

Tributes paid to CDS general Bipin Rawat on death anniv

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Dehradun

Glowing tributes were paid to the first chief of defence staff (CDS) late general Bipin Rawat on his fourth death anniversary on Monday. In a programme organised at Kanak Chowk in Dehradun, chief minister Pushkar Singh Dhami paid tribute to general Rawat, by placing a wreath at his statue.

Recalling general Rawat's indomitable courage, leadership skills and supreme dedication to the nation, the CM described him as the pride of Uttarakhand and the country. He said that general Rawat's life is

an inspiring example of patriotism, discipline and dedication, which will always inspire future generations to serve the nation. The CM also reiterated the state government's commitment to honour the martyrs. A silence of two minutes was observed as a mark of respect to the departed soul on the occasion. Tributes to the late CDS were also paid by the public representatives, soldiers, ex-servicemen and general public.

Soldier Welfare minister Ganesh Joshi, Rajpur Road MLA Khajan Das and



Dehradun Cantt MLA Savita Kapoor also attended the programme.

Free health camps to be held in villages from Dharali to Tihar-Sanglai

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Uttarkashi

To provide quality treatment to the people living in the frontier, inaccessible and disaster-affected areas, a two-month special free health service campaign has been jointly launched by the Uttarkashi Health department and TSL Foundation, Gurgaon. Under this initiative, launched on the guidelines of the district magistrate Prashant Arya, a mobile medical van along with an expert medical team has been deployed which will provide health services in a phased manner in the vibrant villages and disaster-affected areas of

the district. Speaking of the initiative. The chief medical officer, Dr B S Rawat said that the mobile medical vans would conduct health camps in the villages designated as Vibrant Villages and also the disaster-affected areas of Bhatwari block on the scheduled dates. While a camp will be held in Dharali on December 9 the same will be held in Bagori and Mukhwa on December 10. The same will be held in Jhala on December 11 and the next day it will be held in Jaspur. On December 13, camps will be held in Tihar and Sanglai. The

CMO further stated that this collaboration with the TSL Foundation would prove extremely beneficial for people living in mountainous areas who have to travel long distances to access healthcare. "Now they will have easy access to primary care, general medical consultations, essential tests and free medicines in their own villages," he added. The district programme manager (NHM) Hardev Rana and a medical team from the Health department will be present during the health camps.

Swachh Bharat Abhiyan: UPES concludes cleanliness drives in villages

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Dehradun

Aligning itself with the Swachh Bharat Abhiyan and echoing Mahatma Gandhi's vision of a clean and healthy nation, UPES conducted cleanliness drives in three neighbouring villages - Bidholi, Kandoli and Paundha. UPES sources said that the drives were supported by a waste collection, management and consultancy NGO in ecologically sensitive Himalayan regions- Waste Warriors and Global Society of Social Soldiers (GS3), a UPES students' NGO mentored by Srijan Samarth Internship Team, UPES. The event brought together over 160 volunteers.

The volunteer teams, comprising UPES students, employees and local community members, began the drive with street-side waste collection and spreading awareness on waste collection, segregation and its responsible disposal to onlookers and passers-by alike. The volunteers collected 108 bags of waste segregated category-wise for plastic, paper, glass etc. The collected

waste was later transported to a Waste Recycling Facility located in Harrawala, Dehradun. UPES sources further said that the locations for the drives had been identified in consultation with the gram pradhans of the villages. Commenting on the initiative, the registrar, UPES, Manish Madaan said that giving back to the community is a core part of being a true University of Tomorrow like UPES. "Through initiatives like this carried out around our campuses, our ideas about sustainability and social responsibility become real. We are thankful to the Gram Pradhans, their village residents, Waste Warriors, GS3 and each student volunteer who joined us in this drive. Together, we are keeping our villages cleaner and greener while shaping responsible citizens in the process," he added.

UPES states that they have plans to organise similar drives on a regular basis, integrating community outreach with its broader sustainability agenda.

HRDA organises good governance camp, 35 maps approved, 16 issued

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Haridwar

To promote simplification, resolution, disposal and satisfaction, Haridwar-Roorkee Development Authority (HRDA) organised a good governance camp at its headquarters on Monday. This is the third one with two previous good governance camps being organised previously. A large number of applicants arrived at the camp seeking solutions to their problems. The secretary Manish Kumar Singh, joint secretary Deepak Ramchandra Seth and executive engineer

Rajan Singh were present among others. The vice-chairman, HRDA, Sonika inspected the camp and reviewed various matters. She directed officials to ensure prompt, transparent and satisfactory resolution of all applicants' problems so that the people could truly benefit from good governance. During the camp, 35 maps were approved and 16 were issued. Sonika stated that the next good governance camp would be in Haridwar headquarters on December 10.

Disaster management: Yuva Aapda Mitra training programme concludes

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Dehradun

A training programme christened as Yuva Aapda Mitra- conducted under the Yuva Aapda Mitra Yojana and as per the directives of the secretary, Disaster Management & Rehabilitation department, Uttarakhand, concluded in Dehradun on Monday. Notably, the training took place from December 2 to 8 in Garhi Cantt, Dehradun with the participation of 50 NCC cadets of the 11th NCC Battalion in Dehradun. The participants were trained to act as first responders in disaster situations.

The ADG of the NCC Directorate in Uttarakhand and a recipient of Seva Medal, Major General Rohan Anand was the chief guest at the closing cere-

mony. While addressing the cadets, he stated, "Young Aapda Mitra are the true pioneers of our nation's security and human service. Your quick decisions and courage during calamities can save many precious lives."

The training covered various topics, including the Disaster Management Act of 2005, the institutional framework for disaster management, techniques to handle earthquakes, landslides, floods, and flash floods, first aid and injury management. Additionally, participants learned about search and rescue operations, rope techniques, stretcher construction, forest fire and urban fire management among other skills. The

master trainer Raju Shahi from the District Disaster Management Authority in Dehradun, along with trainers Sushil Singh Kaintura and Kishan Rajguru, imparted the training. They expressed confidence that the 50 newly trained youth disaster friends would strengthen the district's disaster management system. "These young friends are expected to make invaluable contributions to the protection of human life and property by assisting the local community and administration in swift relief and rescue operations during natural calamities," said Shahi.

Electric carts introduced: Porters at Doon station face survival uncertainty

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Dehradun

Livelihood uncertainty has been staring at the luggage helpers at Dehradun railway station since the introduction of electric vehicles about a month ago. These electric carts charge Rs 50 per passenger and Rs 30 for luggage. Only two vehicles operate at the station, but they cover all five platforms of Dehradun railway station. The porters, who have been working here since the early 1900s, are struggling hard to survive with their income plummeting fast. Notably, these electric carts were introduced for senior citizens and patients to help them come and leave the station. An electric carts driver, Shivam

Mishra said that the porters charge extra money for their service despite the rate being fixed. The porters have their own tales of woe to tell. The National Federation of Railway Porters and Coolie Union says that the porters who would earlier earn Rs 300-Rs 400 a day are now earning barely Rs 100-Rs 200 a day and even less on some days. "The elderly porters who are ill cannot afford treatment. Some days, they do not earn a single buck. Around 40 to 45 porters in Dehradun and nearly 25,000 porters across the country are facing the same crisis," said the president of the union, Ram Suresh.

"We are at the receiving end of what is called development. To help us come out of this grim crisis, the government should roll out a porter-friendly policy. We have rights to survive," he said, adding that something should be done on the lines of what the former Railway Minister, Lalu Prasad Yadav had done through adjusting porters into railway work. A porter, Ravindra Yadav, who has been working since 1990, said that things are really grim for them. "Earlier, we used to earn enough to make both ends meet. Now we are amidst an existential crisis, staring at starvation along with our families," he said.

Transgender awareness & felicitation: Dignity, inclusivity stressed

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Dehradun

A Transgender Awareness Programme and Felicitation Ceremony 2025 was organised by Setu Foundation here on Monday, aiming to promote dignity, rights and inclusivity for the transgender community. The Dharampur MLA and senior BJP leader, Vinod Chamoli said that the transgender community is an essential part of society and must be ensured equal opportunities and respect. "Such initiatives help create awareness and narrow the gap between soci-

ety and the marginalised groups," he added. The programme was chaired by the former State minister, Ravindra Singh Anand. "No society can progress without equality and justice for one and all. Inclusive growth must prioritise those communities that have always remained outside the mainstream," he commented. Some members of the transgender community were felicitated for their contributions to society on the occasion.

THE PIONEER CLASSIFIEDS PUBLIC NOTICE

The general public is informed that I have changed my name from PAWAN to PAWAN KUMAR TANDON and in future I should be known as Pawan Kumar Tandon s/o Ved Singh Tandon, address: 206, Manni Tower, PNB Bank, Dadu Bagh Ashram, Jagjeetpur, Kankhal, Haridwar

In my Army records my son's name has been mistakenly recorded as MR PRIYANSHU whereas in all other documents his name is PRIYANSHU SINGH which is his real and correct name. Army No 4093874W/NK Jagmohan Singh, s/o Late Bachan Singh, resident of Batadhar Rohira Chamoli (Uttarakhand)

In my Army records my wife's name has been mistakenly recorded as SMT SAROJNI whereas in all other documents her name is SAROJANI DEVI which is her real and correct name. Army No 4093874W/NK Jagmohan Singh, s/o Late Bachan Singh, resident of Batadhar Rohira Chamoli (Uttarakhand)

I, Army No. 4073606L (Pensioner), Rank-Havildar, Unit 19 Garhwal Rifles, Name-Somwari Lal Semwal, R/o Smith Nagar, Prem Nagar, Dehradun. In my Army records, my wife's name is wrongly recorded as Madhubala Devi and DOB as 01.01.1977, whereas the correct name is Madhu Bala and actual DOB is 20.05.1979.

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For advertisement booking
Contact: 9045057787, 8909212518
pioneerdoon@gmail.com

Punjab & Sind Bank

Branch: Rishikesh

Security Details: Equitable mortgage of residential property measuring 254.17 sq. meters built up area 90 sq. mtr situated at ganga nagar rishikesh dehradun in the name of Mr Kunwar pal singh s/o shree singh bearing municipal no 458/534+535(oid no 45/25) consisting book no 1, zild no 533, pages 213 to 222 by virtue of sale deed dated 16.11.2006 duly registered in office of sub registrar rishikesh. The above document is to be mortgaged in **Punjab And Sind Bank, Rishikesh Branch.** Anyone claiming any interest or title in the property or otherwise having any objection can make representation to the bank within 10 days of such notice.

Branch Manager, Punjab And Sindh Bank, Rishikesh

ICICI Bank

[Regd. Office: ICICI Bank Limited, Landmark, Race Course Circle, Vadodara - 390007]
Corporate Office: ICICI Bank Ltd., Shal Tower, Plot No. 23, New Rohtak Road, Korol Bagh, Delhi- 110005
Branch Office: ICICI Bank Ltd., Shal Tower, Plot No. 23, New Rohtak Road, Korol Bagh, Delhi- 110005
Notice for Disclosure of Legal Heirs of Deceased Borrower

PUBLIC NOTICE

Notice is hereby given that Home LoanLBBAR00006775041 / TBBAR00006764065 (Credit facility) was granted to TARA DEVI (Deceased) along with the deceased RENU SHARMA by ICICI Bank Ltd. (The Bank). We would like to inform you that the demise of RENU SHARMA has come to our knowledge during field visits conducted by the Bank officials and by telephonic communications on the registered contact numbers. In this regard, letter dated December 05, 2025 was previously sent to the registered addresses of the Borrowers and the deceased RENU SHARMA for providing information about the Legal Heirs of the deceased Borrower. Therefore, this Notice is hereby given for sharing details of the Legal Heirs of the deceased RENU SHARMA with supporting documents for updating the Bank's records, within 15 days of publication of this Notice. You may submit the above-mentioned details to Mr. HIMANSHU YADAV by visiting ICICI BANK LTD PLOT NO 409, MOHALLA CHAWANI NEAR MAHILA POLICE STATION, CIVIL LINES, MORADABAD, UTTAR PRADESH- 244001.
Date : December 09, 2025
Place : Haridwar

SD Authorised Officer
For ICICI Bank Ltd.

SMFG India Home Finance Co. Ltd.

Corporate Off. : 503 & 504, 5th Floor, G-Block, Inspire BKC, BKC Main Road, Bandra Kurla Complex, Bandra (E), Mumbai - 400051
Regd. Off. : Commerzone IT Park, Tower B, 1st Floor, No. 111, Mount Poonamallee Road, Porur, Chennai - 600116, TN.

SALE NOTICE FOR SALE OF IMMOVABLE PROPERTIES

E-AUCTION SALE NOTICE OF 30 DAYS FOR SALE OF IMMOVABLE ASSETS UNDER THE SECURITISATION AND RECONSTRUCTION OF FINANCIAL ASSETS AND ENFORCEMENT OF SECURITY INTEREST ACT, 2002 READ WITH PROVISION TO RULE 8(6) OF THE SECURITY INTEREST (ENFORCEMENT) RULES, 2002.

Notice is hereby given to the Public in General and in particular to the Borrower(s) and Guarantor(s) that the below listed immovable properties ("Secured Assets") mortgaged / charged to the Secured Creditor, the Possession of which has been taken by the **Authorised Officer of SMFG India Home Finance Co. Ltd.** (hereinafter referred to as SMHFC) ("**Secured Creditor**"), will be sold on "**As is where is**", "**As is what is**" and "**Whatever there is**" on the date and time mentioned herein below, for recovery of the dues mentioned herein below and further interest and other expenses thereon till date of realization, due to SMHFC Secured Creditor from the Borrower(s) and Guarantor(s) mentioned herein below.

Sl. No.	Name of the Borrower(s) / Guarantor(s) LAN	Description of the Properties	Reserve Price : Earnest Money Deposit :-	Date & Time of E-Auction	Date of EMD Submission
1.	Lan No. - 611639211615955 1. Kushalpal Singh, S/o. Priyam Singh 2. Neelam Devi, W/o. Kushalpal Singh	A Plot No. H-27, Admeasuring Having Total Area 752.50 Sq Ft or 69.83 Sqmts. Bring Its Khata No. 238 (I) Khassa No. 563 Situated At Han Kung, Village Shantarahash, Pargana & Tehsil Roorkee Distt. Haridwar East: Plot No. H-26, West: Plot No. H-26 Ajay, North: Road 24 Feet Wide, South: Plot No. H-24 Others.	Rs. 16,20,000/- Rs. 1,62,000/-	20.01.2026 at 11.00 AM to 01.00 PM	19.01.2026
	Lan No. - 611639211847024 1. Yashi Sharma, S/o. Deepak Sharma 2. Dhan Devi Mishra, W/o. Rajendra Kumar Mishra 3. Komal Kumar, S/o. Sakindar Singh	All That Land Bearing Khata Khatauni No. 89 (1417 To 1422 Fasil) Khassa No. 143 Min Land Measuring 81.93 Sq.mtrs Situated At Mauza Chak Danda Lakhand, Pargana Parwa Doon Distt. Dehradun East: Land of Seller (Suresh Chandra) West: Land of Seller (Suresh Chandra), North: 20 Feet Wide Road, South: Land of Others.	Rs. 31,50,000/- Rs. 3,15,000/-	20.01.2026 at 11.00 AM to 01.00 PM	19.01.2026

Details terms and conditions of the sale are as below and the details are also provided in our/secured creditor's website at the following link website address (<https://BidDeal.in> and <https://www.grihashakti.com/pdf/E-Auction.pdf>) The **Intending Bidders can also contact : Hanuwant Singh, on his Mob. No. 8005968270, E-mail : Hanuwant.Singh@grihashakti.com** and **Mr. Niloy Dey, on his Mob. 9988989312, E-mail : Niloy.Dey@grihashakti.com**
Place : Haridwar / Dehradun, Uttarakhand
Date : 08.12.2025

Sd/-
Authorized Officer
SMFG INDIA HOME FINANCE CO. LTD.

Branch Office: ICICI Bank Ltd, NCR Plaza, 24, New Cantt Road, Hathibarkola, Dehradun, Uttarakhand- 248001

PUBLIC NOTICE-TENDER CUM E-AUCTION FOR SALE OF SECURED ASSET

[See proviso to Rule 8(6)]
Notice for sale of immovable asset(s)

E-Auction Sale Notice for the sale of immovable asset(s) under the Securitisation and Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002 read with proviso to Rule 8 (6) of the Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules, 2002.

This notice is hereby given to the public in general and in particular to the Borrower(s) and Guarantor(s) that the below described immovable property mortgaged/ charged to the Secured Creditor, the physical possession of which has been taken by the Authorised Officer of ICICI Bank Limited will be sold on 'As is where is', 'As is what is' and 'Whatever there is' as per the brief particulars given hereunder;

Sr. No.	Name of Borrower(s)/ Co-Borrowers/ Guarantors/ Loan Account No.	Details of the Secured asset(s) with known encumbrances, if any	Amount Outstanding	Reserve Price/ Earnest Money Deposit	Date and Time of Property Inspection	Date & Time of E-Auction
(A)	(B)	(C)	(D)	(E)	(F)	(G)
1.	Pavneesh (Borrower)- Lan: LBDEH00005929336, LBGHZ00005989307	Flat No. B- G03, Ground Floor, Resizone Residency, Tower- B, Part of Khata No. 422 (Fasli 1420 To 1425), Khassa No. 124 Gha (Old 231, 232, 233, and 234), Situated At Mauza Kandoli, Pargana Parwadoon, District. Dehradun, Uttarakhand. Area: 1850 Sq Ft	Rs. 1,26, 26,350/- As on November 29, 2025	Rs. 74,50, 000/- Rs. 7,45, 000/-	December 22, 2025 From 01:00 PM To 02:00 PM	December 31, 2025 From 11:00 AM To 12:00 Noon

The online auction will be conducted on the website <https://disposalhub.com> of our auction agency M/s NexXen Solutions Private Limited The Mortgagors/ Notices are given a last chance to pay the total dues with further interest by December 30, 2025 before 05:00 P.M else the secured asset(s) will be sold as per schedule. The prospective bidder(s) must submit the Earnest Money Deposit (EMD) Demand Draft (DD) (Refer Column E) at ICICI Bank Ltd, NCR Plaza, 24, New Cantt Road, Hathibarkola, Dehradun, Uttarakhand- 248001 on or before December 30, 2025 by 05:00 P.M Thereafter, they have to submit their offer through the website mentioned above on or before December 30, 2025 by 05:00 P.M along with the scanned image of the Bank acknowledged DD towards proof of payment of EMD. In case the prospective bidder(s) is/ are unable to submit his/ her/ their offer through the website, then the signed copy of tender documents may be submitted at ICICI Bank Ltd, NCR Plaza, 24, New Cantt Road, Hathibarkola, Dehradun, Uttarakhand- 248001 on or before December 30, 2025 by 05:00 P.M. Earnest Money Deposit DD/PO should be from a Nationalised/ Scheduled Bank in favour of 'ICICI Bank Limited' payable at Dehradun.

For any further clarifications in terms of inspection, Terms and Conditions of the E-Auction or submission of tenders, contact ICICI Bank Employee Phone No. 9372730494/8584874809
Please note that the Marketing agencies 1. Augeo Assets Management Private Limited, 2. Matex Net Pvt. Ltd. 3. Finwin Estate Deal Technologies Pvt Ltd. 4. Ginarsoft Pvt Ltd. 5 Hecto Prop Tech Pvt Ltd. 6. Arca Smart Pvt Ltd. 7. Novel Asset Service Pvt Ltd. 8. Nobroker Technologies Solutions Pvt Ltd. 9. Valuetrust Capital Services Pvt Ltd., have also been engaged for facilitating the sale of this property. The Authorised Officer reserves the right to reject any or all the bids without furnishing any further reasons. For detailed Terms and Conditions of the sale, please visit www.icicibank.com/n4p4s
Date : December 09, 2025
Place : Dehradun

Authorized Officer
ICICI Bank Limited

Branch Office: ICICI Bank Ltd, NCR Plaza, 24, New Cantt Road, Hathibarkola, Dehradun, Uttarakhand- 248001

PUBLIC NOTICE-TENDER CUM E-AUCTION FOR SALE OF SECURED ASSET

[See proviso to Rule 8(6)]
Notice for sale of immovable asset(s)

E-Auction Sale Notice for the sale of immovable asset(s) under the Securitisation and Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002 read with proviso to Rule 8 (6) of the Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules, 2002.

This notice is hereby given to the public in general and in particular to the Borrower(s) and Guarantor(s) that the below described immovable property mortgaged/ charged to the Secured Creditor, the physical possession of which has been taken by the Authorised Officer of ICICI Bank Limited will be sold on 'As is where is', 'As is what is' and 'Whatever there is' as per the brief particulars given hereunder;

Sr. No.	Name of Borrower(s)/ Co-Borrowers/ Guarantors/ Loan Account No.	Details of the Secured asset(s) with known encumbrances, if any	Amount Outstanding	Reserve Price/ Earnest Money Deposit	Date and Time of Property Inspection	Date & Time of E-Auction
(A)	(B)	(C)	(D)	(E)	(F)	(G)
1.	Suraj Prasad (Borrower), Murti Devi (Co-Borrower)- Lan: LBDEH00005882584, LBDEH00005995398	Flat No. E-204, 2nd Floor, Tower-D, Resizone Residency, Part of Khata No. 422 (Fasli 1420 To 1425), Khassa No. 124 Gha (Old 231, 232, 233, and 234), Situated At Mauza Kandoli, Pargana Parwadoon, District. Dehradun, Uttarakhand Area: 1550 Sq Ft	Rs. 1,13,24, 218/- As on November 29, 2025	Rs. 62,00, 000/- Rs. 6,20, 000/-	December 22, 2025 From 02:00 PM To 03:00 PM	December 31, 2025 From 11:00 AM To 12:00 Noon

The online auction will be conducted on the website <https://disposalhub.com> of our auction agency M/s NexXen Solutions Private Limited The Mortgagors/ Notices are given a last chance to pay the total dues with further interest by December 30, 2025 before 05:00 P.M else the secured asset(s) will be sold as per schedule. The prospective bidder(s) must submit the Earnest Money Deposit (EMD) Demand Draft (DD) (Refer Column E) at ICICI Bank Ltd, NCR Plaza, 24, New Cantt Road, Hathibarkola, Dehradun, Uttarakhand- 248001 on or before December 30, 2025 by 05:00 P.M Thereafter, they have to submit their offer through the website mentioned above on or before December 30, 2025 by 05:00 P.M along with the scanned image of the Bank acknowledged DD towards proof of payment of EMD. In case the prospective bidder(s) is/ are unable to submit his/ her/ their offer through the website, then the signed copy of tender documents may be submitted at ICICI Bank Ltd, NCR Plaza, 24, New Cantt Road, Hathibarkola, Dehradun, Uttarakhand- 248001 on or before December 30, 2025 by 05:00 P.M. Earnest Money Deposit DD/PO should be from a Nationalised/ Scheduled Bank in favour of 'ICICI Bank Limited' payable at Dehradun.

For any further clarifications in terms of inspection, Terms and Conditions of the E-Auction or submission of tenders, contact ICICI Bank Employee Phone No. 9372730494/8584874809.
Please note that the Marketing agencies 1. Augeo Assets Management Private Limited, 2. Matex Net Pvt. Ltd. 3. Finwin Estate Deal Technologies Pvt Ltd. 4. Ginarsoft Pvt Ltd. 5 Hecto Prop Tech Pvt Ltd. 6. Arca Smart Pvt Ltd. 7. Novel Asset Service Pvt Ltd. 8. Nobroker Technologies Solutions Pvt Ltd. 9. Valuetrust Capital Services Pvt Ltd., have also been engaged for facilitating the sale of this property. The Authorised Officer reserves the right to reject any or all the bids without furnishing any further reasons. For detailed Terms and Conditions of the sale, please visit www.icicibank.com/n4p4s
Date : December 09, 2025
Place : Dehradun

Authorized Officer
ICICI Bank Limited

Uttarakhand has many firsts to its credit in last few years: CM

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Dehradun

Chief Minister Pushkar Singh Dhami has averred that Uttarakhand has to its credit many firsts in the country such as implementation of Uniform Civil Code (UCC) and enactment of a strict anti-copying act in the State. He was addressing a group of 240 meritorious students of class X examination- 2025 of Uttarakhand board selected for the Bharat Darshan Education Tour at State Council of Education Research and Training (SCERT), Nanoorkheda here on Monday.

He said that the education tour programme is an opportunity for the student to witness and understand India's progress, science, technology, history and culture. The CM asked the students to document their travel experiences in their diaries, as well as to document innovations and achievements that have taken place in Uttarakhand for the first time. Citing examples of UCC and anti-copying law enacted and implemented by the State, the CM said that for the first time Uttarakhand has

been ranked first in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) by the NITI Aayog. Similarly, Uttarakhand's tableau ranked first in the Republic Day parade 2023 parade. He added that 27,000 youth in the State have been provided government jobs in the last four years and the State hosted the National Games for the first time. Similarly action against corruption was taken on a large scale and for the first time 10,000 acres of land was freed from encroachment. The Madrasa

Board was abolished and Uttarakhand received the Most Film-Friendly State award for the first time.

The students will visit institutions such as ISRO, Satish Dhawan Space Centre in Sriharikota, Professor UR Rao Satellite Centre and Vikram Sarabhai Space Centre in the tour. Dhami said that a major benefit of this trip will be that the students will develop teamwork, social skills and self-confidence. They will cherish the experiences gained from this trip for a lifetime and, as brand ambassadors of Uttarakhand, will share the specialties of our culture, nature, food, and tourism in different parts of the country.

Speaking on the occasion, the Education minister Dhan Singh Rawat said on the occasion of the composition of 150 years of Vande Mataram, about 21 lakh students of 23,000 schools created a record by singing the national song on November 26, the Constitution Day.

Raipur MLA Umesh Sharma Kau, secretary Ravinath Raman, additional secretary Ranjana Rajguru, director general Education Deepti Singh and other officials attended the programme.

Rawat's comments inspired by Congress' mentality in 1984 riots: BJP

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Dehradun

The Bharatiya Janata Party has stated that the comments made on the Sikh community by senior Congress leader Harak Singh Rawat are a reflection of the Congress' mentality during the 1984 anti-Sikh riots. MLA and BJP State spokesman Khajjan Das said that the people will not forgive the Congress despite its leaders making a show of apologising. He challenged the Congress asking whether its leaders can make a similar comment about the vote bank it appeases.

On being asked about the Congress leaders visiting Gurudwaras he opined that this was another unforgivable error of the Congress. The insulting comment made by a former cabinet minister and the Congress State election management committee head, shows how the party views self-respecting and brave members of the Sikh community. "People still remember the time of the

1980 riots when many Congress leaders' hands were tainted with the blood of thousands of Sikhs. The society witnessed the attempt made to create discord between the Hindus and Sikhs in order to divide the society. The people remember well how those who murdered Sikhs were kept as ministers at the Centre by the Congress party," the BJP leader said.

