



Mamata slams SIR, urges people to protest



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



PAGE 10: MONEY
Personal is the new credit norm



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



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

PIONEER IN SHORT

WARNING AGAINST FAKE JOBS ISSUED

The Indian government has alerted Parliament about fraudulent recruitment schemes luring Indian nationals, mainly through social media, to South-East Asian countries such as Cambodia, Myanmar, and Lao PDR, often to carry out cybercrime or other illegal activities. Minister of State for External Affairs Kirti Vardhan Singh stated that over 6,700 Indians have been rescued from these nations so far, with 2,265 from Cambodia, 2,290 from Lao PDR, and 2,165 from Myanmar. The exact number of Indians still trapped is unknown, as many travel voluntarily via unscrupulous recruitment agents or illegal channels. The government has engaged host country authorities and Indian Missions to facilitate rescue and repatriation. Multiple channels, including walk-ins, WhatsApp numbers, grievance portals like MADAD and eMigrate, and social media, are available for Indians seeking help. Authorities regularly issue advisories warning job seekers to verify recruitment agents and offers. The Ministry of Home Affairs' Indian Cybercrime Coordination Centre (I4C) monitors related cybercrime activities and coordinates preventive and corrective measures.

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

ASHOKE RAJ ■ New Delhi

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

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

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



An Indian family eating in the middle of Times Square, New York City

ISTOCK

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

by the consulate to applicants read.

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

Immigration attorney Rahul Reddy warned that travelling now could put H-1B

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

Luthras detained in Thailand after Delhi court rejects bail

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

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

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

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

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



Composite image of Gaurav Luthra (left) and his brother Saurabh Luthra (right)

PIONEER PHOTO

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

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

But the court noted that the offence was serious in nature

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

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

The ByStander



TOXIC EGGS FLAGGED IN J&K

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

ARUNACHAL ACCIDENT CLAIMS 18 LIVES

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

ECI extends SIR timeline

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

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

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

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

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

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

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

IndiGo CEO back in the DGCA dock

RAJESH KUMAR ■ New Delhi

IndiGo CEO has been summoned by the aviation regulator again on Friday, according to a regulatory filing by the company. Pieter Elbers was summoned by the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) on Thursday and asked to submit a report on the flight disruptions. He reached the DGCA office around 2.24pm, and left after a little over two hours at 4.45pm.

Meanwhile, passengers of the IndiGo Airlines who were left stranded at the airports between December 3 and 5 will be

given a travel voucher worth ₹10,000 valid for 12 months. The compensation would be in addition to flight cancellations charges under DGCA norms.

In another development, JD(U) leader KC Tyagi has alleged complicity between the DGCA and airlines, saying he was forced to shell out an inordinate sum of over ₹40,000 for a Delhi-Mumbai flight. In a letter to party colleague Sajay Jha, who is the Chairman of the Parliamentary panel on tourism, Tyagi said he became a victim of Air India's "arbitrary charging."

E-cigarette cloud over Lok Sabha

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

After BJP MP Anurag Thakur accused a Trinamool Congress member of smoking an e-cigarette in the Lok Sabha, the BJP alleged that the lawmaker has set a new record of lowering the dignity of Parliament with his conduct.

During the Question Hour, Thakur asked the Lok Sabha Speaker if e-cigarettes, which are banned in the country, have been allowed in the House, alleging, "The TMC member has been constantly smoking in the House for



Union Minister of State Sanjay Seth with BJP MPs Anurag Thakur, Jagdambika Pal and others in the Lok Sabha

PTI

the past several days." Thakur, however, did not name the TMC MP. Amid uproar, Birla urged the members to main-

tain the dignity of the House and said he would take action if a written complaint was lodged.

Modi, Trump call to reset trade ties



FILE PHOTO

ASHOKE RAJ ■ New Delhi

Prime Minister Narendra Modi spoke to United States President Donald Trump on Thursday in what officials described as a "very warm conversation," during which the two leaders reviewed progress in the India-US

Comprehensive Global Strategic Partnership. Both sides expressed satisfaction at the steady expansion of cooperation across multiple sectors.

According to the official readout, Modi and Trump discussed ways to maintain momentum in bilateral trade

MODI-TRUMP INTERACTIONS IN 2025

- January 27 – Phone Call: Trump congratulates Modi; discuss bilateral ties.
- February 13 – White House Meeting: Modi meets Trump in Washington; talks cover trade, defence, and strategic issues.
- April 22 – Phone Call: Trump offers condolences after the Pahalgam incident.
- June 17 – Phone Call: Trump invites Modi to a multilateral luncheon

- hosted by the Pakistan PM and military chief.
- September 17 – Phone Call: Birthday greetings and bilateral progress discussed.
- October 21 – Phone Call: Diwali greetings exchanged; ongoing cooperation discussed.
- December 11 – Phone Call: Review of India-US Comprehensive Global Strategic Partnership, trade, defence, and critical technologies.

talks and explored avenues to widen collaboration in critical technologies, energy, defence, security, and other priority areas under the India-US COMPACT frame-

work - a mechanism aimed at boosting military partnership, economic engagement and technology cooperation for the coming decades.

Trump offers million-dollar US entry

ASSOCIATED PRESS ■ Washington

President Donald Trump announced on Wednesday that his long-promised "gold card" was officially going on sale, offering legal status and an eventual pathway to US citizenship for individuals paying \$1 million and corporations ponying up twice that per foreign-born employee.

A website accepting applications went live as Trump revealed the start of the programme while surrounded by business leaders in the White House's Roosevelt Room.

It is meant to replace EB-5 visas, which Congress created in 1990 to generate foreign investment and had been available to people who spend about \$1 million on a company that employs at least 10 people. Trump sees the new version as a way for

the US to attract and retain top talent, all while generating revenue for federal coffers. He has been promoting the gold card programme for months, and once suggested that each card would cost \$5 million, though he more recently revised that to the \$1 million and \$2 million pricing scheme.

The president said all funds taken in as part of the programme will "go to the US government" and predicted that billions would flow into an account run by the Treasury Department "where we can do things positive for the country."

The new programme is actually a green card, effectively offering permanent legal residency with the chance for citizenship.

"Basically, it's a green card but much better," Trump said. "Much more powerful, a much stronger path."

Rural India roars back as household consumption hits record highs

RAJESH KUMAR ■ New Delhi

India's rural economy is witnessing a boom due to increased purchasing power, rising incomes, stronger consumption and improved financial behavior, according to a bi-monthly survey by NABARD. According to the latest Rural Economic Conditions and Sentiments Survey (RECSS) 80 per cent of rural households reported higher consumption compared with last year.

"Moreover, 67.3 per cent of monthly household income was devoted to consumption expenditure, which is the

highest level among all rounds of the survey conducted since September 2024," the survey noted. It also highlighted that the rural investment activity is accelerating, and the credit access has also improved.

The November 2025 round of the survey was conducted after the GST rate rationalisation announced on 3 September 2025, during the festival season, and against the backdrop of sharp moderation in rural inflation and food deflation. As per the NABARD survey, 42.2 per cent of rural households reported to have experienced an increase in



Women at the Pushkar market

ISTOCK

income in the last one year, which is the highest level among all rounds of this survey so far. Importantly, the percentage of households experiencing a decline in income during the last year fell to its lowest level (15.7 per cent).

While a lower percentage of rural households (21.9 per cent) reported their savings rising during last year, as against 23.7 per cent in the September 2025 round of the survey, it still showed some improvement relative to all the pre-September 2025 rounds of the survey. There was only a modest increase in the number

of households who reported taking recourse to increased borrowings/loans during last year. Thus, it appears that the higher consumption expenditure of rural households was not funded by excessive recourse to borrowings.

Further, only 15.7 per cent reported any decline in income, the lowest so far.

"During the next one year, however, the income prospects are seen by them to improve, with 75.9 per cent expecting to witness an increase in income, which is the highest level," the survey added.



Classifieds

LOST AND FOUND

I, Dr. Indera Mohan Bisht S/o Col Sohan Singh Bisht (Rtd), R/O D2A Villa Round Retreat Nahan, District Sirmaur, H.P., & Sh. Digamber Singh Rawat S/o Late Sh. Bhupal Singh Rawat H.N. 103/1, Cantt Road Nahan declare that Policy of Insurance Numbered 145398702 was granted on by the LIFE INSURANCE CORPORATION OF INDIA and was lost somewhere while shifting from Chakrera to Villa Round Retreat Nahan.

BEDKHALI NOTICE

I, Satwant Kaur W/o Gurbaksh Singh R/O 413 Ladwa Farm, Village Murtzapur, Tehsil Pehowa, District Kurukshetra, have evicted my daughter Navjot Kaur, from all my movable-immovable properties, as she is beyond my control. She has married against our wishes and without our consent. Anyone dealing with her at their own risk.

We, Gurmali Singh, son of Shri Rachna Singh and Smt Kulwant Kaur w/o Shri Gurmali Singh, R/O village Manakpur Nanak Chand Pinjore Tehsil Kalka District Panchkula Haryana, hereby declare that my son Gurpreet Singh & daughter in law Jaspreet Kaur and their minor child Jhulhar Singh are beyond my control. I hereby disown them from all my movable and immovable property. In the future, if anything happens to any of them they are responsible for same.

I Randhir Singh S/O Gurmali Singh R/O # 30, Sector 23 A, Mandi Gobindgarh, District Fatehgarh Sahib declare that my son Ekamjit singh and his wife Navjot kaur are out of my control so i disowned both of them from all my movable and immovable properties. anybody dealing with them on their own risk.

I, Asha Devi, W/o Sh. Laxman Singh, R/o M.J.-575/B-2, Lekh Mohalla, Pinjore, Tehsil Kalka, District Panchkula, Haryana, declare that my sons Yogender Singh and his wife Rekha Rani, Mohan Singh and his wife Manju, and Lal Singh and his wife Sonia all are out of my control, so I disown them from my movable and immovable property. Anybody deals with them at their own risk.

I, Balwinder Singh S/o Barkha Ram Vill.Thol Sub Tehsil Ismailabad Distt.Kurukshetra My Son Jagtar Singh and his wife Gurjeet Kaur and my wife Veermati They are beyond my control, hence I evict my son and daughter-in-law from my movable and immovable property and break all ties with my wife Veermati. They will be responsible for any immoral acts and transactions done by them in the future.

We, Balwinder Singh S/o Phulla Singh And Maan Kaur W/o Balwinder Singh Vill.Bodhni Tehsil Pehowa Distt.Kurukshetra Our Son Sahab Singh and his wife Siinder Kaur are out of our control. We, disown them from our all moveable and immovable properties. If anybody deals with him that will be at his own risk.

I, Randhiri, w/o Late Roshan R/o Vill. Bayan (Baraut), Teh. Gannaur, Distt. Sonipat, declare that my son Balwan and his wife Aashu are out of my control. So I evict them from all my movable and immovable property. Anybody deals with them at their on risk. I and rest of my family will have no responsibility.

I Parkash Kaur W/o Amar Singh R/O Village Rasulpur alias Dundimajra, Tehsil Dudhan Sadha, Distt Patiala declare that my son Darshan Singh and his wife Rajni Rani, who are beyond my control, hereby disclaim all movable and immovable property. Whoever transacts with them will be held responsible. I or my family have no relation with them.

ਮੈਂ ਦੌਲਤ ਰਾਮ ਪੁੱਤਰ ਦੇਵਾ ਰਾਮ ਵਾਸੀ ਮ.ਨੰ. 414 ਚੰਡੀਗੜ੍ਹ ਟਾਂਡਾ ਜ਼ਿਲ੍ਹਾ ਪੰਚਕੁਲਾ, ਕੁਰਕਸ਼ੇਟਰ ਕੰਟ. ਪੰਚਕੁਲਾ, ਹਰਿਆਣਾ-134107 ਬਿਆਨ ਕਰਦਾ ਹਾਂ ਕਿ ਮੇਰਾ ਲੜਕਾ ਕਰਨ (ਉਮਰ ਲਗਭਗ 21 ਸਾਲ) ਜੋ ਕਿ ਮੇਰੇ ਕਹਿਣ ਤੇ ਬਾਹਰ ਹੈ। ਮੈਂ ਇਸ ਨੂੰ ਆਪਣੀ ਚੁੱਲ-ਅਚੁੱਲ ਜਾਇਦਾਦ ਤੋਂ ਬੇਦਖਲ ਕਰਦਾ ਹਾਂ। ਇਸ ਨਾਲ ਲੁਣ ਦੇਣ ਕਰਨ ਵਾਲਾ ਖੁਦ ਜ਼ਿੰਮੇਵਾਰ ਹੋਵੇਗਾ। ਮੇਰਾ ਜਾਂ ਮੇਰੇ ਪਰਿਵਾਰ ਦਾ ਕੋਈ ਵੀ ਤਾਲੁਕ ਵਾ ਵਾਸਤਾ ਨਹੀਂ ਹੋਵੇਗਾ।

PUBLIC NOTICE

Known to all that the name of Trust changed from Gur Asra Trust, Village Manana, Teh. & Distt. S.A.S. Nagar, Punjab to Akaal Aasra Trust Head Office:Palsora, Sector 55, Chandigarh

I, No. 2889272A Ex Hav Ram Kumar S/o Shri Krishan R/O Vill. & P.O. Sampal, Teh. Kalanaur, Distt. Rohtak (Haryana) declare that my daughter name Tamena is wrongly mentioned in my Service record. But my daughter correct & actual name is Tamena Kumari. vide affidavit dated 11.12.2025 before Notary Public Rohtak.

I PATSHO (existing name) M/o of No. 3199757A Ex Sepoy Narender Kumar R/o VPO Saman, Tehsil Meham DISTT. ROHTAK (HR.) declare that I have changed/amend my name in my son Army Records from Patsho (existing name) to Pataso (CORRECT name) my Correct/actual DOB is 01.01.1950 instead of 20.11.1954 as per my Aadhaar / Pan Card. In future I shall may be known/ written/called as PATASO (DOB : 01.01.1950) for all work purposes, Vide Affidavit dated 11 Dec 2025 before Executive Magistrate, MEHAM (Rohtak).

I Army No. 4443429 Sep Ram Chand Singh (Retd), S/O Santa Singh R/O Vpo Halwara Tehsil Raikot, District Ludhiana Punjab,141107, Hereby Declare That In My Service Record My Wife Name And Dob Entered As Ginno Kaur, 01-07-1945 Are Incorrect. Her Correct Name And Dob Are Joginder Kaur, 01-01-1953.

I Smt Baljinder Kaur Widow Of No. 4556916H Ex Nk Late Harbhajan Singh R/O Vpo Changan Tehsil And District Ludhiana (Punjab)-141110 Hereby Declare That In My Service Record My Daughter Name Entered As Sarbjit Kaur Is Incorrect. Her Correct Name Is Sarabjeet Kaur.

I, No. 13760774Y Ex-Nk Mangal Singh Resident of Vill: Karura Po. Jhaj Teh-Anandpur Sahib Distt. Rupnagar (Punjab) do hereby affirm and declare that name of my daughter Kashiaash Rani has erroneously been recorded in my service documents. the correct name of my daughter is Kashish Rani as recorded in her Aadhar Card and Matriculation Certificate. Please note.

I, Suresh Kumar Bhambi S/o Vidia Raj R/o Vpo. Rahon Teh-Nawanshahr Distt. SBS Nagar declare that I known by two names Suresh Kumar Bhambi and Suresh Kumar Bhabi both names are mine and one and the same person.

I, Prem Lata W/o Inderjit Vashishat R/o Adarsh Nagar Kohara Road Machhiwara Teh-Samrala Distt. Ludhiana declare that I known by two names Prem Lata and Prem Lata Vashishat both names are mine and same and the one person.

CHANGE OF NAME

I, JC-196925A Ex Sub Maj (Hony Lt) Gurmit Dass (Retd) R/O Village Dharampur, PO and Tehsil Mukerian, Distt Hoshiarpur (Pb) have changed name of my daughter from Rina Kumari to Reena Kumari and her correct DOB is 20.04.1987.

I, Satvinder Kaur Sahota D/o JC-166760X Ex Nb Sub Late Mohan Singh R/O Village Barala, PO Garhdiwala, Distt. Hoshiarpur Punjab have changed my name from Satvinder Kaur Sahota to Satwinder Kaur. Concerned note.

I Sunita Nehra spouse of No. 669708R Rank SGT Prem Singh Vpo Barsola Dist. jind haryana, I have changed my name from Sunita Nehra to Sunita and date of birth 16/04/1967 to 02/04/1967 vide affidavit no 28497 dated 09/12/2025 before Notary public Jind.

I, Narender Singh Sarkaria S/o Sh. Anup Singh R/O 167A, Theri Baba Sawan Singh, PO Moriwala, Distt. Sirsa (Haryana). That I have changed my name from Narender Singh Sarkaria to Narender Singh, in future my name is to be called as Narender Singh

I, Suman W/o Sh. Naresh Kumar R/O 1413, Bhilam Pana, Kharak Punia, Kharak (17) Distt. Hisar (Haryana). That I have changed my name from Suman to Suman Devi, in future my name is to be called as Suman Devi

I, Karamjeet Kaur Sarkaria W/o Sh. Karanveer Singh Sarkaria R/O 167A, Theri Baba Sawan Singh, PO Moriwala, Distt. Sirsa (Haryana). That I have changed my name from Karamjeet Kaur Sarkaria to Karamjeet Kaur, in future my name is to be called as Karamjeet Kaur

I, Sarbjeet Kaur Sarkaria W/o Sh. Narender Singh R/O 167A, Theri Baba Sawan Singh, PO Moriwala, Distt. Sirsa (Haryana). That I have changed my name from Sarbjeet Kaur Sarkaria to Sarvjeet Kaur, in future my name is to be called as Sarvjeet Kaur

I Suraj S/o Gian Chand R/o #34/1, Village Faidan, Nizampur, Chandigarh UT have changed my name to Suraj Singh.

I, SADDAM S/O SHAMSHAD, R/O H.N.-60, G.F. SAINI VIHARF, PHASE-1, BALTANA, ZIRAKPUR, BALTANA, PO- BALTANA, DIST-SAS NAGAR, MOHALI, PUNJAB-140604 that I have changed my name from Saddam to Saddam Ansari

I, Pritpal Kaur W/o Rajinder Singh Rank Havildar Service No. 3405661A Unit 3 Sikh Regiment R/o Village Bhambol, Distt Yamuna Nagar declare that in my husband service record my DOB is written as 01.08.1987. My correct DOB is 20.04.1987. vide affidavit no. M032567

I, Sonam D/o Vijender Singh, R/O Village Jalalpura Khurd, Tehsil & Distt. Jind, Haryana, have changed my name from Sonam to Sonam Pahal.

I, Meenakshi W/o Ankit Mehla R/o 118, Moti Bagh, Bank Colony, Govind Pura, Yamuna Nagar have changed my name from Meenakshi to Meenakshi Mehla.

