased to exist.

The officials said the aim is to complete the exercise in the next few months — the first quarter of 2026 being the immediate deadline.

The last show cause notices under the FERA were issued in May 2002.

ED Director Rahul Navin, during a recent conference of the agency officers held in Gujarat, had also reiterated his directions for "fast-tracking" of old FERA adjudication cases as he emphasised the "completion of lifecycle" of all pending cases in various



forums. The officials said that the closure of FERA cases over the "next few months" will end the legacy of litigation and redundancy going on for more than two decades.

They said that the FERA had an avatar even before 1973 which was first brought in 1947.

The Central Government had, in 1956, established the ED as an "enforcement unit" under the Department of Economic Affairs (DEA) to handle violations and cases registered under the

FERA of 1947. This law was then repealed and replaced by the FERA of 1973 and subsequently by the FEMA law of 1999 as part of the economic liberalisation policy of India.

The FEMA focuses more on the management of foreign exchange rather than its regulation and control (like in FERA).

Most of the violations under the FEMA are treated as civil offences as compared to criminal proceedings under the FERA.

President Murmu rejects mercy plea of man convicted for rape, murder

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

President Droupadi Murmu has rejected the mercy petition of a man convicted of kidnapping, raping and killing a two-year-old girl in Maharashtra in 2012, officials said on Sunday.

This is the third mercy plea rejected by the President after assuming office on July 25, 2022. The Supreme Court on October 3, 2019, affirmed the death sentence awarded to Ravi Ashok Ghumare, saying he had no control over his "carnal desires" and surpassed all natural, social and legal limits just to satiate his sexual hunger.

In its verdict, a three-judge bench comprising Justice Surya Kant (now chief justice of India), by a majority verdict of 2:1, said the man had "ruthlessly finished" a life which was yet to bloom and his act of committing unnatural offence with the two-year-old exhibits "a dirty and perverted mind, showcasing a

horrifying tale of brutality".

Ghumare's mercy plea was rejected by the President on November 6, 2025, according to the status of the mercy petition disclosed by the Rashtrapati Bhavan. "Having said that, it may be seen that the victim was barely a two-year-old baby whom the appellant (Ravi) kidnapped and apparently kept on assaulting for over four to five hours till she breathed her last.

"The appellant, who had no control over his carnal desires, surpassed all natural, social and legal limits just to satiate his sexual hunger. He ruthlessly finished a life which was yet to bloom," Justice Surya Kant had said, while writing the verdict for himself and (now retired) Justice Rohinton Fali Nariman. The appellant, instead of showing fatherly love, affection and protection to the child against the evils of society, made her the victim of lust, the majority verdict said.

Technology should amplify human judgment, not replace it: CJI Surya Kant

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Cuttack

Chief Justice of India Surya Kant on Sunday said technology should amplify human judgment and not replace it.

He was addressing a symposium on 'Ensuring justice for the common man: strategies for reducing litigation costs and delays' here.

"Pendency of cases in courts clogs every level of the judicial structure, from the trial court to the constitutional court. And when a blockage occurs at the top, the pressure only intensifies below," he said.

He also stressed the need to strengthen judicial infrastructure to reduce pendency. "This is because without sufficient courts, even the most sincere judicial system will collapse under logistical strain," he said.

Justice Kant said technology was very useful during the COVID pandemic.



CJI Surya Kant

He, however, said that one cannot afford to forget that technology comes with its own shadows.

"In an age of deep fakes and digital arrests, courts cannot afford naive optimism.... A reform that excludes the poor, elderly, or digitally unfamiliar is

not reform at all, it is regression. That is why I have always maintained that technology must remain a servant of justice, not its substitute. It should amplify human judgment, not replace it," the CJI said.

He said a system where the executive, legislature and judiciary do not move in harmony resembles a tricycle missing a wheel — the rule of law cannot balance, let alone move forward.

"And the consequences are stark — laws may be enacted, offences registered, even liberty curtailed, yet the citizen is left waiting for the one thing that completes the promise of justice: a timely trial that the infrastructure is simply too frail to deliver," he added.

Among others, Orissa High Court Chief Justice Harish Tandon, and judges from high courts across India attended the event, which was also joined by Advocate General Pitambar Acharya.



Editor's
TAKE

A dispute written in stone

The clashes between two otherwise peaceful countries underscore how unresolved historical disputes can turn heritage sites and borderlines into flashpoints

The year 2025 has been turbulent throughout. From the war in Ukraine to the Gaza conflict and renewed hostilities along the Pakistan-Afghanistan frontier, the year has witnessed conflict on multiple fronts. Even in its final month, unrest persists, with unexpected clashes erupting between Cambodia and Thailand – two otherwise peaceful neighbours bound by shared borders and intertwined histories.

The latest flare-up along the Thailand-Cambodia border is a grim reminder that unresolved issues have a habit of erupting into armed conflict. Sporadic skirmishes on the border escalated into air strikes and artillery exchanges, leading to large-scale evacuations on both sides and leaving at least 20 dead. If there is a conflict anywhere in the world, US President Donald Trump has an uncanny urge to get involved and become a self-appointed peace broker, often with detrimental effect. This time too, US President Donald Trump announced that both sides had “agreed to cease all shooting”, a statement that proved rather premature, as neither side appeared very keen on it.

At the heart of the confrontation lies the long-disputed border region surrounding the 11th-century Preah Vihear temple complex. Though the International Court of Justice awarded the temple to Cambodia decades ago, divergent interpretations of boundary lines and provocative statements on both sides have fuelled public anger. Periodic flare-ups, including violent clashes in 2008-11 and again earlier this year, demonstrate how fragile past ceasefires have been.

This week's violence followed the collapse of October talks, after Thailand accused Cambodian forces of laying landmines in the region. What is clear is that deep mistrust, militarised borders, and domestic political pressures in both countries continue to fuel this conflict, which is more emotive than real. The involvement of Donald Trump as a self-styled mediator adds another dimension to the problem. Announcing the ceasefire on his Truth Social platform, Trump cast himself as an indispensable power broker, positioning himself as the principal mediator. His eagerness to insert himself into every global conflict often appears driven less by a commitment to peace than by the pursuit of personal legacy. By sidelining regional diplomacy and framing himself as a Nobel Peace Prize contender, Trump ultimately does more harm than good to the cause of peace. For India, the conflict is not a distant Southeast Asian squabble but a matter of tangible concern. New Delhi's immediate worry has been the reported damage to conservation facilities at the Preah Vihear temple, a UNESCO World Heritage Site where the Archaeological Survey of India has been leading a \$5.5 million restoration project since 2022. Beyond heritage, India has strategic stakes in regional stability under its Act East policy. Prolonged instability between two ASEAN members threatens trade routes, economic integration, and the broader balance in a region already under pressure from great-power rivalry. For India and the wider region, the lesson is stark: history ignored does not fade – it flares up, often with consequences far beyond the battlefield.

How a Jaish network was uncovered

What began as a routine investigation into Jaish-e-Mohammed posters in Srinagar's Nowgam area spiralled into the exposure of a chilling, multi-state terror network involving radicalised doctors, clerics and overground workers



ANIL BHAT

On October 19, 2025, when Jammu & Kashmir (J&K) Police began an investigation into Jaish-e-Mohammed (JeM) posters threatening attacks on security forces that appeared in Srinagar's Nowgam area, a terror network involving Kashmiri doctors was exposed. Persistent police work, including analysis of CCTV footage, led to the identification and arrest of three local overground workers (OGWs) with prior records of stone-pelting. Their interrogation led the police to a cleric and former paramedic named Maulvi Irfan Ahmad from Shopian.

Irfan's interrogation revealed a wider Jaish-e-Mohammed network operating across multiple states, including J&K, Haryana, and Uttar Pradesh. He had allegedly used his position as an imam to radicalise educated professionals, including doctors. Maulvi Irfan's phone contacts included several doctors, raising police suspicion. His interrogation, along with that of another arrested individual, Zameer Ahmad Ahanger, exposed a network of radicalised medical professionals. Based on these leads, police conducted a series of raids across different states.

Dr Adeel Ahmad Rather was arrested in Saharanpur, Uttar Pradesh, where he had moved after working at Government Medical College (GMC), Anantnag. An AK-47 rifle was recovered from his old locker at GMC, and his interrogation led the police to Dr Muzammil Ganaie at Al-Falah University in Faridabad, Haryana.

Raids on two houses rented by Ganaie in Faridabad uncovered a massive cache of explosives – nearly 2,900 kg of materials, including ammonium nitrate, two AK-series rifles, and other bomb-making equipment.

The multi-agency crackdown caused panic among the network members, which, it is believed, led another doctor, Dr Umar Ul Nabi, who worked with Drs Adeel and Muzammil, to prematurely detonate a vehicle-borne explosive device near Delhi's Red Fort on November 10, 2025, resulting in 13 fatalities and his own death. On November 10, 2025, at about 6:52 pm, a white Hyundai i20 car parked near the Red Fort Metro rail station in Delhi exploded, killing at least eight people and injuring many more. Reportedly, a probable reason was that its driver, Dr Umar Nabi, whose accomplices were already under investigation and some of whom had been arrested, may have panicked and prematurely caused the detonation of the device.

Immediately afterwards, Delhi Police, forensic teams, and fire engines rushed to the scene. CCTV footage from the scene and nearby areas was collected to trace the car's movements and ownership. On November 11, 2025, the Ministry of Home Affairs handed over the probe to the



WHITE-COLLAR
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National Investigation Agency (NIA), indicating that it was being treated as a terror attack. J&K Police collected DNA samples from Nabi's family in Pulwama for matching with the remains from the blast site. On November 12, 2025, DNA results confirmed that Dr Umar Nabi was the driver and sole occupant of the exploded car. It was revealed that Drs Nabi and Ganaie had visited the Red Fort in January 2025, possibly for reconnaissance. A red Ford EcoSport car linked to the accused was also found in Haryana. On November 13, 2025, J&K Police's Counter Intelligence Kashmir wing conducted further raids at 13 locations across the Kashmir Valley in connection with the terror module.

On November 15, 2025, an explosion occurred inside the Nowgam police station in Srinagar while police and forensic teams were handling the seized explosive materials brought from Faridabad as evidence in the Red Fort case, resulting in nine deaths and numerous injuries among police personnel and civilians.

It is believed that Nabi's panicked actions inadvertently set off an explosion and thereby prevented a larger, planned series of attacks in many other parts of the country.

Wider investigations also revealed Dr Shaheen Saeed, a doctor and teacher from Lucknow, who raised ₹20 lakh for procuring raw materials for IEDs; Amir Rashid Ali, arrested for arranging the Hyundai i20 car used in the attack and helping prepare the explosives; and Jasir Bilal Wani, a technician tasked with exploring ways to attach explosives to drones. Authorities also reportedly questioned over 50 doctors in Kashmir in connection with the case, including Drs Sajjad Ahmed and Sajad Malik. The doctors were reportedly radicalised through online channels such as Telegram and through trips to countries like Turkey. Funds were allegedly raised under the guise of social or charitable causes.

Al-Falah University, a private university in Faridabad, Haryana, established in 2014 by the Al-Falah Charitable Trust, is headed by Jawad Ahmad Siddiqui, chairman-cum-chancellor

of Al-Falah University and founder of the Al-Falah Group. While it aims to provide “quality education, promote research, and prepare students for successful careers” and is officially recognised by the University Grants Commission, it has been a hub of Kashmiri doctors involved in terror.

White-collar terrorists are certainly not new in the Kashmir Valley. One classic case is Yasin Malik, head of the Jammu Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF), who spearheaded separatist ideology and violent activities in the Valley since 1988, when the term ‘white-collar terror’ was not current. He was the mastermind behind the purging of Kashmiri Pandits and was responsible for their genocide and the exodus of at least 400,000 from the Kashmir Valley. He and his colleagues were known to boast about murdering Indian Air Force officers and many innocent non-Muslims. After all that, they masqueraded as ‘separatists’ and enjoyed being hosted at taxpayers’ expense by Congress governments.

It should also not be forgotten that political leaders ruling J&K were responsible for allowing the massacre and purge of the Kashmiri Pandits and who, after five years of the abrogation of Articles 370 and 35A, got elected again

in 2024 by the decision of the Supreme Court, and are ruling at a time when Pakistani terrorists massacred tourists in Pahalgam, with their presence being known to and accommodated by local shopkeepers and pony operators.

A vital course correction for India's security by New Delhi, albeit very right-wing sounding, should be:

- reverting J&K to long-term President's Rule;
- ensuring long-term, organised, and effective de-radicalisation;
- increasing permanent Army presence in the Kashmir Valley and hinterland, with many more cantonments; and
- ensuring that elections are held in J&K only when there are sufficient Kashmiri Pandit and/or Dogra candidates.

Justice delayed leaves truth unanswered still



ASHA IYER KUMAR

2ND OPINION
THE PIONEER

Justice is an elusive and often ambiguous idea. It does not always arrive where one expects it to, nor does it consistently side with those who have been grievously wronged. At times, it appears to favour individuals widely perceived as guilty in the court of public opinion, yet declared “not guilty” within the strict confines of the law.

This uneasy tension between moral certainty and legal outcome came sharply into focus in Kerala this week, when a prominent actor was acquitted of criminal conspiracy in the 2017 abduction and rape case involving another actor. The verdict triggered an outpouring of anger across social media and public forums in the state. Many viewed the acquittal as a stain on the country's judicial system, a moment that seemed to reaffirm public cynicism about

the ability of institutions to deliver justice in cases involving wealth, influence, and power. Accusations flew thick and fast – some openly asserting that money and clout had tilted the scales, quietly seeping into the crevices of a system meant to safeguard truth and fairness. Enough rage has been vented over what many see as the irony of the judgment, and it will likely remain one of the most telling examples of how a high-profile case can unravel over time. For eight long years, the matter lingered in court.