Though various Congress leaders are visiting Gurudwaras, the reality is made clear by Rawat's statement that he "had said all this as a joke". Das further said, "How can a civilised, responsible and sensitive person make such a joke. This shows the mentality of the Congress and the respect it accords to Sikhism and Sanatan Dharm. Does the Congress dare make such a comment for the community it continues to appease? Any leader making such a comment will not last in the party," Das added.

BJP trying to divert public attention from Dharali, disaster mismanagement: Godiyal

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Dehradun

Pradesh Congress Committee (PCC) president Ganesh Godiyal has said that the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) is deliberately raising the issue of comment made by the Congress leader Harak Singh Rawat in order to divert attention from the issue of Dharali disaster and failure of the State government in disaster management works. Interacting with the media persons at Rajiv Bhawan on Monday, the PCC president said that though both the parties involved in the derogatory comment controversy on Sikh community, Harak Singh Rawat and the Sikh community have sorted out the issue after apology tendered by the Congress leader, the BJP is continuing to raise the issue in order to divert attention from the issues of missing people in Dharali disaster and the increasing attacks of wild animals particularly bears and leopard on humans in mountainous areas of the State.

It is worth mentioning here that Harak Singh Rawat while addressing agitating lawyers in Dehradun recently, inadvertently made a comment against Sikh community which was objected to by the lawyers. Though Rawat realised his mistake and sought an apology, some Sikh organisations held a

protest in Dehradun on Saturday. Following the protest, the PCC president Godiyal, former chief minister Harish Rawat and leader of opposition Yashpal Arya tendered apology for the comment. Harak Singh Rawat himself visited the Paunta Sahib Gurudwara on



Sunday where he engaged in Kar Sewa as repentance of his sin. Former CM Harish Rawat also offered Sewa at Race Course Gurudwara in Dehradun on Monday.

TENDER NOTICE for Hiring of Readily Available Rented Office Premises for Food Corporation of India (FCI), Divisional Office at Srinagar (Pauri Garhwal)

Online bids are invited for hiring of rented office premises for Food Corporation of India (FCI), Divisional Office at Srinagar (Pauri Garhwal). Interested Govt. bodies/PSUs /individuals / firms may participate in Bid No: GEM/2025/B/6969934 available at GeM. Approximately 250 square metre area is required. The Last date & time of submission of bid is 20.12.2025 (3:00 p.m.)

General Manager (R)



UJS concerned : Water supply schemes suffer due to delayed budget

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Dehradun

The delay in receiving the budget for the permanent restoration of water supply schemes damaged during this year's monsoon season has become a matter of concern for water services in the State. The secretary (Appraisal) at Uttarakhand Jal Sansthan, Maneesh Semwal provided detailed information on the matter, noting that the UJS assesses damage to water supply schemes across the State every year during the monsoon period, particularly from July to August. This damage is often attributed to landslides, cloud bursts and other monsoon-re-

lated factors. This year too, UJS has reported a significant number of damaged water supply schemes. Specifically, approximately 4,430 water supply schemes across the

State were affected during the monsoon season this year. Due to damage to the water supply schemes, budget appeals were promptly submitted to the authorities for permanent restoration. "A total of Rs 151.18 crore has been asked for the affected schemes. Of this amount, Rs 20 crore was initially received, but the remaining funds have yet to be disbursed," he said.

Semwal further said that during the monsoon season, instead of making permanent repairs, temporary restoration was implemented for the affected supply schemes. "We are

permanent restoration. So we are concerned. The temporary restoration is prone to deterioration, impacting water services," he said.

"To address the ongoing need for water restoration, the recovery of affected supply schemes is crucial," he said.

Semwal said that the Post-Disaster Need Assessment team from the Central government had recently reached out to them and they had discussed the budgetary requirements for restoring the disrupted water supply schemes. "But we are yet to receive a response. We, however,

Police stop unemployed nursing graduates marching towards CM residence

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Dehradun

The unemployed nursing graduates from across the State under the banner of Nursing Ekta Manch (NEM) attempted to march towards the chief minister's residence on Monday to voice their unaddressed demands. However, police personnel blocked their march along the route and redirected them to the protest site at Ekta Vihar.

Importantly, the unemployed nursing graduates have been protesting since December 5. "As part of our demonstration, we tried to march towards the CM's residence to highlight our unresolved issues, but police intervened by erecting barricades," said one of the protestors. During this time, police and the agitators were engaged in heated arguments.

The agitators said that a number of issues had remained unresolved. "These include the need for transparency in the recruitment process for nursing officials and the immediate closure of the examination portals among others," said the vice-president of NEM, Sarita Joshi.

"With no assurances having come from the authorities regarding our demands, we were left with no alternative but to march towards the CM's residence. However, police personnel blocked our path with barricades. Not just this but the cops behaved inappropriately with us and transported us back to our protest site. This should not

have happened," she said.

"We will not take things lying down. We are planning to approach the director general of police. Besides, our protest will continue until the authorities act on their demands," she warned.

Notably, the nursing graduates have been protesting since December 5 for several key demands, including recruitment based on year-wise seniority for candidates who have completed their qualifying examinations. Other demands include the immediate closure of the examination portal and the recruitment of over 2,500 nursing positions each year in accordance with IPHS. Further, they are calling for special age relaxation for candidates who have exceeded the age limit due to prolonged delays and for priority to be given to candidates who are natives of Uttarakhand.

Ramnagar's demography altered on Rs 10 stamp paper

CHANCHAL GOLA ■ Ramnagar

The recent demolition of 51 encroachments on reserved forest land in Puchhdi area of Ramnagar has revealed the extent of demographic change and the means being used by the encroachers to occupy government land and also enjoy various government facilities.

The State government has finally stepped up vigilance considering the rapidly changing demographic pattern in various parts of the State. Years of unchecked encroachments and the rising influx of outsiders have now placed the administration on high alert. The most recent example is the village of Puchhdi in Ramnagar, where large areas of land were illegally colonized through transactions made on mere Rs10 stamp papers.

The region, which falls under the Terai West forest division, was once known for its dense forest cover. However, in the past few years, people from various districts of Uttar Pradesh began settling here by initially setting up temporary huts. Proximity to the Kosi river enabled many to earn through sand mining and gradually convert their makeshift shelters into permanent houses.



Not only this, the encroachers also occupied vacant forest land and even began farming illegally. Through small monetary transactions and basic stamp papers, thousands of square feet of land came under unau-

thorised occupation, eventually turning into a permanent settlement.

Surprisingly, these encroachers managed to obtain Aadhaar cards, electricity connections, water supply, ration cards and various other government facilities. Over time, they brought in more relatives, expanding the illegal settlement into a sizable colony.

When the government conducted a detailed assessment of the changing demographic trends, it became clear that such patterns could pose a threat to Uttarakhand's social, cultural and geographic balance. Consequently, the State has initiated stringent measures to curb this rising trend.

The recent action in Puchhdi village is an example of this new strict approach, where dozens of illegal structures were demolished and appropriate action taken against the encroachers. According to official sources, considering the State's sensitive geographic conditions and limited resources, controlling unregulated demographic shifts has become essential. Preparations are un-



derway for statewide action against encroachments, forged documents and unauthorised settlements.

hope that the authorities will allocate the necessary budget as soon as possible to help us plunge into the work without further delay," he said.

Winter Carnival in Nainital: 30% of high-end hotel rooms booked in advance

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Nainital

The picturesque Lake Town Nainital is now gearing up to celebrate the Winter Carnival slated to start before the ushering in of the New Year. It will be followed by the New Year celebrations. With the festive season drawing near, bookings for hotels have already begun. With thousands of tourists expected to swarm in, the hill station is now being appropriately illuminated at the initiative of the Nainital Hotels and Restaurants Association.

NHRA sources said that the three-day Winter Carnival would be held this year principally for tourists, from December 23 to 25. It will showcase the uniqueness of Uttarakhand's culture. While the Tourism department will announce the details of the pro-

grammes soon, the district administration will play a major role in this event. "Our organisation will provide significant support to ensure that a tourists enjoy the festive programmes to their heart's content," said a senior functionary of NHRA.

Meanwhile, the high-end hotels have drawn up attractive New Year packages to lure tourists from all corners of the country. These packages will include two-night and three-day events, featuring live music, DJs and Bollywood nights. Entertainment programmes for everyone from children to the elderly are included in the packages. Some hotels will feature Kumaoni folk songs and music and the gala dinner will feature dozens of delectable dishes. Forty

rooms have already been booked in advance at Namah Nainital, informed its cluster general manager, Medhatitshi Bhattacharjee, adding that a special programme, themed on '80s Bollywood songs, would be organised to welcome the New Year. Besides, Namah Nainital will be hosting a DJ night starting from Saturday. Admission is free while transportation to and from Mall Road will be arranged free for tourists. DJ nights will be held every Saturday. The general manager of Shervani Hilltop Inn, Kamlesh Singh said that advance booking has already started. "We are organising live music while other programmes will be like last year," he said.

The GM of Naini Retreat, D S Jina said that 10 rooms have been booked in advance. "Traditional music accompanied by Kumaoni musical instruments will be held to the delight of the music-loving tourists," he said.

The president, NHRA, Digvijay Singh Bisht said that colourful lights would be seen around Naini Lake with electric strings. "We are going all-out to make the festive programmes, including the carnival, memorable," he added.



SYMBOLIC POSSESSION NOTICE

ICICI Bank Branch Office: ICICI Bank Limited Plot No-23, Shal Tower, 3rd Floor, New Rohtak Road, Karol Bagh, New Delhi- 110005

The Authorised ICICI Bank Officer under the Securitisation, Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002 and in exercise of the powers conferred under section 13(12) read with Rule 3 of the Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules 2002, issued Demand Notices to the borrower(s) mentioned below, to repay the amount mentioned in the Notice within 60 days from the date of receipt of the said Notice.

Having failed to repay the amount, the Notice is issued to the borrower and the public in general that the undersigned has taken symbolic possession of the property described below, by exercising powers conferred on him/her under Section 13(4) of the said Act read with Rule 8 of the said rules on the below-mentioned dates. The borrower in particular and the public in general are hereby cautioned not to deal with the property. Any dealings with the property will be subject to charges of ICICI Bank Limited.

Sr. No.	Name of the Borrower(s)/ Loan Account Number	Description of Property/ Date of Symbolic Possession	Date of Demand Notice/ Amount in Demand Notice (Rs)	Name of Branch
1.	Upavan Restaurant/ Anil Kumar Chaurasia/ Raj Kumar Chaurasiya/ Santosh Chaurasiya/ Suyogya Chaurasiya/ LBDEH00006094793	Flat No.- 02, First Floor Comprised Over Khata Khatouni No. 1173 (Fasil Year 1394-1399), Khadra No 537/1/4 Min. Situated in Mauza Kanwali, Mohit Nagar Colony, Pargana Kendriyadoon Teshil & District Dehradun Uttarakhand - 248006 / 4-Dec-2025	August 28,2025 Rs. 6,80,456/-	Dehradun
2.	Upavan Restaurant/ Anil Kumar Chaurasia/ Santosh Chaurasiya/ Suyogya Chaurasiya/ LBDEH00006068314	Part Of Khadra No. 537 Min Situated At Mohit Nagar, Maurza Kanwali, Paragana- Central Doon, District - Dehradun Uttarakhand, Dehradun- 248001/ 4-Dec-2025	August 28,2025 Rs. 1,06,05,048/-	Dehradun

The above-mentioned borrower(s)/guarantor(s) is/are hereby issued a 30 day Notice to repay the amount, else the mortgaged properties will be sold after 30 days from the date of publishing this Notice, as per the provisions under Rules 8 and 9 of Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules 2002.

Date: December 09, 2025 Place: Dehradun

Sincerely Authorised Officer For ICICI Bank Ltd.

IN FOCUS



A participant shows his skills during the Home Guard and Civil Defence Foundation Day celebrations in Dehradun Monday

PTI

Delhi Court defers bail order in Kartavya Path case to December 9

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

A Delhi court on Monday deferred its order on the bail pleas of several accused in the Kartavya Path protest case to December 9 due to Judicial Magistrate Aridaman Singh Cheema falling ill.

Outside the courtroom, parents of several accused students voiced their grief to their lawyers about being “emotionally provoked by the repeated deferrals” on the bail order.

On Thursday, the judge deferred the order on the bail pleas, saying the new material put on record by the investigating officers (IOs) would require time to be perused. Several advocates pleaded that their clients had exams coming up shortly and the bail order

needs to be released “on an urgent basis.”

On November 23, a protest took place at the India Gate over rising air pollution in the national Capital.

The protesters have been accused of raising controversial slogans and using pepper spray on the police trying to contain them.

According to police, 23 protesters have been arrested in two separate cases lodged at the Parliament Street and Kartavya Path police stations.

Seventeen protesters were held in connection with a scuffle at the Parliament Street Police Station, while six were arrested in the pepper-spray case.

Fifteen of the 17 accused in the Parliament Street case were rearrested in the Kartavya Path case.

Opposition blasts Govt over Vande Mataram debate

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

Opposition MPs lashed out at the Government on Monday over the “Vande Mataram” debate in the Lok Sabha, calling it an attempt at diverting attention and dividing the country. Some of them also claimed that the debate was started keeping in mind next year’s West Bengal Assembly polls.

Speaking in the Lok Sabha, Congress MP Priyanka Gandhi Vadra accused the BJP of committing a “big sin” by creating a controversy over Vande Mataram and claimed that the Government pushed for a debate on the national song as the West Bengal assembly polls were approaching. She hit out at PM Modi, saying “he is not the prime minister he used to be as his self-confidence is decreasing and his policies are weakening the country”.

Samajwadi Party leader Akhilesh Yadav also hit out at the BJP, claiming that those who did not participate in

the freedom struggle were now talking of the values of “Vande Mataram” and asserted that the national song should not be used as a tool to impose one’s beliefs on others. He said that “Vande Mataram” should be followed in spirit, as it is a song which bonded people during the freedom struggle. He also questioned how individuals who did not participate in the freedom struggle could truly understand the meaning of “Vande Mataram.”

Priyanka Gandhi said the Government wanted the debate to divert attention from people’s problems and make fresh allegations against those who sacrificed for the country’s freedom. “... Whatever complaints you have against (Jawaharlal) Nehru, whatever mistakes you think he made... If you want to hurl abuses, if you want to insult as much as you like, please make a list of that too... 999 insults, 9,999 insults... Make a list, and then we will fix a time. “Just like we debated for 10



Congress MP Priyanka Gandhi Vadra speaks in the Lok Sabha during the Winter session of Parliament in New Delhi on Monday

PTI

hours today on Vande Mataram, in the same way, we will ask the Speaker, we will fix a time – 10 hours, 20 hours, 40 hours, however many hours it takes for your complaint to be fully addressed,” she said. “Let’s close the chapter for once and all. After that, let’s talk about today’s issues – price rise and unemployment,” she added.

Launching a strong defence of India’s first prime

minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, who was repeatedly criticised by treasury bench members during the debate, Priyanka Gandhi said Prime Minister Modi has been the country’s PM for about 12 years, while Jawaharlal Nehru had spent as many years in jail for the independence of the country.

Priyanka Gandhi said that though PM Modi gives a good speech, there is one shortcoming that he is “weak on facts”.

Former CM Prithviraj Chavan slams Modi Govt over aviation monopoly

TN RAGHUNATHA ■ Mumbai

Maharashtra’s former chief minister Prithviraj Chavan on Monday came down heavily on the Narendra Modi Government for enabling “unprecedented monopoly” in the aviation sector – an unhealthy development that may prove to be “dangerous” for the country in the long-run.

Chavan – who was a Minister of State in the Prime Minister’s Office (PMO) in the Manmohan Singh Government – said that the growing dominance of a single airline like IndiGo posed a “serious threat” to the national economy and adversely affected passenger interests. Talking to media persons

here, Chavan alluded to the Indigo crisis that has resulted in wide-spread flight disruptions and severe passenger distress and rooted for splitting the 20-year old private airline into two companies to ensure fair competition.

Averting that two major players now dominate India’s air travel – IndiGo with 65 per cent market share and the Tata Group (Air India and AI Express) with nearly 30 per cent share, Chavan said that “a dominance by just two carriers “is extremely dangerous” for a sector that once had 10 competing airlines. Chavan said that time had come for the Government to set up its own national airline to prevent monopolies in the sky.

Chavan said the current situation in the country’s aviation sector was a fallout of the ‘systemic indulgence’ granted to IndiGo by the Government and the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA).

“Both Government and DGCA have failed to enforce their own rules and regulations, compounding the operational failures and the nationwide breakdown,” he said.

“Today, 40 crore passengers depend on these two mega-airlines, leaving the public vulnerable to cascading crises whenever one system falters. The Government must balance the situation by launching a national carrier. It was a wrong policy to let a crucial

sector like aviation fall entirely into private hands,” Chavan said. Hitting out at the Competition Commission of India (CCI), the former Union Minister said that the CCI had “miserably failed” in safeguarding consumer rights, demanding it should be dismantled and replaced by a stronger watchdog with real authority.

Referring to reports in a section of media, Chavan demanded to know if the IndiGo’s Rs 56 crore donation to the ruling BJP through electoral bonds had influenced regulatory decisions.

“Was it a contribution or a bribe for a quid pro quo? The public deserves answers,” Chavan asked, while

demanding a probe into the allegation.

Dwelling upon the Adani Defence & Aerospace (ADA)’s November 25, 2025 purchase of the Flight Simulation Technique Centre Pvt Ltd (FSTC), India’s largest pilot training academy, Chavan chose to link this with the Civil Aviation Minister’s recent statements that India will require 30,000 pilots within the next decade.

“Within days after the FSTC takeover by Adani Group, IndiGo crisis started. The acquisition of FSTC by the Adani group is likely to consolidate its control over yet another critical part of the aviation ecosystem, Chavan said. Among other things,

Chavan made seven specific demands – including the resignation of Civil Aviation Minister K Ram Mohan Naidu, splitting up of IndiGo and the Government to establish a national carrier to demolish aviation monopoly and removal of DGCA officers responsible for failing to avert the IndiGo crisis.

Chavan’s other demands include: immediate suspension of IndiGo CEO Peiter Elbers, setting up of a high-level inquiry with a 15-day deadline to submit its report, disbanding/restructuring the CCI watchdog and implementing the long-pending Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) proposed during the UPA era.

IIM Jammu launches workshop on centuries-old Basohli art

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Jammu

The Indian Institute of Management (IIM) Jammu on Monday inaugurated a unique week-long workshop on the centuries-old Basohli painting art form, providing students and participants an exclusive opportunity to learn the intricate craft directly from women artists who are officially certified under its Geographical Indication (GI) tag.

Considered one of the most vibrant and distinctive schools of Pahari miniature painting, Basohli painting originated in the erstwhile princely state of Basohli around the 17th–18th centuries. Known for its bold colours, dramatic facial features, rich borders and liberal use of beetle-wing cases for embellishment, the art form



received the prestigious GI tag in March 2023, recognising its unique geographical and cultural origin.

The workshop, described by IIM Jammu as the “first-of-

its-kind” initiative on its campus, brings together nationally recognised women artisans from the Basohli region who have played a pivotal role in reviv-

ing and preserving this 300-year-old tradition.

Over the seven-day programme, participants will receive hands-on training under the guidance of award-

winning senior artist Sohan Singh Billowaria, state awardees Rajni Bala and Sonam Jamwal, and several others in traditional techniques, including natural pigment preparation, brushwork, gold embellishment and thematic storytelling drawn from Hindu mythology, court life and Ragamala series, which are hallmarks of authentic Basohli paintings.

Speaking at the inauguration, Professor BS Sahay, Director, IIM Jammu, said he welcomes the living heritage of Basohli Art to its Jagti campus, as it hosts the master practitioners “whose devotion, skill, and cultural memory preserve the aesthetic soul of Jammu and uphold India’s artistic heritage.”

“By facilitating direct interaction between our students and these extraordinary

women artisans, we aim to foster appreciation for indigenous art forms while promoting entrepreneurship and sustainable livelihoods in the artisan community,” he said.

The participating women artists, many of whom belong to families that have been practising the craft for generations, have gained national acclaim in recent years. Several have received state and national awards, and their works have been exhibited at prestigious platforms, including the National Museum in New Delhi.

The workshop, scheduled to end on December 14, has been organised under Anandam: The Centre for Happiness and the Painting Club, IIM Jammu, in association with the Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts (IGNCA), Regional Centre Jammu.

Mahayuti to contest upcoming civic, Zill Parishad polls together: Shinde

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ Nagpur

The Mahayuti will put up a united fight in the upcoming municipal corporation and zilla parishad polls, Shiv Sena leader and Maharashtra Deputy Chief Minister Eknath Shinde said on Monday.

He advised MLAs and ministers of his party to follow the “alliance dharma” and refrain from making any statements or behaviour that would lead to a conflict in the Mahayuti alliance of BJP, Sena, and NCP.

Addressing Shiv Sena MLAs and ministers in Nagpur, Shinde said the party contested elections for the post of presidents in 168 municipal councils and 4,000 councillors.

He said the atmosphere

was very conducive for Shiv Sena in the first phase of local body polls, voting for which was held on December 2, and that the party put up a good fight. The results will also be good for the party, he added.

“The municipal corporation and zilla parishad polls will be contested as a Mahayuti alliance. Follow the alliance dharma. Do not make any controversial statement or do anything that will cause a conflict in the alliance,” said Shinde.

The first phase of the local body polls saw Mahayuti allies contesting against each other at many places in Maharashtra.

In some cases, the campaign became acerbic, prompting Shinde to raise the issue with the top leadership of the BJP.

Naveen Patnaik dubs BJP’s supplementary budget as empty vessel that make good sound

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ Bhubaneswar

Leader of Opposition Naveen Patnaik termed the Odisha Government’s supplementary budget as “an empty vessel” that makes “good sound”.

Patnaik made the statement outside the Assembly while the House debated the Odisha Appropriation (number 2) Bill, 2025, introduced by Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi here. Though the BJD president attended the session, he did not participate in the debate.

Responding to the criticism, the chief minister said Patnaik should make his comments

inside the House.

“It is said by many people in our state and no expenditure is being made by the Government for the people and their development. This is very sad to report. Time and again this is being brought to the attention of the state Government that there must be some expenditure for the development of the people,” he said.

Alleging that the state Government was neglecting the expenditure on development, Patnaik claimed that everyone is suffering.

“It is not exclusively for any section; all are suffering. It

(supplementary budget) is like an empty vessel and you know empty vessels sounds good and they are satisfied with it. I am very sorry to report this plight,” the former CM said.

Replying to the debate, Majhi said the Leader of Opposition should make his statements in the House.

“He is not present most of the time. It is another matter if his health is not good. He should attend the proceedings and make statements. The people will not accept the statements made on X posts,” the chief minister said.

Participating in the debate, Opposition Deputy Leader



Prasanna Acharya also described the budget as “an illusion.”

“I heard many members speaking and the debate is mostly on political aspects. As we discuss budget, there

should be some economic issues,” he said.

Citing NITI Aayog data, Acharya said the BJD came to power in 2000 when the state was almost bankrupt and

making overdrafts to pay salary of employees, but Naveen Patnaik, during his 24 years of rule, changed the state’s fiscal situation.

“The BJD left the Government when the state’s financial health was very positive. You (BJP) have inherited a Government that is revenue surplus. Therefore, try to maintain it and do not push the state to bankruptcy again,” Acharya said.

The BJD leader accused the state’s BJP Government of mismanaging a strong economy handed over to it and cited falling GST collections and declining mining revenue.

continue until they are located and questioned. The tragedy has triggered strong public anger in Goa, with calls for accountability from both the club’s owners and officials who allowed the establishment to operate despite repeated lapses. State authorities have launched parallel reviews into the licensing process and safety inspections carried out at the venue.

PM questions Nehru legacy

PM Modi lamented that the Constitution was “throttled” and the nation chained by the Emergency when the national song Vande

Mataram completed 100 years. The prime minister also noted that Vande Mataram stood like a rock and inspired unity despite British oppression.

The prime minister noted that the mantra of the national song gave power and inspiration to the entire country during the freedom struggle. Modi recalled that the British were forced to ban Vande Mataram as they brought in laws to prevent printing and propagation of the poem.

“Through Vande Mataram, Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay responded to this challenge with great strength and resolve. The British divided Bengal in 1905, but Vande Mataram stood like a rock and inspired unity,” he said.

1.11 crore PMAY houses sanctioned: Khattar



The Centre has sanctioned 1.11 crore houses under two schemes of Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana, with 95.54 lakh of those houses having already been completed and handed over to beneficiaries, Minister of Housing and Urban Affairs Manohar Lal Khattar informed the Rajya Sabha on Monday.

Attacks on ECI part of conspiracy: Rajnath Singh

Defence Minister and senior BJP leader Rajnath Singh on Monday accused the opposition parties of attacking bodies such as the Election Commission of India as part of a conspiracy to weaken the institutions of the country. Interjecting in a discussion on 150 years of Vande Matram in Lok Sabha, Singh said constant migration, deaths and rapid urbanisation lead to



Revanth targets 10% national GDP for Telangana by 2047



CM A Revanth Reddy on Monday said he wanted Telangana to contribute 10 per cent to the national GDP by 2047. Speaking at the Telangana Rising Global Summit 2025, he also said the state Government wants to replicate the model of Guang-Dong province in China whose economy is the largest of any province in China.

Patna airport runway needs expansion: Aviation Minister

The runway at Patna airport needs expansion, and the Government has been repeatedly requesting additional land from the Bihar Government while operating the airport based on all safety risk assessments, Aviation Minister K Ram Mohan Naidu said in the Rajya Sabha on Monday. According to Naidu, the current runway at Patna airport is not suitable for operating many types of aircraft due to load penalties.



Siddaramaiah to follow high command on turmoil

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Belagavi (Karnataka)

Karnataka Chief Minister Siddaramaiah on Monday reiterated that he will abide by the Congress high command's decision on the leadership change issue in the state. The CM has been repeatedly stating for the last few days that he and Deputy CM DK Shivakumar will go by what the high command decides on the chief minister change.

"Will abide by whatever the high command decides," Siddaramaiah told reporters in response to a question on his son and Congress Member of the Legislative Council (MLC) Yathindra Siddaramaiah's statement that there is no question of leadership change as of now, and that he believes that the former will continue as CM for five years. Earlier in the day, Yathindra claimed that

the Congress high command has said that there is no leadership change in the state. "I have been saying this, which is not new. I feel that, as of now, there is nothing like leadership change. I hope that he (Siddaramaiah) will complete his five-year term," Yathindra told reporters at the Suvarna Vidhana Soudha.

To a question that Siddaramaiah had been asked to come to Delhi in January, Yathindra said the Congress high command calls the chief minister for various issues. So he will go there and discuss. He will also talk about the prevailing situation in the state, he said.

Yathindra also admitted that there was confusion over the leadership issue because, "the Deputy Chief Minister was asked whether he wants to be the CM. There are aspirants in all the political parties. The high



Karnataka Chief Minister Siddaramaiah

command has said that they will not decide it now."

