

Doctors warn of respiratory risks as pollution levels rise

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Dehradun

Doctors in Dehradun have advised individuals to take precautions to prevent respiratory issues which may increase due to the unhealthy Air Quality Index (AQI) levels. It is noteworthy that in recent days, Dehradun's AQI levels have reached 164, 201, 172 and 173 and other similar readings, considered moderate to unhealthy. Given this, doctors have highlighted that the affected AQI can lead to respiratory problems, including breathing difficulties and other related issues.

The principal medical superintendent at the Deen Dayal Upadhyay District Hospital, Dr Manu Jain informed that there has been no increase in cases related to affected air quality index (AQI) levels in the hospital's outpatient department. In the same breath, he, however, said that a mod-

erate to unhealthy AQI has been observed in recent days and this might lead to a surge in respiratory issues. "Poor air quality can exacerbate breathing difficulties, increase the risk of heart attacks and contribute to other health problems. Vulnerable sections, particularly the elderly and children, are more susceptible to infections as a result," he warned. To mitigate these risks, Jain advised individuals, especially those in the aforementioned age groups, to take precautions such as limiting unnecessary outings, wearing masks and staying properly hydrated. "During the winter months, the AQI levels get affected because pollution in the atmosphere is not cleared by rain. With a moderate to unhealthy AQI, an increase in respiratory issues used to be observed among children.

During this time, many children experienced difficulty breathing, asthma and other related problems," said a paediatrician at Shri Mahant Indresh Hospital, Dr Vishal Kaushik. He said that he usually encounters these cases during this season. To help prevent such issues in children, parents are advised to ensure their children wear masks, use air purifiers at home, limit indoor activities and encourage increased fluid intake, he added. Speaking of the same matter, a senior physician at Combined Medical Institute (CMI) Hospital, Dr Anshika Jain said that due to the deteriorating air quality index (AQI) in Dehradun, she has been currently observing a rise in respiratory issues in OPD. Alongside this, cases of allergies have also increased, she said.

Project 101: Boosting sugarcane productivity and rural livelihoods

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Dehradun

Sugarcane farming in Uttar Pradesh has long relied on traditional, multi-generational practices like multi-bud seed sets, narrow row spacing and heavy urea application. While once effective, these methods now contribute to declining productivity, higher susceptibility to pests and disease and stagnating yields. In this sce-

simple, accessible interventions like trench planting, balanced nutrient management and integrated pest management could dramatically change yield and income. But most farmers lacked the knowledge, material support and technological access required to adopt it. That gap stayed with me," he said.



nario, 18-year-old Winchester College student Yash Sawhney stepped in with an idea few would expect from someone his age. In 2023, he founded Project 101 (Ek Sau Ek) to strengthen sugarcane productivity and socio-economic resilience across rural communities in Bulandshahr. What began as a small initiative with 100 farmers across 26 villages has since expanded to 1,000 farmers in 45 villages, reflecting growing trust, demonstrable results and rising demand for science-backed farming support.

The idea for this initiative took shape earlier during Sawhney's research project, 'Agricultural Interventions in Sub-Tropical India for Optimised Sugar Cane Cultivation & Farmer Empowerment: A Case Study'. "During my extensive fieldwork in Bulandshahr, I noticed that very

He created Project 101 to bring practical, affordable, scientifically grounded solutions directly to farmers while respecting and preserving indigenous agricultural wisdom.

At its core, the initiative is equipping farmers with techniques that improve crop performance and reduce costs while enabling sustainable, climate-resilient agriculture. Through hands-on training, farmers are introduced to trench planting with 4-foot row spacing, which encourages better tillering and also creates space for intercropping pulses and vegetables, creating an extra source of income. Furrow irrigation has reduced water usage by approximately 30 per cent, while bio-compost and mulching have improved soil organic carbon and reduced crop-residue burning.

"Across our project plots, we have seen clear and consistent

gains. Single-bud planting has led to nearly 30-70 per cent savings in seed material, while germination rates have improved from about 40 per cent in control plots to 70-76 per cent, resulting in an 8-15 per cent increase in millable cane count. Crops in project fields were 11-23 per cent taller and 5-9 per cent thicker in girth, with farmers reporting stronger tillering, better cane maturity and noticeable reductions in insect damage and Red Rot," Sawhney said.

These improvements, combined with lower input requirements, have already translated into meaningful cost savings. Yield and sucrose data, currently being collected from mid-January to February, are expected to further confirm the strong performance observed so far.

Along with improvements in farming practices, Project 101 also focuses on strengthening rural livelihoods more broadly.

Sawhney said, "In partnership with Haqdarshak, we help farmers access government schemes, subsidies, healthcare and other essential services. We have also developed and shared educational materials, pamphlets on sustainable farming with more than 200,000 farmers. Our bilingual myth-busting booklet has been distributed to 5,000 farmers and accessed digitally by nearly 200,000 through the Sugarcane Farmers App, enabling widespread dissemination of verified scientific information." Today, as the initiative continues to grow, it is contributing to a larger effort to future-proof Indian agriculture - one where knowledge, technology and community partnerships work together to deliver lasting improvements in yield, income and resilience.

Hotel institute owner alleges Rs 45 lakh foreign job fraud

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Dehradun

The owner of a hotel management institute has filed a complaint at Doiwala police station, alleging that he and 31 candidates had been swindled of around Rs 45 lakh on the pretext of sending students abroad for jobs.

As per the complaint, the institute owner, Rajeev Singh Rawat, who runs a hotel and a hotel management training centre in Gularghati, said that a friend of his had introduced him in May 2024 to a man called Amrish, who had

claimed to provide 100 per cent job placement abroad for the students. Rajeev said that he had not found anything suspicious about Amrish.

Trusting him, Rajeev had thus transferred nearly Rs 45 lakh through his bank account for sending about 28 candidates abroad with jobs. However, as none of them had got job within the promised time, the students started pressing him to return the money they had given him. As per the complaint, Rajeev had already

refunded some students from his pocket. The complainant alleged that despite repeated requests, Amish has not returned the money. This had resulted in financial loss for him aside from damaging his reputation. Rajeev also mentioned in the complaint that a woman called Sheena Sharma was involved in the matter and some money had been deposited into her account as well. Doiwala police said that they have received the FIR and started the investigation.

STF warns about online fraud ahead of Christmas, New Year festivities

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Dehradun

With Christmas and New Year celebrations drawing closer, the Uttarakhand Special Task Force (STF) has warned people to stay safe from online fraud. STF officials said that fraudsters become active during festival season and go all-out to dupe people by offering heavy discounts on online shopping which are too good to be true.

Speaking of the matter, the senior superintendent of police, STF Navneet Singh Bhullar said that scammers are offering fake discounts of 50 to 60 per cent to lure the gullible customers. "Their modus operandi is nearly the same. They send fake links and APK files and when

people click on them, their phones get hacked. The hackers can then steal personal information and money," he warned.

He advised the people not to fall prey to their vicious game by opening suspicious links or messages claiming to offer big discounts. "The online shopping should be done only on trusted and official websites. Besides, to be on the safe side, people should follow cyber safety rules and avoid sharing any personal details with unknown sources," he said.

The STF says that if anyone becomes a victim of cyber fraud, he or she should immediately call the national helpline 1930 and report the incident.

Under Smart City project, Doon's major intersections get cultural makeover

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Dehradun

Following the guidance of the chief minister Pushkar Singh Dhami, major intersections in Dehradun are being transformed from simple traffic points into safe and culturally rich show-cases. Importantly, the district administration, led by district magistrate Savin Bansal, keeps overseeing these renovations, funded by Smart City Limited. According to officials, the work at Kuthal Gate cost Rs 135 lakh while the upgrades at Sai Mandir Tiraha amounted to Rs 85 lakh.

The DM said that within six months, the administration has developed 10-metre-wide motorable slip roads, roundabouts, modern lighting, aesthetically pleasing

mountain-style beautification, traffic safety designs and artwork that highlights the State's culture and the Statehood movement at both intersections. These improvements aim to enhance traffic flow in Dehradun, reduce the risk of accidents and provide tourists with a glimpse of the city's cultural heritage, he said.

"The incorporation of traditional Garhwal and Kumaon architectural styles, memorials of notable personalities and Statehood agitators, as well as religious and cultural artifacts at these locations is helping Dehradun to transform into a vibrant cultural corridor. These will introduce the visitors to Ut-

UVSP to meet CEOs on Dec 12 to finalise exam centres

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Dehradun

The Uttarakhand Shiksha Parishad (UVSP) will hold a meeting with the chief education officers (CEOs) from all 13 districts of the State on December 12 in Dehradun. This meeting will discuss and finalise examination centres across the districts in preparation for the 2026 board examinations for Class X and Class XII.

Informing this, the secretary, UVSP, Vinod Simalti said that UVSP has been actively preparing to ensure a trouble-free 2026 board examinations. "Continuous efforts are being made in this regard," he said, adding that UVSP had earlier focused on gathering data concerning the students registered for the upcoming

board examinations. "Recently, the process of collecting student data was completed," he said.