While it is true that truth, in law, must be established through evidence alone – and, viewed strictly through that prism, the acquittal followed established legal principles – the larger question cannot be ignored. When justice is delayed for nearly a decade, it ceases to be justice in any meaningful sense. In such cases, delay itself becomes a denial of the victim's fundamental right.

Memories fade, narratives shift, and pressure – subtle or otherwise – begins to reshape testimony. In this case, several witnesses who once provided critical statements later turned hostile. Of the 261 witnesses examined, 28 reversed their earlier accounts. How much truth was lost in that erosion is impossible to measure, but its impact on the outcome is undeniable. Such reversals are not uncommon in trials involving influential accused persons, and they point to a systemic vulnerability that the justice system has

yet to adequately address. While there may be no legal proof establishing intimidation or directly implicating the accused as a conspirator, the manner in which the crime was executed and subsequently handled makes it difficult to accept that it was a random act. The precision of the crime and the subsequent disintegration of the prosecution's case suggest manipulation so thorough that it left the state with little to sustain a conviction.

For the public – largely excluded from the complexities of legal procedure and the unseen forces that can shape a trial – the only option is reluctant acceptance of the verdict. There is some consolation in knowing that higher courts remain open should the survivor choose to pursue the matter further, with the hope that proceedings there may be swifter and more resolute. Yet a deep unease lingers. When crimes appear to be softened by power and privilege, it breeds fear and insecurity. It sends a chilling message that truth can be weakened by neglect, delay, or influence, and that the law may not always protect the vulnerable. The anger provoked by the Emakulam court's verdict may eventually fade, but the questions it raises will endure. At the heart of this legal and moral dilemma stands a woman whose struggle for justice and dignity remains painfully unresolved.

The writer is a Dubai-based author, columnist, independent journalist and children's writing coach

The Pioneer
SINCE 1865

FOREIGN CAMPUSES EXPOSE NEGLECT OF INDIA'S PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES

The entry of foreign universities into India marks a significant shift in the country's higher education landscape, but it also exposes a worrying lack of confidence in public, government run institutions.

While foreign campuses may reduce foreign exchange outflow and offer international exposure, their high fees, absence of reservation policies, and limited geographical reach will largely benefit a privileged minority. More fundamentally, the policy raises an uncomfortable question: is India's education system truly incapable of reform, or has it simply suffered from prolonged neglect? Public universities, despite chronic underfunding, faculty shortages and infrastructure constraints, continue to educate the overwhelming majority of

students and remain vital spaces for social mobility, inclusion and diversity. They produce teachers, researchers, administrators and professionals who sustain the country's economic and democratic life.

Instead of importing exclusivity under the banner of globalisation, the government must prioritise strengthening domestic institutions. Meaningful reform requires sustained public investment, academic autonomy, transparent governance and respect for constitutional values such as equity and access. Without this, foreign universities will remain islands of privilege, while the foundational system that serves millions continues to erode, undermining education as a public good.

KYAMUDIN ANSARI | MUMBAI

Parliamentary praise for Ladakh institute

The Himalayan Institute of Alternatives, HIAL, founded by Ladakh educator and innovator Sonam Wangchuk, has received strong praise from a Parliamentary panel, which described its work as exemplary and urged the University Grants Commission to grant long pending recognition. In its report, the Standing Committee on Education, Women, Youth and Sports, chaired by Congress Member of Parliament Digvijaya Singh, expressed concern that HIAL's application for recognition has remained unresolved for years despite the institute's growing academic stature and international acclaim. The committee said it was impressed by HIAL's distinctive academic ecosystem, which blends education, research and entrepreneurship while remaining rooted in the region's socio cultural and ecological realities. It highlighted the institute's emphasis on experiential and project based learning, noting that HIAL reflects the spirit of the National Education Policy 2020.

The panel noted HIAL's impact on local communities and its global recognition through initiatives such as ice stupas and sustained community engagement. Despite administrative challenges, the report presents HIAL as a beacon of educational innovation deserving recognition and wider national adoption.

BHAGWAN THADANI | MUMBAI

Messi event signals administrative failure

The chaotic collapse of Lionel Messi's Kolkata appearance is a sobering reminder that celebrity spectacle without professional planning can quickly turn into a public hazard. Tens of thousands of fans paid exorbitant prices in good faith, only to be denied even a fleeting and dignified glimpse of the footballer they idolise. What followed, vandalism, pitch invasion and panic, was not spontaneous behaviour but the predictable outcome of gross mismanagement.

Events of such scale demand meticulous crowd control, transparent communication and realistic expectations. Instead, Messi's brief appearance was overwhelmed by VIPs and selfie seekers, while paying spectators were left confused and frustrated. The abrupt withdrawal of players without explanation deepened the sense of betrayal. That even experienced administrators and security forces were overwhelmed speaks volumes about the organisers' lack of preparedness. Damage to a stadium refurbished with public funds and risks to lives make this more than an entertainment fiasco. Accountability must be fixed, refunds ensured and criminal negligence examined. India's sporting ambitions will ring hollow unless professionalism, transparency and respect for fans are strictly enforced.

SANJAY CHOPRA | MOHALI

Centralisation threatens higher education

The Cabinet's approval of the Viksit Bharat Shiksha Adhikshan Bill is being presented as reform, yet it reveals a troubling obsession with centralisation in higher education governance. Replacing the University Grants Commission, AICTE and NCTE with a single regulator ignores India's deeper crisis of chronic underfunding, faculty shortages, rural exclusion and shrinking academic freedom. Separating funding from regulation while retaining ministerial control invites political interference and weakens university autonomy.

Centralised uniform standards will disproportionately harm small and rural institutions, pushing many towards closure or privatisation. Genuine reform requires trust in universities, sustained public investment and transparent, accountable governance. India's higher education system needs empowerment, not another top down, one size fits all experiment that rewards administrative control over quality, equity and intellectual freedom. Students and teachers deserve meaningful investment, institutional autonomy and academic accountability, rather than cosmetic restructuring and symbolic renaming of regulatory bodies that fail to address foundational structural problems affecting access, excellence and inclusion nationwide.

VIJAYKUMAR H K | RAICHUR

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Remembering Chandan Mitra: Mentor, visionary, and friend

In an industry often marred by sensationalism, Chandan championed balanced reporting, reminding us that journalism’s true power lies in informing, not inflaming. Beyond his professional acumen, he was a multifaceted personality – a politician, historian and cultural enthusiast

FIRST
Column



PROF (DR) K G SURESH

As I sit down to pen this tribute (my first column after his demise) on the occasion of Chandan Mitra's birth anniversary, my thoughts drift back to the man who shaped not just Indian journalism but also impacted the lives of countless journalists like me. Born on December 12, 1955, Chandan would have turned 70 this year, a milestone that feels both poignant and unreal in his absence. He left us on September 1, 2021, at the age of 66, but his legacy endures like the enduring ink of a well-crafted editorial.

My association with Chandan Da was both as a columnist with *The Pioneer*, where he served as the Editor and Managing Director for many years and as General Secretary of the Indian Media Centre (IMC), an organisation focused on media training and skill upgradation, led by him as Chairman. There, we collaborated on initiatives aimed at strengthening grassroots journalism, a cause close to both our hearts.

Chandan's journey into journalism was nothing short of illustrious, marked by academic excellence and a relentless pursuit of truth. A product of Kolkata's La Martiniere School, he went on to graduate from St Stephen's College, Delhi University, before earning a Master's and a DPhil from Oxford University. His scholarly background infused his journalism with depth and rigor, setting him apart in an era when reporting often prioritized speed over substance.

Starting his career at *The Statesman* in Kolkata, Chandan quickly rose through the ranks, moving to *The Times of India* in Delhi and then to the *Hindustan Times*, where he served as Executive Editor. But it was at *The Pioneer*, which he joined in 1993 and eventually led as editor and managing director, that he truly left his mark. Under his stewardship, *The Pioneer* transformed from a regional newspaper into a national voice known for its bold editorials, investigative reporting, and commitment to ethical journalism.

As a senior journalist with experience in broadcast and print media, I had contributed to various outlets, but writing for *The Pioneer* under Chandan's guidance was a defining phase. He had a knack for spotting potential in young and mid-career journalists, encour-



DR. CHANDAN MITRA
(12 DEC 1954-01 SEPT 2021)

ON THIS DAY, I RAISE A SILENT TOAST TO MY FRIEND AND MENTOR. MAY HIS VISION FOR A VIBRANT, ETHICAL, AND INCLUSIVE MEDIA CONTINUE TO GUIDE US. REST IN PEACE, CHANDAN — YOU ARE MISSED, BUT NEVER FORGOTTEN

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aging us to push boundaries while maintaining journalistic integrity. I remember submitting columns on socio-political issues, and Chandan would often call me personally to discuss nuances — sometimes challenging my views, other times refining them with his sharp insights. His feedback was never condescending; it was always aimed at elevating the discourse.

In an industry often marred by sensationalism, Chandan championed balanced reporting, reminding us that journalism's true power lies in informing, not inflaming. Our collaboration extended beyond *The Pioneer* to the Indian Media Center initiatives, particularly through events and programs at IIMC, where I later served as Director General. IIMC, with its focus on training and skill upgradation for aspiring journalists, especially from grassroots levels, aligned perfectly with Chandan's vision for a more inclusive media ecosystem.

He was a frequent panelist and guest at IIMC events, sharing his experiences on topics ranging from the evolution of Indian language journalism to the challenges of digital media. One memorable occasion was a panel discussion on journalism ethics, where Chandan delved into how media could empower rural and underserved communities. He emphasized the need for skill-building programs that went beyond urban elites, advocating for training modules that

equipped journalists from small towns with tools for investigative reporting and multimedia storytelling. Often me and IMC Founder and veteran journalist late Shyam Khosla would admire the manner in which Chandan, unlike people of his stature and with hectic work schedules, would spend days together at our meetings in Chandigarh and other cities discussing how to empower content wise and technologically the journalists working in small towns and districts.

Chandan's commitment to grassroots journalism was not mere rhetoric; it was action-oriented. At *The Pioneer*, he initiated coverage of underreported stories from India's hinterlands, giving voice to issues like rural development, tribal rights, and local governance. This approach resonated with the ethos of IMC's training

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programs, which aim to bridge the gap between metropolitan media and regional realities. He was also a passionate advocate for the soft power of Indian cinema, and was amongst the first to dedicate space in any mainstream newspaper to discussions linked to the industry. During our joint sessions, we discussed strategies to integrate digital literacy into journalism curricula, recognizing that the rise of social media demanded new skills for fact-checking and ethical online reporting. Chandan often shared anecdotes from his early days, illustrating how grassroots stories could influence

India's missing digital infrastructure: Why a tech Superpower still imports Computer



KRISHNA V GIRI



PAYAL SETH

India generates close to one-fifth of the world's digital data yet hosts barely 2-3 per cent of global data-centre capacity. The result is stark: a country that creates the digital exhaust of 1.4 billion people depends heavily on infrastructure physically located elsewhere. Our firms, start-ups and even public systems increasingly rely on computing outside India's borders.

The global comparison is sobering (see Figure 1). Switzerland, with under ten million people, operates over a hundred data centres, while India, with 1.4 billion, has only around 150. That is roughly a hundred-fold gap on a per-capita basis. The paradox is that India, the world's software factory, is still a compute importer.

Our domestic capacity today is about 1.2 gigawatts (GW) and is projected to rise to 2 GW by 2026 and 9 GW by 2032. These are healthy growth numbers, yet they remain modest relative to our digital footprint, and as AI workloads surge, the deficit will deepen unless compute is treated as national infrastructure.

The Job Question and the Real Economic Multiplier

It is easy to dismiss data centres as "job-poor". Indeed, a typical 100 MW facility might sustain only around 50 long-term operational jobs and approximately 500 construction roles during its build phase. But this narrow view ignores the broader ecosystem they anchor: power infrastructure, fibre connectivity, cooling systems, server manufacturing and high-skilled services. The surrounding economic activity is expected to exceed ₹50,000 crore by FY 2027. For instance, in Andhra Pradesh, a ₹4,500-crore facility (by Adani Group and Google) is projected to create over 16,000 direct and indirect jobs, and a broader renewables-plus-data-centre cluster could add over 70,000 indirect jobs.

If India reaches 9 GW by 2032, even conservative multipliers imply tens of thousands of direct construction jobs, several thousand high-skill permanent roles and many times that number in the wider ecosystem spanning equipment, power, cooling, connectivity and services. That is not labour-intensive in the way textiles are, but it is deeply consequential for state economies looking to anchor clusters of high-wage activity.

How India Built the Wrong Architecture

India entered the data-centre era early but built the wrong model. Beginning in 2006, government funding created State Data Centres (SDCs) with a ₹1,623-crore outlay to host e-governance workloads. They replaced scattered server rooms but were designed for kilowatt-scale loads — not the tens of megawatts modern workloads need. Managed as government IT assets rather than industrial platforms, they remain closed to private demand. India essentially built small server rooms and mistook them for a compute strategy.

The Policy Flip-Flop That Followed

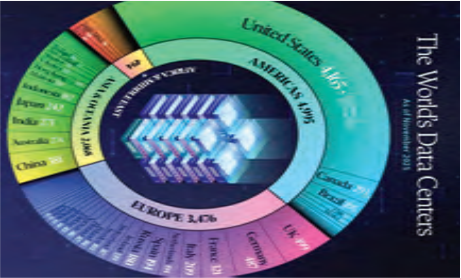
Regulatory shifts deepened investor uncertainty. The 2018 Srikrishna Committee recommended storing a copy of all personal data in India and designating some as "critical", to be stored exclusively onshore. This signalled localisation push and could have guaranteed domestic demand. But the 2023 law took the opposite approach: most cross-border transfers are allowed unless countries are blacklisted. Investors, expecting guaranteed local demand, faced years of ambiguity followed by a diluted regime. The result was predictable: hesitation and slow capacity growth.