According to Yathindra, the Congress Legislative Party (CLP) elects a candidate for a

definite period. It is the CLP which decides who should be the chief minister. He claimed that, "The Congress high command has made it clear

that there is no leadership change as of now." Yathindra further claimed that high command had a meeting recently where they said they

have not taken any decision and postponed it. "So, as of now, there is no talk on the change of leadership in Karnataka," he claimed.

The power tussle within the ruling party had intensified amid speculation about a change in chief minister in the state, after the Congress Government reached the halfway mark of its five-year term on November 20.

The speculation was fuelled by an alleged "power-sharing" agreement involving Siddaramaiah and Shivakumar in 2023. However, both CM and Deputy CM had recently held breakfast meetings at each others residences, on the instructions of the high command, which is seen as a move to pause the leadership tussle between the two and to signal Siddaramaiah's continuation as the CM for the time being, especially ahead of the Belagavi legislature session.

22 MLAs close to Fadnavis, may cross over: Aaditya

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ Nagpur

Shiv Sena (UBT) legislator Aaditya Thackeray on Monday claimed that 22 MLAs from a Mahauti ally have "grown close" to Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis and are ready to switch sides, an oblique reference to Deputy CM Eknath Shinde-led Shiv Sena.

In June 2022, the Shiv Sena split following a rebellion led by Shinde, resulting in the collapse of the then Uddhav Thackeray-led Maha Vikas Aghadi Government.

Later, in January 2024, assembly speaker Rahul Narwekar held that the Eknath Shinde-led faction was the "real" Shiv Sena, which is a constituent of the ruling Mahayuti in the state along with the BJP and Deputy CM Ajit Pawar's NCP.



Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis at Vidhan Bhawan on the first day of the Winter session of State Assembly in Nagpur

"There is one party and two factions on the treasury side. Twenty-two MLAs from one faction have grown close to the CM. They have good funds and they have started dancing to the tune of the CM," Aaditya Thackeray claimed, without naming the Shinde-led Shiv Sena.

The 22 MLAs are "ready to switch (sides)," he further claimed while talking to reporters in the Vidhan Bhawan premises here.

The Worli MLA also said that someone from these 22 legislators calls himself "vice-captain", a veiled reference to Industries Minister Uday Samant.

Actress assault case: Kerala Govt to appeal against verdict

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ Kochi

Kerala Government on Monday said it will appeal against the verdict in the actress assault case in which Malayalam actor Dileep was acquitted while six others were found guilty.

Announcing the decision, State Law Minister P Rajeev said the survivor didn't get complete justice through the present verdict.

"Though those who were directly involved in the crime were found guilty by the court, it was not the verdict everyone expected," he told reporters, shortly after the court acquitted the actor in the case.

"The state Government has always stood strongly with the survivor, and that will be continued," Rajeev

said. Pointing to the strong stand taken by the prosecution, he said it had even submitted a five-volume argument note at the court with regard to the case. "The Government has decided to go on appeal against the verdict. I have already talked to the chief minister and the DGP in this regard. The prosecution has been directed to initiate further proceedings in this regard," he added.

State Cultural Affairs and Cinema Minister Saji Cheriyan also said the Government has always supported the survivor, and its stance is to ensure the guilty are punished, however high-profile they are.

While KPCC chief Sunny Joseph said the verdict pronounced by the principal sessions court was not satisfactory, Leader of

Opposition VD Satheesan said declaring those who had direct involvement in the crime as guilty was a relief. Joseph, in a video message, accused the prosecution of completely failing in proving the conspiracy part in the case and assuring justice to the survivor.

Meanwhile, speaking to reporters in Kozhikode, Satheesan said what the survivor went through is a tragedy that should never happen to any woman. This judgment finding six accused directly involved in the crime guilty will help prevent such incidents from recurring.

When asked whether the prosecution has failed to prove the conspiracy angle in the case, he said that will be clear only when the detailed judgment is released.

Over 8,700 to gather as Rajasthan hosts first Pravasi Rajasthani Diwas

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Jaipur

Rajasthan will celebrate its first-ever Pravasi Rajasthani Diwas at the Jaipur Exhibition Convention Centre (JECC) on 10th December, bringing together more than 8,700 Non-Resident Rajasthanis and industrialists who have registered to be part of this landmark occasion organised under the leadership of Chief Minister Bhajanlal Sharma.

The event has been envisioned to strengthen the bond between Rajasthan and its global diaspora by inviting them to Connect, Collaborate, and Contribute to the state's ambitious goal of becoming a \$350 billion economy by 2030, a vision that CM Sharma has been championing through diaspora outreach programmes held in Hyderabad, Surat, and Kolkata ahead of main event, where he declared, "We have drawn up an action plan towards becoming a 350 billion dollar economy in the next five years, and I invite you all to be a part of this historic growth story of Rising Rajasthan."

To translate this vision

THE EVENT HAS BEEN ENVISIONED TO STRENGTHEN THE BOND BETWEEN RAJASTHAN AND ITS GLOBAL DIASPORA

into action, the programme will feature sectorial sessions engaging diaspora members, industry leaders, and policymakers across Industry, Tourism, Education, Healthcare, and Water Resources, while an exclusive NRR Roundtable will provide an interactive platform for Non-Resident Rajasthanis to discuss investment opportunities and share their global expertise — an initiative aligned with Prime Minister Narendra Modi's 'Viksit Bharat' vision that aims to transform Rajasthan's diaspora network into a strategic force driving sustainable development.

Laying the institutional foundation for this engagement, the state cabinet recently approved the Non-Resident Rajasthani (NRR) Policy-2025, which establishes an NRR Investment Facilitation Cell along with Investment Liaison Officers and Advisory Councils comprising overseas experts

and business leaders, complemented by a dedicated Non-Resident Rajasthani Department with the Additional District Collector appointed as nodal officer in every district to assist NRR families, while the Rajasthan Foundation now operates 26 chapters worldwide including in New York, London, and Riyadh to maintain this global connect.

The event will also be witnessing the announcement of Pravasi Rajasthani Samman Awards honouring distinguished diaspora members for their achievements in business, science, art, philanthropy, and social service, with thirty-three eminent personalities attending as state guests at a venue thoughtfully designed to reflect Rajasthan's rich culture and heritage through a 'Progress Path' showcasing the state Government's achievements and folk art-inspired souvenirs that will ensure Pravasi Rajasthanis carry home fond memories of their home land before the celebrations continue with the Rising Rajasthan Partnership Conclave on December 11-12.

Third AIESC meeting boosts bilateral cooperation

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

The Third Australia-India Education and Skills Council meeting (AIESC) held in New Delhi on Monday was chaired by Dharmendra Pradhan, Union Minister of Education, Government of India and Jayant Chaudhary, Minister of State for Skill Development & Entrepreneurship and Education, from the Indian side. From Australia, the meeting was chaired by Hon Jason Clare MP, Minister for Education, Government of Australia and Hon. Mr. Andrew Giles MP, Australian Minister for Skills & Training.

The meeting was also attended by Dr Sukanta Majumdar, Minister of State for Education and DoNER; Hon Julian Hill MP, Assistant Minister for International Education, Govt of Australia, Sanjay Kumar, Secretary, School Education, Dr. Vineet Joshi; Secretary, Higher Education; Ms. Debashree Mukherjee, Secretary, Skill Development & Entrepreneurship, senior Government officials from both the sides and Vice-Chancellors & representatives of Australian universities.

The third AIESC meeting reviewed the ongoing initiatives under school education, higher education, research, and skill develop-



ment, and reaffirmed the commitment to deepen institutional linkages, expand mobility pathways, and strengthen regulatory cooperation. AIESC is a bi-national body that guide the strategic direction and strengthen the partnership between the two countries in the fields of the education, training, research and skill ecosystem.

Speaking on the occasion Pradhan said that the 3rd AIESC served as a great opportunity to build upon the progress made since the inaugural meeting of AIESC, break new ground in

Australia-India education, skills and research partnership, open wider avenues for India's youth, and further deepen our bilateral engagements across the full spectrum of education and skill development as well as in areas of national and global priority.

He appreciated the Australian Ministers and the delegation for the substantive discussions on the agenda items— school education, higher education and research and skills and also for their vigorous efforts to elevate the AIESC platform to a higher-level.

Pradhan further said that education, skills and research are the key pillars of India-Australia Strategic Partnership. Both India and Australia remain committed to working together and collaborating more in Early Childhood Care and Education, technology adoption, sports education, building institutional capacities, empowering teachers, preparing youth for critical and emerging areas, like AI, advanced materials, semiconductors, MedTech, energy, and sustainability and also for innovative skilling partnerships, he

added. Taking forward the spirit of collaboration and ambition, the Minister urged all stakeholders to successfully implement the outcome-centric and in-depth discussions held today across school, higher and skill education and to ensure that the bridges built today continue to grow stronger in the years to come.

Speaking on the occasion, Hon Jason Clare MP, Australian Minister for Education, said "This is a win-win. It is good for Australia and it is good for India. "It is a great sign of the strength of the relationship between India and Australia. There is no such collaboration with any other country in the field of education and skill development. This shows deep trust and faith between India and Australia."

Highlighting the depth and uniqueness of the India-Australia skilling partnership, Jayant Chaudhary stated that the two countries share a one-of-its-kind institutional platform that is translating discussions into tangible outcomes through structured frameworks, such as, the Mutual Recognition of Qualifications (MRQ) 2023, a dedicated Skills Mapping Framework for demand assessment, and the signing of three key MoUs to strengthen cooperation.

Union Minister of Minority Affairs Kiren Rijiju

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

A total of 5.17 lakh Waqf properties were initiated on the UMEED portal while 2,16,905 properties were approved by the designated approvers during the six-month window provided, according to the data provided by the Ministry of Minority Affairs.

The UMEED Central Portal for management of Waqf Properties in India, launched by Union Minister of Minority Affairs Kiren Rijiju on June 6, 2025, officially closed for uploads on December 6, 2025, completing its six-month window, as per the UMEED Act, 1995 and the clear directions of the Supreme Court.

In the final count, the momentum significantly accelerated as the deadline approached, the ministry said in a statement.

Many review meetings, training workshops, and high-level interventions even at the secretary-level injected renewed pace into the process, making the upload surge in the last hours, it said.

According to the data provided by the ministry, 5,17,040 Waqf properties were initiated on the portal with 2,16,905 properties approved by the designated approvers. A total of 2,13,941 properties have been submitted by makers and remain in the pipeline as of the dead-

line, the ministry said, adding that 10,869 properties stood rejected during verification

"To support this massive national exercise, the Ministry of Minority Affairs conducted continuous workshops and training sessions with State/UT Waqf Boards and Minority Departments," the statement said.

A two-day master trainer workshop was also conducted in Delhi to equip Waqf Boards and State/UT officials with hands-on training for the uploading process, the ministry said.

Senior technical and administrative teams were deputed across states, and seven zonal meetings were held nationwide.

A dedicated helpline was also set up at the Ministry office for technical support and quick resolution of issues arising during the uploads.

Since the launch of the portal, secretary, Ministry of Minority Affairs, Chandra Shekhar Kumar took 20 plus review meetings, consistently guiding, motivating, and monitoring States/UTs to ensure timely and accurate uploading of existing Waqf property details, the statement said.

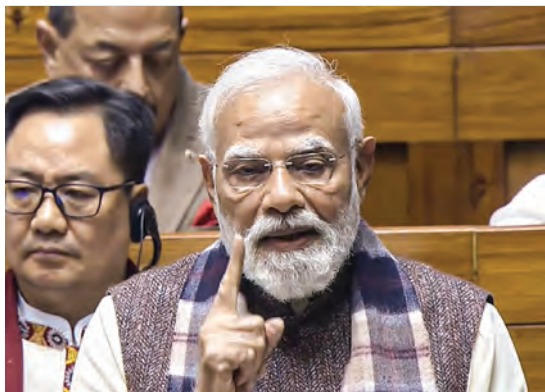
The conclusion of this phase marks a significant milestone in bringing transparency, efficiency, and unified digital management to Waqf properties across India under the UMEED framework, it said.

States Focus



PRIYANK KHARGE SLAMS BJP FOR NEGLECTING OPPOSITION DUTIES

Karnataka Minister Priyank Kharge on Monday hit out at the BJP ahead of the Assembly session, alleging that the party has abandoned its responsibilities as an opposition and was instead focusing only on trivial issues. Speaking to reporters on the premises of Suvarana Vidhana Soudha, Kharge took a dig at the BJP for remaining silent on matters that fall under the purview of the central government. Responding to a question that the BJP was going to target the Congress government in the session, Kharge said, "Let them do it. They have abandoned their responsibilities as an opposition."



PM MODI URGES BIHAR NDA MPS TO SHOULDER 'GREATER RESPONSIBILITY'

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Monday told the NDA MPs from Bihar to work with more vigour for the welfare of the people after the ruling alliance's resounding victory in the recent Assembly elections, saying "with great victory comes great responsibility". Lok Janshakti Party (Ram Vilas) MP Shambhavi Choudhary said the prime minister conveyed the message to a delegation of NDA MPs when they called on him here to congratulate him for the NDA's massive victory in the Bihar polls.

"OVER 90% OF LARGE FARM FIRES IN PUNJAB, HARYANA NOW GO UNDETECTED"

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

More than 90 per cent of large farm fires in Punjab and Haryana are now going undetected by the official monitoring systems as farmers are shifting stubble-burning activities to late afternoons, according to a new analysis published on Monday. The Stubble Burning Status Report 2025 by the International Forum for Environment, Sustainability and Technology (iFOREST) said this led to major underestimation of the contribution of stubble burning to Delhi's air pollution this year.

iFOREST said the government's current monitoring protocol, run by the Consortium for Research on Agroecosystem Monitoring and Modeling from Space (CREAMS) of the Indian Agricultural Research Institute, is unable to detect most farm fires as it relies mainly on polar-orbiting satellites that observe India only between 10.30 am and 1.30 pm.

This narrow time window no longer matches farmers' burning practices, it said.

At the same time, the report finds real progress on the ground, with burnt areas in Punjab and Haryana falling by 25-35 per cent over recent years. iFOREST said burnt-area mapping provides a more accurate picture than active fire counts, which currently suggest a much larger decline. Chandra Bhushan, CEO of iFOREST, said, "Our analysis provides incontrovertible evidence that India's current stubble-burning monitoring system is structurally misaligned with ground realities. "Farmers have shifted burning to the late afternoon, while our monitoring relies on satellites that capture active fires only during a narrow time window (10:30 am to 1:30 pm).

J&K Police raid hotels over Form-C violations

MOHIT KANDHARI
■ Jammu

The Jammu and Kashmir police conducted a massive drive against several hotels and a homestay for violating the mandatory Form-C reporting norms required under the Immigration & Foreigners Act in Srinagar on Monday.

The drive was conducted close on the heels of the detention of a Chinese national who had entered Ladakh and Jammu and Kashmir without permission and later stayed in an unregistered guest house in Srinagar in the last week of November 2025. The drive was conducted across several 'hot spots' of Srinagar frequented by foreign tourists.

Official sources claimed that after the Pahalgam terror attack, over 2500 foreign nationals have visited the valley along with domestic travellers.

The Chinese national was detained by the security forces after he was allegedly found using a social media app for chatting.

At present, the police officials are trying to join the dots and figure out the purpose of his visit to Ladakh and Jammu and Kashmir, especially when, as per his tourist VISA, he was only permitted to visit Buddhist religious places in Varanasi, Agra, New Delhi, Jaipur, Sarnath, Gaya and Kushi Nagar.

According to a police spokesman, in the Rajbagh area, Hotel Blossoms, Hotel Grand MS, and Hotel Golden Forest had allowed foreign nationals to check in without submitting Form-C to the Foreigners Registration Office (FRO). Accordingly, FIR No. 65/2025 U/S 8 & 23-B of the Immigration & Foreigners Act was registered at Police Station Rajbagh. Similarly, in the Khanyar area, Hotel Khyber, located in Khayam, was also found violating Form-C reporting requirements. Despite repeated instructions, the management failed to produce any proof of Form-C submission. As a result, FIR No. 57/2025 was registered under relevant sections of law at Police Station Khanyar, the police



REPRESENTATIVE PHOTO

spokesman said.

In the busy Lal Bazar area, IMY Home Stay, Nowabagh Bagwanpora, owned by Mohammad Aslam Baktoo S/o Late Habibullah Baktoo, was found operating without Form-C compliance for Starobinsky Lior, a foreign national from Israel, along with others. The manage-

ment had deliberately concealed the stay of the foreign guest and failed to submit the mandatory online Form-C reporting. Accordingly, FIR No. 60/2025 U/S 8 and 23(b) of the Immigration & Foreigners Act was registered at Police Station Lal Bazar.

In another hotspot of the

Nishat area, a house owner, namely Mohammad Ashraf Zargar S/o Mohammad Ramzan Zargar R/o Vakeel Colony, Brein was found in non-compliance with the mandatory reporting of Form C to FRO. In this connection, FIR No. 101/2025 U/S 8-23(b) of the Immigration and Foreigners Act was regis-

Odisha records 40,947 crimes against women: Report

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Bhubaneswar

A total of 40,947 cases of crimes against women, including 3,205 rapes, were registered in Odisha in 15 months till September, according to data provided by Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi in the assembly on Monday.

These cases were reported since July 1, 2024, Majhi said, in reply to a written question by BJD legislator Prasanna Acharya.

The BJP came to power in the state in June 2024, ending the 24-year rule of the Naveen Patnaik-led BJD government. The opposition has been regularly criticising Majhi's government,



alleging that crimes against women have increased after the BJP came to power in the state.

According to data provided by the CM, 202 cases of

attempted rape, 1,476 cases of sexual harassment, 9,851 cases of molestations, 2,310 cases of public disrobing of women, 8,863 cases of kidnapping of women, 796

eve-teasing and 556 stalking cases were registered in the state during the period.

Among the other cases registered were 129 trafficking, 277 dowry homicides, 49 dowry suicides, 5,861 dowry tortures, 6,773 non-dowry tortures and 152 voyeurism. Four cases of acid attack were also lodged during the period.

Majhi said several steps have been taken to improve the quality of investigation, fast-tracking of the cases and improving the conviction rate. Investigative Units on Crime Against Women (IUCAW) are functioning in 29 districts. These units take up investigation of important and sensitive cases, he said.

Bengal CM Mamata slams centre over IndiGo crisis

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ Kolkata

Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Monday slammed the Centre for mishandling the IndiGo crisis and asked the government to arrange for special train services as an alternative to ferry stranded passengers back to their destinations.

"Thousands of passengers are stranded at airports. so what is the alternative for them? This is a travel disaster as maximum number of flights has been stopped," Banerjee told in Kolkata even as the crisis involving India's largest air service provider entered its seventh day.

Alleging that the BJP-led Centre was only concerned about its votes and not the

interests of the people at large, Banerjee asked "the Government of India to make a plan to resolve the issue," adding, "it seems that the BJP is only concerned about capturing the institutions and not the interests of the people."

Speaking on the issue of Prime Minister Narendra Modi addressing to Bengali Novelist — and the creator of the coinage "Vande Mataram" — Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay, as "Bankim Da" Banerjee attacked the former for being "unaware of the history of Bengal." This, though the Prime Minister corrected himself the next moment naming the pre-Independence writer as "Bankim Babu."

Attacking the saffron lead-



ership she said, "they not only do not know history of Bengal but also they have been in the habit of Bengali icons like Netaji Subhas

Chandra Bose, Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay, Rabindranath Tagore, Vidya Sagar." She said "things have come to such a pass that

today anyone who speaks the Bengali language is promptly dismissed as a Bangladeshi which is humiliation of the Bengali culture." Referring to Special Intensive Revision of electoral rolls the Chief Minister also attacked the Election Commission of India for thrusting it on the people of Bengal in "most unplanned manner." She said, "it is difficult to understand why SIR was imposed in such an unplanned manner to be completed in a matter of mere two months why was there such a hurry."

The Chief Minister was likely to begin a two-day trip of Cooch Behar in North Bengal where she would take up the SIR issue in public rallies, Trinamool Congress sources said.

Randhawa slams Navjot Kaur's ₹500 crore CM chair claim

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

After her "500 crore for CMs chair" claim, Congress general secretary Sukhjinder Randhawa on Monday said it was "unfortunate" that Navjot Kaur Sidhu made such a remark and asked how much was paid when her husband Navjot Sidhu was made a minister and then the Punjab Congress president.

Randhawa, the former deputy chief minister of Punjab, also said the Congress faces threat from no one in the state but from such people within. "It is unfortunate that Navjot Kaur Sidhu has made such a statement. Navjot Sidhu joined the Congress from the BJP, and he was made a minister. They should tell how much was paid for Sidhu to become a minister. He was made the number 2 minister. How much was paid? "Then he was made the Punjab Congress



Committee (PCC) president. They should reveal how much was paid then," Randhawa told reporters outside Parliament. He also said they all worked with Sidhu and stayed with him when he was made the minister and then the PCC president.

"The party is supreme, the party president is supreme. The chief minister remains under him and

comes later," the Congress leader claimed.

"My sister Navjot Kaur should tell how much money was paid for Sidhu to become the PCC president. For three-and-a-half years, Congress workers in Punjab have been beaten up and facing action from the ruling dispensation in Punjab. Why were they (Sidhus) silent for all this time?

Jharkhand migrants killed in Goa nightclub fire cremated

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ Ranchi

The last rites of the three migrant workers from Jharkhand, killed in the fire at the Goa nightclub, were performed at their native places on Monday.

Pradeep Mahto (24) and Binod Mahto (20), two brothers from Fatehpur village in Lapung in Ranchi district, and Mohit Munda (22) of Govindpur village in Khunti district died in the inferno that ravaged the North Goa club post-midnight on Sunday.

A total of 25 people, including 14 staff members of the nightclub, were killed in the fire.

The bodies of Pradeep, Binod and Mohit, who used to work at the nightclub, were brought back to the state in the morning by a flight.

The mortal remains of Pradeep and Binod were cremated on the bank of the Karo river in Lapung, around 60 km from the state capital, in the presence of villagers and block officials.

The brothers had migrated to Goa about a year ago and



Family members and relatives of Mohit Munda, who was killed in the fire at a nightclub in North Goa mourn during his last rites in Khunti district of Jharkhand

PTI

used to send around ₹30,000 per month to their family. "Both were unmarried. They were scheduled to celebrate Holi with us next year," their elder brother Phagu Mahto said.

Mohit's last rites were performed as per tribal customs at his native village.

Agriculture Minister Shilpy Neha Tirkey, who coordinated with the Goa government to bring back the bodies, said all three belonged to her

Mandar constituency.

"The bodies were sent to their native villages in special ambulances. I will request Chief Minister Hemant Soren for some welfare provisions for the families of the victims," she told PTI.

The Labour Department has handed ₹50,000 each to the families of the victims as immediate assistance.

Disaster Management Minister Irfan Ansari said compensation of ₹4 lakh

each would be provided to the kin of the workers.

"There is no such particular provision in this regard. However, as it is a very pro-people government led by Chief Minister Hemant Soren, we have decided to give the compensation," he told reporters outside the assembly.

Ansari urged the Centre to provide compensation of ₹1 crore to the families of each deceased.

tered in Police Station Nishat.

In RamMunshi Bagh, several houseboats occupied by foreign nationals during their brief stay in the valley were found to be violating the norms. According to a police spokesman, Floating Castle owned by Farooq Ahmad Guroo S/o Late Gh Nabi Guroo R/o Ghat No 15 Nehru Park, boarded by Lee Ya Hui of Taiwan, Best View Houseboat owned by Farooq Ahmad Kutroo S/o Ali Mohd Kutroo R/o Ghat No 09 Da Lake, boarded by Maistrui Sergel of Russia, House Boat Crystal Palace, owned by Gh Hassan Karnai S/o Haji Gh Mohammad R/o Abi Karpura Dal lake, boarded by Naum Silvui of Romania and Houseboat Lake Palace, owned by Mohammad Altaf Gunna S/o Habibullah Gunna R/o Abi Karpura Dal Lake, boarded by Eduardo Tejerina Gonzalez of Spain, was found in violation of the norms for mandatory reporting rules. In this connection, FIR No. 94/2025 U/S 7,14, and 16 of the Immigration and Foreigner Act was registered in Police Station RM Bagh.

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Order Order

HC adjourns hearing on plea seeking ASI survey of Gyanvapi's wazukhana



The Allahabad High Court on Monday adjourned hearing on a plea seeking an ASI survey of the 'wazukhana' area, excluding the structure described by the Hindu side as shivling, inside the Gyanvapi mosque at Varanasi till January 16. When the case was taken up on Monday, the court was informed that a related matter is pending before the Supreme Court. Subsequently, the court adjourned the hearing.

Justice Rohit Ranjan Agarwal is hearing the civil revision petition filed by Rakhi Singh, one of the plaintiffs in the Gyanvapi case. The petition has been filed challenging an order of a Varanasi judge passed on October 21, 2023 which refused to direct the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) to survey the wazukhana (ablution) area except for the structure which the Hindu side calls a shivling and the Muslims describe as a fountain inside the Gyanvapi mosque located adjacent to the Kashi Vishwanath temple.

In her revision, Rakhi Singh has pleaded that the survey of the wazukhana area is necessary in the interest of justice. It shall benefit the plaintiff(s) and defendants alike and help the court arrive at a decision in the suit, the plea said.

Red Fort blast case: Delhi court extends NIA custody of 3 doctors, preacher by 4 days

A Delhi court on Monday extended the NIA custody of three doctors and a preacher, who were arrested in connection with the November 10 Red Fort blast case, by four days. All four accused – Dr Muzammil Ganai, Dr Adeel Rather, Dr Shaheena Saeed and Maulvi Irfan Ahmed Wagay – were produced before Principal and Sessions Judge Anju Bajaj Chandna on the expiry of their 10-day NIA custody granted on November 29.

Mediapersons were barred from covering the court proceedings, which were held under tight security in and around the Patiala House district court premises.

Till now, the National Investigation Agency (NIA) has made seven arrests in the case, which is linked to a 'white-collar' terror module busted by the Jammu and Kashmir Police.

"The agency continues to pursue various leads in connection with the suicide bombing, and has been conducting searches across states in coordination with the respective police forces to identify and track the others involved in the gruesome attack," the agency said in a statement earlier.

SC seeks ED's response on journalist bail plea

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

The Supreme Court on Monday asked the Enforcement Directorate (ED) to file its response within three days on a bail plea of journalist Mahesh Langa in a money laundering case linked to an alleged financial fraud. A bench comprising Chief Justice of India (CJI) Surya Kant and Justice Joymalya Bagchi also asked senior advocate Kapil Sibal, appearing for the jailed journalist, to file rejoinder, if needed, to the ED's response within two days of it being filed.

The top court fixed the

case for further hearing on December 15.

During the brief hearing on Monday, Sibal said a journalist has been facing as many as six cases. "The journalist is accused of extortion," the counsel for the ED said and sought a short adjournment on the ground that Solicitor General Tuhar Mehta was unavailable at the moment.

