

The Consulate General of India in Shanghai inaugurated its new, state-of-the-art Chancery at the Dawning Centre in Changning District, marking a major upgrade after 32 years at its previous premises. The 1,436.63-square-metre facility doubles the operational space, consolidating consular, commercial, cultural, and administrative sections on a single modern floor, enhancing efficiency and public service delivery. The inauguration was attended by nearly 400 guests, including Ambassador Pradeep Kumar Rawat, diplomats, Shanghai officials, business leaders, and members of the Indian community across East China. Consul General Pratik Mathur thanked the Ministry of External Affairs and Shanghai authorities and emphasised the Chancery's strategic location in the Hongqiao-Gubei business corridor, offering improved outreach and accessibility.

IN BRIEF

City records very poor air; IMD predicts cold wave



Delhi recorded “very poor” air quality on Sunday morning. According to the Central Pollution Control Board’s (CPCB) Sameer app, the Air Quality Index (AQI) at 10 am stood at 302, with 26 stations across the city reporting “very poor” levels. The CPCB classifies AQI between 0 and 50 as “good”, 51 to 100 “satisfactory”, 101 to 200 “moderate”, 201 to 300 “poor”, 301 to 400 “very poor” and 401 to 500 “severe”. Meanwhile, the India Meteorological Department (IMD) has forecast a cold wave for the day. The minimum temperature settled at 8 degrees Celsius, which is 1.6 notches below normal, while the relative humidity in the morning touched 100 per cent. The maximum temperature is expected at 22 to 24 degrees Celsius later in the day, the IMD said.

Noida: University student dies in road accident



A 22-year-old student of a private university died on Sunday after an unidentified vehicle hit his motorcycle in Uttar Pradesh’s Gautam Buddh Nagar district, police said. The deceased, identified as Vivek Kumar Sharma, was a student of Galgotias University, police said, adding that he died on the spot. The police took the body into custody and sent it for a post-mortem, a police spokesperson said. A case has been registered, and an investigation is underway, he said. After receiving information about the incident, according to the spokesperson, hundreds of students from the university reached the spot.

You are the future: Shubhanshu tells students

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

Indian Air Force Group Captain Shubhanshu Shukla, the first astronaut from the country to travel to the International Space Station, on Sunday urged youngsters to contribute towards realising a ‘Viksit Bharat’ by 2047, a goal the Centre has envisaged. Speaking at the launch of the Delhi government’s AI Grind Challenge, Shukla shared his experience in space and highlighted the role of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in space technology. “You are the future. I am giving you a call to action. You have to work towards realising the goal of Viksit Bharat by 2047,” the astronaut told the students.

Earlier this year, Shukla became the first Indian to visit the International Space Station (ISS) as part of the Axiom-4 mission. He landed in the US and returned to India on August 17 after the 18-day mission. “When I came here, I did not know what the programme was about. But when I saw the Education Minister



Delhi Chief Minister Rekha Gupta with the union territory’s Education Minister Ashish Sood and astronaut Shubhanshu Shukla during the launch of the government’s ‘Delhi AI Grind’ initiative across all its schools, in New Delhi

and senior leadership, it became clear where our leadership is focusing its attention. These are the areas that must be prioritised, and such efforts will take us closer to the vision of Viksit Bharat 2047,” he said.

Delhi Chief Minister Rekha Gupta said Shukla was “a

source of inspiration for the younger generation.” She said that under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, India is forging a new global identity in the fields of AI and other technological innovations. She claimed that the ‘AI Grind’ will bring a transforma-

tional change to the national capital’s education system. The initiative will convert traditional classrooms into innovation-oriented labs, where students will develop AI-based projects to solve real-life problems the city faces, she said. She said that nearly five

lakh students will benefit directly from the programme, which she called a crucial step towards the vision of a ‘Viksit Delhi’ and a ‘Viksit Bharat’. “We must all move forward together. This is the true spirit of nation-building.” According to an official statement, the initiative will

reach over 5 lakh learners across 1,000-plus schools, colleges, ITIs, and universities, building large-scale foundational AI capability among Delhi’s youth. Education Minister Ashish Sood said the initiative has been designed keeping in mind “India’s AI Decade.” He said under the initiative, students will identify civic and industry challenges and work with the government and industry partners to develop practical solutions. Over the next four months, Delhi AI Grind will train 5,000 teachers as certified AI mentors, develop 1,000 student-led prototypes, select 50 AI Youth Ambassadors, and publish a National Innovation Compendium featuring ideas created by Delhi’s youth. The initiative invites participation from youth aged 10 to 25 years across school, college, and open categories in ten key sectors – transport, health, food systems, tourism, governance, energy, digital education, climate and environment, water and waste management, and public services.

India’s rich civilisational heritage is rooted in spirituality, meditation: VP

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Gurugram

Vice-President CP Radhakrishnan on Sunday emphasised India’s rich civilisational heritage rooted in spirituality, meditation and inner awakening, and recalled the contributions of sages, whose ‘tapasya’ and meditative practices have shaped the country’s timeless wisdom. Radhakrishnan made these remarks at the launch of the silver jubilee year celebrations of the ‘Om Shanti Retreat Centre (OSRC) of the Brahma Kumaris in Gurugram. Addressing the gathering, the Vice-President expressed happiness at joining the celebrations of the Centre, which was founded 24 years ago

with the spiritual vision of the Brahma Kumaris and has now entered its 25th year of service. He appreciated the diversity of professionals - scientists, doctors, administrators, politicians - who are drawn to the Centre’s message of peace and meditation. Traditions such as ‘Rajyoga’ and ‘Vipasana’, he said, highlight that true strength and clarity emerge from within. Radhakrishnan lauded the Brahma Kumaris for carrying forward this spiritual legacy and guiding millions in India and abroad towards peace and purity of mind. He commended the Brahma Kumaris for emerging as the world’s largest women-led spiritual organisation. Radhakrishnan emphasised India’s rich civilisational her-



Vice President CP Radhakrishnan addresses the gathering during the launch of the Silver Jubilee Year of Brahma Kumaris’ Om Shanti Retreat Centre (ORC) in Gurugram

itage rooted in spirituality, meditation, and inner awakening. He noted that in the ‘Amrit Kaal’, Prime Minister Narendra Modi has envisioned a Viksit Bharat@2047, where economic growth is complemented by inner stability, happiness, and peace. Meditation, he said, must be embraced as an essential life skill in today’s fast-paced world. The Vice-President also appreciated the Om Shanti Retreat Centre’s strong commitment to environmental sustainability and alignment with Mission LiFE - an initiative encouraging individuals to adopt pro-planet lifestyles. He praised the Centre’s green initiatives, including a 1 MW hybrid solar power plant, rainwater harvesting systems,

biogas and sewage treatment plants, green kitchens, free sapling nurseries, and large-scale tree plantation under the Kalp Taru project. He also appreciated the Brahma Kumaris’ contribution to the ‘Nasha Mukta Bharat Abhiyaan’ and other social initiatives promoting dignity for senior citizens and the practice of Karma Yoga in all fields. Referring to the recent inauguration of the Brahma Kumaris’ annual campaign “Rajyoga Meditation for World Unity and Trust” by President Droupadi Murmu in Lucknow, Radhakrishnan expressed confidence that the Silver Jubilee year will open new avenues of service, deeper societal partnerships, and amplified spiritual outreach.

THE PIONEER CLASSIFIEDS

CHANGE OF NAME

I, Vijaya, Mother of- No. 15183522N Hav (GNR) Kale Koushal Baban R/o- Vill & Po- Sonori, Teh- Purandar & Dist- Pune, Maharashtra, have changed my name from Vijaya, to Vijaya Baban Kale, vide affidavit dated 06/12/2025 before Notary Public Delhi.

PD(36185)C I, Gouindamma, Mother of- No.14662070P Hav Mahesh Erra R/o- Vill- Srinagar, Teh & PO- Gajuwaka, Dist- Visakhapatnam, A.P.- 530026, have changed my name from Gouindamma to Erra Govindamma, vide affidavit dated 06/12/2025 before Notary Public Delhi.

PD(36186)C I, Shri Demudu, Father of- No.14662070P Hav Mahesh Erra R/o- Vill- Srinagar, Teh & PO- Gajuwaka, Dist- Visakhapatnam, A.P.- 530026, have changed my name from Shri Demudu to Erra Demudu, vide affidavit dated 06/12/2025 before Notary Public Delhi.

PD(36187)C I, Baban, Father of- No. 15183522N Hav (GNR) Kale Koushal Baban R/o- Vill & Po- Sonori, Teh- Purandar & Dist- Pune, Maharashtra, have changed my name from Baban, to Baban Lakshman Kale, vide affidavit dated 06/12/2025 before Notary Public Delhi.

PD(36188)C I, Vaishanvi Singh, W/o- No.16030117W RFN Yogendra Singh, R/o- Vill- Nawada Khurd Kalan, Dist- Etawah, U.P.- 206127, have changed my name from Vaishanvi Singh to Vaishnavi Singh, vide affidavit dated 06/12/2025 before Notary Public New Delhi.

PD(36189)C I, Meena W/o- No.16022364P Nk Naveen Kumar, R/o- Vill & PO- Buroli, Dist- Rewari, Haryana- 123411, have changed my name from Meena to Meena Kumari, vide affidavit dated 06/12/2025 before Notary Public Delhi.

I, Nabab, Father of- No.16034589K Rfn Vaseed, R/o- Vill- Nangal, PO- Kakrala, Teh- Nagar, Dist- Bharatpur, Rajasthan- 321024, have changed my name from Nabab to Nawab, vide affidavit dated 06/12/2025 before Notary Public Delhi.

PD(36191)C I, Bismilla Bee, Mother of No.16025669A Rfn Rahees Khan, R/o- Vill- PO- Managayon, Teh- Makhan Nagar, Dist- Narmadapuram, M.P.- 461111, declare that in my Son’s service record my name is wrongly recorded as Bismilla whereas my correct name is Bismilla Bee which may be amended accordingly.

PD(36192)C I, Rashee, Mother of- JC- 343855P Nb Sub Manoj, R/o- Vill- Chargaon Karbal, PO- Rajegaon, PS & Teh- Mohkhed, Dist- Chhindwara, M.P.- 480107, have changed my name from Rashee to Rashi, vide affidavit dated 06/12/2025 before Notary Public Delhi.

PD(36193)C I, Kala Bai, Mother of No.16027837M Rfn Jaypal Singh, R/o- Vill- Borsali, PO- Polaykhurd, Teh- Gulana, Dist- Shajapur, M.P.- 465223, declare that in my Son’s service record my name is wrongly recorded as Krishna Bai whereas my correct name is Kala Bai which may be amended accordingly.

PD(36194)C I, Umrav, Father of No.16028424P Nk Ashok Kumar Gurjar, R/o- Vill- Kala Khera, PO- Ladikabas, Teh- Neem Ka Thana, Dist- Sikar, Rajasthan- 332705, declare that in my Son’s service record my name is wrongly recorded as Umrav Gurjar whereas my correct name is Umrav which may be amended accordingly.

PD(36195)C I, Mrs Preetipal, W/o- No.15411682W Hav Ram Bhawan, R/o- Vill- Pure Mahavir, Post- Benti, Teh- Kunda, Dist- Pratapgarh, U.P.- 230204, have changed my name from Mrs Preetipal to Preeti Pal for all future purposes, vide affidavit dated 06/12/2025 before Notary Public Delhi.

NOTICE FOR PUBLICATION DEBTS RECOVERY APPELLATE TRIBUNAL-DELHI					
Apartment No. 318 1Ird Floor, Hotel Samrat, Kautliya Marg, Chanakyapuri, New Delhi-110021.					
		Appeal No.65/2025 In T/SA No.724/2022 (DRT- II, Delhi) Appellant/s			
Vijay Kumar & Anr Vs Karnataka Bank & Ors.		Respondent/s			
Notice					
1. M/s New World Enterprises H. No. 0-21/19, Gali No. 5 Vijay Colony New Usmanpur, Delhi- 110053	Respondent No. 3				
2. Mohd. Sallauddin S/o Late Pool Hussain 33-A, A-4 Block, Gali No.9 Chanakya Place, Part-1 Uttam Nagar, Delhi 110059	Respondent No. 5				

Whereas the notice that an appeal from the order passed by the Presiding Officer of D.R.T. in the above case has been presented by the appellant on 24.03.2025 and is registered in the Tribunal. The matter was listed before this Tribunal on 08.01.2025.

Whereas it has been shown to the satisfaction of the Tribunal that it is not possible to serve you in the ordinary way. Therefore, this notice is given by advertisement directing you to make appearance in this Tribunal on 08.01.2025.

The Publication be made in two newspapers "one in vernacular language and the other in English" which are widely circulated in the said area / last known addresses of the respondents.

Whereas take notice that in default of your appearance on the day mentioned above, the case will be heard and determined in your absence.

Given under my hand and the Seal of the Tribunal, this 24th day of November, 2025.

BY ORDER OF THE TRIBUNAL
Section Officer

न्यायालय अपर सिविल जज
(सीओ) कोर्ट सं-4 गाजियाबाद
वाद सं-570/23

1. एस. एम. वी. एन-सीजी प्रॉ. लि. द्वारा अधिकृत हस्ताक्षरी प्रेम कुमार पुत्र स्वः दिशान लाल निवासी 78 सी फर्स्ट फ्लोर पॉकेट-डी 2-से-डी-सैकेण्ड डी. डी. ए. फ्लैट कोन्डली घडोली मयूर विहार फेज-3, दिल्ली

2. शौर्यपुरम एस्. टी. पी. एल. द्वारा अधिकृत हस्ताक्षरी प्रेम कुमार निवासी 786 कोण्डली घडोली, पॉकेट डी-2, डी. डी. ए. जन्ता फ्लैट मयूर विहार फेज-3, ईस्ट दिल्ली

1. मैं स्टारकेन द्वारा आदित्य कुमार पुत्र श्री महेश कुमार निवासी जी-190 सैक्टर-63, नोएडा 201301, जनपद गौतमबुद्ध नगर 2. बैंक आफ बड़ौदा शाखा सी-25 सक्टर आई. टी. पार्क टावर सैकेण्ड सैक्टर-62 नोएडा के लिए आपके विवेक उक्त वाद सख्त किया है। वाद आवेदन दखिल किया है।

आपको इस न्यायालय ने तारीख 09/12/25 को दिन में 10:00 बजे उतर देने के लिए व्यक्तिगत रूप या अधिवक्ता द्वारा उतर देने के लिए उपसजात होने के लिए सम्मन किया जाता है। जिसमें असफल रहने पर वाद। आवेदन का एक प्रतिय निस्तारण किया जाएगा। आज यह तारीख 14 /11 /2025 को मेरे हस्ताक्षर से और न्यायालय की मुद्रा लगाकर दिया गया।

अपर सिविल जज
(सीओ) कोर्ट सं-4 गाजियाबाद

Finland envoy unveils Christmas tree made from 300 kg of e-waste

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

Le Méridien New Delhi kicked off the holiday season in style with the unveiling of its “Consciously Festive” Christmas Tree, a 23-foot installation crafted from 300 kilograms of responsibly sourced e-waste. The initiative, executed in partnership with certified recyclers, transforms discarded electronics into a striking symbol of sustainability, creativity, and conscious luxury. This year’s tree continues the hotel’s tradition of blending festive artistry with environmental advocacy. By highlighting the challenge of e-waste management, the installation encourages mindful consumption, reuse, and innovative repurposing of materials that would otherwise end up in landfills. The ceremonial lighting was led by Kimmo Lähdevirta, Ambassador of



Finland to India, accompanied by the First Lady, who also joined in unveiling the hotel’s Advent Calendar. The tree and Advent Calendar reveal set the tone for a festive season focused on community, creativity, and conscious celebration. Guests were invited to explore the hotel’s E-Waste Drop Box, aimed at promoting responsible disposal habits among visitors. Meena Bhatia, Vice President and General Manager of Le Méridien New Delhi, hosted the Advent Calendar Reveal, sharing daily surprises that

include exclusive dining offers, festive lobby moments, and seasonal treats. “Festive installations should be more than ornamental — they should embody values. Each year, our Christmas tree becomes a canvas for sustainability, design, and craftsmanship. By upcycling materials and collaborating with artisans, we create not just beauty but meaning. This season, we are proud to once again present something unexpected, rooted in conscious luxury and shared with the city.”

PUBLIC NOTICE

Be it known to all that my clients Sh. Vipin Kumar Aggrawal S/o Late Sh. Dayanand Aggrawal and Smt. Madhu Aggrawal W/o-Sh. Vipin Kumar Aggrawal both R/o- 146, Savita Vihar, Delhi-110092 have henceforth severed all their relationships with their son Sh. Anshul Aggrawal, daughters-in-law namely Khushi Aggrawal w/o Sh. Anshul Aggrawal and Grand Son master Avyay Aggrawal due to their wayward, insolent and incorrigible ways and has debared & disowned them from their entire immoveable and moveable properties. If anybody deals with them in future, will do so entirely at their own risks and responsibility. S.N. JHA (Advocate) G-77, Ktd Courts Delhi-32

PUBLIC NOTICE

It is informed to all that Late Smt. Anjali Chatterjee, has bequeathed by Registered WILL in Noida, her residential Flat: F-269-B, Sector 22, Noida, Gautam Budh Nagar Uttar Pradesh, in the name of Shree Shree Ma Anandamayee Ashram, Kalkaji, New Delhi (unit of the Shree Shree Anandamayee Sangha (SSAS), registered at Uttarakhand under Societies Registration Act). The Management of SSAS has passed resolution to sell this flat. So, now with the help of this Public Notice, SSAS wants to take permissions from the office of the Registrar, Firms, Societies and Chits, Uttarakhand to proceed with Sale. If any person, society or any financial institution, bank etc. has any objection or has anything to say in this regard, must submit its objection/statement with an original copy of this advertisement to Registrar, Firms, Societies and Chits, Uttarakhand, Aniket Vihar PO Defence Colony, Doon University Road, Dehradun within 15 days of the publication of this advertisement and send a copy of letter marked to- Assistant Secretary, Shree Ma Anandamayee Ashram, Kalkaji New Delhi-110019

Politicians, State heads attend prayer meeting held for Swaraj Kaushal

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

A prayer meet was held on Sunday to eulogise former Governor of Mizoram, Swaraj Kaushal, who died on December 4 at 73.

His daughter, Bansuri Swaraj, shared her memories of her father and her mother, the late Sushma Swaraj, and paid her tributes to them both. She expressed her gratitude to the dignitaries who turned up at her home, several judges of the Supreme Court and high courts, political leaders, relatives, fellow advocates, and political workers, among them.

“Your sentiments will give me the strength to bear this untimely loss,” said the current BJP MP from New Delhi. A message from Prime Minister Narendra Modi was



read out at the prayer meeting. Union ministers Shriyraj Singh Chouhan, Arjun Meghwal, and Gajendra Shekhawat were among the politicians who paid their homage to the deceased. Mizoram Governor General V K Singh, Delhi Lieutenant Governor V K Saxena, Delhi Chief Minister Rekha Gupta, Haryana Chief Minister Nayab Singh Saini,

and Delhi Assembly Speaker Vijender Gupta were in attendance. MPs Ravi Shankar Prasad, Anurag Thakur, Naveen Jindal, Manoj Tiwari, Kamaljeet Sehrawat, Aam Aadmi Party Delhi unit president Saurabh Bharadwaj, Congress National Media Head Pawan Khera, Shiv Sena spokesperson Priyanka Chaturvedi also attended the condolence meeting.

₹1.5 cr prize announced for cricketer Pratika Rawal

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

Chief Minister Rekha Gupta, who met cricketer Pratika Rawal at her residence on Sunday, announced a prize of Rs 1.5 crore for her from the Delhi government. Rawal, who had scored 308 runs in the recent ICC Women’s World Cup, was fourth in the list of run-scorers after Laura Wolvaardt (571), Smriti Mandhana (434) and Ashleigh Gardner (328). The cricketer from Delhi, who was injured while playing against Bangladesh in the last group league game, was unable to play the semi-final and final. “Today, at the chief minister’s Jan Sava Sadan, we welcomed the talented young player of the Indian women’s cricket team, Pratika Rawal.”

Police tighten patrols, clubs told to boost, recheck fire safety

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

With Christmas and New Year crowds expected to surge in the national capital, the Delhi Police announced on Sunday that patrolling will be intensified across major party zones, and that clubs, bars, restaurants, and event venues have been instructed to review their fire safety compliance.

These directions follow a deadly blaze at a nightclub in Goa that resulted in the deaths of 25 people on Saturday, leading to renewed scrutiny of fire preparedness in entertainment venues across the country.

According to the police, establishments in the national capital must ensure that fire extinguishers are functional, exits are unob-

structed, and electrical loads are monitored.

They emphasised that nights with heavy crowds require strict adherence to emergency protocols.

Joy Singh, founder of Raasta and Yeti clubs in the capital, said his outlets are fully aligned with all rules issued by authorities. "All our outlets are fully compliant, and we follow every norm issued by the authorities. Regarding the Goa incident, most clubs already adhere to all the rules here in Delhi. It is a heartbreaking incident. Every human life is important," Singh said.

He highlighted the need for strict adherence to regulations for anyone entering the nightlife sector. "If someone is entering this space, I would strongly suggest they follow the rules.



It is an ever-evolving world, and nothing is more important than our people who come to our clubs. We must

be careful and follow all the norms laid down so that they have a good and safe evening," he said.

Manpreet Singh, treasurer of the National Restaurant Association of India, told PTI that venues hosting social

THESE DIRECTIONS FOLLOW A DEADLY BLAZE AT A NIGHTCLUB IN GOA THAT RESULTED IN THE DEATHS OF 25 PEOPLE ON SATURDAY

gatherings must treat fire-safety norms as non-negotiable. "When you run a club, bar or restaurant, it is crucial that fire safety norms are followed. One of the most important factors is ensuring there are as many exits as possible so people can escape easily," he said.

He also noted that crowd density must always be monitored. "In restaurants, the seating arrangement controls the number of patrons, but in clubs and

bars, people often stand. If too many people gather in one place, it can lead to a stampede-like situation during an evacuation or make escape extremely difficult. There should be no obstructions near the doors, and exits must always be kept clear," he said.

Regular club-goers in the capital also expressed their concerns. Priyanka, a resident of Lutyens' Delhi, remarked that nightlife spaces should feel safe for those seeking a respite from hectic routines.

"After a whole day of work, many of us go out to relax, meet friends, network and try something new. Clubs are where we unwind after a hectic week. Incidents like the Goa fire instil a sense of fear because we are supposed to feel safe in these

places. Fire safety is paramount. It has become a little scary now, and we hope authorities and establishments take every precaution," she said.

The Delhi Police further informed that checks with district authorities and fire officials will be strengthened across the festive period to ensure compliance at high-density venues.

Another officer mentioned that a robust security plan for the upcoming festivals is already in place. "We have already deployed additional PCR's, motorcycle riders and increased foot patrolling in the city. Additional force has been deployed outside nightclubs, and we will maintain strict vigilance to ensure that all regulations are followed," said the officer.

Police nab mastermind of forex fraud syndicate

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

Delhi Police have arrested the alleged mastermind of a multi-state forex cheating syndicate that targeted traders, professionals and travel businesses by posing as high-value clients and film industry insiders.