A Compute Hub Emerges on the East Coast

Against this backdrop, Visakhapatnam (Vizag) demonstrates what a coherent ecosystem can achieve. A planned US\$15-billion investment, including a subsea cable landing and gigawatt-scale compute capacity, aims to position Vizag as a regional gateway. Andhra Pradesh targets 6 GW in five years, with 1.6 GW already committed. The vision includes Google's largest India data centre and major renewable-energy integration. Andhra Pradesh's IT Minister has separately articulated a vision of Visakhapatnam as "India's Data City". While many states—Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Uttar Pradesh and Telangana—have data-centre policies offering tariff waivers and land subsidies, the absence of a national framework risks a race to the bottom. States compete on incentives but lack coordination on grid integration, cooling standards, renewable-energy tie-ups and geographic distribution.

A Coherent National Strategy

India's compute transition will not happen by accident. It requires three deliberate shifts. First, treat data centres as core national infrastructure: link incentives to efficiency, water use and renewable PPAs. Second, adopt a national spatial strategy: coast to inland, cable-landing hubs to high-voltage corridors. Third, shift the state from operator to enabler: provide land, trunk infrastructure and



clearances; let private capital build and run to global standards.

The Energy Constraint: Why Green Is Not Optional

Finally, no credible data-centre strategy can ignore energy. One expects data centres to consume nearly 30 per cent of national electricity in a decade. India's share today is modest, around 0.8 per cent of total electricity demand, rising to 2.6 per cent by 2030. But the grid is weaker and reliability uneven. One megawatt of IT load requires roughly 1.2-1.5 megawatts of grid power, depending on efficiency.

Without pairing new capacity with dedicated renewable generation, the sector risks public backlash in a country where many households still face outages. The only durable solution is to structurally couple new data-centre capacity with new renewable-energy projects. For instance, Madhya Pradesh's agreement with Submer Technologies is to develop up to 1 GW of energy-efficient, immersion-cooled, AI-ready data centres with up to 45 per cent energy savings and 90% water conservation relative to conventional designs. Another good example of the model India needs is Greenko's 1,680 MW pumped-storage hydropower project at Pinnapuram in Andhra Pradesh, one of the largest of its kind globally. By pairing long-duration storage with solar and wind, it functions as a round-the-clock clean-energy backbone.

The Stakes

The next decade will be defined not by who writes the algorithms, but by who owns the infrastructure that runs them. If India remains a talent exporter but a compute importer, it will capture only a fragment of the value the AI era creates. We already generate the data. We already have the developers. What we lack is the infrastructure, the strategy and the execution strength to convert that into sovereign compute power.

Krishna V Giri, Distinguished Fellow & Special Advisor to the Chairperson and Payal Seth, Fellow. Both are at Pahle India Foundation

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The high-technology turn in India-Russia relations



PRIYA GUPTA

President Vladimir Putin's 4-5 December visit to India has often been interpreted through conventional lenses such as energy supplies, defence transactions and routine diplomatic signalling. Putin described India as "a unique civilisation and a trusted partner," a sentiment that framed the tone of his visit and underscored why technological cooperation now sits at the centre of the relationship. "India has shown remarkable stability and responsible leadership," he observed in the interview.

India's emergence as the world's fifth-largest economy, with credible projections of becoming the third largest by 2027, forms the backdrop to this renewed engagement. A median age of twenty-eight strengthens India's long-term capacity in digital innovation, advanced computing and scientific research. Bilateral trade with Russia has now crossed sixty-five billion dollars. A large part of this increase came from the shift in energy sourcing, with Russian crude rising from one per cent of India's imports in 2021 to more than thirty-five per cent today. This shift generated savings estimated to be between five and six billion dollars in the last financial year.

Defence cooperation remains substantial. Russia continues to supply a significant share of India's military equipment, and a large proportion of India's defence platforms still depend on Russian technical ecosystems. The digital economy is projected to reach one trillion dollars by 2030. India has become the third-largest hub of global AI talent. Unlike earlier engagements that were centred on defence procurement and hydrocarbons, this visit placed technology at the forefront of bilateral priorities.

From Buyer and Seller to Joint Innovators

As he put it in the interview, Russia does not "simply sell weapons to India; we share technologies," a remark that reveals how Moscow now views India as a long-term co-developer rather than a downstream recipient.

Putin's interview reflects an important shift in Russia's approach to India. He stated that Russia seeks to share technology with India rather than remain a supplier of equipment. The principle of joint development is now extending beyond defence into artificial intelligence, quantum technologies, space systems, nuclear research and advanced materials. These sectors jointly form a coherent Indo-Russian technology corridor. It

reaches and introducing innovative formats that blended print with emerging digital trends. His editorials were incisive, often critiquing power structures while advocating for democratic values. In fact, I vividly remember him telling me that financially managing a newspaper was a huge challenge and he was never interested in becoming a proprietor "but circumstances, the prospects of my journalism and non-journalist colleagues losing their jobs, prompted me to take up this challenge."

In politics, he bridged the gap between media and governance, using his platform to highlight issues like press freedom and cultural preservation. Tributes poured in after his passing, from Prime Minister Narendra Modi to fellow journalists, underscoring his role in nurturing young talent. The Rajya Sabha even paid homage to him in November 2021, recognizing his contributions as a former MP and Editor.

In the context of grassroots journalism, Chandan's work at *The Pioneer* and his engagements with training bodies like IMC were pioneering. He supported programs that trained journalists in regional languages, ensuring that stories from India's villages reached national audiences. Today, as media faces challenges from misinformation and digital disruption, his emphasis on skill upgradation feels more relevant than ever. I often reflect on our discussions about integrating technology into journalism education — ideas that have influenced modern curricula at institutions across India. As we mark this anniversary, I am reminded of Chandan's enduring spirit. He was a man of many seasons: journalist, politician, scholar, and above all, a humanist.

His death snapped long-standing friendships, as noted by colleagues like Swapan Dasgupta, who remembered their bond dating back to 1966. For me, Chandan was a guiding light in a profession that demands both courage and compassion. His initiatives at the Indian Media Center — through panels, workshops, and advocacy — helped democratize journalism. In closing, Chandan Mitra's legacy is not confined to headlines or parliamentary records; it lives in the journalists he inspired, the stories he amplified, and the institutions he strengthened. On this day, I raise a silent toast to my friend and mentor. May his vision for a vibrant, ethical, and inclusive media continue to guide us. Rest in peace, Chandan — you are missed, but never forgotten.

represents a move from a transactional relationship to one grounded in shared knowledge creation and scientific confidence. For India, this aligns closely with the pursuit of technological sovereignty and long-term strategic autonomy.

Artificial Intelligence and the New East-Eurasian Axis

Artificial intelligence is one of the clearest areas where the benefits of collaboration are visible. India contributes nearly sixteen per cent of global AI talent and hosts more than nine hundred AI-based start-ups. Its digital public infrastructure, which includes Aadhaar, UPI and DigiLocker, provides a fertile environment for designing and deploying large-scale AI systems. Russia adds strengths derived from several decades of scientific investment. When combined, these capacities give the partnership the ability to build independent AI architectures without relying on Western technological ecosystems.

Quantum Technologies as a Transformative Frontier

Quantum science is another domain in which cooperation could deliver long-term advantages. India's National Quantum Mission, supported by significant public investment, aims to build national capacity in quantum communication, quantum computing and advanced materials. Russia already possesses strong foundations in quantum physics and superconducting materials. Joint projects could include Quantum Key Distribution satellites, secure post-quantum communication protocols, shared quantum laboratories and hardware accelerators for high-performance computing.

Space Cooperation for Renewed Strategic Depth

India and Russia have a long history of collaboration in space. The recent visit opens the possibility of a much more expansive programme. Potential areas of cooperation include joint lunar exploration building upon India's Chandrayaan missions, propulsion systems for deep-space mobility and a coordinated navigation architecture through NavIC and GLONASS. This functions as a form of national infrastructure that influences communication, logistics, defence readiness and economic planning.

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

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BLASÉ CAPITAL

US vs THEM

A leading business newspaper did an interesting calculation. It stated that foreign institutional investors sold equities worth more than ₹2.23 lakh crore in the secondary market in this calendar year (January 1-December 14). This worked out to a net selling of ₹900 crore a day based on the number of days the stock exchanges were open. In other words, it translated into sales of just over ₹150 crore an hour based on the number of hours they were open. Such a pace, added the newspaper, had never been witnessed before, ever since foreign investors were allowed to directly invest in Indian equities. There were days, weeks, and months when hectic selling took place. But it was never so sustained, regular, consistent, and continuous over nearly 12 months. During this year, there were moments, and short periods of net inflows. The overall trend was outwards.

However, the broader indices remained relatively stable despite periods of high volatility, and regular uncertainties. The net outflows by the foreigners were more than matched by the domestic inflows, especially by retail investors largely through mutual funds, which invariably invested in the secondary market. The small investors pumped in huge sums in IPOs (Initial Public Offerings) through the year, and especially in the past 2-3 months. Listing gains in the IPOs were common, and some shares were listed 50-60 per cent higher than the offer prices. For example, while foreigners sold ₹16,000 crore worth of equities in this month, the domestic investors bought shares worth ₹40,000 crore, or two-and-a-half times the former figure. Experts contend that domestic inflows have consistently been ₹30,000 crore a month for the past three months. One of them dubs the pattern as foreigners versus domestic “tug of war.”

What does this mean? Are the foreigners smarter, or know something about the Indian equities that the local investors do not? Or is it that the domestic investors have more faith and trust in equities? As far as the foreigners are concerned, they are driven by three factors. One, they regularly book profits, and invariably have target sale prices in mind. The moment they achieve it, they vamoose. While the larger institutions invest for a longer period, others like hedge funds, which are more driven by quarterly returns, buy-and-dump regularly. When the sale decisions of the two converge, there is madness in the markets, and the herd mentality takes over. Two, the foreigners are dictated by safety. Whenever they see threats, or feel that the safer US market offers decent returns, money flies away from the emerging markets like India. Three, the foreigners take macro and fundamental data seriously. Any instability, and they are gone, even if they return quite fast, and within weeks or months.

In the case of the Indian retail investors, they are generally the last ones to join the equity party. They wait until stock prices are already high, and then jump in because either they see their friends, relatives, and neighbours making money, or they are gripped by FOMO, and do not wish to lose out on the opportunities. Although many of them burnt their hands, and legs, during the pandemic bust, the Indian indices have gone up by more than three times since then. Thus, the small investors have seen massive returns accrue to those who stayed invested, and had the patience. Now that the stocks are rising across the large-caps, midcaps, and small-caps spectrum, the retail investors feel that the party will go on. During the past few years, they have come to believe that mutual funds are the safest, and the least risky instruments, which offer substantial returns on the upside. They have thronged to the markets like never before.

One needs to examine two more factors that are likely to play out in the future. The first is that the foreigners will return, as they have in the past, as soon as there is good news on the Indian economic horizon. This can be in the form of the India-US trade deal that may be inked within weeks or a few months. It will ensure that the current 50 per cent tariffs will come down, even as India will need to open its market for American imports. This will change the growth trajectory immediately, and positively impact the trade deficit. It will aid private investments even as the Government feels compelled to ease public investments to manage the fiscal deficit. External factors like an end to the Russia-Ukraine war, and the easing of the western sanctions on Russia will help India, which is being forced to limit crude oil imports from Russia. Oil prices are likely to come down.

On the domestic investors’ front, there are a few under-the-radar changes. Despite the overall inflows, the retail investors have begun to sell in the secondary market, and invest in IPOs, where they see better returns. This means that the mindset may change in 2026, and there may be less inflows through mutual funds in percentage terms, even if the overall inflows remain positive. If the stock indices go up, or if the prices of certain stocks go up, even the domestic investors, who possibly entered late, will begin to book profits. This will put pressure on overall inflows. One will need to watch these two sub-trends to determine whether they converge or diverge.

The Pioneer



BHUBANESWAR | MONDAY | DECEMBER 15, 2025

BUSINESS

10

Open graveyards in open skies

Over the past few decades, most successful airlines crashed

OUR TAKE

Sutanu Guru
Author, Journalist
and Academician

There are probably tens of thousands of furious flyers, who want the CEO of IndiGo Airline, Peiter Elbers, to go. There may be a few hundred, who desire that he is arrested for the way the airline treated thousands of passengers over the past two weeks, as thousands of flights were either delayed or cancelled. But even the worst critics of IndiGo will not like Elbers to suffer the fate of another CEO of a past, and similarly successful, private airline.

Three decades ago, to be precise, in 1995, Thakiyuddin Abdul Wahid left for his office in the western suburbs of Mumbai. He had received several threats from the city’s underworld, even as the leadership of the most dreaded gang had shifted lock, stock, and barrel to the United Arab Emirates. But Wahid, who had launched the East-West Airlines, which was the country’s first private sector airline, and doing reasonably well, seemed unfazed. He should have heeded to the warnings, as on his way to the office, he was shot dead.

The police stated that the shooters possibly belonged to one of the gangs that operated in the city. With the brutal and public killing came the hastened end of East-West Airlines which, like Wahid, died an unsung death. Started in 1993, the airline was history by 1996. Interestingly, in 1993, Naresh Goyal promoted Jet Airways, which later emerged as the most successful airline in India. More than two decades later, Jet crashed, was declared bankrupt, and sold off to a new buyer as part of the insolvency exercise.