The top court on September 8 sought responses from the Gujarat Government and the ED on Langa's bail plea. While issuing the notices on Langa's bail plea, the bench asked, "What kind of a journalist is he?" "With due

of India' with separate pending petitions challenging the validity of the provisions of the Rajasthan Prohibition of Unlawful Conversion of Religion Act, 2025.

The top court had earlier agreed to hear some separate pleas raising similar issues and sought replies from the state Government.

During the hearing on Monday, Solicitor General Tushar Mehta told the bench that similar matters are pending consideration before



SC orders 30% seats for women in bar councils

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

The Supreme Court on Monday directed that 30 per cent seats in State Bar councils, where the election process has not been set in motion, be kept for women advocates.

A bench of Chief Justice Surya Kant and Justice Joymalya Bagchi said for the current year, the State Bar councils where elections are yet to be held should fill 20 per cent seats with women candidates and 10 per cent by co-option if there are not many desirous lawyers to contest.

The top court directed that a proposal for co-option shall be placed before the court in regard to the State Bar councils where the number of contesting women lawyers are inadequate.

At the outset, senior advocate Manan Kumar Mishra, who is also the chairperson of the Bar Council of India (BCI), informed the bench that the election process as per court's earlier direction has commenced in six Bar bodies with notification of the poll.

He submitted that the BCI, in principle, is of the view that



there should be at least 30 per cent women's reservation in the State Bar councils, and suggested that for the present year, the councils should be permitted to fill up the posts by co-opting women candidates.

He also proposed that 15 per cent of seats be filled by way of co-option of women members.

However, the bench said it

would be appropriate if co-option is restricted to only 10 per cent seats.

The bench said it would not be prudent to reserve seats for women in the Bar councils, where the election process has already commenced.

It said in the Bar councils of Andhra Pradesh, Punjab and Haryana, Uttar Pradesh and Telangana, where elections have been notified, the

women members who are contesting the polls shall contest with full spirit, and the voters shall also make endeavours to ensure that adequate representation is provided to female advocates in the councils.

It made a similar appeal to the voters of the Bar councils of Bihar and Chhattisgarh, where elections have been notified. For the remaining

Bar councils, the bench said 30 per cent seats shall be represented by women advocates out of which 20 per cent shall be by election and 10 per cent by co-option.

It said, "Wherever the women members of the Bbar are reluctant to come forward and contest the 20 per cent seats, the process of co-option in such Bar councils shall be undertaken so that

eventually women get 30 per cent representation in the executive council."

The top court was hearing pleas filed by advocates Yogamaya M G and Shehla Chaudhary seeking reservation of one-third of seats for women in all State Bar councils.

Senior advocate Meenakshi Arora, appearing for the petitioners, said that a blanket order for 30 per cent women's reservation across all state Bar councils may not be practical, as many states have very low percentages of practising women advocates.

On December 4, the top court asked the BCI to ensure 30 per cent reservation for women in the upcoming state Bar council elections. The pleas filed by Yogamaya and Chaudhary also sought that at least one office-bearer post be reserved for women lawyers on a rotational basis.

The pleas were filed relying upon the May 2, 2024, order of the top court, in which it was directed that one-third of seats in the executive committee of the Supreme Court Bar Association, including one office-bearer post, be reserved for women.

Land-for-jobs scam: CBI seeks time to verify status of accused persons



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

The CBI on Monday sought time from a Delhi court to verify the status of various accused persons in the alleged land-for-jobs scam involving RJD chief Lalu Prasad, his family members and others.

Special CBI Judge Vishal Gogne is hearing the case on whether there is sufficient evidence to frame charges against the accused.

The judge had, on December 4, directed the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) to file a report after verifying the status of the accused in the case. Of the 103 accused, four

have died. "Some time is sought on behalf of the CBI to verify the status of various accused persons in terms of the previous order. List on December 10," the judge said on Monday.

On November 10, the judge had deferred the order on framing charges against the accused till December 4.

The CBI had filed chargesheets against Lalu Yadav, his wife and former Bihar chief minister Rabri Devi, their son and former deputy chief minister Tejashwi Yadav and others in connection with the alleged scam.

The prosecution has alleged that appointments in the Group-D category of

the Indian Railways' West Central Zone based in Jabalpur, Madhya Pradesh, were made during Lalu Yadav's tenure as the railway minister from 2004 to 2009 in return for land parcels gifted or transferred by the recruits in the name of the Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD) supremo's family members and associates.

The CBI has also claimed that the appointments were made in violation of norms and that the transactions involved benami properties, amounting to criminal misconduct and conspiracy. The accused have denied the charges and claimed that the case is politically motivated.

Court acquits actor Dileep, convicts six in 2017 actress sexual assault case

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Kochi

A Kerala court on Monday acquitted Malayalam cinema star Dileep in the sensational 2017 actress sexual assault case, in which six people, including the main accused charged with committing the crime, were pronounced guilty. In a case that made national headlines while sending shockwaves over the top actor's alleged involvement in the matter, three others, including Dileep's close friend Sarath, were also acquitted.

Coming out from the court, Dileep said that there was a "real conspiracy" by some police officials and a section of media to implicate him in the case earlier with an eye on destroying his career.

Dileep also said that his first wife and actress Manju Warrier started a conspiracy to tag him in the case. The Left Government in Kerala said it would prefer an appeal against the lower court verdict while reiterating its support to the survivor, a multi-lingual female actor who has worked in a number of Malayalam, Tamil and Telugu movies.

Apart from Dileep (57), the eighth accused in the case, the court also acquitted three others — Charley



Thomas (A7), Sanil Kumar alias Mesthri Sanil (A9) and Sarath (A15). The verdict was pronounced by Ernakulam District and Principal Sessions Judge Honey M Varghese, in a tightly packed courtroom here.

Judge Honey M Varghese began by substantiating the offences charged in the case and then declared the first six accused — Sunil, Martin Antony, Manikandan B, Vijesh VP, Salim H, and Pradeep, guilty.

"Since the offenses are grave and serious in nature and perpetrated against a woman, accused not entitled to get benevolence of the Probation of Offenders Act.

Bail bonds of A1 to A6 are cancelled and remanded to custody," the court ordered. They were charged under Sections of the then IPC and IT Act, including criminal conspiracy, wrongful confinement, gang rape, kidnapping or abducting a woman and criminal force to a woman with an intent to outrage her modesty. Later, after reading out the charges against Dileep, the court found him not guilty.

Dileep was acquitted after the court ruled the prosecution failed to substantiate the charges, including criminal conspiracy, wrongful confinement, assault, gang rape, and related IPC offences.

IndiGo crisis serious matter, says SC, Delhi HC agrees to hear plea on Dec 10

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

Woes of flyers hit by mass flight cancellations by IndiGo found a compassionate ear in the Delhi High Court, which agreed to hear one of the pleas on December 10, while the Supreme Court termed the consequent chaos a "serious matter", but stopped short of intervening.

Chief Justice of India Surya Kant said lakhs of people are stranded at the airports, even though the apex court refused to accord an urgent hearing to a plea seeking judicial intervention into the matter, saying the Centre had taken steps to address it.

IndiGo cancelled 500 flights and plans to operate 1,802 services on Monday, the civil aviation ministry said.

The airline has delivered 4,500 bags out of a total of 9,000 to the passengers, and will deliver the rest in the next 36 hours, the ministry said in a statement.

When a plea concerning the cancellation of flights by IndiGo was mentioned in the top court, a bench headed by the CJI said, "It is a serious matter. Lakhs of people are stranded at the airports. We know that the Government of India has taken timely action and cognisance of the issue."

The CJI, who was heading a bench comprising Justice Joymalya Bagchi, added, "We know people may have health issues and other important issues, etc."

Over the day, a separate petition seeking directions to the Centre to provide support and refunds to affected passengers was mentioned in the Delhi High Court. A bench of Chief



Justice Devendra Kumar Upadhyaya and Justice Tushar Rao Gedela listed the matter for hearing on December 10.

Before the apex court, a lawyer mentioned the issue and said there have been a lot of flight cancellations by IndiGo over the last few days, and the passengers were suffering.

"The cancellations are not informed to the flyers," he said, adding that around 2,500 flights were delayed and flyers were hit at 95 airports across the country. In the High Court, the counsel for the petitioner said they had filed a PIL on the crisis with the airline.

"Several people are stuck. The ground situation at airports is inhumane. We are expecting the court to pass orders to IndiGo and ground support staff for people stranded at the airports.

There is no proper system for refunds," he said. When the High Court pointed out that

the Government had already passed some directions in the matter, the counsel responded in the affirmative.

The bench said the PIL will be listed for hearing on December 10.

IndiGo has been facing heat from both the Centre and the passengers for cancelling hundreds of flights since December 2, citing regulatory changes in the pilots' flight duty and regulations norms. The disruptions have left lakhs of passengers stranded at airports across the country.

Over 250 IndiGo flights were cancelled from Delhi and Bengaluru airports on Monday as the disruptions of the airline's flight operations entered the seventh day, sources said.

At the Delhi airport, 134 flights were cancelled — 75 departures and 59 arrivals — while at the Bengaluru airport, the carrier cancelled 117 services — 65 arrivals and 62 departures, they said.



Editor's
TAKE

Why India needs a legal right to disconnect

A nation cannot build a future on depleted minds and exhausted bodies. Supriya Sule's Bill offers not just legal protection but a cultural reset

Stress has become endemic in the corporate world, and "burnout" is now the widely accepted term for it. Burnout is a state of intense physical, emotional, and mental exhaustion caused by prolonged and excessive work-related stress. These two words capture the reality of today's corporate workforce on a massive scale. The death of 26-year-old chartered accountant Anna Sebastian Perayil, whose death was linked to severe work-related stress, is a case in point.

The irony is that most people do not even realise they are experiencing it, seeking treatment is a far cry. Reports of suicides and worsening mental health due to work pressure are increasingly common. Both mental and physical health deteriorate sharply, leaving individuals drained, cynical, and exhausted. Fatigue, insomnia, headaches, detachment, and disturbed sleep have become alarmingly routine.

The constant ringing of the smartphone and the rise of hybrid digital work culture have erased personal boundaries, making it difficult for many to have any "me time". Being available 24×7 has turned into a modern form of slavery that takes a heavy toll on lives.

To restore work-life balance, Supriya Sule has taken an important initiative. If her proposal succeeds, it may soon become law, introducing penalties for employers who overstep time boundaries and encroach on workers' personal lives. Supriya Sule's Right to Disconnect Bill, 2025, is a long-overdue intervention, seeking to restore a basic but endangered human need: the right to switch off and relax.

The core premise of the Bill is simple yet transformative. It states that employees should not be penalised for choosing not to respond to work-related communication after office hours. The bill sets to end the culture of checking messages throughout the day, during dinner, on weekends, and even on holidays. Studies have repeatedly shown that such constant pressure to check phone leads to sleep deprivation, chronic stress, emotional burnout, and a slow erosion of family life.

The Bill recognises that mental health is not separate from productivity; it is its very foundation. Importantly, the legislation does not ignore the realities of India's competitive and diverse business landscape. Sule's proposal allows companies to set their own after-hours communication norms through Employees' Welfare Committees. Companies that disregard these provisions could face penalties equivalent to one per cent of their total employee remuneration, ensuring that compliance is mandatory and damages are for real.

Yet the path ahead is not without challenges. India's workforce is vast and varied, and cultural attitudes often equate overwork with dedication. Smaller firms may fear compliance burdens, while multinational companies may worry about servicing their offshore clients. Besides, enforcement remains a perennial weakness in India.

Despite these obstacles, the direction is clear and the move is a step in right direction. For India to continue its progress, it must safeguard the well-being of its workers.

SAARC@40: An idea that refuses to die

As the world reorganises around regional blocs and shared vulnerabilities, South Asia cannot afford to remain disconnected. SAARC may be dormant, but its spirit endures, waiting for a political moment that restores its relevance



SANTHOSH
MATHEW

Forty years ago, on a December morning in 1985, South Asia embarked on an ambitious experiment. Seven neighbours — united by shared histories yet separated by borders, suspicion and political complications — met in Dhaka to outline a collective vision for peace, prosperity and cooperation. The South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) emerged from that hope, designed to transcend bilateral tensions and forge a regional identity grounded in development. Four decades later, that optimism feels remote. The organisation has been effectively frozen since 2014, its institutional vitality drained by enduring political hostilities. Yet, paradoxically, the idea of SAARC is more essential today than ever. The phrase "SAARC is dead, long live SAARC" captures this duality: the institution may be dormant, but the logic of regional cooperation remains compelling.

South Asia itself embodies profound contradictions. It is home to nearly 40 per cent of the world's democracies, each with its strengths and complexities. Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka together represent one of the most diverse political landscapes on earth. Bangladesh's strides in poverty alleviation, Bhutan's pioneering Gross National Happiness framework, Sri Lanka's social indicators, Nepal's federal evolution, Maldives' climate resilience, Pakistan's active civil society, Afghanistan's enduring cultural heritage and India's unmatched electoral scale all testify to a region rich in innovation and vitality.

To see South Asia only through the prism of conflict is to overlook its immense civilisational, demographic and strategic advantages. This potential, however, has been consistently undermined by geopolitical mistrust, particularly between India and Pakistan. SAARC's stagnation is rooted in this unresolved hostility. Without political trust at the highest level, regional structures lose momentum. The cost of this paralysis has been significant. South Asia remains among the least economically integrated regions in the world. Intra-regional trade hovers around a mere 5 per cent, compared with ASEAN's over 25 per cent. High tariffs, rigid borders and bureaucratic obstacles have stifled the movement of goods, services and ideas that could dramatically uplift the region.

Against this backdrop, the South Asian Free Trade Area (SAFTA) deserves renewed focus. Operational since 2006, SAFTA was designed to dismantle tariff and non-tariff barriers and build a seamless regional market. Fully implemented, it could transform South Asia economically by strengthening supply chains, reducing logistics costs and opening vast new opportunities for employment and investment. The stakes are large: nearly 736 million South Asians still live in



TO SEE SOUTH ASIA ONLY THROUGH THE PRISM OF CONFLICT IS TO OVERLOOK ITS IMMENSE CIVILISATIONAL, DEMOGRAPHIC AND STRATEGIC ADVANTAGES. THIS POTENTIAL, HOWEVER, HAS BEEN CONSISTENTLY UNDERMINED BY GEOPOLITICAL MISTRUST, PARTICULARLY BETWEEN INDIA AND PAKISTAN

Santhosh Mathew is a Professor at Puducherry University, and Inputs by Denny Thomas Vattakunnel

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 The Pioneer

extreme poverty. Global comparisons illustrate what is possible. The African Continental Free Trade Area is projected to raise Africa's regional income by 7 per cent and lift 30 million people out of extreme poverty by 2035. With its larger consumer base and energetic private sector, South Asia could achieve even more if SAFTA were revived with genuine political commitment.

But cooperation must extend beyond trade. South Asia's civilisational heritage — Hinduism, Buddhism and Sufi traditions — offers a reservoir of cultural connections that can be harnessed to rebuild trust even when politics stagnates. India's soft power initiatives, such as the Buddhist Circuit, the revival of Nalanda University, the International Solar Alliance and the International Big Cat Alliance, create platforms that transcend political divides. These efforts draw on the ethos of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam — the world is one family — and demonstrate that meaningful regional collaboration does not always require formal institutional momentum.

India's neighbourhood-first policy has, in many ways, kept the idea of SAARC alive. The South Asia Satellite exemplified technological cooperation, supporting communication and disaster management across the region. India's vaccine diplomacy during the COVID-19 pandemic further highlighted its role as a regional first responder. When global supply chains collapsed, India supplied vaccines and essential medical aid to Nepal, Sri Lanka, Maldives, Bangladesh and other neighbours. More recently, India's rapid assistance during the Sri Lankan floods under Operation Sagar Bandhu reaffirmed its consistent commitment to regional humanitarian support. Such gestures cannot replace formal diplomacy, but they help rebuild trust and demonstrate the tangible value of cooperation.

Every member of SAARC, however, must recognise what is lost by leaving the organisation dormant.

South Asia faces shared, transnational problems — climate change, water scarcity, terrorism, cybercrime, unemployment and migration — that no country can solve alone. The Shanghai Cooperation Organisation's Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure provides a useful example of how coordinated security cooperation strengthens collective resilience. A comparable mechanism within SAARC could enhance intelligence-sharing and counter-terrorism efforts at a moment when radicalisation and cyber threats are growing.

Equally significant is the demographic challenge. South Asia has the world's largest youth population, with nearly 100,000 people entering the labour force each day, yet UNICEF estimates that more than half will lack the skills needed for employment by 2030. Without regional frameworks for mobility, innovation, skilling and academic exchange, this demographic dividend could be squandered, even though instruments such as the dormant SAARC Youth Charter offer a ready framework for collaboration.

A reimagined SAARC must also prioritise mobility. Visa liberalisation, academic exchanges, cross-border tourism and digital corridors can revive cultural linkages and unlock economic potential. Drawing on Europe's multiple-entry visas or ASEAN's reciprocal arrangements, South Asia could adopt Mutual Favourable Access to facilitate travel, study and business with transformative impact.

Ultimately, SAARC's future may lie in redefining it as a flexible development platform focused on digital public goods, climate resilience, health networks and research collaboration. India's digital governance tools — UPI, Aadhaar architecture, e-governance and tele-health — could anchor such a partnership, reaffirming a shared South Asian destiny rooted in cooperation, connectivity and collective prosperity.

The Pioneer
SINCE 1865

Confronting popcorn brain in the digital age



SAKSHI
SETHI

2ND OPINION
THE PIONEER

In the relentless pulse of our digital era, silence has become a scarce commodity. Screens glow from dawn to midnight; alerts blink with the insistence of tiny sirens; content arrives in bursts designed to captivate and distract. In this environment of continuous cognitive stimulation, a troubling behavioural pattern has entered educational conversations: Popcorn Brain Syndrome. Though not a medical diagnosis, the term vividly expresses a growing reality—minds conditioned to crave rapid, high-intensity digital input, much like kernels bursting unpredictably in hot oil. For educators, this is no passing metaphor but a looming crisis. Increasingly, teachers observe shrinking attention spans, heightened restlessness, and an erosion of the ability to engage in deep, sustained thinking. The modern student,

equipped with limitless access to information, is paradoxically losing the capacity to grapple with it meaningfully. When the brain becomes accustomed to the quick bursts of dopamine offered by fast-paced media, slower, more reflective tasks—reading, writing, analytical reasoning—begin to feel burdensome. The very foundation of real learning is compromised. The signs are subtle yet unmistakable. A student sits in class, eyes fixed on the teacher, but their attention flickers. A phantom notification tugs at their mind; an impulse to check a device momentarily derails focus. This mental hopping mirrors popcorn in motion—bright, brief, and directionless. What suffers in the process is not merely academic performance, but the deeper capacities that shape intellectual maturity: critical thinking, creativity, emotional steadiness, and the ability to connect ideas in meaningful ways. Reflection, that slow and steady cultivator of insight, becomes a rarity.

Teachers now carry a dual mandate: to deliver curriculum content and to rebuild the cognitive stamina necessary to absorb it. It is a daunting task—almost like teaching a child to find stillness while surrounded by whirlpools of distraction. Yet it is not an impossible one. Recognising that Popcorn Brain is a cultural construct—not a personal failing—is the first step. Our digital environment is designed to hook, stimulate, and fragment; young learners are simply

responding to the architecture around them. The solution, therefore, is not to reject technology but to reintroduce balance. Classrooms can become places where deliberate pauses are woven into the learning fabric. Slow reading exercises, device-free discussions, and moments of reflection can act as anchors.

Teachers can cultivate an atmosphere where depth is celebrated over speed, where observation matters as much as reaction. Simple routines—journaling, mindful breathing, silent thinking—can gently retrain wandering minds. Parents, too, play a pivotal role. Children absorb what they see, not what they are told. A home where conversation, play, and unstructured time coexist with digital tools helps restore natural rhythms of attention. The partnership between school and family is essential to recalibrating young minds. The broader education system must recognise this phenomenon as a silent disruptor of learning outcomes. As curricula grow more rigorous, attention has become a critically limited resource, making investment in executive function, emotional regulation and digital discipline urgent. Without intervention, Popcorn Brain will continue to fragment focus across classrooms, undermining deep engagement and sustained understanding that are essential for shaping thoughtful, purposeful thinkers.

The writer is an educator and counsellor

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

IndiGo disruptions signal deeper crisis

There has been widespread chaos at several airports as turbulence in IndiGo's operations continues unabated, leaving passengers anxious, exhausted, and stranded for over a week. Mass cancellations and delays have transformed terminals into scenes of distress, with travellers sleeping on floors and, in some cases, near operational areas. Many passengers missed job interviews, family emergencies, and long-planned commitments, despite tickets being reissued multiple times only to face repeated cancellations. While IndiGo has stated that operations will stabilise by December 15, this assurance rings hollow for those still marooned without clarity or support. The situation reflects not merely operational failure but a deeper issue of regulatory oversight. Both IndiGo and the DGCA ignored early warning signs arising from new pilot duty norms.

Instead of adjusting manpower to meet regulatory requirements, IndiGo expanded its winter schedule, fully aware of its staffing limitations. It is deeply concerning that regulatory authorities appeared to yield under pressure, easing norms to manage public inconvenience. Such short-term relief undermines aviation safety and accountability. This crisis must serve as a moment for corrective action, not quiet compromise.

BHAGWAN THADANI | MUMBAI

Goa tragedy highlights safety failures

Apropos "Goa nightclub blaze kills 25" (Dec. 8), the devastating incident once again exposes how routine disregard for safety norms turns leisure spaces into sites of avoidable tragedy. Reports indicate a convergence of structural violations, inadequate exits, and delayed emergency access—conditions that make disaster inevitable rather than accidental. More troubling is the apparent awareness of these violations by multiple authorities, followed by delayed or diluted action.

As Goa's tourism economy expands, the need for professional oversight becomes critical, especially in venues with high crowd density and limited evacuation options. Safety cannot depend on goodwill or post-incident outrage. Mandatory clearances, transparent licensing, and regular inspections must be strictly enforced. Officials who ignore violations must be held as accountable as operators who commit them. Infrastructure issues such as narrow access roads and informal expansions further compound risk and must be addressed urgently. A coordinated emergency protocol involving municipal bodies, fire services, and police should be standard, not reactive. A time-bound review of all public entertainment venues would be a constructive first step toward preventing future tragedies.

A MYILSAMI | TAMIL NADU

Aviation regulation under scrutiny

It takes years to build a reputation, but only days to destroy it. The ongoing IndiGo crisis appears less accidental and more self-inflicted, aided by regulatory inertia. Despite being aware of revised pilot duty norms, both the airline and the DGCA failed to act in time. IndiGo's decision to expand its winter schedule without adequate crew strength reflects corporate arrogance rather than operational prudence.

Equally culpable is the regulator's delayed auditing and passive oversight, which allowed the situation to escalate into a national disruption. When the crisis peaked, the DGCA appeared compelled to dilute enforcement to ease passenger hardship, effectively allowing the airline to escape accountability. Such precedents are dangerous in a safety-critical sector like aviation.

This year has already witnessed tragic incidents, including an aircraft crash in Ahmedabad, helicopter accidents in Uttarakhand, and an ATC systems failure in Delhi.

Together, these point to systemic vulnerabilities. The current disruption offers the aviation ministry a crucial opportunity to conduct a comprehensive review and institute reforms.

BAL GOVIND | NOIDA

PIC TALK



Artists from Punjab perform at the National Craft Fair in Prayagraj.

PHOTO: PTI

DIGITAL EXPERIENCE



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THE NAMAMI GANGA PROGRAMME: GANGA GHATS REVEAL ADMINISTRATIVE LAPSES

The front-page report of 8 December on the deteriorating condition of Ganga ghats exposes a grim and deeply troubling account of man-made neglect. The collapse of ghat infrastructure across Uttarakhand and along the Gangetic plains is the result of multiple failures, foremost among them weak municipal accountability compounded by persistent local political interference.

Ghats are often sanctioned to serve constituency interests, even when locations are ecologically fragile or geographically unsuitable.

The Namami Ganga programme was conceived as an ambitious and essential initiative to conserve the river and protect surrounding plains from floods during the monsoon. Yet, crores of rupees have been squandered

due to poor planning, inadequate supervision, and indifference on the ground. Public apathy has further aggravated the problem, with citizens frequently neglecting their responsibility to maintain cleanliness and preserve environmental assets created for their benefit.

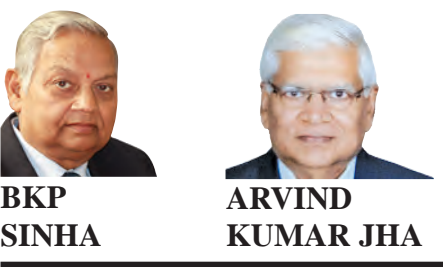
Ganga ghats are sensitive environmental interventions requiring expert design and sustained oversight by conservation architects and geological scientists, yet serious consultation with such specialists appears largely absent. Local municipal authorities must therefore be held fully accountable for maintenance and for regulating public access during vulnerable periods to prevent further degradation.

VINOD JOHRI | DELHI

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

Misuse of FRA: Undermining forest rights framework

From recognising ineligible encroachments to manipulating community forest rights, the law meant to protect vulnerable groups and safeguard forests is being bent and exploited. This misuse now threatens both conservation goals and the long-term credibility of India's forest rights framework



Although the Forest Survey of India, in its 2023 report, indicates an increasing trend in the country's forest cover, a major undisclosed ailment is affecting the heart of India's forest conservation efforts: the alleged widespread misuse of the Forest Rights Act (FRA), 2006. Apart from procedural irregularities and misreading of provisions noticed in the implementation of the FRA, the major and substantive issues are the recognition of post-2005 encroachments on forest land as Individual Forest Rights (IFR) for habitation or cultivation, and the mass-scale grant of management rights (named Community Forest Resource Rights, or CFRR, under the FRA Rules amended in 2012) in cases of grossly ineligible claims.

The pattern of misuse of the FRA was initially highlighted by the 2011 NC Saxena Committee Report. The Committee, an inter-ministerial body, raised serious concerns about the recognition of ineligible claims. It found evidence that "fresh encroachers, with business interests in forest lands", were manipulating the Act in states such as Maharashtra and Assam. The Committee pointed to specific instances of forest land being cleared after the cut-off date of December 13, 2005 in protected areas such as Kawal Sanctuary and Yaval Sanctuary, stressing that the FRA was never intended to be a "ploy to distribute national wealth of forest land to all claimants irrespective of their real legal eligibility". The FRA is meant exclusively for Forest Dwelling Scheduled Tribes (FDSTs) and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (OTFDs).

The Maharashtra Forest Department launched a detailed study in 2012 covering 35,044 finally approved Individual Forest Rights (IFR) cases, encompassing over 60,000 hectares of forest land across six districts.