According to the available data, a total of 216,373 students will participate in the board examinations for Class X and Class XII in 2026 under UVSP. Of them, 112,744 candidates have registered for the Class X examination while 103,629 candidates are set to take the Class XII examination.

Simalti shared that they had previously instructed the chief executive officers (CEOs) of all the districts to identify appropriate examination centres within their respective areas. Following this directive, the CEOs have identified the centres and recently forwarded the details to UVSP.

"All the district CEOs will attend the December 12 meeting," he said.

"Following this, we will proceed to further steps for conducting the examinations. We have also requested the State government to provide a holiday calendar for 2026, which will help us decide the exam dates," Simalti said.

Notably, Simalti had previously informed that this year, UVSP intended to enhance the question paper format to foster critical thinking and analytical abilities in students.

UVSP also aims to announce the results of the 2026 board examinations at the earliest, much like they did last year.



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Letter No. : 3755/Nivida Dated : 11/12/2025
Public Work Department Government of Uttarakhand
National Inviting bidding (NIT)

On behalf of Governor of Uttarakhand the Executive Engineer CD PWD Almora hereby Invities Request for Proposal for Procurement of Consultancy Services for Design / DPR including Architecture / Structure / Electrical / Sanitary / Interior Design with a long term master plan through National / International competitive Procurement process of Mallikadevi in Distt Almora and surrounding under Manskhand MandirMala Mission Phase – III.

The request for Proposal (RFP) document shall be available online on the e-tender portal of Government of uttarakhand <http://uktenders.gov.in> **15.12.2025 (From 1600 hrs IST)**. All relevant information about the assignment may be obtained from the RFP document.

**Executive Engineer
CD, PWD, Almora**



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Public Work Department Government of Uttarakhand
National Inviting bidding (NIT)

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**Executive Engineer
CD, PWD, Almora**



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Letter No. : 3755/Nivida Dated : 11/12/2025
Public Work Department Government of Uttarakhand
National Inviting bidding (NIT)

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**Executive Engineer
CD, PWD, Almora**



watchers from nine states- Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Himachal Pradesh, Gujarat, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh among others- are participating. On this occasion, the founder of Oriental Trail, Amit Sankhya gave information related to bird and biodiversity surveys. The 34 bird watchers from different states have been divided into eight groups and they will conduct bird and biodiversity surveys in Himalayan Botanical Garden, Naina Devi Himalayan Bird Conservation Reserve, Nainital Bhawali and Maheshkhan under Nainital Forest Division.

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Human-wildlife conflict: Escort school children in sensitive areas, transfer Pauri DFO, directs CM

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Dehradun

Considering the recent escalation in human-wildlife conflict especially in the mountainous regions of

conflict. It must be ensured that the department's team reaches the site within 30 minutes of receiving information

pose. Emphasis should also be laid on finding permanent solutions to ensure that wild animals do not enter human



State, chief minister Pushkar Singh Dhami directed that in areas with heightened risk of wild animals, school children will be escorted to and from school by the Forest department and district administration. Taking a serious note of the rise in damage caused by the conflict in Pauri district, he also directed the immediate transfer of the divisional forest officer. The CM issued these directions while chairing a review meeting of the Forest department on Thursday.

Addressing the officials, Dhami said that effective efforts must be undertaken by the department and at the government-administration level to resolve the human-wildlife

about a human-wildlife conflict incident. The responsibility of the divisional forest officer and ranger should be fixed for this. Further, the affected must be provided with immediate financial assistance, the CM said. He also directed the Forest department to prepare a policy within two weeks to assist in the livelihood of a family that loses its earning member to human-wildlife conflict. Equipment needed to reduce human-wildlife conflict in the districts should be provided at the earliest, he said.

“Our first responsibility is to protect the lives of people from wildlife and special focus should be laid on the use of new technology for this pur-

habitations. Wildlife sensitive areas should be monitored constantly through cameras. The forest personnel should also maintain a constant vigil while also strengthening their interaction with the villagers,” the CM said. Dhami further said that a campaign should be undertaken to clear undergrowth from near settlements and the public, especially women and children must be made aware about the presence of wildlife nearby, he added.

Forest minister Subodh Uniyal, principal secretary RK Sudhanshu, principal chief conservator of forest Ranjan Kumar Mishra and others were present in the meeting.

CEO directs BLOs to establish direct contact with voters ahead of SIR

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Dehradun

Chief electoral officer (CEO), BVRC Purushottam has directed the booth level officers (BLO) to establish direct contact with the voters of their areas under the BLO outreach programme. The CEO gave the directive while chairing a review meeting on the progress of the preparation of the special intensive revi-

sion (SIR) with the district magistrates on Thursday. The meeting was held in an online mode.

In the meeting, the CEO directed that the DMs should regularly monitor the activities of the BLOs and submit a regular report to the CEO's office. He said that the issues of the voters who have sought informa-

tion about the voter list on the 'voter helpline number' should be resolved. Purushottam added that the helpdesks in the districts and election returning offices (ERO) should be set up and responsibilities of the officers concerned should be fixed. He said that the booth awareness groups (BAG) should also be constituted in every polling booth of the State.

The meeting was attended by the additional chief electoral officer Vijay Kumar Jogdande, deputy CEO Kishan Singh Negi, assistant CEO Mastu Dass and others. The DMs attended the meeting in a virtual mode.



NEM agitators stopped from reaching Health minister's residence

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Dehradun

The unemployed nursing graduates from across the State, united under the banner of Nursing Ekta Manch (NEM), marched towards the residence of Health minister Dhan Singh Rawat on Thursday to press the State government to accept their unaddressed demands. The police, however, blocked them as they had set up barricades along the route to the minister's residence. Alongside the unemployed nursing graduates, Congress leader Harak Singh Rawat and Uttarakhand Mahila Congress president Jyoti Rautela walked in the march in support of the agitators' demands.

Importantly, the unemployed nursing graduates have been staging a sit-in for their unresolved demands for several days at Ekta Vihar. Recently, they had attempted a march towards the CM's residence to highlight their unmet de-

away from the Health minister's residence, they staged demonstrations for two hours. Subsequently, police transported them back to Ekta Vihar, their designated protest area. Pundir emphasised that their protest would continue until the State government acts positively on their demands.

Notably, with many unemployed nursing graduates participating in the protest, functioning of some private hospitals is being affected. According to sources, OPD and ward services have slowed down due to a shortage of nursing staff in various hospitals, leading to delays in patient care and interrupting the daily functions of medical facilities.

Notably, the unemployed nursing graduates' demands include the need for transparency in the recruitment process. They assert that selections should be based on the year-wise seniority of candi-



mands, but police had intercepted them with barricades. To escalate their protest, the graduates redirected their march to the Health minister's residence on Thursday. As tensions rose, police detained Harak Singh Rawat.

The NEM president, Naval Pundir said that after police had stopped them a few steps

dates who have completed their qualifying examinations. They are also calling for the immediate closure of the examination portal and the recruitment of over 2,500 nursing positions each year in accordance with the Indian Public Health Standards (IPHS).

Municipal commissioner orders probe into road-work being declared 'complete' sans work

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Dehradun

A 300-metre road project in ward 41, Indirapuram, was marked as fully completed in official records

laid when the election model code of conduct was in force, raising further doubts about the project.



despite no construction taking place on the ground. The work on the road located in Raj Enclave, was valued at about Rs 20 lakh and the entire payment had already been released by the Municipal Corporation of Dehradun. The Dehradun commissioner Namami Bansal has ordered an inquiry in the matter.

According to the documents, excavation, base preparation and black-topping were shown as completed in November last year. However, residents rejected the claims, stating that no machines or labourers were ever seen at the site. Only a small patch was

The matter came to light when a board displaying the names of a former councillor and former mayor was installed at the site, declaring the project "completed". An application filed under Right To Information Act by residents revealed that the file showed the project as closed. Residents including SP Tyagi and Anita Verma, stated that the old road remains in its damaged state, and no construction work has been initiated. Taking cognisance of the issue, municipal commissioner Namami Bansal has ordered an inquiry into the misappropriation of public funds.

CM directs officials to introduce 'One Jail-One Product' in all prisons

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Dehradun

The chief minister Pushkar Singh Dhami has directed the officials concerned to introduce the 'One Jail-One Product' concept in all the prisons located across Uttarakhand while chairing a meeting on the functioning of Jail Development Board held at the Secretariat here on Thursday.

The officials informed that the bakery units in Haridwar, Almora, Sitarganj and Haldwani jails have earned about Rs 12 lakh. This aside, a cowedshed in the Sitarganj open jail has also earned around Rs 10 lakh.

Dhami said that the State should create its own model for developing prisons. He also directed that the products made in prisons be used in government offices. Also, he asked the officials to inspect the quality of the food served in jails from time to time and stressed on regular skill development programmes to be organised for inmates to help them learn useful trades. Training through ITIs would also be arranged inside the jails, he said.

It was decided at the meeting that laundry machines would be installed in several

jails, including the Central Jail Sitarganj, district jails in Almora, Pauri and Tehri and sub-jails in Haldwani and Roorkee. The officials said that installing such machines in Dehradun and Haridwar jails had shown good results earlier.

