

Mamata suspends MLA for planning Babri replica



SC asks States to provide more staff to ECIs

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A story of boom, gloom and doom

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US orders visa applicants to make social media profiles public

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Nikita overcomes tragedies to win gold in KIUG

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KHALEDA MAY BE SHIFTED TO UK

Former Bangladesh prime minister and BNP chairperson Khaleda Zia, 80, remains in critical condition at Dhaka's Evercare Hospital as her family prepares to move her to London for advanced treatment. Admitted on November 23 with a severe chest infection affecting her heart and lungs, she was shifted to the coronary care unit four days later as complications worsened. BNP acting chairperson Tarique Rahman's wife, Dr Zubaida Rahman, is expected to arrive in Dhaka to assess Zia's condition before an air transfer. Qatar has offered an air ambulance, while Bangladesh's military conducted rooftop landing tests at the hospital to facilitate evacuation. International medical teams including specialists from China and the UK have joined local doctors to review treatment options. Interim Government chief Muhammad Yunus and senior military leaders have visited the hospital. Meanwhile, BNP supporters nationwide are holding prayers for Zia's recovery amid renewed attention on Tarique Rahman's long exile in London.

Modi welcomes Putin as India-Russia ties shine



Russian President Vladimir Putin and PM Narendra Modi sitting inside a limousine after arriving at the Palam Air Base in New Delhi, India

PTI

ASHOKE RAJ ■ New Delhi

Russian President Vladimir Putin arrived in New Delhi on Thursday — his first trip to India since the Ukraine conflict erupted in February 2022. The visit comes at a moment of global uncertainty, with both nations reassessing their roles amid escalating

geopolitical competition and rapidly shifting alliances. On his arrival, PM received President Putin at the airport and drove together to the Lutyens zone. Soon thereafter, PM Modi hosted the Russian president for a private dinner. The duo had travelled last together during the SCO meet in China.

Sharing his thoughts on social media, PM Modi stated, "Delighted to welcome my friend, President Putin, to India. Looking forward to our interactions later this evening and tomorrow. The India-Russia friendship is a time-tested one that has greatly benefited our people."

FULL AGENDA ON DECEMBER 5

- Ceremonial welcome at Rashtrapati Bhavan
- Tribute at Rajghat, the memorial of Mahatma Gandhi
- Delegation-level talks with PM Modi
- Joint statement on outcomes of the summit
- A business forum with the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI)
- Dinner at Rashtrapati Bhavan
- Scheduled departure

EXPECTED OUTCOMES FROM THE VISIT

- Strengthening economic co-operation
- Improving trade deficit
- Increase Indian exports of pharmaceuticals, automobiles, agricultural products including marine products
- Market for Indian businesses and agriculture
- MoUs in shipping, healthcare, fertilisers
- Improving people-to-people relations, culture and scientific collaboration



Defence Minister Rajnath Singh with his Russian counterpart Andrei Belousov prior to the 22nd India-Russia Inter-Governmental Commission on Military and Military Technical Cooperation ministerial meeting, in New Delhi

PTI

Rajnath, Belousov hold talks

RAHUL DATTA ■ New Delhi

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh and his Russian counterpart, Andrei Belousov reviewed India-Russia defence ties on Thursday, a day before the 23rd India-Russia Annual Summit between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and President Vladimir Putin. The two ministers co-chaired the 22nd India-Russia Inter-Governmental Commission on Military and Military Technical Cooperation (IRIGC-M&MTC) ministerial meeting. In an effort to further

enhance operational capabilities of the armed forces, India is keen to procure more S-400 missile systems, upgrade of Sukhoi 30 fighter jets and purchasing other critical military hardware from Russia. India is also looking at procuring additional batches of S-400 surface-to-air missile systems from Russia as the weapons proved to be very effective during Operation Sindoor. During the talks between the two defence ministers, Rajnath Singh voiced India's determination for capacity building of its indigenous

defence industry. He also stressed on new opportunities for enhancing collaboration between both countries across niche technologies. The Russian Defence Minister emphasised on deepening relationship between both the countries which is based on mutual trust. He stated that the Russian defence industry is ready to support India towards becoming self-reliant in the field of defence production. Belousov also invited Singh to visit Russia to co-chair the 23rd session of IRIC-M&MTC in 2026.

The Bystander



EX-GUV SWARAJ KAUSHAL DIES

Former Mizoram governor and senior advocate Swaraj Kaushal, husband of the late BJP stalwart Sushma Swaraj, passed away on Thursday at the age of 73. He was rushed to AIIMS by his daughter, BJP MP Bansuri Swaraj, after complaining of chest pain, but was declared dead on arrival, the Delhi BJP said. Kaushal was cremated at Lodhi Road crematorium with full honours, with Bansuri performing the last rites in the presence of Union ministers, Delhi Chief Minister Rekha Gupta, senior BJP and RSS leaders, and a Delhi Police contingent that offered a final salute.

WON'T ASK PIASTRI FOR HELP: NORRIS

Lando Norris says he will not ask McLaren teammate Oscar Piastri to give up a position to support his championship bid in Formula 1's three-way title showdown with Max Verstappen at the Abu Dhabi Grand Prix. Norris leads Verstappen by 12 points heading into Sunday's finale, with Piastri only four points behind. While Piastri could theoretically aid Norris if he falls out of title contention, Norris insisted he would not request team orders, calling it unfair and a decision solely for Piastri. Piastri said the team had not discussed such scenarios and he would wait to understand what might be expected of him. Last week in Qatar, a McLaren strategy error cost Norris a chance to seal the championship, with Verstappen winning and Piastri finishing second.

IndiGo delays, cancellations swamp airports across India

ASHOKE RAJ ■ New Delhi

India's largest airline cancelled over 300 flights and experienced delays in hundreds of other flights in the last 48 hours. Major Indian airports are overwhelmed and passengers stranded as IndiGo battles one of its toughest operational crises in recent years.

IndiGo CEO Pieter Elbers has issued an apology to employees, acknowledging that the carrier has failed to meet the expectations of the 3.8 lakh passengers it serves daily.

In his internal email titled Stronger Together, Elbers wrote the disruption stemmed from "an accumulation of several opera-

tional challenges", including minor technology glitches, schedule changes, adverse weather, heightened congestion across the aviation ecosystem and the enforcement of the new Flight Duty Time Limit (FDTL) norms for pilots. The tightened rules, effective November 1, have squeezed crew availability across airlines-but IndiGo has taken the sharpest hit due to the size and complexity of its network. The crisis intensified after the airline cancelled 150 flights on Wednesday, cautioning that "calibrated adjustments" to schedules would continue for at least 48 hours as crew rosters and operational resources were rebalanced.



A passenger looks at the display board for information at Kempegowda International Airport, in Bengaluru

PTI

Skating season opens in Shimla

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Shimla

The ice skating season officially opened in the chilly morning hours on Thursday in Shimla, home to Asia's largest natural ice skating rink. The rink was quality tested on Wednesday by skating veterans and a few tourists. As the weather was deemed conducive, ice skating, which is a major attraction here, began during the day, said Rajat Malhotra, the secretary of Shimla Ice Skating Club.

Morning sessions would be held from 8 am to 10 am, depending on the quality of the ice. Evening sessions would soon begin in the

A CLEAR SKY AND TEMPERATURES BELOW 4 DEGREES CELSIUS ARE THE MOST REQUIRED PREREQUISITES FOR ICE FORMATION

days to come, he said. Malhotra said the winter carnival and annual gymkhana (competitions) would be organised in December and January, respectively.

In the past few years, skating activities began in the second week of December. Last year, the ice skating season commenced on December 18, and in 2023,

PANEL SEEKS ACTION ON PENDING LOKPAL WINGS

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

A Parliamentary panel on Thursday suggested urgent steps to operationalise the inquiry and prosecution wings of the Lokpal. The panel noted that "operationalisation of these statutory wings remains incomplete" despite efforts made to utilise deputation-based arrangements until regular appointments are made.

"In view of its earlier recommendation that both wings be fully constituted within six months, the committee reiterates that urgent steps be taken to operationalise the inquiry and prosecution wings through regular appointments or deputation, so that the Lokpal may effectively discharge its statutory mandate without further delay," said the 159th report by the Department related Parliamentary Standing Committee on Personnel, Public Grievances, Law and Justice, tabled in the Rajya Sabha.

it began on December 11.

A clear sky and temperatures below 4 degrees Celsius are the most conducive prerequisites for ice formation, but construction activity in the vicinity of the rink and the demolition of Rivoli Theatre above it have posed a challenge.

Skating enthusiasts Drishya, Aditya and Joanne said they wait for the winters the whole year, and expressed hope for a long skating season. The subscription fee for the full season for seniors and juniors (aged under 16) is ₹3,000 and ₹1,800, said Manpreet Singh, the president of the ice skating club, which has around 300 members.

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Last-Minute Nominations for Panchayat Polls Turn Turbulent Across Punjab

MONIKA MALIK ■ Chandigarh

The last day of filing nomination papers for Punjab's Zila Parishad and Block Samiti elections on Thursday unfolded like a political pressure cooker — sealed with accusations, ripped open by roadside scuffles, and overflowing with confrontations that cut across party lines. From Gurdaspur to Jalandhar, Patiala to Amritsar, the day's script offered little resemblance to orderly democratic procedure; instead, it resembled an open display of political muscle, suspicion, and full-blown hostility as candidates scrambled to submit their papers before the deadline.

To top it all, the political temperature soared in the morning after SAD president Sukhbir Singh Badal released an alleged leaked audio clip, involving Patiala's top police officials, claiming poll rigging by police officials, prompting Patiala Police to register an FIR while branding the recording "fake" and AI-generated.

What should have been a procedural culmination of the nomination phase turned into a litany of allegations — AAP workers accused of intimidation, Congress candidates claiming obstruction, Akali Dal supporters reporting assault, BJP alleging state-sponsored strong-arm tactics, and BSP protesting exclusion at the gates. By

evening, every party had a grievance, every district had a flashpoint, and every leader had a charge to level.

In Ropar, where tensions had already been simmering, senior BJP leader Subhash Sharma set the tone with a scathing attack on the Punjab Government. Calling the nomination day chaos a "pre-planned sabotage", Sharma alleged that the ruling AAP was intervening blatantly in the local body elections.

He said that the government had been forced into announcing these polls only after the High Court's directions, and now found itself "misusing the police force to prevent opposition candidates from even reaching nomination centres."

Sharma accused the officials of tearing papers, blocking entries, and working under political duress. The election machinery, he claimed, had been reduced to an extension of the ruling party.

If the process is fair, our candidates will sweep every seat," he declared, insisting that the BJP cadre was contesting these rural polls with unprecedented enthusiasm.

The most dramatic visuals of the day came from Gurdaspur's Dera Baba Nanak, where AAP and Congress workers clashed violently. The scene escalated from slogan shouting to hand-to-hand scuffles, ending with turbans knocked off and the police

wading into the crowd.

Gurdaspur MP Sukhjinder Singh Randhawa's son, Udayveer, reached the spot and directly accused the AAP Government of unleashing "hooliganism masked as governance." AAP MLA Gurdeep Singh Randhawa, however, countered that the Congress was attempting to "disrupt peaceful nominations" and replaying the same "muscle-flexing tactics" witnessed during previous local body polls.

The tension was no less charged in Amritsar, where a confrontation erupted within the SDM-2 office itself. SAD candidate Paramjit Singh and the accompanying leaders alleged that AAP members attempted to block his entry and heckle him during filing. The conflict escalated when Singh's turban was reportedly pulled during the melee — an act that ignited fresh outrage within the Akali cadre.

Senior Akali leader Gulzar Singh Ranike termed it a "direct assault on democratic rights" and demanded strict action against those responsible. Outside the office, crowds surged, tempers ran high, and police intervention became necessary to prevent further escalation.

Chaos mirrored itself in Patiala's Doodhanwala, where candidates arriving after 3 pm found barricades blocking their entry. The result was a heated argument between police and candidates belonging to

both the Congress and the Akali Dal.

Scuffles broke out as candidates attempted to push past barricades, insisting that delaying tactics were being deployed to prevent certain names from reaching the nomination desk.

In nearby Samana, the tension took a startling turn when Congress candidate Jaswinder Singh saw his nomination papers snatched, torn and thrown onto a school rooftop. Singh accused an AAP worker of orchestrating the attack, claiming that he had been followed since the previous evening. Former MLA Rajinder Singh soon arrived, adding weight to the protest and demanding that those behind the snatching be identified and arrested.

Jalandhar's Goraya centre delivered a separate theatre of conflict altogether. BSP leaders, upset after being stopped at the gate for arriving past the permitted time, began raising slogans against the AAP government. The situation aggravated after they alleged that an AAP member had jumped the boundary wall to file papers from the inside.

Angered by this, BSP workers replicated the act — climbing the same wall, scaling the boundary, forcing their way into the nomination centre, and triggering a physical confrontation with police.

The protest intensified as BSP leaders accused officials of selectively accepting late

files from AAP while rejecting documents from other parties. Two such files — related to Kahna Dhesian and Muthada Kalan — were cited as examples. A formal complaint was lodged with the Returning Officer, and for nearly half an hour, slogan-shouting echoed within the complex until officials eventually took all pending papers inside to pacify the crowd.

In Tarn Taran, Akali leader Kanchanpreet Kaur delivered a sharp rebuke to the ruling party, questioning why AAP leaders seemed "afraid of their own people's vote." She alleged that AAP workers were intentionally creating long queues to push Akali workers out of the process. "This intimidation won't last. Punjab watches everything," she said, warning that attempts to stop nomination papers would not influence the coming year's political verdict.

WARRING ACCUSES AAP OF "BRUTAL ABUSE OF POWER"

By late evening, the Congress launched a state-wide condemnation. Punjab Congress president Amarinder Singh Raja Warring called the day's events "evidence of the government's panic" and accused AAP of unleashing police intimidation across districts.

He cited incidents of opposition candidates being detained, misled, or prevented from reaching filing centres. Referring to an audio clip reportedly

involving Patiala Police, he said that its authenticity might be uncertain, but its contents matched what was "happening across Punjab and being recorded by common citizens."

Warring claimed that one Congress leader's husband had been picked up by police and kept in illegal detention through the night to stop his wife from filing papers. "This government may believe this is strength, but it is only fear in disguise," he said, warning officers that none would be spared responsibility for excesses.

BJP'S STRONG CHARGE: 'POLICE HAVE BECOME AAP'S B-TEAM'

The BJP, too, sharpened its attack. At a press conference in Chandigarh, state general secretary Anil Sareen alleged that the Punjab Police had been "transformed into AAP's private election squad." He said that homes of candidates were raided, gates locked, routes blocked and nomination files torn by individuals acting "with official sanction." Sareen played videos of police picking up Vikas Pandey, husband of a BJP candidate, early in the morning. He also accused the Election Commission of "stunning silence" despite receiving multiple complaints with evidence. He warned that the party would not hesitate to launch mass protests if democratic processes continued to be "choked."

"Leaked" Audio on Panchayat Polls Triggers Political Firestorm in Punjab; Police Deny Claims, FIR Lodged

PNS ■ Chandigarh

A fresh political storm swept across Punjab's already charged election atmosphere on Thursday morning after Shiromani Akali Dal president Sukhbir Singh Badal released an alleged leaked audio clip accusing top Patiala Police officials of plotting to block opposition candidates during the Zila Parishad and Block Samiti elections. The claim triggered sharp reactions across parties, a police rebuttal branding the clip as fake, and swift legal action with the registration of an FIR.

The 18-minute audio, shared by Sukhbir on social media, is claimed to be part of a late-night conference call held on December 3. According to the Akali Dal chief, the recording features a conversation between senior police officers, allegedly led by Patiala SSP Varun Sharma, with instructions being issued to stop opposition candidates from reaching Returning Officers during the nomination process. The alleged conversation includes references to restricting candidates from their homes, villages and even outside nomination centres.

Sukhbir termed the episode a "murder of democracy" and accused the Aam Aadmi Party Government of openly misusing the police machinery to ensure electoral advantage. He demanded immediate intervention by the judiciary and the Election Commission, alleging that the integrity of the election process itself was under threat.

Reacting to the viral clip,

Japanese steel giant Aichi Steel to expand in Punjab

PNS ■ Chandigarh

Japanese steel giant Aichi Steel agreed to expand its collaboration with Vardhman Special Steels in Punjab, entailing an investment of Rs 500 crore, according to a statement issued here. Aichi Steel and Vardhman Special Steels signed an MoU in the presence of Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann, who is on a 10-day visit to Japan and South Korea.

Mann, in a statement, said it is a red-letter day for the state as the Aichi Steel Corporation, better known as the steel arm of Toyota, has inked this agreement to give

fillip to the industrial development in the state. He said Aichi Steel, which already holds about 24.9 per cent stake in Vardhman, is a key technology partner, symbolising a strong and evolving Indo-Japan partnership in Punjab's industrial ecosystem.

The Punjab CM said the Japanese steel giant will study future factory operations in Punjab, including a feasibility assessment for an investment of about Rs 500 crore. Meanwhile, Mann assured full support and cooperation to strengthen and expand Aichi Steel's collaboration with Vardhman Special Steels in the state.

Punjab Poll Panel Orders Mandatory Videography After Opposition Uproar

PNS ■ Chandigarh

With opposition parties alleging forcible obstruction and official non-cooperation during the nomination process, the Punjab State Election Commission on Thursday ordered compulsory videography of the entire filing process for the Zila Parishad and Panchayat Samiti elections, warning of strict action against any lapse in duty.

The directive comes on the final day of nominations for elections to 22 Zila Parishads and 153 Panchayat Samitis, scheduled to be held on December 14. The Commission has instructed all Deputy Commissioners-cum-District Electoral Officers to ensure that the entire process is videographed and that the recorded footage is preserved securely in their custody.

The move follows a series of complaints from opposition parties alleging that their candidates were either physically stopped from filing nominations or that officials responsible for issuing NOCs and accepting papers were deliberately absent from offices.

State Election Commissioner Raj Kamal Chaudhary has directed officials to ensure foolproof security arrangements at all nomination centres to prevent any law and order disturbances, cautioning that "serious action will be taken in case of dereliction of duty."

Officials have also been reminded to ensure the mandatory presence of all returning and assistant returning officers during working hours to guarantee an unhindered and transparent process.

BRIEFS

CM SAINI ANNOUNCES INITIATIVES TO ACCELERATE DEVELOPMENT IN LADWA CONSTITUENCY
Kurukshetra: Addressing a state-level function held in Ladwa to commemorate the birth anniversary of Bhagat Saini, a prominent spiritual preacher of the 14th-15th century, Haryana chief minister Nayab Singh Saini announced a series of initiatives to further improve health services, education facilities and infrastructure in his assembly constituency of Ladwa in Kurukshetra. He announced that an educational institution in the state will be named after Saini, while the Ladwa community health centre (CHC) would be upgraded to a 50-bed sub-divisional hospital-cum-CHC. He also said that a Government College would be established at Ramsharan Majra in Babain.

HOODA DEMANDS SPECIAL SESSION ON CHANDIGARH ISSUE
Chandigarh: Former Haryana Chief Minister and Leader of the Opposition Bhupinder Singh Hooda on Thursday demanded that the state government should convene a special session of the Assembly as soon as possible on the Chandigarh issue. "It is clear that the BJP led State Government has completely failed to protect Haryana's rights regarding Chandigarh and the SYL. This government is unable to acquire land for the new Assembly or provide Haryana with the SYL water. Despite clear Supreme Court orders, the BJP has failed to secure Haryana's rightful share of water. The BJP's policy on Chandigarh is also indecisive," he stated. "The central government itself is unable to clarify whether the two states will have a shared capital or whether it will become a full-fledged Union Territory. All these issues should be discussed within the Assembly," he added.

HIMACHAL CM INAUGURATES DIGITAL FORENSIC DIVISION ADVANCED EQUIPMENT LABORATORY IN DHARAMSHALA
Shimla: Himachal Pradesh Chief Minister Sukhvinder Singh Sukhu on Thursday inaugurated the Digital Forensic Division and Advanced Equipment Laboratory in the Regional Forensic Science Laboratory (RFSL) in Dharamshala. Sukhu said that the newly created division would greatly assist investigating agencies in preserving and examining evidence from crime scenes, particularly in cases where the prescribed punishment is seven years or more. This facility is equipped with the state-of-the-art infrastructure worth around Rs 3 crore and includes advanced tools capable of extracting and analysing data even from damaged mobile phones. In addition, an advanced equipment laboratory costing about Rs 1.05 crore has been established to ensure high-precision forensic analysis. The equipment installed in these laboratories is valued at around Rs 1.50 crore. These facilities are expected to significantly enhance transparency, reliability and efficiency in forensic investigations across the northern region of the state.

330 ARRESTED UNDER 'OPERATION HOTSPOT DOMINATION' IN HARYANA
Chandigarh: On the third day of Haryana Police's 'Operation Hotspot Domination' on Thursday, the State Police undertook aggressive action against criminals across the state. In this intensive 72-hour campaign, the police combed 1,512 sensitive locations (hotspots). On the third day alone, raids were conducted at 647 places. As a result of coordinated action over the last three days, a total of 188 new criminal cases have been registered across the state, and 330 offenders have been arrested and sent to jail. During this period, the police seized more than Rs 4.5 lakh in cash. On the third day, the police recovered three country-made pistols and one handgun, taking the cumulative seizure to four pistols and five live cartridges during the entire operation, an official statement said.

HARYANA MINISTER INAUGURATES 25TH CRUSHING SEASON OF GOHANA SUGAR MILL
Chandigarh: Haryana Cooperation Minister Arvind Sharma on Thursday inaugurated the 25th crushing season (2025–26) of Chaudhary Devi Lal Cooperative Sugar Mill, Gohana. He informed that the price of early variety sugarcane has been fixed at Rs. 415 per quintal, while the late variety has been fixed at Rs. 408 per quintal. During the previous crushing season, farmers across the state were paid Rs. 1,211 crore, which included Rs. 80 crore from Gohana mill and Rs. 103 crore from Sonipat mill.

SKILL DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVES & DIPLOMA COURSES TO BEGIN IN HARYANA PRISONS
Chandigarh: The Punjab and Haryana High Court, in collaboration with the Haryana Government, will launch skill development centres, polytechnic diploma courses, and ITI-level vocational training programs across various prisons in the state. The initiative will be inaugurated by the Chief Justice of India, Justice Surya Kant, on December 6 at the District Jail, Gurugram. On this occasion, Supreme Court Judges Justice Rajesh Bindal and Justice Augustine George Masih, along with the Chief Justice of the Punjab and Haryana High Court, Justice Sheel Nagu, and all judges of the High Court will also be present. A government spokesperson informed that continuous efforts of the committee on "Rehabilitation and Skill Development of Undertrials/Prison Inmates," chaired by Justice Kuldeep Tiwari, have played a crucial role in shaping this initiative. Their collective vision underscores the belief that prisons should evolve into institutions of reform, capacity building, and human dignity.

Encourage farmers to adopt modern technologies: Haryana CM asks officers

PNS ■ Chandigarh\ Kurukshetra

Keeping in view of the changing times and shrinking agricultural land, Haryana Chief Minister Nayab Singh Saini on Thursday said that the Agriculture Department should encourage farmers to adopt modern technologies such as vertical farming. The department must accelerate its efforts toward future readiness by understanding emerging technological needs, changes and challenges, he added.

Chairing a review meeting of the Department of Future, Saini said that the various schemes being implemented by the Agriculture and Horticulture Departments should be assessed to identify the challenges likely to emerge over the next decade. The departments must work with a clear vision and well-planned strategies throughout the year, keeping future requirements in focus.

Saini said that efforts must be made to introduce technology that prevents

farmers from burning crop residue. The Agriculture Department and the Department of Future should jointly develop solutions that discourage stubble burning and make the removal of crop residue from fields easier. Similarly, to ensure adherence to prescribed moisture standards in produce, he suggested that consultations be held with relevant industries so that machine-combine-harvested crops adhere to the required moisture levels.

He said that with rapidly improving connectivity across the state, the India International Horticulture Market being developed in Gannaur is likely to witness considerable pressure in the coming years. To address this effectively, he said the department should prepare a long-term plan spanning 10 to 20 years. Haryana's future readiness should focus on guiding farmers toward crops that will be in global demand and where Haryana has a competitive advantage. All departments work towards strengthening the use of AI and digital governance as part of their long-term planning, he added.

Additional funds for expansion of Kangra airport to be released soon: Himachal CM

PNS ■ Shimla

Himachal Pradesh Chief Minister Sukhvinder Singh Sukhu on Thursday said the state government has released Rs 460 crore for the expansion of Kangra airport aiming to accommodate larger aircraft, boost tourism, improve connectivity and create employment opportunities for the youth.

Additional funds for the airport will also be released shortly, he informed, after inaugurating the multipurpose indoor stadium at Kaliyara in Shahpur Assembly Constituency, Kangra. The stadium built at Rs 3.36 crore includes facilities for basketball, badminton and a fitness centre.

Sukhu said education remains the state government's top priority, with several reforms introduced to strengthen it. "As a result of the government's sustained efforts, Himachal Pradesh has achieved fifth rank in quality education, a significant rise from the 21st position during the previous government's tenure," he said.

"The Kaliyara school in Shahpur has already been

approved for conversion into CBSE, where science and commerce streams will be introduced along with a proper dress code," he added.

Students in the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) schools will not be allowed to carry mobile phones, ensuring focus on studies, sports, and co-curricular activities, the chief minister said.