The Department established a system using Cartosat-1 satellite images from 2005, 2007, and 2011, overlaid with GPS polygons delineating land parcels for each claim. Data on granted cases was available on the website of Maharashtra's Tribal Research and Training Institute (TRTI), which had developed and utilised a robust, transpar-



THE FACT ALSO REMAINS THAT GENUINE COMMUNITIES AND ELIGIBLE LANDS, SUCH AS SACRED GROVES AND COMMUNITY-OCCUPIED, CUSTOMARILY AND RULE-BASED MANAGED AREAS AWAITING FORMALISATION OF THEIR MANAGEMENT AND GOVERNANCE UNDER THE FRA, HAVE SIMPLY BEEN LEFT OUT

ent, and technology-driven verification system for comparing land-use status before and after the December 2005 cut-off date, documenting approximately 2.9 lakh polygons under IFR claims.

Despite this technological safety net based on satellite imagery, it was found that about 16 per cent of the studied cases were granted IFRs on lands that were clearly ineligible-being fully barren, tree-covered, or a mixture of both, as seen in satellite images. More than 3,000 cases showing land-use change, specifically conversion to cultivation after the 2005 cut-off date, were also found to have been cleared as valid claims. Additionally, approximately 4 per cent of cleared claims exceeded the maximum permissible limit of four hectares.

The Ministry of Tribal Affairs (MoTA) amended the FRA Rules in 2012, effectively downgrading the evidentiary value of satellite imagery. Such imagery, as well as other uses of technology, could thereafter be used only to "supplement" other forms of evidence and not as a replacement. Critics argue that this move prioritised subjective claims over objective science. As a result, while many states, including major ones such as Madhya Pradesh and Andhra Pradesh, reportedly discontinued their use,

Maharashtra's well-grounded system was not only derailed but the invaluable dataset of 2.9 lakh GPS polygons embedded in satellite imagery also reportedly became untraceable. Notably, in response to a requirement from the Forest Survey of India (FSI) for analysis in compliance with the Hon'ble Supreme Court's February 2019 order in Writ Petition (C) No. 109/2008, Maharashtra did not make the data available. With regard to eviction of encroachers, no state has initiated proceedings against those with rejected claims, and even the Hon'ble Supreme Court, on February 28, 2019, stayed its own eviction order within fifteen days.

The right to minor forest produce is mandated to be limited to the quantity traditionally collected by beneficiaries. However, the recognition process has been misused to grant rights over the entire commercial MFP output and trade, often to Gram Sabhas, disregarding the heterogeneity and occupational diversity of their members. As a result, new intermediaries are emerging in states such as Maharashtra and Odisha. They operate as contractors in league with tendu leaf traders, while the intended empowerment of FDST and OTFD communities for resource conservation and democratic local governance envisioned by the FRA is subverted. A similar atmosphere is being created in Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh to dismantle their federation-based systems.

With regard to CFRRs, these are being illegally recognised almost unabated on government forest lands (such as Reserved or Protected Forests under working plans), even though their specified location is statutorily limited to "customary common forest land" or "community forest resource" as defined in the Act. Further, CFRRs are being granted to ineligible communities that do not meet the criteria under Section 3(1)(i), which requires proof of a traditional role in protection and conservation of the land under claim. Such grants to ineligible entities have been facilitated by amendments to the FRA Rules themselves, whereby the presence of even a few Scheduled Tribes or OTFDs qualifies a Gram Sabha to submit a claim. Shockingly, scrutiny of 80 randomly selected sanctioned cases from districts in Maharashtra and Chhattisgarh reveals that all are illegal recognitions. Meanwhile, genuine communities and eligible lands, such as sacred groves and customary rule-based managed areas awaiting formalisation under the FRA, have been excluded.

Unfortunately, misuse of the FRA has been continuously and systematically

ignored despite repeated complaints. Foresters objecting to ineligible claims in Sub-Divisional and District-level Committee meetings are often branded anti-tribal and persecuted. Pressurised, and frequently backed by political authorities and civil society, Committees tend to exceed the Act's provisions with impunity, without recognising that the long-term sustenance of forest rights depends on the sustainability of forest resources. While the MoTA issues regular instructions for reconsideration of rejected claims, it has never mandated scrutiny of approved claims, even on a sample basis. By reiterating that implementation responsibility lies with States and Union Territories, it overlooks the implication that reviewing rejected cases while ignoring illegally granted ones amounts to implicit permission for continued misuse.

Objective and verifiable scientific evidence must be treated as the primary defence against fraudulent claims, not merely a supplement to easily manipulated traditional evidence. The FRA Rules must therefore be amended to restore the high evidentiary value of satellite imagery and GPS data. The government, in accordance with Section 13 of the FRA, must demonstrate a genuine commitment to enforcing all existing laws.

Prosecution of powerful individuals misusing the FRA for land speculation or for harming the interests of genuine beneficiaries can act as a strong deterrent. While the Central Empowered Committee's recent action regarding alleged irregularities in IFRs granted to Podu cultivators in Telangana is welcome, rectifying errors requires significant resources and political neutrality. Comprehensive retraining must therefore be provided to Committee members to ensure strict implementation of the Act, and they must be held accountable for permitting demonstrably false claims.

The government should prioritise the establishment of a National Audit Mechanism for technology-based scrutiny of approved cases and cancellation of all illegally recognised rights. The MoTA, in collaboration with the FSI and the National Remote Sensing Centre (NRSC), must develop and maintain a centralised database to securely store GPS polygons and records of recognised claims nationwide. Given the scale of potential error, the FRA must not be allowed to undermine conservation laws or the rights of genuine, eligible forest dwellers.

Towards a home-grown knowledge ecosystem



India's Viksit Bharat aspiration by 2047 transcends traditional capital investment. While tangible infrastructure remains critical, the primary constraint to sustained, high-quality growth is the knowledge ecosystem deficit. To successfully transition from a middle-income economy to a fully developed nation, India must aggressively cultivate a robust, home-grown intellectual infrastructure; one encompassing R&D, credible think tanks, advanced data infrastructure, and scalable domestic innovation capacity.

India's gross expenditure on R&D (GERD) remains persistently low at just 0.65 per cent of GDP, far below advanced economies such as the US and Germany (3 per cent), as well as emerging markets like China (2 per cent). This places India well under the global average of approximately 1.8 per cent, reflecting a structural under-investment in innovation. This structural weakness is compounded by a profound imbalance: only about 5 per cent of India's R&D spending comes from the private sector, compared to approximately 70 per cent in the US.

While the 2025-26 Union Budget increased national R&D allocations to ₹61,028 crore, representing only 1.28 per cent of the Central Budget, the scale is still insufficient to trigger the kind of innovation acceleration India needs. The government's announcement of a ₹1 lakh crore Research Development and Innovation (RDI) Fund in 2025 could be transformative, but its impact will hinge on execution discipline and meaningful alignment with private-sector investment. For the fund to succeed, execution discipline must include transparent governance, mandated industry co-funding, and a focus on measurable outcomes tied to national priorities.

This chronic underinvestment depresses innovation output, technological absorption, and productivity growth. OECD studies show that a 1 per cent rise in business R&D increases productivity by approximately 0.13 per cent, and an equivalent increase in public R&D yields about 0.17 per cent productivity growth. If India does not correct its R&D deficit, it cannot realistically close its productivity gap with peer economies.

India's innovation output has improved. Patent grants have grown fourfold, from 7,509 (2010-11) to 28,391 (2020-21), and patent applications have risen from approximately 39,400 to 58,500 (Economic Survey 2022). In 2023, India was among the fastest-growing patent origins globally (WIPO). The gap, though, remains large. India's patent portfolio is still only a small fraction of China's or the United States', and over 70 per cent

of high-quality publications come from fewer than 200 institutions, signalling an ecosystem that remains narrow, institutionally shallow, and highly concentrated.

Yet India has proven that strategic investments yield transformative outcomes. ISRO's space programme, built on modest budgets and indigenous capabilities, has delivered world-class missions such as Chandrayaan and Mangalyaan at a fraction of global costs. India's digital public infrastructure (DPI) has revolutionised financial inclusion and service delivery and now serves as a model for developing nations worldwide. These successes demonstrate that when India invests in knowledge systems with clarity and commitment, the results can leapfrog conventional development paths. Talent is not the constraint. Institutional depth is.

A successful knowledge ecosystem requires more than isolated R&D labs; it needs the systemic translation of research into actionable policy and practice. Strong, independent domestic think tanks, policy centres, and data institutions are critical for:

- Contextualisation: Bridging the gap between academic research and on-the-ground implementation, generating timely, granular, India-focused data for evidence-based governance, which global firms often lack.
- Diffusion: Ensuring technology and best practices are adapted and diffused to MSMEs and lagging regions, mitigating the concentration of innovation within a few large firms or urban centres.
- Intellectual sovereignty: Protecting India's development agenda from being shaped by foreign-funded or non-contextual research, and offering a cost-efficient alternative to large, protracted global consulting engagements for structural and social reforms.

India's current policy research landscape remains fragmented. While NITI Aayog plays an important role in policy formulation, the broader ecosystem of independent think tanks and research institutions operates at a limited scale with constrained resources. Many rely heavily on external grants, limiting their ability to pursue long-term, strategic research agendas.

Global studies show that a 1 per cent increase in R&D intensity typically delivers a 0.13-0.17 per cent annual boost in productivity growth (OECD). Raising R&D spending could help India break into the upper-middle-income bracket, strengthen industrial competitiveness, and power high-skill job creation in digital technology, biotechnology, artificial intelligence, and clean technology.

To realise this vision, policymakers must act with long-term focus. Key steps should include:

- Raising R&D investment to globally competitive levels. Set a clear national target for R&D

intensity; for example, gradually increasing from approximately 0.65 per cent to at least 2 per cent of GDP by 2047, with an increasing share from the private sector. This will require not only higher government outlays but also incentives such as tax credits, grants, and public-private partnerships.

- Institutionalising long-term funding for domestic think tanks and policy research bodies. Create a dedicated Viksit Bharat Knowledge Fund or similar endowment, allowing multi-year grants, seed funding for new institutions, and stable operating resources.
- Building a National Knowledge Ecosystem. Link universities, research institutes, think tanks, industry, and government into a network that facilitates research, innovation, technology transfer, policy formulation, and diffusion of knowledge, especially to MSMEs and lagging regions.
- Promoting technology diffusion beyond large firms. Provide support for smaller firms and regional enterprises to adopt or adapt technologies through subsidies, incubation, outreach, and technical assistance.
- Expanding the notion of a "domestic Big Four" beyond consulting firms. Encourage the emergence of large, credible, Indian-owned knowledge institutions and think tanks that can compete globally in consultancy, policy research, data analytics, design, and technology transfer.

India's CSR spending has grown sharply, from ₹26,278 crore in FY22 to ₹34,909 crore in FY24 (Bharat CSR Performance Report, 2024), yet less than 3 per cent of this pool supports research, policy, or knowledge infrastructure. Redirecting even 5-10 per cent of CSR funding towards knowledge creation-such as think tanks, public data systems, applied research labs, and digital public goods-would significantly strengthen India's intellectual capacity. In parallel, industry must deepen its own R&D investment by leveraging fiscal incentives, building in-house research capabilities, and expanding industry-academia collaboration. Together, these shifts would reduce dependence on imported technologies and external consulting, while building the long-term competitiveness required for India's innovation-driven growth.

For India to become a developed nation, it must invest as much in brains, ideas, and institutions as in roads, ports, and industrial parks. Countries that mastered the knowledge game-South Korea, Germany, and Japan-used it to leapfrog into high-growth, high-productivity, high-innovation economies. India's story must now follow that path. Viksit Bharat requires Viksit Buddhi; a developed nation needs developed minds. The time to build is now.

Understanding the Yogi factor



The figure of Yogi Adityanath, Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh, invariably triggers a familiar, polarised debate. To his supporters, he is the 'Hindu Hriday Samrat', a decisive administrator who has restored order and pride. To his detractors, he is a deeply divisive communalist and a symbol of majoritarian assertion that undermines India's secular fabric. This binary, however, is a lazy and inadequate framework — a relic of an older political vocabulary that fails to capture the complexity of his political project. To understand Yogi Adityanath's enduring influence, one must look beyond the simplistic communal-versus-secular lens.

His politics represents a far more sophisticated and potent synthesis: a unique blend of spiritual authority from the Gorakhnath Peeth, a strategic project of "subaltern Hindutva", and a governance model framed around "Lok Kalyan" (public welfare). This model is rooted in a politics of labharthi (beneficiary) and a law-and-order situation unimaginable in Uttar Pradesh before 2017. It fulfils a public craving not just for a normal life but for a quality of life that many felt was sacrificed under the previous guise of social justice. These elements converge into a powerful form of identity politics that is fundamentally reshaping the Indian polity.

At the core of Yogi Adityanath's identity is his role as the Mahant, or head priest, of the Gorakhnath Peeth. This is not merely a religious title; it is the bedrock of his philosophical outlook and an autonomous source of political legitimacy. The Peeth, belonging to the Nath Panth tradition, carries a legacy of spiritual and temporal influence that predates modern political parties by centuries. This role grants him an authority insulated from the whims of party politics, setting him apart from career politicians. Crucially, the Peeth's ideology provides a philosophical bridge connecting the spiritual to the material.

The principle of 'Lok Kalyan' is central here. Adityanath articulates a vision in which spiritual values are not antithetical to material progress but are its very foundation. He has often stated that India's spiritual traditions provide a "moral compass to humanity", rooted in compassion and the principle of 'live and let live'. He argues that "spirituality, cultural advancement, and material development all require a safe, civilised, and clean environment". This philosophy allows him to seamlessly frame the construction of a temple and the building of an expressway as complementary, not contradictory, acts-both presented as sacred duties in the larger project of national rejuvenation.

This refutes the Western-inspired dichotomy that separates the sacred from the profane, offering a holistic vision in which development is imbued with cultural and spiritual meaning.

Perhaps the most politically astute element of the Yogi model is its project of 'subaltern Hindutva'-a conscious effort to broaden the social base of Hindu nationalism beyond its traditional upper-caste anchor. This is a strategic move to dismantle the caste-based political fortresses of parties such as the Samajwadi Party and the Bahujan Samaj Party, whose politics of social justice gradually converted into fiefdoms of specific families and castes. This re-engineering operates on multiple fronts. First, there is the radical inclusivity historically associated with the Gorakhnath Peeth itself, an unorthodox institution known for its openness to lower castes.

Second, and more crucially, was the founding of the Hindu Yuva Vahini, an organisation that gave prominent positions and a sense of agency to youth from OBC and Dalit communities, alongside their mobilisation in the Ram Janmabhumi Andolan by his guru, Mahant Avaidyanath. This created a populist, often aggressive, form of 'non-Brahmin Hindutva'. It empowered non-dominant castes by tapping into their "anxieties and aspirations" — their desire for recognition and a share of power that they felt was denied to them by established 'social justice' parties. By offering a platform within a pan-Hindu identity, the Yogi model convinced a significant section of the subaltern electorate that their interests were better served by aligning with a majoritarian project than by remaining within caste-specific silos. This strategic inclusion is not about erasing caste but about subsuming it within a larger religious-political identity positioned against a perceived common 'other'.

This leads to the third pillar of his strategy: a distinct form of identity politics that constructs a pan-Hindu social coalition while positioning itself as a corrective to the "politics of appeasement", a term used to critique policies aimed at Muslim minorities. His discourse consistently contrasts this alleged appeasement with his government's commitment to 'Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikas', reflected in his labharthi politics. The implicit and often explicit message is the dawn of a new era in which the majority community receives its due. This is identity politics on a grand scale, appealing to a sense of historical grievance and majoritarian entitlement. The success of this strategy is starkly evident in electoral outcomes. The BJP, under his leadership, secured a massive majority in the 2022 State Assembly elections without fielding a single Muslim candidate.

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SENSEX-ED



Yesterday, the Sensex, or the Bombay Stock Exchange index fell by 600 points. It was kind of unexpected since it had turned around its southward movement over the past few sessions. Once, the pundits began to explain the reasons behind the fall, there was a feeling of hollowness, and inexplicability about them. For example, one of the factors was the two-day meeting of the US Federal Reserve Board, which was expected to announce another minor rate cut. But then this was expected for weeks, and one thought that the stock markets, like it does with future expected events, had discounted it. Indeed, one of the reasons for the earlier rises was that the minor rate cut was unlikely to change things materially in the form of foreign outflows, which are turbo-charged when the US interest rates seem attractive, and the money flies to a safer less-risky haven.

Another factor that the experts harped on was the fall of the rupee, and it having crossed the ₹90 mark against the dollar. One can partially accept it. But then again, the rupee breached ₹90 days ago, and has firmed up since then, or at least has not gone down further, as the Reserve Bank of India stepped in to support the currency. One thought that the investors would be enthused by the intervention. No one can say. Maybe they believe the doomsayers, who contend that it is a matter of when, and not if, for the rupee to fall to ₹100 a dollar. Maybe the investors were more concerned by the central bank's opinion, which chimed with that of the finance minister, rather than the former's actions. In the recent past, both maintained that they have no target for the rupee, and the currency needs to find its stable, steady, and appropriate level.

The stock markets are uncertain about the India-US trade deal, which has been delayed. Thus, they reacted to the growing apprehensions. One can flip this argument, and contend that an American delegation is on its way to New Delhi to discuss the tariffs. This is good news as it shows an urgency among the two nations. Indian ministers have repeatedly claimed that an agreement will be in place by December 2025 since most of the issues are finalised, and the two sides need to dot the i's, and cross the t's. Of course, the investors are peeved that the earlier deadline was November 2025. But that one passed more than a week ago. Why should the Sensex and Nifty crash on December 8? This factor seems to be a non-factor that was cooked up by some of the experts as a reasonable factor to provide some logic to the market madness on Monday.

Several analysts reiterated a view that the Indian valuations were overstretched. For several months, in fact this entire year, valuations were raised as a worry. This is one of the major reasons why the markets behaved so erratically during 2025, and Indian equities were among the worst performers among Asian peers, and emerging markets. Hence, a concern about a persistent past concern, which has shaken up investors for more than 11 months, cannot be a legitimate one to explain a one-day fall of 600 points. Another twisted logic: Same analysts say in the same breath that steady (domestic) inflows, and long-term retail participation suggest continued optimism. In addition, high valuations may persist, supported by investor confidence, and consistent domestic equity inflows. Please explain clearly whether valuations are stretched or not, whether investors will sell to book profits or not, or whether the high valuations do not matter because of the steady inflows. We are suitably confused.

To add to the confusion and uncertainty, the stock markets went down on Monday because of the steady outflows by foreign investors. For months, and throughout this year, the foreigners have proved to be net sellers in the secondary market. Yet, they have aggressively participated in the IPOs (Initial Public Offerings), which provides clear hints that they feel the listed stocks are overvalued, and there are chances to earn higher returns on new stocks. But again, this trend is evident for the past several months, and is nothing new. It is not that on Monday the foreigners dumped the stocks. One can add this as a factor if the Indian equities had consistently gone down due to this regularly-occurring trend. But stocks went up in the past few sessions, and the same analysts remarked that this was the great turnaround, which would push the Sensex past 1,00,000 points by December 2026. Moreover, one is unsure which section is more important, foreigners or domestic investors.

At one level, the net selling by the foreigners pulls down the market indices. At another, there is a feeling that valuations will remain stretched because of huge domestic inflows. There is a tussle between the two, and one is not sure who will win. Both cannot, or maybe they can. The foreigners will book profits, and the locals will take valuations to higher levels to book profits later. A clear win-win.

The Pioneer

DEHRADUN | TUESDAY | DECEMBER 9, 2025



BUSINESS10

Marathon, steeplechase & sprint

In the third global business race, India is fast losing to China

It was a manufacturing marathon. While India and China were the favourites, South Korea, Taiwan, and Brazil were the dark horses. India lost, China won, and the smaller Asian nations stood on the podium. In the steeplechase in the software and hardware space, India and China are the joint winners. The former vaulted over the oceans to emerge as the world's IT leader, and China overcame the obstacles to directly compete with the US in chips, and Artificial Intelligence. In the ongoing healthcare sprint, while China is about to touch the tape, India has not even left the blocks.

Until a few years ago, 'Big Pharma' in the West focused on the discovery and launches of billion-dollar blockbuster drugs, India became the global supplier of generics (off-patent medicines), and China mastered the science of Active Pharma Ingredients (APIs). Today, after America, China is the world's largest developer of new molecules and drugs. According to a recent article in 'The Economist,' Chinese firms conducted a third of the global clinical trials last year and, in the first six months of 2025, they were responsible for a third of the licensing deals signed by 'Big Pharma.'

Over the next decade, the battles in areas such as biosciences, medical research, and discovery of life-saving medicines (cancer) will be aggressively fought between China and America. India is more likely to pursue its generics journey, and take advantage of the steep 'patent cliffs,' "as drugs expected to generate more than \$300 billion in total revenues over the next six years will lose their patent protection by 2030. Yet again, India will be left behind in this third global race. Americans and Europeans, who will intensify their global searches for new molecules, will increasingly find them in China.

The signs are visible, and the writing on the medical wall is getting clearer. Early this year,

Pfizer, the largest manufacturer in the US, paid \$1.25 billion to a Chinese biotech firm for the rights to make-and-sell a new cancer drug. GlaxoSmithKline of Britain paid \$500 million to another Chinese firm for lung-disease treatment, and unbelievably committed a further \$12 billion for 11 drugs in the pipeline. China's share in global licensing has gone up four times in four years. In comparison, except for a small oasis of new discoveries, India is way behind despite a slew of ongoing clinical trials.

Like the Indian market, the Chinese one is rugged, and difficult. Both are price-sensitive, with political and social pressures to enable the poor to access the medicines. In China, "state insurance covers most purchases," which forces private firms into "bidding wars." Drugmakers need to "slash prices by half or more to reach a wide patient pool." Hence, it made sense for the Chinese, as well as Indians, to work with generics, which are cheaper. India extended the business model in the overseas markets, either by exporting, or setting up generics' plants in the West. China chose differently.

In conjunction with the policy-makers, Chinese firms looked at America and Europe as "big prizes," or markets where they could sell new drugs, rather than continue to export generics or APIs. They decided to boost research, and ink licensing agreements with 'Big Pharma' to boost profits, and margins. According to the article in 'The Economist,' "A growing model is the 'New-Co,' under which a biotech company sets up a legally distinct company in America, often backed by foreign investors, and spins off promising assets into it." Since 'Big Pharma' spends billions of dollars to launch a new drug, the deals with Chinese pharma seem lucrative, and tempting.

Governance models make a huge difference. In the recent past, India has struggled with clinical trials due to irregularities, even illegality, which were highlighted by the judiciary, and activists. These rightfully delayed, and derailed them. In China, the period to secure human trials shrank from more than 500 days to less than 90. Unlike India, the workforce at China's regulator quadrupled, and cleared a backlog of 20,000 drug applications within two years. Despite reforms, Indian drugmakers continue to complain about red tape. In a sense, China has reinvented regulation. One is not sure if it is for better or worse, but it has speeded up the approval processes.

Of course, given the existing security, economic, energy, business, defence, and trade tensions between China and the West, China's regulatory framework is being questioned and scrutinised. The US drug regulator is stricter when it deals with medicines based on clinical trials only in China. There are concerns about data security, and data privacy. The US halted trials that exported American genetic data to China. The US policy-makers, states the piece in 'The Economist,' "fret about the security risks at the junction of pharmaceuticals and biotechnology." India faces some of these challenges as the US questions its drug-efficacy data.

This explains the Indians' penchant to make generics in America through the inorganic M&A route. China innovated to produce "fast followers," which enhance the safety and/or delivery of the existing drugs. The next step was to move on to the "first-in-class" medicines, which have proteins or genes, or mechanisms to boost functions. The first, according to experts, provided the firms with the courage to do the second. This led to the making of new drugs. For example, according to a media report, of the 160 obesity drugs in development across the world, a third are being made in China.

India has the potential for drug discoveries. The skills, management, and research were evident during the pandemic, when India emerged as a leading drugmaker, and a low-cost exporter. But this was due to the help from the Government, which cajoled and pushed the private sector. Similar impetus lacks in other cases, and Indian firms are generally happy with their march in the generics segment. They are low-hanging fruits, with ample margins, especially when they are sold in the US and Europe. In most cases, Indian firms lack the risk-taking abilities to spend billions on a new discovery.

However, as of now, China, which won the manufacturing race comfortably, and raced ahead in chips and AI, is comfortably placed in healthcare and biosciences. India needs to build an efficient ecosystem to achieve similar results. It has the right ingredients such as scientific temper, cheap manpower, research and manufacturing units, and government support. What it requires is access to foreign capital, and a change in entrepreneurial mindset so that producers switch from off-patent mentality to new-patent one.



The Cynical Optimist

India goes, India grounded

Why does competition invariably crash in the aviation sector?



acquire aircraft. In most cases, the planes are purchased before the demand increases, which create a lag time before the investments pay off. Despite the lucrative finance-and-lease deals offered by the manufacturers, airlines can find themselves in a tailspin, and get stuck in financial air-pockets. Several airlines are in trouble because either they buy too many planes, and are forced to operate them on low-profit routes, or buy too less, and lose volumes, and market shares on high-profit ones. It is a delicate balance that keeps changing, and needs to be tweaked.

Thus, the levers to control and manage costs fall on manpower since most other expenses are necessary, and continuous. This

impact is quite like what happened to IndiGo. Policies, regulations, and external non-controllable factors play a part. For instance, the global prices of crude oil and, hence, aviation fuel fluctuates, and eats into profits. In several quarters, IndiGo went from profits to losses, largely because of the prices of aviation fuel. Sudden policy changes impact operational and business models, especially for low-cost airlines. Regulations can create havoc, and force the planes to fly off the radar. The flight-schedule rules imposed by the regulator after the recent crash in Ahmedabad apparently forced Indigo's delays, and cancellations. The low-cost structure spun out of control, which was blamed on management errors.

According to experts, aviation fuel accounts for 20-30 per cent of the total costs, and the prices can be highly-volatile. Leased engines, and aircraft result in "significant fixed monthly rent payment," which is around 16 per cent of the revenues. Add the various taxes such as landing fees, gate charges, and navigation fees, which account for another nine per cent of the revenues.

Even as IndiGo Airline grounds flights, passengers go crazy, regulators take refuge behind inquiries, pilots blame managers, and the country's civil aviation sector goes for a six, the central minister, K Ramamohan Naidu claims that this is the best "time to start an airline in India." He adds that the country needs "five big airlines," and the ministry encourages competition, and wants "more airlines to join the industry" with the Government's support. He predicts that the demand is likely to grow at a rapid pace in the future. While the desires are noble, the in-air realities are turbulent.

Of course, there is a difference between a need, desire, or wish, and what the market dynamics can accommodate. In the past three decades, each time, the Indian skies became competitive, airlines either nosedived, and crashed, or found it difficult to take off, and were forced into a competitor's lap. Despite the growing demand, competition curtailed ticket prices, and profitability which, in turn, ended up killing competition. Thus, closures, mergers, and acquisitions became the regular norms in the aviation sector. Higher the number of airlines, the more the pressures that grounded them.