I, Komalpreet W/o Sh. Nitish Malik R/O 168, VPO Balia-la-125051 Distt. Fatehabad (Haryana). That I have changed my name from Komalpreet to Komalpreet Kaur, in future my name is to be called as Komalpreet Kaur.

I, Nilam Rani W/o Raj Kumar R/o 1784/469, Deha Basti, Shekhn Wala Mohalla, Thanesar, District Kurukshetra declare that my name is mentioned Neelam in the 10th DMC of my Son. Nilam Rani and Neelam are the names of one and the same person.

I Ram Devi W/o Inder Parsad R/O House No. 2169, Sector 35-C, Chandigarh have changed my name from Ram Devi to Indani.

I Shruti Bhushan Gupta W/o Sh. Lovelesh Garg, House No. 5606, Modern Housing Complex, Sector 13, Chandigarh have changed my name Shruti Bhushan Gupta to Shruti Gupta.

I Reeta Verma W/o Ram Narayan Verma R/o House No. 194, Sector 45 Burail Chandigarh have changed my name from Reeta Verma to Nankiu Verma.

I, Naresh Kumar Chawla S/o Brij Mohan, R/O House No.199, Phase-3-A, S.A.S. Nagar (Mohali), Punjab-160059, have changed my name to Naresh Kumar.

I, Sarabjit S/o Kishori Lal R/O Village Sarmast Pur, Ball Distt. Jalandhar Punjab have changed my name from Sarabjit to Sarabjit Nar. Concerned note.

I, Hitesh Kumar Taneja S/o Sh. Chander Bhan Taneja R/o H.No. 511/8, Chadau Mohalla, Near Sethi Chowk, Panipat, declare that I have changed my name from Hitesh Kumar to Hitesh Kumar Taneja. For all future purposes.

I, Savinder Kumar S/o Roshan Lal R/o H.No. 151-P, Part-1, near Umri Road, Green Homes, Sector 29, Tehsil Thanesar, District Kurukshetra, have changed my name from Savinder Kumar to Savinder. In the future, I should be known by the name Savinder.

I MINAKSHI, D/o Balinder, r/o village Goela Khurd, Post Office Goela Kalan, Tehsil Bapoli, District Panipat. Already My name is MINAKSHI, Now I have changed MINAKSHI to MEENAKSHI.

I, Dr Piyush Kumar Sharma s/o Ram Murti Sharma R/o H.No. 395, old Housing Board, Sector-13, Karnal state that Piyush Kumar Sharma, Piyush, Piyush Kumar and Piyush Sharma is the one and the same person.

I, Lilu S/O Risala R/o Vill Mehenda Tehsil Hansi Distt. Hisar Haryana 125033 India have change my name from Lilu (Old name) to Dilbag (New Name)

I, Sushila S/o Sh. Karmbir R/o V.P.O Nara Tehsil Madlauda Distt Panipat, have changed my name from Sushila to Sushil Verma for all future purposes.

I Jaskiranjeet Kaur D/o No: 4457987F Late-NK- Jaswant Singh Resident of Khalsa Colony, Railway Road Sarafkot Fatehgarh Churian PO- Fatehgarh Churian Tehsil Batala District Gurdaspur, Punjab, That I declare changed my name from Jaskranjit Kaur to Jaskiranjeet Kaur and date of birth from 09/12/1990 to 16/10/1992 in my father army record.

I, Drisshti R Jain D/O Riicky Jainin R/o # 1825, Sector 22 B, Chandigarh have changed my name from Drisshti R Jain to Drishti Jain.

I, Shakila W/o Subedeon, residing at Village Bahlolpur, PO Bakkarwala (177), Sub Tehsil Partap Nagar, Distt Yamuna Nagar- 135021, Haryana, India have changed my name from Shakila to Sakila.

I Pinki Rani D/o Subhash Chand r/o ward no. 12, Cheeka tehsil Guhla distt Kaithal Haryana inform that I have changed my name from Pinki to Pinki Rani

I, Brijesh Kumar Yadav S/o Shree Ram Niwaj Yadav R/o 310 Preti Nagar, Hisar declare that I have changed my name from Brijesh Kumar Yadav to Brijesh Yadav for future purpose.

I, Manju Khanna W/o Parveen Khanna R/o 439, Sector 16, Hisar declare that I have changed my name from Manju Khanna to Manju Rani for future purpose.

I, Dani W/o Ram Kumar R/o VPO Gorchhi, Distt. Hisar declare that I have changed my name from Dani to Nanda Devi for future purpose.

I, Hemakshi D/o Sh. Pankaj Khurana R/o House No. 1845P, Sector 9-11, Hisar Haryana declare that I have changed my name from Hemakshi to Hemakshi Khurana for all future purpose.

I, Pankaj Khurana S/o Sh. Avinash Chander Khurana R/o House No. 1845P, Sector 9-11, Hisar Haryana declare that I have changed the name of my minor son from Yojit to Yojit Khurana for all future purpose.

I Joginder Pal Son of Piaru Lal residence of Village Singhowal PO Dagan Tehsil Mukerian District Hoshiarpur have change my name from Joginder Pal to Joginder Singh.

I Nanudeen S/o Mohd. Sadik Resident of Village Chuharpur Kalan Sub Tehsil Partap Nagar Distt. Yamuna Nagar. I have change my name from Mohammad zarif Ansari Urf Nanudeen to Nanudeen

I, Islama, (Old Name, which is to be changed) W/o Aas Mohammad Resident of Raipur (145) PO Shadipur Yamuna Nagar Tehsil Jagadhri Distt. Yamuna Nagar (Haryana) have changed my name from Islama (old name) to Islaman (New name)

I, DAMNEET KAUR, wife of Paramveer Singh Narang R/o 367, ward no 19 Krishna Nagar Moga Punjab, 142001 declare that DAMNEET is my given name and KAUR is my surname

I, Sajjan Kumar S/O Joginder Singh Village Singhowal PO Dagan Teh Mukerian Distt. Hoshiarpur, Punjab Pin- 144221 declare that my name is Sajjan Kumar. Kumar is my Surname and Sajjan is my given name concerned note.

I Rajeev Chauhan Son Of Sh Gajraj Singh, R/O- Vpo- Shahzadpur, Naraingarh, Ambala, Haryana-134202 Had Changed My Name From Rajeev Chauhan To Rajeev Kumar In All My Documents.

I Dangar Bhagirathbhai Harsurbhai, S/o Harsurbhai R/o Mata No Vister, Gam-Sakhavadar, Bhavnagar, Gujarat, declared that my daughter's name has been wrongly mentioned as Dangar Pratiksha in Army school records. Her correct name as per Aadhaar is Pratiksha Bhagirathbhai Dangar.

I, Dangar Bhagirathbhai Harsurbhai, S/o Harsurbhai R/o Mata No Vister, Gam-Sakhavadar, Bhavnagar, Gujarat, declare that my daughter's name Dangar Dhruvisha Bhagirathbhai is wrongly mentioned in Army school records, whereas her correct name as per Aadhaar is Dhruvisha Bhagirathbhai Dangar.

I, Chavan Tukaram Motiram, R/o Malegaon Post Jaipur, CT Mantha, Dist. Jaina, Maharashtra, declare that my daughter's name is wrongly written as Chavan Divya in Army school records, whereas her correct name as per Aadhaar is Divya Tukaram Chavan.

I, INDALSING KAKARWAL F/O No. 8038204N, Rank: NK, Name: KAKARWAL GANESH INDALSING RESIDING at:- Village WADI PARDESHI Post Office JAFRABAD Tehsil JAFRABAD Distt. JALNA State Maharashtra pin 431206 That I have changed my name from INDALSING KAKARWAL (old name) to INDALSING FAKIRCHAND KAKARVAL (new name) That my date of birth is 12/08/1969. Hence the affidavit sworn before notary advocate Col. APS Chahal dated 11/12/25

I Naresh Nandal S/o Sh.Inder Singh Resident 1156/9 Ward 21 Gali no 1 Bhiend New Bus Stand Uttam Vihar Rohtak Declare that I have changed my daughter name from Garima to Garima Nandal.

I, Naveen Kumar S/o Khushiram R/o H. No. 20, Indra Colony, Near Daffodil High School, Gali No 03, Azad Nagar, Rajgarh Road, Hisar, Distt. Hisar declares that I have correct my daughter's name from Tanvi to Tanvi Yadav for future purpose.

I, Vicky Kumar Alias Vicky Yadav S/o Hori Lal R/o H.No. 9, Gali No.1 Ram Bali Chowk, Vishal Vihar, Batala Road, Amritsar, Punjab have changed my name from Vicky Kumar alias Vicky Yadav to Vicky Kumar.

I Rishi S/o Gurmali Singh R/o H.No 38, Gali No .12, Baba Deep Singh Colony, Bharar, Tehsil and Distt. Amritsar, Punjab have changed my name from Rishi to Rishi Singh.

I, Mohit S/o Sh. Rajesh R/O Village Bheri Akbarpur Tehsil Uklana District Hisar have Changed my name from Mohit to Mohit Kumar.

I, Baksho W/O Hari Krishan R/O Kharkuwal, Nawanshahr, SBS Nagar, Punjab-144518 have changed my name to Gurbaksh Kaur.

I, Sandeep Kaur Uday D/O Gurmeet Singh Uday W/O Kulvinder Singh R/O House No-1743, LIG Phase 10 Mohali SAS Nagar, Punjab-160062 have changed my name to Geet Uday Saini.

I, Rita W/O Inderpal Singh R/O House No 1181, Street No 2 Ward 44, Vishkarma Puri, Ludhiana, Millerganj, Punjab-141003 have changed my name to Reeta.

I, Purnema Malhotra (Aadhaar No. 339496870439), W/o Sh. Ashish Malhotra, R/o H.No. 1085, Sector 5, Urban Estate, Kurukshetra, Tehsil Thanesar, District Kurukshetra, have changed my name from Purnema to Purnema Malhotra.

I, hitherto Known as Lashmi wife of Gurbhej Singh residing at Village Sakhira Tarn Taran District Tarn Taran-143401 Punjab have changed my name and Shall hereafter be known as Amandeep Kaur. I have changed only my name not my religion.

I, hitherto Known as M Aggarwal Alias Aggarwal M Alias Manju Aggarwal Alias Manju Alias Aggarwal Manju Daughter of Pran Nath Wife of Raj Kumar Gupta residing at H.No.40 A, Gobind Bhawan, Gali No.2, Gopal Nagar, Majitha Road, District Amritsar-143001 Punjab have changed my name and Shall hereafter be known as Manju Gupta.

I, hitherto Known as Raj Alias Gupta D R R K Alias Dr Raj Kumar Gupta son of Amar Nath residing at H.No.40 A, Gobind Bhawan, Gali No.2, Gopal Nagar, Majitha Road, District Amritsar-143001 Punjab have changed my name and Shall hereafter be known as Raj Kumar Gupta

I, hitherto Known as Kunal K Gupta alias Gupta K Kunal son of Raj Kumar Gupta residing at 40 A, Gobind Bhawan, Gali No.2, Gopal Nagar, Majitha Road, District Amritsar-143001 Punjab. Punjab have changed my name and Shall hereafter be known as Kunal Gupta

I, Sunny Son of Ram Ji Lal residing at Awankhi Gate, Post Office Dinanagar District Gurdaspur , Punjab, India PIN- 143531 have changed the name of my minor daughter Akashvi aged 16 years and he shall hereafter be known as Kashvi.

I, hitherto Known as Winder Kaur wife of Gurmit Singh residing at VPO Harchowal Tehsil Batala District Gurdaspur-143527 Punjab have changed my name and Shall hereafter be known as Ninder Kaur.

I, hitherto Known as Danish Son of Mukesh Kumar residing at Ward No.9 Hindu Mohalla VTC: Qadian PO Qadian Tehsil Batala District Gurdaspur-143516 Punjab have changed my name and Shall hereafter be known as Danish Narula

I, Mulik Kohli S/o Vinod Kumar R/O Near Lakir Sahib Gurudwara Fatehchak Deep Avenue, Tarn Taran have declare that Mulik is my Given name and Kohli is my Surname

I, Nirmal Singh S/o Jaswant Singh R/o Patti Balle Ki, Varpal Amritsar have declare that Nirmal is my Given name and Singh is my Surname

I, Davinder W/o Saroop Singh R/o H.No.1943/3, Gali Kambo Wali, Near Jallian Wala Bagh Lakkar Mandi, Amritsar have changed my name from Davinder to Davinder Kaur

I, Jodha Singh S/o Pal Singh R/o H.No.19, Kot Mitt Singh Mata Ganga Ji Nagar, Tarn Taran Road, Amritsar have changed my name from Jodha Singh Khahera to Jodha Singh

I, Harjit Kaur W/o Gurmeet Singh R/o H No 40, Near ITI Ward No 12 Patti, Tehsil Patti District Tarn Taran have changed my name from Harjit Kaur to Harjeet Kaur

I, Attenderjeet Singh S/o Mohinder Singh R/o H.No.108, East Mohan Nagar, Sultanwind Road, Amritsar have changed my name from Attenderjeet Singh to Attinder Jeet Singh

I, Hira Singh S/o Sucha Singh R/O H.No.366 Navi Abadi Faiz Pura Fgc Road Amritsar have changed my name to Heera Singh

I, Rajwinder W/o Piara Singh R/O H.No.F9/1515, Gali No.2, Tandon Nagar, Batala Road, Amritsar have changed my name from Rajwinder to Rajwinder Kaur. Concerned May Please Be Noted.

I, Harwinder Singh S/o Davinder Singh R/o H.No.95-96, 100ft Road, Sudarshan Nagar, Sultanwind Road, Amritsar have changed my name from Harwinder Singh to Harvinder Singh

I, Harjit Singh Pannu S/o Gurdial Singh R/o VPO Mohan Bhandari Teh Ajnala Distt Amritsar have changed my name from Harjit Singh Pannu to Harjit Singh

I, Harshit S/o Sandeep Kumar R/o 2569/D6, Rehrian Wala, Dhapai, Amritsar have changed my name from Harshit to Harshit Kumar.

I, Archana Rajiv kumar Singh W/o Rajiv Kumar, 4056-B, Customs Colony, Sector -37C, Chandigarh, have changed name to Archana Singh

I, Suresh Kumar S/o Jagdish Mishra R/o # 1222 Sector 45 Burail Chandigarh, have changed my name to Suresh Mishra.

I, Shivam s/o Suresh Mishra R/o # 1222 Sector 45 Burail Chandigarh have changed my name to Shivam Mishra.

I, Mahajan Kumar Das S/o Shri Satrudhan Dass R/o # 260 Pipliwala Town Manimajra Chandigarh have changed my name to Mahajan Das.

I, Mahabir s/o Tota Ram R/o # 190 Gali No 2 Shatri Nagar Manimajra Chandigarh have changed my name to Mahavir

I, Priya D/o Kunwar Pal Singh R/o # 860 Khuda Alisher Chandigarh have changed my name to Priya Singh

I, Preeti w/o Sher Singh R/o # 1438/24 Sector 29-B Chandigarh have changed my name to Preeti Kaur

I, Preeti Kaur w/o Sher Singh r/o # 1438/24 Sector 29-B Chandigarh have changed my minor daughter's name from Harsh Preet Kour to Harshpreet Kaur

I, Ram Samajh s/o Shyam Dhari r/o # 1734 Vikas Nagar Mauli Jagran Chandigarh have changed my name to Ram Samujh

I, Mamta Rani w/o Vijay Kumar r/o # 2493 Sector 24-C Chandigarh have changed my name to Payal Rani.

I, Reshmi Rani W/o Sh. Om Parkash R/O H.No. 2201, Block B, Beta IT City, Sector 66, Chajui Majra, PO Dharamgarh District S.A.S Nagar, Punjab-140306 I have changed my name from Reshmi Rani to Reshima Rani.

I, Laxman S/O Arjun Dass R/O Gali No. 10, Near Vikas High School, Aggarsain Colony, Sirsa Have Changed My Name From Laxman To Laxman Dass.

I, Army No. 14941555H Rank: Nk Name: Narendar Kumar Unit: 6 Mech Inf. C/o 56 APO, Resident of Kimoli, Chamoli, Uttarakhand Pin- 246455 have changed my Son's name from Sahdev Agarwal to Sahdev Kumar.

Continuity Pg. No 07

LOST & FOUND
IT IS NOTIFIED FOR THE INFORMATION THAT I HAVE LOST MY PROPERTY REGISTRY DOCUMENT DURING DRIVING. THE PROPERTY DETAILS AS PER DOCUMENT IS VASEKHA NUMBER 2336, JUILD NUMBER -1862, DATE OF SALE 06/02/2015, SUB REGISTERED AT MUKERIAN ACTUALLY LOST AT NO SURE PLACE, DATE OF LOST 11-11-2025, DATE OF REPORT 10-12-2025, PSOC HAJIPIUR HOSHIARPUR, DISTRICT- HOSHIARPUR, LR N: 657221/2025. IF ANY BODY FOUND BELOW ADDRESSES- AASHISH KUMAR S/O HARBANS SINGH. R/O BUDHABAR MUKERIAN HOSHIARPUR MOBILE 7347205701.

Public Notice
It is for the information of General Public that M/s SG Multimetalshas been granted Environmental Clearance by SEIAA, Punjab for expansion of existing Steel Manufacturing Unit namely M/s SG Multimetals located at Village Bhadla, Tehsil Khanna, District Ludhiana, Punjab Vide EC Identification No. EC24B1010PB5489362N dated 18-11-2025 through our Environmental Consultant M/s Eco Payrayavan Laboratories & consultants Pvt. Ltd., Mohali. The copy of Environmental Clearance along with the conditions to be complied is available with project proponent and may also be seen on Environmental Clearance portal (https://parivesh.nic.in/). The interested person can contact either of the two.
M/s SG Multimetals.
Village Bhadla, Tehsil Khanna, District Ludhiana, Punjab,
M/s Eco Payrayavan Laboratories & Consultants Pvt. Ltd.
E-207, Industrial Area, Phase VIII-B, Sector-74, Mohali, Punjab.
www.ecopayrayavan.org

PUBLIC NOTICE
BEFORE DR. INDER JEET, HCS, JOINT COMMISSIONER-I, MUNICIPAL CORPORATION, CHANDIGARH
Sub: Transfer of ownership of 25% share of House No. 32, Situated in 61.21 Acres Development Scheme, Shivalki Enclave, NAC, Manimajra, U.T., Chandigarh on the basis of Registered WILL.
It is notified for the information of general public and all concerned that as per record of this office, 25% share in respect of respect of House No.32, situated in 61.21 Acres Development Scheme, Shivalki Enclave, NAC, Manimajra, U.T., Chandigarh stands in the name of Smt. Kailash Rani Bansal W/o Sh. Ram Niwas Bansal.
It has been reported by **Sh. Atul Bansal** that **Smt. Kailash Rani Bansal W/o Sh. Ram Niwas Bansal** had expired on 11.5.2021 and executed Registered WILL dated 25.02.2020 vide which she bequeath their share i.e. 25% in favour of **Sh. Atul Bansal & Sh. Sunil Bansal** who have applied for transfer of ownership rights to the extent of **25% share** in respect of House No.32, situated in 61.21 Acres Development Scheme, Shivalki Enclave, NAC, Manimajra, U.T., Chandigarh in his favour on the basis of Registered WILL. Registered in the office of the sub registrar U.T. Chandigarh

Punjab Cong Turmoil Deepens as Sidhu Secures Meeting with Priyanka; Warring Huddles with Leadership

MONIKA MALIK ■ Chandigarh

Mounting friction, parallel power plays, and rising distrust have pushed the Punjab Congress into a full-blown churn, with the party leadership scrambling for damage control even as key actors chart their own moves. As the storm triggered by Congress leader and former MLA Dr Navjot Kaur Sidhu's explosive "Rs 500-crore for CM chair" remark continues to rage, the crisis has now pulled both cricketer-turned-politician Navjot Singh Sidhu and state unit president Amarinder Singh Raja Warring into a frenetic round of firefighting in Delhi.