The CM instructed that proper medical facilities must be ensured in all prisons. The proposal of a mustard oil unit in Sitarganj open jail has received approval at the meeting. Moreover, the proposals for mushroom farming in Sitarganj and Haridwar jails have been approved, too.

PRD personnel playing a leading role in security & public service: CM

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Dehradun

Chief Minister Pushkar Singh Dhami said that a specialised training institute would be established in the State for the personnel of Prantiya Rakshak Dal (PRD). The CM attended the ceremonial Parade of the PRD personnel at Nanoorkheda in Dehradun on Thursday. The Parade marked the foundation day

a leading role in security and public service in the State. The PRD personnel are helping in maintaining smooth traffic, security arrangements, clerical work and various departmental responsibilities and are working in challenging situations during natural disasters. During the Char Dham Yatra, the PRD per-

Jawans who retired after completing 10 years of service. The amount given to the family in case of death during duty in communal riots has been increased from Rs one lakh to Rs two lakh.

Speaking on the occasion, the cabinet minister Rekha Arya said that PRD soldiers serve the State in every sit-



of the PRD in the State.

The CM announced that the PRD personnel will be considered on duty during treatment if hospitalised during duty and will continue to receive honorarium for a period of six months. He also declared that a sports ground for PRD will be constructed in Asthal village of Dehradun.

Extending his greetings on the foundation day of the PRD, the CM said that the PRD personnel are working with patience and dedication and are playing

sonnel help in ensuring the safe journey of lakhs of devotees.

The CM claimed that the State government has taken many decisions for the welfare of PRD personnel. At the time of the State's formation, the allowance of PRD personnel was Rs 65 per day which now has increased to Rs 650 per day. The government is providing scholarships to the children of PRD personnel. Dhami said that a one-time allowance of Rs 18 lakh has also been provided to PRD

uation. From elections, festivals, disasters, to normal times, PRD soldiers are always at the forefront. She said that CM Dhami has taken several historic decisions in the interests of PRD soldiers. Arya added that more than 7,500 PRD personnel are serving the State.

Local MLA Umesh Sharma Kau, special principal secretary Amit Sinha, additional director Youth Welfare Rakesh Dimri and others attended the programme.

Stronger governance, education reforms & more cultural tourism needed: Experts

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Dehradun

Experts from various spheres have stressed on the need for stronger governance, education reforms and a cultural tourism push. These views were expressed at a dialogue 'Uttarakhand @25: Looking Back-Looking Forward' on the occasion of International Mountain Day at the Doon Library and Research Centre (DLRC) here on Thursday. The event centred around the recently published book 'Uttarakhand @25', jointly brought out by DLRC and the Indian Institute of Public Administration (IIPA).

In the session on governance, migration and security concerns, former director general of police Anil Raturi highlighted the challenges posed by rising population density, growing tourist inflow and the increasing load on the State's road network. He stressed on the need for strengthening police preparedness and transport systems as the State witnesses a rapid surge in pilgrimage-related mobility.

Former additional director general of India Coast Guard, Kripa Nautiyal raised concerns over outmigration from the border districts of Pithoragarh, Chamoli and Uttarkashi, calling it a "national security risk" as villages along the borders with China and Nepal continue to be vacated.

Rural Development and Migration Prevention Commission vice chairman SS Negi said that post-Covid, nearly 75 per cent of migration within Uttarakhand has been internal, with people moving from remote villages to nearby towns. "If education, health and livelihood avenues are strengthened at the village level, outmigration can be significantly reduced," he added.

In the session on education, environment and cultural identity, educationist Kiran Sood said the Himalaya represent "a vast repository of ecological and cultural knowledge" and emphasised the need to build environmental awareness among both residents and visitors. Academician Sudha Rani Pandey called for uniform standards in higher education across the State's universities and argued that value-based and employ-

ment-oriented education is key to Uttarakhand's long-term growth. Culture expert Dataram Purohit underscored the potential of cultural

tourism, saying it could generate livelihoods, curb migration and reduce ecological pressure through community-led initiatives.



CANDID NOTES

Gajendra Singh Negi

Cascading conflict

The decision of chief minister Pushkar Singh Dhami to remove the divisional forest officer of Pauri amid a spurt in the cases of human-wildlife conflict cases in the mountainous areas of the State is an appreciable albeit delayed step in the direction of fixing responsibilities of the officials in such cases. Forest department which holds sway over 65 per cent of the land area of Uttarakhand needs to be more sensitive, prompt and pro-active to reduce the conflict between the wildlife and humans in the State. The senior officers of the department should ensure that the mandatory patrolling by its personnel should be done on the ground and not on paper. Apart from intensifying vigil, the department should work in sync with the district administrations in undertaking a massive campaign about the measures the villagers should take to reduce the conflict. Continued migration coupled with increasing disenchantment of the people with agriculture has converted farm land into a jungle bringing the wild animals to the doorstep of people in villages. The government is advised to include the work of clearing bushes from the fields around the villages under MNREGA which will help in providing livelihood, firewood and protection from wild animals.

Rawats' rapprochement

The ice in the relationship between Congress stalwart Harish Rawat and mercurial Harak Singh Rawat appears to be thawing due to political compulsions in Uttarakhand and altered power balance in the State unit of the party. Ignoring the Ujjyadu baladh (the ox habituated to barge into grain fields) barb thrown repeatedly at him by senior Rawat in the past for his role played in the infamous 2016 mutiny in Congress, Harak Singh attended Harish Rawat's Malta party last week from which former PCC chiefs Pritam Singh and Karan Mahara were conspicuous by their absence. The senior Rawat was quick to return the compliment when Harak got embroiled in an unintentional yet unsavoury controversy involving his comment on the Sikh community as he quickly sought apology on Harak's behalf and visited a local Gurudwara to undertake Kar Sewa as a repentance for the sin committed. The Congress party workers are hoping that the two mighty leaders now seemingly inclined to bury the hatchet will prove beneficial for the party in the crucial Assembly elections slated in early 2027.

In limbo

The suspense over the long-pending expansion of Pushkar Singh Dhami cabinet is continuing in the Himalayan State. Ever since the powerful Prem Chand Agarwal was unceremoniously removed from the council of ministers following a huge uproar over the abusive language used by him on the floor of assembly in March this year, the talks of expansion of Dhami cabinet have surfaced at regular intervals. In the hope of finding a berth in the cabinet where as many as five positions are up for grabs, some of the aspiring MLAs can be seen shuttling between Delhi and Dehradun to humour the senior leaders. The president of the State BJP, Mahendra Bhatt too gives a fillip to the talk of cabinet expansion with his occasional comment which often turns out to be a faux pas for him. It appears that the BJP's central leadership has decided to adopt a wait-and-watch policy on the expansion of the Uttarakhand cabinet by keeping the issue to hang fire. With the Assembly elections not far away, many hopefuls seem to have lost interest in the elusive cabinet berth and are focusing on their constituencies instead.

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Public Work Department Government of Uttarakhand

National Inviting bidding (NIT)

On behalf of Governor of Uttarakhand the Executive Engineer CD PWD Almora hereby Invities Request for Proposal for Procurement of Consultancy Services for Design / DPR including Architecture / Structure / Electrical / Sanitary / Interior Design with a long term master plan through National / International competitive Procurement process of Chetai Golju in Distt Almora and surrounding under Manskhand MandirMala Mission.

The request for Proposal (RFP) document shall be available online on the e-tender portal of Government of uttarakhand <http://uktenders.gov.in> 15.12.2025 (From 1600 hrs IST). All relevant information about the assignment may be obtained from the RFP document.

Executive Engineer
CD, PWD, Almora

कार्यालय अधिशासी अभियन्ता निर्माण खण्ड, लोक निर्माण विभाग, अल्मोड़ा
Office of the Executive Engineer, C.D., PWD, Almora (Uttarakhand)
E-mail: eepdalmora@rediffmail.com Web-http://pwd.uk.gov.in

Letter No. : 3755/Nivida Dated : 11/12/2025

Public Work Department Government of Uttarakhand

National Inviting bidding (NIT)

On behalf of Governor of Uttarakhand the Executive Engineer CD PWD Almora hereby Invities Request for Proposal for Procurement of Consultancy Services for Design / DPR including Architecture / Structure / Electrical / Sanitary / Interior Design with a long term master plan through National / International competitive Procurement process of Shiv mandir takula in Distt Almora and surrounding under Manskhand MandirMala Mission Phase – III.

The request for Proposal (RFP) document shall be available online on the e-tender portal of Government of uttarakhand <http://uktenders.gov.in> 15.12.2025 (From 1600 hrs IST). All relevant information about the assignment may be obtained from the RFP document.

Executive Engineer
CD, PWD, Almora



President Droupadi Murmu paying tribute to ex-President Pranab Mukherjee on his birth anniversary, at Rashtrapati Bhavan

PTI

President, PM remember Pranab Mukherjee

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

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

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

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

In a social media post, Prime Minister Modi said, "A towering statesman and a

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

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

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

Born on this day in 1935, Mukherjee's political career spanned over five decades during which he played a key role in policymaking that guided the development of the country. Mukherjee, who served as the President of India from July 2012 to July 2017, breathed his last on August 31, 2020.