Not just this but each time an airline attained a dominant position vis-à-vis domestic market share, the cost structures ate into its financials, which bankrupted it, or forced it on the auction block. Look at Jet Airways, which ruled the skies, and was sold under the insolvency laws. Sahara and Deccan aimed big, and flew into competitor's hangars. The state-owned Indian Airlines, and Air India were prisoners of their monopolistic successes, until they were merged, and then sold to the Tata Group. Today, the largest airline, IndiGo, faces a similar situation, and critics blame its seemingly-successful business model as the reason for its problems.

Globally, airlines grapple with volumes, costs, market shares, apart from the impact of policies and regulations on them. Volumes are obviously critical but they cannot be universal, national, or international. The trick is to acquire passengers on select, highly-profitable, and fast-churning routes. For example, domestically, Delhi-Mumbai, Bangalore-Delhi, and local regional routes are more coveted given the number of passengers who travel to these cities. Internationally, Delhi-London, Delhi-Hong Kong, and India-US journeys are crowded, and desired by the airlines. Getting overall volumes, as national share is irrelevant, and dicey.

However, volumes imply huge one-time investments, and capital costs to buy and

Under such a rigid structure, regular so-called fixed expenses can account for almost 60-70 per cent of the costs, not revenues. There is little leeway for the airlines to immediately counter shifting changes.

Profit margins are wafer-thin despite high volumes, or market shares. During competition, there are downward pressures on ticket prices. This happens even when there is minimal competition as the airlines scamper to sell more seats on relatively-low traffic routes. Unexpected events like wars and pandemics, policy and regulation changes, and economic slowdowns can rapidly change things. "This pushes down profit margins to low levels, typically 2-5 per cent globally, which makes it different to absorb financial shocks, or support high capital investments." It is a typical catch-22 situation. You need to spend more to grab volumes. This creates cost pressures.

Consider the case of Southwest Airlines, which faced a huge crisis during the winter holiday season in the US in 2022. While other airlines recovered from the severe winter effect within days, Southwest went south for days and weeks. It was its unique and, till then, highly successful business and operational model that was unable to react to the new unusual challenges. According to a case study (2024), the IndiGo-like crisis, which led to the cancellations of thousands of flights, "provides an opportunity to dig deeply into the need for scalability, challenges of risk management... and the wide variety of challenges of managing airline supply chains."

Concludes the same case study, "Airlines are not easy businesses to run. They are capital and labour intensive, they are subject to impact from weather, politics, public health, and other unexpected issues. And they are competitive, seeking not only to provide good price and performance for customers but also an appropriate yield for every seat on the plane, and to keep planes in the air, and generate revenues." Thus, competition, and five airlines, as the civil aviation minister desires, may be the wrong solution for the wrong pinpointed problems. IndiGo did not crash because of lack of competition. It could not take off because of its straitjacketed business model.

The real AI revolution in banking: Decision packs, not algorithms



SUNDAR
SUNDARARAJAN

Rethinking the race in banking

For nearly a decade, the financial industry has been obsessed with the wrong race. Banks have focused on who can deploy the smartest models, the fastest algorithms, or the most advanced AI platforms. Yet the real transformation underway is not about faster predictions or more complex math. It is about making better decisions.

The competitive frontier is shifting. Success is no longer determined by model accuracy alone. Predictions only hold value when paired with context and alerts only matter when they contribute to decisions that are consistent, defensible and trusted. In banking today, AI is no longer a race for speed-it is a race to prevent breakdowns before they occur.

The limits of model-only thinking

Banking operates in deeply interconnected environments. Every customer interaction, exception case and transaction activates a web of operational decisions that must work seamlessly. Models can detect anomalies at scale, but without institutional context, they rest on assumptions that can quickly unravel under real-world pressures.

The risk is rarely a single bad decision. It is the gaps between systems, where incomplete or contradictory information can slip through unnoticed. A customer's cash flow in the core system may suggest stability, while transaction history hints at stress. Branch notes, call-center transcripts and chat interactions add further fragments, rarely reconciled. When AI is applied on top of unchanged processes, it magnifies inconsistencies rather than correcting them, making operational cracks increasingly costly as pilots scale to production.



AI works-but only with context

Modern AI excels at pattern recognition, anomaly detection, document interpretation, and structured data triage. McKinsey estimates generative AI could unlock between 200 and 340 billion dollars annually for global banking-but only where context already exists. Early successes are seen where structured data is available, single-customer views are real and workflows are intentionally redesigned to integrate AI inputs, rather than patched superficially.

A striking example comes from HSBC. Their AI-powered transaction-screening engine now



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processes more than 900 million transactions per month, identifying more suspicious activity while reducing false positives. The real breakthrough was not the algorithm itself, but pairing detection with structured decision packs and audit-ready trails. By consolidating history, evidence, exceptions and reason codes into a sequenced context pack, analysts can focus on informed decision-making instead of unraveling contradictions. This approach also addresses regulatory concerns over undocumented overrides a systemic weakness that decision packs directly resolve.

The enduring role of human judgment

Even the most sophisticated AI models stumble when faced with intent, ethical considerations, rare events, market shocks or adversarial behavior. Humans, however, excel at interpreting nuance and cross-domain context. Yet humans alone cannot sustain consistent, auditable decisions at scale. Judgment becomes reliable only when supported by structured evidence, transparent lineage and clear

operational controls-the very artifacts AI can provide at speed and volume.

The emerging hybrid model blends both capabilities. AI aggregates, alerts, summarises, and contextualises information, while humans are routed to the right decision at the right moment, applying ethics, accountability and experience. Automation does not replace judgment; it restores the conditions for good judgment to prevail.

Decision packs: engineering context into workflows

Leading banks are moving beyond delivering raw alerts to analysts. They are creating decision packs-structured, sequenced bundles of information delivered precisely when a decision is required. These packs weave together customer history, channel behavior, transaction patterns, risk flags, documents, prior actions and reason codes into a coherent, actionable view.

In trade finance, for example, AI might flag irregular document signatures, sanctions-list hits, or routing anomalies. The human officer adds

supplier-buyer history, commodity pricing trends, geopolitical insights and country risk into the decision-making process. The resulting decision is informed, defensible, timely and aligned with policy. Context-aware banking transforms the question from "What does the model say?" to "What does the model say within the full context the institution can recover and verify?" This shift closes the gaps that historically caused inconsistency, omission and operational fragility.

Operating models matter more than models

Across the industry, there is growing consensus: the operating model-how decisions are designed, governed, and executed-delivers far more value than the model architecture itself. Banks that extract the most value from AI maintain auditable override controls, human-in-loop workflows, strong data lineage, cross-channel decision rights and scalable accountability. In practice, a model contributes perhaps ten to twenty percent of value, while the remaining eighty to ninety percent comes from how decisions are operationalized. AI cannot fix broken workflows, but effective workflows make AI meaningful.

Fewer contextless decisions, not faster decisions

Banks do not simply need faster decision-making. They need fewer decisions made in the absence of context. The purpose of AI is not to replace bankers but to remove the breakdowns that force decisions to be made using incomplete fragments.

Forward-looking institutions are designing systems where ledgers record not only the model output, but also the decision pack, the human override and the governance trail. This creates a future where decisions are explainable, repeatable and trusted at scale.

The future: AI-assisted, context-rich, human-governed banking

The real revolution is subtle but profound. It is not AI replacing bankers; it is AI replacing the conditions that constrained them for decades. Banks that embrace decision packs will achieve consistent decision-making at scale, strengthen regulatory defensibility, reduce operational fragility, unlock deeper predictive intelligence, and build enduring trust with customers and regulators.

The path ahead is clear. The banks that will thrive in the AI era will not be those with the fastest algorithms. They will be the ones capable of making the best decisions, armed with context, evidence and human judgment at the right moment.

Labour codes: Legally accurate, socially transformative, and politically defining. A landmark reform of the Modi era



ASEERVATHAM
ACHARY

India, that is *Bharat* had long been burdened by laws created during the British regime, shaped by a colonial mentality that openly viewed *Bharatiyas* as their slaves and servants. Those laws were never meant to empower the people of this land.

They were crafted only to safeguard the interests of foreign rulers and to keep the native population dependent, restricted and voiceless. For decades, *Bharat* waited for a Government with the conviction to break free from these outdated colonial structures. This long pending transformation became possible only under the Modi Government, which has consistently delivered bold decisions, structural reforms and governance that truly serves the nation.

In the past decade, the Modi Government has brought a historic reform package that has reshaped the governance landscape of India, making it simpler, transparent and friendly for innovation and growth. More than 40000 unnecessary compliances have been abolished, around 1500 obsolete laws have been repealed and several existing regulations have been streamlined to reduce the burden on citizens, businesses and startups.

Through legislative action, more than a dozen laws have been simplified. Around 280 provisions have been removed to make governance more accessible and citizen centric. These reforms are fully aligned with the vision of *Atmanirbhar Bharat* and the goal of making India a developed nation by 2047.

Taking this reform journey to the next level, the Modi Government has now implemented the four Labour Codes from 21 November 2025. These Codes replace 29 scattered and confusing laws with one modern, clear and worker friendly framework. For the first time, India has a labour system that supports today's economy, today's workforce and tomorrow's aspirations. It gives workers better protection, ensures fair wages, improves safety and strengthens industries so India can compete globally.



This change was long overdue. Most of our old labour laws were written even before independence viz., Workmen's Compensation Act, 1923, Indian Trade Unions Act, 1926, Trade Disputes Act, 1929, Industrial Employment (Standing Orders) Act, 1946, etc.

The economy changed, industries changed, technology changed, but those laws remained frozen in the past. Workers suffered. Employers struggled. Compliance became a maze. The new Labour Codes finally break

this cycle and bring India into a new era of simple rules and honest governance.

A broad range of benefits across sectors

The new Labour Codes bring clear, future ready protections for workers across every sector of the economy. Fixed term employees now receive the same benefits as permanent staff including leave, medical cover and social security, with gratuity eligibility reduced from five years to one. Gig and platform workers get formal recognition for the first time, with aggregators contributing to their social security and Aadhaar linked UAN ensuring portable benefits across states.

Contract workers gain transparent protection, social security and health coverage from principal employers, along with annual free health check-ups. Women workers are assured equal pay, protection from discrimination and the freedom to work night shifts and in all sectors with full safety and consent. Youth workers benefit from guaranteed

minimum wages, mandatory appointment letters and wages during leave.

The Labour Codes mark a historic step in modernising India's workforce by aligning with international standards on wages, gender equality and occupational safety. Over 2.78 million workers die globally each year from occupational accidents and diseases, highlighting the relevance of OSH provisions in the Codes.

MSME workers receive minimum wages, safe working conditions, double overtime wages and timely salary payments. Beedi and cigar workers are protected with fixed working hours, double overtime rates and bonus eligibility after thirty days. Plantation workers receive mandatory safety training, medical facilities for families and education support for children.

Audio visual and digital media workers including journalists and artists get clear wage structures, appointment letters and social security. Mining workers are protected under national safety standards, receive free annual health

check-ups and regulated working hours. In hazardous industries, annual medical tests and safety committees are mandatory. Women are empowered to work safely even in high-risk environments.

Textile and migrant workers receive equal wages, PDS portability and protection for pending dues. IT and ITES workers get timely salaries, equal pay, social security and strong grievance redressal. Dock workers gain formal recognition along with provident fund, pension, insurance and essential workplace facilities.

Additional transformative reforms under the labour codes

A national floor wage now guarantees that every worker receives a dignified minimum earning ensuring uniform protection across the country. Gender neutral job opportunities and wages have been emphasised extending equal rights and safeguards to all workers including transgender persons.

To replace outdated inspection systems an inspector cum facilitator model has been introduced focusing on guidance and compliance support rather than fear and harassment. Disputes will now be resolved in a time bound manner through two member Industrial Tribunals giving workers and employers faster and predictable outcomes.

Paperwork has been simplified through single registration, single licence and single return replacing the earlier system of multiple overlapping filings. Workplace safety has also been strengthened with the creation of a National OSH Board to ensure uniform safety standards across sectors. Mandatory safety committees in major establishments further enhance accountability and on site protection.

Higher factory applicability limits ensure that smaller units are not overburdened by excessive regulations while core safeguards for workers remain fully intact. These reforms collectively reflect a clear commitment to worker dignity, workplace safety and smoother industrial operations.

Labour codes: modernising workplaces and empowering MSMEs

The new Labour Codes bring clarity, transparency and digitisation to India's labour framework. Clear rules on contract labour, retrenchment and fixed-term employment will reduce disputes and help MSMEs formalise previously informal arrangements. Mandatory appointment letters, wage linkages to the national floor and timely payments encourage proper records and digital payroll adoption.

Recognition of fixed-term employment provides flexibility for project or seasonal work while ensuring wage and benefit parity, including gratuity after one year. Expanded ESIC, EPF and insurance coverage for casual, fixed-term, gig, platform and hazardous sector workers strengthens social security for all.

Provisions on safety, welfare and timely wages are expected to improve workplace conditions, raise morale and create a more motivated workforce. Experts note that these reforms will lead to structured, predictable and cooperative labour management, benefiting both workers and businesses.

Global backing for India's labour codes

The Director General of the International Labour Organisation praised India's decision to implement the four Labour Codes, calling it an important step toward stronger social protection and fair wage systems. He emphasised that social dialogue between the Government, employers and workers will play a key role in ensuring positive outcomes for both labour and industry.

The International Social Security Association also welcomed the reforms, stating that India's Labour Codes add powerful momentum to global efforts for building stronger and more inclusive social security systems. ISSA highlighted that India's initiative strengthens global progress toward wider coverage, better protection and stronger institutional capacity.

Opposing for the sake of opposing

The Opposition's stand against these reforms is baseless and unjustified. Their poster marches and dramatic protests are nothing more than political theatrics designed to manufacture issues where none exist. These reforms have been thoughtfully drafted to protect workers' interests and to strengthen Bharat's workforce. It is difficult to comprehend why the Opposition is resisting measures that clearly benefit the nation.

Do they not want Bharat's workers to have stable and secure employment? Do they not want gig workers, platform workers and contract workers to receive the protections they deserve?

Do they not want women and youth to receive equal pay for equal work? Do they not want workers to access gratuity, health support and social security? Do they not want our labour force to become more skilled and our economy to grow faster? What exactly are they protesting? Only they can answer, because their objections clearly do not align with national interest.

Despite the opposition raised by the Left supported Trade Unions, Modi Government has delivered reforms that will protect workers, will formalise jobs and will strengthen the workforce while enabling businesses to grow, proving its commitment to a modern and prosperous India.

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FROM THE WORLD

BENIN

Coup leader missing

The apparent leader of a failed coup in Benin was on the run and the fate of hostages remained unclear a day after a group of soldiers attempted to overthrow the Government of the West African nation. The soldiers calling themselves the Committee for Refoundation stormed the national television station early Sunday morning. Led by Benin army officer Lt. Col. Pascal Tigr, eight soldiers appeared in a broadcast announcing the removal of President Patrice Talon, dissolution of the Government and suspension of all state institutions. By Sunday afternoon, the coup was foiled by Benin's military, supported by Nigerian air and ground forces, which launched a series of attacks against fleeing mutineers. At least a dozen soldiers were arrested while others remained at large Monday.

■ TURKEY

Officer killed in drug raid

A police officer died on Monday after being shot and seriously wounded during an early morning drug raid in Istanbul, Turkish officials said. Officer Emre Albayrak died of his wounds in a hospital. He was part of a special operations team carrying out the raid in the Cekmekoy district on Istanbul's Asian side. "Our police officer Emre Albayrak, who was seriously injured in a narcotics operation in the Cekmekoy district, could not be saved despite all interventions in the hospital to which he was taken and became a martyr," the Istanbul Governor's Office said in a statement. The man who opened fire on police was killed, and two other suspects were detained, the office said. Turkiye has experienced a rise in drug-related crime in recent years. There was a 23 per cent rise in drug-related incidents last year.

Zelenskyy hasn't read US peace proposal: Trump

■ Kyiv

President Donald Trump on Sunday claimed Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy "hasn't read" a US-authored peace proposal aimed at ending the Russia-Ukraine war. Trump was critical of Zelenskyy after US and Ukrainian negotiators completed three days of talks on Saturday aimed at trying to narrow differences on the US administration's proposal. But in an exchange with reporters on Sunday night, Trump suggested that the Ukrainian leader is holding up the talks from moving forward. "I'm a little bit disappointed that President Zelenskyy hasn't yet read the proposal, that was as of a few hours ago. His people love it. But he hasn't—Russia's fine with it," Trump told reporters on the red carpet at the Kennedy Center Honors. "Russia is, I believe, fine with it, but I'm not sure that Zelenskyy's fine with it. His people love it, but he hasn't read it."

Russian President Vladimir Putin also hasn't publicly expressed approval for the White House plan. In fact, Putin last week had said that aspects of Trump's proposal were unworkable, even though the original draft heavily favoured Moscow. Trump has had a hot-and-cold relationship with Zelenskyy since riding into a second White House term insisting that the war was a waste of US taxpayer money. Trump has also repeatedly urged the Ukrainians to cede land to Russia to bring an end to a now nearly four-year conflict he says has cost far too many lives. Zelenskyy said Saturday he had a "substantive phone call" with the American officials engaged in the talks with a Ukrainian delegation in Florida. He said he had been given an update over the phone by US and Ukrainian officials at the talks. "Ukraine is determined to keep working in good faith with the American side to genuinely achieve



peace," Zelenskyy wrote on social media. Trump's criticism of Zelenskyy came as Russia on Sunday welcomed the Trump administration's new national security strategy in comments by the Kremlin spokesman published by Russia's Tass news agency. Dmitry Peskov said the

updated strategic document, which spells out the administration's core foreign policy interests, was largely in line with Moscow's vision. "There are statements there against confrontation and in favour of dialogue and building good relations," he said, adding that Russia hopes this would lead to

"further constructive cooperation with Washington on the Ukrainian settlement." The document released Friday by the White House said the US wants to improve its relationship with Russia after years of Moscow being treated as a global pariah and that ending the war is a core US interest to "reestab-

lish strategic stability with Russia." Speaking on Saturday at the Reagan National Defense Forum, Trump's outgoing Ukraine envoy, Keith Kellogg, said efforts to end the war were in "the last 10 meters." He said a deal depended on the two outstanding issues of "terrain, primarily the Donbas," and the Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant. Russia controls most of Donbas, its name for the Donetsk and neighbouring Luhansk regions, which, along with two southern regions, it illegally annexed three years ago. The Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant is in an area that has been under Russian control since early in Moscow's invasion of Ukraine and is not in service. It needs reliable power to cool its six shutdown reactors and spent fuel, to avoid any catastrophic nuclear incidents. Kellogg, who is due to leave his post in January, was not present at the talks

in Florida. Separately, officials said the leaders of the United Kingdom, France and Germany would participate in a meeting with Zelenskyy in London on Monday. As the three days of talks wrapped up, Russian missile, drone and shelling attacks overnight and Sunday killed at least four people in Ukraine. A man was killed in a drone attack on Ukraine's northern Chernihiv region Saturday night, local officials said, while a combined missile and drone attack on infrastructure in the central city of Kremenchuk caused power and water outages. Kremenchuk is home to one of Ukraine's biggest oil refineries and is an industrial hub. Kyiv and its Western allies say Russia is trying to cripple the Ukrainian power grid and deny civilians access to heat, light and running water for a fourth consecutive winter, in what Ukrainian officials call "weaponising" the cold.

Ukraine President visits London for peace talks

■ London

President Volodymyr Zelenskyy was meeting the French, German and British leaders in London on Monday as Kyiv's European allies try to strengthen Ukraine's hand in thorny talks on a US-backed plan to end the Russia-Ukraine war. Prime Minister Keir Starmer was due to gather with Zelenskyy, President Emmanuel Macron and Chancellor Friedrich Merz at the British leader's 10 Downing St. Residence. Zelenskyy said late Sunday that his talks with European leaders this week in London and Brussels will focus on security, air defence and long-term funding for Ukraine's war effort. The leaders are working to ensure that any ceasefire is backed by solid security guarantees, both from Europe and the US, to deter Russia from attacking again. US and Ukrainian negotiators completed three days of talks on Saturday aimed at trying to narrow differences on the US administration's peace proposal. Zelenskyy said in a post on Telegram that talks had been



British Prime Minister Keir Starmer (left), Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy (centre) and French President Emmanuel Macron (right) meeting at 10 Downing Street in London

"substantive" and that National Security and Defence Council Secretary Rustem Umerov and Chief of the General Staff Andrii Hnatov were travelling back to Europe to brief him. A major sticking point in the proposal is the suggestion that Ukraine must cede control of its eastern Donbas region to Russia, which illegally occupies most but not all of the territory. Ukraine

and its European allies have balked at the idea of handing over land. Starmer said he "won't be putting pressure" on Zelenskyy to accept a peace settlement. "The most important thing is to ensure that if there is a cessation of hostilities, and I hope there is, it has to be just and it has to be lasting, which is what we will be focused on this afternoon," he told

broadcaster ITV. In an exchange with reporters on Sunday night, US President Donald Trump appeared frustrated with Zelenskyy, claiming the Ukrainian leader "hasn't yet read the proposal." "Russia is, I believe, fine with it, but I'm not sure that Zelenskyy's fine with it," Trump said before taking part in the Kennedy Centre Honours in Washington.

Top EU official warns US against interfering in Europe's affairs

■ Brussels

A top European Union official on Monday warned the United States against interfering in Europe's affairs and said only European citizens can decide which parties should govern them. European Council President Antonio Costa's remarks came in reaction to the Trump administration's new national security strategy, which was published on Friday and paints European allies as weak while offering tacit support to far-right political parties. It's "good" that the strategy depicts European countries as an ally, but "allies don't threaten to interfere in the domestic political choices of their allies," Costa said. "What we can't accept is the threat of interference in European political life. The United States cannot replace European citizens in choosing what the good or the bad parties are," he said in Paris at the Jacques Delors Institute, a think tank. The strategy was critical of European free speech and



migration policy. US allies in Europe face the "prospect of civilizational erasure," the document said, raising doubts about their long-term reliability as American partners. But Costa, who chairs summits of the 27 national EU leaders, said Europe's "history has taught us that you can't have freedom of speech without freedom of information." The former Portuguese prime minister also warned "there will never be free speech if the freedom of information of citizens is

sacrificed for the aims of the tech oligarchs in the United States." The security strategy is the administration's first since President Donald Trump returned to office in January. It breaks starkly from the course set by President Joe Biden's Democratic administration, which sought to reinvigorate US alliances. It comes as the US seeks an end to Russia's nearly 4-year-old war in Ukraine, a goal that the national security strategy says is in America's vital interests.

Nepal's Home Minister Aryal seeks cooperation to conduct free, fair elections

■ Kathmandu

Nepal's Home Minister Om Prakash Aryal on Monday said that the Government is committed to institutionalising democracy as he sought cooperation from all stakeholders to conduct the next year's general elections in a free, fair and fearless manner.



"The effective implementation of human rights is possible only when democracy is strengthened, as democracy and human rights are interdependent," Aryal said while addressing the inaugural ceremony of the 17th Human Rights National Magna Meet 2025 in Lalitpur district. In the present context, the Government is committed to institutionalising democracy, he said. The minister sought cooperation from all stakeholders to conduct the upcoming

general elections in a free, fair and fearless manner. Aryal underscored the need for a logical conclusion to the Transitional Justice Process, both relating to the decade-long Maoist insurgency and the recent Gen Z movement that toppled the KP Oli-led Government in September. As human rights are the backbone of any civilised, inclusive and democratic society, the first duty of the Government is to ensure

Greenland holds Annual talks with US after takeover buzz

■ Nuuk (Greenland)

Greenland is hosting annual meetings with US officials to discuss bilateral ties at the end of a year in which US President Donald Trump ramped up talk of a US takeover of the mineral-rich island that is a semi-autonomous territory of Denmark. The meetings starting Monday will include a bilateral "joint committee" meeting between Greenland and US officials that will discuss cooperation "in a number of important areas," according to a statement from Greenland's Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Science. A separate "permanent committee" meeting will involve the Danish Government. Similar meetings were held last year in the United States.

114 people were killed, including 63 children, in last week's drone strikes in Sudan: WHO

■ Cairo

The head of the World Health Organisation said on Monday that the death toll from drone strikes on a kindergarten and other sites in Sudan's Kordofan state last week is now at 114 people killed, including 63 children. WHO said there were three separate drone strikes on Kagoli last Thursday. The first targeted the kindergarten, and the subsequent strikes targeted paramedics as they were transporting the survivors to a hospital. The death toll was not immediately clear at the time, in part due to communications outages. Dr Tedros Ghebreyesus, the director of the WHO, said on X that the organisation "deplores these senseless attacks on civilians and health facilities, and calls again for an end to the violence, and increased access



to humanitarian aid, including health." The Sudan Doctors' Network and Emergency Lawyers, groups that track violence against civilians in Sudan, blamed the Rapid Support Forces paramilitary, also known as the RSF, for the strikes. In a statement Saturday, Emergency Lawyers called the attack "a flagrant violation of international humanitarian law, including the protection of civilians, espe-

cially children, and vital civilian infrastructure." The strikes come amid a two-year war between the RSF and the Sudanese military. More than 40,000 people have been killed to date, according to the World Health Organisation, and 12 million displaced. However, aid groups warn that the true death toll is likely far higher. The battle is now concentrating on the oil-rich Kordofan region, after the RSF took over the last military

stronghold, el-Fasher, in Darfur, in western Sudan. The takeover of el-Fasher by the RSF has been marred by violence. There have been reports of executions of civilians, rapes and sexual assaults, and other atrocities. Over 100,000 people have fled since the takeover, according to the UN Migration agency. The UN human rights chief, Volker Turk, warned last week that Kordofan could face new atrocities like those in el-Fasher. The humanitarian situation in the Kordofan region is worsening as famine is also spreading after more than two years of the devastating war. Famine was declared last month in the capital of South Kordofan, Kadugli. Dilling, also in South Kordofan, has reportedly experienced the same hunger conditions as Kadugli.



2 men found alive as 17 dead found on migrant boat near Crete

■ Athens

Two men found alive among 17 dead bodies in a partially sunken migrant boat south of the island of Crete over the weekend told Greek authorities the vessel had been carrying a total of 34 people, and that 15 had fallen overboard and were missing, Greece's coast guard said Monday. A search and rescue operation was underway, the coast guard says, but strong winds and rough seas have been hampering efforts. The survivors' revelation could mean the death toll might increase to 32. On Saturday, the coast guard said a passing Turkish merchant vessel had come across the half-sunken migrant boat 36 nautical miles southwest of the town of Ierapetra in southern Crete. Seventeen of the passengers on board, all men, were already dead, and there were only two survivors, the coast guard said, revising its initial count of 18 bodies.