The biggest development came with Navjot Sidhu managing to secure a personal meeting with Priyanka Gandhi Vadra on December 19 — a slot he had actively sought to present his case before the Congress takes any disciplinary action following his wife's allegations. Sidhu travelled to Delhi earlier as well, but the Parliament's heavy schedule kept senior leaders unavailable. For a leader who once thrived on high-voltage commentary, his current silence — no media interactions, no social-media outbursts — has fueled speculation that he is preparing for a decisive encounter with the high command.

Meanwhile, the parallel pressure axis within the Punjab Congress is working at full throttle. Warring, also an MP from Ludhiana, is in Delhi for the Parliament session and held a series of strategy sessions with

Punjab state affairs in-charge Bhupesh Baghel and the two co-incharges Suraj Singh Thakur and Ravinder Dalvi. The meetings, party insiders said, are aimed at assessing the damage caused by the ongoing factional drama and formulating the state unit's response to whatever emerges from Sidhu's December 19 meeting.

The Congress high command, deeply displeased with the public meltdown in Punjab — barely two years before the 2027 Assembly elections — has ordered a high-level inquiry into Dr Navjot Kaur's claims, with Bhupesh Baghel appointed inquiry head. The rest of the committee members have not yet been disclosed, but the gesture signalled unmistakable seriousness from Delhi.

The probe stemmed from the uproar after Dr Navjot Kaur alleged that the Chief Minister's chair in Punjab goes to the one who "brings a Rs 500-crore briefcase". Although she later attempted to qualify her words, her subsequent escalation — accusing several senior Punjab Congress leaders of corruption and irresponsibility — pushed matters to a point where the state unit suspended her. The Sidhus retaliated by questioning the leadership of Warring, calling him unfit, unethical, and corrupt.

Warring has chosen restraint. After meeting Baghel at AICC headquarters this week, he fielded media questions on Dr Navjot Kaur's suspension with a clipped statement. "I do not want to interfere in who is

doing what. Once a matter has been concluded, there should be no further discussion," he said.

Party managers read this cautious tone as an attempt to avoid inflaming tensions ahead of Sidhu's upcoming meeting with Priyanka Gandhi.

Amid the churn, the state unit has already sent a detailed report to the Congress leadership on the conduct of the Sidhu couple. The report asserted that Dr Navjot Kaur's public allegations have "caused considerable damage" to the party. It added that Navjot Singh Sidhu himself has, for years, made statements "diverging from the party line" or attacking senior leaders. Their absence from party programmes over the past four years contradicts their claims of marginalization, it added.

The report also pointed out the past tensions — particularly the 2022 clash between Sidhu and the then Chief Minister Charanjit Singh Channi, documented earlier by the then in-charge Harish Chaudhary — contributed to electoral losses and continue to disrupt organizational coherence. The report emphasized that immediate disciplinary measures are essential to protect the party's credibility ahead of 2027 polls.

Party insiders said that the report reflected growing frustration within the organization that repeated indulgence of high-profile leaders has only emboldened dissent rather than strengthening the cadre.

The Congress leadership

is also alarmed by the timing of the crisis. With the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) entrenched in the state and the BJP aggressively courting factions, internal implodings are the last thing the party can afford. Delhi believed that left unchecked, the current turmoil could dent the party's 2027 prospects, especially if the Sidhu family decides to escalate further.

For Warring, the challenge is twofold — tightening organizational discipline and projecting a strong leadership profile, even as public attention remains fixated on the Sidhus. His meeting with Baghel also covered governance issues — particularly Punjab's deteriorating law-and-order situation — the issue he raised in the Lok Sabha also. He flagged the rise in gang wars, extortion, targeted killings, and daylight robberies, warning that both the AAP Government and the Centre were "mute spectators" to the crisis.

With Priyanka Gandhi's intervention now scheduled, political observers widely expected December 19 to set the course for the Congress in Punjab. Whether the high command delivers stern action, extends another conciliatory gesture, or attempts a negotiated truce remains to be seen. But what is clear is that the party's Punjab unit stands at a delicate crossroads — one fraught with bruised egos, competing ambitions, and a leadership unwilling to tolerate further public embarrassment. For now, the Congress waits for Sidhu's next move.

Punjab CM Cracks Down on Poor-Quality Road Works, Orders Action Against Contractor During Surprise Checks

PNS ■ Patiala

Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann on Thursday sent a strong message across the state's construction ecosystem by halting payments and ordering a show-cause notice against a contractor after detecting lapses on an under-construction link road in Patiala. The tough action came during a series of surprise inspections — spread across Patiala and Fatehgarh Sahib — aimed at ensuring that every rupee of the state's massive road-building programme delivers results on the ground.

With Punjab undertaking its largest-ever road construction initiative, involving 44,920 kilometres of new and upgraded roads at a cost of Rs 16,209 crore, the Chief Minister said that he would personally continue such checks to guarantee quality and protect public money. "This is taxpayers' money, and it must be utilized properly," Mann said firmly after sampling material at the Reetkheri Link Road site, where he found non-compliance with mandated weight parameters.

Angered by the lapse, he directed officials to withhold the contractor's payments immediately and issue a show-cause notice.

The Chief Minister's sudden visits covered three key stretches — the Reetkheri Link Road and the



Patiala-Sirhind Road in Patiala district, and the Rurki-Reona Plan Road in Fatehgarh Sahib. At each stop, Mann reviewed ongoing work, ordered laboratory testing of materials, and signalled zero tolerance for compromises in construction quality.

He underlined that the broader purpose of the exercise was not punitive but corrective — ensuring that the unprecedented road-building push achieves durable, world-class results. "A huge sum is being invested. We must guarantee that only the best material goes into these roads," he said, adding that surprise inspections would become a routine feature.

STATE'S BIGGEST-EVER ROAD PROG

Mann highlighted that the government has taken up the most extensive road reconstruction and

expansion effort in Punjab's history. By the end of next year, the state aims to complete 44,920 kilometres of roads in villages, towns and cities — each covered under a five-year maintenance clause to ensure longevity and consistent quality.

A significant component of this mission is already underway. The government has constructed or begun constructing 19,373 kilometres of rural link roads costing Rs 4,092 crore. This work became even more critical after recent floods severely damaged connectivity in several areas. The ongoing projects incorporate advanced safety and durability features such as luminous lane markings, edge guides and improved signages.

The Chief Minister emphasized tight coordination among departments — including

Punjab Mandi Board (PMB), Public Works Department (PWD), Urban Local Bodies and representatives from local administrations — to ensure that all utilities such as sewerage lines, water pipes and fibre cables are laid well before new roads are built. This, he said, would prevent the common practice of newly-constructed roads being dug up repeatedly, saving both public money and public inconvenience.

Calling citizens "owners of the roads", Mann urged the public to monitor construction in their own localities. "People should oversee the work and bring any irregularity to the notice of the government. We will take the severest action against defaulters," he assured.

Mann revealed that the Chief Minister's Flying Squad has been checking road quality across the state and has already recommended cancellation of several contracts for use of substandard materials. He warned that contractors or government employees found complicit in poor-quality work would face stringent punishment.

Reiterating his commitment to safeguarding taxpayer funds, the Chief Minister said that no compromise would be tolerated. "We are duty-bound to ensure proper utilization of public money. Not a single stone will be left unturned," he declared.

Home Minister Amit Shah to visit Haryana on Dec 24: CM Saini

PNS ■ New Delhi/Chandigarh

Haryana Chief Minister Nayab Singh Saini, who met Union and Cooperation Home Minister Amit Shah on Thursday, said that Shah will visit Haryana on December 24. Home Minister will be the chief guest at the passing out parade of 5,000 newly recruited Haryana Police personnel," he added while interacting with the media persons after presiding over a meeting with the Members of Parliament from Haryana at Haryana Bhawan in New Delhi.

He said, "During the meeting, we held detailed discussions on the ongoing development works in the Lok Sabha constituencies of the MPs." He said that the State Government is undertaking development works in every sector. Continuous development activities are also underway in the Lok Sabha constituencies of the MPs. "We also discussed with all MPs about the demands related to their respective regions and deliberated on the development projects. The purpose of the meeting is to further accelerate development works so that the general public can reap maximum benefits from government schemes, he added.

Saini accused the opposition of spreading misinformation and failing to address real issues. He criticized the Congress party, stating that it has no constructive agenda. They don't have a single scheme that isn't mired in corruption, and their programs never take shape on the ground. Instead of spreading baseless allegations like vote rigging, they should present a clear vision for the country and focus on development. People do not take their claims seriously, Saini added.

Haryana doctors' strike enters Day 4; Govt officials claim smooth health services in Hospitals

PNS ■ Chandigarh

Government doctors in Haryana continued their indefinite strike under the banner of the Haryana Civil Medical Services Association (HCMSA) on the fourth day on Thursday, severely disrupting key healthcare services across the state.

Despite the ESMA order banning strikes by doctors and health staff for six months, HCMSA members refused to relent, extending the strike indefinitely after asserting that one of their key demands — the halt on SMO direct recruitment — had only been partly conceded by the government, while the ACP issue remains unresolved. Outpatient departments (OPDs) at District Civil Hospitals, Community

Health Centres (CHCs) and primary health centres are functioning in a limited capacity through contingency deployments. Doctors, including some on hunger strike outside the Directorate of Health Services office in Panchkula, have reiterated their stance that normal duties will not resume until all legitimate demands are met.

Meanwhile, Panchkula Civil Surgeon Dr Mukta Kumar, claimed that despite the strike, patient care services at Civil Hospital Panchkula such as the OPD, Emergency, and other essential services continued to function as per the routine. Around 3500 OPD patients per day reported in various clinical departments. The patients reported receiving timely consultations and treatment, he claimed.

SAD requests SEC to extend deadline for holding Block Samiti and Zila Parishad polls

PNS ■ Chandigarh

Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) on Thursday requested Punjab State Election Commission (SEC) to extend the polling hours from 7 am to 5 pm on December 14 to ensure maximum participation in the Block Samiti and Zila Parishad elections.

In a request to the SEC, senior SAD leader Daljit Singh Cheema said that the present polling deadline between 8 am to 4 pm was woefully short. "The

DRY DAY DECLARED ON DEC 14, THE POLL DAY IN PUNJAB
As per the directions given by Punjab State Election Commission, the state's Excise Commissioner Jitendra Jorwal on Thursday declared the poll day, December 14, 2025, as 'dry day', with effect from 00.00 hours on December 14, 2025, to 10 am on December 15, 2025, in the revenue estate of the villages falling in jurisdiction of the Zila Parishads and Panchayat Samitis of the state of Punjab.

restricted timings will prevent poor families, farmers, and daily wagers from exercising their democratic right, ultimately reducing overall voter turnout.

Asserting that the SEC



Haryana Chief Minister Nayab Singh Saini on Thursday met Prime Minister Narendra Modi in New Delhi. He expressed his gratitude to the Prime Minister for attending two major events-Guru Tegh Bahadur Ji and the International Gita Mahotsav in the State.

Pioneer Photo

We will transform Himachal as prosperous state in next two years: CM Sukhu

PNS ■ Mandi/Shimla



Amid criticism from the opposition on accumulating debt, Himachal Pradesh Chief Minister Sukhvinder Singh Sukhu on Thursday said he was compelled to take loans to pay installments of existing loans amounting Rs 75,000 crore.

Speaking at the Jan Sankalp rally in Mandi to mark the completion of three years of his government, Sukhu said financial debt, the 2023 monsoon disaster and the political crisis triggered by cross-voting in Rajya Sabha elections by Congress leaders were the top three challenges since he became chief minister.

"The Congress government was compelled to take loan to repay the installments of already existing loans as there was a loan liability of Rs 75,000 crore when he took charge."

The programme was organised in Mandi district, which was badly hit by the monsoon disaster, to present reports of government initiatives in the past three years and spell out the vision for the next two years. The Congress lost nine out of ten seats in Mandi district, the home

district of Leader of Opposition Jai Ram Thakur, in the 2022 assembly polls.

Sukhu claimed that his government has fulfilled a majority of the ten guarantees announced by the Congress ahead of the assembly polls. He listed the Old Pension Scheme, initiatives on milk and cow dung procurement and English medium education in government schools as some of the achievements in the last three years.

The chief minister alleged that the central government withheld Rs 1,600 crore of funds after the Congress government restored OPS in the state. Sukhu recalled that on his first day as CM, he announced government support for 6,000 children,

which included Rs 3 lakh for house construction, Rs 1 lakh for tuition and Rs 4,000 monthly pocket money, besides funds for higher education.

Reacting to LoP Jai Ram Thakur's remark that after the next state polls, the Congress MLAs would fit into a small "Alto car", Sukhu said the Congress would come back in a 52-seater Volvo bus. He took a dig at the previous BJP government for alleged corruption and irregularities in its transactions with private companies, including waive offs and "customised packages" for big industrialists. Congress in-charge for Himachal Pradesh Rajni Patil praised the government for its drive against drugs and becoming self-reliant and asserted that Congress would definitely return to power in 2027. "We are fighting the fight to safeguard the interests of the state and have not forgotten our guarantees and will fulfill them," said Deputy Chief Minister Mukesh Agnihotri. He also spoke on eradicating 'chitta'-adulterated heroin — abuse in the state. Targeting the central government, Agnihotri said that funds worth Rs 1,200 crore of Jal Jeevan Mission have been withheld, which is affecting

the pace of development projects.

The CM launched MyDeed portal, the Naksha scheme, digital jamabandi module and also distributed benefits to beneficiaries of various flagship schemes of the present state government, a statement issued here said. He transferred Rs 50.63 lakh directly into the bank accounts of 401 beneficiaries under the Rajiv Gandhi Pratikriti Kheti Khushal Kisan Yojana. A special relief assistance amounting to Rs 5.11 crore was also disbursed to disaster-affected families of Chamba, Hamirpur, Kangra, Lahaul-Spiti, Sirmaur, Solan and Una districts.

He handed over symbolic keys of e-taxis to 25 beneficiaries under the Rajiv Gandhi Swarozgar start-up scheme and air tickets and visas to 21 youths selected for overseas employment.

The CM also distributed e-vouchers to meritorious students under the Srinivasa Ramanujan Students Digital Scheme to purchase laptops, tablets and smartphones. A total of 8,450 toppers from Class 10 and 12, along-with 900 final-year undergraduate students have received benefits under the scheme, the statement added.

Haryana CM launches Phase II of Mukhyamantri Antyodaya Parivar Utthan Yojana

PNS ■ Chandigarh

Haryana Chief Minister Nayab Singh Saini, while launching the Mukhyamantri Antyodaya Parivar Utthan Yojana-2.0 on Thursday, inaugurated the state-level Antyodaya Utthan Mela in Sonapat. Speaking on the occasion, the Chief Minister said that the government is committed to improving the living standards of the poorest families. The Antyodaya Mela is not just a platform to share information about schemes, but a confluence of development, participation, and enthusiasm. The hope on the faces of every family here is the true measure of our efforts, he said.

Saini explained that the scheme has been started to increase the income of poor families and provide them with equal opportunities, skill development, employment, dignity, and better living standards. In the first phase, Antyodaya Melas were organized at 166 locations, and in the second phase, these fairs will be

held across the state in a phased manner.

He said that the strength of any society lies in the strength of its families. Educated and empowered families automatically lead the state towards prosperity. Our government ensures that the benefits of all schemes reach every eligible person without discrimination or delay, the Chief Minister said.

Saini added that the scheme focuses on developing the capabilities of families through loans, training, and skill development, helping them become self-reliant. This initiative provides new opportunities in employment, self-employment, education, and health. Services from departments such as pensions, BPL, ration cards, self-employment loans, women's empowerment, agriculture, and animal husbandry are being offered on the spot. Eligible beneficiaries are provided immediate solutions to their problems.

He further said that the government aims to

increase the annual income of the poorest families to at least Rs 1,80,000 under this scheme. Families are being linked to loan schemes, skill development programs, daily wage employment opportunities, and other facilities. The scheme integrates 49 programs from 19 departments, and a dedicated portal has been created to provide information, eligibility criteria, benefits, and online application facilities.

Saini said that the state government is firmly committed to the empowerment of women. Referring to the Deendayal Lado Lakshmi Yojana, he said the scheme was launched to provide economic and social security to women. So far, Rs 258 crore has been disbursed to over 7 lakh women and girls in two installments, he added.

ALLOCATES FLATS AND HANDS OVER KEYS TO 509 EWS BENEFICIARIES

On this occasion, Saini also allocated flats to 509 beneficiaries from the Economically Weaker

Sections (EWS) under the EWS Housing Scheme and handed over keys to 20 people on the spot. The beneficiaries included 16 nomadic families, 79 widowed women, 186 Scheduled Caste families, 156 families with an income of less than Rs. 1 lakh, and 72 families with an income of less than Rs. 1.40 lakh. A waiting list of 127 applicants was also released.

The Chief Minister also launched the official logo of Sonapat district, designed by 20 government school students under the guidance of Rupendra Punia, APC of the Education Department. The logo reflects Sonapat's rich heritage and features elements representing its history from the Mahabharata era, sports and athletes, mushroom, wheat and rice production, the automobile sector, educational institutions and sports university, Asia's largest Gannaur vegetable market, NH-44, the famous dhabas of Muthral, and the sacred Yamuna River flowing through the district.

ECI can't treat voters with doubt, SC told



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

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

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

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

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

He said initiating an inquiry based on a BLO’s suspicion effectively amounts to “suspending citizenship”.