Goyal, who worked for years in the travel agency business, started his career in East-West. Back in the early 1990s, Jet and East-West were rivals. With the demise of the latter, Jet became an even stronger player in the domestic market. There is more of history, when one talks about the travails and troubles of the Indian aviation

industry, and its private and state-owned players. These remind us of the situation that IndiGo finds itself in today.

In 1995, the Tata Group tied up with Singapore Airlines, one of the best-known, and arguably one of the best airlines in the world, to launch a domestic airline to ply on both local and international routes. Incidentally, the Tata Group was the promoter of India’s national carrier, Air India, which was later taken over by the Government, merged with the state-owned Indian Airlines, and then privatised and sold to the same group. There were speculations and allegations, though unproven, that Jet was responsible for the non-take-off of the Tata-Singapore Airlines venture.

So successful was the lobbying by Jet in preventing the entry that there was a time when the then chairman of Tata Group, the late Ratan Tata angrily spoke about vested interests that were damaging the Indian aviation sector by blocking worthwhile investments from gold-plated firms like Singapore Airlines. In any case, the Tatas had to wait for more than two decades before it could enter the Indian airwaves with its proposed venture with Singapore Airlines. Vistara was launched in 2016, and the Tatas later took over Air India.

There are several other examples of major engine failures in the aviation sector. Most of us may not remember a relatively-unknown NEPC Airlines, which belonged to NEPC Group that specialised in non-renewable energy. The background of the promoters, and the source of the finances were questionable, and the airline died a quiet death a few years after it launched the operations. Around the same time, there was the famous or notorious Subrata Roy of the Sahara Group, who decided to jump into the cockpit.

Sahara Airways, in retrospect, seemed more like a pomp-and-show business aimed to satisfy the late Roy, rather than a serious effort.

As the passenger and freight market grew, Captain Gopinath launched Air Deccan, possibly the first low-cost airline in the country. Since the launch in 2003, it proved to be a major success as it offered flight tickets at amazingly affordable prices. IndiGo entered the fray as another low-cost operation in 2006. There were two promoters. Rahul Bhatia was associated with the travel agency business, and Rakesh Gangwal, who lived in the US, was a known expert in the aviation sector. Of course, not to be outdone, the flamboyant Vijay Maliya launched Kingfisher Airline.

Giving this short, and summarised history of private aviation in India is not to recap past events. It is to pinpoint a major highlight, trend, and pattern. In most cases, possibly in every case, the most successful private player at any given point in time, or the upcoming ones that dreamed of flying high, either crashed, or were sold off. We know about Jet and East-West, as well as NEPC. Jet took over Sahara, and Kingfisher gobbled Air Deccan. Later, Kingfisher went out of business, and took down Malliya, and his spirits with it.

IndiGo may survive the current problems, and controversies, but its credibility has taken a huge hit. Till date, Captain Gopinath accuses that the promoters of IndiGo sabotaged Air Deccan by mishandling the latter’s backend Internet-based operations. When Kingfisher hit air pockets, it died a messy death in 2012 with thousands of non-refunded canceled tickets, hundreds of employees who found themselves out of jobs, and without salaries for months. Malliya left India in 2016, and remains a fugitive in the UK.

Questions were repeatedly raised about the finances behind many successful airlines. East-West’s Wahid was believed, rightly or wrongly, to have links with the underworld. Jet’s money initially came through the Isle of Man, which is known for banking secrecy laws. Malliya was accused of siphoning off banks’ money from his ventures. Jet’s Goyal, once celebrated as the hero of Indian aviation, was arrested by the Enforcement Directorate for money laundering, and possible bank fraud at an old age. It was a sight to watch the pitiable condition of Goyal pleading for bail.

Months before the IndiGo debacle, Gangwal, the co-founder who fought with his previous partner, and exited the airline, sold a huge portion of his and family’s existing stake. Although this is in the realm of speculation, one can question whether Gangwal knew what was about to happen. To be fair, he had charged that the airline was being mismanaged, and could go down under any time. This was the reason for his tussle with Bhatia. But finances, arrogance, overconfidence, and hubris are only some of the factors why private and state-owned players fail to remain in the air for too long.

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

A Contrarian Investor

57 months of equity inflows

Since 2021, investors thronged to invest in equity mutual funds

“Sectoral/Thematic gross sales softened only because October was boosted by NFO-driven one-offs. The overall trend for November reflects a stabilising risk appetite, and stronger, broad-based net inflows across core equity categories,” says Akhil Chaturvedi, Executive Director and Chief Business Officer, Motilal Oswal Asset Management Company.

“Flexi-cap funds, which were less favoured earlier, are seeing renewed traction as investors rotate back into broader, more flexible equity strategies. Another steady trend is the rise in gold and silver funds, which are seeing consistent monthly inflows. The ETF and FoF structures there are clearly finding more acceptance,” explains Joseph. Over the past three months, between September and November 2025, the overall AUM rose from ₹78-79 lakh crore to nearly ₹81 lakh crore. Most of the incremental money and inflows came into equity, hybrid, and passive strategies, even as the inflows in debt funds turned choppy, and diverged from month to month.

“What stands out is that the small cap, sector/thematic, and flexi-cap funds continue to see rising folios alongside healthy NFO mobilisation in small cap, thematic, multi-asset, and passive offerings, signalling that retail investors are steadily embracing more diversified, higher beta, and solution-oriented mutual fund

portfolios to play the India’s growth story,” says Robin Arya, Small-case Manager, Founder & CEO, GoalFi. During November 2025, 24 open-ended NFOs were floated, with sectoral/thematic funds accounting for 63 per cent of the share. Two dozen schemes were launched during the month, raising a total of ₹3,126 crore.

Gold ETFs continue to witness healthy investor interest in November 2025, recording net inflows of ₹3,741 crore, extending their streak of positive flows for the seventh consecutive month. “Although moderating from the unusually strong surge seen in September and October (this year), the latest figure still reflects sustained demand for gold-backed products in a market environment marked by elevated macro uncertainty and intermittent risk-off sentiment,” says Nehal Meshram, Senior Analyst, Morningstar Investment Research India. After a sustained surge, global gold prices softened slightly during the month as the US dollar strengthened. Despite this trend, the domestic investors maintained their allocations to

gold ETFs, underscoring their growing role as a strategic asset for wealth preservation, hedge effectiveness, and portfolio diversification. Debt mutual fund categories witnessed outflows, barring the ultra-short duration funds,

low duration funds, money market funds, short duration funds, corporate bond funds, and floater funds. “There was a marginal net outflow in the debt category overall, but the AUM of the category remained steady at ₹19.36 lakh crore for the month of November 2025, owing to MTM gains,” says Agarwal. India’s passive investing landscape continues to be strong, with AUM for passive funds increasing from ₹13.72 lakh crore in November 2025. This reflects momentum, and a broader behavioural shift that has seen passive assets grow more than eight times since March 2020.

“The surge is driven by the structural evolution of the Indian markets. Greater financial penetration, and widespread real-time access to information have enhanced market efficiency, encouraging investors to embrace transparent, low-cost products that deliver index-linked outcomes. Supported by the seamless digital access, and a progressive regulatory environment, passive investing is rapidly emerging as a preferred choice in India’s asset management ecosystem,” says Hemen Bhatia, Executive Director & CEO, Angel One. The investors have become smarter and sharper.

Overall, even though 2025 was a difficult year, and the markets slowed down for most of the past 11 months, mutual funds remained the preferred investment option. “Investors are staying committed through SIPs, equity flows remain healthy despite volatility, and interest in gold and silver continues to climb. The resilience in flows is the strongest signal that the retail participation, and long-term investing habits are only getting stronger,” says Joseph. This is contrary to the behaviour of the foreign investors, who remained net sellers during the year. It seems like a war is on between the two sections.

As the accompanying article (Sidebar) on this page highlights, the divergence in the investing mindset can be explained through several factors. In the future, foreigners may emerge as net buyers, and domestic retail investors may turn part-sellers to book profits. Thus, 2026 will be an interesting year for Indian equities, even as some brokerage houses predict the beginning of another bull run. However, the battles between foreigners and Indians may decide the outcomes.

The Pioneer

SINCE 1865

FROM THE
WORLD

PAIKISTAN

Army kills three
TTP terrorists

Three terrorists associated with the banned terror outfit Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan were killed in an intelligence-based operation in northwest Pakistan's restive Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, police said on Sunday. The operation was conducted in the area close to the Pak-Afghan border in Bajaur district after the reported presence of the terrorists. The terrorists were involved in various subversive activities like attacks on security forces, police, and IED blasts. The security forces seized a huge cache of arms and ammunition from the possession of the terrorists after the operation. The police cordoned off the area and launched a search operation. Pakistan continues to reel under terrorism with a surge of 25 per cent terror incidents in 2025.

SOUTH AFRICA

Indian killed in
temple collapse

A 52-year-old Indian-origin man is among four people killed after a four-storey Hindu temple under construction collapsed in South Africa's KwaZulu-Natal province, officials have said. The New Ahobilam Temple of Protection, situated on a steep hill in Redcliffe in north of eThekweni, was being expanded when a section of the building gave way on Friday while workers were on site. The exact number of workers and temple officials believed to be trapped beneath tonnes of rubble is unknown. While two people, a construction worker and a devotee, were confirmed dead on Friday, the death toll rose to four on Saturday after rescue teams recovered more bodies. Of the four deceased, one has been identified as Vicky Jairaj Panday, an executive member of the temple trust and manager of the construction project.

Jaishankar meets European, UK,
Egyptian counterparts in UAE

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
Dubai

External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar has met with his counterparts from Europe, the UK and Egypt on the sidelines of a high-level international summit in the United Arab Emirates(UAE), where leaders and policy-makers gathered to discuss key geopolitical and security challenges. In a social media post on Saturday, Jaishankar said "it was great to be" with Luxembourg's Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Xavier Bettel, Poland's Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Radoslaw Sikorski, and Latvia's Foreign Minister Baiba Braze. The minister was in the UAE capital Abu Dhabi to attend the three-day Sir Bani Yas Forum 2025, which

ASSOCIATED PRESS
Berlin

US envoys arrived in Berlin on Sunday morning for another round of talks intended to secure a deal to end the war in Ukraine. US President Donald Trump's special envoy Steve Witkoff and Trump's son-in-law Jared Kushner were spotted in downtown Berlin by a photographer for the German news agency dpa. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said that Ukrainian, US and European officials will hold a series of meetings in Berlin in the coming days. "Most importantly, I will be meeting with envoys of President Trump, and there will also be meetings with our European partners, with many leaders, concerning the foundation of peace — a political agreement to end the war," Zelenskyy said in an address to the nation late Saturday. Washington has tried for months to navigate the demands of each side as Trump presses for a swift end to Russia's war and grows increasingly exasperated by delays. The search for possible compromises has run into major obstacles, including control of Ukraine's eastern Donetsk region, which is mostly occupied by Russian forces, and security guarantees for Ukraine. "The chance is considerable at



this moment, and it matters for our every city, for our every Ukrainian community," Zelenskyy said. "We are working to ensure that peace for Ukraine is dignified, and to secure a guarantee — a guarantee, above all — that Russia will not return to Ukraine for a third invasion." Russian President Vladimir Putin has demanded that Ukraine

withdraw its forces from the part of the Donetsk region still under its control and abandon its bid to join NATO, among the key conditions for peace — demands Kyiv has rejected. Putin's foreign affairs adviser Yuri Ushakov told the business daily Kommersant that Russian police and national guard troops

would stay in parts of eastern Ukraine's Donbas even if they become a demilitarised zone under a prospective peace plan — a demand likely to be rejected by Ukraine as US-led negotiations drag on. Ushakov warned that a search for compromise could take a long time, noting that the US proposals

that took into account Russian demands had been "worsened" by alterations proposed by Ukraine and its European allies. "We don't know what changes they are making, but clearly they aren't for the better," Ushakov said, adding: "We will strongly insist on our considerations." German Chancellor Friedrich Merz, who has spearheaded European efforts to support Ukraine alongside French President Emmanuel Macron and UK Prime Minister Keir Starmer, said Saturday that "the decades of the Pax Americana are largely over for us in Europe and for us in Germany as well." He warned that Putin's aim is "a fundamental change to the borders in Europe, the restoration of the old Soviet Union within its borders." "If Ukraine falls, he won't stop," Merz warned on Saturday during a party conference in Munich. Putin has denied plans to restore the Soviet Union or attack any European allies. As peace efforts continued, Russia and Ukraine exchanged another round of aerial attacks. Ukraine's air force said overnight that Russia launched ballistic missiles and 138 attack drones at Ukraine. In its daily report, the air force said 110 had been intercepted or downed, but missile and drone hits were recorded at six locations. Zelenskyy said Sunday

that hundreds of thousands of families were still without power in the south, east and north-east regions and work was continuing to restore electricity, heat and water to multiple regions following a large-scale attack the previous night. The Ukrainian president said that in the past week, Russia had launched over 1,500 strike drones, nearly 900 guided aerial bombs and 46 missiles of various types at Ukraine. "Ukraine needs peace on decent terms, and we are ready to work as constructively as possible. These days will be filled with diplomacy. It's very important that it brings results," Zelenskyy said. Russia's Defence Ministry said that air defences downed 235 Ukrainian drones late Saturday and early Sunday. In the Belgorod region, a drone injured a man and set his house ablaze in the village of Yasnye Zori, regional governor Vyacheslav Gladkov said. Ukrainian drones struck an oil depot in Uryupinsk in the Volgograd region, triggering a fire, according to the regional governor, Andrei Bocharov. In the Krasnodar region, the Ukrainian drones attacked the town of Afipsky, where an oil refinery is located. The authorities said that explosions shattered windows in residential buildings, but didn't report any damage to the refinery.