Israeli Police forced entry into refugee compound: UN agency

■ Jerusalem

Israeli police forcibly entered the compound of the UN agency for Palestinian refugees in East Jerusalem early on Monday, escalating a campaign against an organisation that has been banned from operating on Israeli territory. The UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees in the Near East, or UNRWA, said in a statement that "sizeable numbers" of Israeli forces, including police, trucks and forklifts, entered the compound in the Palestinian neighbourhood of Sheikh Jarrah and cut communications to the compound. "The unauthorised and forceful entry by Israeli security forces is an unacceptable violation of UNRWA's privileges and immunities as a UN agency," the agency said. Police said in a statement they entered for a "debt-collection procedure" spearheaded by Jerusalem's municipal Government, which did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

Thailand strikes Cambodia as border tensions flare

ASSOCIATED PRESS ■ Bangkok

Thailand launched airstrikes along the disputed border with Cambodia on Monday as both sides accused the other of breaking a ceasefire that halted fighting earlier this year.

Longstanding border disputes erupted into five days of combat in July that killed dozens of soldiers and civilians. US President Donald Trump pushed the Southeast Asian neighbours to sign a truce agreement in October, but tensions have continued to simmer.

The Thai army said that more than 50,000 people have left areas near the border for shelters, while Cambodia's Information Minister Neth Pheaktra said that residents of several villages near the border have been evacuated.

The latest round of clashes has killed at least one Thai soldier and four Cambodian civilians, officials said.

Thai Prime Minister Anutin Charnvirakul said in a televised speech that military operations would be carried out as necessary to defend the country and protect public safety.

"Thailand has never wished for violence. I'd like to reiterate



A wounded Thai soldier is carried to be transferred to a hospital in Sisaket province Thailand on Sunday after, according to a Thai army spokesperson, Cambodian troops fired into Thai territory

that Thailand has never initiated a fight or an invasion, but will never tolerate a violation of its sovereignty," he said.

Fighting followed the exchange of fire on Sunday.

The ceasefire was strained in early November after Thai troops were injured by land mines, leading Thailand to

announce that it would indefinitely suspend implementation of the agreement. Both sides continue to trade accusations over responsibility, even as they are supposed to be cooperating in getting rid of the mines.

Trump said in mid-November that he'd inter-

vened to preserve the ceasefire as tensions simmered between the two countries.

But another brief episode of fighting took place along the border Sunday, after which both sides said the other fired first. The Thai army said Cambodian fire injured two Thai soldiers, and Thai troops

retaliated, resulting in an exchange of fire that lasted around 20 minutes. Cambodia said that the Thai side fired first and that its own troops did not retaliate.

On Monday, Thai army spokesperson Maj. Gen. Winthai Suvarree said the Cambodian troops fired first into Thai territory in multiple areas. He said at least one Thai soldier was killed and about eight other soldiers were wounded, and civilians were being evacuated from the affected areas.

Thailand used aircraft "to strike military targets in several areas to suppress Cambodian supporting fire attacks," he said.

The Thai army said artillery rounds landed near residential areas on the Thai side, but reported no civilian casualties so far. Cambodian Defence Ministry spokesperson Maly Socheata said the Thai military attacked the Cambodian troops first on Monday, and that Cambodia did not retaliate during the initial attacks.

"Cambodia urges that Thailand immediately stop all hostile activities that threaten peace and stability in the region," she said.

Neth Pheaktra, the Cambodian Minister of

Earthquake triggers tsunami on northern coast of Japan



ASSOCIATED PRESS ■ Tokyo

A powerful 7.6-magnitude earthquake struck off northern Japan on Monday, triggering a tsunami of up to 40 centimetres in coastal communities in the region, the Japanese Meteorological Agency said.

The agency said the magnitude quake struck just east of Aomori, the northernmost prefecture of Japan's main Honshu island, and just south of Hokkaido island. It said a tsunami of 40

centimetres struck the Hokkaido prefecture town of Urakawa and the Aomori prefecture port of Mutsu Ogawara. Several people were injured at a hotel in the Aomori town of Hachinohe, public broadcaster NHK reported.

Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi, in a brief comment to reporters, said the government set up an emergency task force to urgently assess the extent of damage. "We are putting people's lives first and doing everything we can," she said.

'One Battle After Another' leads Golden Globe nominations



ASSOCIATED PRESS ■ Beverly Hills (US)

Paul Thomas Anderson's "One Battle After Another" scored a leading nine nominations to the 83rd Golden Globe Awards on Monday, adding to the Oscar favourite's momentum and handing Warner Bros. A victory amid its deal to be acquired by Netflix.

"One Battle After Another" landed nominations for its cast – Leonardo DiCaprio, Teyana Taylor, Sean Penn and Chase Infiniti – along with nods for Anderson's screenplay and

direction. It's competing in the Globes' category for comedy and musicals.

Close on its heels was Joachim Trier's "Sentimental Value," a Norwegian family drama about a filmmaking family. The Neon release's eight nominations included nods for four of its actors: Stellan Skarsgard, Renate Reinsve, Elle Fanning and Inga lbsdottir Lilleaas.

The Globe nominations, a tattered but persistent rite in Hollywood, are coming on the heels of a potentially seismic shift in entertainment.

UK care home agency boss jailed for hiring Indian migrants illegally

PRESS TRUST OIF INDIA ■ London

A director of a care home agency based in south-east England has been jailed for two-and-a-half years after being found guilty of repeatedly employing immigrants from India with no right to work in the UK.

Benoy Thomas was convicted after a trial at Lewes Crown Court in July and sentenced on Friday, the UK's Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) said.

The 50-year-old was found to have recruited Indian nationals to work as care assistants through his A Class Care Recruitment Ltd at Bexhill-on-Sea in East Sussex, despite being aware of their illegal migration status.

"Benoy Thomas knowingly breached immigration laws by employing people who had no right to work in the UK," Katie Samways, Specialist Prosecutor for CPS South East, said in a statement.

"Many of those he illegally employed were working with some of the most vulnerable people without adequate training or medical expertise, putting the safety and well-being of those who needed care at significant risk.

"The Crown Prosecution Service will continue to prosecute those who exploit our immigration system," she said.

An investigation by Immigration Enforcement, an agency of the UK Home Office, determined that Thomas assisted the "unlawful immigration" of 13 individuals between 2017 and 2018.

UAE-backed separatists tighten grip of southern Yemen

ASSOCIATED PRESS ■ Aden

The airspace of war-torn Yemen was briefly closed Monday, an official said, as tensions escalated in the country's south after a separatist group, backed by the United Arab Emirates, took over of an oil-rich region in a rift that could fracture the anti-Houthi alliance.

A Yemeni government official said that the Saudiled coalition didn't issue required permissions for flights to or from Yemen, briefly halting flights to and from the southern city of Aden – the seat of the internationally recognized government.

The official described the move as a "Saudi message" to the separatist Southern Transitional Council's latest clashes across southern Yemen, including its seizure of much of the sprawling oil-rich province of Hadhramaut, which borders Saudi Arabia.

The move was later reversed, allowing flight operations in Aden airport, where hundreds of passengers were stranded for hours, said the official, who spoke on condition of anonymity because he wasn't authorised to brief the media.

An Associated Press journalist at the airport said workers have begun processing pas-

sengers of a Cairo-bound flight that was supposed to take off early Monday.

Since the entry of a Saudi-led coalition into Yemen's war in 2015, the coalition has controlled the country's airspace. Saudi Arabia didn't acknowledge closing Yemen's airspace on Monday.

The Southern Transitional Council (STC) – an umbrella of armed groups trained and financed by the UAE – has expanded its control over Yemen's south earlier this month.

They seized control of Seiyun in Hadhramaut, including crucial oil fields and energy installations following brief clashes with

the Yemeni military, and allied tribes.

Forces of the secessionist group were deployed across the strategic Wadi Hadramout area, which includes major urban centres and military bases, according to STC-allied media. They took over the presidential palace and the international airport in Seiyun last week, and advanced to the province of Mahra, which borders Oman, the group said.

STC hoisted the flag of South Yemen over government buildings across the country's south including on the border crossing with Oman. Images circulated on STC-allied media showed the South Yemen flag, with its light blue chevron and a red star, flying over government buildings and schools in the south.

The separatists enjoy loyalty through much of southern Yemen and have repeatedly pushed to break up Yemen into two countries, as it was between 1967 and 1990.

Hundreds of STC supporters took to the streets in Aden to call for the establishment of an independent state in the south.

The demonstrators raised the flag of South Yemen, and pictures of Aidarous al-Zubaidi, the STC leader, who is also vice president of the country.

Rubio, Hegseth meet Australian counterparts on Indo-Pacific security

ASSOCIATED PRESS ■ Washington

Secretary of State Marco Rubio and Defence Secretary Pete Hegseth are meeting their Australian counterparts Monday in Washington for annual talks expected to focus on Indo-Pacific security and countering China's increasing assertiveness in the region, including in the South China Sea and directed at Taiwan.

Rubio, Hegseth, Australian Foreign Minister Penny Wong and Defence Minister Richard Marles gathered at the State Department, with many eyes also on the Russia-Ukraine war, fragile ceasefire in Gaza and US military strikes against alleged drug traffickers in the Western Hemisphere that have raised questions about the use of force there.

"This is a very strong partnership, it's a strong alliance, and what we want to do is continue to build on it. We

think we have a lot of momentum behind this alliance," Rubio said, hailing cooperation between Washington and Canberra on critical minerals, defense production and troop deployments.

None of the four mentioned China by name in their brief comments to reporters before the formal meeting began, but the challenges posed by Beijing throughout the Pacific and elsewhere for years have been a central theme of the US-Australia relationship.

President Donald Trump and Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese signed a critical minerals deal at the White House in October after China imposed tougher rules on exporting its own critical minerals, used in technology from cellphones to fighter jets and of which Beijing is the top producer and processor.

After Trump and Chinese leader Xi Jinping met later

that month, Beijing said it would pause those rules for a year. "We have to have critical mineral supplies and supply chains that are reliable, and that are diverse, and not overly invested in one place where they can be used as leverage against us or our partners of the world," Rubio said Monday.

One element of that is the AUKUS pact, a Biden administration-era agreement under which the US, Britain and Australia committed to building an Australian fleet of submarines powered by US nuclear technology.

Rubio is to meet later Monday with British Foreign Secretary Yvette Cooper. "The alliance has always been to ensure it delivers concrete benefits for our security and prosperity and for that of the US. And AUKUS is central to that: a win for Australia, a win for the US and a win for the United Kingdom," Wong said.

China positive on Putin's India visit; calls for stronger trilateral cooperation

PRESS TRUST OF IDNIA ■ Beijing

China on Monday reacted positively to Russian President Vladimir Putin's visit to India, framing the three countries as an important part of the Global South and saying that sound trilateral ties are conducive to regional and global peace and stability, besides their own national interests.

"China, Russia and India are emerging economies and important members of the Global South," Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Guo Jiakun told a media briefing here, reacting for the first time to Putin's high-profile visit to New Delhi last week and his interactions with Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

Guo said that the "three countries maintaining sound relations is not only in line with their own interests but also conducive to regional



and global peace, security, stability and prosperity".

Putin's visit was watched here closely, considering Beijing's close and strong ties with Moscow.

Responding to a question about Putin's comments about New Delhi and Beijing ahead of his visit, Guo said that "China stands ready to work with Russia and India to continue advancing the bilateral relations".

In an interview ahead of his visit, Putin had said, "India and

China are our closest friends – we treasure that relationship deeply."

On India-China relations – currently on a path of normalisation after the Eastern Ladakh confrontation, which resulted in a freeze in ties from 2020 until last year – Guo said China wants to promote sustained and strong ties with New Delhi with a long-term perspective.

"On China-India ties, China stands ready to work with India to view and handle the

bilateral relationship from a strategic height and long-term perspective, promote the sustained, sound and steady development of China-India ties, so as to better benefit the two countries and two peoples and make due contributions to peace and prosperity in Asia and beyond," he said.

Besides terming New Delhi and Beijing as close friends of Moscow, Putin, in the interview with an Indian news channel, also expressed confidence that the leaderships of India and China are committed to finding solutions to their issues, and Russia has no right to interfere in their bilateral affairs.

Chinese official media highlighted Putin's comments on India-China relations.

The state-run Xinhua news agency carried his remarks refuting US accusations over India's purchases of Russian oil.

Corio Deepwater Port: India's strategic gateway to South America



JAVIER PAULINICH

As India accelerates its global economic expansion, the need for diversified and resilient supply chains has become central to long-term national planning. With nearly 90 per cent of global trade dependent on maritime routes, India's future industrial growth, food security, and energy transition hinge on access to strategic ports around the world.

In this context, the Corio Deepwater Port in southern Peru emerges as a rare geoeconomic opportunity-an asset capable of shaping India's commercial and strategic trajectory for the next 30 to 50 years.

Its 28-metre natural depth and scalable capacity of over 100 million tonnes position it as one of the deepest and most future-ready ports on the Pacific

coast of South America, offering India an unprecedented gateway into a resource-rich continent.

Peru's importance to India is rooted in both mineral security and agricultural diversification. As the world's third-largest copper producer, Peru holds the key to India's rising demand for critical minerals essential for renewable energy, electric mobility, data centers, and advanced electronics.

With India projected to import more than 90 per cent of its copper needs by 2047, securing steady access to Peru's southern mining corridor becomes strategically indispensable. At the same time, Peru's \$24 billion agricultural transformation has positioned it as a global powerhouse for high-value agro-exports such as avocados, blueberries, quinoa, grapes, and specialty grains.

By 2040, Peru's agro-exports are expected to triple to \$40 billion, creating new avenues for India to diversify food imports and build integrated cold-chain and logistics networks.

What makes Corio uniquely valuable is its ability to serve as a continental gateway. The port connects India not



only to Peru but to four additional South American economies-Bolivia, Brazil, Argentina, and Chile-each with substantial reserves of minerals, lithium, agricultural commodities, and industrial products.

This single-entry platform allows Indian companies to access the broader Andean, Amazonian, and Southern Cone

markets through interconnected overland routes. For example, Bolivia and Argentina provide strategic lithium access, Brazil's western states offer soy and protein exports, and northern Chile adds further copper and mineral capacity. Corio thus becomes India's multi-country springboard into South America.

A dedicated Corio-Visakhapatnam

(Vizag) maritime axis can further transform trade flows between India and South America. Vizag, one of India's leading deepwater ports, is already a major industrial and export hub on the eastern coast.

A direct corridor linking Vizag with Corio would create predictable, high-volume trade routes for copper, lithium, grains, and fresh produce outbound from South America, while enabling inbound shipments of Indian pharmaceuticals, fertilizers, heavy machinery, engineering goods, and digital infrastructure solutions. Such balanced cargo flows reduce empty return voyages and improve shipping economics, making the corridor attractive for private investment, Indian shipping lines, and long-term logistics planning.

Realising this opportunity requires proactive strategy. India should consider forming a public-private investment consortium, initiating government-level engagement with Peru, and commissioning an Indian-led pre-feasibility and ESG baseline study tailored to India's long-term needs.

Aligning Corio with India's critical

mineral plan and maritime strategy would ensure sustained national benefits. Ultimately, Corio is far more than a port-it is a strategic bridge to South America's natural resources, agricultural strength, and industrial potential.

For long-term investors, it represents a rare infrastructure platform capable of delivering commercial viability, supply-chain resilience, and geopolitical value for decades to come.

The Corio Deepwater Port is a rare, next-generation infrastructure asset. Situated in Peru's Arequipa region, it offers a natural depth of 28 metres-among the deepest on South America's Pacific coast-making it capable of accommodating Very Large Bulk Carriers (VLBCs). This depth, coupled with a scalable capacity exceeding 100 million tonnes per year, positions Corio as a long-term maritime platform that can evolve in tandem with India's expanding industrial and logistical requirements.

This article has been written by Amb. Javier Paulinich, the Ambassador of the Republic of Peru, presently stationed in New Delhi.

PROSPECT



Nandil Biswa Sarma from Assam participates in the 'Ironman 70.3' in Bahrain. Nandil is son of Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma

15 CRORE PM JAN DHAN ACCOUNTS ARE INOPERATIVE



As many as 15 crore, or 26 per cent of the total 57.07 crore Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana (PMJDY) accounts, are inoperative, Minister of State for Finance Pankaj Chaudhary said on Monday. "The data regarding number of inoperative accounts vis-a-vis women, rural and semi-urban areas that are closed under the Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana (PMJDY), is not centrally maintained. However, there are about 15.09 crore inoperative PMJDY accounts out of the total 57.07 crore PMJDY accounts in the country," he said in a written reply in the Lok Sabha.

Replying to another question, Chaudhary said as on September 30, 2025, banks have a total of 7.81 crore KCC accounts with an outstanding amount of ₹10.39 lakh crore, of which public sector banks (PSBs) have a total of 2.22 crore KCC accounts with an outstanding amount of ₹4.19 lakh crore.

Under Stand-up India Scheme, he said, banks have sanctioned 2.75 lakh loans amounting to ₹62,791 crore, of which PSBs have sanctioned 2.28 lakh loans amounting to ₹51,191 crore.

Further, under Pradhan Mantri Mudra Yojana, banks have disbursed ₹2.54 lakh crore till October, 2025 during the current FY 2025-26, out of which PSBs have disbursed ₹1.03 lakh crore.

Replying to another question, he said the International Monetary Fund (IMF) report on 'Growing Retail Digital Payments (The Value of Interoperability)' dated June 2025 had recognised Unified Payments Interface (UPI) as the world's largest retail fast-payment system (FPS) by transaction volume.

Further, as per ACI Worldwide report on 'Prime Time for Real-Time' 2024, UPI has around 49 per cent share in the global real-time payment system transaction volume.

PSU banks write off ₹6.15 lakh cr over 5.5 years

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

Public sector banks have written off loans worth ₹6.15 lakh crore in the last five and a half years, Parliament was informed on Monday. "As per Reserve Bank of India (RBI) data, PSBs have written-off an aggregate loan amount of ₹6,15,647 crore, during the last five financial years and the current financial year till September 30, 2025 (provisional data)," Minister of State for Finance Pankaj Chaudhary said in a written reply in the Lok Sabha.

There has been no capital infusion in Public Sector Banks (PSBs) by the Government since FY2022-23, he said, adding, PSBs have significantly improved their financial performance,

turning profitable and strengthening their capital position. PSBs now rely on market sources and internal accruals to meet their capital requirements and they have raised ₹1.79 lakh crore capital from market through equity and bonds since April 1, 2022 till September 30, 2025, he said.

He further said, banks write-off NPAs, including those in respect of which full provisioning has been made on completion of four years, as per RBI guidelines and policy approved by banks' board. Such write-off does not result in waiver of liabilities of borrowers to repay, he said. Further, he said, recovery in written-off loans is an ongoing process and banks continue pursuing their recovery actions initiat-



ed against borrowers under the various recovery mechanism available to them, such as filing of a suit in civil courts or in Debts Recovery Tribunals (DRT), action under the Securitisation and Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest (SARFAESI)

Act 2002, filing of cases in the National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT) under the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code, 2016 etc.

As provisioning for bad loans has already been done and the write-off process does not entail any actual cash outflow, the bank's liq-

uidity position remains intact, he said. Moreover, banks evaluate/consider the impact of write-offs as part of their regular exercise to clean up their balance-sheet, avail tax benefit, optimise capital base, enhance lending capacity and boost investor sentiments, he added. Replying to

another question, Chaudhary said, banks and financial Institutions have traditionally been the primary source of export finance in India. The total export credit disbursed by Public Sector Banks, SIDBI and Exim Bank in the last five years (FY 20-21 to FY 24-25) stood at ₹21.71 lakh crore, he said.

In another reply, Chaudhary said, 5,83,291 fraud cases were registered in the last four and a half years till September 2025 amounting to ₹3,588.22 crore. Of this, he said, ₹238.83 crore have been recovered.

With increasing digital payment transactions in the country, incidence of cyber frauds including digital payment frauds have also gone up in the last few years, he said.

Attorney General inaugurates State-of-the-art Club House in Noida

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Noida

The newly constructed Club House-cum-Community Centre at Heart Beat City, Sector-107, Noida, was inaugurated on Monday, marking a significant step in delivering fully serviced residential ecosystems to the residents. The facility was officially opened by the Chief Guest, R. Venkataramani, Attorney General for India and Learned Court Receiver for Amrapali projects.

He was present alongside Ravi Bhatia and DK Mishra, Court Committee Members, KP Mahadevaswamy, CMD, NBCC and Dr Suman Kumar, Director

(Commercial), NBCC, as well as officer bearers of the Apartment Owner's Association and residents.

The Club House stands as a testament to NBCC's (National Buildings Construction Corporation) commitment to completing and upgrading amenities for the erstwhile Amrapali projects, which it took over under the guidance of the Learned Court Receiver and Committee members. NBCC has successfully completed all residential units in Heart Beat City.

Spread across 5,200 square metres of built-up area, the Club House is a ground plus two-storey structure equipped with three lifts. It is designed to be a vibrant social



Dignitaries present during the inauguration of Club House-cum-Community Centre at Heart Beat City, Sector-107, Noida

and recreational hub, offering a comprehensive suite of amenities to enhance the residents' living experience.



Under the divine presence of Pujya Dwarkeshlalji Maharajshree and the esteemed inauguration by Home Minister Amit Shah, the iconic Narsinh Mehta Lake (Vasturpur Lake) begins a new chapter of cultural pride and devotion where heritage meets harmony and Bhakti meets Bharat

RInfra setting up integrated solar manufacturing ecosystem

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

Anil Ambani-led Reliance Group on Monday said its arm Reliance Infrastructure is setting up one of India's most advanced, fully integrated solar manufacturing ecosystems spanning ingots, wafers, cells and modules.

According to an investors presentation of Reliance Infrastructure, the manufacturing facility will have next-gen technology.

The facility will bridge large demand-supply gap as India will need 55-60 GW of solar modules annually by 2030, while upstream capacity remains significantly short.

It will be a high-value, vertically integrated platform

to reduce import dependence and strengthen India's clean energy security. It is establishing an end-to-end battery manufacturing ecosystem covering cell manufacturing, pack assembly and grid-scale containerised BESS (battery energy storage system)

As per the presentation, India's installed stationary storage base is less than 1 GWh today and will rise to 250 GWh by 2032. Domestic manufacturing currently meets less than 10 per cent of expected demand.

Reliance Group's another firm Reliance Power said in its investor presentation that Reliance NU Energies is powering the shift from plain-vanilla solar to hybrid and firm, round-the-clock (RTC) renewable energy.



Assam Govt to hand over 992 acres to AAI for Silchar greenfield airport

TONY DAS ■ Guwahati

The Assam Government decided to hand over 3,000 bighas (nearly 992 acres) of land at Doloo Tea Estate in Cachar district to the Airports Authority of India (AAI) for the construction of a greenfield airport, Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said. Addressing a press conference after a cabinet meeting on Sunday, Sarma said the panel approved an increase of 500 bighas from the earlier decision to allocate 2,500 bighas (826.45 acres) for the proposed airport near Silchar.

"The cabinet approved the transfer of 3,000 bighas at Doloo Tea Estate in Silchar to the AAI for the construction of a greenfield airport," Sarma said, adding that the decision will pave the way for obtaining the Union Cabinet's nod for the project. The State Government had proposed a new airport in Silchar spread over 2,500 bighas as the existing facility at Kumbhirgram is a defence airport and expansion of the facility to



Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma addressing media after Cabinet meeting

accommodate the increasing demands of air traffic is not possible.

In November 2022, the Assam Government had distributed financial assistance to 1,296

families living at Doloo Tea Estate "as a goodwill gesture". Earlier that year, a controversy had arisen over the State Government's efforts to acquire land for setting a greenfield airport with the then Civil Aviation Minister Jyotiraditya Scindia claiming that no such proposal was received for the facility from the BJP-led State. It was later clarified that the land was being acquired at AAI's request.

Because of the confusion, land acquisition at the tea eState for the airport had led to protests by the garden workers, but the Government assured that no worker would be evicted from their homes and there would be no job loss.

The State Government had previously announced a compensation of ₹50 crore for the acquisition of land at Doloo, Lalbagh and Mainagarh tea gardens for setting up the greenfield airport.

Talking about other cabinet decisions, the CM said the Government has approved allotment of land to 1,200 families under flagship

scheme Mission Basundhara. The cabinet also approved a joint project to be set up at State-run Assam Engineering College and Dassault Systems India Pvt Ltd.

"The project, to be established over 5,000 sq ft at a cost of ₹243 crore, will offer courses related to aerospace and defence, automotive and electric vehicles," Sarma said. Of the total cost, the Assam Government will contribute ₹43 crore, while Dassault Systems will invest Rs 200 crore, he added.

Sarma further said the cabinet granted administrative approval for the construction of Assam's second Sainik School at Longvaku in Karbi Anglong district.

"The school will be built at a cost of ₹335 crore, of which 80 per cent will be borne by the Ministry of Defence and the remaining 20 per cent by the Assam Government," he added. Besides, the cabinet approved compensation to 884 families for land acquired during the construction of the four-lane National Highway in Dima Hasao district.

Trident Group to invest ₹1500 Crore in modernising sustainable paper manufacturing and terry towel production in Punjab

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

Trident Group, one of India's leading agro-based and environmentally responsible paper manufacturers, has announced a ₹1500-crore investment to upgrade its sustainable paper operations and Terry Towel production at its Punjab unit. The move strengthens the company's commitment to eco-friendly manufacturing and future-ready technologies.

The announcement follows Trident's strong presence at PaperEx 2025, where it showcased its expanded range of sustainable, wheat-straw-based paper—produced without



cutting a single tree. The company also highlighted its shift toward automation, digitalisation and circular manufacturing, aimed at improving efficiency, reducing waste and enhancing production accuracy.

Trident is further expanding its portfolio with new

copier, maplitho and notebook variants designed to meet evolving consumer and institutional needs.

Speaking on the announcement, Rajnish Kumar Gera, CEO – Paper & Chemicals, Trident Group, said: "This investment marks a new phase of transforma-

tion for Trident. It reinforces our commitment to sustainable, zero-tree paper manufacturing while accelerating our shift toward a technologically advanced, resource-efficient ecosystem. By strengthening automation and expanding our eco-smart product portfolio, we are preparing for the next generation of sustainable solutions for our customers."

With this investment and technology-driven transformation, Trident Group is poised to further strengthen its position as a leader in sustainable manufacturing, delivering high-quality, environmentally responsible products to markets in India and across the world.

Constl, Ciena achieve 1 Tbps transmission across 1,450 km long-haul network

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

Capitalising on India's burgeoning digital economy, digital infrastructure provider Constl has successfully tested and deployed a record-breaking 1 terabit per second (Tbps) line rate on a single optical channel across the 1,450 km Mumbai-Chennai route.

The breakthrough, achieved in collaboration with global networking leader Ciena, utilised Ciena's Wave Logic 6 Extreme (WL6e) solution on one of Constl's most critical corridors, without the need for regeneration. Constl is a subsidiary of the Space World Group.