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

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

He argued that while the right to vote may be statutory, it flows from constitutional rights including Article 19(1)(a) and Article 21. “Removal from an electoral roll on suspicion amounts to giving a power to suspend citizenship,” he said.

On the definition and implication of the term “migrant”, he said that in the current socio-political discourse, the term is often loaded and used to imply “illegal migrant” or “exodus” rather than domestic movement. Offering a broader view, Justice Bagchi said, “Migration does not have a domestic import... It is their livelihood which drives them. We have a brain drain

which is also migration.”

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

The CJ added a stark reality check regarding labour migration and said, “In North India, trains are full of farm workers from Bihar... They are virtually auctioned and by the time they come to Punjab, they are in tears.” He noted that many such workers have settled in Punjab, their children have mixed with the culture, yet their roots remain in Bihar or West Bengal.

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

While the petitioners argued against the arbitrary nature of the SIR exercise, the bench said, “The SIR cannot be seen too much on procedural aspects.

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

When the petitioners pressed on the “inquisitorial” nature of the process, Justice Bagchi clarified that the court’s queries were “dialectical” in nature, intended to evoke responses rather than signal a conclusion. The senior lawyer questioned the rationale behind selecting nine states and three Union Territories, including Chhattisgarh, Kerala, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh, for this exercise.

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

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

“Many are coming now just for publicity. No fresh matters are required any more,” the CJ said.

The matter will continue on December 16. Earlier, the bench asked whether the Election Commission is barred from conducting an inquiry in case of a doubtful citizen and if an inquisitorial process falls outside its constitutional power.

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



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

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

“There is a requisition of the services of doctors and this is evident from the con-

joint reading of the provisions of the Act, the Maharashtra Prevention and Containment of COVID-19 Regulations 2020, the Navi Mumbai Municipal Corporation Order dated March 31, 2020, the PMGKY-Package Scheme, the explanatory communication to the PMGKY policy and the FAQs released,” the bench said.

It said the invocation of laws and regulations was intended to leave no stone unturned in requisitioning the doctors and the insurance scheme was equally intended to assure doctors and health professionals in the frontline that the country is with them.

The court said individual claims for insurance made

under the PMGKY-Package will be considered and decided in accordance with the law and on the basis of evidence. “The onus to prove that a deceased lost his life while performing a COVID-19-related duty is on the claimant and the same needs to be established on the basis of credible evidence,” it added.

The top court was hearing a plea moved by Pradeep Arora and others against a March 9, 2021, order of the Bombay High Court that held that private hospital staffers were not entitled to receive benefits under the insurance scheme unless their services were requisitioned by the state or the central Government.

CHANGE OF NAME

I, Nazar Singh Father of Army No. 4470951F Rank: Nk Name: Jagdev Singh Posted with Unit: Sikh LI C/o 56 APO, Permanent Resident of Village Ramgarh, District Mansa, Punjab have changed my Name from Nazar Singh and Date of Birth 20-11-1950 to Najar Singh and Date of Birth 04-06-1945.

I, Puro Kaur Mother of Army No. 4470951F Rank: Nk Name: Jagdev Singh Posted with Unit: Sikh LI C/o 56 APO, Permanent Resident of Village Ramgarh, District Mansa, Punjab have changed my Name from Puro Kaur and Date of Birth 04-06-1945 to Bhuro Kaur and Date of Birth 20-11-1950.

I, Priyanka Sharma (Aadhaar No. 9459 7216 2216) daughter of Shri Vijay Kumar R/o Village Dautaur, Tehsil Sampla, District Rohtak, Haryana declare that in my 10th and 12th class mark sheets, my mother’s name is Babita, and in some of my other documents, my mother’s name is Babita Devi. The both names, Babita and Babita Devi, belong to my mother, and she is the same person and no one else.

I, Ninder Singh S/o Jeet Singh Vill. Galedwa, Pehowa, Kurukshetra have changed my name Narender Singh.

I, URMILA W/o PARMOD KUMAR R/o Ward No. 14, Fouji Plot, Pehowa, Tehsil Pehowa, Distt. Kurukshetra, Haryana have changed my name from URMILA to URMILA DEVI

I, Paramjit Singh S/o Ram Kala R/o Village Kurali, Distt. Kamal have changed my name from Parmjit to Paramjit Singh. Please note for future.

I, Anu Kumar S/o Om Prakash, village Jhansa, Tehsil Pehowa, Kurukshetra, have mistakenly mentioned my father’s name as Raj Kumar in my driving licence but according to all my documents, my father’s name is correctly mentioned as Om Prakash.

I, No. 15678122A Rank-CQMH Name Sohan Lal permanent resident of Jaipur, P.O. Kalyana, Tehsil Shahabad Markanda, Distt. Kurukshetra, State Haryana - 136 135 and presently serving in 15 EW BN, Pin-918015 C/O 99, APO, that I have changed my son’s name from Lakshya Siyoliya to Lakshay Siyoliya vide affidavit before the Notary Public Shahabad Markanda on 11/12/2025.

I, Ankur S/o Mukesh Kumar R/o ME-157 Mapsko City, Sector-27, Sonapat have changed my name from Ankur Malik to Ankur for all future purposes.

I, Maya legally mother of No. 15754140Y Rank Signm Name Kalugade Uttam Tanaji presently residing at Helavi Galli, At – Benikre, PO – Mouje Haladi, Tehsil – Kagal, Distt – Kolhapur, State – Maharashtra, PIN – 416219 have changed my name from Maya to Kalugade Mayatai Tanaji vide Affidavit dated 10/12/2025 before Executive Magistrate Jalandhar, (PB).

I, Vimal legally mother of No. 15747198N Rank Signm Name Jadhav Shubham Namdev presently residing at Malvadi, Vill – Savarvadi, PO – Beed, Distt – Kolhapur, State – Maharashtra, PIN – 416001 have changed my name from Vimal to Vimal Namdev Jadhav vide Affidavit dated 10/12/2025 before Executive Magistrate Jalandhar, (PB).

I, Ratwant W/o Ram Singh R/o Vill: Sheron, PO: Dhotion, Distt: Tarn Taran have changed my name to Ratwant Kaur concerned Note.

I, Seema Chhabra W/o Raj Kumar R/o #1787 MLA Road Rajpura Distt Patiala changed name as Seema.

I, Ikbai Singh S/O Natha Singh, R/O Vpo. Pakhowal, Tehsil Raikot, Distt Ludhiana Have Change My Name Ikbai Singh. Plz Note.

I, Kamaljit S/o Mangal Singh R/o H.No. 94, Tibba Mohalla, VPO. Jamsher Khas, Distt. Jalandhar have changed my name from Kamaljit to Kamaljit Gill (Surname as Gill)

I, Mohinder Singh S/o Rakha Singh R/o H.No. 18-M, Basti Peer Dada, Kacha Kot, Jalandhar-144021. Punjab have changed my spelling name from Mohinder Singh to Mahinder Singh.

I, Sita W/o Vijay Kumar R/o Village Kot Fatuhi, Distt.Hoshiarpur, Punjab-144519 have changed my name from Sita to Sita Rani.

I, hitherto Known as Dilbara Singh S/o Kartar Singh R/o H.No. W.N-391, Katra Mohalla, Basti Danishmanda, Jalandhar-144002, Punjab have changed my name and shall hereafter be known as Dilbagh Singh.

I, Sudeshkaur Lakhvitsingh Saunte W/o Lakhbirsingh Saunte R/o Village Dhirpur, Distt. Jalandhar have changed my name as Sudeshkaur L Saunte.

I, hitherto Known as Beero W/o Jai Chand R/o H.No. 14, Pind Wadala, Distt. Jalandhar, Punjab have changed my name and shell be known as Balwir Kaur.

I, hitherto Known as Parwinder Kaur W/o Roop Lal R/o Village Janta Nagar, Kot Badal Khan, Distt.Jalandhar, Punjab have changed my name and shell be known as Palwinder Kaur.

I, Arshdeep Singh S/O Hardeep Singh R/O Vill. Saranwali P.O. Wara Bhai Ka (Ferozepur) Have Changed My Name Arshdeep Singh To Arshdeep Singh Bath.

I Sukhwinder Singh Sandhu S/O Joginder Singh R/O Village Rajan Wala P.O Kadar Wala Distt. Moga Have Changed My Name To Sukhwinder Singh.

I Rajinder Wadhwa S/O Amar Nath R/O House No.-309 Ward No.-11 Partap Road Moga Punjab 142001 Have Changed My Name To Rajinder Kumar Wadhwa.

I Balvinder Kaur W/O Harjinder Singh R/O Village Baddian Tehsil Gilderbaha Distt. Sri Muktsar Sahib Have Changed My Name To Balvinder Kaur.

I Binder Kaur W/o Harpal Singh R/o Ward No. 03, 24 O, Ganganagar (Rajasthan) -335073 has changed my name to Balvinder Kaur.

I, Ramandeep Kaur W/O Amandeep Singh R/O Vill Danyal Po Dhianpur Tehsil Baba Bakala Distt Amritsar Rural Punjab I Have Changed My Name From Ramandeep Kaur To Ramandeep Is My Given Name And Kaur Is My Surname.

We Amandeep Singh S/O Pritpal Singh & Smt Ramandeep Kaur W/O Amandeep Singh R/O Vill Danyal Po Dhianpur Tehsil Baba Bakala Distt Amritsar Rural Punjab on behalf our minor Son/Daughter have changed name Manraj Singh to Manraj is given name and Singh is surname.

I Ratwant W/o Ram Singh R/o Vill: Sheron, PO: Dhotion, Distt: Tarn Taran have changed my name to Ratwant Kaur concerned Note.

I Seema Chhabra W/o Raj Kumar R/o #1787 MLA Road Rajpura Distt Patiala changed name as Seema.

I Ikbai Singh S/O Natha Singh, R/O Vpo. Pakhowal, Tehsil Raikot, Distt Ludhiana Have Change My Name Ikbai Singh. Plz Note.

I, Tajdeep Singh S/o Amninder Singh R/o Vpo. Maloke Teh-Zira (Ferozepur) have changed my name to Tajdeep Singh Gill.

I, Santosh Rani W/o No 10197946 Ex NK Charan Dass Village Pamdori Bhawa PO Nainowal Jattan, Tehsil & Distt Hoshiarpur (Punjab) have changed my name from Santosh Rani to Rani Devi.

I Sunil S/o Bhawani Dutt Badola R/o 2655/21, Near Shiv Mandir, Patel Nagar, Sonipat, Haryana - 131001, have changed my name to Sunil Dutt Badola.

I Raj Kumar S/o Abhay Kumar R/o # 544/4, Ekta Vihar Anand Nagar-B, Patiala, Punjab-147011 have changed my name to Raj Kumar Gupta.

I, hitherto known as Kumari Priyanka W/o Ram Kumar Yadav R/o Hira Bagh, Street No. 7, Main Road Rishi Colony, Patiala, PO: University (Patiala), District Patiala, Punjab-147002 have changed my name and shall hereafter be known as Priyanka Yadav.

I, hitherto known as Sangita Rani W/o Omesh Kumar Sofat R/o House No. 46, Street No. 5, Adarsh Nagar, Sector 2 B, Mandi Gobindgarh, District Fatehgarh Sahib, Punjab-147301 have changed my name and shall hereafter be known as Sangeeta Sofat.

I, hitherto known as Umesh Kumar S/o Jagdish Rai Sofat Resident of House No. 46, Street No. 5, Adarsh Nagar, Sector 2 B, Mandi Gobindgarh, District Fatehgarh Sahib, Punjab-147301, India have changed my name and shall hereafter be known as Omesh Kumar Sofat.

I, Shilo Kaur W/O Late Pritam Singh R/O Vpo- Saidawal Kalan. Tehsil/District – Gurdaspur, Punjab-143530 India. Declare That My Son Sarwan Singh S/O Late Pritam Singh Army No.144425801 Rank Sep In My Son Army Service Record My Name Sheel Kour And My Date Of Birth 01-07-1946 Is Wrong. But My Son Army Service Record My Name Shilo Kaur And My Date Of Birth 01-07-1953 Is Correct. Vide Affidavit No. IN-PB 92030148662434X Dated 13-11-2025, Before Executive Magistrate Gurdaspur.

I, No. 14369521N Ex Hav Balbir Kumar resident of VPO – Kaunterpur, Tehsil and Distt Pathankot (Punjab), have changed name of my daughter from PUJA DEVI to POOJA DEVI vide Affidavit No. IN-PB01336209113766X dated 11-12-2025 before Executive Magistrate Pathankot.

I, No 10363338W Rank HAV Name GOVIND RAM of 126 Inf Bn (TA) JAK RIF, C/o 56 APO, have changed name of my mother from MACHALI DEVI to MANCHALI DEVI and correct date of birth of my mother is 07-01-1954 instead of 47 Yrs vide Affidavit No. IN-PB01129163127288X Dated 10-12-2025 before Notary Public Pathankot (Punjab).

I Jatinder Singh S/o Sukhwinder Singh Village Bhulle chak P/o Pull Tibri District Gurdaspur have changed my name jatinder Singh to Singh Jatinder. My Given name is Jatinder and Surname is Singh.

I, Service No.15428761F Rank NK Ravi Shankar Kumar S/O Parmod Kumar Singh R/O Village- Lalu Bigha, Po- Chiraili, Distt- Gaya, (Bihar) India. Declare That In My Army Records My Mother Name Kanti Devi His Date Of Birth 25-08-1971 Is Wrong. But My Mother Date Of Birth 01-01-1977 Is Correct. Vide Affidavit No. IN-PB 00498700017968X Dated 09-12-2025, Before Executive Magistrate Gurdaspur.

I, Sandeep Verma son of Sh. Rajender Verma R/o House No. 572, Amar Nagar Tibba Basti, Gali No. 8, Bhiwani, Haryana 127021 have changed my minor son name from Mahir to Parth.

I, Renu Sheoran d/o Moji Ram R/o VPO Jhumpa Khurd, Tehsil Loharu, District Bhiwani, Haryana 127201 have changed my minor son name from Raman Saharan to Pushkal Adwaite.

I, Chinni Tavudu father of No. JC392887F, Nb Sub, Chinni Ramana residing of unit 31 NSR chandimandir cant declare that in my son army record my name is erroneously written as Chinni Thavitayya my correct name is chinni Tavudu. That my Correct Date of birth is 01 July 1966.

I, YOGITA am legally Wedded Spouse of Army No- 14677763K Rank: NK Name: Solam Naresh Suresh Permanent Residing At Village: Waki Khurd, Post - Padvi, Teh - Mahad, Dist - Raigad, State: Maharashtra, Pin: 402302 declare that I have changed My Name from YOGITA to YOGITA NARESH SOLAM. Vide Affidavit No: 11AA 219206, Dated: 11/12/2025

I, BABAN am Father of Army No: 2803561N Rank: Hav Name: Pawar Uttam Baban Permanent Address: Village - Bhendawade, Teh -Khanapur, Dist-Sangli, State: Maharashtra, Pin-415310 declare that I have changed my name from BABAN to BABAN BAPU PAWAR and also Correct my Date of birth from 20/09/1952 to 01/06/1953. Vide Affidavit No: 11AA 219205, Dated: 11/12/2025

I, VIJINA PRAJESH P wife of PRAJESH. R resident of RAYAROTH, Padiyoor (Post), Kannur (Dist) Kerala (State), Pin – 670703, HAVE CHANGED MY NAME FROM VIJINA PRAJESH P (Old Name) To VIJINA P (New Name), vide affidavit dated 11 Dec 2025 sworn before Notary Public Satpal,Pathankot. Please correct it.

I, Khundrakpam Neety Devi Daughter of JC-288380N Nb/Sub Khundrakpam Birjit Singh resident of Heirok Part II Laimayum. Thoubal, Manipur, 795148, have changed my name & DOB from Kh Naoba Devi to Khundrakpam Neety Devi and date of birth from 31 Dec 2010 to 03 Feb 2012.

I, Konda Revathi spouse of No.15734107A Signm Pasupuleti Anil Kumar resident of Village- Reddy Vari Palli, Post- Rayachoty, Tehsil- Rayachoty, District- Kadapa, State- Andhra Pradesh, Pin-516270, have changed my name from Konda Revathi to Pasupuleti Revathi Vide affidavit No.IN-PB01486843785111X dated 11 Dec 2025 before notary public Pathankot

I, Kamlesh Devi spouse of No.15499377K NK Ram Ratan Singh resident of Village- Nagla Naga, Post- Beri Chahar, Tehsil- Kheragarh, District- Agra, State- Uttar Pradesh, Pin-283102, have changed my name from Kamlesh Devi to Kamlesh Vide affidavit No.IN-PB01078624690539X dated 10 Dec 2025 before notary public Pathankot

I, No.15779765Y Hav Sidaray Huddar resident of Village- Kumathe, Post- Kumathe, Tehsil- Bableshwar, District- Vijayapura, State- Karnataka, Pin- 586126, have changed my son name from Sudarshan to Sudarshan Sidaray Huddar, Vide affidavit No.IN-PB01517569735158X dated 11 Dec 2025 before notary public Pathankot.

I, Rajashri Sidaray Huddar wife of No.15779765Y Hav Sidaray Huddar resident of Village- Kumathe, Post- Kumathe, Tehsil- Bableshwar, District- Vijayapura, State- Karnataka, Pin- 586126, have changed my name from Rajeshwari to Rajashri Sidaray Huddar, Vide affidavit No.IN-PB01518806163630X dated 11 Dec 2025 before notary public Pathankot.

I, Singuru Laxmi mother of No.15790582H RHM(TIR) Rajarao Singuru resident of Village- Singuru, Post- Kinthali, Tehsil- Ponduru, District- Srikakulam, State- Andhra Pradesh, Pin- 532402, have changed my name from Lakshmi to Singuru Laxmi Vide affidavit No.IN-PB01520629612165X dated 11 Dec 2025 before notary public Pathankot.

I, Singuru Madhusudanarao father of No.15790582H RHM(TIR) Rajarao Singuru resident of Village- Singuru, Post- Kinthali, Tehsil- Ponduru, District- Srikakulam, State- Andhra Pradesh, Pin- 532402, have changed my name from Madhusudhana Rao to Singuru Madhusudanarao Vide affidavit No.IN-PB01522054797178X dated 11 Dec 2025 before notary public Pathankot.

I, No.15779765Y Hav Sidaray Huddar resident of Village- Kumathe, Post- Kumathe, Tehsil- Bableshwar, District- Vijayapura, State- Karnataka, Pin- 586126, have changed my daughter name from Susmita to Sushmita Sidaray Huddar, Vide affidavit No.IN-PB01517252431870X dated 11 Dec 2025 before notary public Pathankot.