Cambodian rocket fire caused its first civilian death, says Thailand

ASSOCIATED PRESS
Kantharalak (Thailand)

Thailand's Government said a rocket attack from Cambodia on Sunday killed a 63-year-old villager, its first civilian death reported as a direct result of combat over the past week along the border of the two Southeast Asian nations. Both countries confirmed that large-scale fighting, which was set off by a skirmish on December 7 that wounded two Thai soldiers, continued Sunday. The two sides are battling over long-standing competing claims to patches of frontier land, some of which contain centuries-old temple ruins. More than two dozen people on both sides of the border have officially been reported killed in the past week's fighting, while more than half a million have been displaced. Reporters from The Associated Press arrived at the scene of Sunday's rocket impact in Sisaket province's Kantharalak District about 10



A village security volunteer splashing water to control a fire at a house after what a Thai soldier said was a Cambodian artillery strike in the area in Sisaket province, Thailand

minutes after it hit. They witnessed the body of a man totally wrapped in bandages being put on a stretcher that was taken to an ambulance. A house a couple of hundred metres away was in flames, with village volunteers attempting to put out the fire with buckets of water. A piece of shrapnel believed to be from the same

rocket was embedded nearby in the road. The victim, identified as Don Patchapan, was killed in the heart of a residential area near a school, according to a Thai Army statement. Thai Government spokesperson Siripong Angkasakulkiat condemned Cambodia for deliberately firing into civilian areas,

saying that such an action was "cruel and inhumane". Cambodia has deployed truck-mounted BM-21 rocket launchers with a range of 30-40 km. Each can fire up to 40 rockets at a time but cannot be precisely targeted. They have landed largely in areas from where most people have already been evacuated. Thai authorities say

Cambodia has launched thousands of the rockets on virtually a daily basis. Thailand, meanwhile, has been carrying out airstrikes with its fighter planes, with Cambodia saying the bombing continued on Sunday. Both sides have employed drones for surveillance and delivering bombs. The Thai military has acknowledged 15 of its troops have died during the fighting, and estimated Sunday that there have been at least 221 fatalities among Cambodian soldiers. Cambodia denounced the Thai count of its dead as disinformation but has not yet acknowledged any military casualties. It has said at least 11 civilians have been killed and more than six dozen wounded. Cambodia Prime Minister Hun Manet delivered a morale-boosting message to his countrymen on Sunday, writing on social media that he is proud to see this nation's strength "in this situation where our country is

facing difficulties due to aggression from neighbouring countries". The new fighting derailed a ceasefire promoted by US President Donald Trump that ended five days of earlier combat in July. It had been brokered by Malaysia and pushed through by pressure from Trump, who threatened to withhold trade privileges unless Thailand and Cambodia agreed. It was formalised in more detail in October at a regional meeting in Malaysia that Trump attended. Trump announced this past Friday that the two countries had agreed at his urging to renew the ceasefire, but Thai Prime Minister Anutin Charnvirakul denied making any commitment and Cambodia announced it was continuing to fight in what it said is self-defense. A Thai Navy warship in the Gulf of Thailand joined the fighting on Saturday morning, trading fire with guns based in Cambodia's southwestern province of Koh Kong.

UK hikes
security near
Jewish sites
after attack
in Australia

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
London

British Prime Minister Keir Starmer condemned the terrorist attack at Bondi Beach in Sydney, Australia, as he confirmed increased vigilance around Jewish sites across the country on Sunday. The attack in Sydney was earlier described by Australian authorities as a terrorist attack targeted at members of the Jewish community celebrating the holy festival of Hanukkah, or Chanukah, at the time of the shooting. The Metropolitan Police in London issued a statement in solidarity soon after, reiterating plans to bolster security around synagogues. "The news that the Bondi beach attack was an antisemitic terrorist attack against Jewish families at a Chanukah event is sickening," said Starmer. "My thoughts are with the victims and their families. The United Kingdom will always stand with Australia and the Jewish community. We are actively working with the Community Security Trust (CST) on the policing of Chanukah events," he said. New South Wales Premier Chris Minns said two individuals fired on a "crowded group of families" at the park in a "cowardly act of terrifying violence". At least 11 fatalities and 29 injuries have been reported from the site of the attack, categorised by Australian officials as a "terrorist incident". "While the details of the incident continue to emerge, the Australian authorities have now confirmed that the target was a Hanukkah gathering taking place on Bondi Beach," the Met Police said in a statement. We were already working closely with partners, including the Community Security Trust, to provide an increased presence around synagogues and other community venues at this important time.

Anti-immigrant rhetoric across Europe

ASSOCIATED PRESS
London

In the past year, tens of thousands hostile to immigrants marched through London chanting "send them home!" A British lawmaker complained of seeing too many non-white faces on TV. And senior politicians advocated the deportation of longtime UK residents born abroad.

The overt demonisation of immigrants and those with immigrant roots is intensifying in the UK — and across Europe — as migration shoots up the political agenda and right-wing parties gain popularity. In several European countries, political parties that favour mass deportations and depict immigration as a threat to national identity come at or near the top of opinion polls: Reform UK, the Alliance for Germany and France's National Rally.

IMMIGRATION
HAS RISEN
DRAMATICALLY OVER
THE PAST DECADE IN
SOME EUROPEAN
COUNTRIES

President Donald Trump, who recently called Somali immigrants in the US "garbage" and whose national security strategy depicts European countries as threatened by immigration, appears to be endorsing and emboldening Europe's coarse, anti-immigrant sentiments. Amid the rising tensions, Europe's mainstream parties are taking a harder line on migration and at times using divisive language about race. "What were once dismissed as being at the far extreme end of far-right politics has now become a central part of the political debate," said Kieran Connell,

a lecturer in British history at Queen's University Belfast. Immigration has risen dramatically over the past decade in some European countries, driven in part by millions of asylum-seekers who have come to Europe fleeing conflicts in Africa, the Middle East and Ukraine. Asylum-seekers account for a small percentage of total immigration, however, and experts say antipathy toward diversity and migration stems from a mix of factors. Economic stagnation in the years since the 2008 global financial crisis, the rise of charismatic nationalist politicians and the polarizing influence of social media all play a role, experts say. In Britain, there is "a frightening increase in the sense of national division and decline" and that tends to push people toward political extremes, said Bobby Duffy, director of the Policy Unit at

King's College London. It took root after the financial crisis, was reinforced by Britain's debate about Brexit and deepened during the COVID-19 pandemic, Duffy said. Social media has exacerbated the mood, notably on X, whose algorithm promotes divisive content and whose owner, Elon Musk, approvingly retweets far-right posts. Across Europe, ethnonationalism has been promoted by right-wing parties such as Alliance for Germany, France's National Rally and the Fidesz party of Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban. Now it appears to have the stamp of approval from the Trump administration, whose new national security strategy depicts Europe as a collection of countries facing "economic decline" and "civilisational erasure" because of immigration and loss of national identities.

Three children killed as
drone crashes in Pakistan

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
Peshawar

At least three children were killed and another sustained injuries when a quadcopter drone crashed into a residential area in northwest Pakistan, police said. According to initial reports, the incident occurred in the Mumand Khel area, in Bannu district, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, where the drone fell into a populated neighbourhood late Saturday, causing casualties among children. Following the incident, residents immediately launched rescue efforts and shifted the injured child and the bodies of the deceased to a nearby hospital. Rescue and security personnel also rushed to the scene soon after the incident. Hospital authorities confirmed that the injured child is out of danger, while the bodies of the three children have been placed in the hospital morgue.



Bangladesh foreign ministry
summons Indian envoy

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
Dhaka

Bangladesh's Foreign Ministry on Sunday summoned Indian High Commissioner Pranay Verma to express its "serious concern" over the "incendiary statements" made by deposed prime minister Sheikh Hasina. Hasina fled to India in August last year. She was sentenced to death by a special tribunal last month after being convicted on charges of crimes against humanity. Bangladesh has been demanding her extradition. "The Ministry of Foreign Affairs summoned the Indian High Commissioner today to convey the Government of Bangladesh's serious concern to the Government of India for allowing fugitive Hasina to continue to make incendiary statements calling upon her supporters to engage in terrorist activities in Bangladesh, aiming to thwart the upcoming parliamentary elections," a foreign office statement said.

Lithuania-India Relations Gain Momentum Through Trade, Aadhaar 2.0 and Cybersecurity

ASHOKE RAJ ■ New Delhi

In an in-depth conversation with *The Pioneer*, Lithuania Ambassador Diana Mickeviciene spoke about India-Lithuania trade dynamics, high-tech cooperation, her country's surprising role in India's proposed Aadhaar 2.0 upgrade, and the cultural bridge connecting Lithuanian and Sanskrit.

● **How do you assess the current trade relationship between India and Lithuania? Which sectors show the greatest potential for growth?** I am happy to see the positive trade dynamics between our countries. Lithuania started from a very small base—almost ground zero. But as of 2024, our bilateral trade has crossed \$300 million, which is significant for us. It is still a humble number, but what's important is the steady, stable growth, increasing annually by 20-30 per cent. Indian exports to Lithuania were once very small, but they are now growing rapidly—by almost 40 per cent annually. Lithuanian exports to India have also grown by about 30 per cent. Among all sectors, technology holds the greatest potential. Over the last few years, we have seen a clear

rise in tech-oriented trade—engineering products, machinery, devices. Lithuania is a small but highly advanced tech economy. India is huge, fast-growing, and always expanding its digital footprint. That naturally creates complementarities. One success story is Teltonika, a leading Lithuanian IoT company. Their devices—sensors, trackers, industrial applications—are already used across India, from mining to public transport. They've also decided to Make in India, beginning with assembly and gradually expanding.

● **Many in India are curious about Lithuania's involvement in Aadhaar 2.0. Could you explain your country's role?** Lithuania has a very strong reputation in biometrics, robotics, and identity technologies. Our company Neurotechnology is internationally known for expertise in identity de-duplication, which prevents duplicate or fraudulent identity records. In the case of Aadhaar 2.0, Neurotechnology has been shortlisted—along with one French and one Japanese company—for a very specific technical function: deduplication of identities, to ensure



Lithuania Ambassador Diana Mickeviciene

Aadhaar remains unique for every individual.

Aadhaar is fully Indian. India rightly does not hand over a nationally sensitive system to any foreign entity. But for highly specialised components, Indian project leaders source the best global solutions. That is why Neurotechnology is among the top three companies selected. This is a de-risked, multi-vendor model.

No foreign company gets access to the full system—only to the segment they are contracted for. This protects sovereignty and privacy.

● **If Lithuanian firms excel in de-duplication, does that expertise extend to voter**

rolls or other identity systems as well?

Lithuanian companies have performed voter-list de-duplication in Africa and Asia, and similar tasks in property and identity databases. These systems use high-accuracy criteria—fingerprints, retina scans, and other biometric markers. But how Aadhaar is linked to voter cards in India is not something I can comment on. Each country decides how to integrate its systems.

● **Beyond Aadhaar, which other high-tech areas can Lithuania and India collaborate in?**

Lithuania is known as the “country of lasers.” We spe-

cialise in femto-second and pico-second precision lasers, used in research, manufacturing, and semiconductor industries. Indian research institutions already use our lasers, and we are keen to support India's smart manufacturing initiative. Cybersecurity—Lithuanian companies are very strong in this domain. For example, a Lithuanian firm designed the National Cybersecurity System of Bhutan, including its CERT. These are private companies competing globally without Government backing. Fintech—After the UK left the EU, Lithuania became the #1 fintech hub in the European Union. Despite being only a 3-million-population country, it hosts over

300 global fintech operators. This is an area of significant collaboration potential with India. Biotech & Pharma—Lithuania offers high-quality labs and research facilities at competitive costs.

We already work with several Indian pharmaceutical companies for testing and joint development.

● **If a Lithuanian company participates in Aadhaar 2.0, would it work independently or with an Indian partner?** That depends entirely on the tender conditions. In India's case, Tata Consultancy Services (TCS) is the main agency commissioned by the Government of India for Aadhaar. To speed up work and ensure the best solu-

Russia's increasing influence and the looming threat from America are both consequences of the Trump era



SURJIT SINGH FLORIA

Amidst a chaotic landscape of conflicts, economic sanctions, and global threats, the recent meeting between Russian President Vladimir Putin and Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi during his visit to India on December 4 and 5, 2025, represents a turning point in the enduring friendship between India and Russia, as well as in the broader international arena. Indeed! Prior to arriving in India, he departed from Moscow. Initially, he dismissed US President Donald Trump's 28-point peace proposal concerning the Ukraine-Russia conflict, which was presented following talks with his special envoys Steve Witkoff and Jared Kushner (Trump's son-in-law). Secondly, he commanded Russian forces to carry out a 'special military operation' against Ukraine for the second time, following Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. The whole world is once again on the brink of war. Nations find themselves entangled in both minor and major conflicts with one another. Civil wars are also taking lives in many countries. The year 2025 was very chaotic. This year, it

has become difficult to even recognize strangers. Everyone is following the policy of selfishness. The greed of the second-time elected President of the United States, Donald Trump, is not hidden from anyone; in the name of the rights of Americans, he is busy in a different game to increase his business. That is why he has made tariffs a big weapon, and it is used to attack anyone.

India has also come under the influence of this weapon. Apart from this, America's increasing tendencies toward Pakistan have also forced India to distance itself. During his first term, Trump praised Prime Minister Modi, but in his second term, he is doing everything he can to trap India, while India remains silent.