This milestone makes

Constl India's first digital infrastructure provider to achieve a 1 Tbps transmission rate over a long-haul distance. The WL6e upgrade is set to significantly boost Constl's ambition to become the network of choice for hyperscalers operating in India.

The deployment effectively doubles the fibre wavelength capacity from 800 Gb/s to 1.6 Tb/s compared to its earlier WaveLogic 5 Extreme deployment, delivering a strong competitive edge by increasing capacity while simultaneously reducing cost per bit, improving spectral efficiency and lowering power consumption.

"Since inception in 2023—just two years ago—Constl

has deployed over 12,000 km of fibre and connected around 100 data centres across 13 Indian cities, powered by Ciena's industry-leading optical technology," said Ankit Goel, Chairman and Founder, Space World Group. "This milestone positions us to expand our terrestrial fibre network and deliver high capacity 800GbE services for the AI era." Constl's successful trial is also seen as a testament to the high-quality fibre infrastructure the company is laying across the country.

Amit Malik, Vice President and General Manager, Asia Pacific, Japan and India, Ciena, reinforced the partnership's focus on future-ready connectivity. "Constl is com-

mitted to developing networks tailored to hyperscaler requirements and Ciena's coherent optics are recognised as the best-in-class platform for high-capacity AI services. Together, we are driving next-generation connectivity to support India's digital future and AI ambitions."

Constl specialises in delivering advanced digital infrastructure solutions purpose-built for hyperscalers, telcos and OTT/CDN providers, operating a pan-India high-speed network.

Ciena is a global leader in high-speed connectivity, known for building adaptive networks to support exponential growth in bandwidth demand.

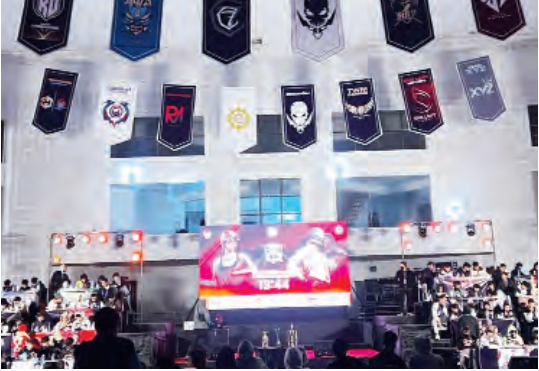
BRIEFLY

DORTMUND BEATS HOFFENHEIM 2-0 IN BUNDESLIGA



Former Tottenham defender Mauricio Taricco will resign as assistant coach of South Korean champion Jeonbuk Hyundai Motors after receiving a five-match ban for an alleged racist gesture during a K League game, the club said on Tuesday. On November 8 as Jeonbuk faced Daejeon Hana, the Argentine assistant was sent off by referee Kim Woo-seong for vehemently protesting a penalty decision. Subsequently, Taricco placed his index fingers besides the corner of his eyes – a gesture the referee interpreted as racist and reported to the league’s disciplinary committee. On November 19, the committee banned Taricco for five games and fined him 20 million won (\$13,646). The 52-year-old, who featured for Tottenham between 1998 and 2004 and also played for Ipswich Town, West Ham and Brighton in England, denied any racist intent, insisting that he was asking the official if he had seen the incident.

HORNBILL E-SPORTS FESTIVAL KICKS OFF IN KOHIMA



The Hornbill Esports Festival 2025, the second edition of Nagaland’s premier competitive gaming showcase, will feature competition in three categories including E-chess. The event that began Monday is being organised by the Esports Association of Nagaland (ESAN) in collaboration with the Department of Youth Resources and Sports. Speaking at the inaugural session, Abu Metha, advisor to the Chief Minister and Vice President of the Athletics Federation of India (AFI), said, “E-Sports is a modern-day trend and a billion-dollar industry that cannot be ignored.” He emphasised that Nagaland does not want its youth to miss opportunities in this fast-growing sector.

Napoli beat Juventus 2-1 in Serie A

ASSOCIATED PRESS
■ Milan

Luciano Spalletti’s return to the team he led to the Serie A title was spoiled by Rasmus Højlund’s brace as host Napoli beat Juventus 2-1 on Sunday. The result also lifted Napoli back to the top of the Italian league. The defending champion moved a point above Inter Milan and three points above AC Milan, which visits Torino on Monday. It was Juventus coach Spalletti’s first time at Napoli as opposition manager since he led the southern team to its first scudetto in more than 30 years in 2023. Napoli coach Antonio Conte was also facing his former team. He steered Juventus to three Serie A titles during his time in charge and also played for the Bianconeri for 13 years, winning numerous trophies. Adding to the occasion, it was the first time the two coaches had faced each



other. Napoli got off to a great start as the in-form David Neres got away down the right before rolling the ball across for Højlund to tap it in with less than seven minutes on the clock. Napoli had the better of the chances but Juventus leveled in the 59th minute as the Bianconeri went on the counterattack and Kenan Yildiz played a one-two with Weston McKennie before placing an angled drive into the far bottom corner.

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ Santiago (Chile)

Out of quarterfinal contention, India defeated Wales 3-1 to remain in the hunt for a ninth-place finish at the FIH Junior Women’s World Cup. Hina Bano (14’), Sunelita Toppo (24’), and Ishika (31’) scored for India, while Eloise Moat (52’) netted the lone goal for Wales. India had logged two wins and a loss to finish outside the top eight in the pool stage. In Sunday’s match, India began with a penalty corner in the first 30 seconds. They were playing between the lines to carve out opportunities on regular occasions, but couldn’t find the opening goal early on. Wales had the opportuni-



ty to surge ahead with a penalty stroke, but were denied by Nidhi as she made a sharp stop to keep the

scores level. India eventually managed to break the deadlock towards the end of the first

quarter, courtesy a tap-in from Hina after some neat work by Sakshi Rana. Looking to double their

advantage, India maintained the pressure with another penalty corner at the start of the second quarter. They continued to create chances regularly, and were rewarded for their persistence after Rana’s initial shot fell in the way of Sunelita, who made no mistake from close range. With 14 circle penetrations in the first half, India held a deserving 2-0 lead at the break. India extended their lead to 3-0 early in the second half as Ishika found the back of the net after a rebound from the Welsh goalkeeper fell in her way. Jyoti Singh’s side controlled the tempo of the game, stretching the Welsh defense by playing between the lines and pressing high, while remaining disciplined and

compact at the back. India continued to create chances, pushing Wales back in their own half to close out the third quarter. With the lion’s share of possession, India remained in pursuit of more goal-scoring opportunities to further increase their advantage in the final quarter. Wales had an opening on the other end and Eloise Moat (52nd) made it count, pulling one back for her side. However, that only proved to be a consolation goal as India held firm to secure a well-deserved 3-1 win. India will next play Uruguay on Tuesday and the winner of this match will progress to the ninth place showdown. The losing team will fight for the 11th spot in the overall standings.

1191 posts lying vacant in SAI: Sports minister

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ New Delhi

Sports Minister Mansukh Mandaviya on Monday acknowledged that over 1,000 posts are currently lying vacant in the Sports Authority of India (SAI), a concern that was highlighted in a recent Parliamentary Standing Committee report which had described the body as “critically” under-funded and under-staffed. The minister was responding to a question from Congress MP Adoor Prakash, who represents Kerala’s Attingal constituency, in Lok Sabha. Asked whether the government has noted the concerns raised by the Parliamentary Standing Committee over severe shortage of funds and staff in SAI, Mandaviya said, “The Government has taken note of the observations.” “A total of 1,191 posts are lying vacant in the SAI. The recruitment process of certain posts has already been initiated,” he added. In its report in August, the Parliamentary Standing Committee on sports, headed by Congress’ Rajya Sabha MP Digvijaya Singh, observed that about 45 per cent of sanctioned posts in the SAI are



Union Minister Mansukh Mandaviya speaks in the Lok Sabha during the Winter session of Parliament in New Delhi

presently vacant. “The fact that these short-falls in staff are being managed through contractual appointment may at best be only an ad hoc arrangement,” it had pointed out. The Committee, which also includes cricketer and AAP Rajya Sabha MP Harbhajan Singh, and BJP MPs Sambit Patra and Bansuri Swaraj, among others, expressed “grave” concern over the shortage of staff and low funding of SAI. The panel “heard the views” of Sports Secretary, and SAI representatives in its meeting held on June 6 this year. It commended the recruit-

ment drive to fill up these vacancies but asked the Sports Ministry to complete the process in the next six months and “furnish an Action Taken Report (ATR).” In its annual budget this year, the government allocated ₹3,794 crore to the Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports. Of this ₹830 crore were earmarked for SAI. “The budget allocation to SAI is based on the proposals submitted by them for the respective financial year. Any additional requirements that arise during the year are examined at the RE stage and, where appropriate, consid-

THE GOVERNMENT ALLOCATED ₹3,794 CRORE TO THE MINISTRY OF YOUTH AFFAIRS AND SPORTS. OF THIS ₹830 CRORE WERE EARMARKED FOR SAI

ered through supplementary grants,” the minister stated in Lok Sabha.

Dealing with sexual harassment

To another question on whether the government has a consolidated record of sexual harassment complaints filed by sportspersons, the minister reiterated that no such dedicated database exists. He, however, listed the measures that have been in place to “ensure a safe and positive environment.”

“In order to provide a safe environment in sports, the SAI also runs a 24x7 helpline for the players,” he said.

In addition, National Sports Federations have been told to mandatorily have women coaches in contingents that feature female athletes during camps and competition exposures. They have also been asked to increase the strength of women Coaches and Support Staff in camps.

Santos stuns Cruzeiro

ASSOCIATED PRESS
■ Sao Paulo

Neymar’s Santos secured its survival in Brazil’s Serie A on Sunday with a 3-0 win over Cruzeiro, and the 33-year-old soccer star later confirmed he will undergo surgery on his left knee. Playing its last league match of the season, Santos — which achieved a global following with all-time great Pelé — avoided what would have been the club’s second relegation in its history. Santos was relegated in 2023 for the first time almost a year after the death of Pelé.

Neymar struggled to recover from a torn ACL in October 2023 during a World Cup qualifier against Uruguay. But he proved key for Santos in its successful fight to avoid relegation in the Brazilian championship after its promotion last year.

Neymar, who returned to Santos in January, was decisive for the club where he started his professional career. In the last three rounds of the league, Neymar scored a goal against Sport Recife in a 3-0 win, netted a hat trick against Juventude on Wednesday in another 3-0 victory, and on Sunday was an effective playmaker.

NEYMAR, WHO RETURNED TO SANTOS IN JANUARY, WAS DECISIVE FOR THE CLUB WHERE HE STARTED HIS PROFESSIONAL CAREER

Thaciano (26th and 28th minutes) and João Schmidt (60th) scored against Cruzeiro at Vila Belmiro Stadium as Santos finished 12th with 47 points. Neymar played only 19 of the 38 rounds of the league, which started in April. He scored eight goals.

“I came for this, to try to help the best way I can. These have been tough weeks for me,” Neymar said after the game. “I thank those who were with me to lift me up. If it weren’t for them, I wouldn’t have played these matches because of these injuries, this knee problem. I need to rest and then we will have this knee surgery.” Neymar did not give more details about the knee injury and surgery. He still hopes to be included in Brazil’s final squad for the 2026 World Cup, though coach Carlo Ancelotti is yet to pick the former captain since he took over in May.

La Liga: Real Madrid lose 2-0 to Celta Vigo

ASSOCIATED PRESS
■ Madrid

Real Madrid had two players sent off in its 2-0 home defeat to Celta Vigo on Sunday and lost more ground to Spanish league leader Barcelona. Madrid conceded early in the second half and then saw red cards for Fran Garcia and Alvaro Carreras in its first defeat of the season at the Santiago Bernabeu stadium in all competitions. Unused Madrid substitute Endrick also was shown a red card for complaining. Williot Swedberg scored for the visitors with a nice flick from near the penalty spot in the 54th. Madrid lost Garcia with a second yellow card in the 64th and Carreras in stoppage time. Swedberg sealed Celta’s victory in a break-away shortly after Madrid was reduced to nine players. “We are all upset. It wasn’t the game or the result that we wanted,” Madrid coach



Xabi Alonso said. “The referee’s decisions threw us off balance. I didn’t like the refereeing.” Madrid has won only two of its last seven matches across all tournaments. It next hosts Manchester City in the Champions League on Wednesday. Madrid’s only other league loss this season was a heavy defeat at Atletico Madrid in September. It also lost at Liverpool in the league phase

of the Champions League in November. Sunday’s setback left Alonso’s team four points behind Barcelona. The Catalan club won 5-3 at Real Betis on Saturday. Madrid is only one point ahead of third-placed Villarreal, which has a game in hand. Vinicius Júnior and Kylian Mbappé both had good chances to equalize for Madrid but couldn’t capitalize on their opportunities.

Madrid defender Éder Militão had to leave the game in the first half because of an injury. Celta moved to 10th place with its second win in three league games. Goalkeeping mistakes Girona goalkeeper Paulo Gazzaniga had an afternoon to forget in Girona’s 3-0 loss to Elche at home. The Argentine goalkeeper’s mistakes led to two Elche goals, including one after he passed the ball straight to an opponent inside the area while trying to send it to a defender. Earlier, he had failed to make a routine save on an angled shot by the near post. Gazzaniga also had a nightmare game in Girona’s opening league match, when his blunders led to a goal and a penalty and his ejection in a 3-1 loss to Rayo Vallecano. Girona, sitting inside the relegation zone in 18th place, has only one win in its last six games in all competitions.

Nice fans boo team during 7th loss

ASSOCIATED PRESS
■ Nice (France)

Nice was booed on the field a week after its players were attacked by supporters. The French team’s crisis on and off the pitch deepened as it lost 1-0 at home to Angers in Ligue 1 on Sunday for a seventh straight loss across all competitions. After last week’s defeat at Lorient, Nice players were confronted by a large number of their supporters when they returned to the club’s training and academy centre. Players and staff were reportedly assaulted and fans shouted insults and demanded greater commitment from the squad. Jérémie Boga and Terem Moffi took multiple blows,

including to the head and groin. Those two players were absent against Angers and their teammates took the field with the names of either Boga or Moffi on the backs of their jerseys instead of their own. The jeers rang out right from the start. Yassin Belkhdim scored for Angers in the 33rd minute and Nice’s hopes of ending its losing streak diminished early in the second half when Tom Louchet was sent off for a foul on Jacques Ekomié. Surprise win Lorient upset fifth-placed Lyon 1-0 to move up to 13th. Lyon had to play the entire second half with 10 men after Ainsley Maitland-Niles was sent off in the 42nd minute following two quick yellow cards.

Lorient had taken the lead three minutes before the dismissal with a goal from Pablo Pagis. Off the bottom Auxerre moved off the bottom of the table with a 3-1 win over Metz, which took its opponent’s spot. The result ended a nine-match winless run for Auxerre. Lassine Sinayoko’s penalty and a goal by Oussama El-Azzouzi three minutes later put Auxerre 2-0 ahead before Gauthier Hein halved the deficit on the stroke of halftime. But Kevin Danois scored his first Ligue 1 goal late on to secure the win. Le Havre forward Issa Soumaré failed to convert a penalty as another relegation fight, against Paris FC, ended in a 0-0 draw.

ASSOCIATED PRESS
■ Abu Dhabi

Say goodbye to DRS, and hello to a battery power boost. Sunday’s Abu Dhabi Grand Prix marked the last time Formula 1 uses the Drag Reduction System overtaking aid, introduced in 2011. Next year, drivers will have to manage the car’s systems more closely than ever with a more visible role for aerodynamic and electrical technology. After a season-long title battle ended with Lando Norris’ first title, here’s what to expect in 2026: Smaller, lighter, more electric The biggest regulation changes in years make cars shorter, narrower and lighter, with movable “active aerodynamics” — X-mode for straight-line speed, Z-mode



for cornering — and more reliance on electric hybrid power. The FIA’s target was for electrical power to make up half of total output along with a traditional V6 turbo engine. Instead of DRS, drivers can deploy extra electrical power at key moments. That makes driving even

more strategic but could lead to drivers lifting off the power and coasting on some straights to allow the electrical systems to harvest energy. The FIA claims the rules emphasize driver skill but there have been mixed reviews from those who’ve tried 2026 designs in their teams’ simulators.

Smaller, more agile cars could help overtaking but the fastest and slowest cars may be up to four seconds per lap apart on pace, tire supplier Pirelli has reported. In F1 terms, that’s an eternity. Expect to see more engine failures as teams balance reliability with performance. Mercedes, Aston Martin aim for more. Could this be the year Lewis Hamilton finds his form again at Ferrari and chases an eighth title? Maybe not. Even though he never got on with the 2022-25 cars, Hamilton told the BBC he was “not looking forward” to 2026 after the Las Vegas Grand Prix last month, yet another disappointment since he joined Ferrari. Mercedes has designed some of F1’s most dominant engines before, but its eye-

catching “zero-pod” aerodynamic concept was a bust when the last regulation period began in 2022. Get both aspects right this time and George Russell could be a title contender after two wins in 2025. Another team to watch is Aston Martin, which has its first car created with design great Adrian Newey in charge, and is hoping it can make two-time champion Fernando Alonso an F1 race winner for the first time in 13 years. Williams too could make a step forward after abandoning its 2025 projects early to focus on 2026. New Cadillac team, old faces The F1 grid expands to 22 cars for the first time since 2016 as Cadillac becomes the 11th team with backing from General Motors.

India begin official T20I WC build-up against South Africa

TAPAN MOHANTA
■ Cuttack

The return of Shubman Gill and Hardik Pandya will lend fresh sheen and much-needed completeness to reigning world champions India when they begin their official march towards the home T20 World Cup with the opening match of a five-game series against South Africa on Tuesday.

This series marks the start of India's formal build-up to the February showpiece, where they will play 10 T20Is — five against South Africa followed by another five against New Zealand — before opening their title defence against the USA at the Wankhede on February 7.

The defending champions will look to enter this phase with clarity of intent as they refine roles, streamline combinations and settle the XI that will carry the weight of expectations in front of home crowds.

India have been a formidable T20I unit post their World Cup triumph in the format last year, where they won eight matches in a row to lift the title.

Since then, they have extended their tally to 26 wins with only four losses, including a seven-match streak during their Asia Cup victory in Dubai.

They have not lost a T20I series in this period, and with only minor tweaks needed, they will be hoping to sharpen the edges against the side they defeated in the T20 World Cup final.

Gill's return comes after he



India's Shubman Gill during a practice session on the eve of the first T20 cricket match of a series between India and South Africa at Barabati Stadium in Cuttack, Odisha

missed almost a month of cricket owing to a neck spasm suffered while attempting a slog sweep during the opening Test against the Proteas.

Having played non-stop cricket since the last IPL and with India facing a packed season ahead, his workload management will be closely monitored.

But for Gill, who has 837 runs from 33 T20Is at an average of 29.89, this series also doubles up as vital preparation heading into the ICC event.

His reunion with Abhishek Sharma brings back a high-impact opening pair that marries brute force with clean, classical strokeplay.

Abhishek, fresh from a

standout tour of Australia where he topped India's scoring charts with 163 runs in the 2-1 victory, has been in monstrous domestic touch.

In the Syed Mushtaq Ali T20s, the Punjab left-hander hammered 304 runs at an average of 50.66 and a staggering strike rate of 249-plus, including a breathtaking 52-ball 148 against Bengal

as Punjab posted 310/5.

Hardik Pandya's comeback is equally significant.

Out for more than two months after a quadricep injury during the Asia Cup, the all-rounder marked his return in style with a 42-ball 77 not out for Baroda in the SMAT before bowling four overs at full tilt for 1/52.

He arrived here a day



ahead of the squad, trained solo at the Barabati Stadium, bowled for 20 minutes and went through an extended physical routine.

His presence not only deepens India's batting but restores the balance of a bowling attack built heavily on flexibility. One of the central conversations ahead of the series has been skipper Suryakumar Yadav's prolonged lean patch.

The contrast between his dazzling IPL 2025, where he amassed 717 runs for Mumbai Indians, and his underwhelming T20I returns have been striking.

Since taking over as full-time T20I captain in July last year, his form has dipped to an average of 15.33 with 184 runs in 15 innings, he has not scored a fifty in the last 20 games, and his strike rate has reduced to 127.77 from

the 187-plus he clocked in 2022. Even in the SMAT this season, he failed to reach a fifty, scoring 165 runs from five matches. Any drastic move before the World Cup looks unlikely, but the next 10 T20Is will add fodder to conversations surrounding both his form and captaincy.

The wicketkeeper-batter debate — Sanju Samson or Jitesh Sharma — remains equally tantalising.

India's handling of the pair during the Australia series raised eyebrows, with Samson batting only once, promoted to No. 3, before Jitesh was backed for the last three T20Is.

Since India's World Cup triumph, Samson has been the team's third-highest run-getter, flourishing as an opener with three centuries, including two in South Africa. But Gill's

return as vice-captain pushed Samson down the order into a role he rarely occupies in T20 cricket. In the recent SMAT, Samson looked in excellent touch with two fifties, two 40s and a 56-ball 73 not out against Andhra, while Jitesh managed modest returns for Baroda with a top score of 41 from six outings.

South Africa, for their part, welcome back tear-away pacer Anrich Nortje for his first international appearance since last year's T20 World Cup final.Marco Jansen's evolution as a genuine all-rounder adds heft to the visitors; his blistering 93 in the Guwahati Test and 70 off 39 balls in Ranchi underscored a renewed authority with the bat to go with his established potency with the ball.

Teams (from):

India: Suryakumar Yadav (c), Shubman Gill (vc), Abhishek Sharma, Tilak Varma, Sanju Samson (wk), Jitesh Sharma (wk), Hardik Pandya, Axar Patel, Shivam Dube, Washington Sundar, Jasprit Bumrah, Arshdeep Singh, Harshit Rana, Kuldeep Yadav and Varun Chakravorthy.

South Africa: Aiden Markram (captain), Ottineil Baartman, Corbin Bosch, Dewald Brevis, Quinton de Kock, Tony de Zorzi, Donovan Ferreria, Reeza Hendricks, Marco Jansen, George Linde, Keshav Maharaj, Kwena Maphaka, David Miller, Lungi Ngidi, Anrich Nortje, Tristan Stubbs.

(PTI)

No major changes in T20 squad before World Cup: Skipper Salman

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ Karachi

Pakistan's T20 skipper Salman Ali Agha has ruled out any major changes in his squad for the Men's T20 World Cup next year, saying the side has shown a marked improvement after the players were given specific roles in recent months.

Pakistan, who had made big changes to its side following the Asia Cup final defeat to India earlier this year, bringing in Abdul Samad, Babar Azam, Usman Khan and Naseem Shah, defeated South Africa at home in a three-match T20I series and then won the Tri-series, also involving Zimbabwe and Sri Lanka, last month.

"In my personal opinion, I don't see any major



changes in the national T20 squad before the World Cup," Salman said on a Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) podcast.

"I think the current combination we have will be the one we will have in the World Cup. Every player had been given a specific role in

recent months and with that the team had moved forward," he added.

Pakistan are scheduled to play six T20 games before the World Cup, scheduled to be co-hosted by India and Sri Lanka from February 7 till March 8 next year, and Salman said the limited number of matches will make it difficult to make major changes.

"We have six T20 matches to play before the World Cup and I don't think we can make any big changes now in these remaining matches. We have to show consistency and move forward with the current combination," he said.

Experienced allrounder Shadab Khan, who was the vice-captain of the side before he got injured in May and underwent a shoulder

surgery in London, is now rehabilitated and is set to make a comeback in the Big Bash in Australia.

Salman said the "doors were not closed" for Shadab to return to the side for the T20 World Cup as he was a very experienced player.

Salman said his dream was to not just win the T20 World Cup but also the 50-over showpiece in 2027.

He said, playing a short series in Sri Lanka next month would be extremely beneficial for his players as they will play all their T20 World Cup games in the island nation.

Hardik gives us lot of options: Suryakumar

TAPAN MOHANTA
■ Cuttack

India captain Suryakumar Yadav believes Hardik Pandya's return will restore the tactical depth and balance that shaped the team's Asia Cup surge when the world champions take on South Africa in a five-match T20I series starting here on Tuesday.

The ace India seam-bowling all-rounder, who sustained a left quadriceps injury and missed the Asia Cup final, is fully fit and in fine form after making his comeback in the Syed Mushtaq Ali Trophy.

His timely return ahead of next year's T20 World Cup has brought back the much-needed flexibility and balance, with his new-ball spells offering India the cushion to field three, even four spinners.

"I think what you saw in the Asia Cup also, when he was bowling the new ball, he opened a lot of options, lot of combinations for us with respect to playing XI," Suryakumar said on the eve of the series-opening T20I.

"That's what he brings to the table. His experience, the way he has done really well in all the matches, all good games also, all bigger games in ICC events.

"I think that experience will count a lot. His presence will definitely give a good balance to the side."

Incidentally, Pandya, who landed a day early in



Cuttack and trained solo at Barabati Stadium, skipped the optional session on Monday, but the skipper confirmed that both he and Shubman Gill — returning from a neck spasm — are available.

"Right now, both of them look healthy and fit," he said. For India, this series is the start of a 10-match run into the home T20 World Cup in February, but Suryakumar said the groundwork was laid long back. "Our 2026 T20 World Cup preparation began right after we won the T20 World Cup in 2024... Our preparation is similar. The preparation started after the T20

World Cup 2024 got over. Since then, we have been trying new things and everything is working for us."

He underlined that India's recent success stems from consistency of selection.

"I feel in the last 5-6 series which we have played, we have tried and played with a similar combination. We have not changed too much... Everything is going well. We wanted to continue the same way."

On the conversation around Sanju Samson and Jitesh Sharma, Suryakumar reiterated that flexibility is key. "In terms of Sanju, yes, when he came into the circuit, he batted higher up

the order. Now, the thing is, other than the openers, I feel everyone has to be very flexible. He was ready to bat at any number." He insisted India will not indulge in needless tinkering. (PTI)

"We won't be changing a lot of combinations. We won't be trying too many things because things are going really well. So, we want to stick to the process..."

Asked whether Rinku Singh is still in the scheme of things, with the rise of Shivam Dube, Suryakumar said: "Dube is an all-rounder. So, him and Hardik are the all-rounders. So, you can't compare an all-rounder.

"The thing is all the batters from 3 to 7 are capable of batting at any position."

On the series, Suryakumar kept the goals simple.

"The plan for the series is to play good cricket... There are some things that we are doing right. So, why should we change that?"

Barabati's red-soil pitch will be used for the first time, Suryakumar said he hasn't inspected it yet.

"...But we will see. If it is fast, then it is a good thing."

Asked about the dew and whether the toss could again be decisive, Suryakumar grinned as he recalled KL Rahul's quirky change of fortune with a left-handed flip that finally snapped India's run of 20 consecutive lost tosses in ODIs.

सीडैक
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