UP CM assures housing for needy, aid for treatment

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Gorakhpur

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

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

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

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

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

Another woman sought financial assistance for her husband's treatment. Adityanath assured her that funds would be provided



CM Yogi holding a meeting with public representatives on SIR and development related works in Varanasi

PTI

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

"No one's treatment will stop for lack of money," he said, directing officials to promptly prepare estimates for high-level medical treatment for all such applicants so that funds can be released immediately. Responding to complaints about land encroachment, the chief minister instructed the police to take strict action against

anyone forcibly occupying another person's land. In one case, where a woman complained of obstruction in taking possession of her own land, Adityanath directed officials to ensure she is given rightful possession.

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

BEML rolls out prototype of driverless metro trainset for Bengaluru corridors

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Bengaluru

BEML on Thursday rolled out the prototype of its driverless metro trainsets, developed for the upcoming BMRL corridors. The 5RSDM project will be part of Namma Metro's Phases 2, 2A, and 2B, including the much-anticipated Airport Line.

The prototype for the Pink Line was formally unveiled by Bangalore Metro Rail Corporation Limited (BMRL) Managing Director J

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

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

Under the contract, BEML will supply 318 standard-gauge metro cars, designed, engineered, and manufactured at its Bengaluru facility for the Blue Line (Airport Line) and the Pink Line (Kalena Agrahara in the south to Nagawara in the

north), the company said.

The trainsets will undergo a detailed programme of testing and commissioning as per BMRL's implementation schedule, followed by comprehensive maintenance support for up to 15 years, the PSU added.

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

ecosystem, especially in the domain of driverless (GoA4) urban transit systems," the company said.

In August 2023, BEML secured an order for 53 driverless trainsets, which later increased to 66 trainsets comprising 396 cars. All design and engineering work for the trainsets has been carried out by BEML's in-house teams.

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

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

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

BEML said the new driverless trainsets feature energy-

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

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

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

Bihar Govt initiates process to constitute Prakrit, Pali academies

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Patna

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

PTI

Marble sculpture adorns Bikaner House in Delhi

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

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

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



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

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

Odisha CM Majhi awards citizenship certificates to 35 applicants under CAA

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ Bhubaneswar

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

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



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

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

Coast guard seizes Pak boat in Indian waters

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Ahmedabad

The Indian Coast Guard (ICG) has seized a Pakistani fishing boat and apprehended 11 crew members operating illegally in the Indian waters, officials said on Thursday. The detainees have been handed over to Jakhau Marine Police in Gujarat for further investigation, they said.

The Indian Coast Guard, in a swift action on Wednesday, "apprehended a Pakistani fishing boat with 11 crew inside India's Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ)," Gujarat Defence PRO Wing Commander Abhishek Kumar Tiwari said in a social media post. This interdiction underscores the Coast Guard's sustained maritime operations and India's commitment to securing its fron-

tiers while maintaining robust enforcement of international laws within the Maritime Zones of India (MZI), he said. "Continuous vigilance across India's maritime domain remains a cornerstone of our national maritime security strategy," he added.

"The Indian Coast Guard intercepted and apprehended a Pakistani fishing vessel along with 11 crew operating illegally inside Indian waters. This decisive action reflects the unwavering vigilance of the ICG and India's firm resolve to protect its maritime frontiers and uphold international maritime law within the MZI. Relentless surveillance and proactive operation remain the bedrock of our maritime security strategy," Coast Guard said in a social media post.

President meets displaced persons in Imphal

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ Imphal

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

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

No harm in cars from ethanol petrol, says Nitin Gadkari



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

Bihar CM inspects tourist centre in East Champaran

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



RS Chairman hails Deepavali's inclusion in UNESCO list



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

BJP MP accuses Opposition of unconstitutional impeachment

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



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

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

responsible for it," he said.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Ramesh recalled that India's

first President, Rajendra Prasad, had said the same on January 24, 1950.

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

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

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

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

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"They can contact the Missions/Posts through walk-in interview, email, multilingual 24x7 emergency numbers, WhatsApp numbers, grievance redressal portals like MADAD, CPGRAMS, and eMigrate, and social media etc.," he said.

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

The ministry issues advi-

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

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

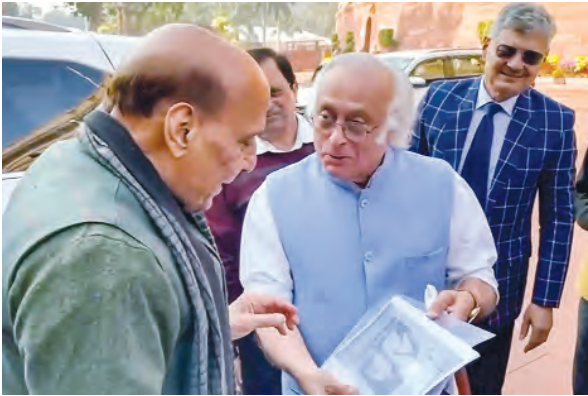
"Our Missions in South-East Asian countries issued various detailed advisories, upon receiving such information on Indian nationals being lured by fake job rackets in South-East countries, to job seekers, and advise them to verify all antecedents of recruiting agents and companies before accepting any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

Congress refutes Shah's vote theft claim against Nehru

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

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

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



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

President on 2-day visit to Manipur



President Droupadi Murmu being welcomed by Manipur Governor Ajay Kumar Bhalla on her arrival in Imphal on Thursday

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Imphal

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

the British colonial rule, and may offer prayers at the renowned Shree Govindajee temple, officials said.

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

This will be Murmu's first trip to the strife-torn state after becoming the President of India.

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

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

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

CBI charges 13 in digital arrest cyber fraud scam

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

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

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

In the chargesheet filed in

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

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

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

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

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

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

Saranda jungle in neighbouring Jharkhand. The NIA took over the case from the local police in June this year.

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

■ States Focus ■



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

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

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



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

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

Majhi made the remarks while handing over appointment letters to 591 newly recruited officers and employees in three departments – Water Resources (252), Housing and Urban Development (142) and Works (197). Majhi said, “Our Government has promised to fill all the 1.5 lakh vacant posts in five years and to fill 65,000 Government posts in two years.”

Justice will be delivered: Himanta ahead of charge sheet filing in Zubeen’s death case

TONY DAS ■ Guwahati

Appealing to people to have faith in the judicial process, Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Thursday said he believes justice will be delivered in the death case of singer Zubeen Garg.

Sarma made the statement as the police are scheduled to file the charge sheet in the sensational case on Friday.

“The SIT will submit its chargesheet, and the court will examine it. The culprit will be punished by the court,” the CM said.

“From tomorrow, the police job will be over, and the court’s role will start. I believe that the court will



definitely deliver justice,” he said, exuding confidence in the entire process.

The celebrated singer died under mysterious circumstances in Singapore on September 19 while swimming in the sea. He had gone to that country to attend the 4th edition of the

Arunachal: 18 dead, 3 missing as truck falls in gorge

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ Tinsukia/Dibrugarh (Assam)

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

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

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

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

tion of casualties and mortal remains,” he said.

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

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

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

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

cover and thick foliage,” he added.

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

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

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

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

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



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

PTI

GUWAHATI FIRE RAGES FOR OVER 38 HOURS; MULTIPLE AGENCIES CALLED

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

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

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

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

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

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

MOHIT KANDHARI ■ Jammu

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

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

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

On November 15, 2004, SPO Sanjeet Kumar was murdered along with his friend by two terrorists in Balan Tundwa, Kishtwar, while they were preparing for a neighbour’s wedding.

On Thursday, Next of Kins (NoKs) of

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

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

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

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

Earlier, on July 28, 2025, the



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

denied justice for decades.

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

Mamata slams SIR, urges people to protest

SAUGAR SENGUPTA
■ Krishnagar

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

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



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

PTI

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

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

mighty dharna (sit in demonstration) “if a single name is deleted from the voters’ lists and asked the people particularly women to get prepared for a sustained struggle on the streets.

Continuing her diatribe against the BJP Government, particularly Union Home Minister Amit Shah called him a dangerous person whose eyes emitted the “villainy” of Duryodhana and Duhshasana — the two anti-heroes of epic Mahabharata.

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

Goa, Israel boost tourism ties as Khaunte meets IMOT team

ASHOKE RAJ ■ New Delhi

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

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

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



route, including assistance with operational requirements.

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

The meeting also saw discussions on hosting a tourism roadshow in Goa, aimed at spotlighting Israel’s diverse tourism offerings and engaging key travel trade

stakeholders across the State.

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

Goa remains one of the most preferred Indian desti-

nations for Israeli visitors, known for its beaches, culture, and warm hospitality. Each year, around 50,000 Israelis visit India, with a significant share opting for Goa — reflecting a deep cultural affinity and strong traveller interest.

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

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

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

BJP MPs flag Yamuna River pollution, highway woes

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

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

Speaking during Zero Hour, Tejveer Singh from Uttar Pradesh acknowledged infrastructure improvements

in Mathura and Vrindavan, but highlighted challenges, particularly Yamuna river pollution, faced by pilgrims and locals.