The accused, identified as 31-year-old Krishna Kumar Sharma, was wanted in a Kolkata case where he allegedly fled with 15,000 US dollars and 1,000 euros, worth roughly ₹14.5 lakh.

Deputy Commissioner of Police (Crime) Harsh Indora said Sharma ran a structured fraud operation that used fake identities, staged luxury meetings and involved multiple accomplices. "He lured victims with promises of big forex deals and sometimes posed as a film producer. Meetings were arranged in five-star hotels to make the setup look credible," he said.

According to investigators, Sharma relied on a carefully choreographed routine. His nephew Mayank and hired associates played the roles of support staff, bouncers and even makeup artists. Their



job was to create the impression of a film crew engaged in large entertainment projects. Victims were told that the cash exchange needed to happen quietly inside hotel rooms. Once the victims handed over the dollars or euros, the group slipped out through side exits.

Police said the syndicate travelled frequently, changed phones and SIM cards after every operation, and kept chilli spray and chloroform with them as precautionary

tools. Officers said Sharma remained mobile and careful, making him difficult to track. A Kolkata court had issued an arrest warrant for Sharma on December 6 in connection with the forex fraud reported there. The Delhi Police team began tracking him the same day based on technical inputs and local surveillance. Investigators traced him to Uttam Nagar in west Delhi, where he was apprehended after a short chase.

The arrest links him not

only to the Kolkata case but also to earlier cases across Mumbai and Delhi. One of the most striking incidents on record is a 2024 case in Delhi, where a complainant carrying 25,000 USD alleged that he was "hypnotised" after Sharma offered him water from a bottle. The victim later discovered that the cash had disappeared.

Police said Sharma had worked in the event management industry before the pandemic. After suffering major financial losses, he turned to organised cheating and built a scam model that targeted people dealing in foreign currency. Officers say his approach capitalised on two elements, urgency and glamour. Victims were told that film producers or international buyers needed foreign currency urgently, and the upscale environment of hotel lounges helped create a false sense of safety.

Investigators are now examining his travel history, bank accounts, devices and past associates to check for more victims. Police believe several cases in different cities may be linked to the same syndicate.

Electric heaters distributed to security guards

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

In a major pollution-control move ahead of peak winter, Delhi Chief Minister Rekha Gupta distributed electric heaters to night guards of Resident Welfare Associations (RWAs) on Sunday. The move aimed to curb the widespread practice of burning firewood and waste to stay warm, one of the most persistent sources of toxic winter smoke in the Capital.

Calling the initiative a "clean and safe alternative" to open fires, the Chief Minister said the Delhi Government would continue to roll out targeted interventions to reduce winter pollution. She stressed that the campaign against pollution is being run in "mission mode," and the city cannot afford avoidable sources of smoke at a time when air quality remains fragile.

The heaters were distributed at Dilli Haat, Pitampura, using CSR funds from the Delhi State Industrial and Infrastructure Development Corporation (DSIIDC). The Chief Minister thanked



Environment and Industries Minister Manjinder Singh Sirsa and DSIIDC for facilitating the initiative. She said the move directly addresses a key winter pollutant: the smoke that rises each night from hundreds of small fires lit by guards across residential colonies. "Open fires create thick layers of smoke that settle over entire neighbourhoods. These heaters will help prevent that. Cleaner winters must become the new normal for Delhi," the Chief Minister said.

She added that the government is simultaneously working on multiple fronts to curb pollution. Mechanical sweeping and water sprin-

gling have been expanded across major roads. Mist-spraying systems are being installed on electricity poles to reduce suspended particulate matter, and a comprehensive dust-mitigation plan has been put in place. Industrial units, she said, are under strict watch for emission compliance.

The Chief Minister reiterated that open burning of waste or firewood is now strictly prohibited. To support low-income families, the government is providing gas connections to curb dependence on firewood for cooking or heating.

She urged RWAs and citizens to actively report cases

of open burning and said that pollution control cannot be achieved by government enforcement alone. "Public participation is essential. Clean air is a shared responsibility," she said.

Environment and Industries Minister Manjinder Singh Sirsa, speaking at the event, said that even though vehicle numbers have risen by nearly 10 per cent this year and construction activity by over 20 per cent, the Air Quality Index (AQI) has shown "consistent and encouraging improvement" compared to previous years.

Sirsa also pointed to progress at Delhi's legacy waste sites, where nearly 40 per cent of garbage mounds have been cleared. Much of the reclaimed land has already been used for plantation drives, he said, calling it a "symbol of the city's transformation strategy."

With the distribution of electric heaters marking the first winter-specific intervention of the season, officials said more targeted measures would be introduced in the coming weeks as part of the government's broader action plan.

Cybercrime syndicate dismantled

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

Delhi Police's Cyber Cell has dismantled a major cybercrime syndicate operating across multiple states and allegedly linked to Chinese-controlled financial networks. The crackdown began after a 61-year-old man was duped of ₹33.1 lakh in an online investment scam, leading investigators to a network of fake firms, shell accounts, and a crypto laundering chain involving United States Dollar Tether (USDT) transactions.

Deputy Commissioner of Police (Cyber Cell) Aditya Gautam said the case revealed a sophisticated financial structure designed to move Indian victims' money through several layers before routing it into cryptocurrency. He said the arrests mark a major breakthrough in disrupting syndicates that use shell companies and crypto channels to send money abroad.

During the technical probe into the victim's E-FIR, investigators found that the

cheated money moved through several second-layer beneficiary accounts linked to a fake company, Belcrest India Pvt. Ltd.

Police identified two men as its key directors, Shivam Singh from Faizabad and Lakshay from Delhi, and the total cheated amount, ₹10.38 lakh, was traced directly to accounts tied to Belcrest.

Lakshay was the first to be arrested, on November 19. Police said he admitted to creating the fake company, opening multiple bank accounts, and handing over bank kits and SIM cards to a man named Shubham and others for ₹20,000 per month.

Once Lakshay was arrested, the Cyber Cell tracked the money trail further and identified Shubham as the next key link. Police said he frequently changed SIM cards, moved between locations, and attempted to avoid digital footprints.

After multiple raids, investigators caught him on December 6 in Tilak Nagar. Police recovered a laptop, two mobile phones, five

chequebooks and six debit cards that were used for laundering transactions. During interrogation, Shubham told investigators that he was working with a handler who supplied him with accounts of third and fourth-layer shell companies. The accounts were used to receive money that had already been cycled through several earlier layers.

Shubham told police that once the money reached these shell accounts, he converted it into USDT cryptocurrency through private vendors. He then sold the USDT to a Chinese-run entity known as "Kool Pay".

Investigators say the cycle repeated continuously, making it difficult to detect and trace the funds in real time.

Police said the Chinese entity initiated the flow by sending funds from the first-layer beneficiary accounts to Belcrest-linked accounts. These were then distributed through multi-layer bank accounts created using forged documents and fake firms.

Road death victim's kin get ₹64.7 lakh in claim

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

Delhi Motor Accident Claims Tribunal has awarded ₹64.71 lakh as compensation to the family of a 37-year-old gardener who died in a 2020 road accident in RK Puram.

Presiding officer Dr Shirish Aggarwal awarded the claim while hearing the claim petition filed by the kin of Jagdish Prakash, who suffered fatal injuries after his bicycle was hit by a car on January 24, 2020.

In a judgment dated November 21, the tribunal said, "It stands proved on the touchstone of preponderance of probability that Jagdish sustained fatal injuries in the accident which took place due to rash and negligent driving of the offending vehicle."

According to the prosecution, Jagdish, who was employed as a senior gardener with the Army Welfare Education Society, was killed by a rashly driven car.

Critically wounded, he was moved to Safdarjung Hospital, where he succumbed, it said.

Relying on Supreme Court precedents on the standard of proof in motor accident claim cases, the tribunal said that strict criminal standards do not apply in claims cases and that the claimants were required to establish their case on a preponderance of probabilities.

The tribunal noted that Jagdish was the sole breadwinner of his family and had eight dependents – both his parents, wife, and five children.

It awarded the claimants a total compensation of ₹64.71 lakh, a large portion of which, ₹60.48 lakh, was for loss of dependency.

The tribunal held that the offending vehicle, owned by a representative of the US Embassy, was not insured on the date of the accident, so the driver and owner of the vehicle were liable to pay the full amount.

City will set up over 200 new night shelters: Ashish Sood

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

Delhi Urban Development Minister Ashish Sood on Sunday announced that the city will set up over 200 new night shelters, pagodas and temporary waterproof tents to ensure that no homeless person is forced to sleep outdoors as temperatures continue to plunge.

The assurance came during his late-night inspections of two night shelters, one at Hanuman Mandir (Code 215) and another at Chabi Ganj's women's wing (Code 629).

Sood said the Delhi government is treating winter preparedness as a top priority. "No homeless person in the city should be compelled to spend the night out in the open," he said, directing officials to scale up capacity immediately in view of the intensifying cold wave.

During the inspection, the minister reviewed the availability and functioning of



essential services, including beds, warm blankets, heating arrangements, sanitation, food, clean drinking water and security. He sought detailed reports from Delhi Urban Shelter Improvement Board (DUSIB) officials on overall readiness across the city's shelter network.

Sood instructed DUSIB, shelter management teams and all concerned departments to ensure a steady supply of blankets and comfortable bedding and to maintain strict cleanliness, proper lighting and functional fire-safety systems. He

said shelters, particularly those dedicated to women, must have enhanced privacy and security measures.

The minister also directed that rescue teams be deployed more actively at night to bring homeless individuals into shelters rather than leaving them exposed to dangerous temperatures. He emphasised that shelters must be run with "sensitivity and a humane approach". Sood said more than 200 new pagoda-style shelters and waterproof tent facilities are being set up at key locations.

CM welcomes delegates of UNESCO heritage committee

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

Delhi Chief Minister Rekha Gupta on Sunday welcomed global delegates at the 20th session of the UNESCO Intergovernmental Committee for the Intangible Cultural Heritage.

She asserted that the national capital stands as a 3,000-year-old "living civilisation" prepared to showcase its cultural depth to the world. The international gathering was held at the Red Fort in the presence of External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar, Union Culture and Tourism Minister Gajendra Singh Shekhawat, UNESCO Director-General Dr Khaled El-Anany, and India's Permanent



Representative to UNESCO Vishal V. Sharma.

Addressing delegates at the historic venue, the chief minister said Delhi was the most symbolic host for the global cultural forum, describing the city as a continuum of civilisations from

the Indraprastha of the Mahabharata era to the modern democratic capital. She said that within a few square kilometres, Delhi offers a rare blend of historic markets, ancient forts, stepwells, classical arts, and diverse culinary traditions,

making it an embodiment of India's living heritage.

The Chief Minister said India's intangible cultural traditions, ranging from the Vedas and Upanishads to yoga, seasonal rituals, folk performances, and festivals, have always survived through people rather than institutions. At a time when the world is navigating rapid modernisation, climate change, migration, and digital disruption, preserving intangible cultural heritage has become even more urgent, the chief minister said. She noted that recent national efforts have focused on elevating traditional knowledge systems and cultural practices on international platforms.

Inviting foreign representatives to experience more than the formal proceedings, the chief minister encouraged them to explore Delhi's "soul" through its streets, architecture, craftsmanship, fragrances, and everyday cultural expressions. She urged them to visit historic sites such as the Red Fort, Purana Qila, museums, art galleries, and libraries that house India's creative and intellectual legacy.

The Chief Minister highlighted key cultural landmarks, including the Pradhanmantri Sangrahalaya, which chronicles the journey of India's prime ministers and stands as a tribute to the country's democratic evolution.

Delhi suffocation deaths: Couple's family asks why shutter was electrified

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

A day after a couple suffocated to death inside their grocery shop in Delhi's Tikri Kalan, their family demanded a thorough probe into "how electric current flowed through the shop's shutter", preventing anyone from pulling it open during the blaze.

Vineet (31) and his wife Renu (29) died after getting trapped in their smoke-filled shop on Friday evening. They are survived by their two children – Aditya, 10, and Om, 8. After noticing smoke drifting out of the

shutter, the children first raised an alarm, calling their uncle in panic.

"He tried to pull the shutter up, but the moment he touched it, he was thrown back. There was current flowing through it. How can that happen? We want to know the truth," Renu's sister, Alka, said.

She said the family was unable to understand how the shutter got pulled down while the couple was still inside.

"We want a fair and transparent investigation. We have full trust in the police and are sure they will investigate the matter properly," she added.

Vineet's mother, Rampyaari, said both her son and daughter-in-law worked tirelessly to support the family and give their children a stable future.

"Now the little boys have no one left. The government must help us. Our earning members are gone," she said.

Relatives said the children were in deep shock after the incident. Police said they are investigating the matter.

"If there was any current passing through the shutter is being examined as part of the ongoing inquiry," a senior officer said.

IN FOCUS



A team of aerobatic jets performs above the Yas Marina racetrack prior to the Formula One Abu Dhabi Grand Prix in Abu Dhabi, UAE

Telangana Rising summit kicks off at Bharat Future City

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Hyderabad

'Bharat Future City' near here is all set to host the Telangana Rising Global Summit, organised by the state Government on December 8 and 9. Nobel laureates Abhijit Banerjee and Kailash Satyarthi, Trump Media and Technology Group Director Eric Swider, and Biocon chief Kiran Mazumdar-Shaw will be among the speakers at the inaugural ceremony, officials said.

The state Government will unveil its 'Telangana Rising 2047 Vision Document' during the summit. The vision document outlines a roadmap to achieve a USD 1 trillion economy by 2034 and a USD 3 trillion economy by 2047. According to a release, over 2,500 participants from more than 42 countries have registered for the event.

The summit will showcase Telangana's vision for transformative growth, positioning the state as a key investment destination and innovation hub, the release added.

Governor Jishnu Dev Varma will inaugurate the summit at 1pm on December 8, according to the programme schedule. Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy visited the venue of the summit—the site of the pro-

posed Bharat Future City on the city outskirts—on Saturday evening to inspect the arrangements.

Deputy CM Mallu Bhatti Vikramarka on Sunday said that as part of the celebrations marking the Congress Government's completion of two years in office, a friendly football match will be played between a Telangana team led by CM Reddy and another team captained by Lionel Messi on December 13.

He added that thousands of fans from across the country are expected to arrive at Uppal Stadium for the match.

Vikramarka noted that celebrations for the Telangana Rising Global Summit have already begun across the state, with Revanth Reddy touring various districts.

"Lionel Messi enjoys massive global popularity and receives special security worldwide. In view of the friendly match between Lionel Messi and CM Revanth Reddy's team on December 13 at Uppal Stadium, fool-proof security arrangements are being made and personally reviewed," Vikramarka said. He explained that the Rachakonda and Hyderabad Police Commissioners are giving special attention to the security arrangements for the match.

JRC TARGETS 30 DISTRICTS TO END CHILD MARRIAGE IN ASSAM

TONY DAS
■ Guwahati

Giving a significant boost to the Government of India's 'Bal Vivah Mukht Bharat' (Child Marriage Free India) campaign, the civil society network Just Rights for Children (JRC) has announced an intensive drive to free one lakh villages nationwide from the social scourge of child marriage within the next year.

Crucially, the drive will concentrate on villages within 30 high-prevalence districts in Assam that were flagged in the National Family Health Survey V (NFHS V, 2019-21). The announcement marks the first anniversary of the national campaign.

Child marriage prevalence in Assam stands at a distressing 31.8 per cent, significantly higher than the national average of 23.3 per cent. Data reveals an alarming situation in districts like Dhubri, where the rate exceeds 50 per cent, and in areas such as South Salmara-Mankachar, Darrang, Nagaon, Goalpara, Bongaigaon, and Barpeta, which all record rates over 40 per cent.

JRC, a network of over 250 non-governmental organisations (NGOs), has eight partner groups operating in the state. In the past year alone, the network successfully prevented 10,114 child marriages across Assam, contributing to over one lakh preventions nationally.

Infant abducted by wolf in Kaiserganj; search underway

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Bahraich (UP)

An infant was taken away by a wolf in the Kaiserganj area here on Sunday, triggering an intense search operation by forest teams and villagers using drone cameras, officials said. The child and the predator remain untraced, they said.

According to villagers, the missing four-month-old infant, Subhash, son of Santosh and Kiran of Mallahanpurwa, was sleeping beside his mother when the wolf entered the house around 1.30 am.

"The predator silently walked in, lifted the baby from the mother's arms, clamped him in its jaws and

Sunali's repatriation from Bangladesh sparks hope

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ Murarai

Thirty-something Amir Khan of Faikirpara in Paikar village, Birbhum district, said he was torn between hope and anxiety after learning of the return of his deported neighbour, Sunali Khatun, from Bangladesh earlier this week.

He hopes that his sister Sweetey Bibi would now follow suit.

"I am now filled with expectations of the return of my sister and my nephews, who still remain stuck in Bangladesh because the Indian Government won't have them back. After all, her circumstances of detention and deportation and those of Sunali's were similar," Amir said on Sunday.

He said the family had repeatedly told authorities over the past seven months that Sweetey is an Indian citizen but their pleas had gone unheard.

"I am also apprehensive that despite our repeated pleadings for the last seven months that my sister and her children were picked up by mistake and she doesn't deserve to remain confined in a foreign land with almost no support, the central Government simply refuses to listen," he added.

Amir is now focused on the hearing of the case scheduled to take place in the Supreme Court on

December 12.

"I have been told by those fighting for our cause that following that hearing, there is a strong chance that my sister would return," he said.

Sweetey and her two sons, Qurban Sheikh (17) and Imam Dewan (6), were detained by Katju Nagar police in Delhi from the same neighbourhood as Sunali on suspicion of being Bangladeshi nationals and subsequently pushed across the border on June 27.

She worked as a domestic help in the area and had been living in Delhi since she was 12, her brother Amir said. Her third son, Imran (10), escaped the deportation and currently lives with his grandmother in Birbhum.

Sweetey and her two children, along with Sunali's family, spent over a hundred days at the Chapai Nawabgunj correctional facility in Bangladesh from August 20 as alleged "infiltrators" until a judicial magistrate granted them bail on December 1.

The Indian Government repatriated Sunali, who is in her advanced stage of pregnancy, and her eight-year-old son Sabir on December 5, "on humanitarian grounds" following a Supreme Court directive. However, her husband Danesh Sheikh and the family of Sweetey continue to remain put in Chapai Nawabgunj Sadar in the house of a Bangladeshi



Samaritan who has allowed them temporary accommodation.

On September 26, a Calcutta High Court division bench directed the Centre to bring back all six deportees within four weeks, but that order was challenged before the apex court, which continues to hear the case. Taking cognisance of Sunali's condition, a Supreme Court bench comprising Chief Justice Surya Kant and Justice Joymalya Bagchi passed a direction for her immediate repatriation after the Union Government submitted on

December 3 that it would bring two of the six deportees back.

"This separation from my daughter is becoming unbearable now. I spoke to her last on December 2 over a video call when she borrowed someone else's phone a day after her release from jail. I can't speak to her regularly because she doesn't have a phone of her own," said Lajina Bibi, the sexagenarian mother of Sweetey.

"What choice do I have but to shed tears for Sweetey and my grandchildren?" she

left," Mofizul said.

He said although Bangladesh police did not misbehave with the deportees, Sweetey was suffering from a cold and body aches on account of sleeping on the floor in her prison cell.

"She and her children as well as Danesh are now having to depend on the food and other essentials which their neighbours in Chapai Nawabgunj, taking pity on their state, are providing them. But they cannot sustain this charity for long. These four people must be brought back without further delay," Mofizul continued.

TMC MP Samirul Islam, who is steering the legal battle of the two families in the corridors of the country's top judiciary, said although Sweetey's family members were happy at Sunali's return, "their tears have not been wiped because Sweetey has herself not returned".

"If the return of Sunali Khatun marked the first phase of our legal battle against the Bangla-birodhi zamindars, the second phase of the struggle awaits Sweetey Bibi and her two minor sons who are still in Bangladesh," he posted on X.

But what happens if her family fails to earn its desired reprieve in court?

"I really don't know what will happen then. Perhaps that will be the end of the road for us," Amir said.

Manish introduces Bill for independent MP voting

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ New Delhi

Congress MP Manish Tewari has introduced a bill in Lok Sabha that seeks to allow parliamentarians to take an independent line in voting on bills and motions other than those affecting the Government's stability in a bid to free them from "whip-driven tyranny" and promote "good lawmaking".

Tewari, who introduced the private member's bill on Friday last to amend the Anti-Defection Law, said his proposed legislation seeks to flag who has primacy in a democracy - the elector who stands in the sun for hours to elect his or her representative or the political party whose whip the representative becomes the helot of.



The bill, introduced by Tewari for the third time in Lok Sabha after 2010 and 2021, seeks to give parliamentarians the freedom to toe an independent line in voting on bills and motions other than a confidence motion, no-confidence motion, adjournment motion, money bills

and financial matters that could affect the stability of a Government.

"This bill seeks to return conscience, constituency and common sense to the echelons of the legislature so that an elected representative actually functions as the representative of the people who elected

him and not as an instrument of a whip issued by his party, transforming law-makers into mere lobotomised numbers and dogmatic ciphers responding to a division bell," Tewari told PTI.

The statement of objects and reasons of the bill state that it proposes to amend the Tenth Schedule to the Constitution with a view to provide for the following - "a member shall incur loss of his membership only when he votes or abstains from voting in the House with regard to a confidence motion, no-confidence motion, adjournment motion, money bill or financial matters, contrary to any direction issued in this behalf by the party to which he belongs to, and in no other case."

Odisha aims for 15 airports by 2047



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Bhubaneswar

The Odisha Government has set an ambitious target to have at least 15 fully operational airports by 2047, when India is going to celebrate 100 years of independence, an officer said on Sunday.

The programmes undertaken to achieve the target were discussed at the 4th Meeting of the High Power Committee on Aviation held under the chairmanship of Chief Secretary Manoj Ahuja on Saturday, the officer said.

Focused on advancing Odisha's aviation ecosystem in line with the Vision of Vikshit Odisha 2036 - 47, the committee reviewed the emerging opportunities in the aviation sector and discussed measures to accelerate infrastructure development, enhance connectivity, and create an enabling policy environment. Odisha will complete 100 years of formation in 2036.

Odisha has 19 airports or airstrips, of which 12 are state-owned. However, at

present, only five civilian airports are operational - Bhubaneswar, Jharsuguda, Jeypore, Utkala and Rourkela, he said.

Bhubaneswar is currently the only international airport in the state, providing connectivity to Dubai, Singapore, and Bangkok. The state is taking necessary steps for building another international airport at Puri with special zones for aviation, logistics, etc.

Progress on the development of airports and airstrips, including the proposed greenfield international airport at Puri, was reviewed in detail, he said. The Government is also expecting to generate annual revenue of ₹5,000 crore from aviation-related services by 2047, the officials said.

The meeting underscored the need for a dedicated policy to promote the establishment of Flight Training Organisations (FTOs) in Odisha, aimed at developing a strong talent pool for the aviation industry.

Only three districts...

In the districts of concern (DOC) category, where Left Wing Extremist influence is waning but focused resource deployment remains necessary, eight districts were included in 2021. Subsequent reviews brought this down to six in April 2025. Now, four districts have been excluded from this category and two added, bringing the total to four. Government records also show a dramatic fall in Naxal-related violence over the past two decades. Violent incidents dropped to 7,744 in 2014-2024 from 16,463 in 2004-2014. While security personnel deaths fell from 1,851 to 509 over the same period and civilian fatalities reduced from 4,766 to 1,495.