I, No.14852095X Hav Netar Singh resident of Village- Neri, Post- Chambi, Tehsil- Sundernagar, District- Mandi, State- Himachal Pradesh, 175018, have changed my mother name from Urmila Devi to Urmila Devi Guleria Vide affidavit No.IN-PB00867142817994X dated 10 Dec 2025 before notary public Pathankot

I, Narendar Kumar Varma S/o Om Prakash R/o B-3783, Refinery Township, District Panipat, Haryana have changed my name from Narendar Kumar to Narendar Kumar Varma. I future I should be known as Narendar Kumar Varma

Disclaimer

The Pioneer does not take responsibility for the contents for the advertisement (Display / Classified) carried in this newspaper. The Paper does not endorse the same. Readers are requested to verify the content on their own.



Editor's

TAKE

Should India ban social media for kids?

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

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

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

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

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

The SC's push for CCTV accountability

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



HASAN
KHURSHID

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

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

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



THE REAL TEST
NOW IS WHETHER
STATES WILL
FINALLY ACT — OR
WHETHER
CUSTODIAL
DEATHS WILL
CONTINUE TO BE
TREATED AS
TRAGIC BUT
INEVITABLE
STATISTICS

The writer is a legal expert and author

dailypioneer
 @dailypioneer
 The Pioneer

that failure to provide full CCTV coverage in any police station would be treated as contempt of court. This, however, has done little to change the ground reality. The disconnect between judicial directives and executive action has allowed custodial violence to fester. India's struggle with custodial brutality is not new. In 1997, the Supreme Court in *D.K. Basu* recognised custodial torture as an assault on the rule of law.

In later cases-Shafhi Mohammad (2018) and Paramvir Singh Saini (2021)-the Court expanded guidelines, with Justice Rohinton Nariman stressing that installing CCTV cameras was a constitutional necessity rooted in Articles 21 and 22. Yet, the implementation remains half-hearted, largely because custodial violence thrives in opacity, and the state machinery shows little urgency to disrupt this culture. The judiciary's frustration draws from a long history of ignored reform efforts. From the National Police Commission reports (1977-81) to the Ribeiro and Padmanabhiiah Committees, from the Malimath Committee to the landmark Prakash Singh judgment of 2006, India has been inundated with recommendations for transforming the police from a "force" to a "service."

Despite this, real change has remained elusive. Justice AN Mulla's searing 1961 remark that no group in India matches the police force's record of lawlessness-though later expunged-continues to resonate with uncomfortable accuracy. Recent events have only reinforced these concerns. During the COVID-19 lockdowns, countless videos surfaced showing policemen mercilessly beating civilians, includ-

ing pregnant women and elderly citizens. Such images laid bare the deep-seated culture of unrestrained power. One of the most horrifying examples remains the 2020 Sathankulam case in Tamil Nadu, where the CBI charge sheet revealed the savage torture of 59-year-old P. Jeyaraj and his 31-year-old son, J. Bennicks. Over seven hours, police personnel stripped, beat, and humiliated the father-son duo, forcing them to clean their own blood from the floor. Despite Jeyaraj's pleas, citing diabetes and high blood pressure, the brutality continued until

both men succumbed to their injuries. Their clothes were drenched in blood to such an extent that police officers had

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

The Pioneer

SINCE 1865

Why educating girls is not enough: Bridge the skill gap



DEVENDRA
KUMAR

2ND OPINION
THE PIONEER

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

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

structural issue: literacy and academic qualifications, although essential, do not automatically translate into employability. Many graduates lack the practical, digital, and workplace skills demanded by contemporary industries. Compounding this are entrenched social norms and cultural expectations that often overshadow the benefits of education. For many girls, familial restrictions, gender stereotypes, and ideas about "appropriate" work limit their ability to turn education into financial independence.

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

The reality becomes even harsher in India's vast informal sector, where more than 90 percent of working women remain concentrated. Most are unskilled and engaged in low-paid, insecure jobs-domestic work, agriculture, tailoring, construction, home-based production, or micro-enterprises. In rural areas especially, women face severe skill deprivation and remain trapped in unsta-

ble jobs with little chance of mobility. Skill development can change this trajectory. Training in digital literacy helps women shift from low-productivity work to stable, better-paying opportunities. Today's industries-whether health-care, manufacturing, hospitality, technology, or retail-demand a blend of theoretical knowledge and practical ability, and skill training provides this bridge.

When women acquire skills, the impact extends far beyond employment. Skilled women strengthen economic productivity, innovation, and inclusive growth. Within families, a working daughter or mother enhances financial security and decision-making power. Moreover, skilled workers are better positioned to negotiate fair wages, resist exploitation, and move into formal employment.

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

The writer is the founder of the Ladli Foundation

The Pioneer

SINCE 1865

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Urban India needs coordinated reform

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

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

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

A. MYLSAMI | TAMIL NADU

Diwali's heritage glows anew

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

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

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

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

VIJAY SINGH ADHIKARI | UTTARAKHAND

Reimagining a song for India

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

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

O PRASADA RAO | HYDERABAD

PIC TALK



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

DIGITAL EXPERIENCE

www.dailypioneer.com

facebook.com/dailypioneer

@TheDailyPioneer

instagram.com/dailypioneer

linkedin.com/in/The Pioneer

AUSTRALIA'S SOCIAL MEDIA BAN SPARKS CALL FOR VIGILANCE

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

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

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

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

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

SUNIL OKHADE | INDORE

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

India redraws its strategic lines with Putin’s Delhi visit

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

FIRST
Column



NILANTHA
ILANGAMUWA

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

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

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

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



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

The writer is a Colombo based Columnist

dailypioneer

@ilangamuwa1

nilanthailangamuwa

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

Historically, the Indo-Russian relationship has oscillated between strategic necessity and opportunism. Declassified CIA documents from the 1980s reveal the delicate dance India played with the USSR during the Cold War. Indira Gandhi’s approach, as the CIA observed, was staunchly nationalist and fiercely protective of India’s regional supremacy. The United States feared that India’s policies towards its neighbours, coupled with its Soviet alignment, could destabilise South Asia while simultaneously granting Moscow a strategic foothold. Today, the echoes of that era reverberate: New Delhi remains Moscow’s top arms buyer, leases nuclear-powered submarines, and maintains energy ties that have drawn ire from Washington, while ensuring that its engagement with Russia does not fully alienate the United States or Western partners.

What is important to note here are the economic metrics. India-Russia trade in FY

2024-25 amounted to approximately USD 68.7 billion, heavily skewed in Moscow’s favour due to energy imports, with a trade deficit of around USD 59 billion. Both Russia and India aim to expand bilateral trade to a target of USD 100 billion by 2030, a goal that falls just two years after the next general elections, when Prime Minister Modi is widely expected to contest again despite the symbolic 75-year age limit for party leadership-a restriction largely treated as political theatre and quickly forgotten. Meanwhile, India continues to negotiate with the United States to mitigate punitive tariffs, including a 25 per cent secondary tariff imposed on India’s purchases of Russian oil. It is also worth noting that India recorded a goods trade surplus of about USD 41.18 billion with the US in FY 2024-25, with exports of USD 86.51 billion and imports of USD 45.33 billion, reflecting strong bilateral trade despite earlier concerns over tariffs. Remittances provide a partial counterweight: total remittances to India reached roughly USD 135.46 billion, including USD 25-30 billion from the US, while Russian remittances are negligible in comparison. This indicates that while India faces challenges in trade metrics, its diaspora injects substantial

financial resilience into the economy.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



ANIL
ANAND

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

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

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

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

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

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

With his closest aides and former Minister Mr GM Saroori, credited with having backed Mr Azad to walk out of Congress and float a new

political outfit, having already joined the Congress, the new setback for him came when his two more trusted aides Mr Jugal Sharma and Mr Abdul Majid Wani, both former ministers, announced their plans to rejoin Congress. Suddenly, the mysterious posts appeared on social media about the possibility of a fresh J&K-centric assignment for Mr Azad.

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

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

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

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

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

done, despite their earlier jubilation on discontinuing the process, under pressure particularly from people in BJP’s stronghold of Jammu which has been under economic stress due to wrong and anti-Jammu policies of the Centre and the UT governments.

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

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

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

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

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

The Pioneer
SINCE 1865

The writer is a political and national affairs analyst

dailypioneer

@dhounti

The Pioneer

A sustainable sporting future for new India



NASIR
ALI

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

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


The Pioneer
SINCE 1865


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


Private innovators are ensuring these facilities are built using sustainable materials that reduce long-term costs and environmental impact. CSR support from corporates is further enhancing the reach and quality of sports infrastructure across communities. Together, these collaborations are building a model that is scalable, eco-conscious, and socially impactful. The future demands more than just building more fields; it demands facilities that are greener, smarter, and longer-lasting. With rising environmental concerns, the sports sector too must move towards responsible innovation. Materials like Nike Grind contribute to a circular economy by reducing waste and repurposing discarded material into high-performance surfaces. Gallant Bounce installations reflect this mindset, prioritising accessibility, safety, and longevity. These facilities become inspirational spaces where children discover confidence, athletes sharpen their skills, and communities gather with pride. India’s next sporting leap will likely emerge from its remotest corners. A new turf in a tribal school or a synthetic track in a hilly region reinforces that talent is not determined by geography. As India prepares for global competitions and future Olympics, the foundations being laid today will determine the champions of tomorrow. The road ahead is filled with promise. India’s sporting aspirations now reflect a larger cultural commitment to fitness, resilience, and collective growth.

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

The writer is the founder of Gallant Sports

dailypioneer

@dailypioneer

nasirali-gallant

iexceed

Appzillon™

AI Powered Digital Banking Solutions

WWW.i-exceed.com

BLASÉ CAPITAL

TRADE LOCKED

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

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

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

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

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

The Pioneer

CHANDIGARH | FRIDAY | DECEMBER 12, 2025

BUSINESS10

India's MAGA vs Trump's MAGA

The future lies in wooing Microsoft, Amazon, Google, Apple

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

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

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

Fast forward a few years, and the US did what even India had never anticipated. The former compelled Russia to stop the supplies of cryogenic engines to India, which could have aided the latter in its space and missile programme. It is a different matter that India managed

without Russian help. But around the same time that diplomatic hostilities with the US were on the rise, McDonald's announced that it would open thousands of fast-food stores across India. Mac-D realised the potential of the Indian market.

A similar kind of schizophrenia-excitement is visible today. After imposing a 50 per cent tariff on Indian exports, hankering about H-1B visa regime, and targeting pharma shipments, Trump recently instructed his aides that there were complaints about India dumping rice in the US. He hinted at new tariffs on rice imports. His tariff war against India seemed unabated. Do remember that after new sanctions were imposed by the European Union, and others against two Russian crude oil exporters, Indian importers stopped, or curtailed purchases from Russia. Or at least publicly announced it.

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

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

Some weeks ago, if you recall, Sundar Pichai of Google said that the firm would invest \$17 billion in Andhra Pradesh to set up a massive data centre, the largest of its kind in Asia, and develop AI capabilities in India.

Now, we come to Apple. Until November 2025, iPhone exports and shipments from India to the US broke previous records, despite the US' tariffs, and Trump's antics. Total iPhone exports may cross the \$25 billion in 2025 (calendar year), or surely in 2025-26 (fiscal year). Apple is committed to manufacturing 25 per cent of iPhones meant for global sales within India, and the process is under way. This completes the quartet of India's MAGA, which will counter Trump's MAGA, and maybe come out trumping America.

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

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

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

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

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

A Contrarian Investor

Personal is the new credit norm

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

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

Two-wheeler financing registered robust growth, with the assets under management touching ₹1.8 lakh crore, or 18 per cent year-on-year rise. New loan sanctions grew nine per cent year-on-year in Q2-FY26. The NBFC dominance continued, aided by higher sourcing from the first-time borrowers. Higher-ticket loans in the Rs 1-2 lakh bracket gained traction, reflecting a shift towards premium vehicle purchases. The delinquency rate reduced from 6.2 per cent to 5.4 per cent, although the longer-duration stress remained elevated.

Consumer durable loans posted the fastest growth among the unsecured products, with

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

As India's credit ecosystem evolves with stronger underwriting, digital enablement, and rising consumer confidence, unsecured lending appears well-positioned for sustained, responsible expansion. The Reserve Bank of India recently cut the repo rate by 25 basis points to 5.25 per cent, which will offer relief to several sections of the borrowers, especially those considering personal loans. As the overall cost of borrowing drops, banks and NBFCs are expected to gradually reduce the interest rates on personal loans. The impact may not be visible immediately, but may see marginally lower rates in the coming weeks. The lenders will slowly realign pricing to reflect the revised repo rate. This bodes well for the unsecured lending

segment.

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

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

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

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

The Pioneer

SINCE 1865

Trade agreement to enhance bilateral ties: Huizenga

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ New York / Washington

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

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

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

The hearing heard from witnesses, Director of Asian Studies Centre, Heritage Foundation, Jeff Smith, Executive Director of the Observer Research Foundation America, Dhruva Jaishankar and External Senior Advisor, Special

Competitive Studies Project, Senior Fellow, Indo-Pacific Programme, German Marshall Fund of the United States, Sameer Lalwani.

Describing India as one of the fastest-growing major economies in the world, Huizenga said American companies increasingly see India not just as a market but as a partner to innovation, especially in AI, communications, and advanced technologies, where collaboration already exists. “American companies are eager to enter the Indian market on a level playing field. A new trade deal with India under

President Trump and Prime Minister Modi would further realise this goal and enhance the relationship. Open markets, strengthening supply chains and driving innovation, all of which would chart a new beginning in our storied partnership,” he said.

Huizenga stressed that every American administration, whether Republican or Democrat, has “strengthened ties, or certainly at least attempted to, making clear that the United States does not see India as a temporary or transactional partner.”

Referring to Russian President Vladimir Putin’s recent visit to

India and Prime Minister Modi’s participation at the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation summit in China in September, Huizenga said, “we must view this moment with clear eyes.”

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

“Moreover, authoritarian powers like China and Russia are redrawing borders by force, undermining democratic norms and coercing their neighbours. Nowhere is this more evident

than in the Indo-Pacific, where an increasingly aggressive China threatens regional stability, global prosperity and the open flow of commerce,” he said.

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

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

icantly reducing its reliance on Russia. Huizenga underscored that US-India cooperation today spans defence, technology, counterterrorism and trade.

On counterterrorism cooperation, which he described as “significant”, Huizenga noted that organisations responsible for the heinous April 22 Pahalgam attack — Lashkar-e-Tayyiba (LeT) and The Resistance Front (TRF) - were designated by the Trump administration as foreign terrorist organisations in July this year. The designation reflected “our shared commitment to fighting terror wherever it occurs”.

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

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Mumbai

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Meanwhile, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Thursday held a telephonic conversation with US

President Donald Trump that focused on enhancing economic ties at a time when the two countries are eyeing a trade deal.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The Indian industry and exporters are eagerly waiting for the conclusion of the negotiations

and announcement of the deal, as the high import duties are hurting their shipments to America.

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

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

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

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

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Mumbai

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

“Every issue is important, and no issue is such that it cannot be resolved to mutual satisfaction. There are issues under discussion,” Goyal said.

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

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

Both Goyal and Tajani stressed the need for cooperation between democracies for the smooth supply of

raw materials in the global market, while the Indian minister also flagged concentration risks amid the weaponisation of trade.

Tajani said one country cannot play a “kingmaker” in deciding the raw material prices, which are critical for production.

The Italian Deputy PM said there is a need for a “political agreement” between Italy, Europe, India, Japan, and the US on this aspect.

Goyal also said that given the deepening ties between Rome and New Delhi, India-Italy ties will be a defining relationship of the 21st century.

Tajani marked pharma, maritime security, technology and defence as among the sectors where India and

Manufacturing to contribute 25 pc of GDP by 2047: Report

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ New Delhi

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

Flagship programmes, such as Make in India, Atmanirbhar Bharat, and production-linked incentive (PLI) schemes, are rapidly expanding domestic capacity, said the report ‘Digitizing Make in India 3.0’. The report outlines five sectors — electronics, defence, automotive and EV, energy, and pharmaceuticals — that could anchor a USD 25 trillion industrial opportunity by 2047.

“Multiple priority areas emerge for India’s growth vision in the manufacturing sector going forward, such as Electronics and Semiconductors, Defence, Automotive and EV, Energy Manufacturing and Transition, and Pharmaceuticals — as they combine strong growth, industry push and a clear policy investment runway,” the report said.

The report also mentioned that India’s next manufacturing leap could revolve around four poten-

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

“Each pathway represents a set of options for policymakers and industry participants to consider in enabling India’s manufacturing transformation,” it added. To realise its 2047 vision, India is leaning on regional manufacturing clusters across defence, EV, and semiconductors. “Corridors like Noida-Chennai-Hosur and Dholera are already showing results. These clusters enable co-location of suppliers, shared labs, logistics, and skilled talent. They reduce cost, increase speed, and foster innovation,” it noted.

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

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

tainable energy. “This is not just technological progress, but a sign that we are advancing confidently towards green energy and indigenous solutions,” he said.

The minister said it was a matter of national pride that India has now joined the list of countries such as China, Norway, the Netherlands, and Japan that operate hydrogen-powered vessels.

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

ensured that inland waterways now play an important role in India’s development journey,” he said in Varanasi, Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s parliamentary constituency.

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



Sonowal said the development marks a major step in India’s shift towards green energy and indigenously developed clean-technology solutions.

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

before full-scale commercial adoption.

Highlighting the sector’s expansion, the minister said the number of national waterways has increased from five to 111 in the past decade. Cargo traffic on inland waterways rose from 80 million tonnes in 2014 to over 145 million tonnes at present, while tourism activities are operational on 13 waterways.

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

equipment, and community jetties.

“Projects worth more than 300 crore have already been completed in Uttar Pradesh for waterway development, while schemes worth around 2,200 crore will be launched in the coming years,” the minister said.

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

government and the Inland Waterways Authority of India (IWAI) have expanded navigation channels, launched modern terminals, and operationalised new passenger and cargo routes to strengthen water-based communication and reduce logistics costs, it stated. These efforts align with long-term strategic frame-

works, including the Maritime India Vision 2030 (MIV 2030) and Maritime Amrit Kaal Vision 2047 (MAKV 2047), which outline the roadmap for greener transport, smart infrastructure, and increased use of alternative fuels on inland waterways, it added.

Unilever sees ‘massive opportunities’ in India

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ New Delhi

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

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

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

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

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

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

Unilever has recently made

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

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

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

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

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

Hindustan Unilever (HUL) is consistently ranked as Unilever’s second-largest market globally by revenue, after the United States, with India contributing around 12-14 per cent of total sales.

Federal Reserve cuts key rate

ASSOCIATED PRESS
■ Washington

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

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

Wednesday’s cut reduced the rate to about 3.6 per cent, the lowest it has been in nearly three years. Lower rates from the Fed can bring down borrowing costs for mortgages, auto loans, and credit cards over time, though market forces can

also affect those rates.