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

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

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

“This will not only make the journey of crores of devotees comfortable but will also reduce traffic in the entire Vrindavan area, help in environmental protection and provide global recognition to pilgrims,” he said.

He also suggested smart traffic management systems, e-shuttle bus services, multi-level parking facilities, and a

special package for local youth in tourism-related activities.

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

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

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

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Patna

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

Bihar Rural Development Minister Sharwan Kumar met

engaged under MGNREGA.

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

It said the implementation of these schemes was being

hindered due to the non-release of funds as per the ministry’s procedures.

The progress of each scheme and the status of pending dues were reviewed during the meeting.

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



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



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

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

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

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

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

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

‘Humanitarian grounds can’t override punishment’

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

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

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

While dismissing her appeal, a bench of justices Sanjay Karol and Vipul M

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

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

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

ECI can’t treat voters with doubt, SC told

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

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

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

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

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

He said initiating an inquiry

based on a BLO's suspicion effectively amounts to "suspending citizenship".

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

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

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

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

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

Offering a broader view, Justice Bagchi said, "Migration



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

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

The CJJ added a stark reality check regarding labour migration and said, "In North India, trains are full of farm workers from Bihar... They are virtually auctioned and by the

time they come to Punjab, they are in tears."

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

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

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

be seen too much on procedural aspects.

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

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

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

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

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

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

The matter will continue on December 16.

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

SC refuses Prajwal Revanna plea for transfer of cases

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

The Supreme Court on Thursday refused to entertain a plea of former Janata Dal (Secular) MP Prajwal Revanna to transfer the trial of two criminal cases before the special MP/MLA court in Bengaluru to another court in the city on the ground of bias.

A bench of Chief Justice Surya Kant and Justice Joymalya Bagchi told Revanna's counsel that observations of the judge cannot be a ground of bias as it dismissed his plea.

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

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



requires expunction.

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

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

CJJ Kant said that Revanna's counsel can furnish an apology before the high court as it is the most unethical thing to allege bias just because some observations were made by the presiding

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

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

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

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

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

"Sometimes, errors happen as we deal with such a large volume of cases and evidence," the CJJ said.

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

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

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

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

A sessions court in Palanpur town of Gujarat's Banaskantha district had sentenced Bhatt to 20 years in the case dating back to 1996.

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

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

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

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

Former police inspector IB Vyas had



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

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

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

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



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Widow gets railways compensation after 23 yrs

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

"A smile on a poor person's face is what we want to earn, nothing else," Chief Justice of India Surya Kant said on Thursday while noting that Railways finally managed to trace and pay ₹8.92 lakh as compensation to a tragedy-struck widow, who lost her husband in a train accident in 2002 after the Supreme Court's nudge.

The bench, also compris-

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

"This young lawyer (Shakil), who represented

her pro bono ensured that she gets the compensation after 23 years.

We had to trace her with the help of local police and administration and finally railways managed to pay her.

A smile on a poor person's face is what we want to earn nothing else," CJJ Surya Kant said. The railways in its affidavit said that in compliance with the October 6 order, it managed to trace the woman Sanyokta Devi with the help of local administra-

tion and the police. In October, the top court walked an extra mile to ensure that the widow is duly compensated by the Railways after years of struggle.

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

heavy rush inside the compartment and died instantly.

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

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



Editor's
TAKE

Should India ban social media for kids?

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

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

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

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

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

The SC's push for CCTV accountability

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



HASAN
KHURSHID

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

ing pregnant women and elderly citizens. Such images laid bare the deep-seated culture of unrestrained power. One of the most horrifying examples remains the 2020 Sathankulam case in Tamil Nadu, where the CBI charge sheet revealed the savage torture of 59-year-old P. Jeyaraj and his 31-year-old son, J. Bennicks. Over seven hours, police personnel stripped, beat, and humiliated the father-son duo, forcing them to clean their own blood from the floor. Despite Jeyaraj's pleas, citing diabetes and high blood pressure, the brutality continued until both men succumbed to their injuries. Their clothes were drenched in blood to such an extent that police officers had to change their uniforms twice before presenting them in court. The investigation also exposed medical negligence-Dr Vinila, who examined them, failed to document their injuries or provide medical support that might have saved their lives. This case stands as a grim reminder that custodial torture is not an aberration but a structural crisis embedded in policing culture. CCTV cameras alone cannot eradicate it, but they can act as a crucial deterrent-if the system allows them to function. The Supreme Court's recent intervention is not merely a legal exercise; it is a moral reckoning. India cannot claim to be a constitutional democracy while allowing citizens to be brutalised behind closed doors. The real test now is whether states will finally act-or whether custodial deaths will continue to be treated as tragic but inevitable statistics. The nation's conscience demands more than compliance affidavits; it demands genuine accountability.

The Pioneer
SINCE 1865

Why educating girls is not enough: Bridge the skill gap



DEVENDRA
KUMAR

2ND OPINION
THE PIONEER

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The writer is the founder of the Ladli Foundation

DIGITAL EXPERIENCE



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AUSTRALIA'S SOCIAL MEDIA BAN SPARKS CALL FOR VIGILANCE

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

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

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

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

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

SUNIL OKHADE | INDORE

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Urban India needs coordinated reform

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

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

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

Diwali's heritage glows anew

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

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

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

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

Reimagining a song for India

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

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

India redraws its strategic lines with Putin’s Delhi visit

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

FIRST
Column



NILANTHA
ILANGAMUWA

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

financial resilience into the economy.

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

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


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

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

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

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

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



ANIL
ANAND

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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A sustainable sporting future for new India



NASIR
ALI

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

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


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


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

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

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TRADE LOCKED

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

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

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

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

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

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BUSINESS10

India's MAGA vs Trump's MAGA

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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A Contrarian Investor

Personal is the new credit norm

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

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

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

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

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

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

segment.

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

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

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

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

The Pioneer

SINCE 1865

Trade agreement to enhance bilateral ties: Huizenga

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ New York / Washington

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Referring to Russian President Vladimir Putin’s recent visit to

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Mumbai

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Mumbai

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Manufacturing to contribute 25 pc of GDP by 2047: Report

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ New Delhi

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

before full-scale commercial adoption.

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

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

equipment, and community jetties.

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

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

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

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

Unilever sees ‘massive opportunities’ in India

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ New Delhi

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

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

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

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

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

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

Unilever has recently made

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

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

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

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

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

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

Federal Reserve cuts key rate

ASSOCIATED PRESS
■ Washington

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

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

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

also affect those rates.

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

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

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

FROM THE WORLD

CROATIA

Migrant boat capsizes, 3 dead

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

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

PAKISTAN

Two children killed in blast

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

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

ASSOCIATED PRESS ■ Seoul

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

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

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

US, Japan hold joint flight drills amid Chinese military activity

ASSOCIATED PRESS ■ Tokyo

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

Former Pakistan spy chief sentenced for 14 years by military court

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Islamabad

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Colombo

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

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

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

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

Indian envoy meets Canadian Speaker

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Toronto

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

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



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

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

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

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



Maduro Govt did not know where she was hiding: María

ASSOCIATED PRESS ■ Oslo

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



ICIMOD transfers HUC to Kathmandu University

ASSOCIATED PRESS ■ Kathmandu

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

Airstrike on hospital leaves 34 dead in Myanmar

ASSOCIATED PRESS ■ Bangkok

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Ex-PM Khaleda is responding to treatment: Doctor



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Dhaka

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

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

Pragmatic engagement with Taliban: India at UN



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ United Nation

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Bangladesh to hold elections on February 12

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Dhaka

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

The interim Government has disbanded Hasina's Awami League.

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

ASSOCIATED PRESS ■ Jerusalem

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



Bulgaria's Govt resigns amid public protests

ASSOCIATED PRESS ■ Sofia

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



Washington State under emergency due to heavy rain

ASSOCIATED PRESS ■ Mount Vernon

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

PROSPECT



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

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

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

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

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

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

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

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

ICAI clears new global networking guidelines

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

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

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

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

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

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

Ambani calls for tech, industry self-reliance

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Gandhinagar

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

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

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

about a Vibrant India."

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

BSES launches campaign to promote cleaner air – #CleanAirWithBSES

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Guwahati

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

earlier Governments could not ensure," he said.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Himanta launches bicycle scheme to boost school attendance

TONY DAS
■ Guwahati

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

Power grid cyber security on shaky ground as critical upgrades stall

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

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

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

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

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



grids are frequently targeted by sophisticated cyber actors.