In 2025 alone, forces neutralised 270 Naxals, arrested 680, and secured the surrender of 1,225 insurgents.

Security agencies are now using cutting-edge technologies to ensure precise monitoring and analysis of Naxal activity. Tools such as location tracking, mobile data analysis, scientific call log examination, and social media monitoring are being deployed

to closely track Naxal movements. Support from various forensic and technical institutes has strengthened intelligence gathering and enhanced operational efficiency. Additionally, drone surveillance, satellite imaging, and AI-driven data analytics are being effectively deployed to improve monitoring and strategic planning," sources said.

PMAY scam cracks...

The agency, sources said, is carrying out an exercise for valuation of the assets of the company and its promoters so that they can be possibly attached under the anti-money laundering law and later restituted to the victims of the alleged fraud.

A chargesheet is also expected to be filed against Yadav and his linked entities soon, the sources said. There was no immediate response from the company on the allegations made by the ED against it and its MD.

The agency had claimed to have found a "pattern of accelerated liq-

uidation" of personal and company-held assets by Yadav across Gurugram, Maharashtra and Rajasthan in the recent past to convert "illicit" gains into easily disposable form.

The ED told a court and in a public statement that Yadav's wife Sunita Swaraj "relocated" to the US in August, 2025 and was found residing at Harvard University at Boston in Massachusetts, while his children (a son and a daughter) were studying at the Trinity College in Connecticut. "...Such accelerated sales indicates a clear attempt to dissipate assets and evade legal action," the ED alleged.

IndiGo chaos eases

In a statement the company said, "The Board of Directors of Interglobe Aviation Limited (IndiGo) met on the first day that the problem of cancellations and delayed flights arose. The members received a detailed briefing from the management on the nature and extent of the crisis." This

meeting was followed up with a session confined to only Board members, in which it was decided to set up a Crisis Management Group (CMG), comprising, among others, Chairman Vikram Singh Mehta; Board Directors Gregg Saretzky, Mike Whitaker and Amitabh Kant, and CEO Pieter Elbers, it added.

The airline has claimed it will give full waiver on cancellations and reschedule requests for bookings till December 15. The process of refunds and sorting luggage is going on fast, it said.

IndiGo has urged passengers to check the latest flight status on its website before heading to the airport, as minor changes may still occur while the airline continues to fine-tune its operations. It added that cancellations are now being made at an earlier stage, enabling the airline to alert passengers well in advance. IndiGo said its teams are working round-the-clock to bring operations back to normal and improve the travel experience for passengers.

FROM PAGE - 1

CM Stalin: TN rising investor meet brings jobs, growth



Tamil Nadu CM MK Stalin said on Sunday that the State signed 91 MoUs at the TN Rising Investor Meet here, bringing in investments worth ₹36,660 crore and creating 56,766 jobs. The CM said that thanks to the “unshakable confidence” shown by the investors, Tamil Nadu is moving towards the goal of becoming a one-trillion-US-dollar economy.

US Under Secretary Allison Hooker begins India visit

Allison Hooker, the US Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs, is on a five-day visit to India from Sunday to advance bilateral strategic and economic ties. Hooker's trip to New Delhi and Bengaluru comes amid increasing strain in ties between the two countries after Washington slapped a whopping 50 per cent tariff on Indian goods, including 25 per cent levies for India's procurement of Russian crude oil.



Amit Shah predicts NDA victory in Bengal and TN



Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Sunday said the NDA will score a big victory in the upcoming elections to West Bengal and Tamil Nadu with the support of the people who have rejected the Congress and its allies in every corner of the country.

CM Saini urges scientists to take science beyond labs

Haryana CM Nayab Singh Saini on Sunday urged scientists to take science beyond laboratories, ensuring its benefits reach every person in society. He said science brings true prosperity only when it helps a farmer increase crop yield, cures a patient's illness, and empowers an entrepreneur. Addressing the 11th India International Science Festival in Panchkula, Saini said science is not just a career, but a medium for nation-building, according to an official Statement issued.



Nehru's reality will be exposed in Parliament: BJP

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

The BJP on Sunday asserted that Jawaharlal Nehru's “reality” will come out in the open during the upcoming debate on Vande Mataram's anniversary in Lok Sabha, as it played Congress leader Sonia Gandhi over her allegation that the ruling dispensation's main objective is to vilify the country's first prime minister.

The Congress tried to “end” the legacy of leaders like Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, Dr Bhim Rao Ambedkar and Subhash Chandra Bose just to keep Nehru's legacy alive, BJP national spokesperson Sambit Patra charged and asked the Congress parliamentary party chairperson to stop promoting the Nehru-Gandhi family.

“So far as the question of finishing Nehru's legacy is concerned, who best will finish his legacy other than

the present clan of the so-called Gandhis who are out on bail in the National Herald case,” the BJP MP from Puri Lok Sabha constituency told reporters here, in an apparent reference to Sonia Gandhi and her son Rahul Gandhi, the Leader of Opposition in Lok Sabha.

Without naming Gandhis, Patra said that an FIR has recently been filed against them for allegedly “capturing” National Herald, which was started by Nehru. “If they are not tarnishing the legacy of Nehru, then who else is trying to do so,” Patra said, adding, “When there will be a debate on Vande Mataram in Parliament tomorrow, I feel that the reality of Nehru ji will be revealed to everyone; he will again be exposed.”

Prime Minister Narendra Modi will initiate the debate on the 150th anniversary of the national song, Vande Mataram, in the Lok Sabha



“THE BJP AIMS NOT TO REWRITE HISTORY BUT TO RECTIFY IT, GIVING PROPER RECOGNITION TO THOSE WHO TRULY CONTRIBUTED TO INDIA'S INDEPENDENCE AND ITS DIVERSE HERITAGE”

On Monday, while Home Minister Amit Shah will begin the discussion in the Rajya Sabha on December 9.

The Lok Sabha has listed 'Discussion on the 150th anniversary of national song Vande Mataram' on Monday and allocated 10 hours for the debate.

On Sonia Gandhi's accusations that a systematic attempt is being made to demolish Nehru's multifaceted legacy and rewrite history, Patra hit back, saying the BJP is only trying to ensure that due recognition is given to leaders. “The BJP is not trying to

rewrite history. The BJP is trying to rectify the history and give due recognition to the people who really contributed towards the independence of this country and to the various other facets of this country,” he added.

Reacting sharply to the Congress leader's allegation that those targeting Nehru belong to an ideology that had no role whatsoever in the country's freedom movement and the making of the Constitution, the BJP said the remark is coming from a person who did not even belong to the country.

“Sonia Gandhiji, you shouldn't have raised this question.... It's because the country will ask a counter question as to what role Sonia Gandhi, who was known as Antonia Maino, and her family played in India's freedom struggle,” he said.

“All of us who are here

have, in some form, directly or indirectly, contributed and participated in the freedom struggle. But you did not even belong to this country. So you don't ask this question as to what contribution we made in the freedom struggle,” Patra said.

The BJP leader also targeted Gandhi over her remarks that Nehru firmly believed in secularism, alleging that he had a “false sense of secularism” because he had once said that the original version of Vande Mataram would “irritate Muslims”.

For Nehru, only that definition of secularism was important in which Lord Ram does not exist, he charged.

“Tomorrow, when there will be a discussion on Vande Mataram, I feel that Nehru will again be subjected to debate and discussion, and might be exposed,” Patra said.

Chhattisgarh's Kondapalli village gets its first mobile tower

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Raipur

A mobile tower has been installed for the first time at Kondapalli village in Chhattisgarh's Naxal-affected Bijapur district, an area long cut off from the outside world, officials said on Sunday.

The village, about 450 km from State capital Raipur and located in the dense forests along the border with Telangana, did not have roads, electricity and drinking water until recently.

The installation of a mobile tower last week was not merely a technological step forward for the local community but a symbol of getting connected with the outside world, said a Government Statement.

His Government was committed to ensure that every village and every family in Bastar region becomes part of the development mainstream, gains access to digital services, and sees new avenues of opportunity open for them, Chief Minister Vishnu Deo Sai was quoted as saying in the Statement.

This was the dawn of a new era of trust, transformation and new possibilities, he said.

Mobile network was being provided under the ‘Niyad Nellanaar’ (Your Good Village) scheme of the State Government which aims to bring development to remote villages close to security camps, the Statement said.

As the tower's activation was announced last week, excitement swept through Kondapalli as women, men and children marched to the tower site in a procession and performed traditional rituals. People danced to the beat of the ‘mandar’ drum and residents of neighbouring villages also joined in.

With mobile network, the villagers can now access banking services, Aadhaar, ration, health schemes, pension schemes and educational services, the release said.

Since a security camp was set up at Kondapalli in December 2024, the administration has been able to reach the village regularly. The long-defunct road in the area is being reconstructed by the Border Roads Organisation, and work on a 50-km stretch is currently under progress, the Statement said.

Parliament panel to summon IndiGo, DGCA amid flight chaos

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

With air travel chaos continuing for the sixth consecutive day, the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Transport, Tourism and Culture is set to summon top executives of IndiGo and key officials of the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) and the Ministry of Civil Aviation to explain about the cause of disruption in air services and possible solutions.

The committee, chaired by JD(U) leader Sanjay Jha, has taken serious note of the hardships faced by thousands of passengers stuck at airports nationwide. According to a panel member, even several parliamentarians travelling to the national Capital for the Winter Session were affected by IndiGo cancellations and delays by other carriers.



Union Minister of Civil Aviation Ram Mohan Naidu Kinjarapu chairs a meeting to addressing the disruption caused by the recent IndiGo operational crisis

A member said the panel has taken serious note of the difficulties faced by thousands of passengers due to disruption in air services.

Even parliamentarians, who were in the national capital for the Winter Session, faced the brunt of flight cancellations by IndiGo and delays by other airlines,

the panel member said.

Civil aviation minister Ram Mohan Naidu, in response to Rahul Gandhi's remark, stated that the Government has consistently promoted competition in the aviation sector to promote the entry of more airlines in the market. He highlighted recent legislation aimed at

reducing leasing costs, noting that it will make it easier for airlines to expand their fleets. In his Statement, Naidu pointed out that the IndiGo crisis is an issue of public concern rather than a political issue.

Several MPs also received complaints from people about air fares shooting up due to the scenario. Meanwhile, CPI(M) Rajya Sabha member John Brittas, who is not part of the standing committee on transport, has demanded setting up of a joint parliamentary committee or a judicial inquiry into the large-scale disruption of flights.

IndiGo cancelled more than 220 flights at Delhi and Mumbai airports on Sunday, as the disruptions entered the sixth day even as efforts were on to normalise operations.

The Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) has held IndiGo's top manage-

ment accountable for ongoing flight disruptions, issuing a show-cause notice to its CEO Pieter Elbers, as the low-cost airlines cancelled more flights on Sunday amid an ongoing crisis.

The aviation regulator has sought explanation from him within 24 hours on why enforcement action should not be initiated against him after widespread IndiGo delays and cancellations disrupted air travel across the country.

The rules the airline failed to comply with are 42A of the Aircraft Rules, 1937, and Civil Aviation Requirements which pertain to fatigue management of pilots.

According to the DGCA notice, “Whereas such large-scale operational failures indicate significant lapses in planning, oversight, and resource management, and prima facie non-compliance on the part of the airline”.

Three Jharkhand migrants among victims of Goa nightclub fire

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ Lapung (Ranchi)

Three migrant workers from Jharkhand were among those killed in the Goa nightclub fire, their family said on Sunday.

Two brothers, Pradeep (24) and Vinod Mahto (20), from Fatehpur village in Lapung, and Mohti Manda (22) from Govindpur village in Khunti district's Karra block, died in the incident, their families said.

Phagu Mahto (32), elder brother of Pradeep and Vinod, said they learnt of the deaths around 3am after one of their relatives in Goa called.

“I lost both my brothers - Pradeep and Vinod. We came to know about it when we received a call from Nishan Kumar, one of our relatives who had gone to Goa in search of livelihood. My father Dhaneshwar Mahto is shocked.”

At least 25 people were killed and six others suffered injuries in a massive fire that erupted at a nightclub in North Goa after midnight on Sunday. The deceased included four tourists and 14 staff members, while the identities of the remaining seven were yet to be established, police said.

Six persons who suffered

injuries in the blaze and they are currently undergoing treatment at the Goa Medical College and Hospital, Bambolim.

Phagu said both the brothers had migrated to Goa around 10-12 months ago and were scheduled to celebrate Holi with family next year.

“My brothers used to send around Rs 30,000 per month to support the family here. Both were unmarried,” he said. So far none of the officials or any representatives from the State Government have contacted the family, Phagu claimed.

His wife Sulanti said the family is very poor and they

depended on their meagre income from a makeshift sweets shop in the village and money sent by the brothers.

In Govindpur, the family of Mohti Munda received a similar call informing them of his death. Relatives said his father, Etwa Manda, was in shock.

His son, Mohti Manda (22) who worked in the same nightclub had also died in the blaze.

An official at the State migrant control room in Ranchi said they had contacted all affected families and efforts were underway to reach the employer in Goa.

CONGRESS DEMANDS PROBE

New Delhi: The Congress on Sunday demanded a comprehensive investigation and strict accountability for the tragic fire at a nightclub in Goa that killed 25 people, with Rahul Gandhi claiming it was a criminal failure of safety and governance.

The fire broke out at Birch by Romeo Lane, a popular nightclub at Arpora village in North Goa, early Sunday, killing at least 25 people, including four tourists and 14 staff members, and injuring six others.

Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge expressed his deepest condolences to those who lost their loved ones in the blaze.

"This avoidable tragic incident is an irreparable loss, and I pray for the speedy recovery of all those who have been injured."

"Such tragedies call for a comprehensive investigation, strict accountability, and immediate steps to ensure that all fire safety norms are enforced, so that such devastating incidents are never repeated," Kharge said in a social media post.

PM Modi gifts marble chess set to Putin

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Agra

With Prime Minister Narendra Modi gifting a marble chess set from Agra to Russian President Vladimir Putin during his recent India visit, the local handicraft artisans said they are now hopeful of more recognition for their work.

The chessboard, crafted from stone with intricate inlay work, is similar to the traditional techniques used on marble in Taj Mahal. Handicraft artist Adnan Sheikh expressed gratitude to the Prime Minister for showcasing Agra's centuries-old crafts-

manship on the global stage.

"Today, the whole world is talking about a chess set made in Agra. After Prime Minister Modi gifted a handcrafted piece to the Russian President, the value and recognition of this art has increased. Demand for hand-made stone inlay work will grow worldwide, boosting the morale of local artisans," Sheikh said.

Artisan Zafar said the news have renewed hope among craftsmen, who were struggling for regular work. "Now that people around the world know about Agra's handicraft, employment will rise. We hope this art will flourish

again and wages will improve," he said.

Trader Ayush Gupta said nearly 5,000 artisans and merchants in Agra are associated with stone inlay handicraft, a business worth crores of rupees annually.

"Gifting a handcrafted chess set to the Russian President has energised the entire trade community. We will display the photograph of Prime Minister Modi presenting the gift to President Putin in our showrooms. We will also inform Russian tourists that the chess set gifted to their President was made right here in Agra," Gupta said.

Rajasthan: Leopard dies under mysterious circumstances

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ Jaipur

A leopard that was trapped in a room following an attack on a minor boy died allegedly under mysterious circumstances in the Banswara district of Rajasthan on Sunday morning.

The incident occurred in a village under the Kalinjara police station area. According to the police, 15-year-old Shantilal was sitting outside his house when the leopard suddenly attacked him, leaving him injured. Hearing his screams, family members rushed to his aid, prompting the leopard to flee into a nearby house.

Villagers immediately closed the door from the outside, trapping the animal inside the room. A team from the forest department arrived on the scene, and officials noted that the leopard did not seem to be in normal condition.

"Before the rescue operation could begin, the animal vomited inside the room and died shortly after. No external injury marks were found on its body," the police said. The carcass has been sent for post-mortem, officials said, adding that the cause of death will be ascertained only after the report is received.

■ States Focus ■

Gangsters in uniform: BJP's Jakhar hits at Punjab Police



HP GOVERNOR CALLS FOR FIGHT AGAINST DRUG ABUSE

Himachal Pradesh Governor Shiv Pratap Shukla on Sunday said that coordinated and determined efforts are required to combat drug abuse in the state.

After inaugurating a workshop on 'War on Drugs – Chitte Par Chot' organised by 'Sanjeevani', a group of NGOs, the governor said the fight against drugs demands both strict action by police and a sensitive approach towards the affected individuals. Along with the NGOs, participation from religious institutions is crucial to break the drug network backed by foreign entities, Shukla said.

Appreciating the efforts of the state Government in tackling the drug menace, particularly the manner in which both the ruling and Opposition parties united on this issue, Shukla said, "Without collective political resolve, it would not be possible to save the Devbhoomi from this crisis."



GOGOI HAILS TEZPUR STUDENTS AS SYMBOL OF NEW ASSAM

Congress leader Gaurav Gogoi on Sunday lauded the student-led agitation at Tezpur University as a symbol of "new Assam". Gogoi, the deputy leader of the Congress in Lok Sabha and chief of the party in the state, criticised the government for its handling of the unrest, which started in mid-September following the death of singer Zubeen Garg. "It is disappointing to see the manner in which Tezpur University is being tackled by the government. At the same time, I am proud of the manner in which the students and faculty of Tezpur University have conducted themselves. Firm, unbending and dignified," Gogoi said in a series of posts on X.

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Chandigarh

In a sharp attack on the Punjab Police, state BJP chief Sunil Jakhar Sunday called it "gangsters in uniform" and alleged that certain police personnel have "bowed" to the AAP dispensation, helping in "undemocratic tasks".

Jakhar also attacked the Bhagwant Mann Government for the alleged deteriorating law and order, claiming there is a prevailing atmosphere of fear in Punjab, as he cited extortion threats and firing incidents.

He referenced AAP leader Arvind Kejriwal's warning to gangsters to leave Punjab within seven days or face consequences.

Instead of leaving, Jakhar claimed, gangsters have openly accepted this challenge, committing crimes daily, while Kejriwal has not been seen in Punjab since



making the threat.

During a media address, Jakhar cited several alarming incidents, including the murder of the son of an RSS leader in Ferozepur, two deaths during a shooting at

a marriage palace in Ludhiana, and an attack on the residence of AAP leader Daljit Raju in Phagwara.

He remarked that hardly a day goes by without a shocking crime committed by

gangsters.

Jakhar noted that despite Punjab having 17 officers with the rank of Director General of Police (DGP) and 13 with the rank of Additional DGP, crime continues to rise.

Lakhs of people assemble in Kolkata to chant Gita

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ Kolkata

Lakhs of *sanatani* devotees led by prominent *sadhus* and *sadhvis* on Sunday assembled at the historic Brigade Parade Ground in Kolkata to participate in a mega Bhagwad Gita recital programme christened *Paanch Lakhs Konthe Gita Paath* (chanting of Gita in 5 lakh voices).

While Governor CV Ananda Bose addressed the gathering — interpreted by many a critic as a pre-electoral show of strength by the pro-BJP groups — senior BJP leaders, including Union Minister and former Bengal BJP state president Sukanta Majumdar, ex-MP Locket Chatterjee and MLA Agnimitra Paul, and prominent religious figures, including Dharendra Shastri and Kartik Maharaj attend

the event.

Speaking to the media men after the programme Majumdar said "Gita is not a religion specific book, it is applicable not only to the Hindus but members of all religions."

On whether Bengal was getting split along communal lines after former Trinamool Congress MLA Humayun Kabir's laying of the foundation stone of a Babri Mosque at Murshidabad on Saturday followed by chanting of Gita by lakhs of people on Sunday, he said, it was Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee who had brought the situation to such pass.

State BJP spokesperson Sajal Ghosh said, "alarmed by the steady alienation of the Muslim votes Mamata Banerjee has fixed Humayun Kabir to unite the Muslim



A youngster during the 'five-lakh-voices Gita chanting' event, at the Brigade Parade Ground in Kolkata on Sunday

votes in the name of Babri Mosque, she knew that his suspension from the party would trigger communal sentiments more than on normal conditions after the elections if Kabir manages to

rid of them one is sure Gita chanting will cleanse the heart of people and focus them on the real cause."

Meanwhile, in a parallel Kabir said that he too would give a call to Muslim clerics to chant hymns from Quran. "I respect the Hindu sentiments and I respect their chanting of their religious scripture Gita, I too call upon the cleric to do the same and I am giving a call to chant Quran in one lakh voices the event will be decided and the date will be declared soon," he said.

Referring to the Sunday's the TMC said that it was being done to further political goals. "When religion comes out of the home and peddled in public it surely has political purpose, the BJP and its associates are doing the same with an eye on the 2026 Assembly elections."

10 Naxalites surrender in MP's Balaghat

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Bhopal

Ten wanted Naxalites, including four women, surrendered before Chief Minister Dr Mohan Yadav in Balaghat on Sunday, marking a significant step in Madhya Pradesh's push to eliminate Naxal influence.

Dr Yadav handed them copies of the Constitution as they laid down their weapons and urged other cadres to return to the mainstream, saying the state is committed to achieving Naxal-free status by January 2026.

He said the government, working in line with targets set by Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Home Minister Amit Shah, will ensure the safety, rehabilitation and development of those who abandon violence. "No individual has the licence to take up arms. Those who choose the path of law will find full support in rebuilding their lives," Dr Yadav said.

The Chief Minister said anti-Naxal operations have been strengthened through new camps, increased personnel and sustained field action. Fifteen temporary camps and 882 posts for a special support battalion



have been sanctioned to reinforce the campaign. He said continuous surveillance, intensive checks and coordinated action have sharply reduced the Naxal footprint in the state.

Dr Yadav said last year's opening of 46 single-window centres in affected regions has helped provide employment, forest rights documents and essential services, aiding rehabilitation efforts. Paying tribute to policeman Ashish Sharma, he said 328 Hawk Force personnel and other officers demonstrating exceptional service have been granted out-of-turn promotions.

Director General of Police

Kailash Makwana said expanded operations, increased manpower and consistent encouragement for field teams have produced visible results, with surrenders rising in Madhya Pradesh and neighbouring states. Job and skill development initiatives, he said, are helping connect youth and residents in affected areas with the mainstream.

Transport and School Education Minister Uday Pratap Singh, senior police officials and personnel attended the programme, where authorities released the names of all ten cadres who surrendered across Sukma, Bijapur, Dantewada and Gadchiroli.

Rajnath reaffirms push for self-reliant defence sector

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Jammu

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh on Sunday reiterated the commitment of the Narendra Modi-led central Government to make the nation 'Atma Nirbhar' (Self-Reliant) in defence manufacturing.

Speaking during the launch of the 125 'game-changing' infrastructure projects in Leh, Singh emphasised that India, which was once dependent on imports, is today witnessing a paradigm shift in defence manufacturing, from being an import-dependent nation to an emerging producer-exporter.

He said the country once lacked a robust system to manufacture arms and equipment domestically, but sustained efforts over the last decade have reversed that situation.