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

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

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

FROM THE WORLD

CROATIA

Migrant boat capsizes, 3 dead

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

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

PAKISTAN

Two children killed in blast

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

Choi Sang-mok faces charges over Yoon's martial law declaration

ASSOCIATED PRESS ■ Seoul

South Korea's former acting leader Choi Sang-mok was indicted on Thursday on charges related to the brief imposition of martial law in December 2024 by then-President Yoon Suk Yeol, becoming the latest high-profile figure embroiled in legal troubles over the case.

Choi is one of three top Yoon administration officials who served as caretaker presidents after Yoon was impeached and removed from office over the martial law declaration that plunged South Korea into massive political turmoil.

Yoon is now in jail while facing a high-stakes criminal trial on rebellion charges. Dozens of high-level officials and military commanders of the Yoon administra-

US, Japan hold joint flight drills amid Chinese military activity

ASSOCIATED PRESS ■ Tokyo

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

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

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

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

forces." Two US B-52 strategic bombers and three Japanese F-35 stealth fighter jets and three F-15 jets conducted their joint flight drills near Japan's western airspace, above the waters between the country and South Korea, officials said.

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

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



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

PTI

ed by repeated radar-locking — a move considered as possible preparation for firing.

Tokyo protested to Beijing, asking for an explanation and preventive measures. China denied the allegation and accused Japanese jets of interfering and endangering the Chinese exercise.

Washington stressed its "unwavering" alliance with Japan, saying the incident was not "conducive to regional peace and stability."

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

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

Former Pakistan spy chief sentenced for 14 years by military court

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Islamabad

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

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



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

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

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

"Involvement of the convict in fomenting vested political agitation and instability in cohorts with political elements and in certain

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

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

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

He said that red lines had been crossed and political interference had taken place. He said the former ISI chief had acted as a political adviser to PTI and provided

Khan's party with "full political support." The information minister said that the decision would reinforce the rule of law and the country's accountability mechanisms.

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

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

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

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

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

The senator said that Hameed had caused harm to the country, its institutions, politics, and judiciary through misuse of authority. Hameed made headlines for the first time after he played a vital role in an agreement signed between the Government and the radical Islamist party Tehreek-e-Labbaik Pakistan (TLP) to end the 21-day sit-in at Faizabad in November 2017.

UN TO MOBILISE \$35 MILLION GRANT FOR CYCLONE-HIT SRI LANKA

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Colombo

The United Nations is set to mobilise \$35 million grant for cyclone-hit Sri Lanka in the next four years as the island nation is unable to afford debts after the economic crisis and the debt default, a UN official said on Thursday.

The UN and humanitarian partners launched post Ditwah Humanitarian Priorities Plan (HPP) for Sri Lanka, which covers immediate life-saving assistance in education, food security, agriculture and nutrition, health, protection, shelter, non-food items, camp coordination, water, sanitation and hygiene and early recovery, Marc-Andre Franche, the UN Resident Coordinator, told reporters. At least 638 people have died, and 193 are missing as of Sunday, 6 am, due to the catastrophic floods and landslides caused by extreme weather conditions since November 16.

"Cyclone Ditwah has hit the poorest and the most vulnerable the hardest", Franche said. "The disaster has compounded the impact after Sri Lanka's economic crisis, where 25 per cent of the population is living in poverty", he added. The UN called on the international community to contribute towards HPP. The UN has already received \$9.5 million for the initiative with the support extended by Australia, Canada, the European Union Switzerland, the United Kingdom and the United States, Adaderana quoted Franche as saying.

He noted they are seeking to mobilise a further \$26 million in the coming months with a coordinated programme. "While initial contributions from bilateral partners and 4.5 million dollars from the UN Central Emergency Fund are enabling rapid assistance, significant gaps remain," he said. Franche said protection risks are increasing with crowded shelters and limited facilities.

Indian envoy meets Canadian Speaker

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Toronto

Indian High Commissioner to Canada has met Canadian Speaker of the House of Commons and discussed advancing parliamentary ties between both the countries along with productive exchange on shared democratic values and future collaboration.

In January, India will be welcoming a delegation led by the Speaker Francis Scarpaleggia at the 28th Conference of Speakers and Presiding Officers of Parliaments of Commonwealth Countries (CSPOC). "High Commissioner @DineshKPatnaik met with the Speaker of the House of Commons @HoCSpeaker Honourable Francis Scarpaleggia today to discuss advancing India-Canada parliamentary ties.



Productive exchange on shared democratic values and future collaboration. India looks forward to welcoming a delegation led by the Speaker at the 28th CSPOC next month," the Indian High Commission in Ottawa posted on X on Thursday. On Wednesday, Patnaik had a productive meeting with Minister

of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Lena Metlege Diab which focussed on enhancing bilateral cooperation between India and Canada.

"Productive meeting held between High Commissioner @DineshKPatnaik and Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship

@LenaMetlegeDiab focused on enhancing bilateral cooperation between India and Canada. The discussions covered immigration processes, student-related issues, and a deeper understanding of our respective systems, with an emphasis on strengthening people-to-people ties," the post on X read.



Maduro Govt did not know where she was hiding: María

ASSOCIATED PRESS ■ Oslo

Opposition leader María Corina Machado said on Thursday that she doesn't believe the Venezuelan Government knew where she was hiding for most of this year, as she met Norway's leader a day after her daughter received the Nobel Peace Prize on her behalf. Machado arrived in Oslo hours after Wednesday's prize ceremony and made her first public appearance in 11 months in the early hours of Thursday, emerging from a hotel balcony and waving to an emotional crowd of supporters. She had been in hiding since January 9, when she was briefly detained after joining supporters in a protest in Caracas. Machado was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in October after mounting the most serious peaceful challenge in years to the authoritarian Government of Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro.



ICIMOD transfers HUC to Kathmandu University

ASSOCIATED PRESS ■ Kathmandu

The ICIMOD has signed a deal to formally transfer the Himalayan University Consortium (HUC) to Kathmandu University, launching its next phase as an "independent and regionally rooted" consortium. The ICIMOD (International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development) signed a Memorandum of Understanding on Wednesday at a ceremony in its headquarters in Kathmandu. ICIMOD is a regional intergovernmental organisation that represents all eight Himalayan nations. "This MoU reflects our shared commitment to strengthening regional leadership and research for sustainable mountain development. Kathmandu University is exceptionally well placed to guide HUC into its next phase as an independent and regionally rooted

Airstrike on hospital leaves 34 dead in Myanmar

ASSOCIATED PRESS ■ Bangkok

An airstrike by Myanmar's military destroyed a hospital in an area controlled by a leading rebel armed force, killing 34 patients and medical staff, according to a local rescue worker and independent media reports on Thursday.

About 80 other people were injured in the attack Wednesday night on the general hospital in Mrauk-U township, an area controlled by the ethnic Arakan Army in the western state of Rakhine.

The ruling military has not announced news of any attack in the area. Wai Hun Aung, a senior official for rescue services in Rakhine, told The Associated Press that a jet fighter dropped two bombs at 9.13 pm with one hitting the hospital's recovery ward and the other landing near the hospital's main building. He said he arrived at the hospital early Thursday to provide assistance and recorded the deaths of 17 women and 17 men. He said that most of the hospital building was destroyed by the bombs, and taxis and motorbikes near the hospital were also damaged.

Rakhine-based online media posted photos and videos showing damaged buildings and debris, including medical equipment. The hospital has been the main source of health care for people in Rakhine, where most hospitals have closed because of



Damaged building is seen at the hospital that was allegedly hit by a military air strike in Mrauk-U township in Rakhine state, Myanmar AP

Myanmar's ongoing civil war, said Wai Hun Aung. It was reopened after doctors gathered in Mrauk-U to provide much-needed medical services. Mrauk-U, located 530 kilometres northwest of

Yangon, the country's largest city, was captured by the Arakan Army in February last year. The Arakan Army is the well-trained and well-armed military wing of the Rakhine ethnic minority move-

ment, which seeks autonomy from Myanmar's central Government. It began its offensive in Rakhine in November 2023 and has seized a strategically important regional army headquarters

and 14 of Rakhine's 17 townships. Rakhine, formerly known as Arakan, was the site of a brutal army counterinsurgency operation in 2017 that drove about 7,40,000 minority Rohingya Muslims to seek safety across the border in Bangladesh.

There is still ethnic tension between the Buddhist Rakhine and the Rohingya.

Myanmar's shadow National Unity Government, established by elected lawmakers who were barred from taking their seats in 2021, condemned the airstrike.

The organisation urged the international community to pressure the military to end its actions, take action against perpetrators and provide humanitarian assistance as soon as possible.

Myanmar has been in turmoil since the army took power in 2021, triggering widespread popular opposition. Many opponents of military rule have since taken up arms, and large parts of the country are now embroiled in conflict. The military Government has stepped up airstrikes ahead of planned December 28 elections against the armed pro-democracy People's Defence Force, which is closely associated with the National Unity Government. Opponents of military rule charge that the polls will be neither free nor fair, and are mainly an effort to legitimise the army retaining power.

Ex-PM Khaleda is responding to treatment: Doctor



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Dhaka

Bangladesh's critically ill former prime minister Khaleda Zia is "responding" to treatment, but no decision has yet been taken on whether she will be flown abroad for further medical care, her personal doctor said on Wednesday. The 80-year-old Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) chairperson has been undergoing treatment at Dhaka's Evercare Hospital since November 23 for multiple health complications. "She is being provided treatments which are needed for a critically ill patient," Zia's personal physician and BNP's decision-making standing committee member, AZM Zahid Hossain, told reporters outside the private hospital. "In medical terms, she is responding to the

treatment as she did in the past," he added, noting that foreign doctors are involved and medical-board decisions are being taken in nighttime meetings. Hossain said the three-time prime minister is receiving care in the hospital's intensive care unit (ICU). He said while a transfer abroad remains a possibility, no date has been fixed, urging people not to give in to speculation. "The time has not yet come to give a definite date," the doctor said. A medical board led by cardiologist Shahabuddin and including specialists from Bangladesh, the UK, the US, and China, is supervising Zia's treatment. Her daughter-in-law, Zubaida Rahman, a doctor by profession, has been attending the medical board's meetings in person since returning to Dhaka from London on December 5.

Pragmatic engagement with Taliban: India at UN



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ United Nation

India told the UN Security Council that it calls for a "pragmatic engagement" with the Taliban as New Delhi underlined that a focus on only punitive measures will ensure a 'business as usual' approach.

Addressing the UN Security Council meeting on the Situation in Afghanistan on Wednesday, India's Permanent Representative to the UN Ambassador Parvathaneni Harish said India calls on the United Nations and the international community to adopt nuanced policy instruments that help bring sustainable benefits for the people of Afghanistan.

"India calls for a pragmatic engagement with the Taliban. A coherent policy of engagement should incentivise positive actions. A focus on only punitive measures will only ensure that a 'business as usual' approach continues as we have been seeing now for the last four and a half years," Harish said.

He reiterated India's commitment to meeting the development needs of the people of Afghanistan.

Harish said the recent decision by the Indian Government to restore the status of Delhi's Technical Mission in Kabul to that of an Embassy "underscores this resolve."

"We will continue our engagements with all stakeholders to augment our contribution to

Afghanistan's comprehensive development, humanitarian assistance, and capacity-building initiatives, in keeping with the priorities and aspirations of Afghan society," he said.

Afghan Foreign Minister Amir Khan Muttaqi was in New Delhi on a six-day trip in October, the first senior Taliban minister to visit India after the group seized power in Kabul in 2021. External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar held wide-ranging talks with Muttaqi, announcing the upgrading of Delhi's technical mission in Kabul to the status of an embassy and pledging to renew its development works in Afghanistan.

India had withdrawn its officials from its embassy in Kabul after the Taliban seized power in August 2021.

In June 2022, India re-established its diplomatic presence in the Afghan capital by deploying a "technical team". India continues to closely monitor the security situation in Afghanistan, Harish said.

He emphasised that the international community must coordinate efforts towards ensuring that entities and individuals designated by the UN Security Council - the ISIL and Al Qaida and their affiliates, including the Lashkar e Tayyiba and Jaish-e-Mohammed and proxies of LeT such as the Resistance Front, along with those who facilitate their operations - no longer indulge in cross border terrorism, a thinly veiled reference to Pakistan.

Bangladesh to hold elections on February 12

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Dhaka

Bangladesh will hold the general elections on February 12, its first since the ouster of the Sheikh Hasina-led Awami League Government in a violent student-led protest in August 2024.

"Voting will take place on February 12, 2026, from 7.30 am to 4.30 pm," Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) AMM Nasir Uddin said in an address to the nation on Thursday.

A referendum will simultaneously be held on the voting day, February 12, to elicit public opinion on a series of reform proposals of the Chief Adviser Muhammad Yunus-led National Consensus Commission. The announcement came a day after the CEC met President Mohammed Shahabuddin, who assured him "optimum support and cooperation" to conduct the general elections in a "free, fair and meaningful" manner. According to the election



schedule, the last date for submission of nomination papers is December 29, and scrutiny of nominations will be held from December 30 to January 4. The last date for withdrawal of candidature is January 20. The final list of candidates will be published on January 21. Election campaigns will begin

on January 22 and continue until 7.30 am on February 10, Nasir said.

The last general elections were held in January 2024. Hasina won the elections marred by controversy and boycott by major parties.

Six months after Hasina's victory in the 2024 election,

protests erupted against her Government. The violent street protests forced Hasina to leave for India on August 5, 2024. Three days later, Yunus took over as chief adviser of the interim Government.

The interim Government has disbanded Hasina's Awami League.

Winter storm rips through Gaza, exposing failure to deliver enough aid

ASSOCIATED PRESS ■ Jerusalem

Rains drenched Gaza's tent camps and dropping temperatures chilled Palestinians huddling inside them Thursday as storm Byron descended on the war-battered territory, showing how two months of a ceasefire have failed to sufficiently address the spiralling humanitarian crisis there.

Children's sandaled feet disappeared under opaque brown water that flooded the camps. Trucks moved slowly to avoid sending waves of mud toward the tents.

Piles of garbage and sewage turned to waterfalls. "We have been drowned. I don't have clothes to wear and we have no mattresses left," said Um Salman Abu Qenas, a mother displaced from east of Khan Younis to a tent camp in Deir al-Balah. She said her family could not sleep the night before because of the water in the tent. Aid groups say not enough



Palestinians crossing a flooded street following heavy rain in Khan Younis, southern Gaza Strip PTI

shelter aid is getting into Gaza during the truce. Figures recently released by Israel's military suggest it has not met the ceasefire stipulation of allowing 600 trucks of aid into Gaza a day, though Israel disputes that finding. "Cold, overcrowded, and unsanitary envi-

ronments heighten the risk of illness and infection," said the UN agency for Palestinian refugees, UNRWA, in a terse statement posted on X.

"This suffering could be prevented by unhindered humanitarian aid, including medical support and proper shelter."

Sabreen Qudeeh, also in the Deir al-Balah camp, said her family woke up to rain leaking from their tent's ceiling and water from the street soaking their mattresses.

"My little daughters were screaming and got shocked when they saw water on the

floor," she said. Ahmad Abu Taha, a Palestinian man in the camp, said there was not a tent that escaped the flooding. "Conditions are very bad, we have old people, displaced, and sick people inside this camp," he said.

In Israel, heavy rains fell and flood warnings were in effect in several parts of the country — but no major weather-related emergencies were reported as of midday.

The contrasting scenes with Gaza made clear how profoundly the Israel-Hamas war had damaged the territory, destroying the majority of homes. Gaza's population of around 2 million is almost entirely displaced and most people live in vast tent camps stretching for miles along the beach, exposed to the elements, without adequate flooding infrastructure and with cesspits dug near tents as toilets. The Palestinian Civil Defence, part of the Hamas-run Government, said that since the

storm began they have received more than 2,500 distress calls from citizens whose tents and shelters were damaged in all parts of the Gaza Strip. Aid groups say that Israel is not allowing enough aid into Gaza to begin rebuilding the territory after years of war. Under the agreement, Israel agreed to comply with aid stipulations from an earlier January 2025 truce, which specified that it allow 600 trucks of aid each day into Gaza and an agreed-upon number of temporary homes and tents. It maintains it is doing so, though Associated Press has found that some of its own figures call that into question. COGAT said December 9, without providing evidence, that it had "lately" let 260,000 tents and tarpaulins into Gaza and over 1,500 trucks of blankets and warm clothing. The Shelter Cluster, an international coalition of aid providers led by the Norwegian Refugee Council, sets the number lower.



Bulgaria's Govt resigns amid public protests

ASSOCIATED PRESS ■ Sofia

Bulgaria's Government resigned on Thursday as mass protests gripped the country just weeks before it's due to join the eurozone. The resignation of the minority coalition, led by the centre-right GERB party, was announced minutes before parliament was scheduled to vote on a no-confidence motion tabled by the opposition over economic mismanagement and supported by growing public anger with widespread corruption. "Ahead of today's vote of no confidence, the Government is resigning," Prime Minister Rosen Zhelyazkov told reporters in parliament. "The decisions of the National Assembly are meaningful when they reflect the will of the people. We want to be where society expects us to be," Zhelyazkov said, referring to the anti-Government protests.



Washington State under emergency due to heavy rain

ASSOCIATED PRESS ■ Mount Vernon

Washington state was under a State of emergency Thursday from a barrage of torrential rain that has sent rivers flowing over their banks, caused a mudslide to crash down on a highway and trapped people in floodwaters. Tens of thousands of residents could face evacuation orders. Heavy rain continued to fall over parts of the state Thursday morning, prompting road closures, water rescues and suspension of Amtrak trains between Seattle and Vancouver. Rainfall intensity increased in several counties in Washington's Cascade Mountains, which had seen up to 6 inches of rain in a 24-hour period. One area, Snoqualmie Pass, picked up an additional 1.7 inches of rain in six hours, the National Weather Service said.

PROSPECT



Ahead of PM Narendra Modi's visit, Assam Minister Pijush Hazarika attended a preparatory meeting with Assam Chief Secretary Dr Ravi Kota and other senior officials of the Govt of Assam to review all arrangements at new terminal of Lokpriya Gopinath Bordoloi International Airport at Guwahati PM will inaugurate the new terminal on 20th December

Regional PR talent to shine as IRPRA 40 under 40 returns this January

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

The fourth edition of India's Regional PR Awards (IRPRA) 40 Under 40 will be held virtually on January 10, 2026 and registrations are now open for participants.

Like its previous editions, the awards will recognise and honour PR professionals from regional India who, through their dedication and consistent efforts, continue to raise the standards of communication excellence. The last date for submitting nominations has been extended to December 25.

According to Pawan Tripathi, Organiser of IRPRA, "The inaugural edition of IRPRA 40 under

40 received an overwhelming response from across the country, reaffirming our belief in the power of regional PR. Building on that success, we are thrilled to launch the fourth edition, which continues our mission to celebrate the next generation of PR and communication leaders who are redefining regional storytelling through creativity, innovation and impact."