He also underscored that the government's second priority remains the health sector. Sukhu informed that Rs 78 crore has been allocated to set up laboratories in Indira Gandhi Medical College (IGMC) in Shimla, Dr Rajendra Prasad Government Medical College and Hospital, Tanda and the Atal Institute of Medical Super Speciality (AIMSS), Chamiana, ensuring more accurate testing and improved medical facilities.

Urging farmers to adopt natural farming, the chief minister said the state, for the first time, has introduced minimum support prices (MSPs) for wheat, maize and turmeric cultivated through this method, creating employment opportunities in agriculture.

Punjab tops the country in human trafficking cases

MONIKA MALIK ■ Chandigarh

Punjab today stands officially identified as the country's worst-affected state in human trafficking — a stark reality placed on parliamentary record in the Rajya Sabha on Thursday. The disclosure by External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar has thrust the border state into the national spotlight, not for its global links or enterprising youth, but for the scale of organized human smuggling flourishing within its boundaries.

From Punjab's perspective, the numbers tell a disturbing story. The state has emerged as the single largest contributor of human trafficking cases in the country. Acting on mounting evidence, the Punjab government has constituted a Special Investigation Team (SIT) along with a fact-finding committee to probe the network of agents, middlemen, and handlers pushing unsuspecting

victims into illegal migration traps.

So far, 25 FIRs have been registered against 58 illegal travel agents operating across Punjab. Sixteen accused have already been arrested, indicating the depth of the racket and the steady pace of enforcement on the ground. These cases are closely linked to illegal foreign travel promises, forged documents, and vulnerable youth being lured by dreams of overseas employment.

The ripples of Punjab's crisis are now being felt at the national level as well. The National Investigation Agency (NIA), which has a dedicated anti-human trafficking division, is also probing cases related to the deportation of Indian nationals from the United States. These investigations include leads connected to Punjab-based networks, underscoring the international reach of local trafficking syndicates.

At the national scale, the NIA has registered 27 human trafficking cases so far.

These investigations have led to 169 arrests across states and the filing of charge sheets against 132 accused. The agency's recent operations also underline how Punjab remains central to the problem. On August 7, two major traffickers were arrested from Punjab and neighbouring Haryana. Another two key arrests followed in Himachal Pradesh on October 2, pointing to inter-state linkages rooted in Punjab's trafficking routes.

The comparison with other states only sharpened Punjab's grim distinction. Haryana has recorded 2,325 cases with 44 FIRs and 27 arrests, while Gujarat has arrested one significant trafficker. Yet, despite these figures, Punjab continues to top the chart nationally in terms of trafficking cases, making it the focal point of both parliamentary debate and national security scrutiny.

The human trafficking crisis in Punjab is also deeply interconnected with the

narcotics menace. Raising the issue in the Parliament, Shiromani Akali Dal MP and former Union Minister Harsimrat Kaur Badal flagged the alarming overlap between drug trafficking and human smuggling. She alleged that drug traffickers continue to operate their networks from inside jails, claiming that as many as 43,000 drug-related calls are being made from a single prison. She even cited visual evidence from Mansa jail allegedly showing open drug trade within the premises, calling for urgent central intervention to protect Punjab's youth.

For Punjab, the implications go far beyond arrests and statistics. Every FIR represented shattered families, exploited migrants, and young lives pushed into perilous illegal journeys. The Centre's confirmation that Punjab leads the country in trafficking cases now places the onus squarely on both state and central agencies to dismantle the networks that thrive on desperation, debt and deception.



Classifieds

CHANGE OF NAME

I, Santavvav Duggani legally mother of No.15694233F Rank HAV Name Gopal Duggani Unit 14(I) Armd Bde Sig Coy C/o 56 APO Bathinda cantt. (Punjab) permanent resident of Tergaon, TT- Haliyal, Tergaon, Uttara Kannada, State Karnataka- 581356 declare That I have changed my name from Santavva Duggani to Shantavva Jayapal Duggani and DOB from 01.07.1964 to 03.10.1962 vide affidavit dated 03.12.2025 before the court of Bathinda.

I Suman Aged 30 Years, Wife Of Sahil Gintma, Resident Of Vpo Bijmal Tehsil Nerwa, District Shimla, Hp 171210 I Declare That I Have Changed The Name Of My Son From Shoriya (Old Name) To Shorya (New Name). All Concerned Please Take Note.

I, David S/o Sh. Vasudev R/o Barwala, Distt. Hisar, Haryana, declare that I want to change my name from David to David Aneja for my all educational certificates/Govt. ID and all future purposes.

I, Lilawati W/o Babu Ram R/o Village Manbhar Wala, Manbharwala (79), PO Deodhar, Distt Yamuna Nagar, Haryana, INDIA have changed my name from Lilawati to Bilma.

I, Lalita Rani W/o Late Bhagwan Dass R/o 176, Bank Colony, Rajiv garden, Yamuna Nagar, PO Yamuna Nagar, Tehsil Jagadhri, Distt Yamuna Nagar, Haryana-135001 have changed my name from Lalita Rani to Shimla Rani.

I, Manoj Kumar S/o Maghan Pal R/o Village Khizrabad, PO Partap Nagar, Distt Yamuna Nagar, Haryana, INDIA have changed my minor son's name from Raj Mehra to Raaj.

I, Rajeev Kumar S/o Munshi Ram R/o 412, Sector 18, Huda, Jagadhri, Distt Yamuna Nagar have changed my name from Rajeev Kumar to Rajeev Kumar Budhiraja.

I, Shakti Budhiraja W/o Rajeev Kumar Budhiraja R/o 412, Sector 18, Huda, Jagadhri, Distt Yamuna Nagar have changed my name from Shakti Budhiraja to Shakti.

I, Narender Bharti S/o Sh. Jagdish Chand Bharti R/o 15/34, Gali No. 02, Bharti Basera, Court Colony, Sirsa, Distt. Sirsa (Haryana) have changed my name from Narender Bharti to Narender Kumar Bharti. That in future my name is to be called as Narender Kumar Bharti

I, Dev Prakash S/o Sh. Om Sharan Bansal R/o Gali No. 03, Opp. Peer Mandir, GTM Colony, Sirsa, Distt. Sirsa (Haryana) have changed my name from Dev Prakash to Dev Prakash Bansal. That in future my name is to be called as Dev Prakash Bansal.

I Havaladar Sunil (Army No. 3205727F), R/o VPO Shekhupur Daroli Sub-Tehsil Bhatu Kalan. District Fatehabad, posted at 14 Jat Regiment. Akhnour. Jammu & Kashmir, declare that I want to correct my mother's name from KALAWATI DEVI to KALAWATI in my Army service record.

I Sato Devi W/o Sh. Raj Singh R/o Village Lohari, Tehsil Matlauda, Distt. Panipat, declare that my DOB 15.03.1986 and my name Santosh Devi mentioned in my Insurance policy No.R-HY-EA-253651, while my correct DOB 01.01.1980 and my Name Sato Devi Which is correct and accurate.

I, Arun Kumar Jain R/o SCF 16-17, Sector 28-C, Chandigarh, my father's name wrongly mentioned in my Pan Card Jatinder Kumar Jain instead Jai Inder Kumar Jain.

I, Gyano Devi w/o Late Ex. Hav. Bhagwan Dass R/o P.O. Deepalpur, Sonipat in my husband's Service records wrongly written as Gnana Devi and DOB is 01.07.1943. But my correct name is Gyano Devi and DOB is 01.01.1945.Pls correct it.

I, Manoj Kumar Saluja S/o Hukum Chand Saluja R/o H. No. 3846, Gali No. 01, Near Saluja Furniture, Indira Colony, Hisar, Haryana 125001 declare that I have changed my name from Manoj Kumar to Manoj Kumar Saluja for all future purpose.

I, Johny Son of Sh. Surinder Kumar resident of H.No.167/27, Gandhi Nagar, Rohtak, Haryana-124001, declared that my old name is Johny and I have to change my name from Johny to Joni. In future I will be known as Joni for all purposes.

I, Sanjay S/o Sh. Inder Lal R/o H.No. 66/1, Ward No. 28, Subhash Nagar, Rohtak, Haryana - 124001 declare that I have changed my minor daughter name from Alisha to Alisha Malhotra. In future her name will be known as Alisha Malhotra.

I hitherto known as JAI BHAGWAN (JAIBHAGWAN) S/O HARPHOOL R/o VPO Hanigarh Kingan, Tehsil-Guhla, Kaithal -136034, Haryana, India have changed my name and shall hereafter be known as JAIBHAGWAN SHIRA.

I hitherto known as NEELAM W/O JAI BHAGWAN alias JAIBHAGWAN SHIRA R/o VPO Harigarh Kingan, Tehsil- Guhla, Kaithal-136034, Haryana, India have changed my name and shall hereafter be known as NEELAM DEVI.

I, Meenakshi Jindal W/O Gagandeep R/O H.No. 3187, Near Pal Dhaba, Sector 28-D, Chandigarh Have Changed My Name From Meenakshi Jindal To Meenakshi Goyal After My Marriage.

I, Pooja Chhibber D/O Subhash Chhibber W/O Late Arun Kumar Taneja R/O Derasalimpur, Ambala, Haryana-133201 have changed name of my minor son Aayan Taneja aged 5 years to Kartik Chhibber.

I, Sangeeta Mann D/O Jagdish Mann W/O Devender Kairon R/O H.No. 37, Professor Colony, Hisar, Haryana-125001 have changed my name to Tanvi Kairon.

I, Rashmi Nagpal W/O Naresh Kumar Rawal R/O 12/A Mohini Kunj, Railway Road, Banga (Rural), Po: Banga, Dist: Shaheed Bhagat Singh Nagar, Punjab-144505 have changed my name to Rashmi.

I, Priyanka W/O Devinderpal Singh R/O New Gobind Nagar, District Hoshiarpur, Punjab-146001 have changed my name to Priyanka Choudhary.

I, hitherto Known as Parneet Kaur W/O Gurwinder Singh R/O Village Shukar Chak Tehsil Tarn Taran District Tarn Taran Punjab have changed my name and shall hereafter be known as Prneet Kaur.

I, Vishav Nath S/o Krishan Kumar Pathak R/O H.No. 231,232, Sector-3C, Mandi Gobindgarh, Fatehgarh Sahib-147301(pb) have changed my name from Vishav Nath to Vishav Nath Pathak, plz note.

I, Balwinder Singh Grandfather of Nayab Kaur, holder of Indian Passport No.U9608034 issued at Amritsar on 18/05/2021 residing at H.No.F 14/249, Gali No.2, Guru Gobind Singh Nagar, Majitha Road, Amritsar Punjab Pin 143001 India and presently residing 28 Maltby Court, Brampton, Ontario, Canada L6PIA5 do here by change my grand-daughter's name from Nayab Kaur to Nayab Kaur Maan

I, Jageer Singh S/o Inder Singh R/o Village Hamja Tehsil Majitha District Amritsar have changed my name from Jageer Singh to Jagir Singh

I, Sarbjit Kaur W/o Amarjit Singh R/o Pejo Chak PO Kishankot Teh Batala, Gurdaspur have changed my name to Sarbjit Kaur to Sarabjit Kaur

I, No. 15173172Y Hav Vinay Kumar Rai S/o Bhual Rai R/o Hazipur, Ghazipur, Bagend, Uttar Pradesh-233301 have changed my daughter's name from Yashashvi Rai to Yashasvi Rai Vide Affidavit No.IN-PB98054256238548X Dt.02.12.2025 notary public Amritsar

I, Prahlad Kushwah Singh is father of No. JC-288124Y Sub Anil Singh Kushwah resident of VPO Tehangur, District Bhind, Madhya Pradesh-477001 now at 47RPAS FLT/661 Army Aviation Attach with 255 Army Aviation, C/o 56 APO have changed my name from Prahlad Kushwah Singh to Prahlad Singh vide affidavit no. IN-PB99339797348916X dated 04-12-2025, before Notary Public, Amritsar.

I, Tanveer Rana S/o Parveen, House No.157/s, Model Town, Hisar, PO: Hisar, DIST: Hisar, Haryana – 125001, declare that my name is wrongly written as Tanveer and also my mother's name has been wrongly written as Maina in my 10th & 12th Class marksheet. The actual name of mine is Tanveer Rana and my mother's name is Maina Rani. Which may be amended accordingly.

I, Anita Seraswal D/o Pawan Kumar R/o # 1072, Mori Gate, Manimajra, Chandigarh have changed my name to Anita.

I, Mushahid S/o Maragub R/o # 0035/1, Raipur Kalan, Chandigarh have changed my name to Nawab Ali.

I, Kuldeep Singh S/o Puran Singh Vill.Fatehgarh Majra Chammun, Kurukshetra have changed my given name Kuldeep Singh Surname Hanjra.

I, Sanjeev Kumar Bansal S/o Ram Nath Bansal R/o Purana Bazar, Pehowa, Kurukshetra have changed my name Sanjeev Bansal

I, Urmila W/O Parmod Kumar R/O H.no. 618, Ward no. 14, Opposite Chorch, Fouji Plot, Pehowa, Kurukshetra, Haryana changed name Urmila Devi.

I, Raj Rani W/o Ram Kumar Vill.Banarsi Plot Kalsa, Pehowa, Kurukshetra have changed my name Rani Raj

I, Ram Kumar S/o Dharshan Lal Vill. Banarsi Plot Kalsa, Pehowa, Kurukshetra have changed my name Kumar Ram

I, Ashwani Gir s/o Raksha Gir R/o H.No-08, ward No -15, shiv pranchi mandir Model town pehowa have changed my given name Ashwani Surname Gir.

I, Ranjit Singh Chawla S/O Kartar Singh R/O Govt. School Street, Bhavdin, Sirsa Have Changed My Name From Ranjit Singh Chawla To Ranjit Singh.

I, Gurpreet Kaur Chawla W/O Ranjit Singh Chawla R/O Govt. School Street, Bhavdin, Sirsa Have Changed My Name From Gurpreet Kaur Chawla To Gurpreet Kaur.

I, Parampal Singh S/O Gurmit Singh R/O Vpo-Saidwal Khurd, Distt-Gurdaspur, Pin -143528 Punjab, India. Declare That My Given Name As Parampal And My Surname As Singh.

I, Rahul S/O Surjeet Kumar R/O Village- Pahra Tehsil/Distt- Gurdaspur, Punjab -143521, India. Have Changed My Name Rahul To Rahul Pahra And Surname As Pahra.

I, Gurmakh Singh S/O Karnail Singh R/O Village-Sadhu Chak, Tehsil/Distt-Gurdaspur Pin -143521, Punjab, India. Declare That My Given Name As Gurmakh And My Surname As Singh.

I, Seema Shahria W/O Varinder Kumar R/O Bath Wali Gali, Opposite Guru Nanak Park, Jail Road Gurdaspur. Tehsil/Distt-Gurdaspur, Punjab, India. I Want To Change My Name Seema Shahria Instead Of Seema Shehria As Per My Documents.

I, Munish S/o Daya Chand R/o House No. 339/4, Dheeru Ki Basti, Patiala, Punjab, have changed my name from Munish to Munish Kumar.

I Mahinder Verma S/O Chander Bhan R/O H. No. 19-A Mathura Colony Patiala have changed my name to Mohinder Pal Verma.

I, Sukhwinder Singh s/o Sampurnan Singh r/o Vill. Bala Kullian, Teh.Dasuya, Distt.Hoshiarpur, Punjab have changed my name from Sukhwinder Singh to Singh Sukhwinder (Surname as Singh)

I, Anuradha Joshi W/o Amit Sharma R/o H.No. 608, Karol Bagh, Ladhewali Road, Jalandhar, Punjab have changed my name from Anuradha Joshi to Anuradha Sharma.

Rajukumar S/o Tara Chand R/o House No 82 Badh Malak (68), Sonipat Haryana Pin code 131029 have changed my name from Raju Kumar to Raj Kumar for all future purposes.

I Surinderpal Singh Ghataura S/O Balwant Singh R/O Vpo. Bhagta Bhai Ka Tehsil Phul Distt. Bathinda Have Changed My Name To Surinder Pal Singh.

I Sukhveer Singh S/O Gurdev Singh R/O Vill. Daulatpur Ucha District Moga Have Changed My Name Sukhveer Singh To Sukhveer Singh Virk.

I Baljinder Kaur Sidhu W/O Inderpal Singh Dhillion R/O Patti Dhillion, Buttar (Moga) Distt. Moga Have Changed My Name To Baljinder Kaur Dhillion.

I Amarjit Singh S/o Vajir Singh R/o Kothe Dhillava Wale, Kotli Ablu, Distt. Sri Muktsar Sahib-151202 have changed my name to Amarjeet Singh.

I, Kirti Bansal W/o Vikas Kumar Bansal R/o H.No. 137 Green Velly Malout Distt. Sri Muktsar Sahib have changed my name from Kirti Goyal to Kirti Bansal.

I Hitherto Known As Raj Rani W/O Sh. Manjit Singh Residing At Vill Palaki, Po Bhangala, Tehsil Mukerian, Distt. Hoshiarpur, Punjab Have Changed My Name And Shall Hereafter Be Known As Rani Raj.

I Joginder Singh S/o Buta Singh R/o Vill-Loharanwala Po Lohgarh Teh-Baba Bakala Distt Amritsar have declared that Joginder is my given name and Singh is my surname.

I, Gurmit Kaur W/o Atma Singh R/o Po. Mehampur Khurd Amritsar have changed my name from Gurmit Kaur to Gurmeet Kaur.

I Bikramjit Singh S/O Meor Singh R/O Vill Shafipur Po Khaba Dogran Distt Amritsar Have Declared That Bikramjit Is My Given Name And Singh Is My Surname.

I, Kirpal Singh S/O Karnail Singh R/o Vpo. Tehang Teh-Phillaur Distt. Jalandhar have changed my name from Kirpal Singh Sandhu.

I, Davinder Kaur W/o Kirpal Singh Sandhu R/o Vpo. Tehang Teh-Phillaur Distt. Jalandhar have changed my name from Davinder Kaur to Davinder Kaur Sandhu.

I, Usha Rani D/o Hussan Lal R/o Balwinder Singh R/o Vpo. Thalla Teh-Phillaur Distt. Jalandhar have changed my name from Usha Rani to Asha Rani.

I, Manvir Kaur D/o Amrik Singh R/o Vill: Rawanan Po. Bilga Teh-Phillaur Distt. Jalandhar my given name is Manvir and surname is Kaur.

I, Swaranjit Kaur W/o Jatinder Singh Brar R/o Vill: Mahian Wala Kalan Teh-Zira Distt. Ferozepur have changed my name to Swaranjit Kaur Brar.

I Ashwani Kumar S/O Sunder Dass H/No 732 W/No 11 Shah Nehar Colony Mukerian Distt Hoshiarpur Declare That My Given Name As Ashwani And Surname As Kumar.

I Suman W/O Ashwani Kumar H/No 732 W/No 11 Shah Nehar Colony Mukerian Distt Hoshiarpur Have Changed My Name From Suman To Suman Lata.

I Gurmeet Singh S/o Kulwant Singh R/o Vpo Bundala Patti Hindu Ki Distt Amritsar I have changed my given name to Gurmeet and surname to Singh.

I, No 3354033 Ex Sep Mohan Singh S/o Sadhu Singh VPO: Hussainpur Lalowal, Teh & Distt Hoshiarpur (Punjab) have changed the name of my daughter from Satinder Kaur to Satwinder Kaur.

I, Premjit widow daughter of No 1026127 Late LD Amrik Singh VPO: Gondpur, Teh: Dasuya, Distt Hoshiarpur (Punjab) have changed my name from Premjit to Paramjit Kaur.

I Amanpreet Singh S/o Rajinder Singh R/o # 223/1, Mohalla Sukhdasspura, Patialal have changed my name as Amanpreet Singh Kohli.

I Preeti Rani W/o Rahul Garg R/o #221-B St no.11, Manjit Nagar Patiala have changed my name to Preeti Garg. After Marriage.

I, hitherto known as Roopan Sikand alias Roopan D/o Ravinder Singh R/o House No. A-1, Jagdish Singh Marg, VTC: Patiala, PO: Patiala, District: Patiala, Punjab-147001, India have changed my name and shall hereafter be known as Aman Malli.

I, hitherto known as Aman Sikand alias Aman W/o Jasjeet Singh Malli R/o H.No. A-1, Jagdish Singh Marg, District: Patiala, Punjab-147001, India have changed my name and shall hereafter be known as Aman Malli.

I, hitherto known as Ramanpreet Kaur W/o Sukhdeep Singh Sandhu R/o 6217 Patti Tambu Sahib, Malout Road, Muktsar, PO: Muktsar, District Sri Muktsar Sahib, Punjab-152026 have changed my name and shall hereafter be known as Ramanpreet Kaur Sandhu.

I, hitherto known as Mamta Rani D/o Bikramjit Singh R/o H.No.408 A Street No.06, Jujhar Nagar, District Patiala, Punjab-147001 have changed my name and shall hereafter be known as Manvir Kaur.

I Krishna Aggarwal W/O Kulbhushan Aggarwal R/O 51 Atwal House Colony Cantt road Jalandhar 144001 Punjab Have Changed my Name From Krishna Aggarwal To Krishna Kumari.All Concerned Please Note.

I Pallak Gupta W/O Varun Aggarwal R/O 46 Near Maqsudan, Seth Hukum Chand Colony Jalandhar 144001 Punjab Have Changed my Name From Pallak Gupta To Pallak Aggarwal. After Marriage.

I, Service No. 15678551F, Rank HAV, MD IRAD SK, S/o Sh. Sakender SK, presently residing at Qtr No. 6373, Sector-E, Chandimandar Cantt, Panchkula, Haryana, hereby state that in the school records of my children, my name has been incorrectly recorded as MD IRADSK due to a clerical error. I now wish to correct and change the wrongly recorded name MD IRADSK to my correct name MD IRAD SK.

I, CHZLLA UENKTYAMMA am Mother of Army No: 17008246M Rank: Sep Name- Chilla Ramakrishna Permanent Address: House Number-1-154, Chillaveedh, Bhogapuram (Mandalam), VTC: Gudivada, PO: Gudivada, Sub District: Bhogapuram, District: Vizianagaram, State: Andhra Pradesh, PIN Code: 531162 declare that I have changed my name from CHZLLA UENKTYAMMA to CHILLA VENKAYAMMA. Vide Affidavit No: 11AA 219125, Dated: 04/12/2025

I, Hema Bisht W/o Chandan Singh Bisht R/o B-4012, Refinery Township, Panipat, Haryana, have changed my name Hema to Hema Bisht. I future I should be known as Hema Bisht.

I, Chandan Singh Bisht S/o Hira Singh Bisht R/o B-4012, Refinery Township, Panipat, Haryana, have changed my name from Chandan Singh to Chandan Singh Bisht. In future I should be known as Chandan Singh Bisht.

I, PV SANKAR REDDY am father of ARMY NO. 14681773L, RANK:- NK, NAME:- PALLETI INDRA SENA REDDY resident of 1-36, VEMULAPALLI, YELLANURU, ANANTAPUR, ANDHRA PRADESH-515414 hereby declare that I have changed my name from PV SANKAR REDDY to PALLETI VIJAYASANKAR REDDY which was wrongly entered in my son's service record. Both names pertain to one and the same person vide Affidavit No.IN-PB93460373912176X Dated - 17 November 2025 before Notary Public Pathankot.

I, P TULASMMMA am mother of ARMY NO. 14681773L, RANK:- NK, NAME:- PALLETI INDRA SENA REDDY resident of 1-36, VEMULAPALLI, YELLANURU, ANANTAPUR, ANDHRA PRADESH-515414. hereby declare that I have changed my name from P TULASMMMA to PALLETI THOLISAMMA which was wrongly entered in my son's service record. Both names pertain to one and the same person vide Affidavit No.IN-PB93459956163953X Dated - 17 November 2025 before Notary public Pathankot.

I, Teena Devi Wife of GS No. 187696Y MSW PNR Arun Sharma Unit WBW GREF Station, Pathankot resident of Village Gandran Lahri Tehsil & Distt. Pathankot hereby declare that in my husband's GREF service record, my name wrongly written as TINA DEVI but it's correct name is TEENA DEVI. Both names pertain to one and the same person vide Affidavit No. IN-PB99343319622553X dated 4 Dec 2025 before Notary Public Pathankot.

I, No.6446713 Ex NK Baldev Singh S/o Late Kesar Ram R/O VPO Musahibpur, Tehsil Mukerian, Distt. Hoshiarpur (Punjab) declare that in my army service records, my Wife's name wrongly written as Bithaya Devi instead to Bidiya Devi. Concerned note.

I, Sandeep Kumar S/o Arjan Dass R/o 585/8, Near Rana Depot, Gurdaspur (Punjab) presently residing at 171-K, S/F, Type-2, Chitra Gupta Road, Aram Bagh, Pahar Ganj, New Delhi-110055 have changed my minor daughter's name from Hargun to Vaani. Concerned note.

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States Focus

TMC suspends MLA for planning Babri Mosque replica

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ Kolkata

The Trinamool Congress (TMC) has finally suspended maverick yet, powerful party legislator and former minister from Murshidabad Humayun Kabir for trying to “communalise” the political situation by announcing his plans to construct a Babri Mosque in his district and later in all the districts of the State.

Announcing the decision senior party leader Firhad Hakim on Thursday said that despite being cautioned against making communal remarks Kabir chose to remain indifferent to the party line leading to his suspension.