"Due to our hard work in the last 10 years, our defence production, which was approximately ₹46,000 crore in 2014, has now grown to a record ₹1.51 lakh crore. Our defence exports, which were less than ₹1,000 crore 10 years ago, have now reached nearly ₹24,000 crore," Singh said.

Lauding the BRO for



Defence Minister Rajnath Singh dedicated 125 border infrastructure projects of Border Roads Organisation (BRO)

making great progress in technological innovation, Singh asserted that advanced engineering methods are accelerating the completion of infrastructure projects.

He made special mention of BRO's adoption of Class-70 modular bridges indigenously developed in partnership with Garden Reach Shipbuilders and Engineers under the Aatmanirbhar Bharat (Self-Reliant India) vision.

"The successful construction of these modular bridges at several forward locations is a powerful example of how indigenous technology is transforming infrastructure in border areas. These bridges, completely designed and manufactured in India, mark a significant milestone in India's engineering self-reliance," he said.

The defence minister also pointed out that in the financial year 2024-25, BRO

incurred a record expenditure of ₹16,690 crore, the highest ever, and a target of ₹18,700 crore has been set for FY 2025-26, which underlines the government's confidence in BRO's capabilities.

The Government has enhanced the BRO budget from ₹6,500 crore to ₹7,146 crore in the Union Budget 2025-26 in recognition of its critical role in national security and development, he added.

New disease found: Judiciary must be shielded from political attacks



A ASHVATHAMAN

Judiciary should be protected from personal attacks and from colouring judges with wrong intentions. In a constitutional democracy, the courts stand as the final sentinel on the qui vive, always alert to protect rights. Judiciary should be free from unwanted colourings, because the faith of the judges should never be allowed to faint. Once that faith weakens, the entire edifice of constitutional governance starts to crumble.

If such colouring is allowed, if every judicial order is casually attributed to political or ideological bias, the trust

over the judiciary will fall. Recent public discourse has shown how quickly narratives spread, especially when amplified by party machinery or social media ecosystems.

What then remains for a citizen? A citizen obeys court orders because he believes the judge is neutral. When neutrality is doubted, the rule of law becomes a rule of convenience.

In the Thirupparangunram issue, for protecting the religious rights of Hindus conferred by the Indian Constitution, Justice GR Swaminathan passed an order. Around the same time, across India, debates on temple rights, minority rights, and Article 25 freedoms have become flashpoints, showing how sensitive such matters are. Whether one agrees or disagrees with the reasoning, the constitutional remedy is appeal, not slander.

Yet a DMK MP, TR Balu, stood in Parliament and declared that they

"got an order from an RSS judge". A senior parliamentarian forgetting that the conduct of judges in their official duties generally cannot be discussed in Parliament or State Legislatures, as per Article 121 of the Constitution, undermines the very safeguard created to ensure judicial independence.

The act of TR Balu demands action for breach of parliamentary privilege or contempt of the House. In legal tradition this is scandalising the court, an established category of contempt recognised since the Privy Council's 1899 decision in *McLeod v St Aubyn*, reiterated in Indian jurisprudence from *Brahma Prakash Sharma* (1953) to *Arundhati Roy* (2002).

Even more disturbing is that the High Court Registrar has not taken cognisance of this grave breach. Is this allowed? By remaining passive, the institution risks letting a dangerous precedent take root.

If this passes without action, every judge becomes vulnerable. Anyone unhappy with a judicial order will simply pour colour, attach a political label, and escape accountability. A State Government may claim political rhetoric as free speech, but freedom of speech ends where intimidation of the judiciary begins.

When a citizen sees a Member of Parliament openly attacking a judge in this manner, and the institution not responding, what confidence will he have to follow a court order? This silence sends the wrong signal, that judicial orders can be selectively obeyed. The message becomes dangerous: "Obey if it suits you; defy if it doesn't." That is the death of constitutional morality.

This attitude resurfaces when a Commissioner of Police is shown declaring publicly, "We are not following the order; we will face the conse-

quences", and this defiance is projected as heroism of the Chief Minister.

In legal language this is nothing but executive overreach dressed as bravery. Across India, debates on police non-compliance, from Delhi to Tamil Nadu, have raised the same concern: politicians celebrating disobedience erodes public discipline. In the concept of the rule of law, heroism lies in obedience to the Constitution, not rebellion against it. The police commissioner says he has no fear of consequences, it is the duty of the court to ensure that disobedience of a court order will ensue in consequences not only for a layman, but also for a police commissioner. That "ensure" is a real equality.

Due to the disease that an "accepted vengeance towards Hinduism" in the common mind of India, the Thirupparangunram incident has been allowed to pass as if it were normal.

That silence has given birth to a new disease, attacking the judiciary as the new normal. Attacking Hindus is old normal; attacking the courts is becoming the new normal. If the judiciary is targeted, constitutional morality is weakened at its root. If this continues, the greatest casualty will not be a judge or a political party but the very idea of justice.

A democracy must protect its judges from personal attacks, ideological branding, and institutional silence. The courts have always been described as temples of justice; their sanctity cannot be compromised by political mudslinging. Otherwise, the people will lose their last refuge, an impartial courtroom. And when that refuge collapses, nothing remains to protect the citizen.

The author is Tamil Nadu BJP State secretary; Founder, Project Tamil AI and Integral Humanism Foundation

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Order Order

SC to hear wife's plea challenging Sonam Wangchuk's detention on Monday



The Supreme Court will on Monday hear a plea filed by Gitanjali J Angmo, wife of jailed climate activist Sonam Wangchuk, terming his detention under the National Security Act "illegal, and an arbitrary exercise violating his fundamental rights". A bench of Justices Aravind Kumar and NV Anjaria is likely to hear the matter.

On November 24, the top court had deferred the matter after Solicitor General Tushar Mehta, appearing for the Centre and the UT of Ladakh, sought time to respond to the rejoinder filed by Angmo. On October 29, the top court sought responses from the Centre and the Ladakh administration on an amended plea of Angmo.

According to the amended plea, "The detention order is founded upon stale FIRs, vague imputations, and speculative assertions, lacks any live or proximate connection to the purported grounds of detention and is thus devoid of any legal or factual justification." Angmo said the unfortunate events of violence in Leh on September 24 cannot be attributed to the actions or statements of Wangchuk in any manner.

Wangchuk was detained under the stringent National Security Act (NSA) on September 26, two days after violent protests demanding statehood and Sixth Schedule status for Ladakh left four people dead and 90 injured in the Union territory. The Government had accused him of inciting the violence. The NSA empowers the Centre and states to detain individuals to prevent them from acting in a manner "prejudicial to the defence of India". The maximum detention period is 12 months, though it can be revoked earlier.



Bihar Home Minister Samrat Choudhary

Bihar Govt to constitute 100 fast-track courts to expedite criminal cases

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Patna

Bihar Home Minister Samrat Choudhary on Sunday announced that the State Government will establish 100 fast-track courts (FTCs) to ensure the swift disposal of pending cases. He said that the move also aims to ease the burden on regular courts for them to accord due attention to sensitive cases.

Choudhary said the decision in this regard has been made considering that over 18 lakh cases are pending before different courts in the State. The constitution of FTCs will "bring in a big relief" to the judicial system and litigants, he said.

"To operationalise 100 FTCs across 38 districts and sub-divisions, the Government will undertake large-scale recruitment," the home minister asserted in a statement.

He said that a total of 900 posts, including those of bench clerks, office clerks, stenographers, deposition writers, data entry operators, drivers, process servers and peons, will be filled.

Choudhary also announced that 79 courts will be designated as 'act courts' to fast-track cases related to the Arms Act. Swift resolution of such serious cases, he said, will strengthen law and order in the State.

The minister said that Patna alone will get eight fast-track courts, while four courts each will be set up in Gaya, Muzaffarpur, Darbhanga and Bhagalpur. Three FTCs each are planned for Nalanda (Bihar Sharif), Rohtas (Sasaram), Saran (Chhapra), Begusarai, Vaishali (Hajipur), East Champaran (Motihari), Samastipur and Madhubani.

Similarly, two courts each will be established in West Champaran (Bettiah), Saharsa, Purnea, Munger, Nawada, Jehanabad, Arwal, Aurangabad, Kaimur (Bhabhua), Buxar, Bhojpur (Arrah), Sitamarhi, Sheohar, Siwan, Gopalganj, Supaul, Madhepura, Araria, Kishanganj, Katihar, Banka, Jamui, Sheikhpura, Lakhisarai and Khagaria. One FTC each is also proposed for the sub-divisional courts of Naugachia and Bagaha.



Sandesara settlement tests India's fight against financial crime



**RANJIT
KUMAR
SINHA**

A recent decision by the Supreme Court to quash all criminal proceedings against the Sandesara brothers — Nitin and Chetan Sandesara, promoters of the Sterling Biotech group — has seized national attention. The order, based on a One-Time Settlement (OTS) of ₹5,100 crore, carries significant implications for the prosecution of fugitive economic offenders and large-scale bank fraud.

The case originated from allegations of a multi-crore bank fraud (initially pegged at over ₹5,383 crore in the FIR) involving loan defaults and money laundering, following which the Sandesara brothers fled India in 2017.

The Apex Court's November 19, 2025, order is strictly conditional. The Supreme Court agreed to drop all parallel actions by a host of investigative agencies, including the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI), the Enforcement Directorate (ED), the Serious Fraud Investigation Office (SFIO), the Income Tax Department, and all proceedings under the Fugitive Economic Offenders Act, 2018.

This sweeping quashing is entirely contingent upon the Sandesara brothers depositing the sum of ₹5,100 crore as a "full and final settlement" with the Supreme Court Registry on or before December 17, 2025. This figure was proposed by the Solicitor General, representing the Government and agencies, after consultation with the lender banks.

The Apex Court's primary objective was the recovery of public money, noting that continuing criminal prosecution would serve little purpose if the defalcated amount is substantially returned to the banks.

Crucially, the Supreme Court explicitly clarified that these directions were based on the "peculiar facts of this case" and "shall not be treated as a precedent" in future matters, limiting the order's potential use by other offenders.

In a nutshell, the Supreme Court's extraordinary order is a trade-off where the Government and banks accepted cash over jail. This decision has generated a significant and sharply divided reaction across the legal, financial, and political spheres.

The core of the reaction centres on the tension between the immediate recovery of public money versus the long-term goal of deterrence and penal justice for economic crimes.

Critics believe that despite the warning, this order creates a powerful road map for any wealthy economic criminal to negotiate



Nitin Sandesara

Chetan Sandesara

their freedom if they can settle their debts, potentially weakening laws meant to punish fugitives and major fraudsters. The order has generated keen interest and intense legal scrutiny, particularly when considering the complex background against which the Sandesara saga reached the Apex Court around 2020, resulting in the definitive quietus of all criminal litigation.

This is more so when the Sandesara case has been connected to several politicians, bureaucrats, and other influential people, leading to a political controversy that ran parallel to the financial fraud investigations.

The connections primarily involve allegations of corruption, kickbacks, and the use of influence to facilitate the fraud and impede investigations. Consequently, the quashing of the proceedings against the brothers automatically shields their alleged co-conspirators and facilitators, who were also under investigation.

In the Sandesara case, another noteworthy feature was that the brothers had secured an order of protection from arrest or any coercive action from the Supreme Court. They were also at an advantage as the Government agencies failed in their effort to bring them back from a foreign land.

In this background, a question arises regarding the existence of back-channel negotiations before the matter formally reached the Supreme Court for settlement. While clarity on these discussions rests with the Government, it appears that this back-channel consensus was formally presented to the Supreme Court in a crucial, non-public manner. The Solicitor General, representing the Government and the investigating agencies, submitted the final proposal of ₹5,100 crore demand in a sealed cover — a figure the Sandesaras then accepted. The Supreme Court order immediately

raises another question: why must the Sandesara matter be brought under the category of 'peculiar facts' — to be not treated as a precedent for other fugitive economic offenders of nearly equal magnitude?

Does the existence of an extradition treaty or deportation provisions with the countries of refuge deprive them of the same legal remedy?

The quashing of all criminal proceedings also suggests that the Sandesaras will escape any finding of criminal intent (mensrea).

The settlement guarantees the recovery of money, but it simultaneously ensures that the accused are never found criminally guilty of fraud or money laundering, thereby undermining the foundational principle of criminal law — punishment based on intent.

Further, agencies like the ED and SFIO spent years building their cases (money laundering, corporate fraud). The ultimate resolution, being a cash-for-freedom deal, could demoralise investigators and incentivise them to focus solely on asset attachment rather than conviction.

Giving an insight about the order, noted jurist and senior advocate AK Ganguli, said it is true that the Apex Court has not referred to Article 142 of the Constitution, but it is evident that the Top Court has invoked its inherent powers for quashing the FIRs and the related proceedings that were pending against the petitioners in various fora for violation of several provisions of PMLA, FEOA (Fugitive Economic Offenders Act, 2018), Black Money (Undisclosed Foreign Income and Assets) and Imposition of Tax Act, 2015, Section 447 of the Companies Act, 2013, Prevention of Corruption Act read with Section 120B (Criminal Conspiracy), 420 (Cheating), 467 (Forgery), 468 (Forgery for the purpose of Cheating) and 471 (Using as genuine a forged document) IPC etc.

Ganguli said it is also evident from the Order passed by the Court that all the proceedings pending against the petitioners in various courts and tribunals were in relation to complaints of serious offences being committed by them that attracted penal provisions of several statutes.

The Writ Petitions filed by the petitioners sought the quashing of all proceedings listed in the Order. It is also evident that the prosecuting agencies agreed that if the petitioners pay a lump sum of ₹5,100 crores, which includes liabilities of overseas companies, the pending proceedings would be all quashed. The Court has accepted that proposal given by the parties, including the proposal given by the prosecuting agencies in a sealed cover. However, Ganguli is of the view that it appears that none of the parties brought to the notice of the Court the legal position applicable to the case.

The Senior Advocate said it is well settled that an agreement to stifle prosecution is not enforced by the courts on the ground that the consideration for such an agreement is opposed to public policy and is a violation of Section 23 of the Contract Act.

He said way back in 1962, the Supreme Court in *B NarasimhaRaju v. V GurumurthyRaju*, 1963 (3) SCR 678, had ruled that "the principle underlying this provision (Section 23 of the Indian Contract Act) is obvious. Once the machinery of the Criminal Law is set into motion on the allegation that a non-compoundable offence has been committed, it is for the criminal courts and criminal courts alone to deal with that allegation and to decide whether the offence alleged has in fact been committed or not.

"The decision on this question cannot, either directly or indirectly, be taken out of the hands of criminal courts and dealt with by private individuals. When, as a consideration for not proceeding

with a criminal complaint, an agreement is made, in substance it really means that the complaint has taken upon himself to deal with his complaint and on the bargaining counter he has used his non-prosecution of the complaint as a consideration for the agreement which his opponent has been induced or coerced to enter into."

Ganguli said that the Supreme Court further held that 'In dealing with the question as to whether the consideration for the agreement is opposed to public policy or not, it is immaterial that the debt in respect of which an agreement is made for the illegal consideration was real, nor was it necessary to prove that a crime in fact had been committed.

All that is necessary to prove in such a case is "that each party should understand that the one is making his promise in exchange or part exchange for the promise of the other not to prosecute or continue prosecuting."

Clarifying further, the noted jurist said that the Supreme Court held that "it is clear that if the appellant proves that the consideration for the arbitration agreement was the promise by respondent not to prosecute his complaint, then the said consideration would be opposed to public policy and the agreement based on it would be invalid in law."

Citing certain Privy Council decisions, Ganguli said that the Apex Court further held that "In dealing with the question as to whether the consideration for the agreement is opposed to public policy or not, it is immaterial that the date in respect of which an agreement is made for the illegal consideration was real, nor is it necessary to prove that a crime in fact has been committed.

All that is necessary to prove in such a case is "that each party should understand that the one is making his promise in exchange or part exchange for the promise of the other not to prosecute or continue prosecuting"."

One is not certain as to how the Court would have concluded the case, had this clear, unequivocal legal position been brought to its notice, Ganguli said.

Regardless of the uncertainty over whether the Supreme Court was fully apprised of the legal position on stifling prosecution, the resulting order in the Sandesara case is clear. While it is not a formal legal precedent that grants a right to settlement, it has created a powerful institutional signal that economic criminals with the financial capacity to make a significant repayment can negotiate a "cash-for-freedom" deal at the highest judicial level.

The writer is a senior journalist covering legal affairs

Faced criticism from my own community on creamy layer principle: Ex-CJI Gavai

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Mumbai

Former Chief Justice of India BR Gavai has said he has been "widely criticised" by people from his own community for stating in a judgement that the creamy layer principle should be applied to reservation for the Scheduled Castes. In Dr BR Ambedkar's view, affirmative action was like providing a bicycle to someone who is lagging behind, Gavai said, asking whether Ambedkar thought that such a person should never give up the bicycle. Ambedkar did not think so, he claimed.

Gavai, who retired as CJI recently, was delivering a lecture on "Role of Affirmative Action in Promoting Equal Opportunity" at Mumbai University on Saturday.

Paying tributes to Ambedkar on his death anniversary, Gavai said the iconic leader was the architect not only of the Indian Constitution but also of the affirmative action enshrined in it.

"Babasaheb, in so far affirmative action is concerned, was of the view that it is like providing a cycle to those who are lagging behind.... Suppose somebody is at tenth km and somebody at zero, he (the latter) should be provided a cycle, so that he reaches faster till the tenth km. From there, he joins the person who is already there and walks along with him. Did he (Ambedkar) think that the person should not leave the cycle and carry forward and thereby ask the people who are at zero km to continue to be there?" he asked.

"In my view, that was not the vision of social and economic justice as contemplated by



Former CJI BR Gavai

Babasaheb Ambedkar. He wanted to bring social and economic justice in the real sense and not in a formal sense," the former CJI added. The Indra Sawhney and Others Vs Union of India case enunciated the creamy layer principle, and in another case, he himself held that the creamy layer should also be made applicable to the Scheduled Castes, said Gavai.

The principle demands that those who are sufficiently advanced economically and socially should not get the benefit of affirmative action, even though they are members of the backward community for which it is meant.

He was "widely criticised" by the people of his own community for this judgement, Gavai said, adding that he was accused of taking benefit of the reservation himself to become a Supreme Court judge and then advocating the exclusion of those who fell in the creamy layer. But these people did not even know that there is no reservation for the constitutional office of High Court or Supreme Court judge, Gavai said. Can applying the

same yardstick to the son of a chief justice of India or chief secretary and the son of a labourer who has studied in a gram panchayat school satisfy the test of equality as enshrined in the Constitution, he asked. Gavai, however, emphasised that in the last 75 years "no doubt affirmative action has played a positive role".

"I have travelled across the country, travelled across the world, I have seen many people belonging to the Scheduled Caste becoming chief secretary or director general of police or ambassadors and high commissioners," he said. Maharashtra is a land of social reformers, and the "region can truly be described as the birthplace of the idea of modern India", Gavai said. "We are all aware of Jyotirao Phule and Savitribai Phule's pioneering work in the eradication of inequalities in society," he said.

When women were among the most oppressed in society, it was the Phule couple who opened the door of education for them, he noted.

Unrest in Jharkhand HC over judges' appointments

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Ranchi

Jharkhand High Court is facing a silent unrest over the recommendations on the appointment of judges. The conflict focuses on the Collegium, comprising the Chief Justice and the two most senior judges of the High Court. According to individuals aware of the development, the Collegium has ignored certain names that were previously under active consideration for elevation. Lawyers assert that for more than eight years, not a single name from the local Bar (advocates practising at the High Court) has been successfully recommended for elevation to a High Court judge post.

Sources claim that the selection process is being driven by personal interest and nepotism, rather than merit, preventing the appointment of the most competent advocates. They maintain that this is the reason for the continuous failure to fill posts from the local Bar.

Facing an extreme shortage of judges and impending retirements in December 2025 and January 2026, the Collegium is reportedly sending names of seven Advocates to the Supreme Court for elevation, as mandated. However, sources contend that this new list was deliberately prepared to include candidates who are over the age of 55 and have little to no actual legal practice.

The purpose of recommending these aged and less-practising candidates, according to sources, is to ensure the Supreme Court rejects the list. This rejection would then stall the process until other favoured lawyers, who currently do not meet the eligibility criteria, become eligible for recommendation at a later date. Additionally, some of the can-

didates being recommended are reportedly close to a Collegium member, highlighting a pattern of internal politics and favouritism. This current unrest echoes past conflicts. Sources recall that when the previous Chief Justice recommended six lawyers for elevation, one Collegium member dissented.

The actual concern, according to the Bar, was the inclusion of an advocate who was not a regular Jharkhand High Court practitioner but was made to appear in a few cases just prior to the recommendation.

In addition, sources said the aforementioned Collegium member had in fact given his dissent for all six recommended names in the absence of the names of his favourites, and this time he has ensured, except for one all the previously recommended names have been removed in the current recommendation. It is noteworthy that the earlier panel had the names of eminent and able lawyers with impeccable integrity, whose age profile was excellent.

Lawyers argue that this "dirty politics" scuttled the elevation of several other very able advocates. These procedural issues are occurring while the court operates with a crippling shortage of judges.

The sanctioned strength for the Jharkhand High Court is 25 judges (20 Permanent and 5 Additional). The current working strength stands at just 15, leaving 10 crucial vacancies. This represents a 40 per cent shortfall, and the entire quota of five Additional Judges remains unfilled.

This persistent gap places immense pressure on the serving judges, exacerbating the backlog of cases and severely compromising the efficiency of the justice system in Jharkhand.



Editor's
TAKE

India's moment in an uncertain world

Prime Minister Modi's recent remarks offer both a reflection on how India has navigated recent crises and a vision of where the nation must head next

When Prime Minister Modi asserted on Sunday that India is shining in a world of uncertainties, he was largely on the mark. The phrase neatly captures India's current growth trajectory. At a time when global volatility has become the new normal – marked by economic disruptions, geopolitical tensions, technological upheavals and rising environmental concerns – his remarks sought to position India as an island of stability and a country with clear purpose. Yet the address went beyond optimism; it attempted to outline both the architecture of India's present momentum and the roadblocks that remain. The first quarter of the 21st century has tested nations in unprecedented ways. A global financial crisis, a pandemic, supply-chain breakdowns, wars and deepening political polarisation have shaken the international order to its core. Modi rightly noted that India has weathered these storms through a deliberate shift in its governance culture. There was a time, he said, when reforms were reactionary – driven by crises rather than conviction. Today, reforms are calibrated to national goals rather than global panic. This, he argued, is the essence of being "constant, consistent and nation-first". There is truth in the narrative of India as a strong and resilient economy, somewhat insulated from the vagaries of international push and pull. Much of the Prime Minister's confidence stems from India's macroeconomic trajectory. Despite global slowdowns, India remains among the fastest-growing major economies. Investment activity has strengthened, and inflation is relatively under control compared with many advanced economies. India is also benefiting from shifts in the global trade environment, including the new tariff regime of the United States.