Registrations and fulfillment of nominations for IRPRA 40 under 40 are free of cost. Criteria for applicants should be 40 years or below as of the event date and should be practicing PR and Corporate communication within the geographical territory of India.

ICAI clears new global networking guidelines

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

Chartered accountants' apex body ICAI has approved new global networking guidelines as well as changes to advertising guidelines, a significant move that will help create large homegrown domestic chartered accountant firms and compete at the global level.

The ICAI Central Council, during its meeting held on December 10 and 11 in the national capital, approved the ICAI (Global Networking) Guidelines, 2025 and changes to the Code of Ethics under which advertising norms are being eased.

At a briefing in the national capital on Thursday, ICAI (Institute of Chartered Accountants of India) President Charanjot Singh Nanda said the Council has

cleared the global networking guidelines, which have been a long-pending demand of CAs. The revised Code of Ethics, which also provides for limited advertisements, will help Indian firms to compete globally, he added. The approvals assume significance against the backdrop of larger Government efforts to have homegrown big accounting firms that can help create more opportunities in the country's growing economy and also compete at the scale of global players.

The guidelines have been formulated with the objective of facilitating global networking opportunities for Indian Chartered Accountant (CA) firms, domestic networks of CA firms and management consultancy services companies registered with ICAI.

Ambani calls for tech, industry self-reliance

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Gandhinagar

Billionaire Mukesh Ambani on Thursday said India must become self-reliant in critical technologies and industries to tide over geopolitical situations that may pose challenges to the country's future progress. Speaking at the 13th convocation of Pandit Deendayal Energy University here, he contrasted India's "sprinting" 8 per cent economic growth with "erosion of confidence all around."

"There is erosion of confidence all around. In contrast, India is bubbling with hope and self-confidence," he said.

"A decade ago, the rest of India was talking about Vibrant Gujarat. Today, the rest of the world is talking

about a Vibrant India."

Ambani, chairman of Reliance Industries Ltd and president of PDEU, Stated that the geopolitical situation has created certain challenges for India's future progress. "India must become Atma Nirbhar — self-reliant — in critical technologies and industries," he said.

While he did not identify the global geopolitical challenges, China's tightening grip on global supply chains and critical minerals has emerged as a major strategic concern for economies worldwide.

As the dominant supplier of rare earths and a key processor of lithium, cobalt, graphite and other essential inputs for batteries, renewable energy and advanced electronics, Beijing wields



significant leverage over industries central to the energy transition and future technologies.

Its export controls on gallium, germanium and other strategic minerals — coupled with supply-chain

consolidation in sectors like solar manufacturing, EV components and electronics — have triggered a global push for diversification.

Countries are now accelerating efforts to secure alternative supply routes, invest in domestic processing capacity and forge mineral partnerships to reduce dependence on China's tightly managed, State-backed ecosystem.

Ambani urged graduating students to harness curiosity, courage, perseverance and gratitude as guiding principles in a world of rapid technological change, telling them they represent the "unstoppable spirit of New India".

He said India was at a defining moment, growing at nearly 8 per cent amid global economic uncertainty and

stressed that the country must achieve self-reliance in critical technologies such as AI, new energy, space, biotechnology and life sciences.

"In this race, jo jeeta wohi sikandar. Under PM Modi's leadership, Bharat jeetega," he said, calling on PDEU to strive to become one of the world's best universities in green energy, green materials and green economy.

Addressing students, Ambani said their graduation comes at a time of unprecedented opportunity. Encouraging them to ask better questions in the age of AI, he said curiosity keeps individuals relevant, courage enables big dreams, perseverance ensures long-term success and gratitude keeps achievers grounded.

BSES launches campaign to promote cleaner air – #CleanAirWithBSES

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

As Delhi's skyline fades behind layers of haze, BSES has rolled out a high-impact social media campaign that transforms concern into collective responsibility. Launched across digital platforms—Facebook, X (formerly Twitter), LinkedIn and Instagram—under the hashtag #CleanAirWithBSES, the campaign comprises multiple sets of evocative creatives and short-format videos, each spotlighting how everyday choices directly impact the air we breathe.

Through a series of powerful visuals depicting Delhi's iconic landmarks, neighbourhoods and streetscapes increasingly



enveloped in smog, BSES urges citizens to rethink mobility and energy habits. Several creatives make a compelling case for switching to electric vehicles, highlighting how EV adoption can reduce dependence on fossil fuels and significantly cut vehicular emissions. Other posts champion rooftop solar and clean energy choices, reinforcing the role of decentralised green power in lowering pollution levels.

Health and safety form a key pillar of the campaign narrative. Dedicated creatives advise citizens to plant trees, grow indoor plants, seal homes to prevent polluted air from entering and limit outdoor exposure during severe AQI periods. Other posts highlight the

importance of regular vehicle servicing and promote the use of energy-efficient appliances, underscoring that informed choices can be as critical as long-term solutions.

Equally central are behaviour-led messages encouraging cleaner commutes—walking, cycling, carpooling and public transport—to reduce vehicular congestion. The campaign also promotes responsible waste practices based on Reduce, Reuse and Recycle, linking everyday habits with sustained improvements in air quality.

With its strong visuals and clear calls to action, BSES's digital campaign positions clean air not as an abstract ideal, but as a shared responsibility that will help Delhiites breathe cleaner.

From conflict to development: Govt grants financial assistance to former BLT cadres

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Guwahati

In a special programme held at the Srimanta Sankardev Kalakshetra, financial assistance was ceremonially distributed to former BLT cadres residing outside the BTC region, in the presence of BTC Chief Executive Member Hagrama Mohilary and Minister for Housing and Urban Affairs, Jayanta Mallabaruah.

Minister Baruah, alongside CEM Hagrama Mohilary, distributed the grants as part of the State Government's continued efforts to support the rehabilitation and reintegration of individuals returning to the mainstream.

Speaking at the programme, Minister Baruah conveyed gratitude on behalf of Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma and the State Government. He thanked the former cadres for choosing the path of rehabilitation and development and for realising that armed struggle could not fulfil their aspirations. "Today we celebrate your homecoming and we hope you begin a self-reliant and peaceful life ahead," he said.



The Minister noted that since 2020 the Government of Assam and the Government of India have signed five historic Memorandum of Settlements, including the NDFB Accord, Karbi Peace Accord, Adivasi Peace Accord, DNLA Agreement and ULFA Peace Agreement, paving the way for lasting peace in the region.

These agreements have brought 9,022 cadres of peace signed groups back

into the mainstream, in addition to more than 2,000 members of smaller groups rehabilitated under State schemes.

Reflecting on the past, Minister Baruah said Assam had suffered for decades as young people were compelled to take up arms due to neglect and lack of opportunity. "Your return to the mainstream is honourable.

For the first time in many years, development is reaching people in a way that

earlier Governments could not ensure," he said.

He recalled how Assam once had to revolt to defend its natural resources. "Forty years ago, Assam protested

crude oil being taken out without benefiting the State. Today, under the NDA Government, pipelines are being built to bring oil into Assam to run our refineries. This turnaround reflects the vision of Prime Minister Narendra Modi who has brought long-awaited cor-

rection to decades of imbalance," he said. Minister Baruah said that armed revolution only prolonged insecurity and delayed growth. "Today, under Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma, we finally have a leadership that delivers solutions where earlier Governments left gaps.

Industries are coming, peace prevails and communities feel included in the development journey," he said. He added that investments which once seemed unimaginable are now becoming reality. "Through Advantage Assam, five lakh crore of investment is coming to the State, with more than one lakh crore already invested. This was never possible in earlier years, when instability overshadowed progress," he said.

Minister Baruah informed that 442 former BLT cadres, residing outside the BTC region were granted financial support of two lakh rupees each to begin a dignified new life today. "We warmly welcome you to this new journey. The State today values peace and empowers those who contribute to development,"

he said. He urged beneficiaries to pursue skill development programmes and commended BTC Chief Executive Member Hagrama Mohilary for initiatives that have strengthened peace in the region. "We must move from being consumers to becoming producers. The Government is committed to supporting every step of this transformation," he said.

Concluding his remarks, Minister Baruah said, "Assam today is moving with confidence under the leadership of Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma who is working tirelessly to place the State among the top five in India.

His decision to extend Scheduled Tribe status to six communities while protecting the rights of existing ST groups reflects a fair and progressive approach. Together, let us build a peaceful and prosperous Assam that earlier generations could only hope for."

The programme was also attended by Director General of Police Harmeet Singh, Additional Chief Secretary Ajay Tewari and Special ADGP Hiren Chandra Nath.

Himanta launches bicycle scheme to boost school attendance

TONY DAS
■ Guwahati

In a significant move to enhance student safety and attendance, Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma inaugurated a bicycle distribution scheme under the Chief Minister's Special Scheme for Class IX students from Government and provincial schools. The launch, held in Dibrugarh, will benefit 3,10,031 pupils, particularly those residing in rural and interior areas, making their daily commute quicker and safer.

The initiative, which includes tea garden model schools and Adarsha Vidyalayas, aims to significantly increase school enrolment and curb the student drop-out rate. Of the beneficiaries, 1,34,432 are male students and 1,75,608 are female students. Speaking at the event, Sarma highlighted the critical issue of school dropouts, noting that forty per cent of students leave education by the higher sec-



ondary level. He stressed that a suitable environment nurtures talent, which educational institutions are uniquely placed to provide. To combat poverty-related dropouts, the Government has already introduced free textbooks, uniforms and midday meals.

Sarma pointed out that the bicycles address the challenge of long travel distances to secondary schools. This scheme complements other student-centric measures, such as free college enrolment and financial aid like the Nijut Moina scheme,

which provides monthly stipends to girl students at the higher secondary, undergraduate and post-graduate levels. A similar scheme for boys is reportedly forthcoming. The Chief Minister affirmed the Government's relentless efforts over the past five years to improve the academic environment, citing the construction of new school buildings, colleges, medical and engineering institutions. He also encouraged students to utilise their mobile phones for educational purposes,

stating, "The mobile phone in our hands should not be used only to scroll through Facebook or Instagram.

We should use it to learn about geography, history, science, sports and new events around the world." Education Minister Ranaj Pegu, Indigenous and Tribal Faith and Culture Minister Jogen Mohan, Power Minister Prasanta Phukan, Cultural Affairs Minister Bimal Borah, MLAs Chakradhar Gogoi, Binod Hazarika, Terosh Gowala and Taranga Gogoi, Dibrugarh Municipal Board Chairman Saikat Patra, Sonowal Kachari Autonomous Council Chief Executive Member Tonkeswar Sonowal, Moran Autonomous Council Chief Executive Member Saroj Gohain, Dibrugarh Zila Parishad Chairperson Pushpanjali Sonowal, Chairman Assam Tourism Development Corporation Ritupomo Baruah, Secretary Education and host of other dignitaries were present on the occasion.

Power grid cyber security on shaky ground as critical upgrades stall

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

India's national power grid is facing renewed scrutiny as major cyber-security gaps and stalled upgrade plans raise concerns over the country's energy resilience.

With the power sector moving rapidly toward digital and smart-grid technologies, experts warn that inadequate cyber defences leave the grid exposed to potentially catastrophic attacks.

Insiders confirm that several key transmission substations across the country still lack Next-Generation Firewalls (NGFWs) and other advanced protection systems. Despite a rise in cyber threats globally — many of them targeting critical infrastructure — these vulnerabilities remain unresolved, prompting alarm among security agencies.

A major cyber-security tender floated by Power Grid Corporation earlier this year, aimed at strengthening the grid's defences, was cancelled in August. Sources indicate that a company allegedly backed by certain officials failed to meet eligibility requirements, leading to pressure for the tender's withdrawal. The cancellation has raised questions about the corporation's preparedness during a time when global



grids are frequently targeted by sophisticated cyber actors.

The matter has now reached Parliament. An unstarred question scheduled for response on December 9 seeks detailed clarification from the Union Power Minister on substations identified as cyber-security weak points, facilities requiring urgent intervention, whether a comprehensive audit has been conducted within the past year and the roadmap for upgrades following the cancelled tender. MPs have also asked whether any national agency is assisting in real-time grid monitoring.

Cyber-security specialists warn that the power grid remains a high-value target for adversaries. They caution

that a single breach could trigger widespread outages affecting homes, industries and essential services. Given the surge in State-sponsored cyber-attacks worldwide, experts say India cannot afford delays in strengthening its power infrastructure.

Analysts argue that urgent central intervention is required to break the current impasse. They recommend immediate installation of multi-layer cyber defences, expedited security audits and strict compliance with global standards such as NERC-CIP and ISO 27001. Without decisive action, they warn, the national grid remains dangerously exposed at a time of escalating cyber risk.

BRIEFLY

WOMEN'S FOOTBALL LEAGUE
TO START ON DECEMBER 20



The Indian Women's League 2025-26 will kick off on December 20 at the National Centre of Excellence (NCoE) in Kolkata, with Sethu FC taking on Kickstart FC in the opening match. The IWL will be played in two phases, with the first one stretching from December 20 to January 9, 2026, during which the eight teams will play 28 matches, the All India Football Federation (AIFF) said on Thursday. The NCoE in Kolkata and the Kalyani Municipal Stadium in Kalyani are the two venues for the league, which is being held in two centralised venues this season. The second phase of the IWL is set to be held from April 20 to May 10, 2026, thus allowing player availability for the senior and U20 women's national teams, which will participate in their respective AFC Women's Asian Cups categories next year.

CHANDIGARH STADIUM HONOURS
YUVRAJ, HARMANPREET



World Cup winners Yuvraj Singh and Harmanpreet Kaur were on Thursday immortalized at the New Chandigarh Stadium with stands named in their honour. Yuvraj, player of the tournament for the 2011 ODI World Cup, and Harmanpreet, who recently captained India to their first ever Women's World Cup trophy, were surrounded friends, family and Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann on the occasion. Yuvraj was also seen giving a pep talk to the Indian team in a huddle before the second T20 International against South Africa. His longtime teammate Harbhajan Singh has a pavilion named after him at the stadium and Harmanpreet joined him on the other side of the sightsscreen on Thursday.

Salmon makes Arsenal debut in Champions League

ASSOCIATED PRESS
■ London

Marli Salmon became the sixth youngest player to feature in the Champions League when brought on as a late substitute in Arsenal's 3-0 win at Club Brugge. Salmon is 16 years, 103 days and came on for Ben White at Jan Breydelstadion on Wednesday, with manager Mikel Arteta saying: "We knew that at some point we had to use him." "He's so young, 16 still, and he's playing in the Champions League," Arteta said. But Salmon is not even the youngest player that Arsenal has fielded this season. That distinction goes to Max Dowman, who was 15 years, 308 days when he entered as a second-half substitute against Slavia Prague last month. According to UEFA, Salmon is the third player 16 or younger that Arsenal has fielded in the Champions League after



Dowman and former midfielder Jack Wilshere. "That's why we put so much work and everybody in the academy puts (in) so much enthusiasm and work," said Arteta. "And for a long time, you have to prepare those talents. So, thanks to them, because when we need them, they are there, they are ready to perform."

India names Sindhu, Lakshya for Asia Team Championships

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ New Delhi

Two-time Olympics medalist PV Sindhu, Lakshya Sen and the star pair of Satwiksairaj Rankireddy-Chirag Shetty will form the core of Indian squad to take part in the Badminton Asia Team Championships to be played in Qingdao, China from February 3-8.

India are defending champions in the women's category of the competition, whereas the men's team had won two bronze medals in the past.

"Selected on the basis of ranking, performance, and experience, the women's team will once again be led by former world champion and two-time Olympics medalist, PV Sindhu," the Badminton Association of India said in a release.

The world No 13 Sen will be the top ranked men's singles player in the squad which also features Kidambi Srikanth, HS Prannoy, US Open winner Ayush Shetty, and Tharun Mannepal.

Satwik-Chirag will be lead the doubles unit along with Guwahati Masters runners-



up Sai Pratheek K and Pruthvi Krishnamurthy Roy, as well as Hariharan Amsakarunan. In the women's category, Sindhu will be supported by world junior championships silver medalist Tanvi Sharma, Unnati Hooda, Rakshita Sree Santhosh Ramraj and Malvika Bansod in singles, Syed Modi International champions Gayatri Gopichand and Treesa Jolly will lead India's charge in

the doubles while Priya Konjengbam, Shruti Mishra, and Tanisha Crasto complete the squad.

BAI secretary Sanjay Mishra said, "Over the last few years, Indian teams have consistently been medal contenders at the Asian and World level and this squad has the right mix of form and experience and is capable of challenging for the crown in both categories."

Aston Villa faces Basel in Europa League

ASSOCIATED PRESS
■ Basel

Boosted by a victory over the Premier League leader, in form Aston Villa meets Basel in the Europa League on Thursday.

After a slow start to the season, Villa bounced back to be currently on a seven-game winning streak in all competitions, including a 2-1 victory over Arsenal on Saturday.

Beside a top-three place in the English top flight, the Villans are tied with Lyon and Midtjylland atop the standings of the second-tier European competition on 12 points with four wins from five games.

"The most important thing is how we are building the team, how we are



achieving in our process during each competition, our stronger mentality in everything," manager Unai Emery said ahead of the

match at St. Jakob-Park in Basel. Emery has won the Europa League trophy four times during stints in charge of Sevilla

and Villarreal. Lyon hosts Dutch newcomer Go Ahead Eagles while Midtjylland faces Genk at home.

The top eight teams after eight games go directly to the round of 16 in March.

At the other end of the 36-team table, struggling Nice will look to earn the first points against Braga.

Teams placed ninth to 24th advance to the knock-out playoffs in February. In other games, Nottingham Forest is away at Utrecht, Celtic and Roma meet in Glasgow and Maccabi Tel Aviv travels to Stuttgart.

In the third-tier Conference League, Crystal Palace plays Shelbourne in Dublin and Fiorentina hosts Dynamo Kyiv.

Alonso feels Real Madrid will overcome rough patch

ASSOCIATED PRESS
■ Madrid

Xabi Alonso thanked his players for their attitude after another defeat and said he was positive Real Madrid would overcome its slump soon.

Madrid lost 2-1 to Manchester City in the Champions League on Wednesday, remaining with only two wins in its last eight matches in all competitions.

"The players gave it everything they had, and I have nothing to criticize today. I really value their attitude. We have to keep going," Alonso said. "Right now the results aren't as good as we'd like."

"We're critical, we demand a lot of ourselves, and we understand the fans. We have to keep working hard. We believe we'll get through this because everything passes, and I'm convinced we can do it."



The result increased criticism against Alonso and prompted some jeers by the crowd at the Santiago Bernabeu stadium.