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

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

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

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

BRIEFLY

WOMEN'S FOOTBALL LEAGUE
TO START ON DECEMBER 20



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

CHANDIGARH STADIUM HONOURS
YUVRAJ, HARMANPREET



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

Salmon makes Arsenal debut in Champions League

ASSOCIATED PRESS
■ London

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



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

India names Sindhu, Lakshya for Asia Team Championships

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ New Delhi

Two-time Olympics medalist PV Sindhu, Lakshya Sen and the star pair of Satwiksairaj Rankireddy-Chirag Shetty will form the core of Indian squad to take part in the Badminton Asia Team Championships to be played in Qingdao, China from February 3-8. India are defending champions in the women's category of the competition, whereas the men's team had won two bronze medals in the past. "Selected on the basis of ranking, performance, and experience, the women's team will once again be led by former world champion and two-time Olympics medalist, PV Sindhu," the Badminton Association of India said in a release. The world No 13 Sen will be the top ranked men's singles player in the squad which also features Kidambi Srikanth, HS Prannoy, US Open winner Ayush Shetty, and Tharun Mannepal. Satwik-Chirag will be lead the doubles unit along with Guwahati Masters runners-



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

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

Aston Villa faces Basel in Europa League

ASSOCIATED PRESS
■ Basel

Boosted by a victory over the Premier League leader, in form Aston Villa meets Basel in the Europa League on Thursday. After a slow start to the season, Villa bounced back to be currently on a seven-game winning streak in all competitions, including a 2-1 victory over Arsenal on Saturday. Beside a top-three place in the English top flight, the Villans are tied with Lyon and Midtjylland atop the standings of the second-tier European competition on 12 points with four wins from five games. "The most important thing is how we are building the team, how we are



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

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

and Villarreal. Lyon hosts Dutch newcomer Go Ahead Eagles while Midtjylland faces Genk at home. The top eight teams after eight games go directly to the round of 16 in March. At the other end of the 36-team table, struggling Nice will look to earn the first points against Braga. Teams placed ninth to 24th advance to the knock-out playoffs in February. In other games, Nottingham Forest is away at Utrecht, Celtic and Roma meet in Glasgow and Maccabi Tel Aviv travels to Stuttgart. In the third-tier Conference League, Crystal Palace plays Shelbourne in Dublin and Fiorentina hosts Dynamo Kyiv.

Alonso feels Real Madrid will overcome rough patch

ASSOCIATED PRESS
■ Madrid

Xabi Alonso thanked his players for their attitude after another defeat and said he was positive Real Madrid would overcome its slump soon. Madrid lost 2-1 to Manchester City in the Champions League on Wednesday, remaining with only two wins in its last eight matches in all competitions. "The players gave it everything they had, and I have nothing to criticize today. I really value their attitude. We have to keep going," Alonso said. "Right now the results aren't as good as we'd like. "We're critical, we demand a lot of ourselves, and we understand the fans. We have to keep working hard. We believe we'll get through this because everything passes, and I'm convinced we can do it."



The result increased criticism against Alonso and prompted some jeers by the crowd at the Santiago Bernabeu stadium. "We can understand why they whistle, and we have to accept it as normal because the demands here are so high," Alonso said. "We want to turn things around, improve our mental and physical condition, and get the injured players back. There's still a long way to go." Spanish

Bembem, Ashalata named in AFC All-Time Dream XI

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ New Delhi

Indian football legends Bembem Devi and Ashalata Devi have been nominated for the AFC Women's Asian Cup All-Time Dream XI football team in recognition of their stellar performances in the continental showpiece. Former captain Bembem, the only Indian woman footballer to have been conferred the Padma Shri, is one of the 12 midfielders nominated for the Dream XI team. Both Bembem and Ashalata belong to Manipur, the women's football powerhouse in the country. "During an international career spanning over two decades, Bembem Devi was the true leader of a generation of Indian women's footballers," the Asian Football Confederation (AFC) said.

"She was the captain of the Blue Tigresses during their AFC Women's Asian Cup appearance in 2003 and has been adjudged the AIFF Women's Player of the Year twice. India's third most capped player has won several domestic and international honours laying the foundation for the rise of women's football in the South Asian nation." India could not get past the group stage in the 2023 Women's Cup, after winning against Uzbekistan (6-0) but losing to

eventual runners-up China (0-12) and Vietnam (1-2). Ashalata captained the India in the 2022 edition of the Women's Asian Cup hosted by the country. In a fateful tournament, several Indian players contracted COVID-19 despite being inside the bio-bubble. Hosts India played out a 0-0 draw against Iran in their first group match and then could not assemble team for the match against Chinese Taipei. "Ashalata Devi is one of the Indian women's national team's most accomplished defenders. A commanding centre-back, she made her AFC Women's Asian Cup debut in 2022. In 2019, she was named the AIFF Women's Player of the Year in recognition of her consistency and leadership," the AFC said. "Known for her strength, aerial ability, and calmness under pressure, Ashalata has been instrumental in guiding and inspiring a new generation of Indian footballers."

Ashalata is one of the 12 defenders nominated for the Dream XI. Five goalkeepers and 12 forwards were also nominated for the Dream XI, for which voting opened on November 21 and will continue till January 10, 2026. The 2026 edition of the Women's Asian Cup will be held in Australia from March 1-21.



REAL MADRID TRIO BANNED FOR 2 MATCHES FOR REFEREE MISCONDUCT

ASSOCIATED PRESS
■ Madrid

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

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

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ Jagdalpur (Chhattisgarh)

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

event historic. Indian boxing legend MC Mary Kom was also present on the occasion. Sai said the government is determined to connect the youth from tribal-dominated Bastar with the mainstream and ensure their active contribution to the region's development. Winners of the Bastar Olympic would become role models and would be provided advanced training and opportunities to compete at international levels, he said. The government will provide better opportunities and training to the youth of Bastar, preparing



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

them for global competitions, said Sai. Those winning gold, silver, and bronze medals in the international Olympic Games will be awarded honorariums of ₹3 crore, ₹2 crore, and ₹1 crore, respectively, he said. Deputy CM Vijay Sharma, who also holds the Home portfolio, called the Bastar Olympic an important initiative to integrate youth from interior regions into the mainstream. The government has been encouraging the youth from the remote areas of Bastar by providing them with more opportunities, and this initiative will continue

in an even more robust form in the future, he added. Mary Kom met the participants and encouraged them. State's Sports and Youth Welfare Director Tanuja Salam said around 3,500 athletes from all seven districts of Bastar division and 761 participants from the 'Nua Bat' team are competing in the division-level events (finals) in Bastar Olympic this year. The Nua Bat (a term in local Halbi dialect which means a 'new path') team comprises surrendered Naxalites and victims of Maoist violence as partici-

pants. Last year, the event saw 1.65 lakh participants in division, district and block levels. The number has surged to over 3.92 lakh, including more than 2.27 lakh women, this year, she said. The final stage of the Bastar Olympic, featuring 11 sporting disciplines, including athletics, archery, badminton, football, karate, kabaddi, kho-kho, volleyball and tug of war, will be held from December 11 to 13. Union Home Minister Amit Shah will attend the closing ceremony on December 13, officials said.

NZ take 73 run lead over WI in 2nd Test

ASSOCIATED PRESS
■ Wellington

Mitch Hay scored 61 in his first test innings on Thursday to help New Zealand to a 73-run first-innings lead over the West Indies on the second day of the second test. The wicketkeeper-batter who cut his teeth in seven one-day internationals and 12 T20s was called into test cricket as a replacement for the injured Tom Blundell. He followed Devon Conway's 60 at the top of the innings to guide New Zealand to 278.

New Zealand then claimed two wickets in 10 overs before stumps, leaving the West Indies 32-2, still 41 behind. John Campbell (14) was bowled by Michael Rae, leaving a ball which cut back from outside off and night-watchman Anderson Phillip (0) was trapped lbw by Jacob Duffy. "At that time of day their batters have got nothing to gain and we've got all to gain so it was cool to get a couple there," Duffy said. "Any time you get a lead it's not too bad.

"A couple of guys will be a bit gutted to get a start and not go on but any time you get a lead and get them two down, you have to be happy with that."

The West Indies bowlers



Mitch Hay during day two of the second Test match between New Zealand and West Indies

made sure New Zealand's task of surpassing the tourists' first innings of 205 was a difficult one on a pitch at the Basin Reserve which retained pace, bounce and some treacherous movement well into the second day. That was demonstrated in the first session in which New Zealand, after resuming at 24-0, gained a strong position at 112-2 by lunch while losing Tom Latham (11) and Kane Williamson (37) to superb pieces of seam bowling.

Latham was bowled by Kumar Roach in the fifth over of the day with a ball that jagged back sharply from outside off and pierced his tentative defensive shot. Williamson fell close to the first interval, beaten by a peach of a ball from Phillip which pitched on middle and straightened past the outside edge to hit off stump. Conway reached his 15th test half century, his first against the West Indies, from 87 balls prior to lunch. He and Rachin Ravindra (5) were

then out in consecutive overs early in the second session as New Zealand slipped to 117-4. Hay and Daryl Mitchell, returning from injury after missing the drawn first test, put on 63 for the fifth wicket. They batted assertively to put New Zealand back on top before Mitchell (25) was out with the score 190-5.

Hay reached 50 from 74 balls with seven fours and one six before being tempted by a short ball from Ojay Shields which he hooked to Kumar Roach at fine leg. He

left, chiding himself for falling into an obvious trap.

Glenn Phillips, who also missed the first test with injury, made 18 before holing out to deep midwicket off Roston Chase. As a bonus, New Zealand's tail added 45 runs for the last two wickets.

Zak Foulkes made an unbeaten 23, Jacob Duffy 11 and 13 to go with his three wickets on debut.

Blair Tuckner didn't bat after dislocating his left shoulder in a fielding accident on the first day which again leaves the New Zealand bowling attack short-handed. In the second innings of the first test, only Foulkes, Duffy, Michael Bracewell and Ravindra were fit to bowl.