“We cautioned him twice and asked him to refrain from communally sensitive remarks but he still refused to mend his ways that is why we have taken the decision to suspend him the party will have no relation with him hence forward,” Hakim who besides being the Mayor of Kolkata and a senior member



West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee during a public rally at Berhampore in Murshidabad district West Bengal on Thursday

PTI

of Mamata Banerjee Cabinet as well as the TMC's Muslim face said.

Kabir a former Congress leader was initially mentored by the then Behrampore MP Adhir Chowdhury before the both parted ways and the

former joined the TMC.

Considered a leader with considerable following is an MLA from Bharatpur constituency of Murshidabad district.

“The party leadership noticed that an MLA from

Murshidabad had been making unnecessary, irresponsible and communal remarks he was cautioned thrice but he would not listen then he suddenly declared that he would construct a Babri Masjid in his district

Shiv Sena leader alleges theft from Karnataka bank locker

TN RAGHUNATHA ■ Mumbai

In a shocking development, Shiv Sena (Shinde) deputy leader and former MLA Krishna Hegde has lodged a complaint with the police alleging a “theft” of valuables from his safe deposit locker in the strong-room of the Parle East branch of Karnataka Bank in north-west Mumbai.

In his complaint lodged with the Vile Parle Police Station, Hegde said he had kept in his ban locker several valuables — including his mother's jewellery, cash and some key documents — on September 19 and when he opened the locker on October 22, he found many of the items in it had gone missing.

Apart from his mother's jewellery, cash and some key documents, the other items kept in his burgled bank locker included his licensed revolver and watches. “Some of the items in my locker have gone missing,” Hegde said. He however did not disclose the estimated value of the articles lost.

Following the “theft”, he had taken up the matter with bank's branch manager Manish Kumar, Cluster Manager Hari Sarin, DGM Rajgopala Bhatt and others on November 27.

On the following day, he submitted a formal theft complaint with Vile Parle Police Station Senior Police Inspector Gabaji Chimte; and

a probe is underway.

Accusing the bank management of delaying the internal probe and attempting him to deter him from lodging a complaint, Hegde said: “The bank officials did not act quickly on my complaint. They called a Godrej key-maker and involved the bank's internal vigilance. This was not to probe the theft, but to bury the matter and somehow deter me from filing a police complaint”.

“There is utter lack of response from the Karnataka Bank's top brass. I have sent several emails to the Managing Director and CEO, Raghvendra Bhat, but I have not received a single reply from him. The only responses I have received are from

the very branch where my locker was burgled”.

Hegde alleged that the modus operandi behind the lock theft could be that the miscreants had made duplicate keys of mostly dormant lockers with the help of some unscrupulous locksmiths as the banks already hold the ‘master key’ to all lockers.

While seeking stringent action is needed against all the offenders, Hegde said that banks must modernize security and surveillance systems. Bank customers deserve protection, not excuses.

Hegde said that he had approached the ombudsman of the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) for necessary action in the matter.

CENTRE BEGINS 100-DAY PUSH FOR CHILD MARRIAGE-FREE INDIA

Union Minister of Women and Child Development Annapurna Devi on Thursday said child marriage snatches childhood away from daughters and pushes them towards early maternity and “unimaginable suffering”. She was speaking at the launch of a ‘100-day Intensive Awareness Campaign for a Child Marriage Free Bharat’, where she stressed that the country must adopt “zero tolerance” towards child marriage. The minister urged states, civil society groups, and community leaders to unite with an “unwavering commitment” to eliminate the practice. She said India had made “historic progress”, but that far more remained to be done. “Even one child marriage is unacceptable for us,” she said.



ODISHA GOVT SANCTIONS ₹1 CRORE FOR DHANU JATRA FESTIVAL

The Odisha Government on Thursday sanctioned ₹1 crore for Baragarh's Dhanu Jatra, during which the town transforms into an open-air theatre with the life of Lord Krishna being enacted over 11 days. The decision was taken at a meeting chaired by Odia Language, Literature & Culture Minister Suryabanshi Suraj. The festival is scheduled to be held from December 24 to January 3.

Chaos at West Bengal CEO office as BLOs protest SIR deadlines

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ Kolkata

There quite a commotion outside the office of the State Chief Electoral Officer (CEO) when a large section of the Trinamool Congress backed booth level officers — engaged in the special intensive revision (SIR) of electoral rolls on Thursday staged a restive demonstration demanding extension of the submission of enumeration forms.

A group of 400 strong officials of BLO Protection Committee shouted slogans against the Election Commission of India (ECI) and breached the barricades trying to enter the CEO office where they were stopped by the security forces forcing them to stage a sit-in.

Accompanied by the family members of the BLOs who had died during the SIR they complained “we have been running against time and are on the verge of a breakdown. We have to attend to our duties in schools, remain awake all night to digitise the enumeration forms the ECI has not been extending the deadline despite our appeal to do so they are issuing fresh notifications and orders over WhatsApp every day,” one of the agitating BLOs said.

Incidentally about 99 per cent of the enumeration forms had been digitized in Bengal which stood fourth behind Lakshwadeep, Rajasthan and Goa in terms of digitising the forms.

Meanwhile, Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee once again thundered from a rally in Murshidabad district accusing once again Union Home Minister Amit Shah for creating a panic of President's Rule in Bengal so as to enforce an “unplanned SIR” in two months “which is a work of two years.”

She said “it was Amit Shah's trick to enforce SIR with a hidden threat of President's Rule if we had blocked SIR then they would have enforced a President's Rule,” adding however that till she was there she would not allow anyone to

Tezpur University shutdown enters 6th day as proposal rejected

TONY DAS ■ Guwahati

The shutdown by students of Tezpur University in Assam entered its sixth day on Thursday over their demand for the removal of the vice-chancellor, while staffers of the varsity rejected Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma's proposal for the appointment of a pro VC.

State Congress president Gaurav Gogoi has also accused Sarma of “masking the failures” of current VC Shambhu Nath Singh by suggesting the appointment of a pro vice chancellor.

The students of the varsity have been protesting since mid-September for alleged corruption and financial irregularities, and have started the shutdown of all academic activities on the campus from November 29 for an indefinite period. A faculty member said the shutdown has been relaxed for departmental emergencies and pending work for a few hours in the morning for three days since Wednesday.



Sarma on Wednesday said he had spoken to Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan regarding the shutdown of Tezpur University and urged him to appoint a pro VC immediately, pending an impartial enquiry into the conduct of the present VC.

“The Tezpur University fraternity strongly rebuts the Assam chief minister's recent statement regarding the ongoing crisis on the campus. His suggestion to appoint a pro vice chancellor reflects a clear misunderstanding of the movement's

long-standing and repeatedly communicated demand: the urgent appointment of an acting vice chancellor,” Tezpur University United Forum (TUUF) said in a statement late on Wednesday.

The ongoing agitation in the central varsity in Sonitpur district is being carried out under the aegis of the TUUF. The forum also claimed that the university has been in “turmoil” for 76 days, and during the entire period, the chief minister “chose to remain silent”.

“His sudden involvement

- only after the situation gained national attention - raises serious concern about whether he is acting out of genuine responsibility or political self-preservation,” the TUUF questioned.

The chief minister “ignored the crisis for weeks” despite continuous protests, appeals and institutional paralysis, the forum alleged, adding that “leadership demands timely engagement, not last-minute statements”.

“Our demands remain unchanged - immediate suspension of the current vice chancellor, pending enquiry, appointment of an acting vice chancellor — not a pro-VC and publication of all inquiry reports already submitted to authorities,” the TUUF added.

Gogoi has also expressed his ‘disappointment’ with the chief minister's stand on the issues.

“Real leadership would have meant that the chief minister would have stood with the faculty, staff and students of this prestigious uni-

versity. Instead, the chief minister is masking the failures of the current vice chancellor by suggesting a pro vice chancellor,” he said in a post on X on Thursday.

Citing old news reports, Gogoi claimed that there were “enquiries about financial irregularities from the office of Principal Accountant General” during Singh's term as VC of Patna University in Bihar.

“It would be best that the prestige of Tezpur University should be paramount, and a new Vice Chancellor be appointed. Stop using the University of Northeast for posting controversial VCs,” the Congress deputy leader in the Lok Sabha added.

All end-term examinations have been cancelled, and other activities have also stopped in the varsity.

The Tezpur University Teachers' Association (TUTA) and Tezpur University Non-Teaching Employees' Association (TUNTEA) have extended their support to the agitation.

Ruling BJP confronts its own bureaucracy in MP

GIRISH SHARMA ■ Bhopal

Ministers and BJP MLAs in Madhya Pradesh are preparing to open a coordinated front against what they describe as an increasingly unresponsive bureaucracy. They have decided to lodge a formal complaint with the chief minister, arguing that administrative resistance is now disrupting governance and weakening the authority of elected representatives.

The latest flashpoint surfaced at the Madhya Pradesh BJP headquarters, where two ministers are stationed each day under a new coordination mechanism meant to improve interaction with party workers. Minister of State for Housing and Urban Development Pratima Bagri, who handled the outreach on Thursday, said the arrangement helps workers raise issues directly with ministers. But she stressed that the core problem lies in the functioning of the bureaucracy.

Bagri said ministers and MLAs are routinely facing situations where officials ignore their calls or fail to act on instructions. This, she said, has slowed file movement, delayed constituency work and created unnecessary pressure on elected representatives. Bagri also noted that she had recently raised a similar concern during a cabinet meeting, stating that officials “do not listen to ministers,” a remark that drew attention to a widening internal governance rift.

The decision to approach the chief minister comes after months of complaints from lawmakers across regions. MLAs from Malwa, Bundelkhand, Gwalior-Chambal and tribal districts report a growing pattern of



administrative officers taking unilateral decisions without political consultation. Many say district-level functioning has become excessively rigid, with approvals and clearances moving at a pace far slower than what developmental targets require.

This strain comes at a critical time. Madhya Pradesh is entering a heavy implementation cycle for infrastructure, urban development, agriculture-linked interventions and welfare expansions for 2025–26. Any breakdown in coordination between the political leadership and the administrative machinery risks delaying flagship projects and weakening service delivery in high-need areas.

Public frustration mirrors these concerns. Citizens in several districts report long delays in land records, housing approvals, ration updates, pension processing and municipal permissions. In many cases, appeals routed through MLAs or ministers have failed to accelerate action, strengthening the perception that bureaucracy — not elected representatives — is controlling governance outcomes.

The emerging confrontation has triggered internal debate within the ruling BJP. Senior leaders argue that democratic accountability must guide administrative behaviour, not the other way around.

BJP MLAs walk out of Himachal Assembly over alleged lathi charge on ABVP workers

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Dharamshala/Shimla

BJP legislators walked out of the Himachal Pradesh Assembly on Thursday in protest of the alleged lathi charge on ABVP workers near the Zorawar Stadium in Dharamshala.

Raising a point of order after the question hour, Leader of Opposition Jai Ram Thakur said the sub-divisional magistrate (SDM), Dharamshala, had granted permission to the Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad (ABVP) to organise the protest march to the Zorawar Stadium, yet the police resorted to lathi charge on the protesters.

He also accused the chief minister of misleading the House, saying Sukhu had earlier told the assembly that the ABVP had not been granted permission for the protest demonstration. Several people were



Leader of Opposition in Himachal Pradesh Assembly Jai Ram Thakur speaking with the media during the Winter session of the State Assembly in Dharamshala on Thursday

PTI

injured following a scuffle between ABVP activists and the police at the Zorawar ground on Wednesday after workers of the RSS-affiliated students' organisation arrived in large numbers to gherao the Vidhan Sabha to press for their demands. The ABVP workers alleged that women activists were

kicked by male police personnel and demanded action against the police, specifically the suspension of station house officer, Dharamshala, for taking the ABVP workers to a community hall after the protest, and allegedly threatening and thrashing them. As per Chief Minister

Sukhwinder Singh Sukhu's statement on Wednesday, one male and three female police constables were injured in the scuffle and six people were injured due to the agitation.

During the protest, ABVP workers also misbehaved with a female constable, which the Government has taken seriously, he said.

The leader of opposition also raised the issue of Youth Congress workers burning and kicking an effigy of Prime Minister Narendra Modi outside the Raj Bhavan earlier in November.

Terming the incident as unfortunate, he questioned whether the authorities had taken any action against the Youth Congress workers responsible for this.

He then said the BJP legislative party was walking out of the House in protest of the lathi charge on the ABVP activists.



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Order Order

HC declines to put on hold order allowing lighting of oil lamp on TN hill



The Madurai Bench of the Madras High Court on Thursday declined to stay an order of a single judge allowing the lighting of traditional “Karthigai Deepam” oil lamp at a stone pillar, meant for that purpose, on the Thirupparankundram hill, housing the Lord Subramaniya Swamy temple. A bench led by Justice G Jayachandran and Justice KK Ramakrishnan declined to interfere with the order of Justice GR Swaminathan allowing the lighting of the lamp on the hill.

On December 1, Justice Swaminathan allowed writ petitions that sought a direction for appropriate arrangements to light the Karthigai Deepam at the “Dheepathoon,” which is the stone pillar. A devotee Ram Ravi Kumar approached the High Court, represented by Advocate MR Venkatesh. By lighting the lamp at Deepathoon, which is meant for that purpose, the structure of the Dargha is not in any way affected and the Dargha is located at a safe distance of not less than 50 meters away from the stone pillar, the judge had said in the order.

Ensure 30 per cent quota for women lawyers in State Bar Councils, SC to BCI



The Supreme Court on Thursday asked the Bar Council of India (BCI) to ensure 30 per cent reservation for women in the upcoming State bar council elections. The top court, while hearing a petition seeking mandatory women's representation in state bar councils, was told by the apex bar body BCI that implementing such reservation would require amendments to the Advocates Act.

“We expect that the BCI will construe the rules in such a manner that it will ensure 30 per cent reservation in State Bar Councils; such a position should also be available for some posts of office bearers,” said the bench comprising Chief Justice Surya Kant and Justice Joymalya Bagchi.

When the lawyer for the BCI expressed uncertainty on whether sufficient number of women lawyers would contest, the bench referred to a workshop held by the Supreme Court Bar Association based on a survey among women lawyers. “You were not there in yesterday's workshop. 83 per cent of the women want to be members in the SCBA,” the CJI said.

Delhi HC asks MEA to facilitate communication between Celina, her brother detained in UAE

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

The Delhi High Court on Thursday asked the Centre to facilitate communication between actor Celina Jaitley and her brother, a former Indian Army officer detained in the UAE for more than a year.

The court was hearing a plea filed by the actor seeking effective legal representation for her brother Major Vikrant Kumar Jaitley (ret'd).

The actor's application claimed that her brother has been residing in the UAE since 2016. She said that he was employed with the MATITI Group, which is engaged in trading, consultancy, and risk management services.

Major Vikrant had been “illegally abducted and detained” in the UAE on September 6 last year, the petition said.

However, despite the passage of over one year, the Ministry of External Affairs



(MEA) has failed to secure basic information about the actor's brother, including his welfare conditions and legal status, the plea alleged.

On November 3, the court had directed the Government to file its response.

On Thursday, Justice Sachin Datta directed the MEA to inform Major Vikrant in the next consular access that his sister wished to talk to him.

Besides, Justice Dutta also asked the MEA to facilitate Celina's communication with her brother via the TAMM



SC asks States to provide more staff to ECI

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

Taking note of a plea alleging extreme work pressure faced by the Booth Level Officers (BLOs) engaged in the time-bound special revision of the electoral rolls, the Supreme Court directed the States on Thursday to consider deputing additional employees for reducing their working hours.

The court was hearing an application filed by actor Vijay's party, Tamilaga Vetri Kazhagam (TVK), seeking a direction to the Election Commission of India (ECI) not to take coercive actions under the Representation of the People (RP) Act against the BLOs for not performing the duty in a time-bound manner and pointing out that many of them have committed suicide due to the work pressure.

A bench of Chief Justice Surya Kant and Justice Joymalya Bagchi took note of the submissions made by senior advocate Gopal Sankaranarayanan, who appeared in the matter for the TVK, that some instructions are needed to be issued as many BLOs, who are either teachers or anganwadi workers, have died due to the extreme pressure exerted on them by EC officials.

Sankaranarayanan said moreover, the EC officials are also getting FIRs lodged against the BLOs if they fail to perform their duties.

The CJI said the States may consider deploying additional staff, so that the work pressure is eased. “In

case they are facing hardships, including being overburdened with their routine duties as well as the additional duties assigned by the Election Commission, the State Government can obviate such hardships,” the bench noted.

The States may consider the “desirability of deputing additional staff at the disposal of the EC, so that the working hours can be proportionately reduced”, an order issued by the court said.

The bench said if any employee has any “specific reason” for seeking exemption from the SIR duty, the competent officer of the state can consider such requests on a case-to-case basis and replace such an employee with another.

“However, it shall not be construed or understood as if they can withdraw the employees who have been assigned the duty if their substitutes are not provided,” it added.

The court further said the States where the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of the electoral rolls is underway, “shall be obligated to deploy the requisite workforce at the disposal of the EC, though the strength of such employees can be increased as explained above”.

The bench disposed of the plea, saying the other prayers like seeking ex-gratia compensation for the BLOs who died during SIR duties can be revived later, either by the aggrieved persons or the petitioner, by filing another application at a later stage. During the hearing, Sankaranarayanan said FIRs under section 32 of the RP Act



have been filed by the poll panel against BLOs.

Section 32 of the Act deals with a breach of official duty by electoral officers, making it punishable with imprisonment and fines for neglecting their duties related to the electoral rolls.

The senior lawyer said BLOs are not equipped to perform the SIR duties in such a short span of time and moreover, there are internet-related issues. He said the teachers and anganwadi workers have to go for SIR duties early morning or late at night, before or after their regular work.

He said a youngster, who had to go on leave for his wedding, was denied leave and suspended.

“He committed suicide.... When

you are doing this, at least show the human side. Criminal action is harsh, it should not be initiated,” the lawyer said. The bench said the state Governments cannot run away from their obligation.

“If there is a difficulty being experienced, then on a case-to-case basis, the State Government can exempt employees and provide an alternative,” the CJI said. “Why should the Election Commission register FIRs?” Sankaranarayanan asked. “It is not for the first time, earlier also they have been registering it,” the CJI said.

Senior advocate Kapil Sibal said the pressure on the BLOs is a “harsh reality”. Citing the example of Uttar Pradesh, the CJI said the election in the State is due in 2027, yet the BLOs

HC dismisses SAD leader Majithia's bail plea in disproportionate assets case

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Chandigarh

The Punjab and Haryana High Court on Thursday dismissed the bail plea of Shiromani Akali Dal leader and former Punjab minister Bikram Singh Majithia in a disproportionate assets case, observing that the possibility of him influencing the investigation could not be ruled out. While pronouncing the order, Justice Tribhuvan Dahiya, however, directed the Punjab Vigilance Bureau to complete its probe within three months. Thereafter, the petitioner can seek his release on bail, the judge said, adding the court is conscious of the fact that the petitioner cannot be kept in custody for an indefinite period, as that would infringe upon his right to liberty.

The Punjab Vigilance Bureau arrested Majithia on June 25 in the disproportionate assets case that involved alleged laundering of ₹540 crore of “drug money”. He was booked under the Prevention of Corruption Act. The FIR against Majithia stems from an ongoing probe being conducted by a Punjab Police special investigation team into a 2021 drug case. Pronouncing the order on Thursday, the court observed that the petitioner is one of the prominent political figures in the Punjab and had been a cabinet minister for over seven years.

“The investigating agency has cited about 20 material witnesses, who have been termed vulnerable. In case the petitioner is to be released from custody at this stage, the possibility of his influencing the further course of investigation, trying to cover up the questionable transactions, manipulating the record relating to the same, and influencing the concerned persons/witnesses not to cooperate with the investigating agency, cannot



be ruled out,” read the order. The court said the petitioner is accused of serious economic offences.

“Investigation of the case has revealed huge unaccounted money in his bank accounts, as also the setting up of a large number of companies through which the financial transactions have been carried out surreptitiously for his benefit.

“It has also come to the notice of the investigating agency that money has been routed through some foreign entities based in Singapore and Cyprus. The petitioner is directly or indirectly in control of most of these entities with immediate family members, and appears to be the key beneficiary,” it said. The High Court order stated that the transactions, as well as assets accumulated by routing the money in the manner aforementioned, are being investigated, and all this has adverse ramifications for the financial health of the State.

Majithia's counsel RS Cheema contended that the companies or entities

mentioned in the FIR have been thoroughly investigated by the state in the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (NDPS) Act case, as well as in the case the vigilance bureau mentioned the alleged disproportionate assets and cash deposits in the petitioner's as well as in companies' accounts as “drug money”.

Opposing Majithia's bail plea, Punjab Advocate General Maninderjit Singh Bedi and additional Advocate General Chanchal Singla submitted that the petitioner is accused of very serious economic offences. Majithia is lodged in the New Nabha jail in Patiala. A Mohali court rejected his bail plea in August.

The Vigilance Bureau filed an over 40,000-page chargesheet in the disproportionate assets case in the Mohali court on August 22. In 2021, Majithia was booked under the NDPS Act.

The action was taken on the basis of a 2018 report of the anti-drug Special Task Force. He spent more than five months in Patiala jail.

No GST on leasing out residential premises as hostel for students: SC

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

The Supreme Court on Thursday held that leasing out of residential premises to an entity which is using it as hostel for students and working professionals is exempted from GST.

A bench of justices JB Pardiwala and KV Viswanathan upheld the verdict of the Karnataka High Court which said that leasing out of residential premises to an entity which is using it as hostel to students and working professionals is exempt under GST.

“In the case on hand, the ultimate use of the property as residence remains unchanged. However, if 18 per cent GST is levied on this transaction between the respondent No. 1 and the lessee ie, M/s DTwelve Spaces Private Limited, the same would ultimately be passed on to the students and working professionals which would lead to a situation where the legislative intent behind granting exemption for residential use is defeated,” the bench said.

The top court was hearing a plea filed by a co-owner of the residential property having 42 rooms in Bengaluru.

The petitioner along with

other co-owners executed a lease deed in favour of the lessee, namely M/s D Twelve Spaces Private Limited.

The lessee leased out the aforesaid residential property as hostel for long term accommodation to students and working professionals with the duration of stay ranging from three to 12 months.

The petitioner sought clarification with regard to its eligibility to seek exemption for the renting services provided and filed an application before the Authority of Advance Ruling, Karnataka.

The AAR, Karnataka held that the renting of residential dwelling for use as residence is not covered under entry 13 and the benefit of exemption according to notification is not available.

The petitioner filed an appeal before the Appellate Authority for Advance Ruling which held that the property rented out is a hostel and cannot be termed as residential accommodation or residential dwelling and denied the benefit of exemption.

The Karnataka High Court held that the leasing out of residential premises to an entity who is using it as ‘hostel’ to students and working professionals is exempt under GST.

SC asks all High Courts to submit details of pending acid attack cases in four weeks

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

Terming tardy trials in acid attack cases as a “mockery of the system”, the Supreme Court on Thursday directed all the High Courts to submit details of such pending cases across the country within four weeks.

Mooting the idea of setting up special courts for expeditious disposal of acid attack cases, the top court also asked the Centre to consider amending the law through legislation or even an ordinance so that the survivors are formally included within the definition of persons with disabilities under the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act to avail welfare schemes. A bench comprising Chief Justice Surya Kant and Justice Joymalya Bagchi also issued notices to the Centre and the Department of Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities on a PIL filed by acid attack survivor Shaheen Malik that the victims be categorised as persons with disabilities to ensure access to welfare schemes.

Solicitor General Tushar Mehta assured the court that the issue would be taken up with “due seriousness” by the Government.

The bench termed as “national shame” the prolonged delay of 16 years in Malik's own case, which has been pending since 2009 before a Rohini court here.

Malik, who also argued personally, said that she was attacked in 2009, yet the trial has still not concluded. “*Mere saath 2009 mein attack hua tha, abhi tak trial chal raha hai*” (I was attacked in 2009; the trial is still going on), she said. Till 2013, nothing happened in the case and the trial, which is now taking place in Rohini in Delhi, is now at the stage of final hearing, she said. Expressing surprise over the delay of over 16 years, the CJI said, “The offence is of 2009 and the trial is not completed! If the National Capital cannot respond to these challenges, then who will deal with them? It is a shame on the system! This is a national shame.”

The CJI asked Malik to file an application in the PIL itself explaining why the matter has not been concluded, assuring her that the court may even take suo motu cognisance. The CJI said the trial in her case must be held on a day-to-day basis. “Issue notice. Learned Solicitor General who was present in the court has graciously accepted notice.

“He has also expressed concern

about the causes raised in the instant petition. We also direct the registrar generals of all high courts to furnish the details of pending trials in the cases of acid attack victims in their respective jurisdiction,” the bench ordered.

The CJI said that the aspect of pendency of cases and covering acid attack victims within the definition of persons with disabilities will be taken up after four weeks. The bench, however, said that it will take up next week the issue of the delay in the trial in Malik's case at a Rohini court here.

During the hearing, Malik highlighted the plight of victims who are forced to ingest acid, often surviving with artificial feeding tubes and severe disabilities. The CJI expressed shock and said he had heard about the incidents of acid-throwing but had never come across cases where victims were forced to consume acid. CJI Kant further remarked that these offences ought to be tried in special courts, given the gravity and the impact on survivors. “This is a mockery of the system. There should be no sympathy for such persons (accused),” he said.