Due to these tricks of America, India's inclination towards Russia is increasing. Just a few weeks ago, Russian President Vladimir Putin came to India on a visit. During his visit, he formed numerous business partnerships, attracting the attention of the world, particularly America, which understands the significance of India. Apart from this, his own country's political opponents are not letting him live; they clearly say that the reason for India's increasing inclination towards Russia is President Trump's unnecessary strictness and wrong policies.

Due to Trump's wrong policies, we are losing a valuable friend. A photo of Putin and Modi was also

shared regarding the growing India-Russia relations so that Trump's eyes can be opened.

In addition to this, Trump and the American people are deeply concerned about Russia's increasing dominance.

Trump tried very hard to stop the Russia-Ukraine war so that he could pressure Russia. For this, the support of allied countries was also taken, weapons were also given to Ukraine, and financial sanctions were also imposed, but Putin is not ready to come under pressure or stop. In fact, a week ago, Russia also openly threatened its opponents that if a war is started to suppress Russia, then in the end there will be no one left for the agreement; that is, Russia can bring destruction.

After this, NATO chief Mark Rutte warned the European allies of the alliance about the risk of a possible conflict, for which he urged all allies to intensify their defense efforts and be prepared. Expressing his concerns, Rutte warned that NATO allies could be Russia's next target in the future; we must be prepared. Speaking in Berlin, the NATO chief asserted that conflict is imminent and that Russia has returned war to Europe.

According to him, this potential conflict could be like the war that our grandparents endured. Rutte urged allies to increase defense spending and production to prevent wars witnessed by previous generations. Rutte

warned that it is wrong to assume that time is on our side and that action is now.

Rutte said that Russia could be ready to use military force against NATO allies within years. The NATO chief said that Russia has fired more than 46,000 drones and missiles against Ukraine so far this year. Rutte also highlighted Russia's relations with China, describing it as a lifeline for Moscow's war efforts in Ukraine.

Apart from this, now that Trump has threatened Venezuela with a ground war, Putin has taken the front in favor of Venezuela and has announced all kinds of open support.

However, the American report, spanning 33 pages, indicates that Europe and its nations are facing a significant crisis. Consequently, it has requested that the European (NATO) allies assume their security responsibilities by 2027. If the decline of Europe persists, the continent risks losing its identity. In this context, the friendship and partnership between India and Russia will undoubtedly mark the start of a new chapter in the geographical and political history of the world.

On the other hand, the border dispute between Thailand and Cambodia is escalating in severity. Despite US President Donald Trump's recent assertion that he could resolve the conflict with a simple phone call, the present circumstances appear to be intensi-

fying military activity along the border. The Thai Air Force conducted airstrikes in regions adjacent to Cambodia on Saturday. Based on available information, the Thai Air Force deployed two F-16 fighter jets to strike and bomb multiple sites.

The Thai Air Force actually bombed the Tamor Da area of Cambodia's western province of Battambang at 5.50 am local time. The Thai Air Force similarly attacked another nearby hotel at 5.55 am. The assaults subsequently extended to critical infrastructure. Reports indicate that the Chhey Chomnas Bridge was struck at 6.02 am, followed by another bombing of the same bridge at 6:07 am. The old Chhey Chomnas Bridge was struck at 6.12 am.

Amid the escalating tensions at the border, President Donald Trump recently asserted his ability to halt the ongoing conflict between Thailand and Cambodia. He mentioned that his involvement might bring back peace to the area.

Nonetheless, the actual situation indicates that the tensions between the two countries are intensifying instead of subsiding. Overall, Russia's increasing influence and strong ties with India and China have raised significant concerns globally, yet the misguided policies of Trump are evidently to blame for this situation.

The author is Floria is a freelance writer and journalist who lives in Brampton, Canada

tions are used, they may outsource very small specialised functions to foreign partners.

Given Aadhaar's national importance, India naturally would not hand over control to any non-Indian entity. But for specific tasks that do not compromise access or privacy, collaboration is possible.

● **Lithuania and Sanskrit often appear in discussions. What is the linguistic connection between the two?**

It surprises many people, but Lithuanian is considered the closest living sister language to Sanskrit. Linguists, not diplomats, established this connection. It is a purely scientific, linguistic link.

We have published a small dictionary of 108 identical Lithuanian-Sanskrit words, and we are now preparing a much larger dictionary with scholars from both countries. As someone who studied Sanskrit at university, I can personally attest to the similarities—especially in grammar, declensions, and roots. This connection serves as a beautiful bridge between our cultures.

● **What about visas? How easy is it for Indians to travel or study in Lithuania?**

Lithuania is a Schengen country, so Schengen rules

apply uniformly. Anyone with a valid Schengen visa can travel to Lithuania.

However, applicants must ensure they actually intend to visit Lithuania. Some travel agents misuse the system, which leads to visa rejections. A useful provision for travellers is the visa cascade rule, which grants longer-term visas to applicants with a consistent past travel history. On education, around 2,000 Indian students go to Lithuania every year, mainly in engineering and increasingly in other fields.

Our universities offer English-medium Bachelor's, Master's, and PhD programmes. For long-term stays, Lithuania now offers a fully online national residence permit application, valid for two years.

● **Finally, where do you see India-Lithuania ties heading in the next few years?**

We started from a small base, but the direction is upward. The future lies in technology, cybersecurity, lasers, IoT, fintech, biotech, and of course in our cultural ties through Sanskrit.

Our companies are small but highly advanced, and India is vast, innovative, and full of opportunity. It is a natural partnership.

6 peacekeepers killed in drone strike in Sudan

ASSOCIATED PRESS

■ Cairo

A drone strike hit a United Nations facility in war-torn Sudan on Saturday, killing six peacekeepers, UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said. The strike hit the peacekeeping logistics base in the city of Kadugli, in the central region of Kordofan, Guterres said in a statement.

Eight other peacekeepers were wounded in the strike. All the victims are Bangladeshi nationals, serving in the UN Interim Security Force for Abyei, UNISFA. "Attacks targeting United Nations peacekeepers may constitute war crimes under international law," said Guterres, who called for those responsible for the "unjustifiable" attack to be held accountable. The Sudanese military blamed the attack on the Rapid Support Forces, RSF, a notorious paramilitary group at war with the army for the control of the country for more than two years. There was no immediate comment from the RSF.

The attack "clearly reveals the subversive approach of the rebel militia and those behind it," the military said in a statement. The military posted a video on social

media showing plumes of dense black smoke over what it said was the UN facility.

The oil-rich Abyei is a disputed region between Sudan and South Sudan, and the UN mission has been deployed there since 2011 when South Sudan gained its independence from Sudan.

Guterres also called for an immediate ceasefire in Sudan to allow "a comprehensive, inclusive and Sudanese-owned political process" to settle the conflict in the north-east African country. Sudan was plunged into chaos in April 2023 when a power struggle between the military and the RSF exploded into open fighting in the capital, Khartoum, and elsewhere in the country.

The conflict has killed over 40,000 people — a figure rights groups consider a significant undercount. The fighting has recently centered on Kodrofan, particularly since the RSF took control of el-Fasher, the military's last stronghold in the western region of Darfur. The war has wrecked urban areas and has been marked by atrocities, including mass rape and ethnically motivated killings which the UN and rights groups have said amount to war crimes and crimes against humanity.

India sends essential medicine to Sri Lanka

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Colombo

India on Sunday donated a 25 tonnes shipment of 17 essential medicines and over 14,200 kilograms of dry food items to Sri Lanka's Ministry of Health to help it cope better after the devastating Cyclone Ditwah, officials said.

The essential medicines and dry food items were donated on a request by Sri Lanka in wake of the catastrophic cyclone that has left over 640 dead.

Widespread flooding, landslides and severe infrastructure collapse across the island nation severely strained the country's disaster-response capacity since mid-November.

India was the first country to respond to Sri Lanka's international appeal for assistance under its Operation Sagar Bandhu.

A special Indian Airforce aircraft brought the supplies following a meeting between Health Minister

Nalinda Jayathissa and the Indian High Commissioner Santosh Jha, officials said.

The same aircraft took home a team that helped Sri Lankans with a field hospital. Days after the cyclone made a landfall, India has sent a Mobile Field Hospital and over 70 medical personnel to Sri Lanka as part of its humanitarian assistance following the devastating floods and landslides triggered by Cyclone Ditwah.

"As the Indian Army Field Hospital team concludes its mission and returns home today under #OperationSagarBandhu, the Minister @NalindaJay conveyed appreciation for the team's dedicated service," the Indian High Commission said in a post on X. As much as 10 tonnes of medicines and 15 tonnes of dry rations, as requested by Colombo, "were delivered through @IAF_MCC17 Globemaster, in which the team returned, for providing relief to affected communities," the Indian mission said in the post.

EC demands extra security as unrest grips Bangladesh

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Dhaka

The Election Commission (EC) of Bangladesh has demanded extra security for its chief, other commissioners and officials as fresh unrest visibly gripped Bangladesh after gunmen shot an upcoming parliamentary polls candidate and frontline leader of last year's violent street movement dubbed 'July Uprising'.

"The EC has written to the Inspector General of Police (IGP) urging comprehensive security arrangements for the Chief Election Commissioner (CEC), Election Commissioners (ECs), senior officials of the Election Commission Secretariat," the state-run BSS news agency reported on late Saturday.

The EC simultaneously sought the extra security for its field-level offices ahead of the 13th national election, as two of them came under attack in southeastern Lakshmipur and southwestern Pirojpur by unidentified miscreants after the announcement of the schedule for the upcoming polls on



Thursday. The commission demanded an additional escort vehicle for the CEC, while one such police escort with a vehicle was currently in place for him. It asked for round-the-clock police escorts for the four commis-

sioners and the senior secretary. The letter said the enhanced security measures were "urgent and necessary," while EC officials said their 10 regional offices, 64 district election offices and 522 sub-district level offices would

store important documents and election materials. The EC on Thursday said the upcoming parliamentary election would be held on February 12 next year, while a day later, Sharif Osman Hadi was shot from a close

range in the head, critically wounding him, as he initiated his election campaign from a constituency in the capital. Critically ill former prime minister Khaleda Zia's Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) simultaneously asked Muhammad Yunus' Government to provide security for all candidates in the upcoming election after the attack on Hadi, who leads a radical right-wing cultural group called Inquiab Mancha. "We demand that the real culprit be identified immediately and brought under the law, and we call upon this Government to ensure the security of all candidates without delay," BNP Secretary General Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir said.

Hadi was also a frontline leader of last year's student-led violent uprising that toppled then-prime minister Sheikh Hasina's Awami League Government on August 5, 2024.

His Inquilab Mancha was also at the forefront of a campaign to disband the Awami League, which the interim Government complied with in May this year,

disqualifying the party from contesting the polls.

The Government on Saturday ordered a nationwide security clampdown called 'Operation Devil Hunt 2' amid escalated fears over the law and order situation and promised to issue firearms licenses for election candidates for their own security. Home adviser (retd) Lieutenant General Jahangir Alam Chowdhury said the Government had taken steps to ensure special security for the "frontline fighters" of the July Uprising and promised to issue firearms licenses for the election candidates.

He emphasised that the second phase of the 'Devil Hunt' was aimed at helping ensure public safety and combat the growing threat of illegal arms.

The operation was initially launched in February this year following protests over an attack on the private house of a former minister of the ousted Government in the northern suburb of the capital, when it targeted alleged "henchmen" and supporters of the now disbanded Awami League.

▼PROSPECT

Parl panel backs easing clearances for underground coal mining projects



A Parliamentary panel has suggested simplifying the policy and standardised protocols for allowing underground coal mining, saying that the complex clearance process, similar to large open-cast mines, leads to delays in projects that have low environmental impact. The Government has set a target to produce 100 million tonnes (MT) of coal from underground coal mines by 2030. Underground coal mining minimises surface disturbance, thereby preserving land, forests and infrastructure while reducing land reclamation costs and indirect greenhouse gas emissions. This method also allows access to high-quality, deep-seated reserves and ensures year-round operations regardless of weather conditions, the Standing Committee on Coal, Mines and Steel has said in a report.

“Despite low environmental impact, several UG projects undergo the same clearance and documentation processes as in the case of large open-cast coal mines, thereby reportedly facing delays. The committee, therefore, emphasise the need for policy simplification and standardised protocols for UG coal mining practices in India,” it said.

Underground mines (UG), Underground Coal Gasification (UCG) projects and clean coal technology-based pilot projects represent special categories of coal sector initiatives that offer significant environmental and operational advantages. Besides, the panel has also recommended exploring the feasibility of putting in place a standard Terms of Reference (ToRs) and Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) on a single-window clearance system for open-cast mining, on the lines of similar provisions for underground mines.

The coal ministry has earlier said that it has introduced a series of transformative policy measures aimed at promoting underground coal mining. These bold reforms address the traditional challenges of high capital investment and longer gestation periods, reaffirming the Government’s resolve to modernise the coal ecosystem while aligning with the broader vision of sustainable development.

Army promotes youth empowerment through sports

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Kohima/Nagaland

Reinforcing its enduring commitment to youth empowerment, peace-building and nation-building through sports, the Indian Army is organising the inaugural edition of the Red Shield Division Rising Hockey Tournament (Under-19) at the Khuman Lampak Hockey Stadium, Imphal, Manipur.

The week-long tournament commenced on 14 December 2025 and witnessed enthusiastic participation from budding hockey players across Manipur. The initiative was conceptualised following an appeal by Olympian Kshetrimayum Thoiba Singh, a celebrated hockey legend from Manipur, who approached the Indian Army with a vision to provide a constructive platform for young sportspersons from the state, particularly in the backdrop of recent challenges.

Recognising the earnest and noble intent, the Indian



Army responded promptly, translating the idea into a meaningful sporting event aimed at nurturing talent, fostering discipline and instilling hope among the youth.