As South-South cooperation becomes increasingly important, India is well placed to emerge as a leading force. As a manufacturing base, a digital partner and a diplomatic stabiliser, India is positioning itself as a contributor to global stability. However, not all is rosy. Where exactly does India stand today, and where is it headed? Modi's speech implicitly portrayed a country in transition – from a service-heavy model to a more balanced economy, from welfare delivery to welfare empowerment, and from being merely a large market to becoming a global player shaping norms and supply chains. This moment of confidence, however, demands clarity about unresolved challenges. Job creation must accelerate, particularly in high-productivity sectors. Skilling needs to keep pace with rapid technological change. The manufacturing push still requires smoother regulation, deeper logistics reform and faster dispute resolution. Social challenges – urban stress, recurring rural distress and climate vulnerability – require sustained, long-term planning rather than episodic responses. Externally, India must navigate carefully. Conflicts in the Middle East and shifting trade alignments could unsettle even the most resilient economies. What the Prime Minister's address captured well is a vital balance: confidence is warranted, but complacency would be costly. India may be shining – but sustained effort will be essential to keep it that way.

A firm assertion of strategic autonomy

Putin's presence in Delhi is a moment of quiet defiance, diplomatic confidence, and sovereign self-respect in an era marked by geopolitical flux and the overreach of superpowers



BHOPINDER SINGH

The visit of the Russian President, Vladimir Putin, to India in the midst of the Russia-Ukraine war and the ensuing peace talks mediated by the United States is reflective of "multilateralism" and "strategic autonomy", as opposed to the bulldozing and unilateral ways of superpowers. In earlier days, the two "blocs" (USA-led and USSR-led) insisted on pre-defined and conformist tendencies.

However, the end of the Cold War with the implosion of the Soviet Union in the early 1990s led many to prematurely posit the USA as the sole, definitive, and unchallenged superpower. Commentators in the 1990s, such as the former US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, noted, "We are the indispensable nation", while Charles Krauthammer claimed, "The centre of world power is the unchallenged superpower, the United States, attended by its Western allies", and the political scientist Samuel P Huntington thundered, "The United States is the sole state with pre-eminence in every domain of power-economic, military, diplomatic, ideological, technological, and cultural."

Ironically, the concurrent diminishment of multilateral platforms such as the United Nations added to the misplaced superiority of the USA. Even though history has repeatedly taught that global dominance is never permanent, the ostrich-like behaviour of the USA debarred it from recognising the sudden emergence of an expansionist China, or the more measured rise of India. Unipolarity was a seductive idea that lulled the USA into a false sense of invulnerability and hubris as it imperiously (and selectively) launched its War on Terror. However, it took twenty years of the longest, most inconclusive, and most expensive war against a ragtag militia, namely the Taliban, for the USA to be humbled. In recent times, the US has been made to eat humble pie in various other interventions across the globe – yet many within the corridors of power in Washington DC still harbour dated notions of grandiosity, imperiousness, and authority.

US President Donald Trump's rallying cry of MAGA (Make America Great Again) is born from that same fount of presumed invincibility, which routinely leads to open threats, coercion, and even bullying. This unrestrained lust for power in Washington DC does not spare any friend or "ally", as the likes of India, Canada, Mexico, or even NATO countries (North Atlantic Treaty Organisation) are fair game for arm-twisting, as far as Trump is con-



IN RECENT TIMES, THE US HAS BEEN MADE TO EAT HUMBLE PIE IN VARIOUS OTHER INTERVENTIONS ACROSS THE GLOBE — YET MANY WITHIN THE CORRIDORS OF POWER IN WASHINGTON DC STILL HARBOUR DATED NOTIONS OF GRANDIOSITY, IMPERIOUSNESS, AND AUTHORITY

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The Pioneer

cerned. During his first presidency, he targeted Delhi for its civilisational relations with Iran, seeking to debar them from trading with each other, as Iran was unfairly and unilaterally sanctioned by Trump after reneging on the Iran nuclear deal. Similarly, deep displeasure was expressed with India as it sought the S-400 missile systems from Russia-even though the US had not done anything substantial to support India against China during the tense 2020 face-off.

Today, in his second presidency, Trump has further derailed and vitiated relations with allies as he has pursued patent tariff wars without any care or consideration for their sensitivities and urgencies. The ham-handedness of Trump has led to some unthinkable portents, as was optically captured in the surreal moments of bonhomie between the troika of Vladimir Putin, Narendra Modi, and Xi Jinping, chatting on the sidelines of a meeting and giving a loud thumbs-down to Trump's unilateralism. While there may be too much bloody history between Delhi and Beijing to suggest anything beyond symbolism at this stage, the fact remains that the persistent unreasonableness of the USA under Trump can lead to the stitching together of counter-intuitive alliances (which may be tactical rather than strategic) as a rebound effect of the pressures exerted by Trump.

India hosts its long-time and dependable ally, Russia, as it juggles multiple balls in the air to avoid attracting further punitive tariffs from the US, while still extracting the necessary wherewithal from Russia, which has his-

torically been forthcoming, accommodating, and reasonable in commercial terms. This forms part of India's new-found "strategic autonomy", which affords it the dignity to pursue diplomacy and relationships that are favourable to its own citizens, first and foremost. India is simply too large a sovereign state-and even too significant an "idea"-to act like a vassal state of the USA that must kowtow to all its dictates.

This is not to suggest that India should sever its growing and natural ties with the USA, but rather to nuance and assert itself to levels that are mutually beneficial, not exclusively skewed towards one side. Russia under Putin has demonstrated an accommodating template, having not insisted upon India or imposed conditionalities even as India went into overdrive to build relations with the "West", especially the US. Meanwhile, India reciprocated in kind by not militating against Russian interests (Delhi took a muted stand on Ukraine that was not anti-Russia) wherever it could.

It is this lack of reciprocal accommodation and respect that blinds the policies of the Trump administration and could translate into alternate pressure groupings, potentially composed of the unlikely partners. While visits by a Russian head of state have always warranted a high-profile welcome, this time the warmth, pomp, and display reflect a sense of defiance, independence, and an inherent sovereign pride and dignity in the face of pettiness and pressure exerted ungracefully by the Trump administration.

The Pioneer
SINCE 1865

Why we fail at control: The Gita on surrender



AJIT KUMAR BISHNOI

2ND OPINION
THE PIONEER

We all wish to be in control, yet we fail repeatedly — and often miserably. The simple reason is that control never truly rests in our hands. Lord Krishna explains this with crystal clarity in the Bhagavad Gita: "The place of action, the doer, the instruments, the efforts, and providence-these five are the causes of all action." (18.14) He adds, "Whatever action a person performs through body, speech, and mind, these five are its causes." (18.15)

We are constantly acting-physically, verbally, and mentally. Speech and mind are mentioned separately in the Gita because they shape our lives more deeply than other senses. Consider a simple accident where both parties are at fault. If both apologise, the matter ends peacefully. If harsh words are exchanged, a brawl erupts.

The mind's influence is even subtler: it colours our reactions, directs our moods, and silently writes our destiny. Thus, the mind and speech hold a special place among the instruments of action. What are these five causes?

First, the place of action: the circumstances we are placed in. Whether we are in burning Delhi in June or freezing Toronto in January, whether we live in a nuclear family with a newborn or in a bustling joint family-circumstances shape our actions, yet we do not choose them.

Second, the doer: we ourselves. But are we in control of our nature? Not really. Our inherent tendencies steer our responses. An irritable person will shout in the same situation where a calm person would forgive.

Third, the instruments: the tools we possess. Someone with a modern smartphone can perform tasks much faster than one with outdated technology. Our tools decide the quality of our output.

Fourth, the efforts: even effort is not fully ours. Health, energy, mood, and environment-countless factors determine how much effort we can actually put in.

And finally, providence: the results that unfold are shaped primarily by our past karmas. Whether something succeeds or fails often depends far less on our present labour and far more on the ledger of past actions. If all these factors are beyond our complete control, then how much control do we truly have? Not much. The only real controller,

Krishna says, is God. All circumstances originate from Him, all instruments arise from His creation, and the fruits of action operate under His moral order. Even our free will exists within the boundaries of the divine system.

What, then, should we do? Krishna instructs: "In all respects, take shelter of Me alone. By My grace, you will achieve supreme peace and the eternal abode." (18.62) Where Krishna and Arjuna stand together, the Gita promises opulence, victory, righteousness, and unwavering success. (18.78) Yet most of us resist surrender. Ego whispers: "I will succeed this time. I know better." But Krishna warns: "You have a right only to action, never to its fruits." (2.47) Those who try to predetermine outcomes, He says, are "pitiable." (2.49) My own experience is no different. Whenever I try to control situations-especially in emotional matters such as a loved one's illness-I find myself anxious and frustrated. Even when I pray sincerely, peace does not immediately follow. I still expect God to act according to my timeline. Slowly, I am learning that acceptance, not control, is the lesson; past karmas must play out, and God acts when the time is right. The journey from understanding to realisation is long. But the Gita assures us that surrender-not control — is where true freedom lies.

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The writer is a spiritual teacher

PAKISTAN'S CHIEF OF DEFENCE FORCES ESTABLISHES MILITARY SUPREMACY

Pakistan's President, acting on the "advice" of the Prime Minister, has announced the appointment of General Asim Munir as the country's first Chief of Defence Forces for a five-year term under the 27th Constitutional Amendment. Officially, the move seeks to establish a unified command and accelerate decision-making across land, air, sea, space and cyberspace, projecting coherence in Pakistan's security apparatus. The amendment centralises operational, administrative and strategic authority in a single office, which Islamabad has described as a historic reform.

In reality, however, the development surprises few. Pakistan's power structure has long been dominated by the military, regardless of constitutional labels or civilian

endorsements. Many observers believe that General Munir was not merely the beneficiary of the decision but its principal architect, with civilian authorities providing formal approval rather than genuine direction.

Supporters will argue that a consolidated command could improve coordination and modernise defence management. Critics, however, see the appointment as further institutionalising military predominance at the expense of civilian oversight. In a system where elected governments operate under persistent constraints, the creation of the CDF post reinforces an existing reality rather than altering it. The announcement therefore represents continuity dressed up as reform.

RS NARULA | PATIALA

Cess alone cannot end pan masala

The Lok Sabha's decision to impose a 40 per cent cess on pan masala, with proceeds directed towards public health and national security, invites deeper reflection. While taxation is often promoted as a deterrent, the reality is that habitual users of addictive substances rarely abandon them due to higher costs. Instead, they adjust by cutting down on other essential household expenses, which undermines the intended health benefits. Oral cancer and related diseases caused by pan masala remain a major public health crisis, and taxation alone cannot solve it. A more effective approach would be to gradually phase out pan masala manufacturing altogether, while ensuring that workers and small businesses dependent on this industry are provided with alternative livelihoods. Moreover, linking cess revenue from pan masala to national security appears misplaced.

Defence requires stable and predictable funding, not revenue streams tied to harmful consumption patterns that may decline over time. It would be far more prudent to channel pan masala cess exclusively towards health initiatives, while securing national security funding through broader, assured sources. Such a calibrated approach would strengthen both public health outcomes and national priorities in the long run.

O PRASADA RAO | HYDERABAD

Putin and Russia's power paradox

Russian President Vladimir Putin, who recently undertook a whirlwind tour to India, has been at the helm of the "new Russia" since 1999 and is currently in his fifth term. Termed the "king" or "emperor" by loyalists, Putin is seen by many Russians as a saviour who restored stability after inheriting a fractured legacy from the erstwhile Soviet Union. Over the years, he has grown in stature in a manner only he could manage.

Alongside this, the master strategist has held the Kremlin together through turbulent times. His bitter critics, however, spare no criticism, describing him as authoritarian and arrogant. His near-absolute control over institutions and suppression of dissent have become defining features of his leadership.

Putin is poised to steer Russia's fortunes until 2036, being constitutionally entitled to contest another election in 2030. His firm outlook, quick decision-making, risk-taking ability, keen eye for detail and unwavering focus are frequently cited as strengths.

Admirers also credit the former KGB officer with raising living standards and shaping a broad economic vision. While corruption concerns persist, the 73-year-old leader's commitment to his country is rarely questioned.

GANAPATHI BHAT | AKOLA

RBI signals growth over inflation

Apropos "RBI cuts interest rate". The Reserve Bank of India has opened a new monetary cycle with its first rate cut since mid-2025, signalling a shift towards supporting growth as inflation shows clearer signs of moderation. By lowering the repo rate to 5.25 per cent, the central bank has laid the groundwork for softer lending rates, particularly benefiting home buyers. Banks are expected to bring housing loan rates close to 7.1 per cent, among the lowest levels outside the pandemic period, offering meaningful relief to both new and existing borrowers. What distinguishes this move is the strong liquidity support accompanying the cut. The RBI plans to inject nearly ₹1.45 lakh crore into the financial system through bond repurchases and a sizeable three-year dollar swap. This is aimed at stabilising credit flows amid global financial volatility.

The RBI has also presented a more optimistic outlook, raising its FY26 growth forecast to 7.3 per cent while sharply revising down inflation expectations, citing easing food prices and resilient domestic demand. Despite the rupee's weakness, robust foreign exchange reserves have provided policy comfort. Markets responded with cautious optimism, reflecting confidence in the central bank's calibrated approach.

VANDANA | CHANDIGARH

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Jihadi radicalisation: A growing threat to national security

As extremist narratives move seamlessly from religious spaces to peer groups and online platforms, India confronts a challenge that is psychological, ideological and social in equal measure.

FIRST
Column



KARNAL
SINGH

Radicalisation today stands as one of the most serious challenges to India's national security. Modern terrorism does not begin with the gun or the bomb — it begins with the mind. No terror attack is possible unless someone is first convinced, manipulated and mentally prepared to commit violence. The recent arrests in Faridabad, the recovery of explosives and detonators, and even the involvement of highly educated individuals such as doctors in the Delhi blast demonstrate how deep and sophisticated the radicalisation machinery has become. These cases show that the threat is no longer confined to the poor, the uneducated or those living on the fringes of society.

The new targets are educated, urban youth — young men seeking identity, purpose and belonging in a complicated world. Radicalisation generally begins in two key environments. The first is the religious space — madrasas and mosques — where a small number of preachers with Salafi or extremist leanings deliver emotionally charged, misleading interpretations of religion. They twist noble concepts such as Ummah, Zakat and Jihad to create a sense of grievance, victimhood and moral justification for violence.

The radicalisers deliberately misuse verses and stories to convince young minds that their "religious duty" lies in fighting or opposing the State. Over time, these false interpretations become the ideological entrance gate for deeper radicalisation. The second environment (peer group radicalisation) is far less visible but equally dangerous: quiet street corners, small tea shops, college hostels, student groups, parks and closed conversations among friends.

In these informal spaces, long discussions take place on religion, alleged injustices, communal grievances and global events. Slowly, these conversations become an echo chamber. Anger is reinforced, isolation develops, and extremist ideas begin to appear reasonable. Peer-group radicalisation is especially powerful. Once a few individuals in a college or locality adopt extremist thinking, they can easily influence others through trust, friendship and emotional



PTI

RADICALISATION IS A PSYCHOLOGICAL WEAPON DELIBERATELY DESIGNED TO MANIPULATE EMOTIONS, DISTORT RELIGION, EXPLOIT GRIEVANCES AND PROVIDE A FALSE SENSE OF IDENTITY AND HEROISM

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bonding. Young people do not want to lose their place in the group and, therefore, begin accepting ideas they would otherwise reject.

This pattern has been seen in Indian Mujahideen modules, PFI circles and sleeper cells of Lashkar-e-Taiba and Jaish-e-Mohammed. After these initial stages, many youths are sent for several months of training to Pakistan or Pakistan-occupied Kashmir.

There, they are taught how to handle weapons, assemble IEDs, communicate secretly, avoid surveillance and maintain operational discipline. When they return, their behaviour changes in noticeable ways. They withdraw from family, become serious or secretive, avoid normal conversations, express rigid religious views or cut themselves off from their old lifestyle. These behavioural changes are visible to parents and neighbours. A disturbing example of structured radicalisation comes from the confession of an Indian

Mujahideen leader. He described how he radicalised educated youth through a step-by-step psychological process. He would begin by discussing the meaning of life and the concept of life after death. Gradually, he introduced manipulated beliefs — such as that real life begins after death, that paradise is full of pleasure, and that martyrdom in jihad guarantees entry into heaven. He claimed that a jihadi receives "72 hoorein" and that his parents will also enter jannat because of his sacrifice. According to him, an act of jihad was more valuable than lifelong namaz, roza or charity.

This kind of spiritual poisoning creates a false sense of moral superiority. Then he would show videos of global conflicts and alleged atrocities against Muslims — in Palestine, Iraq, Afghanistan and Kashmir. He repeatedly displayed photographs of the Gujarat riots, the Babri Masjid aftermath, Israeli-Palestinian clashes and alleged US operations. The aim was to fill

young minds with anger, helplessness and the feeling that "someone must take revenge". To intensify this emotional impact, he distributed radical literature — books like Maidan Pukarate Hain, Salah ad-Din Ayuubi, Sayyid Qutb's Milestones and biographies of Osama bin Laden. Graphic magazines showing dead bodies and destroyed villages were used to bypass logic and directly trigger emotions. He also used PowerPoint presentations and motivational jihadi songs to create a charged atmosphere. Radicalisation by Abdul Karim Tunda — Madrasa Setting Another major example is Abdul Karim Tunda, the dreaded Lashkar-e-Taiba bomb-maker. Tunda used a madrasa-linked method of recruitment. He targeted poor, uneducated and semi-educated youth, especially those who were frustrated or carrying emotional wounds from communal events. He portrayed himself as a fatherly guide.

Through fiery speeches, he misquoted religious texts, glorified violent jihad and

Time to bid adieu to the Macaulay mindset and restore cultural confidence



GEETA
BHATT

As the Dharma Dhvaj rose high into the sky during the flag-hoisting ceremony marking the completion of the Ram Temple Complex in Ayodhya, Prime Minister Narendra Modi remarked that nearly 190 years ago, Macaulay had sown the seeds of uprooting India from its civilisational roots. The very questions raised about the existence of Shri Ram and the prolonged struggle and delay in the construction of the Ram Temple after Independence were, he said, consequences of the "Macaulay mindset." This mindset was cultivated through the "Minute on Education" introduced and authored in 1835 by Thomas Macaulay in his capacity as a member of the Executive Council of the then Governor-General William Bentinck. It fostered an attitude of apathy towards Bharat's native knowledge systems and languages, shaping generations under a framework that devalued their own cultural, religious and intellectual heritage.

The conviction and self-belief of a nation are rooted in the socio-cultural footprints of its history. Yet, in the decades following Independence, India's education and administrative systems continued to bear deep colonial imprints. The language, curriculum and work culture remained largely unchanged even as white sahibs were replaced by brown sahibs. Macaulay ultimately succeeded in advancing what he had envisioned: the establishment of an intrinsic superiority of the Western model and the English language, while Sanskrit, Arabic and other classical traditions were sidelined. Our ancient knowledge systems-ranging from science and mathematics to philosophy-were dismissed as outdated, irrational or merely religious, weakening the confidence of posterity in their own cultural and intellectual heritage.

The Charter Act of 1813, passed by the British Parliament to renew the East India Company's mandate in Bharat, introduced a significant clause that provided for the allocation of one lakh rupees annually for the revival and improvement of education among its Indian subjects. In the decades that followed, the debate over how this fund should be used intensified. Thomas Macaulay vigorously campaigned for directing this financial support exclusively towards English-medium education and Western literature, arguing against the continuation of funding for classical Sanskrit, Arabic and Persian learn-

ing. Macaulay prevailed, and state patronage for Oriental texts and traditional learning centres declined sharply, marking a decisive shift in education policy. Macaulay's education policy was not confined merely to creating "brown sahibs" to serve as a British-oriented workforce. It carried a deeper, concealed objective: to undermine and ultimately displace the existing socio-cultural foundations of Bharatiya society.

A letter written by Thomas Macaulay to his father on 12 October 1836, published in The Life and Letters of Lord Macaulay by his nephew George Otto Trevelyan, clearly reveals how a larger ideological agenda was being embedded into Bharatiya society through British education policy. In this letter, Macaulay candidly states:

"Our English schools are flourishing wonderfully. We find it difficult indeed, in some places impossible to provide instruction for all who want it. At the single town of Hoogly, fourteen hundred boys are learning English. The effect of this education on the Hindoos is prodigious. No Hindoo who has received an English education ever remains sincerely attached to his religion. Some continue to profess it as a matter of policy; but many profess themselves pure Deists, and some embrace Christianity. It is my firm belief that, if our plans of education are followed up, there will not be a single idolater among the respectable classes in Bengal thirty years hence. And this will be effected without any effort to proselytise; without the smallest interference with religious liberty; merely by the natural operation of knowledge and reflection. I heartily rejoice in the prospect."

It is rather ironic that while Macaulay dismissed the traditional knowledge systems and culture of this land, the very foundations of national schooling in England and several European countries were inspired by Indian educational practices-particularly the methods of "monitor", "slate", and "group learning." Dr Andrew Bell, a chaplain with the British Army, arrived in Madras in 1787. During his stay, he observed local children learning their alphabet by drawing letters in sand, guided by the brighter students in the class. Struck by the efficiency of this method, he adapted it into what he called the "New Schooling System" and introduced it in England. The model became highly popular and soon spread across Europe. Known as the "Madras Monitorial System," it offered an economical and scalable approach to mass education. Dr Bell later established a college in Scotland, naming it "Madras College," which still exists, in recognition of the system's origin. His student, Mr Lancaster, promoted a similar method, which became widely known as the "Bell and Lancaster Model." Yet neither Bell nor Lancaster acknowledged the Indian traditional schooling practices that inspired their innovations. Brigadier-General Alexander Walker, who served the British admin-

istration in Bharat between 1780 and 1810, offered a remarkable testimony on the indigenous education system in the Malabar region. He observed: "The children are instructed without violence and by a process peculiarly simple. The system was borrowed from the Brahmans and brought from India to Europe. It has been made the foundation of National Schools in every enlightened country. Some gratitude is due to a people from whom we have learnt to diffuse among the lower ranks of society instruction by one of the most unerring and economical methods which has ever been invented." Walker further noted that "no people probably appreciate more justly the importance of instruction than the Hindus." His account stands as a powerful acknowledgment of the effectiveness of traditional modes of education that later inspired key models of mass schooling in Europe, even as they were undermined by the colonial education policy imposed on us.

Dr S. Radhakrishnan, as Chairman of the first University Education Commission constituted after Independence, stated in its 1949 report that higher education should be imparted through the regional languages, and that English as the medium of instruction in higher education should be replaced by an Indian language as early as practicable. The challenge is not English as a language, but its long-standing dominance as the primary marker of intellect and academic success in the seven decades since Independence. Had the recommendations of this Commission been implemented earnestly in the early decades after Independence, the "Macaulay syndrome" that continued to shape our intellectual and cultural outlook might well have faded away by the twenty-first century.

The National Education Policy 2020 has acknowledged and endorsed the traditional Bharatiya Knowledge Systems, integrating them with the contemporary global knowledge ecosystem that has evolved through experimentation, innovation and cross-cultural exchanges. For the first time, Bharatiya languages have been given a level playing field in education, and the vision and ingenuity of an education policy have begun to reverse the long colonial practice of undermining our native knowledge, sciences and skills — a practice that left a lasting dent in the foundation required to strengthen our national consciousness. Rebuilding this confidence demands that we reclaim and restore the intellectual traditions that once nurtured a vibrant, self-assured civilisation. It is time to bid adieu to the Macaulay mindset.