The perpetrators “should meet with the same ruthlessness as done by them,” the solicitor general said.



Editor's
TAKE

Putin visit: Reaffirming Indo-Russian solidarity

Russian President's visit carries significance beyond ceremony, reinforcing India's strategic autonomy and its pursuit of an independent foreign policy

India and Russia have been friends since the cold war days when India refused to join the western bloc and charted its Non-aligned course. It came at its own peril as the US sided with Pakistan and was suspicious of India's intention. But the gamble paid off as India maintained its independent foreign policy without budging to the US pressure. Russia supported it in the times of crisis and the friendship endured.

In the present context too, this holds good as India has refused to bow to the US pressure and maintained steady relation with Russia. Russian President Vladimir Putin's state visit to New Delhi will go a long way in cementing this relationship as both countries need each other than ever before. For India, the visit is far more than a diplomatic formality. It is a reaffirmation of a long-standing partnership, a signal of continuity in a turbulent world, and above all, a clear articulation of India's strategic autonomy at a time when Western world continue to frown upon India's import of discounted Russian oil. The visit is packed with symbolism and substance – from a ceremonial welcome at Rashtrapati Bhavan to paying homage at Raj Ghat, and from restricted talks at Hyderabad House to the annual India-Russia Summit, every segment reflects the depth of a relationship that has withstood vagaries of time and pressure from external actors.

This is also an occasion for balancing a heavily skewed trade basket. Although bilateral trade touched \$68 billion last year, driven largely by India's purchase of Russian oil, India's exports amounted to less than \$5 billion. The business forum organised jointly by FICCI and Roscongress was therefore crucial. Defence cooperation, traditionally the bedrock of the partnership, is set to deepen further following the visit. Just ahead of the visit, the Russian Duma ratified the Reciprocal Exchange of Logistics Agreement (RELOS), which will facilitate the movement and support of warships, military aircraft, and personnel to India. Modeled on India's Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement (LEMOA) with the US, Reciprocal Exchange of Logistics (RELOS) with Russia represents a modernisation of the defence relationship, enabling more joint exercises, humanitarian missions, and interoperability. Ongoing discussions over the supply of S-400 systems, Su-57 aircraft, and small modular nuclear reactors further underline Russia's continuing relevance to India's military and energy security architecture.

Besides, the geopolitical context of the visit cannot be ignored. Since the Ukraine conflict began, India has faced sustained pressure from Western countries to reduce its economic and strategic engagement with Moscow. Yet New Delhi has resisted these demands, choosing instead to prioritise its national interest. Putin's visit, therefore, is a reminder that India's foreign policy is shaped neither by the US pressure nor by ideological factors but by its national interest. With agreements spanning trade, agriculture, defence, academia, and media – one message stands out: the India-Russia relationship is evolving and is here to stay.

India's civilisational cohesion

What emerges from this long arc of history is a simple truth: India's unity has never rested on sameness, but on a civilisational ethos that embraces plurality while sustaining a shared rhythm of life



PRAFULL GORADIA

Lately, Shri Mohan Bhagwat, RSS chief, has been speaking with renewed urgency about the unity of India. His concerns are not new. In truth, questions about the cohesion of the subcontinent have echoed since the passing of Akbar. During his nearly half-century rule, Akbar ensured that the people of northern India - and indeed their very souls — breathed in a common rhythm. The south, though geographically distant, shared a civilisational bond that had endured for centuries. Yet since the end of the 12th century, this bond was never fully spontaneous. Every ruler who ascended the throne of Delhi, including the remarkable Razia Sultan, was quietly scrutinised with a single question: is this monarch a sovereign first and a Muslim second — or the other way round?

Akbar was exceptional precisely because he answered this question with unusual clarity. For him, kingship was not a secondary identity — it was the first and the last. His life offered little room for confusion. At just thirteen, he found himself in the storm of the Second Battle of Panipat.

Over the next five years, as he consolidated his power, he thought deeply about the nature of his rule. He realised that he was destined to govern an empire in which nearly 97 per cent of his subjects were Hindu. His long-term success required not merely their obedience but their goodwill. This did not mean antagonising Muslims, but it certainly meant displeasing an orthodox clergy that envisioned the empire under the Nizam-e-Mustafa, where political authority followed religious guidance. Akbar chose a different path — one that placed the stability of the realm above sectarian demands.

Most rulers of the Delhi Sultanate and later the Mughal Empire, however, presided over a realm that resembled what Tipu Sultan would later proudly call a "religious state." The consequence was a deep and often painful divide: rulers and their beneficiaries stood on one side, while the vast Hindu populace remained on the other.

Hindus were routinely called kafir — a term denoting a non-believer, but one that soon came to be understood as an insult in daily life. They were tolerated as taxpayers, artisans and the economic backbone of the empire. For military service, they were summoned when necessary, but rarely trusted with command. A sense of distance persisted, even when peace prevailed.

In medieval India, ideas such as "the souls of all citizens breathing together" to define nationality had not yet been articulated; such expressions would arise much later in Europe.



THE GREATEST VIRTUE OF HINDUISM IS THAT IT IS RARELY AGAINST ANYONE. PRECISELY FOR THIS REASON, SWAMI VIVEKANANDA, DURING HIS VISIT TO THE UNITED STATES, CHOSE TO USE THE TERMS "VEDANTA" AND "VEDANTISM"

The writer is a well-known columnist, author, and former member of the Rajya Sabha

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 @prafullgoradia
 The Pioneer

Yet India had its own notion of unity - dosti ki ekta, the harmony of friendship and coexistence. This unity was not spoken of daily, but it revealed itself in moments of crisis: in the long turmoil of Kashmir, or even in the occasional tensions in Tamil Nadu that could reverberate across the subcontinent. Indians instinctively sensed that unity was not a poetic abstraction but a lived necessity.

The trauma of 1947 was the most severe test of this idea of unity. One-third of the country broke away to follow Mr Jinnah's vision. Yet within twenty-four years, in 1971, more than half of Pakistan rejected that very vision, abandoning the dream of a "New Medina."

The episode demonstrated that religious identity alone cannot hold a country together. What many in the subcontinent failed to grasp — then or now — is that Hinduism, with its inductive, voluntary and internally diverse nature, forms a deeper and more enduring basis for unity than a rigid, prescriptive ideology.

The Hindu ethos, often described simply as "culture", has historically fostered an implicit unity across India's immense diversity. One example is the idea of karma.

A Hindu is taught to believe that one's circumstances are shaped by one's own past actions. Whether or not one remembers the details of past lives, the underlying philosophy encourages introspection rather than blame. A Hindu tends to hold oneself responsible for adversity, instead of attributing calamity to

others or to the state. This worldview, for centuries, prevented large-scale politicisation of suffering. Had the population of western Pakistan embraced such a view, its violent break from its eastern wing might have unfolded very differently.

The greatest virtue of Hinduism is that it is rarely against anyone. Precisely for this reason, Swami Vivekananda, during his visit to the United States, chose to use the terms "Vedanta" and "Vedantism." He wanted to make it clear that Hinduism was not a negation of other faiths but a vast philosophical tradition.

Significantly, India has never witnessed a Hindu-Christian riot, even in regions like Nagercoil where conversions have been widespread. Scuffles may have occurred, but not large-scale communal violence. The more frequent historical clashes were

between Hindus and Muslims, often triggered by anxieties nurtured by sections of the clergy. From time to time, religious leaders warned their communities that a relaxed attitude might allow Hindus to grow complacent — or even to grow in number. Partition, however, dramatically reduced the political potency of this rhetoric.

Across these centuries, one truth has quietly endured: the unity of India does not rest on uniformity of religion, language or ethnicity. It rests on a civilisational ethos — rooted in Hindu thought yet open to all — that absorbs difference without erasing it. Akbar sensed this. Modern India, too, must remember it.

The Pioneer
SINCE 1865

Gen Z inspires carefree living and confidence



ASHA IYER KUMAR

2ND OPINION
THE PIONEER

Pushing into the second half of my fifties can feel like either a renaissance after a lifetime of plodding or a slow slide into becoming a relic condemned to decrepitude. For me, navigating this terrain has taken an unexpected turn. I now find myself looking up to a generation many decades younger, with equal measures of wariness and admiration. Gen Z has me quite jazzed these days. There is something about them that intrigues me, even drawing me to emulate certain aspects of their disposition.

The criticisms laid against them by older generations are plentiful. The cavernous gap that exists between them and us manifests in many ways. There is a mutual 'sus' that pervades our interactions, and their presence invariably makes me feel like I lack the 'rizz'. Like many in my generation, I

too have had qualms about the way they conduct the business of life, but I now wonder if their new ways are being misunderstood and dismissed by us rather too quickly.

Gen Z has grown up in a world that demands constant self-presentation on social media, in academics, in job markets, and in every space they inhabit. They don't have it easy anywhere. Confidence, for them, is not vanity; it is a survival skill. Even when they're unsure, they must sound sure. Older generations mistake that certitude for arrogance. That very conviction mirrors back the diffidence I carried through my youth, even in a world far less competitive than theirs. I envy the self-assurance they possess. I wish I could borrow a fragment of it now, to keep myself afloat in a world that seems to be in rush hour all day.

There are traits that mark them as products of a modern age to which we are somewhat alien. Yet they get several things right-skills that help them navigate life with striking ease. They do not glorify suffering and are unapologetic about setting boundaries. They keep toxicity at bay and walk away from manipulation without hesitation. You cannot arm-twist them; they know better. I find this deeply admirable. Gen Z has no desire to appear perfect. They are cavalier in their ways and do not take critics too seriously. Their humour and candour often mask a quiet sensitivity to self-worth. They care about how they are

treated and cannot tolerate dismissal, even if it sometimes reads as haughtiness. They are less apologetic about who they are and what they want from life. It is an attitude I often wish to emulate, for remaining unbothered when judgement flies in your face is a rare liberation. There is also a breeziness in how they handle personal affairs. Permanent relationships are not assumed. They enter them knowing endings are possible. They invest, but do not chain themselves. They prioritise emotional safety over emotional endurance. They avoid deriving identity solely from relationships and steer clear of over-sentimentality. Their low-intensity connections do not break them when they end; they simply move on, letting bygones be bygones. This is not detachment but self-preservation-a clarity that helps them distinguish between

being kind and being merely nice. They are not frivolous; they are cautious and self-loving. Yes, they have traits old-schoolers may disapprove of, but they also possess a knack for making the most of whatever life offers-lemons or laughter. They show me how to live with more ease, openness and a dash of flair. One day, when I am ready, I will take a leaf from the Gen Z scrapbook and learn to be carefree.

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

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RUSSIA TWISTS PEACE EFFORTS TO SUSTAIN ITS IMPERIAL AMBITIONS

Russia is clearly toying with peace efforts from the West and elsewhere. Behind this lies a layered blend of strategy, politics and narrative shaping. Its core instinct remains geopolitical: Moscow views control over its neighbourhood as essential strategic depth, making any concession in Ukraine a setback rather than a diplomatic trade-off.

This outlook is further strengthened by domestic politics. The war has evolved into a tool for regime consolidation and political control at home. Economic adaptation has also inured Russia to sanctions that were expected to bite much harder.

Energy reorientation towards Asia, deeper strategic ties with China and the creation of alternative supply chains have

significantly reduced the pressure on Moscow to negotiate.

Russia now believes that time favours its attritional strategy. Incremental territorial gains, fortified defensive lines and the perception of gradual advantage leave it with little incentive to alter course. China's quiet but steady support helps dilute its sense of international isolation.

At the same time, Western inconsistency, political shifts in Washington, wavering European unity and growing public fatigue reinforce the Kremlin's ideological framing.

The conflict is portrayed as a civilisational resistance to Western intrusion. For Moscow, peace has become a tactical convenience-no longer a strategic objective.

R NARAYANAN | MUMBAI

Ignoring soil pollution costs lives

Soil pollution has not received adequate attention. Land degradation inevitably leads to soil contamination, and chemicals released through industrial and agricultural activities are the primary culprits. Untreated waste and wastewater have already destroyed thousands of species of fish, birds, plants and other organisms. Although soil has the natural ability to filter contaminants, it can do so only to a limited extent. Remaining pollutants may seep into the atmosphere, contributing to air pollution, or into water bodies, compounding water pollution. Direct human contact with contaminated soil is also a serious possibility. As more than ninety per cent of food comes from soil, its conservation is vital for the ecological chain.

The crippling effects of soil pollution-including congenital disorders, infectious diseases and non-communicable illnesses such as cancer — have alerted health professionals to its dangers. Environmental scientists possess various remedies, such as surface leaching, bioremediation, thermal remediation, mycoremediation and phytoremediation. Nonetheless, on World Soil Day, observed on December 5, the responsibilities of individuals in preventing and eliminating soil pollution cannot be overstated.

GANAPATHI BHAT | AKOLA

Internship scheme fails to deliver

The Centre's ambitious Prime Minister's Internship Scheme has failed to attract the majority of unemployed youth, as confirmed by official data submitted to Parliament.

Harsh Malhotra, Minister of State for Corporate Affairs, informed the Lok Sabha that only 33,300 young people accepted internships during the first two rounds, of whom 6,618 dropped out midway. Companies offered 82,000 internships in the first phase and 83,000 in the second. It is worth noting that the government launched this scheme with great fanfare during the last Lok Sabha elections.

Interns were promised a one-time payment of ₹6,000 and a monthly allowance of ₹5,000 for twelve months. The government also claimed that the initiative would train ten million young people over five years, making them more employable.

The first two years' outcomes are plainly disappointing, as such superficial measures cannot address the unemployment crisis. What is needed is a fundamental shift in economic thinking, with sustained investment in the real economy and human development. Without tackling these structural issues, the government's assurances offer little substance.

ABHIJIT ROY | JAMSHEDPUR

Justice cannot be negotiated away

The recent ruling in the Sandesara case raises troubling questions about the state of our criminal justice system. Allowing fugitives to return, repay a negotiated amount and see multiple criminal proceedings erased may strengthen bank books, but it does little to strengthen public confidence.

What message does this deliver to those who have complied with the law? Banks are forced to absorb significant losses, enforcement agencies are left adrift midway through their efforts, and the perception grows that financial crime can be bargained away if one can produce a sufficiently large cheque. Even more concerning is the possibility that other absconders may now attempt similar "settlements", further straining an already burdened system.

A justice system must impose consequences for wrongdoing, not merely attach a price tag to it. Without transparent findings, proportionate penalties and a firm commitment to prosecute where culpability is clear, such outcomes risk becoming blueprints for evasion rather than models of resolution. Judicial leniency is admirable, but when it eclipses criminal responsibility, it weakens the very rule of law it is meant to uphold.

GOPALASWAMY J | CHENNAI

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

The lost art of ethical rule: Revisiting Milinda’s inquiry

Democracy today resembles a circus, where rulers mistake spectacle for statesmanship and genuine governance remains elusive. Anarchist thought is misread as disorder, Buddhist nations drift from ethical foundations, and corruption corrodes institutions. In this vacuum, the Milinda Pañha offers a rare philosophical corrective and moral compass

FIRST
Column



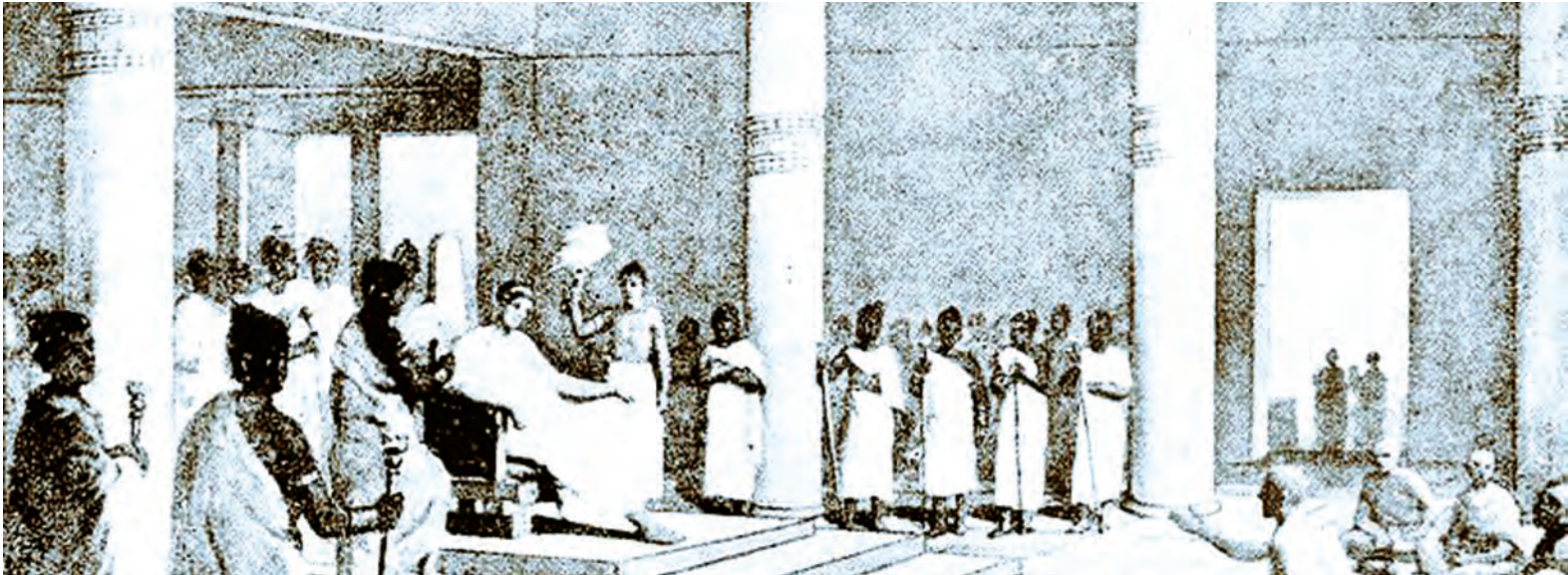
**NILANTHA
ILANGAMUWA**

Most of the time, what we see in modern rulers is reminiscent of a Turkish proverb: when a clown enters a palace, he imagines he will become a king, but the palace instead turns into a circus. Democracy is ironically crumbling, yet a new form of governance has not yet emerged. The most pragmatic governance, as outlined in anarchist thought, has been grievously distorted, and the popular conception now equates anarchism with violence and disorder. However, seminal texts and contemporary interpretations by thinkers such as Noam Chomsky reaffirm that anarchism, properly understood, offers mechanisms to dismantle structural inequalities and bureaucratic apathy, enabling participatory and decentralised decision-making. Yet the gestation of a new paradigm of governance inevitably exceeds the temporality we anticipate, and perhaps only in the coming decades does an unprecedented, universal mode of administration take shape.

Meanwhile, it is lamentable to observe what has transpired in nations nominally anchored in Buddhist principles. Presently, most Buddhist-majority countries suffer from extreme corruption, with political systems that have ossified into nearly irreparable constructs. Leaders no longer trust monastic institutions; temples have transformed into quasi-financial conglomerates sustaining the ostentatious lifestyles of monks.

The ethical substratum the Buddha enjoined — equanimity, compassion and selfless service — has largely vanished. As Aravind Adiga remarks in his novel *The White Tiger*, if the Buddha were to witness the contemporary state of his religious progeny, he would depart immediately without a backward glance. Societies that once pursued ethical coherence and dharmic governance have now become distorted caricatures of their philosophical ideals.

It is precisely here that the *Milinda Pañha* provides an intellectual corrective, a text of extraordinary lucidity and profundity which, while ostensibly a religious-philosophical dialogue, contains the kernel of a gover-



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nance ethos that modern rulers might desperately need. The text chronicles the engagement between King Menander I, the Indo-Greek sovereign remembered in Buddhist tradition as Milinda, and the venerable monk Nagasena. Menander, who reigned c. 165-130 BCE, roughly a century after Emperor Ashoka, presided over a geographically modest realm encompassing parts of north-western India and Afghanistan. Unlike Ashoka, whose Mauryan empire was vast and centrally administered, Menander ruled a fragmented polity more reflective of Hellenistic city-state governance. His coins, with Greek inscriptions and iconography fused with Indian motifs, and surviving inscriptions attest to a sovereign both culturally syncretic and administratively shrewd. While no extant source suggests he learned directly from Ashoka, the philosophical and religious atmosphere shaped by Ashoka's dissemination of Buddhism undoubtedly influenced the intellectual milieu Menander inhabited. The *Milinda Pañha* thus enshrines a historic cross-cultural encounter: a Hellenistic king engaging rigorously with Indian philosophical traditions, adopting an epistemological humility and openness that modern rulers conspicuously lack.

The dialogues themselves exemplify a method of inquiry that parallels the Socratic and Platonic traditions. Milinda's questions are probing, sometimes sceptical, at times provocative, much like

Plato's interlocutors in *The Republic* or *Meno*. Nagasena responds with meticulous reasoning, often employing analogies such as the chariot, the rope and snake, the river and the lamp. Consider the famous opening exchange: "Venerable sir, what is your name?" asks Milinda. Nagasena replies, "I am called Nagasena, Majesty. But this is only a name, a designation, a convenient expression. In the ultimate sense, there is no Nagasena here." When Milinda presses, "How can you say there is no Nagasena? Are your robes Nagasena? Is your bowl Nagasena? Is your body Nagasena? Is your mind Nagasena?" Nagasena elucidates, "No, Majesty. None of these is Nagasena. Yet because all these parts occur together, people use the name 'Nagasena', just as one speaks of a chariot, though no single piece is the chariot." The sophistication of this method, rooted in Buddhist epistemology and the doctrine of impermanence, mirrors the Socratic elenchus, where a proposition is deconstructed through critical questioning and dialectical reasoning.

What makes this dialogue extraordinary for contemporary governance is that it instantiates an ethos of disciplined inquiry and ethical reflection that is evidently absent in today's political apparatus. Milinda's probing mirrors the inquisitiveness that should guide a state's executive: questions not merely about power or prestige but about the self, ethical action and the consequences of policy. The text

repeatedly foregrounds the impermanence and interdependence of phenomena, as exemplified in Nagasena's extended metaphors: "A fruit tree does not bear fruit the moment you plant it; it must mature. In the same way, karma ripens when conditions are right." Here, the philosophical principle of conditionality offers a remarkable lesson for policymakers: outcomes depend on the interplay of multiple variables, and rash or short-sighted interventions invariably yield unintended consequences.

Historically, Menander's engagement with Buddhist philosophy was not mere ornamentation; it influenced his governance ethos. While his kingdom remained smaller than Ashoka's, it displayed a striking pragmatism intertwined with ethical deliberation, a feature reinforced in the *Milinda Pañha*. By contrast, modern Buddhist-majority nations frequently conflate religiosity with ceremonial display or institutional patronage rather than ethical governance. The erosion of dharmic principles is compounded by excessive bureaucratisation, monetisation of monastic institutions and prioritisation of personal or party gain over collective welfare. A Milinda-inspired polity would not conflate the symbolic with the substantive; it would foreground reflective engagement with moral and structural consequences.

Interestingly, the questioning method in the *Milinda Pañha* is anticipated in earlier Buddhist texts such as the *Kalama Sutta*, wherein the Buddha exhorts practitioners not to rely on tradition, hearsay

or authority alone, but to test teachings through reasoned analysis and direct experience. "Do not go upon what has been acquired by repeated hearing; nor upon tradition; nor upon rumour; nor upon what is in a scripture," the Buddha advises, encouraging a culture of scrutiny and empirical ethical reasoning. This same epistemological rigour underpins Nagasena's dialogues: the king is urged not merely to accept Buddhist doctrine but to interrogate it until understanding is internalised. In contemporary governance, such a principle is strikingly absent; policy decisions are rarely subjected to sustained dialectical examination or reflective critique, and when they are, incentives for superficial compliance often outweigh those for substantive analysis.

The parallels with Greek philosophical methodology deepen here. Socrates, in the Platonic dialogues, similarly interrogates interlocutors to reveal inconsistencies in their understanding of justice, virtue and knowledge. Menander, although a foreign king in a non-Greek land, essentially embodies a Hellenistic inquirer transported into the Buddhist epistemological universe. In both traditions, authority is decoupled from truth: the king's power or the interlocutor's status does not confer correctness. This detachment is precisely what is missing in today's political spheres, where charisma or inherited office substitutes for reflective ethical reasoning, and where institutional and religious oversight often becomes perfunctory or complicit. Moreover, the *Milinda Pañha* demonstrates that inquiry is inseparable from ethical imagination. Questions about the self, impermanence and moral causality are not abstract; they carry direct implications for governance. Policies enacted without such reflection are analogous to rulers attempting to drive a chariot without understanding its wheels or axles: the structure may move, but direction and integrity are compromised. Modern Buddhist-majority nations, by ignoring this model, have allowed corruption, patronage networks and institutional sclerosis to metastasise. Practically, this has meant temples act as financial hubs, civic oversight is subordinated to political expediency, and the teachings of the Buddha are commodified into ritualised spectacle, divorced from ethical praxis. Without the missing links of Milinda's wisdom, can modern Buddhist rulers ever move beyond a hollow performance?

Tackling Delhi’s air pollution: A Systems problem demanding a systemic reform



**PRAVIN
KAUSHAL**

Each winter, Delhi descends into its now-familiar public health emergency. As temperatures fall and winds weaken, a heavy grey blanket settles over the NCR, pushing daily life into crisis mode — schools shut, construction halts, and citizens track AQI readings as routinely as the time of day. Yet this seasonal panic obscures a deeper truth: Delhi's pollution is not a winter anomaly but a year-round structural failure. Meteorology merely exposes what governance has failed to fix.