Tuckner took 4-32 before his injury which means he won't bowl or field again in the match.

On the eastern side of the Basin Reserve, grassy embankments are lined with Pohutukawa trees, the New Zealand Christmas tree which is decked at this time of the year with red blossoms, standing out against a vivid blue sky. The trees might have caused the West Indies to drop two catches Thursday when a fielder lost the red ball among the red background.

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

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ Melbourne

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

matches from January 9-14.

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

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

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

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ Mumbai

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

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

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



three editions past us now, is that the World Test Championship final has definitely delivered on the goal of providing a pinnacle event for Test cricket." He said the turnout at Lord's showed that the WTC final has stirred interest among fans, who now look forward to it just as they do with other flagship events.

"The last World Test Championship final was played between Australia and South Africa in England,

and Lord's was packed," he said. "India was not playing, England was not playing, (but) Australia was taking on South Africa, and Lord's was packed, which means that we now have a pinnacle event in Test cricket which the world waits for, or the world that enjoys Test cricket waits for." Gupta added that the growing anticipation among fans in the months leading up to the final also strengthens the broader storytelling around Test cricket.

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

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ Dubai

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

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

Cup early next year. In the senior men's Asia Cup, followed by the Women's ODI World Cup and Rising Stars Asia Cup T20 tournament, Indian players have refused to shake hands with Pakistani players as a mark of solidarity with the Indian Army and victims of the Pahalgam terror attack. However, when it comes to the U-19 cricketers, it is believed that even the ICC wants politics to be kept away from it and the normal protocol of sportsman spirit should be adhered to. "The boys haven't been told anything. But obviously BCCI has given explicit instructions to its manager Anand Datar. Now if Indian boys don't shake hands with Pakistan team then match referee

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

cerned, India and Pakistan are almost sure to qualify for the semi-finals as the top two teams from group A. Apart from India and Pakistan, the other two sides are Malaysia and UAE, and they don't have a lot of experience of playing 50 over cricket.

Both Suryavanshi and skipper Mhatre are coming

into the tournament following a great run of form in the ongoing Syed Mushtaq Ali Trophy. While Mhatre played a massive role in the group league stages with back-to-back centuries and a fifty, Suryavanshi became the youngest player in SMAT history to hit a century, against Maharashtra.

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TENDERS NOTICE
Sr.DEN/II/MB acting for and on behalf of The President of India invites **E-Tenders** against following tenderbidders will be able to submit their original revised bids upto closing date and time only. Manual offers are not allowed against this tender, and any such manual offer received shall be ignored. Contractors are allowed to make payments against this tender towards tender document cost and earnest money **only through online payment modes** available on **IREPS** portal like net banking, debit card, credit card etc. Manual payments through Demand draft, Banker's cheque, Deposit receipts, FDR etc. are not allowed.

Tender No. Date	251-DRM-MB-25-26 Date 10.12.2025
Name of work	(1) TFR=21.271 TKM in BLM-AMG section under jurisdiction of ADENHRI-I, (2) TFR=4.67 TKM in RAC-BLM section under jurisdiction of ADEN-HRI-I, (3) P-Way work at BGH station in connection with replacement of old PI with EI for BGH station of Moradabad Division
Tender Closing Date Time	02.01.2026 16:00
Advertised Value	₹ 64,99,473.74
Earnest Money	₹ 1,30,000.00
Bidding Start Date	19.12.2025
Validity of Offer (Days)	60 Days
Period of Completion	09 Months
No. 75-W/2/3/WA/Publication	Dated: 10.12.2025
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The applicant is required to ensure submission of online application as per the procedure indicated in the detailed advertisement, available on NHA website (<https://www.nhai.gov.in>), by **12.01.2026 (upto 06:00 PM)**.

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E-AUCTION SALE NOTICE
E-Auction Sale Notice for Sale of Immovable Assets under the Securitisation and Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002 (the "Act") read with Rules 8 and 9 of the Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules, 2002.
Notice is hereby given to the public in general and in particular to the Borrower/Co-Borrower/Mortgagee(s)/Guarantor(s) that the below described immovable properties are mortgaged to Grihum Housing Finance Limited (hereinafter referred to as the "Secured Creditor" as per the Act), the possession of which has been taken by the Authorised Officer of Secured Creditor in exercise of powers conferred under section 13(12) of the Act read with Rules 8 and 9 of the security interest (Enforcement) Rule pursuant to notice under section 13(2) of the Act. The Secured Assets will be sold on "As is where is", "As is what is", and "Where is" basis on 12-01-2026 through E-Auction. It is hereby informed to General public that we are going to conduct public through E-Auction platform provided at the website: <https://www.bankauctions.com>. For detailed T&Cs and sale, please refer to link provided in GHFL's/Secured Creditor's website i.e. www.grihumhousing.com

PROPOSAL NO. CUSTOMER NAME (A)	DEMAND NOTICE DATE AND OUTSTANDING AMOUNT (B)	NATURE OF POSSESSION (C)	DESCRIPTION OF PROPERTY (D)	RESERVE PRICE (E)	EMD (10% OF RP) (F)	EMD SUBMISSION DATE (G)	INCREMENTAL BID (H)	PROPERTY INSPECTION DATE/TIME (I)	DATE AND TIME OF AUCTION (J)	KNOWN ENCUMBRANCES/ANY OTHER (K)
LOAN NO. HL0003410000 0005022738 MOHAN CHHETRI (BORROWER) ANITA CHHETRI (CO BORROWER)	Notice Date: 10-09-2025 Total Dues: Rs.1695942/- (Rupees Sixteen Lakh Ninety Five Thousand Nine Hundred Forty Two Only) payable as on 10-09-2025 along with interest @15.6% p.a. till the realization.	Physical	All That Part Of Land Bearing Khata No. 525 (Fasli Year 1422 To 1427), Khasra No. 146 Ka Area Measuring 18.12 Sq. Mtrs., Khasra No. 252 Area Measuring 10 Sq. Mtrs., Khasra No. 303 Area Measuring 100 Sq. Mtrs. And Khasra No. 304 Area Measuring 100 Sq. Mtrs. Total Area 198.12 Sq. Mtrs. Situated At Mauza Bilaspur Kandali, Pargana Pachwadon, Tehsil And Distt. Dehradun, Uttarakhand, Bounded And Butted As Under-East By: Property Of Other, Side Measuring 40 Ft. West By: Property Of Deepak, Side Measuring 40 Ft. North By: 15 Ft. Wide Road, Side Measuring 53.3 Ft. South By: Property Of Other, Side Measuring 53.3 Ft.	Rs. 2268000/- (Rupees Twenty Two Lacs Sixty Eight Thousand Only)	Rs. 226800/- (Rupees Twenty Six Thousand Eight Hundred Only)	31-12-2025 Before 5 PM	10,000/-	26-12-2025 (11 AM 4 PM)	12-01-2026 (11 AM 2 PM)	NIL

The intending bidders/purchasers are advised to visit Secured Creditor Branch and the auction properties, and make his own enquiry and ascertain additional charges, encumbrances and any third-party interests and satisfy himself/herself in all aspects thereto before submitting the bids. All statutory dues like property taxes, electricity/water dues and any other dues, if any, attached to the property to be ascertained and paid by the successful bidder.

The interested bidders are required to register themselves with the portal and obtain login ID and Password well in advance, which is mandatory for e-bidding, from auction service provider) C1 India PVT LTD. Address: Plot No-68 3rd floor Gurgaon Haryana-122003. Helpline Number- 7291981124,25,26 Support Email id- Support@bankauctions.com. Contact Person Vinod Chauhan, Email id- delhi@ciindia.com Contact No- 9813887931. Please note that Prospective bidders may avail online training on e-auction from them only. The intending purchaser/bidder is required to submit amount of the Earnest Money Deposit (EMD) by way of by way of NEFT/RTGS/OD in the account of GRIHUM HOUSING FINANCE LIMITED- AUCTION PROCEEDS A/C, Bank-ICICI BANK LTD. Account No- 091551000028 and IFSC Code- ICIC0000915, ICICI Bank Ltd, Panchshil Tech Park, Near Ganapathi Chowk, 43/44 Viman Nagar 411014 drawn on any nationalized or scheduled Bank on or before 31-12-2025 and register their name at <https://www.bankauctions.com> and get user ID and password free of cost and get training on e-auction from the service provider. After their Registration on the website, the intending purchaser/bidder is required to get the copies of the following documents uploaded, e-mail and sent self-attested hard copy at Address: Sai Kripa, First Floor, 59/3, Rajpura Road, Dehradun, Uttarakhand 248001 Mobile no. +91 8281138143 e-mail ID p.adithi@grihumhousing.com For further details on terms and conditions please visit <https://www.bankauctions.com> and www.grihumhousing.com to take part in e-auction. This notice should also be considered as 30 DAYS (Thirty) notice to Borrower/Co-Borrower/Mortgagee(s)/Guarantor(s) under Rule 8(6) of the Security Interest (Enforcement) Rule-2002 PLACE: DEHRADUN, UTTARAKHAND DATE: 12.12.2025