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SINCE 1865

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‘On-Time, Every Time’: Tagline IndiGo can’t hide behind



CHAITANYA
K PRASAD

For years, IndiGo has lived off the reputation of being the airline that rarely slips. "On-Time, Every Time" wasn't just advertising; it became part of its personality, the shorthand for discipline in a country where delays, long queues, and fraying tempers at airports were almost a given. But today, that tagline feels like a relic from another era. It hangs awkwardly over a crisis that has unfolded in slow motion, then all at once, leaving passengers stranded, confused, angry, and wondering how a crisis of this magnitude blindsided the country's largest carrier.

What we are watching is more than a scheduling mishap. It is far bigger than pilots being unavailable or duty-time rules tightening. This is a communications collapse, one that exposes the hollowness of a brand that has long believed efficiency alone was enough to secure loyalty. The trouble with IndiGo right now isn't just that flights are being cancelled; it's that the airline seems strangely detached from the chaos it has created. The #Manmade #AviationCrisis dominating timelines and airport lounges is the direct result of an organisation that underestimated the new Flight Duty Time Limitation rules, miscalculated crew requirements, and then appeared genuinely shocked when the entire system buckled.

The DGCA's assessment was blunt: IndiGo simply didn't plan. It didn't forecast enough pilots for Phase 2 of the FDTL rollout, even though the norms were public knowledge for months. How does a carrier with over 400 aircraft, thousands of crew members, and a 60 per cent domestic market share stumble on something so fundamental? Perhaps this is what happens when a company begins to operate as though competition is merely decorative. When you behave as the marketplace's default airline, you stop imagining worst-case scenarios. And then, when the cracks appear, you act surprised.

But IndiGo's bigger failure, and the reason public anger feels so visceral, is the vacuum in communication. People can understand delays. They can forgive the occasional cancellation. What people can tolerate, sometimes even with grace, is a delay. What they cannot stomach is the feeling of being dismissed. That is what has cut deepest in this crisis. Passengers have been treated as though their time, their plans, their money, and, in many cases, their simple dignity,

are just footnotes in IndiGo's larger story. At airports across the country, travellers have been left to piece together their own understanding of what's going on. No proper announcements. No clear updates. No realistic timelines. No explanations that sound like they come from a place of honesty rather than corporate defensiveness. Social media has become the only functioning bulletin board in this mess, an accidental newsroom where stranded families are sharing videos of toddlers asleep on cold floors, elderly passengers leaning against walls after hours of standing, and frantic travellers being forced into last-minute, overpriced bookings simply to get home. Even the staff, who are often the first to face the public's fury, look lost, overwhelmed, under-prepared, and painfully unaware of what's happening behind the scenes. IndiGo hasn't just lost control of its operations; it has surrendered control of the story.

And this is where a brand's true nature surfaces. IndiGo, for all its scale and swagger, has looked strangely hollow during these last few days. Distant. Unfeeling. Robotic. As if admitting to the chaos would somehow bruise the pristine corporate image it has been polishing for years. What we got instead of clarity were stitched-together apologies that felt photocopied. Instead of a leader taking charge publicly, we got templated statements with all the warmth of an automated receipt. Instead of empathy, we got... nothing. Silence has its own tone, and in the service industry, it always sounds like indifference.

It is impossible not to think of Vistara in moments like these, an airline that understood something fundamental: people don't remember the aircraft; they remember how they were made to feel. Vistara wasn't flawless. No airline is. But it carried a kind of emotional intelligence in the way it engaged with passengers. There was a warmth, a steadiness, a transparency that said, "You matter." Even today, long after operations merge and brands evolve, people speak of Vistara with an affection they don't extend to most airlines. That's what IndiGo is missing in this moment: the simple humanity that travellers cling to when things go wrong.

In today's world of reels, instant outrage, and hyper-amplified experiences, that human layer isn't a luxury; it is survival. If anything, this crisis has exposed a hard truth: communication is not a box to tick; it is the backbone of public trust.

The Pioneer
SINCE 1865

The writer is a former civil servant, who writes on cinema and strategic communication. With inputs from Zoya Ahmad and Vaishnavie Srinivasan

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HUMAN AI

If a recent survey is to be believed, it is humans who may derail the growing use of Artificial Intelligence (AI). A software firm concludes that while senior management and executives love it, the mid-managers and lower employees shun it, or pay lip-service to it. Almost 90 per cent of the first section use AI at workplaces, and senior management sings praises in earnings calls. In recent times, according to an article in 'The Economist,' "two-thirds of executives at S&P 500 companies mentioned AI. At the same time, the people actually responsible for implementing AI may not be as forward-thinking, perhaps because they are worried about tech putting them out of a job." So, less than 60 per cent of the mid-managers, and less than 30 per cent of the employees use AI on the job. This implies that while these two categories happily go ahead with the AI-related efforts to please their seniors, they quietly refuse to use the tools.

A similar thing happened with desktops, laptops, and mobiles. In India, for instance, desktops inundated the state-owned banks and finance firms, as they did in progressive and forward-thinking private firms. Employees used them mostly to play games in the late 1980s, and early 1990s. In some cases, especially at the banks, desktops were purchased because of the top management's decisions, but remained wrapped in original packaging for months, and years. The same happened with the laptops, and mobiles, when they became office tools to work, and communicate. Only over time, when there was no escape, and the Internet and web became a necessity did employees and mid-managers upgrade skills to handle the new tools, and new ways of working. Hence, AI may go through the same learning tech curve before the bulk of the employees adopt it actively, and adapt to its social and job disruptions at workplaces.

Yet another piece of insight lies in perception and imagination, which is subjective. New technology, whether it is hardware, Internet, or AI initially may lead to extra work, lower productivity, and lesser efficiency. In the case of desktops, and laptops the employees needed to learn new skills, which were more easily acquired by the youngsters. In the case of mobile-as-moving-offices, it was excruciating to work with the small screens to read, write, and monitor work. AI leads to such delays. Rewiring offices, as was the case with desktops, and making them wireless (Internet and mobile) takes time. Processes and workflows need to be re-defined. Employees need to get used to the newer ways. This may take months, or years. Erik Brynjolfsson of Stanford University dubs it the 'J-curve' of technology. Yvonne Chen, and others of ShanghaiTech University refer to it as "gen-AI's mediocrity gap." AI helps the weak workers, and does the opposite with the better ones, who may decide to work less since they can get the same work done faster.

When it comes to small and mid-sized firms, tech-led gains in productivity and profitability do not come naturally and logically. A recent poll by a global think tank finds that 45 per cent said that the returns from the use of AI were below their expectations. Only 10 per cent agreed that their expectations were exceeded. The same goes for profits, as most entities conclude that tech has not "significantly affected enterprise-wide profits." This may be due to a dual strain of human nature. In most cases, we overestimate returns, and thus find that the benefits are not adequate. In addition, since we need to rewire the workflows, the transition takes more time than expected, and we get frustrated with tech. The small things matter, which change our subjective perceptions. For example, in the early period of desktops in India, it took a minute or two for the machines to start. This was deemed to be a waste of time compared to the old days when one could start work as soon as one sat at the desk.

For the experts, this translates into either non-adoption of AI, or delays in adoption. Some surveys hint that this is indeed the case in the US. "John Hartley of Stanford University and colleagues found that in September (2025) 37 per cent of Americans used generative AI at work, down from 46 per cent in June.... Ramp, a fintech firm, finds that in early 2025 AI use soared at American firms to 40 per cent, before leveling off. The growth in adoption really does seem to be slowing," states 'The Economist' article. But there can be human-related reasons for this slowdown. When new tech arrives, there is the initial excitement to try, and experiment with it. Top management forces managers, and employees to try it out. Within a few months, many of the users get frustrated, and the number of new people opting for it begins to wane. This may explain why the adoption percentages have come down steeply within months.

Even if the adoption is accelerated due to internal and external pressures, 'The Economist' piece gravely concludes that the "pause suggests that the economic pay-off from AI will arrive more slowly, more unevenly, and at a greater cost than implied by the current investment boom." Yet, until adoption accelerates, the "revenues required to justify \$5 trillion in AI capex will remain out of reach."

The Pioneer

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BUSINESS

10

Russia is past, is the West future?

New Delhi needs to balance ties with Moscow and Washington

OUR TAKE

Sutanu Guru
Author, Journalist and Academician

Last week, New Delhi was enveloped, as usual, in a terrible smog. Last week, the city was shrouded by a surreal sense of romantic eco-diplomacy nostalgia, which paraded as modern-day realpolitik. Informed pundits on TV channels squawked in hoarse voices about a new world order, even as their throats and lungs were impacted by the severe air pollution. Still, the mood seemed ecstatic and jubilant. The reason: During the grand visit of Vladimir Putin, India and Russia reaffirmed their long and historical ties, which seemed to grow higher than Mt Everest, and deeper than the Indian Ocean.

One was left with no doubts that the two nations, beginning from the times when Russia was a much-larger Soviet Union, enjoy enduring relations related to defense, geopolitics, economic cooperation, energy, among others. It is a form of partnership rarely seen in history, and perhaps unmatched in the modern times. While eloquence that reached fever pitch on the bilateral links were unique, even esoteric, and strong, my mind asked a delinked question: Is New Delhi looking at the glorious past towards Moscow, and ignoring its lucrative future that seems centred in Washington?

Look at a simple assumption. The primary goal of India, as stated by everyone from policy-makers to experts, economists to opposition political parties, is to grow economically, possibly at double-digits. In other words, the aim is for the country's GDP to grow as fast as possible. How can India achieve this objective? One way to ascertain which way to lean, and which direction to look at is to compare the West with Russia. The G-7, which constitutes the US, and its key allies in western Europe, has a combined GDP of nearly \$50 trillion, or 20 times larger than Russia, which is a \$2.5-trillion economy.

If India's priority is to grow rapidly, is it not better to be closer to the West? I am not talking about friendships and partnerships. Russia was, and will always be, a friend, and partner. I am talking about relationships that include transactional ones that will propel India to become a \$10-trillion economy by the mid-1930s. Being allied more to Russia rather than the US may not provide the solution. Only Europe and North America have the economic and technological heft, and the fire power and might to help India along this journey.

To be sure, many Indians, including the policy-makers and others, are extremely angry with the antics and tactics of the US president, Donald Trump. And legitimately too. In a few months, Trump's administration has destroyed two-and-a-half decades of carefully-nurtured trust between the two hitherto hostile nations. For some strange reasons, even though the US and India are the two largest democracies in the world, the bilateral relationship has always been testy, to say the least. Only after the 1998 nuclear tests by India was there more active engagement between the two nations.

Over the past 25-odd years, the two became close, and links developed into a crucial and significant strategic relationship. Quite clearly, Trump, with his own tantrums and peculiar behavior, has more-or-less diluted the level of trust that was assiduously built over the decades. While Indians may rave and rant at Trump, and his loyalists, can India do without the US? My short answer: Absolutely not. This is the harsh reality of today. Like it or not, New Delhi needs Washington, and Brussels. Trump is likely to remain in power for another three years, unless things go against him.

Russia can offer things that allow India to

strengthen its present, through the connections of the past. Of course, a large part of our defence equipment and systems are driven by Russian technology. We need to diversify energy sources from the West, and Middle East to add new ones like Russia and Central Asia. Our agriculture, as the anchor piece on this page shows, can benefit from Russian inputs and products. Hence, the dependence on Russia will only grow, and is unlikely to come down, over the next decade or two.

But pause for a moment, and think about the future. Think about 2047, and beyond. The future belongs to adoption and adaptation of Artificial Intelligence, robotics, and other modern tech that are changing the

world, and will drive the global economy over the next several decades. While Russia will remain a steadfast partner, it is no match to the West when it comes to these new-age tech areas. The tech we need, innovations-led processes that our economy demands, and the massive amounts of capital required can come from western Europe and North America. It is time for Indians to get out of their ivory towers, and face the bites of this harsh reality.

Consider another factor, which is not just a geopolitical and national security threat, but can derail India's dreams and ambitions in business, economy, and tech. The US has openly acknowledged China as a competing and equal superpower. Over the next decade, China is likely to aggressively compete with the US in areas such as AI, robotics, biosciences, and consumer electronics. Since India will be unable to partner actively with China, although we will need to keep alive the economic links, it needs to look elsewhere. The future of India lies not towards Russia, but the West to take on China.

Hence, while there is no harm in praising India-Russia ties, claiming that the bilateral partnership will be eternal, the focus needs to be on the future. Let me leave you with another insightful, and critical, thought: India's trade imbalance with Russia is enormous; of the \$70 billion trade, India exports \$5 billion worth of goods and services, or seven per cent of the total. The opposite is true in the case of the US, which runs a more than \$40 billion deficit with India. India sells more goods to the US, with some semblance of a balance in services.

Hence, New Delhi has the trade levers to push Washington to part with its tech and capital. It can increase exports, and buy more. In the case of Russia, although there is talk of higher Indian exports, and Russian businesspersons claim that they were asked to buy more Indian goods, the opportunities are limited. We can go from \$5 billion to \$10 billion. By then, the total trade will be more than \$100 billion, and our percentage share a shade higher at 10%. Maybe it is time to accept the new normal. There is little need for an unending celebration of Putin and Russia as India's strongest friend.

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"Russian President Vladimir Putin and Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi have laid the groundwork for boosting the economic partnership between the traditional allies, with the countries signing a series of pacts to raise bilateral trade to \$100 billion by 2030." This is an excerpt of the media reportage from Russia's state-sponsored RT, earlier known as Russia Today, on the day Putin wrapped up his two-day visit to India. RT commemorated a special edition to the 23rd India-Russia Annual Summit, a tradition that dates to 2000, as President Putin launched RT India on December 5.

The point is not about the RT's report as much as the optimism and euphoria that emanated from the short visit, and which was reflected in voices, opinions, and media coverage in Russia and India. The summit led to a detailed joint statement, and clutch of business deals that foregrounded economic resilience and agricultural security. It included a joint urea plant in Russia, which is expected to produce 1.8-2 million tonnes annually, and ease India's fertiliser supply constraints. The joint declaration "welcomed steps to ensure long-term supply of fertilisers to India, and discussed the potential establishment of joint ventures in this area."

One of the major steps, which was committed earlier, but inked during Putin's visit, was the joint venture between Russia's Uralchem, and three Indian fertiliser firms, Rashtriya Chemicals and Fertilizers, National Fertilizers, and Indian Potash. Incidentally, Indian farmers have faced recurring fertiliser shortages driven by global supply disruptions, rising demand, and logistical bottlenecks. In Madhya Pradesh, long queues were witnessed at the distribution centres, with reports of unrest in some places. The Government consistently denied the reports about shortages.

Demand has grown due to higher cropping intensity, and good monsoons, while domestic production and imports have not kept pace. This has led to periodic shortfalls in key nutrients such as urea and potash. India is the second-largest consumer, and third-largest producer of fertilisers globally. According to the official data, in 2023-24, the country's annual consumption was 601 lakh metric tonnes, with 503 lakh metric tonnes produced

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Fertilising Hindi-Russi bhai-bhai

India-Russia JV to make urea may be a boon for farmers

domestically, and the remaining being imported. Fertilisers play a crucial role to enhance farm productivity, and are essential for self-reliance in production.

The Government has tried to increase domestic production, but depends upon external supplies for feedstock like natural gas and ammonia. Global disruptions, including trade curbs, shifting trade flows, and higher feedstock prices affect the availability of competitively-priced imports. It pushes procurement into the expensive spot markets, and increases the costs for suppliers and farmers. Reports from several states indicate that the central allocations fell short of requirements for the Kharif season, leaving farmers waiting in long queues in some states.

Even when imports arrive in time, delays in port handling, inland transport, and state-level distribution networks create uneven availability across districts. While urea is heavily subsidised, shortages force the governments and private buyers to opt for emergency purchases at the higher prices, which strain the Budgets of the states and Centre. This translates into delayed or uneven subsidy flows that complicate timely access for smallholders. In the recent past, New Delhi inked deals with Saudi Arabia, Nepal, Bhutan, and Sri Lanka to secure long-term supplies.

According to a report in Tass, Russian news agency, Moscow "increased its fertiliser supplies to BRICS countries by 16 per cent this year, with India leading the increase." It

quoted the head of the Russian Association of Fertilizer Producers, Andrey Guryev, who said that India accounts for more than half of the Russian mineral fertiliser exports. The share of Russian fertilisers in India's imports grew to 26 per cent in the first nine months of 2025, he added. The planned joint-plant's scale is expected to increase the steady flow of urea to India, which will reduce dependence on spot purchases, and ease seasonal shortages that led to the recent price spikes.

Russia is interested in expanding the farm input trade, but feels restricted by India's import duty. Hence, the Russians wish that the "negotiations on a free-trade agreement between the Eurasian Economic Union and India must be intensified." They want the duty to be abolished to reduce costs to the farmers, or official subsidies. According to the Russian side, "India has become the locomotive for the growth of our supplies to BRICS countries." Hence, New Delhi can take advantage of the changed position, which is imposed on Moscow due to the growing and continuing global sanctions.

The new urea unit will assure cost stability by anchoring production to Russian ammonia, and long-term offtake arrangements. India can insulate the farmers from volatile global freight and commodity cycles, lowering procurement costs for public and private distributors. Locating a plant in Russia leverages abundant feedstock in that nation, diversifying supply away from source-related risks that previously exposed agricul-

ture to curbs or logistical shocks. The deal will possibly follow a co-production and joint-venture model, where the Russian producers supply ammonia, and Indian firms provide capital and guaranteed purchases. It will align incentives to ensure continuous exports to India once commercial operations begin.

According to media reports, the three Indian firms will together hold 50 per cent in the venture, and the Russian entity the remaining 50 cent. If this is the case, the Russian firm will be the largest shareholder, but the decision-making process will be equally shared between the two nations. The model is the same as India's fertiliser venture in Oman, which operates successfully. The objective: Bag long-term supply stability, rather than seasonal purchases.

This arrangement will reduce upfront capital risks for Russian operators, and provide Indian fertiliser agencies a secured share of output, and pricing leverage during the procurement cycles. Russia's regional and industry outlets have framed the project as a natural fit to tap the abundance source of Russia's potash and ammonia reserves to serve a large, nearby market, and emphasised export potential and industrial cooperation beyond fertilisers, including pharmaceuticals and energy projects mentioned in the joint statement. Moscow's messaging highlights mutual economic benefit, and the logic of linking Russian feedstock with Indian demand.

What remains to be seen in the urea project are the further details such as project timelines, feedstock pricing clauses, logistics, and regulatory clearances. Monitoring the investment decision, offtake contracts, and phased delivery schedule will indicate how quickly the Indian farmers may see the tangible on-ground benefits. The summit's joint statement therefore marks a pragmatic approach with strategic diplomacy converted into industrial partnerships aimed at securing agricultural inputs. If implemented on schedule, the urea plant may become a durable hedge against fertiliser volatility, and a meaningful supply-side relief for India's farm sector.

(The author has more than three decades of experience across print, TV, and digital media)

Prompts to perception: The next leap in human-AI interaction

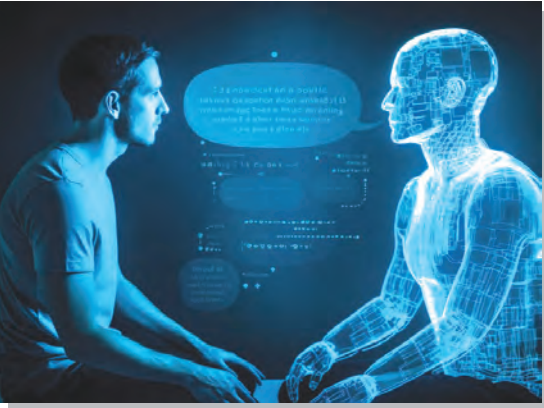


XI ZENG

As artificial intelligence advances, the relationship between humans and machines is evolving, moving from simple typed commands and algorithmic responses toward a deeper, more intuitive level of human perception and interaction. This paper explores how the human-AI relationship is shifting from straightforward prompts (“tell me ...”, “show me ...”) to more complex perceptual interactions — how systems understand context, adjust to human signals, and become collaborators in meaning-making rather than mere tools.

1. The era of prompts: controlling AI through language

Historically, human-AI interaction has been dominated by prompt textual instructions or queries that instruct an AI to perform a task. With the rise of large-language models (LLMs) and generative AI, the prompt became the primary interface: users write or speak a directive, and the model responds.



As Olla et al. observe, “prompts serve as the primary language for communicating with these models” and mark the transition from traditional command interfaces to more open-ended predictive systems.

Prompt engineering has emerged as a discipline focused on crafting concise, precise and layered inputs to elicit desirable outputs. However, this prompt-based approach has limitations: it assumes users know what to ask and that AI can respond correctly. This places the burden of meaning-making largely on humans, often requiring trial and error, refinements and domain expertise.

2. Enter perception: beyond the prompt

The next leap moves from prompts to perception, transitioning from what we say to how the system sees, senses and interprets context, human intent, non-verbal cues, and richer modalities. Research shows humans interacting with AI already treat these systems as social actors. McKee et al. found people attribute warmth and competence to AI systems — judgments shaping their willingness to cooperate.

Similarly, users' mental models of AI affect engagement: perceiving a system as intentional, independent, or aligned with human interests changes trust and interaction dynamics. This shifts the interface from text-prompting toward a face-to-face-like relationship, raising significant design, ethical and cognitive questions.

Additionally, evidence shows human — AI interaction influences human perception and decision-making: a recent study found biased AI systems create feedback loops, increasing bias in human judgments over time. This indicates that as AI perceives and responds, so does the human side, not just in outputs but in perception, judgment and

decision — making.

At Chance AI, we have witnessed firsthand how the shift from prompts to perception reshapes user experience in profound ways. Our app, Chance, is built as the world's first visual agent — a platform where users simply point their camera at anything that sparks curiosity and receive instant, contextual understanding without typing a single word.

One of our core features- AI Decode demonstrates this perceptual leap: when users upload an image, our multi-agent visual reasoning model doesn't just identify what's in the frame — it reverse-engineers the creative and contextual DNA of that image, generating a precise, model-agnostic prompt that captures its essence. This process, compact yet powerful, exemplifies how AI can move beyond responding to commands and instead become an intuitive collaborator that sees, interprets and acts, turning sight into insight seamlessly.

3. Why perception matters: richer collaboration, greater challenges

Richer collaboration: When AI understands more than prompts — interpreting context,

modality (voice, image, gesture), State and intent-it becomes a collaborator rather than a mere executor. For example, students using generative AI to solve creative problems reported greater progress when they treated AI as a partner rather than a tool. In human-AI research, Dalsgaard et al. argue that prompts are often treated as static interfaces, neglecting their role in mediating cognition and collaboration. As AI grows perceptual capacities, image, video, audio, real-world sensors, the potential opens for human-AI partnerships that understand gesture, tone, visual context and emotion.

Greater challenges: At the same time, shifting toward perception brings new issues:

- **Trust & misalignment:** If the AI “perceives” incorrectly, the human partner may be misled. The aforementioned bias-amplification feedback loop shows that perceptions matter not only for the AI, but also for human judgements.

- **Human psychological effects:** When humans treat AI as social actors, attributing intention or “mind” to it, this can influence how they treat both machines and people. Guingrich et al. show that perception of AI as conscious may carry over into human-human relations.
- **Interface complexity:** What used to be a typed prompt may become a multi-modal interaction-voice, gesture, environment. Designing for perception means designing for context, ambiguity, user State and emotion.
- **Ethical & privacy concerns:** Perception often implies sensing-collecting more data about a user: their voice tone, gaze, environment, emotion. This raises serious questions about consent, bias, and autonomy.