Having worked within the Delhi government ecosystem and now leading a data and AI centre, it is clear to me that the science of the problem and the strategy of our response remain misaligned. To move beyond temporary relief, the capital needs systems-level interventions that tackle the roots of emissions - not only their winter manifestations.

A Misdiagnosed Crisis

Much of the public discourse reduces Delhi's air problem to a single culprit: stubble burning in Punjab and Haryana. There is truth in this - data from the Ministry of Earth Sciences' Decision Support System shows that during peak episodes, crop-residue fires can contribute up to one-fourth of Delhi's PM2.5 load. But this is only a part of a much broader emissions landscape. The more uncomfortable reality is that the pollutants choking Delhi in winter are present all year. What changes in October and November is the atmosphere: cold air sinks, moisture captures particulates, and stagnation prevents dispersion. Vehicles, industries, waste burning and construction dust continue producing the same pollutants in summer and monsoon — but winter's inversion conditions magnify their impact. This is why emergency measures such as smog guns, cloud seeding or the hasty implementation of the Graded Response Action Plan (GRAP) offer limited relief. They treat symptoms, not the disease.

The GRAP Paradox

GRAP was designed as a last-mile emergency protocol, not a primary strategy. Its annual invocation signals a governance gap: if the baseline emissions were lower, winter conditions would not plunge Delhi into the "severe" category so

quickly. Even when fully implemented, GRAP yields only marginal improvements. Halting truck entry or shutting schools disrupts daily life but barely shifts average air quality because the underlying emission load remains unchanged. GRAP is, at best, a toumiquet - useful during haemorrhage, but not a substitute for long-term treatment. The real work must focus on three structural sectors: mobility, industry and waste.

1. Mobility: Move People, Not Cars

Vehicles remain among the largest contributors to Delhi's internal PM2.5 load. The adoption of BS-VI fuel — reducing sulphur content dramatically — was a significant achievement. But the gains are being cancelled out by sheer volume: Delhi registers nearly 2,000 new vehicles daily, a figure that overwhelms any technological improvement. A transformative mobility strategy must include:

Fleet Replacement: A targeted, time-bound scrappage and replacement programme is essential — particularly for ageing commercial vehicles, which are big emitters. Incentivising transitions to electric, CNG or compliant engines is far more effective than periodic bans.

Public Transport Revitalisation: No city can fight pollution while expanding private vehicle dependence. Delhi's public transport — buses, metro, last-mile services - needs capacity expansion, better frequency and integration. The policy focus must shift from "restricting cars" to "enabling people to not need cars".

2. An Economics Problem

A persistent misconception is that Delhi has minimal industrial activity. In reality, the NCR's industrial belt — Ghaziabad, Faridabad, Gurugram, Bhiwadi - burns large volumes of dirty fuel. The barrier to clean energy adoption is economic, not technological. Natural gas, the cleaner alternative, becomes prohibitively expensive due to high taxation outside the GST regime. As long as dirty fuels remain cheaper, compliance will remain sporadic. Bringing natural gas under GST would be one of the most impactful policy reforms for clean air. By aligning economic incentives with environmental goals, industry will transition voluntarily instead of under coercion.

3. The Missing Scale

Crop burning persists not because farmers prefer it, but because alternatives lack the scale, infrastructure or economic reward. Technologies exist — baling, in-situ decomposition, biogasification, ethanol production - but deployment remains fragmented. Similarly, within Delhi, waste burning often continues because segregation at source remains inconsistent. Landfills routinely smoulder, and municipal systems struggle with volume.

Addressing this requires:

- Assured procurement and incentives for biomass-based fuels,
- Statewide logistics for residue collection and

processing.

- Strict enforcement coupled with community-level waste segregation,
- Modern waste-to-energy and composting capacity.

Without addressing biomass and municipal waste, Delhi cannot sustainably lower its particulate load.

Lessons from Beijing

Cities like Beijing demonstrate that clean air is not an impossible aspiration. Their gains did not come from symbolic measures but from structural transitions:

- Shifting industries from coal to natural gas
- Phasing out old vehicles through aggressive scrappage schemes,
- Managing construction and road dust with strict, technology-driven enforcement,
- Creating a unified regional governance

A Systems Approach

Pollution in Delhi is not a local issue; it is a regional systems problem involving meteorology, agriculture, mobility, fuel economics and governance architecture. Solutions must therefore be structural and coordinated, not reactive.




A sustainable roadmap should include:

- A regional clean-air council integrating Delhi, Punjab, Haryana, UP and Rajasthan for unified action,
- Adaptive agricultural policies responsive to meteorological forecasts and residue-management capacity,
- Year-round mobility reforms prioritising public transport and fleet renewal,
- GST reform for clean fuels, enabling industries to switch affordably,
- Community-level participation supported by micro-monitoring and transparency dashboards. When policy, science and public will align, Delhi's air can improve dramatically - just as other global megacities have shown.

The Path Ahead

Delhi's pollution crisis is often portrayed as inevitable. It is not. It is the result of fragmented planning, delayed decisions and reactive governance. But just as the smog reveals the consequences of inaction, it also reveals a path forward. Clean air is not a seasonal aspiration - it is a constitutional right and a collective responsibility. The transition demands structural honesty, regional cooperation and a willingness to move to systemic reform. India has the knowledge, the institutions and the civic energy to achieve this. What remains is the resolve to treat clean air not as an annual headline, but as a national mission.

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Reclaiming India’s role as a global education hub

VK PAUL,
SHASHANK SHAH
& OSHIN DHARAP

India carries a formidable legacy as the cradle of ancient knowledge systems and universities such as Takshashila, Nalanda, Vallabhi, Vikramshila and Odantapuri. For millennia, it has sustained multidisciplinary higher learning that reached far beyond the subcontinent. Today, the global skills and talent landscape is being reshaped at a dramatic pace. This moment offers India an opportunity to reclaim its heritage as a civilisational educator and position its higher education institutions as global hubs of knowledge, research and innovation in the 21st century.

Over the last seventy-five years, India's higher education system has expanded enormously. With the launch of the National Education Policy 2020, the country has taken a decisive step towards future readiness by identifying the internationalisation of higher education - especially "internationalisation at home" — as a key driver of systemic transformation. An overwhelming 97 per cent of Indian students study in Indian institutions.

They will form the backbone of India's workforce and contribute to the global talent pool as well. Ensuring that their academic experience meets world-class standards is therefore not just a matter of educational quality but of national competitiveness. Yet, a sharp disparity persists in student mobility. Outbound student numbers have surged, with more than 13.35 lakh Indians studying abroad in 2024, predominantly in Anglophone destinations such as Canada, the United States, the United Kingdom and Australia. In contrast, India hosted only about 47,000 foreign students in 2022, nearly a third of them from Nepal. For every international student studying in India, approximately twenty-eight Indian students are enrolled abroad. This is despite regulatory provisions that allow supernumerary seats for international students and a variety of scholarships to support their education in India. The imbalance underscores both the challenge of retaining talent within the country and the difficulty of positioning India as an attractive host destination.

Several forces continue to push Indian students overseas: the appeal of immersive international exposure, the lure of post-study work opportunities and the perception of higher academic quality abroad. The financial implications of this trend are significant. Indian families spend between US\$47-70 billion annually - equivalent to ₹3.8-6 lakh crore - on overseas education in tuition fees and living expenses alone. This outflow is estimated to be eight to twelve times the central government's higher education budget. Addressing this imbalance makes internationalisation at home not merely desirable but necessary, both

for fiscal prudence and systemic strengthening.

Recognising this urgency, India has initiated several major reforms in recent years. The establishment of the IFSCA GIFT City framework in 2022 and the UGC's regulatory framework in 2023 paved the way for international universities to enter India. Deakin University and the University of Wollongong became the first foreign institutions to start operations in GIFT City. The University of Southampton set up the first international branch campus in Gurugram, and several more - including the University of Liverpool, University of York, University of Aberdeen, University of Western Australia, Illinois Institute of Technology and Istituto Europeo di Design — have announced plans to launch campuses in Bengaluru and Navi Mumbai's emerging International Education City.




The National Forensic Sciences University opened a campus in Jinja, Uganda, in 2023. IIT Madras and IIT Delhi have launched campuses in Zanzibar and Abu Dhabi, while IIM Ahmedabad has established a presence in Dubai and IIT Bombay in Sendai, Japan. Joint, dual and twinning degree programmes are now possible through collaborations between Indian and foreign universities, and the newly notified Equivalence Regulations 2025 offer clarity on recognising foreign qualifications. For India to evolve into a genuine global education destination, it must strengthen the larger ecosystem. This requires world-class infrastructure, cutting-edge research ecosystems, globally competitive curricula and the ability to attract and retain top faculty, including members of the Indian diaspora.

Regulatory processes — from visa facilitation to qualification recognition — must be simplified, and internship opportunities for international students must become more accessible.

India must also strategically fund international research collaborations, global teaching exchanges and faculty mobility to ensure sustained knowledge flows. Equally important is a strong branding and outreach strategy that communicates India's distinctive academic strengths and showcases the achievements of global alumni who studied at Indian institutions. Tailored academic offerings — whether STEM and Bharatiya Gyan Parampara programmes for Western learners or specialised courses in agriculture, healthcare, education and digital finance for African students - can help India address diverse global needs. Looking ahead, India must aim to triple inbound international student enrolment to at least 1.5 lakh by 2030. With the right systemic reforms, regulatory coherence and institutional strategies, India has both the heritage and the capability to re-emerge as a global centre of learning - well beyond 2047.

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As Russia's powerful Vladimir Putin lands in India, there is huge excitement about the potential and possibilities to further concretise the trade, cultural, social, and business links between the two nations. Media reports talk about massive deals in areas such as energy, defence, and other areas. A few days before his visit, there were reports that despite the new US and European sanctions, crude oil imports from Russia went up after a brief drop. Indians, it seems, have mastered the art and science to use grey ships, or illegal smuggling shipments to import oil. Since the global sanctions are against the exports of petrochemicals that use Russian crude, Indian refiners can use the latter to make petroproducts to cater to domestic demand. Thus, in both legal and grey areas, the partnership and friendship between the two nations is on the rise.

Yet, there are a few issues that India needs to contend with in its seemingly-blind pursuit of Putin's pacts. The first is that even as the two nations talk about increasing the annual trade between them by more than 40 per cent to \$100 billion within five years, the current balance is clearly lopsided. Of the nearly \$70 billion trade now, Indian exports constitute a mere seven per cent of the total. The large proportion of the value is about the goods that India imports. Indeed, most of its defence needs, despite purchases from non-Russia suppliers in the recent past, is focused on Russia. The industry and commerce minister, Piyush Goyal rightly analysed the situation, although in a slightly-garbled way, as one where "we cannot rest, we need to grow, we need to balance that." What he means is that India needs to export more goods and services to Russia.

Of course, on paper, there are several areas where India can emerge as an attractive supplier of world-class products. According to Goyal, in manufacturing, there are huge opportunities to expand the trade, and reduce the huge deficit. These include consumer goods, food products, automobiles, tractors, heavy commercial vehicles, consumer electronics, industrial components, and textiles. Similarly, there is a latent potential to push services exports. If India can sell services to the US, and Europe, and the rest of the world, why not Russia? The Russian side seconded Goyal's assessment, and talked about India can increase its current two per cent share in Russia's overall imports. However, there are several problems which, as the Indian commerce secretary, pointed out includes process simplification. The policy-makers on both sides need to sit together to ferret out solutions, which are not likely to be easy, or simple.

Let us start with agriculture and food products. This is a contentious issue, both for exports and imports. Indian policy-makers have articulated the need to increase exports to push up farm incomes. However, exports rarely help the farmers. They mostly benefit the middlemen, and industry, who buy cheap, and sell dear. The second is that as soon as India enters the market, global prices swing wildly. If India is a purchaser, prices zoom. If it is a seller, prices dip, and both happen because of the high volumes in question. Thus, the full benefit of global prices, either high or low, do not accrue to Indians. Finally, there is a strong industry lobby against exports, which invariably sways the other way for cheaper imports. In addition, the current atmosphere, where India is being pushed by America to import higher farm products, is not conducive.

Now, let us move to consumer electronics, and telecom equipment. One of the biggest exports in this area is of the smartphones, especially the iPhones. But, as most of us know, the iPhones are being shipped to the US by Apple, which is under pressure to make more of them in the US. Obviously, while Apple will continue to 'Make in India,' it will surely not export to Russia from India, given the current stalemate between Putin and America's Donald Trump. Unless Russia agrees to a ceasefire in Ukraine, the US, and other global sanctions, prevent American and European firms from trading directly with Russia. So, essentially, iPhones are out of the India-Russia trade equation, especially over the next two years. India makes some components, and assembles the Chinese phones. But China may not wish to export to Russia from India. It will want to use the factories in its country for this purpose.

Despite the cultural affinities, and cultural exchanges between India and Russia, language is a huge barrier in the services sector. Indian IT and outsourcing firms have performed well in nations that are either fluent in English, or comfortable with it. In the case of, say, Russia, and China, one needs to know the local language. Decades ago, we had several Russian-speaking Indians but the tribe has slowly vanished. Russian, since the age of economic reforms, has not been a top priority for the Indians, who wanted to acquire English skills. If the services firms wish to expand in Russia, they need to focus on the language, as well as soft skills that are specific to the Russian culture. The soft-skill training that they impart to fresh hires need to be expanded to include possible entry into Russia.

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BUSINESS10

A story of boom, gloom and doom

Opposing factors will influence Indian indices and equities in 2026

Marc Faber, the stock soothsayer who is famous for his 'Gloom, Boom, Doom' report, feels that the Indian stock market is not going anywhere in 2026. This view is contradictory to those of the analysts, and brokerage houses that believe that the Sensex, the Bombay Stock Exchange index, may gain more than a quarter by December 2026. As we prepare to step into the new year, there are reasons that can be used by both sides, the bulls and bears, and optimists and pessimists. Like the Indian economy's 'Alice in Wonderland' story, the country stock markets imply another trip down the rabbit hole.

One of Faber's main concerns revolves around the value of the rupee, and its exchange rate vis-à-vis the dollar. Already, the Indian currency is below ₹90, and has shed several percentage points this year. This is why the investor-predictor claims that Indian equities gave negative returns if one considers their worth in dollars, rather than in rupees. In contrast, a few markets have registered positive returns in dollar terms. Brazil, for example, went up by 5.5 per cent. Indeed, despite the recent rise, the Indian stock market was one of the worst performers among emerging markets, and Asian peers.

Next year may not see any worthwhile changes. There is a growing fear among currency traders that the rupee may dip to ₹100-a-dollar within a year. The efforts by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) to protect the currency has not yielded results. Despite temporary upward blips, the rupee has continued its free fall. Faber feels that the returns from Indian equities in 2026 in dollar terms, largely due to the state of the

rupee, may be marginally positive, or even negative. Hence, he is not enthused about them, as he is not about equities elsewhere, except for a few niche segments.

However, there are several players who think that Faber's gloom-and-doom tale is a fable. The former experts argue that there is momentum in the Indian economy, as indicated by the GDP growth in the first two quarters, low inflation, adequate space for the RBI to intervene, positive consumer sentiments, and good monsoons that will benefit agriculture. This year (2025) was a bad one for equities, but it is behind us. There will be a re-rating of the stocks, as corporate earnings perk up. Valuations are still high, but are down from their post-Covid peaks. There is bullish steam left.

Another way to see the stock market as either half-full or half-empty glass is to go beyond the overall indices, and look at the entire universe of listed stocks. A media report indicates that the bulk of the hikes in share prices is limited to the stocks that comprise the Sensex and Nifty. If one looks at the top 500 scrips by market cap, more than half are in the negative in 2025. It is not a secular uptrend. Indeed, most of the positive activity is concentrated around the large caps, with problems in midcaps, and small caps.

Of course, the die-hard optimists argue that this is how a new bull run begins. After the post-Covid frenzy, when the Sensex rose from below 30,000 in early 2020 to 85,000 now, the index took a break in 2025. It converged with the growth slowdown in GDP. As valuations have eased, and there is fresh energy and excitement

in the economy, the bull run may pick up, and gather speed. This will lead to another mini-bull run in 2026, whose future will be decided by several domestic and external factors, including the India-US trade deal.

What is more immediate, and scarier than the rupee, or the secular nature of the upcoming boom or doom, is the massive exodus of money from the equity market. In the first three days of December 2025, foreign investors withdrew more money than they did in the entire month of November. Over the past two months, according to reports, Indian retail investors have turned sellers to book profits. During 2025, when foreigners largely remained net sellers, the Indians saved the day as they

poured in huge sums in mutual funds, which invested in stocks. If the ongoing dual-selling trend continues, it can derail the indices over the next few months.

One of the reasons for the retail sales, apart from profit-booking, is the switch from the secondary to primary market. Suddenly, given the plateauing trends in listed stocks, IPOs (Initial Public Offerings) offer the chances to earn better returns. In the recent past, listing gains have touched 50 per cent and more, even if the stocks have subsequently languished at lower prices. This allows the risk-takers to make 30-50 per cent within a few weeks. Apart from the Indian retail investors, foreigners too have adopted these tactics. They sell in the secondary market, and queue up for the IPOs.

Given these contradictory views, Faber advises investors to stay in cash, i.e., get out of stocks, and invest the money in gold, silver, and platinum. He contends that the dollar returns from the precious metals, and bullion, are higher. For Indians, as the rupee slides against the dollar, and if this trend continues in 2026, the metals offer more attractive propositions. Apart from normal increase in prices, as gold and silver have witnessed in 2025, the returns are higher due to the rupee-dollar exchange rate. It is a double-bonanza.

Clearly, the bullion investment strategy can turn into a lot of bull, if the metal prices come down. As trade disruptions, and accompanying disruptions ease, if the Russia-Ukraine war stalls, and if China and the US agree to a more permanent truce, the yellow metal will lose its lustre. Central banks may ease off buying, as will institutional investors. In such a scenario, buying gold or silver now may be fraught with risks. Of course, if one is already invested in them, it will make sense to buy more, after selling equities.

Evidently, stock investors have two options. Either they take the risks, and push further into equities, but trade regularly, almost daily, based on domestic and global events, to reap some rewards, albeit smaller but regularly. Or they can stay away, take a break, and look at other assets, and investment options. It is almost impossible to time a market, any market. Even the best need to be lucky to achieve it. It may be better to wait-and-watch, and assess the stock market before deciding which way it plans to move.

The Tech Wrecker

Censorship vs immigration

No visas for those who post anti-right wing and anti-US views

Already, Indians, who have some strong and ongoing connections with the US, are cagey about attaching themselves to seemingly-anti-US views and opinions. For example, professionals, whose family members work in the US, refuse to associate with controversial issues. Indian students in American colleges refuse to talk on the phone, even on encrypted platforms, about what is happening in that country. Parents and spouses of those living in the US refuse to engage in the so-called sensitive conversations. There is a fear to like, or even attach a thumbs up icon to social media posts.

In a recent cable that was sent to the US missions across the world, consular officers were urged, according to a media report, to see if the visa applicants, and family members who may travel with them, had "worked in areas that include activities such as misinformation, disinformation, content moderation, fact-checking,

compliance, online safety, among others." The cable adds, "If you uncover evidence an applicant was responsible for, or complicit in, censorship or attempted censorship of protected expression in the United States, you should pursue a finding that the applicant is ineligible."

Although the language relates to suppression of free speech through misinformation or disinformation, its practice will have a far-reaching effect. This is because, as media reports indicate, Trump's White House defines the lack of free speech as the "stifling of conservative voices online." Given this context, if you are a liberal with left leanings, you may be suppressing the freedom of expression. The same rules will apply in practice to those who oppose the new America's opinions on social and health issues like the efficacy of vaccines. Indeed, any views contrary to Trump will be included.

In May this year, the US secretary of state

threatened to ban visas for foreigners who censor speech by Americans. Now, this context offers quite a long rope to the consulars, and officials, to stop certain kinds of foreigners. In such cases, any form of anti-US, rather anti-Trump, and anti-conservative views can lead to visa bans. It may have happened years, and decades ago. But if it is still alive on the Internet, and it is difficult to kill content on the web, one can be in trouble. Thus, a thorough clean-up will be required to remove it.

Over the past few months, Trump and his allies and loyalists have even accused the former Democratic president, Joe Biden, of encouraging the suppression of free speech. In this context, the former implies the latter's attempts to counter the false claims by sections of conservatives that the Biden elections were rigged. If a former president can be charged in this manner, one can only imagine what a foreigner, whose visa is rejected, can do. The idea, it seems, is deep. It is to make America home for Americans, and those who think like Americans, or rather hardcore republicans.

There may be a deep-rooted plan, and the advisory to the consulars on H-B visas may be a part of the larger, universal, all-encompassing strategy to increase the voter base of the republicans. Experience shows that most of the recent immigrants are democrat voters, and include huge swathes of recent foreigners. By limiting entries in universities, tech firms, and corporate America to the so-called conservative, or those with republican-like views, the future electorate will reflect this change. In a sense, most of the new voters will vote republicans, and increase the party's victory chances.

H-B visas have become a huge target for the Trump administration, which sees all the ills and evils concentrated in the regime. Limiting and changing the regime will solve most of the existing problems, change America the way Trump's wants, and 'Make America Great Again.' A new visa system will help Americans find more jobs, restrict entry to high-skilled and highly-paid foreigners, allow mostly conservatives to enter the country, and make the US more productive. It will influence the future presidential elections.

The Pioneer

SINCE 1865

Biogas essential for India’s clean energy transition, says MNRE minister

ABHI SINGHAL / ABHINAV KUMAR JHA
■ New Delhi

Setting an ambitious tone for global collaboration in biogas, Union Minister Sripad Yesso Naik on Thursday said India is on the threshold of what we proudly call the Decade of Biogas. “Our goal is clear and consistent: from a national vision to global leadership. We aim to position India as the world’s hub for Biogas policy innovation, investment, and scalable business solutions,” said Naik, addressing the gathering on the concluding day of India Congress 2025, organised by World Biogas Association in the national Capital.

Naik, who holds the Ministry of Power and Ministry of New and Renewable Energy portfolio as Minister of State, also emphasised that Biogas is becoming essential for India’s clean energy transition, energy security, waste management, and industrial

decarbonisation. He noted that it “sits exactly at this intersection” of national priorities and that India is “already aligned and advancing on both fronts” through accelerated programmes and global partnerships.

Naik highlighted that Biogas and Biomethane are



transforming agricultural residues, municipal waste, and industrial effluents into clean energy, organic fertiliser, and green jobs, calling it “the circular economy in action.”

He expressed that village-level and community Biogas systems strengthen waste management, increase access to clean cooking, and enhance local energy security, describing the transi-

tion as “a rural development revolution” and “a pathway to a resilient local economy”. He praised the NDDB-WBA MoU for promoting global standards, training, and operational excellence in India.

The day advanced into parallel policy and technical tracks like Biogas Beyond Borders: Global Dialogue; Strategic Vision for Biogas & Biomethane — Margin to Mainstream; Small and Medium Scale Biogas Plants — Challenges and Opportunities.

The day wrapped up with a rich set of discussions that brought global and Indian perspectives together. Speakers shared how international cooperation can speed up Biogas growth, while MNRE outlined a clear vision for taking the sector mainstream. Sessions explored the role of small and mid-scale plants, the promise of

Biomethane for transport, fresh avenues for private financing, policies to tap industrial organic waste, and India’s push to scale Biogas from early pilots to a nationwide, socially inclusive, job-creating ecosystem.

The second day of the WBA event saw industry leaders, policymakers, and technology experts discussing how to tackle the roadblocks, or how boldly the targets to be met and that India cannot unlock its Biogas potential unless it solves how biomass is collected, stored, priced, and delivered.

The gap between policy ambition and ground-level reality also surfaced. While the government’s SATAT scheme promises up to 50 per cent financial aid for new plants and assures off-take through oil marketing companies, the physical challenge of connecting these plants to consumers remains stiff.

Technology experts pointed to another silent risk: plant safety and design



(L-R) Dr Pradeep Monga, Senior Advisor & Policy Director, World Biogas Association (WBA), UK; Ms Charlotte Morton OBE, Chief Executive Officer, WBA, UK; Mr Sripad Yesso Naik, Union Minister of State, Ministry of New & Renewable Energy, and, Ministry of Power, Government of India; Mr Prashant Tewari, representing The Pioneer, at the WBA India Congress 2025

quality. Flávio Ascenco of the World Biogas Association said mistakes in basic engineering could trigger cata-

strophic failures. “A small error like closing a breather valve and creating negative pressure can collapse a

digester three times,” he warned. He stressed the need for proper HAZOP studies and stronger automa-

tion, pointing to European sites that run with a single worker monitored by safety systems adapted from the oil and gas industry.

NTPC’s Amit Kulshrestha outlined how digestate can be turned into biochar using torrefaction. He said Biogas could also support electricity during peak hours if NCR’s biopulp is used to produce CBG and injected into existing pipelines. IndianOil Adani Venture CEO Atul Kharate spoke about the early challenge of convincing customers to switch from LPG and liquid fuels to CBG, requiring pressure-flow modifications and new firing mechanisms.

Others focused on the long-term environmental case. Kevin Houston of Carbon Masters called CBG one of India’s strongest climate solutions because it produces both clean fuel and soil-restoring fertiliser. “The soil carbon issue is huge. If we don’t fix it in the next 20 years, India will end up with just dirt,” he said.