The tournament was inaugurated by Shri Kuldeep Singh, Security Advisor to the Government of Manipur, who graced the occasion as the Chief Guest, in the presence of KT Singh Hockey Olympian, Dr M Veto Singh, Director YAS and other civil dignitaries and sports enthusiasts,

hosted by GOC and officers of the Red Shield Division.

While interacting with the participants, the Security Advisor highlighted the transformative power of sports in channelising youthful energy, promoting unity and resilience and contributing to long-term peace and development in the region. The opening ceremony captivated spectators with a series of vibrant performances, including a disciplined and energetic display by cadets of Sainik School Imphal, an impressive Wushu demonstration by athletes supported by the Youth Affairs and Sports ecosystem and colourful cultural performances by Manipuri troupes alongside displays by Army personnel. The performances reflected a harmonious blend of tradition, martial spirit and youthful exuberance. Eight teams are participating in the tournament.

The inaugural match was played between Khongman



Students Club (KHSC) and Taobungkhok Welfare Club (TWC) wherein KHSC emerged victorious by 2 goals to 1. Whereas in the 2nd Match Hockey Union, Lairik Yengbam Leikai (HU) defeated South East Youth Organisation (SEYO) with 8 goals to 1. The final match will be played on 21 Dec 2025.

Through this tournament, the Indian Army, under the aegis of the Red Shield Division, has reaffirmed its role as a guardian of national security and as a catalyst for social cohesion and youth development. By promoting sports as a vehicle for positive engagement, the Army continues to inspire confidence, resilience and aspiration among the young generation of Manipur.

The tournament stands as a testament to an unwavering dedication to empowering youth, strengthening community bonds and fostering a brighter, more inclusive future through the unifying power of sports.

Leh students bags award at National Energy Conservation Day contest

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

Droupadi Murmu President of India presented the Second Prize of ₹50,000 alongwith a silver medal and a laptop to Master Stanzin Chosyangs, a student from Standard X of Druk Padma Karpo School, Shey, Leh, UT of Ladakh for his outstanding painting on energy conservation under Category “B”. The award recognises his creativity, talent and awareness showcased at the National Level Painting Competition 2025 on Energy Conservation.

Manohar Lal Union Minister for Power and Housing and Urban Affairs, Shripad NaikMinister of

State for Power and New and Renewable Energy, Pankaj Agarwal, Secretary (Power), Government of India and Dhiraj Kumar Srivastava, DG, BEE were also present during the National Energy Conservation Day Awards Ceremony held in Vigyan Bhavan, New Delhi on 14.12.2025.

Bhupender Gupta, CMD, NHPC, while congratulating the winners for their exceptional talent and artistic excellence in effectively conveying the message of energy conservation, stated that NHPC takes pride in supporting young talent committed to promoting energy conservation and will continue to be an active partner in the

National Awareness Campaign on Energy Conservation, conducted under the aegis of the Bureau of Energy Efficiency (BEE), Ministry of Power, Government of India.

Under the National Awareness Campaign on Energy Conservation launched by the Ministry of Power, Government of India, NHPC was entrusted the States/UTs of Arunachal Pradesh, Jammu and Kashmir, Sikkim, Ladakh and Madhya Pradesh to organise School & State Level Painting Competition on Energy Conservation for the year 2025. NHPC successfully organised the school and State-level painting competitions in the above States/UTs.



CM Sarma receives 28th SIES Chandrasekarendra Saraswati Eminence Award in Mumbai

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Mumbai

In recognition of his exemplary governance and service to the people of Assam, South Indian Education Society conferred Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma with 28th SIES Chandrasekarendra Saraswati Eminence Award at a function held in Mumbai this evening.

It may be noted that instituted in the sacred memory of Puiyasri Chandrasekarendra Saraswati Mahaswamigal, the 68th Sankaracharya of the venerated Sri Kanchi Kamakoti Peetam, the award is an acknowledgement of Sarma's leadership in public.

Speaking on the occasion, Chief Minister Sarma paying rich obeisance to His Holiness Puiyasri Sankara Vijayendra Saraswathi Swamigal, the Jagadguru Shankaracharya of Kanchi Kamakoti Peetam expressed his gratitude to the South Indian Education Society for considering him for the award. Drawing a connection, Chief Minister Sarma reminded how closely Assam's spiritual history is woven with the larger civilizational story of Bharat. Adi Shankaracharya himself travelled through ancient Kamarupa, debating great scholars like

Navagupta and established the Advaita tradition in the Northeast. A mandapam at Kamakhya Temple stands as testimony to that visit. He also said that the setting up of Sankardeva Nethralaya and Poorva Tirupati Mandir with the initiatives of Jayendra Saraswathi Swamigal deepened this connection.

The Chief Minister said that Poorva Tirupati Balaji Mandir has become a spiritual anchor for the people of Assam, who once travelled thousands of kilometres to Tirupati, now find the same divinity, the same grace, right at home. The Sankardeva Nethralaya that carries the name of the greatest spiritual luminary of Assam, Srimanta Sankardeva, is a beautiful confluence of Shankaracharya and Sankardeva, of Advaita and Bhakti, of Kanchi and Assam.

Speaking on the Sanatana Dharma, the Chief Minister said that it is the eternal, ever-renewing civilisational philosophy that has shaped the soul of Bharat for thousands of years. It is not merely a religion; it is a way of life, an ethical compass, a spiritual inquiry and a timeless quest for truth. It is eternal not only because it is ancient, but because its essence continues to remain relevant, open to reform,



renewal and reinterpretation across generations.

He said that within Hinduism itself, diversity is not merely accepted, it is celebrated. A Hindu may choose a personal deity, an ishta devata; another may find solace in the silence of the formless; another in ancestor worship; another in local traditions. Outsiders may mistake this as confusion. But in reality, it reflects the vast freedom that Sanatana Dharma accords to

every seeking soul.

The Chief Minister observed that Assam represents one of the most vibrant expressions of this lived diversity. Assam has always been a meeting ground of cultures where tribal cosmologies, indigenous rituals and classical Hindu traditions have coexisted and enriched one another. Hinduism did not arrive in the Northeast as a conquering force; it arrived as a cultural companion. It adapted to the land,

absorbed local traditions and preserved ancient spiritual impulses connected to nature, ancestors and the cosmic order.

He also said that the communities like the Bodos worship Bathou through the sacred siju plant, symbolising nature's purity. The Rabha people blend ancient spirit worship with Shakta and Vaishnavite traditions. The Tiwas regard Mahadeo as supreme, fusing tribal rituals with Shaivism. The Dimasas

worship ancestral gods like Sibrai and Ranachandi, while embracing elements of mainstream Hinduism. The Karbis preserve deities of protection, illness, forest and home echoing Vedic-era nature worship. The Tai-Ahoms honour a Supreme Being and celestial deities yet eventually embraced Vaishnavism and Shaktism.

Sarma further referred to the issues of political appeasement, intellectual mockery, and ideological hostility after Independence and also shed light on the challenges faced by Sanatan Dharma in its land of origin.

He pointed out the legal asymmetries created by the Places of Worship Act, 1991 and the Waqf Act, 1995, as well as historical distortions that weakened Hindu identity. The Chief Minister also spoke about the civilisational challenges posed by demographic aggression in Assam. He elaborated on how policies such as the 1941 land development scheme led to large-scale settlement of Muslim immigrants from East Bengal, fundamentally altering the state's demographic structure, threatening the cultural continuity of indigenous communities and resulting in encroachment on government land, forest land and the sacred

lands of Satras. Sarma asserted that his government has taken bold steps to address these issues, including freeing nearly 15,000 hectares of forest land from encroachers and clearing encroachments from Bordowa, the sacred birthplace of Srimanta Sankardeva.

He stated that maintaining demographic balance means protecting the civilisational continuity that Assam has preserved for centuries. Sarma strongly reiterated his commitment to nurturing the nation's spiritual heritage and to building an India that is modern in capability, ancient in knowledge and universal in outlook.

It may be noted that this year along with Dr. Sarma the 28th Sri Chandrasekharendra Saraswati National Eminence Award, 2025 was presented to Padma Bhushan Dr A Sivathanu Pillai, Founder Managing Director and Chief Executive Officer, BrahMos Aerospace and Padma Dr Prahlad Ramarao, the first Project Director of the Akash Missile System. The Collective Leadership Award was presented to the Mumbai's Dabbawalas, the city's renowned lunchbox delivery network, while the award for Social Leadership and Philosophy was conferred upon Dr Mani David Shastigal.

Budget 2026-27: CII suggests reforms to drive investment-led growth

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ New Delhi

Industry lobby Confederation of Indian Industry CII has proposed a comprehensive set of reforms for the forthcoming Union Budget 2026-27 to drive sustained investment growth spanning public, private, and foreign investments and maintain India's momentum as one of the world's fastest-growing major economies.

The Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) suggested increasing central capital expenditure by 12 per cent and capex support to states by 10 per cent in FY27; launching a ₹150 lakh crore National Infrastructure Pipeline (NIP) 2.0 for 2026-32; offering incremental tax credits or compliance relaxations for firms achieving significant new investment, production, or tax contribution milestones; and establishing an NRI Investment Promotion Fund.

It also called for reinstating accelerated depreciation benefits to further incentivise

fresh capital expenditure and technology upgrades, particularly for MSMEs and manufacturing industries, provided the measure is structured to stimulate modernisation without triggering Minimum Alternate Tax (MAT) obligations.

Besides, CII urged for strengthening the National Investment and Infrastructure Fund (NIIF) by forming a Sovereign Investment Strategy Council (SIFC) to align investments with national priorities.

The Union Budget for the 2026-27 fiscal year is expected to be presented on February 1. According to CII, reinforcing fiscal stability through an economic-cycle-based public debt framework, in place of inflexible annual deficit rules, would also enhance resilience by allowing counter-cyclical flexibility during global shocks and avoiding repeated breaches of yearly targets.

Such a framework would strengthen credibility by

aligning fiscal policy with medium-term debt sustainability, it said. "The forthcoming Union Budget 2026-27 has to serve the dual role of stabiliser and growth enabler, and promoting investments will be one of the most critical components in this regard," CII Director General Chandrajit Banerjee said. Towards this objective, CII has proposed a comprehensive investment strategy anchored in fiscal prudence, capital efficiency, and investor confidence.

The recommendations emphasise strengthening public capital expenditure as the backbone of infrastructure-led growth, while simultaneously unlocking private and foreign investment through targeted incentives, institutional reforms, and enhanced global engagement.

Bolstering public investment remains essential, CII said, observing that public capital expenditure has been the key driver of India's post-

pandemic recovery, catalysing infrastructure expansion and crowding in private capital.

To strengthen project selection and execution, CII has proposed institutionalising a Capital Expenditure Efficiency Framework (CEEFF) to prioritise high-impact projects, track physical and financial progress and evaluate outcomes based on productivity and regional spillovers.

Second, facilitating private investment will be the next major priority.

While public investment lays the foundation, private and foreign capital will be the true accelerators of India's transformation. "The Government of India has provided a big demand push via income tax relief in last year's Union Budget and recently via GST 2.0. Investments, especially private sector investment, will be the next big driver for economic growth that needs to be focused on in the next fiscal to continue

the growth momentum," added Banerjee.

In this context, incremental tax credits or compliance relaxations for firms achieving significant new investment, production, or tax contribution milestones will encourage reinvestment of profits into productive assets and the scaling of capacity in high-growth sectors such as clean energy, electronics, semiconductors and logistics, CII said.

It suggested creating an NRI Investment Promotion Fund, which can be a government-private holding company, with up to 49 per cent government stake, that channels NRI, FPI and institutional investments into sectors such as infrastructure and AI. The fund can raise capital through long-term convertible bonds benchmarked to FCNR rates, offering secure returns with equity upside, including special India Global Diaspora Bonds, the industry lobby said.

FPIs withdraw ₹17,955 cr from equities in December; total outflow at ₹1.6 lakh cr

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

Foreign investors pulled out ₹17,955 crore (\$2 billion) from Indian equities in the first two weeks of this month, taking the total outflow to ₹1.6 lakh crore (\$18.4 billion) in 2025. This sharp withdrawal follows a net outflow of ₹3,765 crore in November, extending the pressure on domestic equity markets.

The current trend comes after a brief pause in October, when Foreign Portfolio Investors (FPIs) infused ₹14,610 crore, snapping a three-month streak of heavy withdrawals. FPIs sold equities worth ₹23,885 crore in September, ₹34,990 crore in August and ₹17,700 crore in July.

According to data from the National Securities Depository Ltd (NSDL), FPIs withdrew a net ₹17,955 crore from Indian equities

between December 1-12.

Market experts attributed this sustained outflow to several factors including sharp depreciation of the rupee and rich Indian valuations. Explaining the outflow, Himanshu Srivastava, Principal Manager Research at Morningstar Investment Research India, said elevated US interest rates, tighter liquidity conditions and a preference for safer or higher-yielding developed-market assets have weighed on investor sentiment. Adding to the pressure, India's relatively rich equity valuations have made it less attractive compared to other emerging markets that currently offer better value, he added.

In addition to these concerns, Vaqarjaved Khan, Senior Fundamental Analyst at Angel One, pointed to weakness in the Indian rupee, global portfolio rebal-

ancing, year-end effects and lingering macroeconomic uncertainty as key reasons behind the continued pullout. Despite this persistent foreign selling, the impact on markets has been largely offset by strong domestic institutional investor (DII) participation. DIIs invested ₹39,965 crore during the same period, effectively eclipsing FPI outflows.

Looking ahead, some market experts believe the selling pressure may ease.