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Please read the complete article online in www.dailypioneer.com

India’s HR transformation: How AI, AGI and quantum technologies are redesigning foundations of work



YATINDRA DWIVEDI

India has entered a period in which human resource management is no longer characterised by paperwork, checklists or rigid administrative routines. Instead, it is increasingly shaped by intelligent systems—machines that can interpret context, generate insights, collaborate with humans and increasingly operate with a level of autonomy once unimaginable.

As companies seek to retain competitiveness in a technology-driven economy, HR is quietly moving through its most significant shift since economic liberalisation. What once functioned as a support department is evolving into a digitally amplified and strategically influential system — built on Generative AI (GenAI), emerging Artificial General Intelligence (AGI) capabilities, agentic AI frameworks, Retrieval-Augmented Generation (RAG), the Model Context Protocol (MCP) and early signals from quantum innovation.

This transformation aligns closely with India's current policy ecosystem. Initiatives such as Digital India, the IndiaAI Mission from MeitY, the National Quantum Mission and the Ministry of Labour and Employment's Labour Codes are collectively steering the country toward a labour environment where digital infrastructure and public policy reinforce one another. Research from global advisory firms describes this moment as a move from traditional workforce administration to an environment where human capability is enhanced and scaled by intelligent systems.

The earliest wave of change was driven by Generative AI. Its significance for HR is not limited to drafting documents or automating communication. Instead, GenAI brings analytical and creative intelligence into routine decision-making. Indian organisations are learning that GenAI can model cultural attributes, forecast talent gaps, design multilingual learning pathways and adapt communication to diverse regional contexts. For the first time, creativity, analytics and cultural understanding are fused — transforming HR from a repository of forms into an adaptive talent engine.

Beyond this, the early contours of AGI are becoming noticeable. While true AGI remains in research territory, emerging systems that can



reason, interpret uncertain human inputs, and offer higher-order insights hint at what is to come. Within HR, such intelligence could one day integrate economic indicators, workforce sentiment, external skill-market data and internal performance patterns to propose future organisational designs. Instead of responding to what employees do, these systems could analyse the motivations behind behaviour — enabling proactive workforce shaping



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grounded in advanced reasoning. As India's economy becomes increasingly knowledge-centric, AGI may guide everything from leadership pipelines to nationwide skill strategies.

Agentic AI takes this transformation further. Unlike rule-based chatbots, agentic systems combine planning, memory, reasoning and autonomous execution. These agents can independently run multi-step HR processes — from talent sourcing and compensation benchmarking to employee experience monitoring and workflow coordination. They behave less like software tools and more like operational partners. Indian public-sector enterprises and large corporates can leverage such agents to continuously scan labour markets, manage hiring cycles, identify learning trajectories or oversee organisational health with minimal manual intervention. This mirrors global predictions that autonomous AI systems will become deeply embedded in business operations within the decade.

Accuracy and contextual relevance in these systems are rooted in RAG, which grounds AI in an organisation's internal knowledge base — policies, compliance records, case archives, labour advisories, audits, and skill frameworks. This is crucial in India, where labour regulations differ across states and HR must adhere to directives from entities such as MoLE, EPFO, ESIC, and SEZ authorities. When RAG indexes these sources, HR gains something akin to a highly precise institutional memory — always accessible and free from interpretive ambiguity.

The Model Context Protocol (MCP) extends this intelligence into real-world action by connecting AI with HR and enterprise platforms such as HRIS, ERP, payroll, compliance tools, and IT systems. MCP enables automated onboarding, adaptive role changes, workload balancing and seamless internal mobility. It effectively closes the gap between insight generation and operational execution, turning HR into an always-engaged, intelligence-driven system rather than a reactive service unit.

Another emerging dimension is “vibe coding” — the effort to develop AI systems capable of understanding emotional tone, cultural nuance and collective organisational mood. Unlike conventional sentiment analysis, vibe coding uses multimodal AI to recognise psychological patterns across interactions. In a country as diverse as India — with its broad linguistic, cultural, and interpersonal variations—emotionally aware AI systems can provide leadership with a clearer view of organisational wellbeing. In an era of hybrid work and digital overload, such systems could become essential tools for empathetic, people-centric management.

Quantum computing represents the next frontier. Supported by India's National Quantum Mission, the country is positioning itself among global contenders preparing for quantum capabilities. Quantum technology will not simply speed up HR tasks; it will address optimisation problems that classical computers struggle with — scenarios involving vast combinations of variables. HR planning fits precisely into this category. With qubits that can store

multiple states simultaneously, quantum systems can evaluate millions of workforce arrangements at once. Quantum entanglement could allow these systems to quickly identify relationships between employee attributes, performance outcomes, cultural alignment and future skill potential. This could revolutionise team design, long-term workforce planning, capability forecasting, pay structuring and even diversity modelling. Quantum-driven HR tools may eventually allow Indian enterprises to simulate entire organisational futures—something beyond the limits of today's analytics.

This technological shift coincides with a historic redesign of India's labour ecosystem. The new Labour Codes — covering wages, industrial relations, social security and workplace safety — signal India's most comprehensive labour reforms since Independence. These codes emphasise consistency, digitisation and transparency. Organisations will need HR systems that can interpret regulatory changes in real time and adapt instantly. AI-driven HR environments become essential here. Autonomous systems can track compliance exposure, interpret state-level variations and align company policies with evolving Government notifications. Complementing this is India's developing Labour Stack — a digital public infrastructure envisioned to create portable worker identities, authenticated skill records, digital career histories and integrated social security data. When combined with AI, this infrastructure could enable frictionless talent movement across industries, employers and regions — unlocking India's demographic potential more efficiently than traditional reforms alone.

The convergence of AI, agentic intelligence, RAG-enhanced accuracy, MCP-enabled execution, and advancing quantum computing is steering HR toward a role far more strategic than administrative. With India's digital-policy foundation and the scale of its enterprises, the country is uniquely positioned to adopt these technologies at national scale. The future of HR in India will belong not to organisations that simply automate tasks, but to those that design intelligent systems capable of continuous learning, reasoning and workforce orchestration. As India prepares for the next phase of economic growth, this augmented HR function could emerge as one of the most influential engines of institutional and national transformation.

AI is teaching a generation to sound smart. That’s not the same as being informed

As students worldwide turn to AI for learning, the divide isn't between users and non-users — it's between those who can question algorithmic output and those who must accept it - education systems aren't prepared for the consequences.



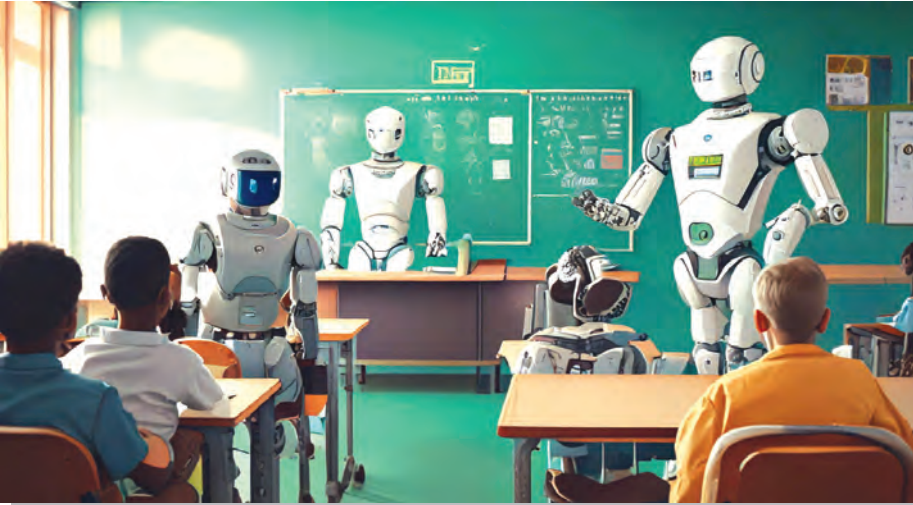
NISHANT SAHDEV

Artificial intelligence didn't storm into education. There was no grand moment when classrooms suddenly changed. Instead, AI arrived slowly — through shortcuts during late-night study sessions, through apps that explained equations more patiently than tutors, through quick rewrites before a deadline. Over time, these small interactions added up. What once felt novel became routine. For many students today, AI is simply part of how thinking happens.

A final-year engineering student in Delhi said something recently that captured this shift perfectly: “Sometimes I'm not sure where my thinking ends and where the AI's suggestion begins.” She wasn't admitting guilt. She was trying to describe a new intellectual experience — the sense that the boundary between her own reasoning and digital assistance is fading.

The numbers across India and globally show just how quickly this shift has taken root. In the US, surveys of teens show that one in four now uses generative AI for schoolwork, double the number from 2023.

Adults, too, are interacting with AI at unprecedented rates, with more than 60 per cent saying they use it several times a week. In India, AI adoption in schools and colleges is accelerating even



faster. A national survey reported that over 70 per cent of Indian teachers already use AI tools for creating lesson plans or automating administrative work, with the figure even higher among experienced teachers.

In higher education, more than half of Indian universities now permit students to use AI tools and many institutions are incorporating generative AI into curriculum design and learning materials.

The Indian market shows this momentum. AI in education here was valued at roughly \$196 million in 2024 and is projected to cross \$1.1 billion by 2030 — a compound annual growth rate of more than 30 per cent. That growth is driven by scale: India has over 40 million higher-education students and one of the world's largest school systems, with 260 million schoolchildren and more than 8.5 million teachers. When a technology

touches this system, even quietly, the effects ripple widely. But numbers only tell part of the story. What matters more is what AI is doing to the inner life of education — the process of thinking itself.



For centuries, education relied on a simple assumption: the work that mattered happened inside the student. The essay or the problem set was just evidence of that internal struggle. Learning meant grappling with ideas, wrestling with confusion, taking wrong turns and correcting course. It was slow, often frustrating work, but it built the kind of understanding that stays with a person for life.

AI scrambles this logic. It can produce clean, fluent,

confident answers instantly. A student need only provide the prompt.

Studies from leading universities have found that AI-generated essays now match or outperform undergraduate writing in structure, clarity, and argumentation. Students who use AI to improve their essays often submit stronger work— but when asked to explain the same ideas orally, their understanding is noticeably weaker. The surface looks polished, but the depth is missing.

Students feel the difference. Surveys in India and abroad show increasing anxiety: many students worry that AI is dulling their ability to think independently. A large majority say they often cannot tell how much of their work reflects their own reasoning. And this isn't laziness; it's human psychology. When a system gives a smooth, immediate answer, it's difficult to resist trusting

it, especially under academic pressure. The trouble is that AI is not always correct. Large language models still generate fabricated information — so-called “hallucinations” — with surprising confidence. Depending on the question, error rates can range from a few percent to nearly a quarter. But students rarely have the time or context to verify every detail. When uncertainties are wrapped in fluent language, they blend into the student's mental model without detection.

This challenge is magnified in countries like India, where access to high-quality teaching remains uneven. UNESCO reports that hundreds of millions of students globally lack regular access to trained teachers and India alone faces a massive shortfall at multiple levels. In such environments, AI sometimes becomes a substitute for human instruction.

That can be a powerful equaliser — AI can deliver explanations anytime, in multiple languages, tailored to a student's pace. But it also carries risks. When students rely on AI without the conceptual framework to evaluate it, they may absorb inaccuracies that weaken their foundations. This creates a new kind of inequality. In well-resourced institutions — elite engineering colleges, private universities, top public universities — students often use AI thoughtfully.

They test ideas, refine drafts, or explore alternative approaches. In under-resourced settings, students may use AI as a primary teacher. The difference is not

access; it is epistemic resilience — the ability to question the information a system gives you.

Meanwhile, universities are struggling to respond. Some tried banning AI, but detection tools remain unreliable and risk penalising honest students. Other institutions welcomed AI but did not rethink how assignments are designed, even though many traditional tasks no longer measure what they once did. If a machine can produce a persuasive answer in seconds, what does an essay or a problem set really test?

International organisations have begun sounding alarms. Analysts warn that without assessment reform, countries could see a decline in deep literacy, reasoning skills, and independent thinking. These warnings apply strongly to India, where millions of students will interact with AI daily long before institutions fully adapt.

So what would meaningful change look like?

First, we need to redesign assessments so that they capture reasoning, not just results. Oral exams, in-class analytical tasks, multi-stage assignments with required reflections and reasoning logs bring the cognitive process back into view. These practices won't eliminate AI use, but they make it harder for AI to replace thinking.

Author is a theoretical physicist at the University of North Carolina, United States

Please read the complete article online in www.dailypioneer.com

FROM THE WORLD

PAKISTAN

EAM Jaishankar remarks criticised

Pakistan on Sunday criticised External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar's remarks against its military, saying its institutions, including armed forces, are a pillar of national security. Speaking at the Hindustan Times Leadership Summit in New Delhi on Saturday, Jaishankar said much of India's problem emanates from Pakistan's military and even referred to its support for terror groups. Like there are good terrorists and bad terrorists, there are good military leaders and apparently not-so-good ones, he said, seen as a reference to Army Chief Field Marshal Asim Munir. "Pakistan categorically rejects and condemns the highly inflammatory, baseless and irresponsible comments made by the Indian External Affairs Minister," Foreign Office spokesperson Tahir Andrabi said.

RUSSIA

Indian security upsets scribes

Russian journalists accompanying President Vladimir Putin during his recent visit to India have expressed disappointment over what they described as very strict security restrictions during the 23rd India-Russia summit. Putin was on a two-day visit to New Delhi from December 4-5 to attend the annual summit, aimed at strengthening the bilateral strategic and economic partnership. According to reporters from Kommersant and Vedomosti, security checks at Hyderabad House, Rashtrapati Bhavan and other venues were far more intensive than they had anticipated. In a report published in Kommersant newspaper, Andrei Kolesnikov, a member of the Kremlin press pool, said issues began at Hyderabad House, the venue for the summit, where several personal items were taken away during screening.

Japan, Australia urge calm after China radar locks on Japanese jets

ASSOCIATED PRESS
Tokyo

Japan and Australia urged calm on Sunday after Chinese military aircraft locked radar on Japanese fighter jets, a month after the Japanese leader's recent remarks on Taiwan that stirred tensions between Tokyo and Beijing.

Defence Minister Shinjiro Koizumi said Japan formally protested the incident, calling it "an extremely regrettable" act and "a dangerous" one that "exceeded the scope necessary for safe aircraft operations."

"We have lodged a strong protest with the Chinese side and demanded strict preventive measures," Koizumi said.

Japan's Defence Ministry said China's military aircraft J-15 took off from the Chinese carrier Liaoning near the southern island of Okinawa on Saturday and "intermittently" latched its radar on Japanese F-15 fighter jets on two occasions Saturday, for about three minutes in the late afternoon and for about 30 minutes in the evening.

It was not made clear whether the radar lock incident involved the same Chinese J-15 both times. Japanese fighter jets that had been scrambled to pursue Chinese jets that were conducting aircraft takeoff and landing exercises in the Pacific.

They were pursuing the



Chinese aircraft at a safe distance and did not take actions that could be interpreted as provocation, Kyodo News agency said, quoting defence officials, when the radar lock happened. There was no breach of Japanese airspace, and no injury or damage was reported from the incident.

Senior Colonel Wang Xuemeng, spokesperson for the Chinese navy, defended China's flight training near the Miyako island Saturday, saying Beijing announced the exercises beforehand and accused Japanese aircraft of "harassment."

"We solemnly asked the Japanese side to immediately stop slandering and smearing, and strictly

restrain its frontline actions. The Chinese Navy will take necessary measures in accordance with the law to resolutely safeguard its own security and legitimate rights and interests," Wang said in a statement posted Sunday on the Chinese Ministry of Defence website.

Relations between Japan and China have worsened after Japan's Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi said in early November its military could get involved if China were to take action against Taiwan, the self-governing island that Beijing claims as its own.

Japan and Australia, whose defence ministers held their scheduled talks in Tokyo on Sunday, expressed

worry over the development.

"We are deeply concerned by the actions of China in the last 24 hours," Australian Defence Minister Richard Marles told a joint news conference Sunday after holding talks with Koizumi. "We expect those interactions to be safe and professional."

Australia does "not want to see any change to the status quo across the Taiwan Straits," Marles said, adding that China is his country's largest trade partner and he wants to have productive relations with Beijing.

"We continue to advocate to China about these issues again, in a very calm,

sensible and moderate way," he said.

Japan and Australia, during Sunday talks, agreed to bolster military ties to lead the region's multilateral defence cooperation. The two ministers agreed to form a comprehensive "framework for strategic defence coordination" and discuss further details.

Tokyo has been accelerating its military buildup while expanding its defence ties beyond its only treaty ally, the United States. It now considers Australia to be a semi-ally.

Marles also visited a Mitsubishi Heavy Industries shipyard in Nagasaki on Saturday to observe production of the upgraded Mogami-class frigate that his country chose in September as a replacement for its aging fleet.

Saturday's radar lock is believed to be the first involving Japanese and Chinese military aircraft. In 2013, a Chinese warship targeted a radar on a Japanese destroyer, Kyodo said.

Fighter jets use radars for search operations or fire control ahead of a missile launch. Elsewhere in the Pacific, the Philippine coast guard said China fired three flares toward a fisheries bureau plane on patrol in the South China Sea on Saturday. Chinese forces fire flares to warn planes to move away from what they consider their airspace over the disputed waters.

Blast in Mexico's Michoacán kills 2, injures 7

ASSOCIATED PRESS
Mexico City

An explosion outside a local police station in the western Mexican state of Michoacán Saturday killed at least two people and wounded seven, local and federal security officials said.

The explosion came as the federal government has stepped up security activities in the state, sending in additional troops after two recent high-profile assassinations.

Hector Zepeda, commander of the Coahuayana community police, said Saturday the blast killed two of his police officers and that civil-

ians were among the wounded. He said some of the victims were found far from the site of the explosion, which also damaged nearby buildings. "With this operation (from the federal government) a lot of marines came," Zepeda said. "We stopped doing patrols because the operation is going on."

The community police, which patrol various rural communities, are a remnant of the civilian vigilante forces that took up arms more than a decade ago to defend communities from drug cartels, and then were formalized by the state. Coahuayana is near the Pacific coast in western

Michoacán and the border with the state of Colima, a stronghold of the powerful Jalisco New Generation Cartel.

Saturday's explosion happened while Michoacán Gov. Alfredo Ramírez Bedolla was in Mexico City to celebrate with President Claudia Sheinbaum the anniversary of their Morena party's arrival in power seven years ago.

Ramírez Bedolla and Sheinbaum have been criticized for the deteriorating security situation in Michoacán where numerous drug cartels are fighting to control territory, terrorizing locals.



Indian consulate in Shanghai shifts to modern premises after 32 years

ASHOKE RAJ
New Delhi

Marking a major milestone in India's diplomatic presence in East China, the Consulate General of India in Shanghai inaugurated its new, state-of-the-art Chancery at the Dawning Centre in Changning District today. The relocation comes after 32 years of operations at the previous premises, signalling a significant upgrade in India's capacity to serve both its citizens and its Chinese partners in the region.

The new Chancery was formally inaugurated by Pradeep Kumar Rawat, Ambassador of India to the People's Republic of China, who attended the ceremony as Guest of Honour. Nearly 400 guests participated in the event, including members of the diplomatic corps, senior officials from the Shanghai Municipal Government, business leaders, academics, and representatives of the Indian

community from Shanghai, Hangzhou, Ningbo, Suzhou, Nanjing, Yiwu, Keqiao, and other cities under the Consulate's jurisdiction.

Addressing the gathering, Consul General Shri Pratik Mathur expressed gratitude to the Ministry of External Affairs and Shanghai authorities for their support and collaboration throughout the relocation process. He reaffirmed the Consulate's commitment to delivering seamless, efficient services to Indian nationals as well as strengthening engagement with Chinese stakeholders across East China.

The new premises — spanning 1,436.63 square metres on the entire 6th floor of the Grade-A Dawning Centre — more than double the operational space of the previous office at the Shanghai International Trade Centre. The expanded layout consolidates consular, commercial, cultural, and administrative sections onto a single,



modern, and secure floorplate, enhancing both internal efficiency and the overall public service experience.

Highlighting the significance of the move, the Consul General noted that Shanghai hosts India's oldest consular presence in mainland China, making the upgrade particularly meaningful. He added

that the Dawning Centre's location in the Hongqiao-Gubei foreign business corridor — home to numerous diplomatic missions and major multinational corporations — offers the Consulate a strategic advantage. Its proximity to the Hongqiao transportation hub and the Gubei international

community further strengthens the Consulate's outreach and accessibility for the growing Indian population and business community in East China. Reflecting on India's broader governance philosophy, Shri Mathur said the move aligns with Prime Minister Narendra Modi's vision of "Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikas," emphasizing inclusive, people-centric administration. The upgraded Chancery, he said, embodies this commitment by enabling the Consulate to deliver improved services, host larger community engagements, and enhance its commercial and cultural outreach.

The opening also comes at a moment of renewed momentum in India-China engagement. The Consul General highlighted recent developments such as the resumption of direct flights between India and Shanghai, which are expected to boost business travel, tourism, and trade.

Indonesian President Prabowo Subianto to visit Pakistan

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
Islamabad

Indonesian President Prabowo Subianto will undertake his maiden official visit to Pakistan from Monday to deepen bilateral ties and explore new avenues of cooperation.

Subianto has been invited by Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif for the visit from December 8-9, the Foreign Office said in a statement, adding that he will be accompanied by a high-level delegation comprising key ministers and senior officials.

"This will be President Prabowo's first visit to Pakistan," the Foreign Office said.

"The upcoming visit carries added significance as it coincides with the 75th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between Pakistan and Indonesia."

Trump awards medals to Kennedy Center honorees



ASSOCIATED PRESS
Washington

President Donald Trump on Saturday presented the 2025 Kennedy Centre honorees with their medals during a ceremony in the Oval Office, hailing the slate of artists he was deeply involved in choosing as "perhaps the most accomplished and renowned class" ever assembled.

This year's recipients are actor Sylvester Stallone, singers Gloria Gaynor and George Strait, the rock band Kiss and actor-singer Michael Crawford.

Trump said they are a group of "incredible people" who represent the "very best in American arts and culture" and that, "I know most of them and I've been a fan of all of them."

"This is a group of icons whose work and accomplishments have inspired, uplifted and unified millions and millions of Americans," said a tuxedo-clad Trump. "This is perhaps the most accomplished and renowned class of Kennedy Centre Honourees ever assembled."

Trump ignored the Kennedy Centre and its premier awards program during his first term as president. But the Republican has instituted a series of changes since returning to office in January, most notably ousting its board of trustees and replacing them with GOP supporters who voted him in as chairman of the board.

Trump also has criticized the centre's programming and its physical appearance, and has vowed to overhaul both. The president placed around each honoree's neck a new medal that was designed, created and donated by jeweller Tiffany and Co., according to the Kennedy Centre and Trump. It's a gold disc etched on

one side with the Kennedy Centre's image and rainbow colours. The honoree's name appears on the reverse side with the date of the ceremony. The medallion hangs from a navy blue ribbon and replaces a large rainbow ribbon decorated with three gold plates that rested on the honoree's shoulders and chest and had been used since the first honours program in 1978.