Falling rupee makes imports costlier, fuels inflation: Experts

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ New Delhi

A depreciating rupee will help exporters and the IT sector, but make imports costlier, thus fuelling inflation, according to experts.

As the rupee plunged below 90-mark to a US dollar, opposition parties raised concern over its impact on common citizens. The matter was also raised in Parliament.

The rupee rebounded from its all-time low levels and appreciated by 19 paise to close at 89.96 against the US dollar on Thursday, on softness in the US dollar index and on reports of the Reserve Bank of India’s supposed intervention.

Forex traders said the greenback fell after ADP non-farm payroll data came in sharply below the forecast, and the softness in the US dollar index supported the rupee at lower levels.

The rupee opened weak earlier in the day and touched an all-time low of

90.43 amid selling pressure from foreign investors and rising crude oil prices. The delay over the announcement of the India-US trade deal has also weighed on the rupee.

“The rupee’s fall below 90 against the dollar brings mixed consequences. While export sectors like IT and textiles gain competitiveness, higher import costs for crude and raw materials will squeeze margins and widen the trade deficit,” said Rajeev Sharan, Head, Criteria, Model Development & Research, Brickwork Ratings.

He also said that rising inflationary pressures could dampen consumer demand and corporate profitability, while firms with unhedged foreign borrowings may face financial stress.

Prodigy Finance, an international student lender, said students who are going for higher studies abroad in 2026 will run into a tougher reality.

The combination of a

weakening rupee, rising overseas living costs and under-estimated budgets is creating a financial risk that families can no longer ignore, it said.

When tuition fees, deposits, and day-to-day living costs abroad are priced in dollars, pounds, or euros, an Indian rupee (INR) loan becomes heavier with every movement in the exchange rate. What looks manageable today can turn into an unexpected financial strain by the time repayments begin. “The one piece of advice I always give is simple: do not pledge your home or land as collateral. You never know what the market will look like back home,” said Sonal Kapoor, Global Chief Business Officer at Prodigy Finance.

Meanwhile, a report by DBS Bank said that in the past fortnight, the central bank’s strong presence across spot, forwards and the NDF markets had prevented a break in the USDINR past 89.00, drawing a de facto line in the sand.

Rupee rises 19 paise to close at 89.96/USD

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ New Delhi

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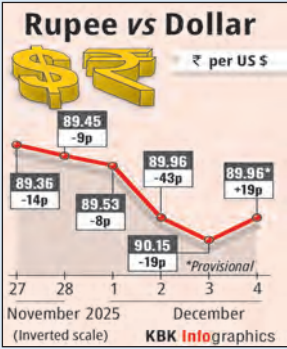
At the interbank foreign exchange market, the rupee opened at 90.36. It slipped further to a record low of 90.43 against the greenback in initial deals, registering a loss of 28 paise from its previous closing level.

At the end of Thursday’s trading session, the rupee was quoted at 89.96 (provisional), up 19 paise over its last close.

On Wednesday, the rupee breached the 90-a dollar level for the first time to settle at a fresh all-time low of 90.15 against the greenback.

Meanwhile, Chief Economic Adviser V Anantha Nageswaran on Wednesday said the falling rupee is not affecting inflation or exports.

A falling rupee helps outward shipment but makes imports costlier.



Import-dependent sectors such as gems and jewellery, petroleum and electronics may see lower benefits due to a rise in input costs, putting pressure on inflationary expectations, he said at an event on Wednesday.

Meanwhile, the dollar index, which gauges the greenback’s strength against a basket of six currencies, was trading 0.01 per cent lower at 98.84. Brent crude, the global oil benchmark, rose 0.22 per cent to USD 62.81 per barrel in futures trade.

“We expect the rupee to trade with a negative bias on continued selling pressure from FIIs and a weak tone in the domestic markets. Elevated crude oil prices may also pressurise the rupee,” said Anuj Choudhary, Research Analyst, Mirae Asset ShareKhan.

Forex traders said multiple pressures, like foreign fund outflows from equities and lingering uncertainty over the Indo-US trade deal, are keeping investor sentiment fragile.

However, weakness in the US dollar amid a disappointing jobs report and rising odds of a rate cut by the Fed in December may support the rupee at lower levels, Choudhary said.

Narcotic smugglers exploiting courier, e-comm: CBIC chief

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ New Delhi

Central Board of Indirect Taxes and Customs (CBIC) Chairman Vivek Chaturvedi



on Thursday said transnational syndicates exploiting couriers and e-commerce shipments, the threat from narcotics smuggling remains persistent in India.

Addressing the Directorate of Revenue Intelligence (DRI) on the 68th Foundation Day, he asked the officers to renew their resolve to stay ahead of emerging threats and contin-

ue to use advanced data analytics to anticipate smuggling patterns.

During last year, DRI seized 65 kg of cocaine, 225 kg of methamphetamine and almost 9 tonnes of ganja, Chaturvedi said, adding DRI has been working to dismantle the drug smuggling network.

“The threat from narcotics remains persistent for our country.

Transnational syndicates continue to engage in a cat-and-mouse game by exploiting couriers and e-commerce shipments, as well as

maritime routes to push synthetic drugs into the country,” Chaturvedi said.

Between April-October, DRI and Customs officials have seized 3,029 kg of narcotics valued at about ₹3,365 crore.

With regard to gold smuggling, Chaturvedi said it continues to be an evolving issue with syndicates coming out with new concealment methods by misusing access within the airport, as well as the cargo handling ecosystems.

The CBIC chief said DRI is targeting these networks, including those using the maritime routes and offshore supply chains.

In the last fiscal, DRI seized 1,072 kg of gold valued at ₹785 crore.

In the current fiscal between April-October, about 260 kg of gold valued at over ₹254 crore was also seized in 461 cases.

Fitch ups India’s FY’26 GDP growth forecast

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ New Delhi

Fitch Ratings on Thursday raised India’s GDP growth forecast for the current fiscal to 7.4 per cent, from 6.9 per cent, on increased consumer spending and improved sentiment boosted by GST reforms.

It said falling inflation gives the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) room for one more policy rate cut in December to 5.25 per cent, following 100 bp of cuts in 2025 so far. Fitch said GDP growth accelerated further in the July-September quarter to 8.2 per cent, from 7.8 per cent in the April-June quarter.

“Growth will ease over the remainder of the financial year 2025-26 (to end-March), but we have raised our full-year growth forecast to 7.4 per cent, from 6.9 per cent in September,” Fitch said in its Global Economic Outlook report for December.

Private consumer spending is the main driver of

growth this year, supported by strong real income dynamics, increased consumer sentiment, and the impact of recently implemented goods and services tax (GST) reforms.

Effective September 22, GST on about 375 items has been slashed, making over 99 per cent of consumption items cheaper. Fitch expects GDP growth to slow to 6.4 per cent in FY’27.

It projected private investment to pick up in the second half of the next fiscal (2026-27) as financial conditions loosen.

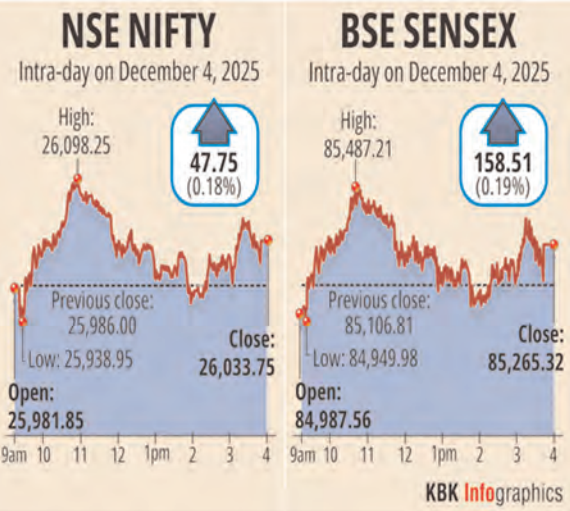
Consumer price inflation fell to an all-time low of 0.3 per cent in October, driven by lower food and drink prices.

“We expect falling inflation should give the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) room for one more policy rate cut in December to 5.25 per cent, following 100bp of cuts in 2025 so far, and a series of reductions in the cash reserve ratio (from 4 per cent to 3 per cent),” Fitch said.

Stock markets bounce back

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ Mumbai

Snapping the four-day losing run, benchmark stock indices Sensex and Nifty rebounded on Thursday on buying in tech and IT shares.



The 30-share BSE Sensex edged higher by 158.51 points or 0.19 per cent to settle at 85,265.32. During the day, it rose by 380.4 points or 0.44 per cent to 85,487.21.

The 50-share NSE Nifty climbed 47.75 points or 0.18 per cent to 26,033.75. Sensex dropped around 613 points or 0.72 per cent while Nifty shed nearly 230 points or 0.8 per cent in four straight sessions to Wednesday.

Tata Consultancy Services, Tech Mahindra, Infosys, HCL Tech, Bharti Airtel, Sun Pharma, Bharat Electronics and Trent were the major gainers among Sensex scrips.

However, Maruti, Eternal, Kotak Mahindra Bank and

stocks worth ₹4,730.41 crore, according to exchange data.

“Domestic markets closed flat amid mixed global cues and caution ahead of the RBI policy. Early value-driven gains were restrained by a record-low rupee and persistent FII outflows. However, lowered expectations of an RBI rate cut supported a mild currency rebound, helping indices stabilise towards the close,” Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geojit Investments Limited said.

In Asian markets, South Korea’s Kospi, Shanghai’s SSE Composite Index settled lower, while Japan’s Nikkei 225 index Hong Kong’s Hang Seng index ended in positive territory.

Post-govt ban on real-money gaming, Dream11 bets on sports entertainment

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ Mumbai

With a major part of the business impacted by the government’s ban on Real Money Gaming, Dream11 on Thursday announced sports entertainment to be its next bet.

The top management also said that none of its 1,200 employees has been laid off as a result of the ban on real money gaming.

“We are moving away from the gaming piece altogether. We are pivoting hard,” the company’s co-founder and chief executive, Harsh Jain, told reporters.

It is launching a service which lets users ‘watch along’ a sporting event with someone seated elsewhere and makes sport-watching less

lonely.

“People want to scream, shout or banter while watching a fixture. The problem we are focusing on is the loneliness of watching a match alone,” he said, adding that Dream11 will be the second screen which a user will sit with.

As a concept, the watchalong service exists on YouTube but this is the first time a dedicated platform for such engagement is being launched in India.

Globally, there are platforms like Twitch offering such engagement for sports viewing, he said, pointing out that it is a USD 10 billion opportunity with 1 billion potential users internationally.

Jain said the new business will primarily depend on advertising



and also in-app purchases to be done through pre-bought virtual coins.

Marketing spends will be negligible, he said, adding that efforts will be made to draw as many of the 250

million users already registered on Dream11 to try and taste the new offering.

Over 20 million users are still active in fantasy gaming, even with the money element being taken off, Jain said.

The company is not facing any pressure from its investors, Jain said, replying to a query on whether the pressure to exit may lead to any changes.

It is sufficiently capitalised for now and does not see any need for money for the next few years, Jain said.

Creating the new platform has not been capital expenditure intensive and the company has deployed its existing workforce to create the platform.

FROM THE WORLD

CHILE

Phones in schools banned

Chile has passed a bill outlawing the use of mobile phones and other smart devices during classes at elementary and middle schools. The new law will take effect next year, making Chile the latest country to restrict smartphone use among young students to reduce its harmful effects and curb classroom distractions. Other nations with various levels of restrictions on smartphone use at schools include France, Brazil, Hungary, the Netherlands and China. "We are advancing a cultural change for children and adolescents who today, more than ever, need to see each other's faces again, socialise during recess, and regain concentration to further boost learning," Education Minister Nicolás Cataldo wrote on social media after the decision.

PAKISTAN

Afghan militant killed in raid

Security forces on Thursday killed an Afghan militant belonging to the banned Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan in northwestern Pakistan's restive Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, police said. The deceased militant was killed in an intelligence-based operation carried out in the Loi Mamond area of Bajaur district of the province, an official added. According to the security sources, the militant was an Afghan national belonging to Afghanistan's Nangarhar province and was involved in many disruptive activities in Bajaur. Pakistan continues to reel under terrorism with a surge of 25 per cent terror incidents in 2025 compared to the previous year, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa being the worst hit province, according to a report by Islamabad-based Centre for Research and Security Studies on Wednesday.

Putin rejects key US proposal on Ukraine

ASSOCIATED PRESS
■ Moscow

Russian President Vladimir Putin says some proposals in a US plan to end the war in Ukraine are unacceptable to the Kremlin, indicating in comments published Thursday that any deal is still some ways off.

US President Donald Trump has set in motion the most intense diplomatic push to stop the fighting since Russia launched the full-scale invasion of its neighbour nearly four years ago. But the effort has once again run into demands that are hard to reconcile, especially over whether Ukraine must give up land to Russia and how it can be kept safe from any future aggression by Moscow.

Trump's special envoy, Steve Witkoff, and son-in-law Jared Kushner are set to meet with Ukraine's lead negotiator, Rustem Umerov, later Thursday in Miami for further talks, according to a senior Trump administration official who wasn't authorised to comment publicly and spoke on condition of anonymity.

Putin said his five-hour talks Tuesday in the Kremlin with Witkoff and Kushner were "necessary" and "useful," but also "difficult work," and some proposals were unacceptable.

Putin spoke to the India Today TV channel before visiting New Delhi on Thursday. Before the full interview was broadcast, Russian state news agencies Tass and RIA Novosti quoted some of his remarks in it. Tass quoted Putin as saying



that in Tuesday's talks, the sides "had to go through each point" of the US peace proposal, "which is why it took so long."

"This was a necessary conversation, a very concrete one," he said, with provisions that Moscow was ready to discuss, while others "we can't agree to."

Trump said Wednesday that Witkoff and Kushner came away from their marathon session confident that he wants to find an end to the war. "Their impression was very strongly that he'd like to make a deal," he added. Putin refused to elaborate on what Russia could accept or reject, and none of the other officials involved

offered details of the talks. "I think it is premature. Because it could simply disrupt the working regime of the peace effort, Tass quoted Putin as saying.

European leaders, left on the sidelines by Washington as US officials engage directly with Moscow and Kyiv, have accused Putin of feigning interest in Trump's peace drive. Russian barages of civilian areas of Ukraine continued overnight into Thursday. A missile struck Kryvyi Rih on Wednesday night, wounding six people, including a 3-year-old girl, according to city administration head Oleksandr Vilkul.

The attack on Ukrainian

President Volodymyr Zelenskyy's hometown damaged more than 40 residential buildings, a school and domestic gas pipes, Vilkul said. A 6-year-old girl died in the southern city of Kherson after Russian artillery shelling wounded her the previous day, regional military administration chief Oleksandr Prokudin wrote on Telegram.

The Kherson Thermal Power Plant, which provides heat for over 40,000 residents, shut down Thursday after Russia pounded it with drones and artillery for several days, he said. Authorities planned emergency meetings to find alternate sources of heating,

he said. Until then, tents were erected across the city where residents could warm up and charge electronic devices.

Russia also struck Odesa with drones, wounding six people, while civilian and energy infrastructure was damaged, said Oleh Kiper, head of the regional military administration. Overall, Russia fired two ballistic missiles and 138 drones at Ukraine overnight, officials said. Meanwhile, in the Russia-occupied part of the Kherson region, two men were killed by a Ukrainian drone strike on their vehicle Thursday, Moscow-installed regional leader Vladimir Saldo said.

Terror attacks increased in Pakistan: Report



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ Karachi

Pakistan continues to reel under terrorism with a surge of 25 per cent violence-related incidents in 2025 compared to the previous year, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa being the worst hit province, a think tank report has said.

Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan together accounted for over 96 per cent of all 3,187 fatalities and 92 per cent of all incidents of violence recorded through January to November 2025, according to the Islamabad-based Centre for Research and Security Studies (CRSS).

"Till November, an overall surge of 25 per cent was observed in violence, which resulted in 3,187 deaths in comparison to 2,546 casualties in 2024, a rise of around 20 per cent," the report, published on Wednesday, by CRSS, a non-profit, independent think tank, said.

In 2024, 2,546 deaths and 1981 injuries were reported. The figures include civilians, security personnel, and militants killed in anti-terror operations. The fatalities reported were from 1,188 recorded incidents of violence, including terror attacks and counter terrorism operations, mainly concentrated in the northwestern Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan provinces.

After clashes and tense relations with Afghanistan, violence has been at its peak in recent months in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, observed the report by CRSS, founded by civil society activists to monitor the security landscape in the country.

The Pakistan Government accuses the banned terror

CLASHES AND TENSE RELATIONS WITH AFGHANISTAN, VIOLENCE HAS BEEN AT ITS PEAK IN RECENT MONTHS IN KHYBER PAKHTUNKHWA

outfit Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) of carrying out terror attacks after its cease-fire deal ended in November 2022. Khyber Pakhtunkhwa was the worst hit region with around 68 per cent (2,165) of the total deaths, and over 62 per cent (732) of the incidents of violence, followed by Balochistan, accounting for over 28 per cent of the total fatalities (896) and over 30 per cent of the incidents reported (366).

The remaining regions of Pakistan — Sindh, Punjab, Pakistan-occupied Kashmir and Islamabad Capital Territory (ICT) — collectively experienced 90 incidents, with 126 lives lost, constituting just 4 per cent of all fatalities, the report said.

The CRSS said on average there were approximately 15 casualties per day throughout the reporting period. It also said that counter terrorism operations by security forces were impactful in the first 11 months of 2025, resulting in 1,795 militant fatalities — approximately 30 per cent more than the 1,392 lives lost in terrorist attacks.

However, in Balochistan, terrorist attacks by mainly banned insurgent groups were responsible for 517 fatalities among security forces personnel and civilians, outnumbering the militants killed in security operations by 36 per cent.

Critically ill former Bangladesh PM Zia to be taken to London: reports

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ Dhaka

Family of former Bangladesh prime minister Khalada Zia, who remains in a critical condition here, is preparing to transfer her to London, where her son and BNP acting chairperson Tarique Rahman lives, media reports said Thursday.

Zia, the 80-year-old Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) chairperson, was admitted to a private hospital on November 23 when she developed a chest infection that affected both her heart and lungs.

Four days later, the three-time prime minister was shifted to the coronary care unit (CCU) after several of her health complications worsened. BBC Bangla Service and Ittefaq newspaper said Zia's son and BNP's self-exiled acting chairperson Tarique

Rahman's wife Zubaida Rahman, a doctor herself, is expected to arrive in Dhaka soon to oversee the transfer of her ailing mother-in-law. "After arriving in Bangladesh, Zubaida Rahman will take her to London (after) assessing Zia's physical condition," at the Dhaka hospital, the BBC Bangla reported saying, several BNP leaders confirmed the decision without mentioning their names.

Qatar, meanwhile, said it is ready to provide an air ambulance for Zia for taking her to London even as two military and air force helicopters on Thursday staged landing tests at the rooftop of Dhaka's Evercare Hospital, where she is admitted.

"If madam's (Zia) health is suitable for travel, we plan to take her to London tomorrow morning. It all depends on her health," Zia's adviser Enamul Haque Chowdhury

told The Daily Star newspaper. A four-member Chinese medical team, comprising doctors Chi Jiang Fang, Yan Xin, Zhong Yuhui, and Meng Huang Wu, arrived at the Evercare Hospital late on Wednesday night and met with the medical board to review treatment options for the BNP chairperson, the state-run BSS news agency reported. BNP Secretary General Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir met the specialists upon their arrival and discussed Zia's treatment with them, according to news portal bdnews24.Com.

The Chinese doctors joined a four-member UK specialist group led by Dr Richard Buell that had arrived earlier in the day to help chart an advanced treatment plan. The team's arrival marked the second batch of Chinese doctors, who had arrived earlier this week.

Flood death toll in Asia surpasses 1,500 as calls grow to fight deforestation

ASSOCIATED PRESS
■ Padang

Deaths from last week's catastrophic floods and landslides in parts of Asia surged past 1,500 Thursday as rescue teams raced to reach survivors isolated by the disaster with hundreds of people still unaccounted for across the region.

The tragedy of so much death and destruction was compounded by warnings that decades of deforestation caused by unchecked development, mining and palm oil plantations may have worsened the devastation.

Calls grew for the Government to act. "We need the Government to investigate and fix forest management," said Rangga Adiputra, a 31-year-old teacher whose home in West Sumatra was swept away. The hills above his village on the outskirts of Padang city had been scarred by illegal logging. "We don't



want this costly disaster to happen again," he said.

Authorities said 837 people were confirmed dead in Indonesia, 479 in Sri Lanka and 185 in Thailand, as well as three in Malaysia. Many villages in Indonesia and Sri Lanka remained buried under mud and debris, with 861 people still unaccounted for in both countries. Thousands

reportedly faced severe shortages of food and clean water in cut off areas. The floods and landslides washed away roads and bridges and knocked out telecommunications, leaving many communities inaccessible.

Indonesian television showed images of huge amounts of felled timber carried downstream in North

Sumatra, West Sumatra and Aceh provinces. The leading Indonesian environmental group WALHI said that decades of deforestation — driven by mining, palm oil plantations, and illegal logging — stripped away natural defences that once absorbed rainfall and stabilised soil. "The disaster was not just nature's fury, it was

amplified by decades of deforestation," said Rianda Purba, an activist with the group.

"Deforestation and unchecked development have stripped Sumatra of its resilience." The group recorded more than 240,000 hectares (nearly 600,000 acres) of primary forest were lost in 2024 alone, leaving Sumatra's small river basins dangerously exposed.

Another environmental group, Global Forest Watch, has said the flood-inundated Indonesian provinces of Aceh, North Sumatra and West Sumatra have since 2000 lost 19,600 sq km (7,569 square miles) of forest, an area larger than the state of New Jersey.

"Unless restoration begins now, more lives will be lost," Purba warned. Massive piles of neatly cut timber lay scattered among the debris across Parkit Beach, a sight that stunned emergency crews deployed to the area.



Lithuanian court convicts leader for antisemitic speech

ASSOCIATED PRESS
■ Vilnius

A Lithuanian court on Thursday convicted the leader of one of the parties in the country's coalition Government for making antisemitic comments and fined him 5,000 euros (about \$5,800). The district court in the capital, Vilnius, found that Remigijus Lemaitytis incited hatred against Jews, grossly downplayed Nazi Germany's crimes and grossly minimized the Holocaust in an offensive and insulting manner. The punishment fell short of prosecutors' call for him to be fined 51,000 euros (around \$60,000) and ordered to pay into a fund for victims of crimes. The case relates to social media posts and public statements from May and June 2023 in which, among other things, he wrote: "Apparently, for our journalists and local Lithuanian Jews, the demolition of schools in Palestine is yet another pastime?!"



One dead in targeted shooting in Washington

ASSOCIATED PRESS
■ Oxon Hill

A man was killed in a targeted shooting at the food court at MGM National Harbor hotel and casino in the Maryland suburbs of Washington, police said. Detectives were working to determine the circumstances, and Prince George's County Police Chief George Nader said at a news conference that they are searching for the shooter, who was captured on video. Officers responded to the shooting just before Wednesday noon and found one victim, a man, who died, Nader said. The shooting was not random, he said. The shooter went to the food court to find the victim, who was ordering food when the suspect appeared and opened fire, he said. The shooter and victim did not exchange any words before the shooting.

Thai worker’s remains returned from Gaza

ASSOCIATED PRESS
■ Jerusalem

Remains that militants in Gaza handed to Israel as part of the first phase of the ceasefire deal were those of a Thai agricultural worker, Israeli and Thai officials said Thursday. The return of Sudthisak Rinthalak’s remains leaves just one more hostage to be returned under the agreement.

Sudthisak was an agricultural worker who had been employed at Kibbutz Be’eri, one of the hardest-hit communities in the attack. Israeli officials said the 42-year-old was killed on October 7, 2023, during the Hamas-led attack in Israel that triggered the Israel-Hamas war and that his body was taken by the militant group Islamic Jihad.

He was officially declared dead on May 16, 2024. Sudthisak’s remains were returned on Wednesday, a day after militants handed over remains that didn’t match either of the last two hostages. Thai Foreign Ministry spokesperson Nikorndej Balankura said Sudthisak’s family has been notified and thanked the Israeli Government for assistance that led to the release of all 31 Thai hostages taken at the start of the war. Of those, 28 were returned alive, and three were dead.

Thais were the largest group of foreigners to be held in captivity. The Thai Foreign Ministry has said that, in addition to the



Hamas hand over a body bag believed to contain the remains of a deceased hostage to the Red Cross for transfer to Israeli authorities, in Beit Lahiya, in the northern Gaza Strip

hostages, 46 Thais have been killed during the war. Israeli Ran Gvili is now the last hostage whose remains have yet to be returned. Gvili was an Israeli police officer who helped people escape from the Nova music festival during the Oct. 7 attack and was killed fighting at another location.

Since the October 10 start of the ceasefire, 20 living hostages and the remains of 27 others have been returned to Israel. In exchange, Israel has released the bodies of hundreds of Palestinians to Gaza. Most remain unidentified.

The return of all the hostages is an essential

element of the first phase of the US-brokered ceasefire that began in October, which both Hamas and Israel have accused the other of breaking. In exchange, Israel has been releasing Palestinian prisoners.

The plan is still in the early stages, and many questions linger over its implementation. The plan to secure and govern the territory authorises an international stabilisation force to provide security, approves a transitional authority to be overseen by US President Donald Trump and envisions a possible future path to an independent Palestinian state.