Authorized Officer
Grihum Housing Finance Limited

NORTHERN RAILWAY
TENDER NOTICE
Sr. Divisional Signal and Telecom Engineer/Moradabad for and on behalf of President of India invites Open tenders through E-Tendering system for the following works:-

S. No.	Tender No. & Description of work	Approx. Cost (₹)	Earnest Money(₹)	Cost of Tender form(₹)	Last date and time for submission of tender and opening of tender
1.	02-Tele-Char/Batt-MB-25-26 Provision of SMPs based Chargers and Batteries of Telecom equipment in lieu of overaged SMPs based Charger over Moradabad Division.	₹2,69,66,217.89	₹2,84,800/-	Nil	08.01.2026 15:00 hrs.
2.	RT-SNT-TELE-RAILNET-22-23 Rainnet Connectivity at Major Station, depot, stores over Moradabad Division.	₹3,19,97,196.04	₹3,10,000/-	Nil	08.01.2026 15:00 hrs.
3.	05-SNT-Sig-SSDAC-MSDAC2 Provision of SSDAC/MSDAC in lieu of overaged Universal axle counters in CH-BE section of Moradabad Division.	₹1,45,52,199.59	₹2,22,800/-	Nil	08.01.2026 15:00 hrs.
4.	SNT-RT-ARC-CEL-Cards-MB-2024 Repairing Contract for 3 years of various type of CEL make SSDAC/HASSDAC/MSDAC cards over Moradabad Division.	₹2,39,11,319.7	₹2,69,600/-	Nil	08.01.2026 15:00 hrs.
5.	04-Tele-CCTVRRoom-MB25-26 Provision of CCTV cameras to monitor common areas of Retiring rooms and ticket counters at all major locations of Moradabad Division.	₹2,14,35,302.09	₹2,57,200/-	Nil	08.01.2026 15:00 hrs.

Note: Complete details of tender can be seen at www.ireps.gov.in
Tender Notice No.: 21/Tele/Charger/Battery, Rainnet, 05 RT-SSDAC, ARC-CEL, CCTV Dated: 10.12.2025 3827/2025

SERVING CUSTOMERS WITH A SMILE

Chola
Serving Customers With A Smile

CHOLAMANDALAM INVESTMENT AND FINANCE COMPANY LIMITED
Corporate Office: "CHOLA CREST", C54 & 55, Super B-4, Thiru Vi Ka Industrial Estate, Guindy, Chennai-600032. Branch Office: 2nd Floor, JJ Tower, 59-Rajpur Road, Adjoining Ram Tirath Ashram, Opp. Sachivalaya Main Gate, Dehradun (U.K.)-248001. Branch Office: Ist Floor, Hemkund Tower, Nainital Road, Tikaonia Chowk, Haldwani, District-Nainital, Uttarakhand 263139. Branch Office: 2nd Floor 13 Vivekanand Marg, Awas Vikas, Rudrapur (US Nagar) Uttarakhand 263153.

SYMBOLIC POSSESSION NOTICE - Under Rule 8 (1)
WHEREAS the undersigned being the Authorised Officer of M/s. Cholamandalam Investment And Finance Company Limited, under the Securitisation and Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002 hereinafter called the Act and in exercise of powers conferred under Section 13(12) read with Rules 9 of the Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules, 2002 issued demand notices calling upon the borrowers, whose names have been indicated in Column [B] below on dates specified in Column [C] to repay the outstanding amount indicated in Column [D] below with interest thereon within 60 days from the date of receipt of the said notice. The borrowers having failed to repay the amount, notice is hereby given to the borrowers in particular and the Public in general that the undersigned has taken possession of the properties mortgaged with the Company described in Column [E] herein below on the respective dates mentioned in Column [F] in exercise of the powers conferred on him under Section 13(4) of the Act read with Rule 9 of the Rules made there under. The borrowers in particular & the Public in general are hereby cautioned not to deal with the properties mentioned in Column [E] below and any such dealings will be subject to the charge of M/s. Cholamandalam Investment And Finance Company Limited for an amount mentioned in Column [D] along with interest and other charges. Under section 13 [8] of the Securitisation Act, the borrowers can redeem the secured asset by payment of the entire outstanding including all costs, charges and expenses before notification of sale.

SL NO	NAME AND ADDRESS OF BORROWER / S & LOAN ACCOUNT NUMBER	DATE OF DEMAND NOTICE	OUT- STANDING AMOUNT	DETAILS OF PROPERTY POSSESSED	DATE OF SYMBOLIC POSSESSION
A	B	C	D	E	F
1.	Loan No. 1. HE01DDNW00000053286 Borrower & Co-Borrowers:- All Legal Heirs Of Mohit Bhatje (Known And Unknowns) 1. Aanchal Chawla W/o Late. Sh. Mohit Bhatje 2. Mis Lala Ji Properties R/o- C 505, Solitaire Avenue, Near Kamla Palace, GMS Road, Majra, Dehradun 248001 (U.K.)	11-09-2025	Rs. 52,86,668/- as on 09/09/2025 with further interest thereon.	3 BHK flat property bearing no. 505 situated at 5th floor having super area 1759 sq.ft. Or 163.41 sq. mts. in the project "The Solitaire Avenue" situated in Village Kanwali, Pargana Pachwa Doon with all easement rights with common stairs and proportionate share of undivided land and right to use one car parking registered as per sale deed registered in the office of sub registrar, Dehradun in Book No.01 vol. 5249, Page No. 205 to 234 at Serial No. 5485 dated 12/05/2022	09/12/2025
2.	Loan No. 1. HE01HDW000000035 280 Borrower & Co-Borrowers :- 1. Gurvinder Singh S/o Dharma Singh, 2. Taranjit Kaur W/o Gurvinder Singh, 3. Ms J.R. Sandhu Punjab Tadka And Family Restaurant Through Its Proprietor (GURVINDER SINGH), R/o H. No. 08, Kachnalaaj, Kumaon Colony. Kashipur, Nainital. 244713 Uttarakhand., Also At: Ram Nagar Road, Near Railway Crossing, Purnmadara, Kashipur: 244713	11-09-2025	Rs. 45,78,077/- as on 09/09/2025 with further interest thereon.	All the Property measuring area Khasra No. 139 M, Rakha 0.097 Hect. Or 970 Sq. Mtrs of Village Kachnalaaj, Tehsil Kashipur, Distt Udham Singh Nagar duly Registered in Sub Registrar Kashipur in Book No. 1, Jild No. 5293, Page NO 187-198, Sr. No. 4540 dated 01/06/2018 Bounded and Butted as under East - Khet of Ajeet Singh, West- 15 Ft. Wide Chak Road, North-Property of Gurvinder Singh, South - 15 Ft Wide Chak Road.	10-12-2025
3.	Loan No. 1. ML01KAS000000061662 2. HE01KAS000000069054 Borrower & Co-Borrowers:- 1. JIMMY BATHLA S/o PREM KUMAR BATHLA, 2. REKHA W/o JIMMY BATHLA 3. M/s R. S. INTERIOR Through Its Proprietor (JIMMY BATHLA) R/o Ward No. 01, Neeljhra, Jaspur Khurd, Kashipur Udham Singh Nagar - 244713 (U.K.), Also At: Pashupati Vihar, Jaspur Khurd, Near Blooming School, Kashipur Udham Singh Nagar - 244713 (U.K.)	11-09-2025	Rs. 39,52,904/- as on 11/09/2025 with further interest thereon.	All the property situated at Revenue Mauja Jaspur Khurd (Outside MC Limits) Tehsil Kashipur Distt Udham Singh Nagar bearing its Khasra 180 min total area 2000 sqr ft or 185.87 sqr mtr duly registered in the office of sub registrar Kashipur in Bahl No 1 Jild No 7059 on pages 215-236 at Serial No 7520 Dated 23-08-2022 All part and parcel property bearing Khasra No 182 min situated in Mauja Jaspurkhurd Tehsil Kashipur Distt US Nagar total area 440 sqr ft i.e 40.89 sqr mtr duly registered under sub registrar Kashipur in Bahl No 1 Jild No 7103 On Pages No 325 348 At Serial No 8363 Dated 13-09-2022	10/12/2025

Date : 12/12/2025
Place : DEHRADUN / US NAGAR

AUTHORIZED OFFICER
M/s. Cholamandalam Investment and Finance Company Limited

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

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ New Delhi

Former South Africa captain AB de Villiers said he agrees "to a certain extent" with India head coach Gautam Gambhir's belief that ODI batting orders are "overrated", but stressed the need for teams to balance flexibility with clearly defined roles.

Following India's 2-1 ODI series win against South Africa, Gambhir had said that he thought batting orders are overrated in the ODI format. "I do agree with him to a certain extent. I've always enjoyed a floating batting lineup in ODIs.

But it's a fine line because you can't really play around too much with the players' roles," De Villiers said on his YouTube channel. "It's the top three, four to six, and then your tailenders who can hold the bat. It's almost like three segments, and you can really be creative with that. "Play with right and left-hand combinations and certain situations of the game." India won the first T20I against South Africa to extend their winning run to 27 victories out of 31 games.