VK Vijayakumar, Chief Investment Strategist at Geojit Investments, noted that sustained selling appears unsustainable given India's strong growth and earnings outlook, suggesting that FPI selling is likely to decline going forward.

Khan added that an expedited US-India trade deal could potentially trigger a reversal in foreign investment trends.

India beat South Africa in third T20I

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ Dharamsala

Abhishek Sharma played a sparkling little innings after the pacers produced a riveting exhibition of swing bowling, powering India to a smooth seven-wicket victory in the third T20I on Sunday.

Chasing a modest 118 for a 2-1 lead in the five-match series, vice-captain Gill (28, 28 balls) and his opening partner Abhishek (35, 18 balls) added 60 runs in 5.2 overs as India achieved their target without much effort in 15.5 overs.

The lone point of interest in India's chase was whether the South African pacers could emulate their Indian counterparts with the new ball and make the opponents' task tougher. However, Abhishek and Gill never allowed the South African bowlers to settle, as the former carted Lungi Ngidi for 16 runs in the first over. In fact, the very first ball of the chase went for a six — an early indicator of the Indian openers' intention.

In the second over, Gill too joined his partner to garner 16 runs as India sped to 32 for no loss in the initial two overs.

Abhishek, as is his wont, batted in a single gear and it required a gem of a catch by Aiden Markram in the deep off Corbin Bosch to snap his stay. Once the left-hander was dismissed, India's chase of the remaining 58 runs settled into a much more sedate rhythm as Gill, who was saved by a DRS call early



India's Varun Chakravathy, left, celebrating with captain Suryakumar Yadav, second left, after taking the wicket of South Africa's Donovan Ferreira during the third T20 International cricket match of a series between India and South Africa at HPCA Stadium in Dharamshala Himachal Pradesh on Sunday

PTI

in his innings and Tilak Varma (26 not out) did not look for any adventure. Gill's run-a-ball 28 will certainly not rank among his fluent ones, but it might have boosted his confidence after two lukewarm outings in the first two matches of the series. He eventually dragged a Marco Jansen delivery back on to his stumps and skipper Suryakumar Yadav too failed to remain till the end. But those were the minor aberrations on the night.

All the credit for this canter should go to India's pacers, who produced a mesmerizing spell of

swing bowling to bundle out South Africa for a below-par 117.

Leading India's show with early wickets were Arshdeep Singh (2/13), Harshit Rana (2/34) and Hardik Pandya (1/23) after the hosts chose to bowl. Skipper Markram offered a tiny spark for South Africa with a spirited 46-ball 61. Undoubtedly, the brightest stars under a cool sky were India's quick bowlers, who procured lethal swing and lateral movement with the new ball.

It had its effect on the low-key power play effort of South Africa — 25 for three — and the

phase contained just two fours. Arshdeep, who had a horror outing at Mullanpur a couple of days back, redeemed himself with a dream first spell (3-0-9-1). He bowled three deliveries which angled away from Reeza Hendricks and then jagged one back to trap the South African opener leg before with the help of DRS. Rana did precisely the same to Quinton de Kock, a nip-backer, trapping the frozen-legged left-hander inside the crease.

Dewald Brevis was slightly unfortunate to get castled while attempting a release shot off a wide deliv-

ery from Rana. South Africa suddenly found themselves at 7 for 3 in 3.1 overs and it was always going to be an uphill climb for them from there. Markram crunched a couple of sweet drives in between to keep the board moving but Tristan Stubbs and Bosch departed in quick succession to further derail South African innings.

Stubbs' wicket helped all-rounder Pandya to complete 100 wickets in T20Is, the third Indian bowler to do so after Arshdeep and Jasprit Bumrah, who did not play this match after returning home to attend to a personal situation.

The BCCI said his availability for the remainder of the series will be announced in due course. Kuldeep Yadav too came into the eleven for an unwell Axar Patel.

Spinner Varun Chakravathy (2/11 in 4 overs) too reached a milestone, capturing his 50th T20I wicket while flattening the stumps of Donovan Ferreira (20, 15 balls).

The big-hitting Ferreria was dropped on 13 by Arshdeep at long-on off Shivam Dube, but that did not hurt India.

Chakravathy cut open the lower-order with his bottomless bag of tricks as the pitch also continued to offer good pace and carry.

The spinner also added the wicket of Jansen to keep South Africa pinned to the mat. Markram completed his fifty off 41 balls with a slashed six off Rana, as the 18th over produced 19 runs. But the South African surge came tad too late.

Coughlin, Novak lead mixed-team Golf event



ASSOCIATED PRESS
■ Naples (US)

Lauren Coughlin holed a bunker shot for eagle on the par-5 17th hole, and she and Andrew Novak teamed for a stout 4-under 68 in four-omes to build a one-shot lead going into the final round of the Grant Thornton Invitational.

It's another chance for Novak to pick up a team title this year. He partnered with Ben Griffin to win the Zurich Classic of New Orleans. The Grant Thornton is the only mixed-team event.

They were at 19-under 125 and leading by one shot over Charley Hull and Michael Brennan, who were poised to share the lead

until a three-putt bogey on the final hole when Hull lipped out from just outside 3 feet. They shot 71. Lexi Thompson and Wyndham Clark were two shots behind after finishing with eight straight pars for a 72. The final round is modified four-balls. Each player tees off, then they switch golf balls and stick with that ball the rest of the way, with the low score counting.

It should lead to lower scoring, although the Canadian duo of Brooke Henderson and Corey Connors did their part in the more difficult foursomes. They managed seven birdies and briefly shared the lead until a bogey on the 18th for a 67.

Cameron Green blames manager after IPL auction listing error

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ Adelaide

Australia all-rounder Cameron Green on Sunday clarified that he will be available to bowl in the IPL saying a "stuff-up" by his manager led to him being mistakenly registered as a batter for next week's mini auction.

The 26-year-old, who missed the 2025 IPL season as he recovered from back surgery, returned to international cricket as a specialist batter in June. However, he has since been cleared to bowl and has been rolling his arm in the ongoing Ashes series between Australia and England.

"I'll be good to bowl. I don't know if my manager would like to hear this, but there was a stuff-up on his end," Green was quoted as saying by ESPNcricinfo.

"He didn't mean to say 'batter'. I think he accidentally selected the wrong box. It was pretty funny



how it's all played out, but it was actually a stuff-up on his end.

The lanky all-rounder, who previously represented Mumbai Indians in 2023 and Royal Challengers Bengaluru in 2024, is among the biggest names in the auction and is likely to be in the highest demand.

Green has entered the auction with a base price of ₹2 crore. He has been

listed under the batters' category instead of the all-rounders' lot.

The auction will take place in Abu Dhabi on Tuesday.

"I'm sure I will be (watching), with a few other guys. They're always good fun to watch. It's a bit of a lottery where you might go, but also who might be in your team, so it's always been fun to watch," he added

India outplay Pakistan in U19 Asia Cup

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ Dubai

A disciplined bowling performance, led by all-rounder Kanishk Chouhan and seamer Deepesh Devendran, powered India to a comprehensive 90-run victory over Pakistan in their Group A match of the Under-19 Asia Cup, here Sunday.

After being put in to bat, India posted a competitive 240 all out in 46.1 overs, riding on a fluent 85 from Aaron George and useful contributions from captain Ayush Mhatre (38) and Chouhan (46).

Pakistan were then bundled out for 150 in 41.2 overs, never quite recovering from the early setbacks in a chase of 241.

India got off to a brisk start with skipper Mhatre striking four boundaries and three sixes during his 25-ball knock before Mohammad Sayyam removed both openers inside the first 10 overs.

George then held the innings together, finding the gaps consistently and adding stability through



the middle phase. Chouhan's late flourish, which included three sixes, helped India cross the 230-run mark despite losing wickets regularly.

For Pakistan, Sayyam (3/67) and Abdul Subhan (3/42) were the standout bowlers, while Niqab Shafiq chipped in with two wickets.

Pakistan's chase faltered early as they slipped to 30 for four, with Devendran striking thrice in a sharp opening spell.

Captain Farhan Yousaf (23) and Huzaifa Ahsan attempt-

ed to steady the innings, but Chouhan's incisive off-spin broke the resistance. Ahsan top-scored for Pakistan with 70 off 83 balls, but lacked support at the other end.

Chouhan finished with 3 for 33, while Devendran returned figures of 3 for 16 as India maintained a firm grip on the contest throughout to register a dominant win in the marquee Group A clash. The players of the two teams did not shake hands with each other at the toss and after the match, continuing the 'no-hand-

shake' protocol observed by the Indian men's team during the recently concluded Asia Cup 2025, where they refused to receive the winner's trophy from PCB Chairman Mohsin Naqvi.

Brief scores:

India U-19: 240 all out in 46.1 overs (Aaron George 85, Kanishk Chouhan 46; Mohammad Sayyam 3/67, Abdul Subhan 3/42).

Pakistan U-19: 150 all out in 41.2 overs (Huzaifa Ahsan 70; Kanishk Chouhan 3/33, Deepesh Devendran 3/16).

Had to reinvent my running, Shelly Ann on shedding poor finisher tag

DEVARCHIT VARMA
■ Pune

Legendary Jamaican sprinter Shelly-Ann Fraser-Pryce says she hated being labelled "a great starter but not a great finisher," and had to reinvent her running style in her formative years to rise to the elite level.

Fraser-Pryce, an eight time Olympic and 17-time World Championship medallist, said she put in a lot of effort in 200m to sharpen her 100m sprint race in which she owns the third-fastest time in history at 10.60 seconds.

"I had to really reinvent the way I ran, growing up in high school to becoming an elite sprinter because how I ran wasn't ideal, it wasn't going to make me win races," Fraser-Pryce, a brand ambassador of the Bajaj Pune Marathon, told *PTI* in an exclusive interview.

"People would say 'man, she's a great starter but not a great finisher' and I used to hate hearing those things, because I'm like, 'but I can finish too!'"

"I had to get stronger in the gym. I had to do more 200m if I wanted my 100m to be better. I really had to

Andhra wins against Punjab in SMAT

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ Pune

Young Andhra batter Hemanth Reddy proved way too strong-willed in the face of some hostile bowling from Punjab as he smashed an unbeaten 109 to lead his side to a thrilling five-wicket win in a high-scoring Syed Mushtaq Ali Trophy Super League A match, on Sunday.

Reddy, playing only his second career SMAT game, saw the entire Andhra top and middle order being wiped out and leaving them perilously close to defeat at 56 for 5 while chasing 206 for victory.

But the 23-year-old, who has played most of his cricket in the Andhra Premier

League, came up with his career-best performance, blazing to a 53-ball 109, studded with 11 boundaries and seven sixes as Andhra reached 211/5 on the penultimate ball of the match.

Tall Punjab pacer Gurnoor Brar (3/23) made life difficult for Andhra batters, removing openers Srikar Bharat (1) and Ashwin Hebbar (4) in the very first over, reducing the opponents to seven or two.

Brar, a former net bowler for five-time IPL champions Mumbai Indians who was bought for ₹1.3 crore by Gujarat Titans ahead of the 2025 season, struck again in the fifth over by dismissing Andhra skipper Ricky Bhui (15). In between, pacer Ayush Goyal also got the



wicket of India all-rounder Nithish Kumar Reddy as Andhra reached at 4/35, which quickly became 5/56 in the ninth over.

Needing someone who could really thwack the Punjab bowlers and also play a sensible innings, Reddy stepped up.

Over 3,000 runners from across India participate in 5th Assam Rifles Half Marathon

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Shillong

More than 3,000 people from across the country took part in the fifth edition of the Assam Rifles Half Marathon here on Sunday, an official statement said.

The annual event was organised at the headquarters of the Directorate General Assam Rifles at Laitkor, attracting runners from 26 states and two Union territories.

Held against the scenic backdrop of the headquarters of the force in the higher reaches of East Khasi Hills district, the event was

attended by senior officials from the armed forces, Government representatives and volunteers from different parts of the country.

The event was conducted in three categories — Cloud Chase (21 km), Pine Path (10 km) and Crystal Stream (5 km). The 21 km run was flagged off by Director General Assam Rifles Lt Gen Vikas Lakhera, while the 10 km and 5 km categories were flagged off by senior officers of the force.

A total of 3,038 runners participated, including 559 in the half marathon, 1,502 in the 10 km run and 977 in the 5 km run, the statement



said. Participants were awarded medals, certificates and commemorative T-shirts, while cash prizes of ₹20 lakh were presented to 48 runners across categories, along with several consolation prizes.

In the overall category, Sandeep Devvari of Kumaon Regiment of the Indian Army, won the men's 21 km race with a timing of 1 hour 7 minutes, while Tamsi Singh from Uttar Pradesh's Varanasi emerged as the winner in the women's 21 km category with a timing of 1 hour 23 minutes.

Air Marshal Surat Singh, AOC-in-C Eastern Air

Command, attended the event as the chief guest and presented prizes to the winners of the 21 km and 10 km categories, praising the enthusiasm and sporting spirit of the participants.

Speaking on the occasion, Lt Gen Lakhera said the marathon seeks to foster a culture of fitness, wellness and togetherness in the Northeast, adding that participation has more than doubled compared to last year. The Assam Rifles thanked the Meghalaya Government for its support in ensuring the smooth conduct of the event, it added.

CHANGE OF NAME

I, DEEKSHA holding Indian Passport No. N6839285 issued at BHUBANESWAR on 12/04/2016, Permanent Resident of ROOM NO-115 EXECUTIVE HOSTEL PARADIP REFINERY TOWNSHIP JAGATSINGHAPUR PIN 754141 ODISHA INDIA, presently residing at DUBAI UAE do hereby change my name from DEEKSHA to DEEKSHA (given name) JHA (Surname) with immediate effect.