More violence reported in Gaza

In Gaza, the Kuwait Speciality Hospital in Rafah said on Thursday it had received the bodies of five people, including two children, following an Israeli airstrike in the south of the strip late Wednesday.

Another 32 people were treated for wounds sustained in the strike on the town of Muwasi, the hospital said. Israel said it launched an airstrike targeting a Hamas militant in retaliation for an attack earlier in the day that wounded five Israeli soldiers. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said Hamas vio-

lated the ceasefire when, according to the army, militants emerged from a tunnel and attacked Israeli soldiers in an area under their control.

Relatives angry at ceasefire violation

Relatives of the dead Palestinians wept and wailed over their loved ones’ bodies being transported in white body bags through the city of Khan Younis on Thursday.

All five of the dead belong to the same family. Blood stains still marked the mattresses on the floor of a tent encampment that was struck.

Some relatives voiced their outrage that people are still being killed during what’s supposed to be a cessation of fighting. Aisha Abu Jazar, a woman living near where the Palestinians were killed, said she was shocked to hear “unusually intense fire” by Israelis overnight.

“They fired a missile at a tent made of cloth, plastic, and wood. The children were asleep. What did the children do to deserve being torn apart in their sleep? What did they do to deserve this?” she said. “We were supposed to be in a ceasefire,” she added.

Israel names new spy chief

Netanyahu appointed his military secretary, Maj. Gen. Roman Goffman, as chief of the country’s Mossad spy agency, the prime minister’s office said in a statement Thursday. Goffman replaces outgoing agency boss David Barnea,

whose five-year term ends in June 2026. The appointment will be put to the Advisory Committee for Appointments to Senior Positions for ratification. Goffman served as commander of several Israeli army brigades, battalions and divisions before leading the country’s National Ground Training Centre and the Government Operations Headquarters in the Territories, the statement said.

Netanyahu believes Goffman is the most worthy and capable candidate who possesses “exceptional professional abilities” and demonstrates “creativity, initiative, cunning, deep knowledge of the enemy, absolute discretion and secrecy,” the statement said. Gaza’s Health Ministry says 366 Palestinians have been killed there since the start of the ceasefire. Israel still carries out strikes in response to what it has called violations of the truce, and bodies from earlier in the war are being recovered from the rubble.

The war began with a Hamas-led attack on southern Israel on October 7, 2023, in which around 1,200 people were killed, and more than 250 others were taken hostage. Almost all of the hostages or their remains have been returned in ceasefires or other deals. The Palestinian death toll has surpassed 70,100 [since the war began, according to Gaza’s Health Ministry, which operates under the Hamas-run Government.

It is staffed by medical professionals and maintains detailed records viewed as generally reliable by the international community.

Massive power outage hits Cuba



ASSOCIATED PRESS
■ Havana

A blackout hit Havana and the rest of the western half of Cuba on Wednesday, leaving millions of people without power on an island struggling with chronic outages blamed on a crumbling electric grid.

Lázaro Guerra, general director of the Ministry of Energy and Mines, said the massive outage was caused by a failure on a transmission line that connects two major plants.

The power grid was operational once again by Wednesday afternoon, but the Government warned that the restoration of electricity would not be immediate and that generation deficits persisted.

The nearly 12-hour blackout snarled activities in the capital and beyond. In Havana, dozens of police officers tried to direct traffic while many students who were already in school were sent back home. Small businesses that have generators resumed their sales, especially of food.

Some areas had intermittent internet service, so many residents were left wondering what had happened. “There’s no connec-

tion. No one knows why the power is out. They’re not saying anything; it’s all silence,” grumbled Raúl Calderón, an 82-year-old retiree, as he waited to hear official reports on the radio. The outage followed two days of peak-hour power shortages across the island.

A total blackout hit Cuba in September, with officials blaming aging infrastructure and fuel shortages at power plants. The ongoing outages also affect water service and impact the island’s fragile business sector. “Things are bad. The power plants are breaking down a lot. I have two children, and food is hard to come by,” said Liubel Quintana, a 47-year-old cafe owner. “It’s very tough everywhere you look.”

Cuba is going through a severe economic crisis that deepened during the coronavirus pandemic, which paralysed the key tourism sector, and was exacerbated by an increase in US sanctions and a failed internal financial reform to unify the currency.

Meanwhile, thermal power plants have been operating for over 30 years and receive little maintenance, which is expensive for Cuban budgets.

Trump administration orders H-1B, H-4 visa applicants to make social media profiles public

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ New York/Washington

The US Government has expanded screening and vetting measures for H-1B visa applicants and their H-4 dependents, directing them to keep the privacy settings on all their social media profiles set to “public”.

In a new order issued Wednesday, the State Department said beginning December 15, a review of the online presence for all H-1B applicants and their dependents will be conducted. Students and exchange visitors were already subject to

such scrutiny, which has now been extended to include those applying for H-1B and H-4 visas.

“To facilitate this vetting, all applicants for H-1B and their dependents (H-4), F, M, and J nonimmigrant visas are instructed to adjust the privacy settings on all of their social media profiles to ‘public,’” the State Department said.

Underscoring that a US visa is a privilege and not a right, the department said it uses all available information in screening and vetting to identify visa applicants who are inadmissible or

pose a threat to America’s national security or public safety. “Every visa adjudication is a national security decision,” it said.

The department said the US “must be vigilant” to ensure applicants do not intend to harm Americans and that all visa applicants credibly establish eligibility and intent to comply with the terms of their admission.

The directive is the latest in a series of steps by the Trump administration to tighten immigration rules.

The administration has launched a massive crack-down to check abuse of the

H-1B visa programme, used largely by US technology companies to hire foreign workers. Indian professionals, including tech workers and physicians, form one of the largest groups of H-1B visa holders.

In September, US President Donald Trump issued a proclamation, titled ‘Restriction on Entry of Certain Nonimmigrant Workers’, imposing a one-time \$100,000 fee on new H-1B work visas, an order that could significantly impact Indian workers seeking temporary employment in the US.

Pak lifts ban on festive kite flying after 20 years

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ Lahore

Amid pressure from artists and civil society members, a ban on kite flying during the Basant festival has been lifted in Pakistan’s Punjab province after 20 years.

The decision by Maryam Nawaz led the administration has evoked widespread excitement across cities and villages in the province of 13 million people.

Celebrated towards the end of winters to mark the arrival of spring (Basant) season, the Basant festival has been an occasion for community celebrations across the province.

Kite flying during Basant festivities was an integral part for centuries but was banned about two decades ago. Announcing the details of the decision made on

Wednesday, Punjab’s Minister for Information and Culture Azma Bokhari said on Thursday that there will, however, be several restrictions and fines for those violating new rules regarding the same.

“After 20 years, the joy of Basant has finally returned to Punjab. But this time, it comes under strict safety regulations. No one will be allowed to break the law during the festival,” Bokhari said in a statement.

In 2005, the Government imposed the ban on kite-flying following several deaths, especially of motorcyclists and children, in accidents when the kite’s sharp glass-coated strings got entangled around their necks leading to serious injuries.

Azma added that children under 18 will not be allowed to fly kites.

Trump hosts leaders of Congo, Rwanda to sign key deal for peace in eastern Congo

ASSOCIATED PRESS
■ Washington

US President Donald Trump will host the leaders of the Democratic Republic of Congo and Rwanda on Thursday for a deal-signing aimed at ending the conflict in eastern Congo and opening access to the region’s critical minerals for the US Government and American companies.

The moment provides Trump—who has repeatedly and with a measure of exaggeration boasted of brokering peace in some of the world’s most entrenched conflicts—another chance to tout himself as a dealmaker extraordinaire on the global stage and make the case that he’s deserving of the Nobel Peace Prize. The US leader hasn’t been shy about

CONGO HAS BEEN BATTERED BY FIGHTING WITH ARMED GROUPS, THE MOST POTENT BEING THE RWANDA-BACKED M23

his desire to receive the honour. Trump is welcoming Presidents Felix Tshisekedi of Congo and Paul Kagame of Rwanda, as well as several officials from other African nations travelling to Washington to witness the signing, in the same week he contemptuously derided the war-torn country of Somalia and said he did he did not want immigrants from the East African nation in the US.

Lauded by the White House as a “historic” agreement brokered by Trump, the

Mexican farmers protest new water law proposal



ASSOCIATED PRESS
■ Mexico City

Dozens of farmers drove their tractors in a caravan to Mexico City and blocked an entrance to Mexico’s Congress to protest a new national water law that imposes stricter controls on water use. The farmers amassed outside the congressional chamber on Wednesday to protest the General Water Law proposal, which they say will take water away from the countryside and re-allocate it for discretionary use. They say the proposal threatens their livelihoods and chips away at their fundamental right to water. “If it affects the countryside, it affects the city!” read a banner hanging from two tractors. “We are protesting against the imposition by the federal

Government of a new water law, a reform that puts at risk the ownership of our lands,” said Jorge Robles, a farmer from the northern state of Chihuahua. The proposal backed by Mexican President Claudia Sheinbaum is being discussed in the Chamber of Deputies, where the president’s Morena Party has a majority. The law aims for the federal Government to impose stricter penalties for water-related crimes and regulate water concessions – a sector plagued by high-profile corruption cases.

The farmers brought their demonstrations to the country’s capital less than a week after they and groups of truck drivers lifted road and highway blockades in at least seven of the country’s 32 States.

EU’s former chief diplomat quits amid fraud probe

ASSOCIATED PRESS
■ Brussels

The European Union’s former foreign policy chief resigned on Thursday as head of a prestigious institute of European studies after becoming embroiled in a fraud investigation over a training programme for junior diplomats. Federica Mogherini said she was stepping down as Rector of the College of Europe, based in the Belgian city of Bruges, and as of the European Union Diplomatic Academy.

Mogherini’s statement gave no reason for the resignation, saying only that she had done so “in line with the utmost rigor and fairness with which I always carried out my duties.” “I am proud of what we have achieved together, and I am deeply grateful for the trust, esteem, and support that students, faculty, staff, and Alumni of the College and the Academy have shown

and are showing to me,” she said. As the EU’s top diplomat from 2014 to 2019, Mogherini was responsible for supervising the Iran nuclear talks, leading efforts to improve long-strained relations between Serbia and Kosovo, and a host of other foreign policy and security issues.

The arrest and resignation of the former Italian foreign minister could tarnish the EU’s image on the world stage as it seeks to assert influence in negotiations aimed at ending the war in Ukraine. The bloc has been urging Ukraine to tackle rampant corruption. Mogherini was detained for questioning Tuesday, along with a senior college staff member and a senior official from the European Commission, after authorities in Belgium raided the offices of the EU diplomatic service in Brussels and the college in Bruges.



Pilot safely ejects before F-16 crashes in US

ASSOCIATED PRESS
■ Trona

A fighter jet with the Air Force’s elite Thunderbirds demonstration squadron crashed in the Southern California desert, but the pilot managed to eject safely, the military said. The pilot was being treated at a hospital for injuries that were not life-threatening, according to the San Bernardino County Fire Department. The F-16C Fighting Falcon crashed around 10:45 am on Wednesday during a training mission “over controlled airspace in California,” according to a statement from Nellis Air Force Base in Nevada. The fire department said it had responded to an “aircraft emergency” near Trona, an unincorporated community in the Mojave Desert about 180 miles (290 kilometers) north of Los Angeles. In 2022, a Navy F/A-18E Super Hornet crashed near Trona, killing the pilot.



Officers wounded, suspect killed in US shooting

ASSOCIATED PRESS
■ Omaha

Three Omaha police officers have been wounded and a suspect killed in an exchange of gunfire at a gas station. The suspect, a man in his 20s, had earlier shot a 61-year-old man several times in the chest about noon at a grocery store, Police Chief Todd Schmaderer said. Officers obtained a license plate number from the scene and followed the suspect’s car to the gas station, he said. The officers watched the suspect get out and enter a restroom on Wednesday. He then left the room and began firing on the officers, the chief said. Two officers were hit, and a third was hit by shrapnel. The officers returned fire, and the suspect was killed. “This is a very dangerous day involving this suspect in the city of Omaha,” Schmaderer said. The officers suffered non-life-threatening injuries and were taken to a local hospital.





Assam CM Himanta Biswa Sarma at the inauguration of the newly constructed 'Kendriya Palnam Than' of Eksaran Bhagawati Samaj at Kaliyabor, Nagaon

Aurobindo Society unveils charter for Indian knowledge systems in schools



Aurobindo Society has initiated a nationwide movement to embed Indian Knowledge Systems into school education, hosting the first International Conference on Integrating IKS in School Education. At the event, the Society unveiled India's first IKS Charter, a national framework providing guidelines for responsible, research-backed and classroom-ready integration of IKS. The Charter outlines principles, curriculum pathways, age-appropriate modules, assessments and teacher-preparation approaches.

Speaking at the event, Sambhrant Sharma said the movement aims to bring India's civilisational wisdom into the core of schooling in a practical and future-ready manner. Chief Guest Bajrang Bagra (VHP) praised the Charter as an essential guideline for safe and effective implementation. The event was organised in partnership with Maharishi International University (USA), Lal Bahadur Shastri National Sanskrit University, *Bhartiya Shiksha* Board, and Future Icons.

Campaign AOTY 2025: Raj Kamble wins top leadership award

Raj Kamble, founder and chief creative officer of famous innovations, has been honoured with one of the highest individual recognitions at the campaign agency of the year awards 2025. He was named "agency head and growth leader of the year", marking his fourth win – a record achievement that makes him the only independent agency head to receive this distinction. Past recipients include industry veterans such as Piyush Pandey, Prasoon Joshi and Ashish Bhasin.

The accolade places Kamble among India's most influential leaders in advertising and marketing. The category acknowledges professionals who have successfully built high-performing agencies, delivered noteworthy business results for brands, and set new benchmarks in creativity and growth.



His Holiness Dalai Lama launching the book titled 'Forest Resources in India' co-authored by Himachal Pradesh Environment Secretary Sushil Kumar Singla, retired Indian Forest Service officer Rakesh B Sinha and Solan University former scientist Krishna Kumar Raina published by National Book Trust

President awards for empowerment of persons with disabilities

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

A society that embraces every individual's abilities becomes stronger, more humane and more prosperous": President of India at National Awards for Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities 2025.

The President of India, Droupadi Murmu, today inspired the nation with a powerful message at the National Awards for Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities 2025, affirming that "a society that embraces every individual's abilities becomes stronger, more humane and more prosperous."

Addressing the gathering at *Vigyan Bhawan* on the International Day of persons with disabilities, she reminded the country that inclusion, dignity and equal opportunity are the true measures of national progress.

She emphasised that the day carries immense significance as it "reminds us of our collective responsibility to build a society that is just, inclusive and enabling for every citizen, especially our *Divyangjan*." The President



highlighted India's long-standing commitment to honouring excellence and empowering Persons with Disabilities, noting that the Awards not only recognise extraordinary achievements but also inspire compassion, responsibility and action.

She lauded the courage and leadership of the 32 awardees, describing them as "shining examples of India's commitment to dignity, equality and inclusion." Recalling the transformative impact of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act,

PM Modi grand architect of new and resurgent NE: Sonowal

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

The Union Minister for Ports, Shipping and Waterways Sarbananda Sonowal said Prime Minister Narendra Modi has emerged as "the grand architect of a new and resurgent Northeast," transforming a region once neglected for decades into a major driver of India's growth, connectivity and national pride.

Speaking on the development outcomes achieved over the last decade, Sonowal said the Northeast has transitioned "from the margins of policymaking to the mainstream of national priorities," reflecting the prime minister's commitment to infrastructure expansion, economic reform, cultural revival and long-term peace-building.

"The Northeast suffered seven decades of under-representation and under-investment," Sarbananda Sonowal said. "Under Modi ji, the region is recognised as the *Ashtalakshmi* of India – not just a border region but a new engine of national growth. From railway capital connectivity and airports to highways, power, digital networks and inland waterways, the transformation has been historic." The Union Minister Sarbananda Sonowal said



Sarbananda Sonowal

connectivity has been the cornerstone of the prime minister's roadmap. All major gauge conversion work in the region has been completed, with Arunachal Pradesh, Tripura, Manipur and Mizoram connected to the broad gauge network and goods and passenger trains reaching the region's interiors for the first time.

The Bogibeel rail-cum-road bridge – completed in 2018 and the commissioning of the Bhairabi – Sairang link in June 2025 have expanded access across Assam and Mizoram.

Four capital connectivity

rail projects – Nagaland, Manipur, Sikkim and Meghalaya – are underway, while the India – Bangladesh Agartala – Akhaura rail link was inaugurated jointly by the prime ministers of both nations in November 2023.

On roads, more than 11,000 km of upgraded national and strategic highways have been taken up in the last decade.

Major corridors include the Shillong – Nongstoin – Tura section, the Nechipu – Hoj NH-13 project and the capital connectivity highways to Kohima, Itanagar



Born in the highlands, destined for honour

TONY DAS
■ Alo, West Siang

The Indian Army's continuous outreach and mentoring efforts in the remote areas of West Siang have yielded yet another proud milestone. Three young aspirants from the Aalo region – Jari Bagra, Toni Doji and Yumper Nada – have successfully cleared the Agniveer selection process and will now proceed to the Recruiting Office, Jorhat on 04 December 2025 for enrolment into the Assam Regiment.

These youths, hailing from the villages of Along and Basar, overcame geographical isolation and limited access to resources through sheer determination and disciplined preparation. Their achievement reflects the impact of the Indian

Army's sustained guidance, structured training support, and its commitment to empowering deserving talent from far-flung areas of Arunachal Pradesh.

To honour their remarkable accomplishment and encourage them as they step into a life of service and responsibility, a felicitation ceremony was conducted on 03 December 2025 to celebrate their hard work and inspire other young individuals across Arunachal to pursue their dreams with similar resolve.

The Indian Army remains dedicated to nurturing potential in border communities, ensuring that opportunity reaches even the most remote corners. The success of these three youths stands as a testament to what courage, mentorship and persistence can achieve.

CM Sarma presents seed capital under MMUA at Tamulpur

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Guwahati

Empowering the *Nari Shakti* of Bodoland Territorial Region (BTR), Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Thursday handed over ₹10,000 seed capital each to 35,199 women beneficiaries under *Mukahya Mantri Mahila Udyamita Abhiyan* at a programme held at Tamulpur.

Speaking on the occasion, Chief Minister Sarma said that MMUA has given a new fillip to strengthening women-led enterprise and livelihoods across the region, which has led to a new awakening among the women of the State.

He observed that from ancient times, the women of Assam exceptionally led several fields and *Sati Joymati* and *Mulagabharu* showed this with fine examples. Although, instead of income-generating works, most women in the State stayed engaged in household tasks, a few women got themselves engaged in different business activities.

In this backdrop, the transformational movement of self-help groups began in the state and as a result, the number of enterprising women kept rising. He said that through various business initiatives, women in the State have started to earn their own income.

The Chief Minister said that Prime Minister Narendra Modi trusts the strength and capacity of women and he aims to help three crore women in the country grow into *Lakhpati*



Baideus. The goal is to build a new force of women who can earn more than ₹1 lakh in a year through entrepreneurial activities. In Assam, forty lakh women now work with self-help groups. The Chief Minister said that many women have already used bank loans and their own savings to run businesses and have joined the ranks of *Lakhpati Baideus*. He said that more than eight lakh women in the State have now become *Lakhpati*.

Dr Sarma said that earlier women in the State wanted to run businesses but the lack of capital held them back. He said that after long discussion, the present Government decided to support each member directly to encourage entrepreneurship. Under the *Mukhyamantri Mahila Udyamita Abhiyan*, the State arranged to give ₹10,000 to each of the forty lakh self-

help group members. He said that the State Government would spend ₹4000 crore for this purpose.

Commenting on the cheque distribution event held in Tamulpur, he said that the State Government has already covered 45 assembly constituencies and 10 lakh women have been benefited.

Catering to the needs of these 45 constituencies proves that the State Government fulfils its promises. Speaker Assam Legislative Assembly Biswajit Daimary, CEM BTC Hagrama Mohilary, Cabinet Ministers Jayanta Mallabaruah and Charan Boro, Tamulpur MLA Jalen Daimary, several BTC executive members, Mission Director Assam State Rural Livelihood Mission Kuntal Moni Sarma Bordoloi, along with a host of other dignitaries were present on the occasion.

Dr Rajib Mukhapadhyay honoured with ET young leaders award 2025

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

Dr Rajib Mukhapadhyay, Country Head and Director (Finance) at SkyPower Global and Co-founder of the social welfare organisation Le Rythme, has been honoured with the prestigious ET Young Industry Leaders 2025 Award.

The award, which recognises excellence in social impact, inclusive growth, and nation-building, was presented by acclaimed Bollywood actress Taapsee Pannu at an exclusive ceremony held at The Grand, New Delhi.

The evening brought together distinguished industry leaders, policymakers, and transformative social change agents.

A highly respected academic and global finance leader, Dr Mukhapadhyay is an alumnus of IIM Kolkata and a Fellow Member of The Institute of Cost Accountants of India.

With over 30 years of international leadership experience, he has signifi-



cantly influenced the financial frameworks of global multinational organisations.

His deep expertise covers multi-billion-dollar project financing, treasury operations, mergers and acquisitions, enterprise risk management, and long-term financial planning.

During his tenure as Regional Treasurer at Alstom, Dr Mukhapadhyay oversaw treasury and governance across 15 countries, driving operational efficiency and financial compliance at a global level.

Earlier, at GAIL (India) Limited, he spearheaded one of India's pioneering digital finance initiatives –

implementing the nation's first 100 per cent corporate electronic banking platform, a milestone that modernised the company's financial systems and set a precedent for digital transformation in the public sector.

Beyond his corporate accomplishments, Dr Mukhapadhyay is profoundly dedicated to social development. As Co-founder of Le Rythme, an organisation established in memory of his late wife, he has championed large-scale initiatives aimed at empowering marginalised communities through skill development, livelihood generation and vocational training.

BRIEFLY

GAGANJEET BHULLAR BAGS
THIRD IGPL TITLE IN STYLE



Gaganjeet Bhullar, who modestly began the week, closed it in a masterly fashion to become the first player to win three times on the IGPL Tour.

Bhullar, who opened the week with a round of 1-under 71, which included a hole-in-one, added solid rounds of 67-67 on the last two days to total a winning 11-under.

The highly talented 21-year-old Raghav Chugh gave it all, but with three pars in the last three holes, he fell one short and ended a creditable sole second.

Chugh shot 4-under 68 and totalled 10-under for the week. Three internationals, Filipino Justin Quiban, Mexican Santiago de la Fuentes and Indian-American Manav Shah, all hoping to become the first international to win on the IGPL, were thwarted at the finish and ended tied third at 8-under.

SANDHU LEADS BY THREE
SHOTS IN JAIPUR



Indian golfer Yuvraj Sandhu carded an impressive third-round score of four-under 66 to establish a three-shot lead with a total of 16-under 194 at the Jaipur Open here on Thursday.

Sandhu (65-63-66), who was in second place and one shot off the lead at the start of round three, produced an eagle, four birdies and two bogeys during his 66 to take control in the penultimate round.

Sandhu is in pursuit of his sixth PGTI title this season. If Yuvraj does go on to bag his sixth win of 2025, he would match the PGTI record for most titles in a season set by Manu Gandas in 2022.

Nikita overcomes tragedies to win gold in KIUG

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ Jaipur

Young women's hockey player Nikita Toppo stands out not just for her exploits in the midfield but also for her resilience in overcoming tough times and a career-threatening injury early in her playing career.

The 22-year-old skipper played a pivotal role in helping Kalinga Institute of Industrial Technology (KIIT) clinch the women's hockey gold in the institution's maiden appearance at the Khelo India University Games here.

Nikita lost her parents when she was five years old, while one of her elder brothers died in an accident when she was on her way to U-23 Five-Nations Cup in Ireland three years ago. A year later,

she suffered a career-threatening injury and soon after her other brother met with an accident and suffered a skull injury from which he hasn't completely recovered yet.

But instead of getting bogged down by the series of setbacks, Nikita found solace in hockey.

"Before this (success at the KIUG), we would not clear our zone as there are many good university teams in Odisha. But from last year onwards, me and my coach have been working on building a strong team by getting good players to take admission in our university. "Before we came here, we were determined to win the title here," Nikita said after her team defeated ITM University, Gwalior, to take the top spot.

Nikita controlled the pace



of the game in the final in the defensive midfielder's role and ensured the ITM players could not penetrate her team's citadel.

However, it's not just Nikita's hockey skills but the clarity of thought and resilience that set her apart.

"I believe what happened, happened, and we can't change it. I focus on the present and accept the situation. I remain strong for my team and my family, or what's left of it, and I don't shed a tear because I don't want my insecurities and unfortunate incidents to take over me and cloud my mind," she said about her personal setbacks.

"What happened to my brother in 2022 was heart-breaking. But I didn't let it pull me down, and I didn't want

my team to suffer because of me. No matter how much I miss him, he won't come back," added Nikita, who could not even attend his last rites. The Indian team then won a silver medal in the U-23 Five-Nations Cup.

Nikita, whose hockey career started when she joined the Government Sports Hostel in Panposh, Rourkela, in 2016, was also part of the Indian U-21 team that won four matches and drew one during their South Africa tour in 2023.

But a ligament tear during a Khelo India Youth Games training camp in 2023 and an accident to her other surviving brother meant that she took almost a year to recover both physically and mentally to start performing on the field again.