"We can understand why they whistle, and we have to accept it as normal because the demands here are so high," Alonso said. "We want to turn things around, improve our mental and physical condition, and get the injured players back. There's still a long way to go." Spanish

Bembem, Ashalata named in AFC All-Time Dream XI

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ New Delhi

Indian football legends Bembem Devi and Ashalata Devi have been nominated for the AFC Women's Asian Cup All-Time Dream XI football team in recognition of their stellar performances in the continental showpiece.

Former captain Bembem, the only Indian woman footballer to have been conferred the Padma Shri, is one of the 12 midfielders nominated for the Dream XI team.

Both Bembem and Ashalata belong to Manipur, the women's football powerhouse in the country.

"During an international career spanning over two decades, Bembem Devi was the true leader of a generation of Indian women's footballers," the Asian Football Confederation (AFC) said.

"She was the captain of the Blue Tigresses during their AFC Women's Asian Cup appearance in 2003 and has been adjudged the AIFF Women's Player of the Year twice. India's third most capped player has won several domestic and international honours laying the foundation for the rise of women's football in the South Asian nation."

India could not get past the group stage in the 2023 Women's Cup, after winning against Uzbekistan (6-0) but losing to

eventual runners-up China (0-12) and Vietnam (1-2).

Ashalata captained the India in the 2022 edition of the Women's Asian Cup hosted by the country.

In a fateful tournament, several Indian players contracted COVID-19 despite being inside the bio-bubble. Hosts India played out a 0-0 draw against Iran in their first group match and then could not assemble team for the match against Chinese Taipei.

"Ashalata Devi is one of the Indian women's national team's most accomplished defenders. A commanding centre-back, she made her AFC Women's Asian Cup debut in 2022. In 2019, she was named the AIFF Women's Player of the Year in recognition of her consistency and leadership," the AFC said.

"Known for her strength, aerial ability, and calmness under pressure, Ashalata has been instrumental in guiding and inspiring a new generation of Indian footballers."

Ashalata is one of the 12 defenders nominated for the Dream XI.

Five goalkeepers and 12 forwards were also nominated for the Dream XI, for which voting opened on November 21 and will continue till January 10, 2026.

The 2026 edition of the Women's Asian Cup will be held in Australia from March 1-21.



REAL MADRID TRIO BANNED FOR 2 MATCHES FOR REFEREE MISCONDUCT

ASSOCIATED PRESS
■ Madrid

Real Madrid players Dani Carvajal, Alvaro Carreras and Endrick were suspended for two games for their behavior toward the refereeing crew in a Spanish league match last weekend.

Defender Carreras was sent off in stoppage time in Madrid's 2-0 home loss against Celta Vigo, a match in which the hosts finished with nine men as Fran Garcia had already been shown a red card. Forward Endrick, an unused substitute, was sent off for complaining from the bench. Carvajal, who was on the bench but was not dressed for the game because of an injury, was accused of disrespecting the referees in the tunnel after the game at the Santiago Bernabeu stadium. Garcia, sent off with two yellow cards, was handed a one-game suspension.

Bastar Olympic opens with 3,500 participants; new team comprises surrendered Naxalites

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ Jagdalpur (Chhattisgarh)

Chhattisgarh Chief Minister Vishnu Deo Sai on Thursday asserted that his government is committed to taking development to every village in the Bastar division, which he said is steadily moving towards peace, harmony and prosperity. Addressing the 'Bastar Olympic 2025' at Indira Priyadarshini Stadium in Jagdalpur, the headquarters of Bastar district, he said the massive participation of youth, including the surrendered Naxalites and victims of Maoist violence, has made the

event historic.

Indian boxing legend MC Mary Kom was also present on the occasion.

Sai said the government is determined to connect the youth from tribal-dominated Bastar with the mainstream and ensure their active contribution to the region's development.

Winners of the Bastar Olympic would become role models and would be provided advanced training and opportunities to compete at international levels, he said.

The government will provide better opportunities and training to the youth of Bastar, preparing



Chhattisgarh CM Vishnu Deo Sai, back right, Deputy CM Arun Sao, center, Olympic medalist and Padma Vibhushan awardee boxer Mary Kom, back second left, Mayor Sanjay Pandey, left, and others holding the torch during the opening ceremony of Bastar Olympics at Jagdalpur in Bastar district Chhattisgarh

them for global competitions, said Sai.

Those winning gold, silver, and bronze medals in the international Olympic Games will be awarded honorariums of ₹3 crore, ₹2 crore, and ₹1 crore, respectively, he said.

Deputy CM Vijay Sharma, who also holds the Home portfolio, called the Bastar Olympic an important initiative to integrate youth from interior regions into the mainstream.

The government has been encouraging the youth from the remote areas of Bastar by providing them with more opportunities, and this initiative will continue

in an even more robust form in the future, he added.

Mary Kom met the participants and encouraged them.

State's Sports and Youth Welfare Director Tanuja Salam said around 3,500 athletes from all seven districts of Bastar division and 761 participants from the 'Nua Bat' team are competing in the division-level events (finals) in Bastar Olympic this year.

The Nua Bat (a term in local Halbi dialect which means a 'new path') team comprises surrendered Naxalites and victims of Maoist violence as partici-

pants.

Last year, the event saw 1.65 lakh participants in division, district and block levels. The number has surged to over 3.92 lakh, including more than 2.27 lakh women, this year, she said.

The final stage of the Bastar Olympic, featuring 11 sporting disciplines, including athletics, archery, badminton, football, karate, kabaddi, kho-kho, volleyball and tug of war, will be held from December 11 to 13.

Union Home Minister Amit Shah will attend the closing ceremony on December 13, officials said.

SA beat India by 51 runs in second T20I

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ Mullanpur

The lean run of Shubman Gill and Suryakumar Yadav was extended as Indian batters stumbled on a good batting surface to lose the second T20 against South Africa by 51 runs here on Thursday.

Quinton de Kock made an effortless 90 of 46 balls, pushing South Africa to a challenging 213 for four after India opted to field.

India were expected to chase down the steep target but South Africa removed Indian trio of Abhishek Sharma (17), Gill (0) and Suryakumar Yadav (5) inside the powerplay to put the hosts on the backfoot. India were eventually bowled out for 162 in 19.1 overs with Tilak Varma (62 off 34) playing a lone hand..

The five match series now stands at 1-1 with the third match scheduled in Dharamsala on December 14. The local crowd was expecting their home heroes, Gill and Abhishek, to fire but it was not to be. Yet to realise his potential in the shortest format, vice-captain Gill, facing his very first ball, got a beauty from Lungi Ngidi that seamed away from length to take a thick outside edge.

Abhshek was caught



South Africa's players celebrating the wicket of India's Shubman Gill during the second T20 International cricket match of a series between India and South Africa in New Chandigarh

PTI

behind in the following over from Marco Jansen. Next to depart was skipper Suryakumar who too got a faint edge after Jansen angled it away from the India skipper.

Batting at three, Axar Patel (21 off 21) was pounced at cover with Reeza Hendricks just about managing to have his fingers under the ball. From thereon, Tilak batted at a high tempo but lack of

partnerships and soaring run rate pushed the game out of India's reach..

Earlier, de Kock entertained the crowd with his remarkable strokeplay.

When in full flow, De Kock is among the most attractive batters in the game and he flaunted his special skills on a true pitch. He was mainly dealing in sixes in the middle and majority of his seven maximums came in the deep

square leg region.

De Kock, who recently reversed his ODI retirement and was not sure about his T20 future post the World Cup last year, is back with a renewed purpose and remains on top of his game.

An innings like this just less than a week before the mini auction will also create the buzz among the franchisees, who might indulge in a bidding war for the multi-

skilled cricketer.

Arshdeep Singh, who had De Kock caught behind in the series opener, was at the receiving end on Thursday. De Kock began the assault with a pick up shot for six off Arshdeep before pulling the left-arm pacer for a maximum over deep mid-wicket. Jasprit Bumrah too conceded 16 runs in his second over after being disdainfully pulled for six by Reeza Hendricks.

WTC finals now the pinnacle of Test cricket: ICC CEO Sanjog

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ Mumbai

The three World Test Championship (WTC) finals held so far have "definitely delivered" on the aim of creating a pinnacle event for the traditional format of the game, said ICC CEO Sanjog Gupta on Thursday.

New Zealand, Australia and South Africa have each won the WTC once with India finishing runners-up twice. Gupta highlighted that a packed Lord's during the previous edition's final between Australia and South Africa, despite the absence of India and hosts England, was a landmark moment for the global governing body."What the World Test Championship final attempts to do, beyond just being a five-plus-one-day event where the two best teams compete for the greatest prize in the format, is to give context to the two years of Test cricket that precedes that final," Gupta said during the announcement of ICC's global partnership with AB InBev India (Budweiser 0.0) here.

"That was the endeavour with which the World Test Championship was launched and what we've



seen with three editions past us now, is that the World Test Championship final has definitely delivered on the goal of providing a pinnacle event for Test cricket."

He said the turnout at Lord's showed that the WTC final has stirred interest among fans, who now look forward to it just as they do with other flagship events.

"The last World Test Championship final was played between Australia and South Africa in England, and Lord's was packed," he said.

"India was not playing, England was not playing, (but) Australia was taking on South Africa, and Lord's was packed, which means that

we now have a pinnacle event in Test cricket which the world waits for, or the world that enjoys Test cricket waits for."

Gupta added that the growing anticipation among fans in the months leading up to the final also strengthens the broader storytelling around Test cricket.

"The other thing that it did was, in the six months leading up to the World Test Championship final, the entire narrative was around who will feature and that gives additional meaning, context, and significance to the bilateral Test cricket that's being played in the lead-up to that World Test Championship final," he added.

Suryavanshi, Mhatre to head India's U-19 Asia Cup

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ Dubai

India's Asia Cup U-19 campaign will be fronted by Gen Z batting sensations Vaibhav Suryavanshi and Ayush Mhatre, but equal focus would be on whether the BCCI allows the youngsters to exchange handshakes with their Pakistani counterparts, in what would be construed as maintaining sporting civility at the junior level.

While the India U-19 side, under the able leadership of dashing Mumbai and CSK opener Mhatre start its campaign against UAE on Friday, it is the match against Pakistan on Sunday that will certainly gain the most traction in the junior continental championship seen as a dress rehearsal for the World Cup early next year.

In the senior men's Asia Cup, followed by the Women's ODI World Cup and Rising Stars Asia Cup T20 tournament, Indian players have refused to shake hands with Pakistani players as a mark of solidarity with the Indian Army and victims of the Pahalgam terror attack. However, when it comes to the U-19 cricketers, it is believed that even the ICC wants politics to be kept away from it and the normal protocol of sports-



man spirit should be adhered to. "The boys haven't been told anything. But obviously BCCI has given explicit instructions to its manager Anand Datar. Now if Indian boys don't shake hands with Pakistan team then match referee will have to be informed in advance.

"We know for a fact that ICC doesn't want politics to take front seat when it comes to junior cricket. So it is a case of both bad optics and public sentiment," a BCCI official in the know of things told PTI on the condition of anonymity.

As far as the tournament is concerned, India and Pakistan are almost sure to qualify for the semi-finals as

Two Indian origin players named in Australia U-19 World Cup squad

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ Melbourne

Two Indian origin players — Aryan Sharma and John James — have been named in Australia's 15-member squad for the men's U-19 World Cup scheduled to be held in Namibia and Zimbabwe from January 15 to February 6.

Aryan, a handy batter and slow left-arm spinner, and James, a right-arm medium pace all-rounder, were both part of the squad that played against India in the youth Tests and one-dayers in September.

Besides cricketers of Indian heritage, the squad features two players of Sri Lankan (Naden Cooray and Nitesh Samuel) and one of Chinese Origin (Alex Lee Young).

Australia enters the tournament as defending champions, with Oliver Peake as captain.

"We're delighted to announce a strong and well-balanced squad for the ICC Under-19 World Cup. Our focus has been on selecting a group with complementary skill sets that provide the best chance of success in tournament," head coach Tim Nielsen said in a release.



"The players named have impressed with their performances during the U19 series against India in September and at the recent National U19 Championship in Perth. "It's an exciting group, some have already experienced senior training environments, while others are progressing rapidly through our pathway."

Australia is placed in Group A alongside Ireland, Japan, and Sri Lanka. The team will reach Namibia in early January and play warm-up

matches from January 9-14.

"The World Cup is a fantastic opportunity for these young cricketers to showcase their talent and test themselves against the best in the world," Nielsen said.

Australia Men's U19 Squad: Oliver Peake, Kasey Barton, Naden Cooray, Jayden Draper, Ben Gordon, Steven Hogan, Thomas Hogan, John James, Charles Lachmund, Will Malajczuk, Nitesh Samuel, Hayden Schiller, Aryan Sharma, William Taylor, Alex Lee Young.

CAN'T PLAY AROUND WITH ROLES, ABD RESPONDS TO GAMBHIR

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ New Delhi

Former South Africa captain AB de Villiers said he agrees "to a certain extent" with India head coach Gautam Gambhir's belief that ODI batting orders are "overrated", but stressed the need for teams to balance flexibility with clearly defined roles.

Following India's 2-1 ODI series win against South Africa, Gambhir had said that he thought batting orders are overrated in the ODI format. "I do agree with him to a certain extent. I've always enjoyed a floating batting lineup in ODIs. But it's a fine line because you can't really play around too much with the players' roles," De Villiers said on his YouTube channel. "It's the top three, four to six, and then your tailenders who can hold the bat. It's almost like three segments, and you can really be creative with that. "Play with right and left-hand combinations and certain situations of the game." India won the first T20I against South Africa to extend their winning run to 27 victories out of 31 games.

Rupa Bayor rises to career-best 8th in world rankings



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ New Delhi

Asian bronze-medallist Rupa Bayor has become India's first Taekwondo player to be ranked as high as eighth in the latest world rankings, rising a rung from her previous career-best position.

The 24-year-old Poomsae competitor from Arunachal Pradesh won a bronze medal at the World Taekwondo President Cup Europe held in Innsbruck, Austria, from November 29 to 30.

Earlier this year, she also won a bronze at the Australia Open Taekwondo

Tournament in August.

Poomsae is a non-combative form of Taekwondo in which competitors perform a pattern of moves like gymnastics routines to be evaluated by a panel of judges.

This format is currently a non-Olympic category but features in the Asian Games.

Bayor, who trains at the Indo Korean Taekwondo Academy in Mumbai, was inducted into the Target Asian Games Group (TAGG) of the Sports Ministry in April this year.

She is the only Indian in the top 100 of the world rankings across categories.

Whatever is good for cricket, BCCI should do it: Kapil on split coaching

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ New Delhi

Former India captain Kapil Dev on Thursday steered clear of endorsing the idea of split coaches after the team's recent 0-2 Test series loss to South Africa at home, saying the BCCI should adopt whatever coaching structure best serves Indian cricket.

Asked whether separate coaches for red-ball and white-ball formats could be an answer to end India's recent run of reverses in Tests at home, Kapil said: "I don't know... I can't answer that. You have to really work something like that in your mind and say what should happen. Whatever is good for cricket, I think they should do it."

Kapil, the 1983 World Cup-winning captain, rejected the notion that it is tougher to be an athlete in the social-media era than during his playing days.

"No, it's always the same. It was difficult then, it is difficult now. It was easy then and it is easy now. Your mindset is more important," he said.

On whether the growing financial pull of T20 leagues has overshadowed



national representation, Kapil said each player weighs priorities differently. "Everybody loves money, but some players feel that is very important. I still feel playing for India is more important than playing IPL. But everybody is individual, they have their own thought process. Good luck to them."

Asked if he preferred any particular format, Kapil said he simply enjoys the

game in all its forms.

"I just love cricket. Doesn't matter even two balls cricket or 100 balls or 100 overs or 10 overs... Cricket is cricket. See golf is golf, whatever format you play, end of the day you enjoy golf."

He also offered a light-hearted remark on Virat Kohli and Rohit Sharma when asked about their performances.

"Good luck, they should

play golf also," quipped Kapil, who is currently the president of Professional Golf Tour of India (PGTI).

Kapil was speaking at the launch of '72 The League', a city-based golf event announced by the PGTI and scheduled for next year.

The former skipper said India needs golfers who can win big global titles to trigger a mass shift in how the sport is perceived nationally.

"We have to produce world champions. Once they go and win a European Cup or US Cup, or win at the Olympics, it will change the entire scenario," he said.

On what could be golf's "1983 moment", Kapil said: "These boys go and win a European Cup or US Open, something like that... That will be the cherry on the cake."

"At the Olympics we just missed a medal. When only a handful of people are playing in our country and still we reached there, that gives hope. One day our kids will go and win Olympics or US Cup. In tennis, if you win Wimbledon, it makes a difference; the same is in golf."

Karandeep Kochhar claims maiden IGPL title in Dubai

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ Dubai

Karandeep Kochhar on Thursday shot a third straight 3-under 69 to end his wait for a maiden title on the IGPL Tour with a hard-earned victory at IGPL Invitational UAE.

Kochhar pipped young Veer Ganapathy and Pukhraj Singh to the post at the Els Club in Dubai at the Shiv Kapur hosted event, the tenth IGPL meet of the inaugural season.

Kochhar, a recent winner on the Asian Development Tour, made up for his runner-up finish at the IGPL Invitational Kolkata, even as Ganapathy's wait for a first pro win continued as he was left knocking on the doors yet again.

Kochhar totalled 9-under, while Ganapathy, who was seemingly coasting to fine win, was left ruing a costly triple bogey on Par-4 14th hole on the back nine. He shot even par 72 and finished one shot behind Kochhar.

Also finishing tied second was Pukhraj, the winner of IGPL Jamshedpur. He shot 2-under 70, and like Ganapathy, was left at 8-under and one behind the winner. Pranavi Urs, the

history-maker at IGPL Mumbai, was sole fourth. She shot 1-under 71 and totalled 7-under for the 54 holes. Gaganjeet Bhullar's streak of wins ended with a fifth-place finish after a round of 71 and a total of 6-under. Tournament host Shiv Kapur (72) was tied for 16th place with Ridhima Dilawari (75) at 1-under total, while Jeev Milkha Singh, who flew in straight from Mauritius where he was the runner-up in the European Legends Tour, shot 73 and finished Tied-18th in his first appearance on the IGPL Tour.

Another Teen star, Kartik Singh (71), legend SSP Chawrasia (72) and another young rookie pro, Raghav Chugh (72) were tied for the sixth place.

The IGPL Order of Merit leader, Aman Raj (73) was tied with Hitaashee Bakshi, who once again put in final round heroics with a 6-under 66, and Mysuru golfer, Yashas Chandra, who has been trending well. Chandra shot 71, as he was tied at 4-under with Aman Raj and Hitaashee.

Four players, Sachin Baisoya (67), Harendra Gupta (68), Kartik Sharma (70) and Gaurav Ghei (72), were tied for 12th place.