Won't ask Piastri for F1 title help: Norris

ASSOCIATED PRESS
■ Abu Dhabi

Lando Norris says he won't ask his McLaren teammate Oscar Piastri to give up a place to favour him in the three-way Formula 1 title fight with Max Verstappen at the season-ending Abu Dhabi Grand Prix.

Norris has a 12-point lead over Verstappen going into Sunday's race, with Piastri four points further back.

If Verstappen is far ahead of both McLarens, its possible Piastri could be in a situation where he can't take the title himself but can aid Norris' title bid. If Verstappen wins on Sunday, a top-three finish would be enough for Norris.

"Honestly, I mean, I would love it, but I don't think I would ask it because it's up to Oscar if he would allow it. I don't think it's necessarily down to me," Norris said, sitting alongside Piastri and Verstappen at a pre-race news conference on Thursday.

Norris added he believed



he would help out Piastri if the roles were reversed, but said they hadn't discussed any such situations within the team.

"Personally, I think I would, just because I feel like I'm always like that and that's just how I am, but this,

it's not really up to me," Norris said. "I'm not going to ask it. I don't want to ask it because I don't think it's necessarily a fair question."

Piastri left the issue open. "It's not something we've discussed," he said. "I don't really have an

answer until I know what's expected of me."

Norris had the chance to wrap up the title at last week's Qatar Grand Prix, but a pit strategy blunder by McLaren handed Verstappen the win to boost his title defence chances.

Italy receives Olympic flame for Milano Winter Games

ASSOCIATED PRESS
■ Athens

The Olympic flame for the Milan Cortina Winter Games was formally handed to Italian organisers on Thursday in the all-marble stadium in central Athens, where the first modern Olympics were held nearly 130 years ago.

From Athens, the flame will travel to Italy, where it will begin a 63-day, 12,000-kilometre relay through all 110 Italian provinces before reaching Milan's San Siro Stadium for the opening ceremony on February 6. Italy will host the flame for the first time in 20 years, and 10,000 torchbearers have been organised.

"To stand here in this historic stadium provides an inspiring reminder of the honour we have been granted and the precious treasure we will carry home with us," Milan Cortina organising committee president Giovanni Malago said before receiving the flame.

A forecast of severe rain-

storms in Athens kept large crowds away and led organisers to announce the ceremony would be shortened. But the rain held off until the very end, a weak sun filtering through the heavy black clouds, and the few hardy spectators who turned up were able to enjoy a performance featuring Greek and Italian singers and a children's choir in the stadium, which staged the first modern Games in 1896.

After spending the night burning in a cauldron outside the 5th century BC. Parthenon temple atop the Acropolis, Greece's most famous landmark, the flame was carried into the Panathenaic stadium by Greek water polo player Elena Xenaki, who lit another cauldron in the stadium along with Greece's women's national water polo team.

The flame was lit on November 26 in Ancient Olympia, the site of the ancient games which inspired the modern Olympic movement.

Kalikesh begins first full term as NRAI president

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ Mohali

Kalikesh Narayan Singh Deo began his first full four-year term as president of the National Rifle Association of India (NRAI) after he was elected unopposed during its general body meeting here on Thursday.

Pawan Singh, a well-known administrator and technical expert of the precision sport, was elected as the new secretary general as the results of the sports body's elections were officially declared.

The elections were conducted by Justice (Retd) Nirmaljit Kaur, who was the returning officer. The elections also put in place a new executive committee and a new governing body.

Sharing his first reactions, Singh Deo said, "Indian shooting has currently seen it's most successful phase in history over the last couple of years, both in terms of



success and popularity and that increases our responsibilities manifold.

"I wholeheartedly thank the entire general body for restoring faith in my team and me, and we promise to leave no stone unturned to accelerate this growth momentum even further and to maximise the potential that our extremely talented shooting athletes possess.

"With the flag paramount in our thoughts, let us all work together to make India number one in the world in our beloved sport." Odisha's

Singh Deo has been in charge of the federation since former president Raninder Singh completed his three terms in the post.

Pawan Singh said, "All the functions in the NRAI are already online, from registration to results, and now the next step is to use technology efficiently. We want to leverage AI and performance data to identify talented shooters across the country.

"My focus will be on using technology to find and nurture promising athletes from every corner of India."

Gayatri-Treesa's reclaim their beat at Syed Modi

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ New Delhi

The title defence at Syed Modi International has done more than just place another trophy on Gayatri Gopichand and Treesa Jolly's shelf. It has restored the rhythm the duo had been searching for through a fragmented season.

The two-time All-England semifinalists opened 2025 in promising fashion, reaching the All England quarterfinals and then the Swiss Open semifinals. But by June, a persistent shoulder issue caught up with both, forcing them to step off the circuit after the Macau Open.

Gayatri and Treesa returned in style, winning in just their second event at Lucknow, something which has given the young Indian pair the clarity and confidence as they prepare for a physically demanding 2026, when their first aim will be to regain their place in the top echelons of women's doubles.

"For me, Syed Modi felt like a reward for staying

patient and trusting the process," Gayatri told PTI in an interview. "I just started playing again, and it gave me a lot of confidence that my game is moving in the right direction."

A painful shoulder injury was followed by a long rehabilitation phase, and Gayatri said the mental grind was equally demanding.

"Even before Macau, it was there, and it was still hurting. After Macau, it was a proper two-month break... It has been a tough, challenging situation," Gayatri said.

"You focus on rehab, stay positive, lean on coaches, physios, family... Mentally, if I stay strong, that helps me."

Her father, former All England champion and national chief coach Pullela Gopichand, remains her anchor. "He talks about his injuries and tells me what to look at... It's a huge confidence for me," she said.

A five-week block to rebuild power

With just a month to go for the next season, Gayatri and Treesa know physical prepa-



ration will shape results more than appearances. "Strength wise I have to build a lot of strength, endurance as well. We've got a good five-week time now, so it's a good time to build strength, agility, endurance — all of that. It's an upward journey," Gayatri said.

The Indian pair was ranked world Number 9 for 13 weeks earlier this year, and they see 2026 as the season to reclaim that zone. "I think our biggest goals are to break into the top bracket of world doubles, win more world titles, and perform well at world championships. And of course,

work towards Olympic qualification as well," Gayatri said. "And yeah, I think improving consistency is a big thing for us right now."

Treesa's doubles stint added new dimension

While Gayatri was rebuilding, Treesa, who recovered in two months, kept herself match-ready through mixed doubles, partnering Hariharan Amsakarunan and winning the Turkiye International Challenge in October.

"Yeah, mixed doubles actually... When Gayatri was injured, I just wanted to get

a tournament feel," Treesa said. "That's how I started playing mixed doubles. I can say I'm really enjoying it."

But she admits scheduling could get complicated once the bigger tournaments begin. "We don't really have any world ranking right now to get entries for 1000s and 750s. That's why I'm a little bit confused... How to manage mixed doubles also."

Yet the stint helped her sharpen net play, anticipation and rotation awareness — elements that were visible in Lucknow. The win in Lucknow showcased Gayatri and Treesa's improved clarity in rotations.

"On court, we've developed a good understanding of each other's strengths," Gayatri said. "I know when Treesa is taking charge, and she knows when I'm going to move in. We're comfortable discussing anything, which helps us stay united through tough phases."

While the title defence signals readiness, the 21-year-olds know well that building deeper consistency at the highest level will be the key.

Marseille's prolific attack faces in-form Lille in Ligue 1

ASSOCIATED PRESS
■ Paris

The two highest scoring teams in Ligue 1 face off on Friday when nine-time champion Marseille travels north to take on Lille.

Marseille missed the chance to move to the top of the standings last weekend after being held to a home draw. On a four-match unbeaten run across all competitions, it has another opportunity to take the lead with a win. Roberto De Zerbi's Marseille sits third in the table, two points behind leader Lens.

Lille is in fourth place, five points off the pace.

With 35 goals in 14 matches, Marseille boasts one of the best attacking records in Europe this season and its highest tally at this stage in the French top flight

since 1970. Lille is also enjoying positive momentum, having won its past three matches across competitions.

Key matchups

Leader Lens plays at Nantes on Saturday on the back of a 2-1 win at Angers that moved the club to the top of the standings for the first time in 21 years. Following its second loss of the season at Monaco, second-placed Paris Saint-Germain is at home against Rennes before a trip to Athletic Bilbao in the Champions League next week.

Players to watch

Florian Thauvin's flair and efficiency have been crucial assets for Lens.

The 2018 World Cup winner is enjoying a revival since his return to the league from Italian side Udinese this summer. The 32-year-old



winger has four goals, including a brace last weekend, and produced two assists.

His performances have earned him a recall for France following a six-year absence.

If he continues to impress there are good chances he will be playing at another World Cup next summer.

"What is new today is being top of the league,"

Thauvin said. "But it is way too early to get carried away. Will we be able to compete with PSG? We'll see."

Who's out?

PSG said on Thursday that goalkeeper Lucas Chevalier is still nursing a right ankle injury. Chevalier was injured in the loss against Monaco after a violent tackle from Lamine Camara. PSG is also missing Désiré Doué, Nuno Mendes, Achraf Hakimi and Lucas Beraldo.

Off the field

Nice made headlines for the wrong reasons this week after shocking acts of violence from its fans. After a sixth consecutive loss across all competitions on Sunday, players and staff were assaulted when they returned to the club's training and academy centre.

Toyota moves further into partnership for 2026 with Haas Formula 1 team



ASSOCIATED PRESS
■ Tokyo

The Haas Formula 1 team will get a new name next season, further showcasing its relationship with Japanese automaker Toyota.

In a statement Thursday, the team said its name in 2026 will be TGR Haas F1

Team. The TGR stands for Toyota Gazoo Racing, which is the racing division of the Toyota Motor Corporation.

Taking over the title sponsorship means Toyota is now more involved in F1 than at any time since it pulled its team out after the 2009 season.

Haas and Toyota entered

into the first stages of this technical partnership a year ago and the Haas car has been carrying Toyota's branding since.

The partnership involves design and technical services but does not include a Toyota engine. Haas will run next year with Ferrari power, but it does move the company ever deeper into Formula 1.

Toyota ran a team in F1 until the end of the 2009 season. It failed to win a race despite spending heavily.

This move does not appear to mark a return to that level of involvement.

"It's naturally a privilege to deepen our relationship with TGR through this new title partnership agreement," Ayao Komatsu, team principal of Haas, said in a statement from Haas.

Root's century outshines Starc's wickets as England wins day 1

ASSOCIATED PRESS ■ Brisbane

Joe Root posted a long-awaited first Ashes century in Australia to give England the honors on Day 1 of the second cricket test despite Mitchell Starc's six wickets.

Starc removed Ben Duckett and Ollie Pope to have England reeling at 5-2 in the third over Thursday.

That's when Root went to the crease and set about restoring the England innings, and confidence, following the series-opening eight-wicket loss in Perth.

His unbeaten 135 led England to 325-9 at stumps, with No. 11 Jofra Archer at a career-best 32 in an unbroken 61-run last-wicket stand.

Zac Crawley, who helped Root get England's revival going in a 117-run third-wicket stand, described his teammate's century as a "phenomenal knock."

"He played brilliantly," Crawley said. The ball "was doing plenty when he first came in and he was so calm and he was so clear as well about how he wanted to go about it."

Opener Crawley, who was coming off two ducks in Perth, scored 76 from 93 balls and was outscoring Root before he attempted an extravagant pull shot and got an under edge through to the keeper just after the first interval.

Starc then returned to dismiss Harry Brook, giving him his 415th career wicket to surpass Pakistan great Wasim Akram (414 from 104 tests) as the most successful left-arm fast bowler in test cricket.

"He's still still the pinnacle of left-armers," Starc said of Wasim. "It's nice to be spoken of up around that but I'll just



England's Joe Root celebrates his century during the second Ashes cricket test match between Australia and England in Brisbane

PTI

try to keep churning a few out." Brook was caught at slip slashing outside off stump and falling for 31 from 33 balls to end a 54-run fourth-wicket partnership with Root just as the sun was going down. Root's highest test score in 15 previous Ashes tests in Australia was 89, and the local media had taken every chance in recent weeks to remind him of his missing milestone.

Playing his 160th test, Root was 88 not out at the drinks break midway through the night session. He moved into the 90s for the first time in Australia with a boundary off Brendan Doggett. He hit another boundary next ball to go to 96.

The rest is history. Momentum swings The first two sessions — in the afternoon and the evening — had

an element of symmetry with England scoring 98 and Australia taking two wickets in each.

So the night session started with England at 196-4.

Root and Ben Stokes appeared to be coasting before a brilliant run out by Josh Inglis mixed things up again.

Stokes (19) pushed a ball into the covers and took off for a single, only for Root to send him back as Inglis raced in and threw down the stumps from side on.

Three balls later, Scott Boland bowled Jamie Smith (0) between bat and pad to make it 211-6.

Root was on 79 when he was joined by Will Jacks. The pair put on 40 before Jacks played an expansive shot to Starc and was well caught. Starc (6-71) then picked off Gus Atkinson and Brydon

Carse in quick time and England, suddenly, was 264-9. Expectations of Australia batting on Day 1 deteriorated, though, as Root and Archer went on the attack.

Still, Starc believed the day was evenly split.

"If you take the last partnership of the day out, I think we'd sit here and say it was a pretty good day's bowling," Starc said. "They blazed away a little bit and probably evened the day out — and Joe batted really well throughout the day."

No Lyon

The most contentious selection of the series so far was Australia's choice to recall Naser in a five-man pace attack at the expense of spinner Nathan Lyon, who missed out for only the second time on home soil since his debut in 2011.

Bhuvneshwar, Rizvi shine in UP's win over Chandigarh

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Kolkata

His days as one of India's leading seamers may be well past him but Bhuvneshwar Kumar continues to deliver handsomely in domestic cricket, evidence of which was his impressive outing in Uttar Pradesh's 40-run win over Chandigarh in the Syed Mushtaq Ali Trophy here Thursday.

The 35-year-old seasoned bowler returned excellent figures of 3/23 in four overs to help his side restrict Chandigarh to 172 for eight after UP posted a competitive 212 for seven in their allotted 20 overs at the Eden Gardens.

Sameer Rizvi top-scored for UP with a blistering 70-run knock that came off just 42 balls and contained six fours and three sixes.

Opener Madhav Kaushik



struck a brisk 67 off 41 balls, and found the fence seven times seven times while clearing it twice in the Group B game.

Rizvi and Kaushik were involved in a third wicket

partnership of 86 runs, which laid the foundation for UP's total in excess of 200.

Siddarth Yadav looked in great touch until he was run out by Nehal Pajni for a

quick-fire 12-ball 28 with three fours and two sixes.

After the dismissal of Rizvi and Kaushik, India's T20I specialist Rinku Singh blazed away to a 10-ball 24 to help prop up the UP

innings after Chandigarh opted to bowl first.

Rajasthan Royals seamer Sandeep Sharma was the most successful bowler for Chandigarh, finishing with fine figures of 4/26, including taking the wickets of Kaushik and Rinku.

In reply, Chandigarh were off to a disastrous start as they lost two wickets with just 19 runs on the board, Bhuvneshwar removing Pajni for a nought.

However, opener Manan Vohra kept Chandigarh in hunt with his explosive batting that fetched him 61 runs from only 35 balls, and which contained six boundaries and three sixes.

But Kartik Tyagi removed him at a crucial juncture to leave Chandigarh at 100 for three in the 11th over.

Wicketkeeper Nikhil Thakur (32 off 28 balls) and Amrit Lubana (30 off 23

balls) carried on the fight, but their team fell short by plenty of runs in the end.

Brief scores:

Uttar Pradesh 212/7 in 20 overs (Sameer Rizvi 70, Madhav Kaushik 67; Sandeep Sharma 4/26) beat Chandigarh 172/8 in 20 overs (Manan Vohra 61; Bhuvneshwar Kumar 3/23) by 40 runs.

Jammu and Kashmir 112 all out in 19.3 overs (Shubham Khajuria 35; Nitin Sai Yadav 3/17, Milind 3/31) lost to Hyderabad 115/6 in 15.1 overs (Tanay Thyagarajan 50; Murugan Ashwin 2/16, Yudhvir Singh Charak 2/18) by 4 wickets.

Bihar 180/7 in 20 overs (S Gani 60, Vaibhav Suryavanshi 46, Akash Raj 40; Deepraj Gaonkar 4/38) lost to Goa 184/5 in 19.5 overs (Suyash Prabhudessai 79, Kashyap Bakhale 64; Suraj Kashyap 3/24) by 5 wickets.



Shami puts Bengal on top of points table with easy win versus Services

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Hyderabad

Out-of-favour India veteran Mohammed Shami continued his impressive show in domestic circuit with match-winning figures of 4 for 13 as Bengal cruised to a seven-wicket victory over Services in a Group C match of the Syed Mushtaq Ali Trophy here on Thursday.

This was Bengal's fourth win in five games and, with 16 points, Abhimanyu Easwaran's men now lead the points table and look good to make the cut for the knock-out stages.

Easwaran, who himself is appearing for IPL auction auditions, did his cause no harm with a 37-ball 58 in Bengal's walk-in-the-park chase of 166 which was completed in just 15.1 overs.

Delhi Capitals star Abhishek Porel (56 off 29 balls) also did his bit in a second-wicket stand of 93 in only 8.2 overs which set up the chase nicely.

But this was possible only because of 'Player of The Match' Shami (4/13 in 3.2 overs) and current India international Akash Deep (3/27), who kept the Services down to a manageable 165 in 18.2 overs.

Shami got two wickets in his first spell, removing openers Gaurav Kochhar (0) and Ravi Chauhan (26 off 9 balls). While comeback man Mukesh Kumar (0/53 in 3 overs) was hammered all around, off-spinner Wriddick Chatterjee (2/32 in 4 overs) and Akash Deep got crucial

middle-order wickets before Shami polished off the tail in his final spell.

Hardik takes 1/16 in Baroda's easy win over Gujarat

In another high-profile group league game, Hardik Pandya, after a swashbuckling knock against Punjab in his comeback, bowled tightly to finish his four-over spell with 1 for 16 in Baroda's comfortable eight-wicket victory against Gujarat in a low-scoring game.

Gujarat were dismissed for just 73 in 14.1 overs with only two players reaching double digits.

Hardik accounted for the CSK danger man Urvil Patel (7), who offered a return catch. Former India U-19 seamer Raj Limbani took 3 for 5.

Baroda knocked off the runs in just 6.4 overs although Hardik's returns with the willow was a mere 10 off 6 balls.

The all-rounder will now fly off to Cuttack on December 6 to link up with the Indian T20I squad for the five-match series starting December 9.

Kamboj, Dalal win it for Haryana

Seamers Anshul Kamboj (3/44), Anuj Thakral (3/31) and batter Yashvardhan Dalal (76 n.O. Off 44 balls) played major roles in Haryana's seven-wicket win over Himachal Pradesh in another group league game here.

Batting first, HP scored 176 for 8 and Haryana surpassed the target in 18 overs.

Dalal hit seven fours and four hite sixes.

Asif takes 5 wickets as Kerala shock defending champions Mumbai in SMAT

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Lucknow

A five-wicket haul by pacer KM Asif, who is having his best domestic season, helped underdogs Kerala earn a shock 15-run victory against defending champions Mumbai in a Syed Mushtaq Ali Trophy Group A match here on Thursday.

Mumbai, who suffered their first defeat in five games in the T20 tournament, though continue to lead the group with 16 points, while Kerala moved to third spot with 12 points -- the same as Andhra who are in second place -- following their third win in the five-team pool.

Kerala are marginally behind Andhra on net run rate.

The star-studded Mumbai side, led by India pacer Shardu Thakur and having the likes of national T20 skipper Suryakumar Yadav and Shivam Dube in their ranks, crumbled to 163 all out in 19.4 overs while chasing 179.

Kerala made 178 for five.

It was India keeper-batter Sanju Samson, who recently completed the move from Rajasthan Royals to Chennai Super Kings in the

biggest deals ahead of the IPL 2026 season, who set the tone for Kerala by smashing a 28-ball 46 after opening the innings.

The Kerala skipper's blazing innings, studded with eight boundaries and a six, gave his team a flourishing start.

But two wickets in quick succession -- of Rohan Kunnummal (2) and Samson -- left the southern state struggling at 58 for 2 in the seventh over.

Samson took majority of the strike, giving his opening partner just five deliveries as the India top-order batter negotiated the star Mumbai bowlers early on.

Samson's dismissal slowed down the scoring rate as one-down batter Vishnu Vinod took 40 balls for his unbeaten 43, which included just three boundaries.

However, Vinod's 63-run stand with Mohammed Azharuddeen (32) and pacer Sharafuddeen's cameo of 35 not out off 15 balls did give Kerala a fighting total in the end.

Mumbai were off to a confident start as, after losing Ayush Mhatre (3) early, Rahane (32 off 18 balls) and Sarfaraz Khan (52 off 40 balls)



were involved in an 80-run stand for the second wicket.

At 99 for three in the 12th over, the defending champions looked

comfortable. But the tables turned in the 18th over bowled by Asif (5/25), who grabbed the wickets of Sairaj Patil (13), Suryakumar (32

and Shardul (0), to send Mumbai reeling at 149 for seven.

He returned to bowl the final over to take out tail-enders Shams Mulani and Hardik Tamore to end Mumbai's innings.

Lucknow has turned out to be a happy hunting ground for the 32-year-old Asif as he now has 13 wickets in four SMAT matches at the venue this season.

Brief scores:

Kerala 178 for 5 in 20 overs (Sanju Samson 46, Vishnu Vinod 43; Shardul Thakur 1/34, Shivam Dube 1/18) beat Mumbai 163 in 19.4 overs (Sarfaraz Khan 52, Ajinkya Rahane 32, Suryakumar Yadav 32; KM Asif 5/24, Vignesh Puthur 2/31) by 15 runs.

Assam 175 for 7 in 20 overs (Abdul Kuraishi 57, Nihar Deka 52; Yash Thakur 3/36) beat Vidarbha 117 in 17.5 overs (Mukhtar Hussain 3/36, Akash Sengupta 3/12) by 58 runs.

Chhattisgarh 158 for 6 in 50 overs (Amandeep Khare 44, Shashank Singh 46; Prithvi Raj 2/35, KV Sasikanth 2/36) lost to Andhra 159 for 2 in 18.5 overs (Ashwin Hebbur 50, Shaik Rasheed 59 not out) by 8 wickets.

Arshdeep Singh's spell vs SA shows need for consistent ODIs

G UNNIKRISHNAN ■ Visakhapatnam



SA's chase under lights with a heavy dew setting in wintry conditions.

But he never let the batters dominate him in either of the matches, registering the best economy among the pacers -- 6.4 at Ranchi and 5.4 at Raipur.

At Raipur, Harshit Rana gave away seven runs an over and Prasidh Krishna was carted around for 10.20.

It may be argued that

Arshdeep largely bowled when the ball was relatively drier in the first Power Play and when the ball was changed after the 44th over in the second ODI.

But even then to contain or dismiss batters like Quinton de Kock and Marco Jansen on a firm pitch, a bowler needs optimum tactical awareness and the ability to bowl to the set field. "That is one area where he has improved a lot

in recent times. He knows the conditions well, he then adjusts the lengths well and he has now learned the importance of mixing up his deliveries to avoid being predictable.

"It is very important in white ball cricket in which batsmen keep looking for runs. He has really matured now as a bowler and is mentally tough," tells Jaswant Rai, his childhood coach. (PTI)

Rizwan eyes big bash success to make comeback in Pakistan T20 squad

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Lahore

Pakistan's seasoned wicketkeeper-batter Muhammad Rizwan is hoping to use the Big Bash platform in Australia to claw his way back into the national T20 squad for next year's World Cup.

Rizwan, a former captain of the ODI and T20I squads, has not been picked to play in the shortest format by the national selectors since December 2024, but he sees the Big Bash League (BBL) as a big opportunity to regain his spot back.

"I am confident of performing well in the Big Bash and in Australia if you are successful everyone takes notice of you," Rizwan told the media.

"I have always enjoyed playing the most in Australia because the competition level is very high and the Australians play their cricket in a very different manner. The level is so high that if a player does well in Australia he knows he can perform anywhere else," he added.

Rizwan is set to leave for Australia with Babar Azam, Shaheen Shah Afridi, Shadab Khan, Haris Rauf and Hasan Ali to play in the Big Bash this week for Melbourne Renegades.

Pakistani selectors tried out young



wicketkeeper-batter Muhammad Haris this year but then dropped him for poor form and recalled Usman Khan who got

some good scores against Sri Lanka and Zimbabwe in the recent tri-series. But Usman is not considered as good a wicketkeeper as Rizwan.

The 33-year-old Rizwan, who has an impressive average of 47 from 106 T20Is with one century and 30 half centuries, was dropped because of his low strike rate of 125 despite forming a reliable opening pair with Babar Azam.

Babar, also sidelined from the format because of his inability to improve his strike rate, is now back in the team but at the number three spot.

Rizwan, who was removed as ODI captain in October to be replaced by Shaheen Shah Afridi, said like every other player he was also keen to get a chance to play for the country in the World Cup.

"I am focussing a lot on my batting and adding new strokes to my range and the Big Bash is the best platform for me to show my worth again," he said.

All-rounder Shadab Khan is another player whose performance would be closely followed by the selectors in the Big Bash. Having recovered from a shoulder injury, he is also in line for a comeback to the Pakistan squad.