Trump honours the honorees

Strait, wearing a cowboy hat, was first to receive his medal. When the country singer started to take off the hat, Trump said, "If you want to leave it on, you can. I think we can get it through." But Strait took it off.

The president said Crawford was a "great star of Broadway" for his lead role in the long-running "Phantom of the Opera". Of Gaynor, he said, "We have the disco queen, and she was indeed, and nobody did it like Gloria Gaynor".

Trump was effusive about his friend Stallone, calling him a "wonderful" and "spectacular" person and "one of the true, great movie stars" and "one of the great legends."

Kiss is an "incredible rock band", he said.

Songs by honorees Gaynor and Kiss played in the Rose Garden just outside the Oval Office as members of the White House press corps waited nearby for Trump to begin the ceremony.

The president said in August that he was "about 98 per cent involved" in choosing the 2025 honorees when he personally announced them at the Kennedy Centre, the first slate chosen under his leadership. The honorees traditionally had been announced by press release.



Inflatable boat sinks near Crete in Greece, 18 dead

ASSOCIATED PRESS
Athens(Greece)

At least 18 migrants attempting to cross the Mediterranean Sea in an inflatable boat died when it capsized south of the island of Crete, Greek authorities said Saturday. The half-sunken boat was located Saturday by a passing Turkish merchant vessel, authorities said. Two survivors were rescued and a rescue operation to find more was ongoing. Greece is a major entry point into the European Union for people fleeing conflict and poverty in the Middle East, Africa and Asia and fatal accidents are a common occurrence. The short but perilous journey from Turkey's coast to nearby Greek islands in inflatable dinghies or small boats, often in poor conditions, used to be the major route until increased patrols and alleged pushbacks reduced crossing attempts. In recent months, arrivals from Libya to Crete have surged.



Senior Indian official visits Nepal for election review

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
Kathmandu

A senior Indian government official arrived on Sunday to review Nepal's election preparations and assess progress in India-funded development projects, officials said. Munu Mahawar, Additional Secretary in the Ministry of External Affairs, will hold a series of high-level meetings during his four-day visit, foreign ministry officials here said. He is expected to call on Prime Minister Sushila Karki and meet Finance Minister Rameshwor Khanal, Commerce Minister Anil Kumar Sinha and Home Minister Om Prakash Aryal on Tuesday, they said. Mahawar's discussions in Kathmandu will focus on India's support and cooperation for the March 5 elections, the officials said, adding that he will also assess progress in India-funded development projects in Nepal.

Endless opportunities in India: Israeli officials

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ Jerusalem

The ties between Israel and India are “very strong” and there are “endless opportunities” for collaboration between the two countries, Israeli officials have said while describing the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC) project as a “very good” initiative.

They also said the two countries can work together, along with partners in the international community, to encourage states to assert their authority over all activities within their borders and ensure that non-state actors do not play a significant role.

“The ties between Israel and India are very, very strong and getting even stronger. Both civilian and I think also in terms of military cooperation, defence cooperation,” a senior Israeli foreign ministry official said while talking to a group of Indian journalists. Another official from the foreign ministry said there are “endless opportunities” for the two countries to work together.

Speaking about the IMEC project, the official said that for Israel, it’s a “very, very good initiative”.

“It’s something that we are really looking into. At the moment, there are two countries which are not part of the signatory - Jordan and Israel. And for the first stage, this is what we’re looking to see: these two countries are



part of the larger framework,” the official said.

The IMEC, a transformative initiative aimed at boosting connectivity, trade, and sustainability across three regions, was formed on the sidelines of the G20 Summit in Delhi in September 2023.

An agreement was signed by India, Saudi Arabia, the European Union, the UAE, the US and some other G20 partners for the corridor.

Less than a month after the IMEC launch, Hamas launched a multi-front attack on Israel on October 7 that impacted the project.

“It’s true that the 7th of

October attack actually put a lid for the moment on all these initiatives. There’s a lot of hesitation for other countries as to how they should be included when there’s still a war going on. And even though there’s a ceasefire, there’s a peace plan by (US President Donald) Trump, there’s still hesitation. What if a war breaks out again?” said the senior diplomat.

“So, I think it would still take time. There’s nothing at the moment Israel can do to persuade or to progress unless Saudi Arabia sees some kind of progress in

Gaza, because Saudi Arabia clearly said that it has to give something to the Palestinians. Any gesture that can pacify the Palestinians before it goes on and normalises relations with Israel,” the official said.

“Until that happens, we don’t see how we can move forward, but we are laying the foundation with Americans, with the Emirates. With other neighbouring countries. So when the time comes, we can pick up from where we left off,” the official added.

The senior diplomat described the IMEC as an “amazing project”, saying it

would stabilise the area and the regional countries could gain from it.

Many strategic affairs watchers have described the IMEC as perhaps an answer to China’s Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), a multi-billion-dollar infrastructure and connectivity project that involves dozens of countries.

The official also said Israel is pushing India, as well as the rest of the world, to designate Hamas as a terror outfit.

“Is there a doubt that Hamas is a terrorist organisation after the October 7 (attack)? Is there doubt about what they have (done)? Their

actions. The way they operate. Their activities?” the official asked.

The official said that India’s listing of Hamas would have a “strong global impact”.

It will send a “very strong message” to the world, because there are a lot of neighbouring countries that look up to India, and when India declares something, it has a great impact.

“It sends a message that India has clearly seen what Hamas is doing, and no operative should step on Indian soil,” the official said.

On the two-state solution, the official said India has a very clear understanding of policy, promoting the two-state solution, seeing the two nations living side by side, and it has never neglected this policy.

“We respect that. We don’t see the vision at the moment of this happening, especially when you don’t have the right reforms and conditions from the Palestinian side,” the official added.

Speaking on condition of anonymity, another official said that there was a thought in Israel that possibly Iran would shift its approach and maybe stop the proxy war after what happened to Hezbollah, Hamas and the Operation Rising Lion.

“But the understanding now is that there was no shift, and Iran is doubling down and reinvesting in the proxy system with slight changes as to where to put the emphasis,” the official said.

Security forces foil attack on Jaffar Express in Pakistan



ASSOCIATED PRESS
■ Mexico City

Security forces foiled an attempt to attack the frequently-targeted Jaffar Express passenger train in Pakistan’s Balochistan province, according to a media report on Sunday. Unidentified insurgents planted an improvised explosive device (IED) on the track used by the Peshawar-bound train in the Nasir-abad area of the province on Saturday, the Dawn newspaper reported. Law enforcement agencies cordoned off the area after receiving information about the device and defused it, the report said, quoting a police official. The attack attempt comes almost a month after the train narrowly escaped an explosion in the same area. Months before that, it came

under a deadly insurgent attack that left 26 people dead. Meanwhile, the Peshawar to Quetta Jaffar Express was stopped at Jacobabad due to security reasons. Another train was also halted there. According to the report, services for these trains will be resumed after the situation is assessed. It is not the first time insurgents have attacked the Jaffar Express, and its service has already been hit multiple times this year. The most devastating attack came on March 11, when the banned Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA) hijacked the Jaffar Express with 380 passengers on board, triggering a two-day standoff in a mountainous area and claiming 26 lives. Security forces later rescued around 354 passengers, while 33 insurgents were killed.

Sri Lanka’s Kandy: A lesson in climate change, human error

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ Colombo

Cyclone-struck Sri Lanka’s Kandy district – the seat of the last Royal Kingdom of Ceylon – suffered extensive damage and was the worst-hit by the Ditwah disaster, which has claimed a total of 618 lives in the island nation. Surrounded by three mountain ranges and set in a basin-like valley, Kandy city escaped direct damage except for disruptions to its road network, electricity, and communication. However, the devastation in the district’s outer areas in the rural heartland was disastrous. Till Saturday night, Kandy district had accounted for 232 of the 618 deaths verified so far. It leads with 91 disappearances and 1,800 fully destroyed homes. Rescue teams are still struggling to reach some of the villages cut off from road access there. An expert indicated that “unplanned and haphazard

settlements” were a cause of the disaster. One such village is in the Minipe administrative division, 75 miles east of the city, 145 feet above sea level. Here unfolded the tragic tale of the village of Nelummala (the lotus flower). Around 5:30 in the evening on November 27, boulders came descending from a nearby range, burying all 21 houses in the village, along with the people inside. “I managed to save six of them,” Rev Palletanne Chandrananda, 34, a Buddhist monk who ran a Buddhist school in the village, told PTI on the phone. He believes over 30 people are dead while the search is still on. Once a beautiful, quaint village amidst acres of paddy fields, it now stands as a site of boulders and loose earth with not a trace of the happier times. A female villager who did not want to be identified said she was thankful to the monk for her survival.

Man held over pepper spray incident at UK airport



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ London

A man was arrested on suspicion of assault at the Heathrow Airport on Sunday after police were called to reports of a number of people being attacked with pepper spray, with the incident causing major travel disruptions.

The Metropolitan Police said the morning incident was not terrorism related and that the injuries to the victims were not thought to be “life-threatening or life changing”.

The force believes the incident involved an argument between a group of people known to each other.

“A number of people were sprayed with what is believed to be a form of pepper spray by a group of men who then left the scene,” the Met Police said in a statement.

“Armed response officers attended and arrested one man on suspicion of assault. He remains in custody and enquiries continue to trace further suspects,” the statement said.

The incident caused major disruption to flights, with the airport advising passengers to allow extra time for their journeys.

“Our teams are current-

ly responding to an incident involving the emergency services in the Terminal 3 multi-storey car park,” Heathrow Airport said.

“Passengers are advised to allow extra time when travelling to the airport and to check with their airline for any queries,” it added.

Armed police rushed to the airport and London Ambulance Service also attended the scene as the victims were taken to hospital. “At this stage, we believe the incident involved a group of people known to each other, with an argument escalating and resulting in a number of people being injured,” said Commander Peter Stevens of the Met Police.

“Our officers responded quickly and there will be an increased police presence at Heathrow Airport throughout the morning, to continue enquiries and ensure the safety of those in the area.

“We are not treating this incident as terrorism. I understand the public’s concerns and would like to thank those in the area for their cooperation this morning,” he said.

The police are also appealing for anyone with information about the incident.

Russian strike kills 1 as US-Ukraine talks end day three

ASSOCIATED PRESS
■ Kyiv

Russian missile and drone attacks overnight into Sunday killed at least one person in Ukraine, after US and Ukrainian officials wrapped up a third day of talks aimed at ending the war. A man was killed in a drone attack on Ukraine’s northern Chernihiv region Saturday night, local officials said, while a combined missile and drone attack on infrastructure in the central city of Kremenchuk caused power and water outages. Kremenchuk is home to one of Ukraine’s biggest oil refineries and is an industrial hub.

Kyiv and its Western allies say Russia is trying to cripple the Ukrainian power grid

and deny civilians access to heat, light and running water for a fourth consecutive winter, in what Ukrainian officials call “weaponising” the cold.

The latest round of attacks came as Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said Saturday evening he had a “substantive phone call” with American officials engaged in talks with a Ukrainian delegation in Florida. He said he had been given an update over the phone by US and Ukrainian officials at the talks.

“Ukraine is determined to keep working in good faith with the American side to genuinely achieve peace,” Zelenskyy wrote on social media.

Speaking Saturday at the Reagan National Defence



Forum, US President Donald Trump’s outgoing Ukraine envoy, Keith Kellogg, said efforts to end the war were in “the last 10 metres.”

He said a deal depended on the two outstanding issues of “terrain, primarily the Donbas,” and the

Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant.

Russia controls most of Donbas, its name for Donetsk and neighbouring Luhansk, which, along with two southern regions, it illegally annexed three years ago.

Benin’s interior minister says coup announced earlier has been foiled

ASSOCIATED PRESS
■ Cotonou (Benin)

A coup that was announced in Benin on Sunday has been “foiled,” the interior minister said in a video on Facebook.

“In the early morning of Sunday, December 7, 2025, a small group of soldiers launched a mutiny with the aim of destabilising the state and its institutions,” Alassane Seidou said. “Faced with this situation, the Beninese Armed Forces and their leadership, true to their oath, remained committed to the republic.”

Earlier, a group of soldiers had appeared on Benin’s state TV Sunday to announce the dissolution of the government in an apparent coup, the latest of many in West Africa.

The group, which called itself the Military Committee for Refoundation,



announced the removal of the president and all state institutions. Lt Col Pascal Tigri was appointed president of the military committee, the soldiers said.

Following its independence from France in 1960, the West African nation witnessed multiple coups, especially in the decades following its independence. Since 1991, the country has been

politically stable following the two-decade rule of Marxist-Leninist Mathieu Kérékou.

There has been no official news about President Patrice Talon since gunshots were heard around the presidential residence. However, the signal to the state television and public radio which was cut off has now been restored.



Nobel laureates arrive for Stockholm, Oslo events

ASSOCIATED PRESS ■ Stockholm

Nobel week was underway in Stockholm and Oslo with laureates holding news conferences and lectures before they will be awarded the prestigious prizes. Hungarian László Krasznahorkai, who won the Prize in literature for his surreal and anarchic novels that combine a bleak world view with mordant humour, was expected to give a lecture in Stockholm on Sunday in one of his rare public appearances. When the Nobel judges announced the award in October, they described the 71-year-old as “a great epic writer” whose work “is characterised by absurdism and grotesque excess.” “Krasznahorkai’s work can be seen as part of a Central European tradition,” the Nobel Prize organisation said.



4.6 quake hits western Nepal; no damage reported

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Kathmandu

A 4.6-magnitude earthquake hit western Nepal’s Sudurpashchim province on Sunday morning. There were no immediate reports of damage. The earthquake was recorded at 8:28 am with an epicentre located in the Ghusha area of the Darchula district, according to the National Earthquake Monitoring and Research Centre. Tremors were felt in the neighbouring districts as well. However, there were no immediate reports of any damage caused by the tremor. Western Nepal is frequently hit by earthquakes. On November 30, an earthquake measuring 4.4 magnitude was recorded in the Saipal mountain region in the Bajhang district of the province.

PROSPECT

Nalco plans to start Pottangi bauxite mines by mid-2026



State-owned National Aluminium Company Ltd (Nalco) is aiming to start its Pottangi bauxite mines in Odisha by June next year as the company plans to ramp up its mining capacity supporting its goal of expanding its integrated aluminium business. Dilip Buildcon Ltd had emerged as L-1 bidder for the development and operation of Pottangi bauxite mines.

“...Our target is June next year we will be starting the mines,” NALCO CMD Brijendra Pratap Singh said. The company is set to enhance its alumina production capacity at its Damanjodi refinery in Koraput district, Odisha. Nalco operates a 2.275 million tonnes per annum (MTPA) alumina refinery at the site and is undertaking the installation of a 5th stream that will add an additional 1 MTPA capacity.

To support this expansion, the Odisha government has granted Nalco a mining lease for the Pottangi Bauxite Deposit in Koraput district. The lease covers an area of 697.979 hectares and is valid for 50 years, ensuring steady raw material supply for the increased alumina production.

This capacity augmentation is expected to strengthen Nalco's position in the aluminium sector and contribute to the industrial growth of Odisha. The CMD further said till production from Pottangi starts or if it gets delayed by a few months, the production from alternate sourcing of bauxite will come. So, there will not be a shortage of bauxite for the expanded refinery.

“Already we have a separate project where alternate sourcing of bauxite is there. We are making a parallel conveyor downhill from our existing mines, perforated mines, which will be having a capacity of around 30 lakh tons per year. So, that will get commissioned in April-May next year,” the CMD explained. Nalco is a Navaratna public sector enterprise under administrative control of Ministry of Mines is in the field of alumina, aluminium and has integrated multi-locational facility of bauxite mining, alumina refining, aluminium smelter, power generation and port. The company is one of the largest manufacturer and exporter of alumina and aluminium in the country.

Not issued any advisory to stop finance to renewables: MNRE

The Ministry of New and Renewable Energy on Sunday clarified that it has not issued any advisory to financial institutions to stop lending to renewable energy projects or to RE equipment manufacturing facilities.

This comes amid reports suggesting that the Ministry of New and Renewable Energy (MNRE) has issued an advisory to lenders to pause fresh financing to renewable energy projects amid significant overcapacity concerns, an MNRE statement said on Sunday. “It is hereby clarified that MNRE has not issued any advisory to financial institutions for stopping lending to either renewable energy power projects or to renewable energy equipment manufacturing facilities,” it said.

However, it stated that the MNRE has circulated to the Department of Financial Services and NBFCs like PFC, REC and IREDA, the status of present installed domestic manufacturing capacities across various sectors of solar PV manufacturing so that the financial institutions can adopt a calibrated and well-informed approach while evaluating proposals for financing any manufacturing facility in solar PV manufacturing sector.

The Government of India is committed to make India self-reliant in solar PV manufacturing and establish the country as a major player in the global value chain, it stated. This commitment is supported through a comprehensive set of initiatives, including the PLI Scheme for High Efficiency Solar PV Modules and measures to provide a level-playing field for Indian manufacturers, it said.

Commerce Minister address Amity University convocation

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Noida/New Delhi

The 21st Convocation-2025 commenced at Amity university Noida campus, spread over four days, from 6th-9th December 2025, wherein over 28,000 qualified Graduands, from various domains, including engineering, management, law, humanities, bio sciences, health and allied science, journalism, agriculture, hospitality, environmental sciences and others are scheduled to be awarded Undergraduate Degrees, Postgraduate Degrees, PhD Degrees, Diplomas, medals and certificates.

On the first day of the Convocation on Saturday, around 9,000 Graduands received their Degrees and Diplomas in the presence of Union Minister of Commerce & Industry Piyush Goyal.

Addressing the students Goyal said Dr Ashok K Chauhan, Founder President Amity Education Group, is committed to serving the nation and continues to motivate us. “My heartiest congratulations to all the graduands, and they must keep the nation's and Amity's flag flying high. When you are in college, you do not appreciate the



Abhay Chauhan, Dr Aseem Chauhan, Dr Amita Chauhan, Dr Ashok K Chauhan, Union Minister Piyush Goyal, Dr Atul Chauhan and Ajit Chauhan during Convocation 2025

hard work of your teachers but once you have passed out, you understand and appreciate the role of teachers in your life.

It is remarkable to see the vibrancy of the students, the variety of subjects, the courses and opportunities that the students receive at Amity. It is heartening to see that half of the students are young girls and I have recognised and awarded so many patent holders and innovators of Amity,” Goyal said.

On the occasion Chauhan remarked Amity is committed to making each student a success story. Dr Atul Chauhan, Chancellor Amity University, said, “Each graduating batch brings with it a unique spirit and an enduring blend of passion, resilience, and purpose. Convocation is

Rajnath Singh inaugurates 125 strategic border infra projects



Defence Minister Rajnath Singh virtually inaugurates 125 strategic border infrastructure projects on Sunday

TONY DAS
■ Guwahati

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh on Sunday inaugurated 125 strategically significant infrastructure projects constructed by the Border Roads Organisation (BRO). The ceremony was conducted from the newly completed Shyok Tunnel in Ladakh, marking a major milestone in strengthening border infrastructure and enhancing the nation's defence preparedness.

These projects, spread across seven States and two Union Territories, comprise twenty-eight roads, ninety-

three bridges and four strategic infrastructure facilities, collectively representing a significant step toward bolstering connectivity in some of India's most challenging and remote terrains.

The highlight of the inauguration was the 920-metre cut-and-cover Shyok Tunnel on a vital strategic road in Ladakh, which will ensure all-weather connectivity, operational flexibility and faster mobilisation in the region.

Additionally, the 3D-printed Habitat and Administrative Complex at Chandigarh stands as a pioneering achievement, show-

casing the BRO's adoption of futuristic construction technologies. In Arunachal Pradesh, seven key bridges were inaugurated across the Shi-Yomi and Siang Valleys under Project Brahman, significantly improving connectivity in remote border areas.

The Shene Bridge on the Tato-Mechuka road is a vital link constructed in extremely challenging terrain, promising a major boost to both defence infrastructure and local tourism.

Furthermore, five bridges constructed along the Ditte-Dimme road — namely Ritbung, Rabung, Seyo,

Raboung and Sirak — will strengthen defence logistics and spur socio-economic growth. The Naglung Ri Bridge on the Tuting-Bona axis further reflects the Government's commitment to improving infrastructure close to the frontier.

During the virtual inauguration, Arunachal Minister Kento Jini, lauded the BRO's exemplary capacity and resolve to achieve the extraordinary in treacherous terrains.

Jini expressed heartfelt appreciation, attributing much of Arunachal Pradesh's development to the BRO's relentless service.

CM Himanta launches ₹79 crore Barak bridge; hails valley's 'golden period'

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Guwahati

Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Sunday marked the second day of his Barak Valley tour by laying the foundation stone for a crucial RCC bridge over the River Barak at Madhuraghat, Silchar.

The structure, planned to link Madhuramukh with Silchar city near the Gandhighat rice mill, is sanctioned under the Central Road and Infrastructure Fund (CRIF) for the year 2025-26. Including approach roads and safety components, the project carries an estimated cost of over ₹79 crore and will span a total length of 340 metres.

Once finished, the bridge promises to unite the geographically segregated areas of Itkholra and Dudhpatil across the river, ushering in significant economic and infrastructural transformation. By reducing the inter-point distance by approximately 8 kilometres, the project will ensure smoother transit for people and goods, resulting in considerable savings in time and fuel, and ultimately helping to curb the prices of essential commodities. The Chief Minister firmly assured that the bridge would be completed within two



CM Himanta lays foundation stone of RCC bridge over the River Barak at Madhuraghat, Silchar on Sunday

years, fulfilling a long-standing local demand for seamless connectivity.

CM Sarma used the occasion to highlight the unprecedented development witnessed by the region over the past five years. He noted that major bridges, including the *Annapurna Setu*, *Badri Setu* and *Sonai Setu*, have been commissioned, while the Silghat bridge is nearing its halfway completion mark. Another key structure at Karatigam is scheduled for completion by October next year.

He further mentioned several

ongoing bridge projects over the Barak River by the National Highways and Infrastructure Development Corporation at locations like Katakhal, Sialtek, Gauri Setu and Sonabari Ghat. Terming the current phase a “golden period” for the Barak Valley, the Chief Minister also informed the gathering that approval for the Dolu airport is anticipated shortly, alongside the already approved ₹564 crore elevated corridor project for Silchar city. He pledged the Government's continued commitment to advancing the region.

IL&FS to initiate NCLT process to recover ₹187 cr from ex-directors

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

The IL&FS Group will initiate before insolvency tribunal NCLT the process to recover ₹187 crore excess remuneration paid to its former directors and two subsidiaries, who have refused to return the excess managerial remuneration, according to the latest affidavit filed by the debt-ridden firm before NCLAT.

Moreover, IL&FS is also going to reopen the financial statements for 2018-19 and 2019-20. It has received approval from NCLT for incorporating impacts arising from the recast financial statements.

“Such revised financial statements for FY 2018-19 have been prepared and are being audited by statutory auditors appointed by NCLT. The revised financial statements will be finalised before the end of 31st December 2025,” the IL&FS Group said.

Last year, books of accounts and financial statements of IL&FS and its two subsidiaries — IFIN and ITNL — were recast on the directions of the National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT) for five years — FY 2013-14 to FY 2017-18 and a loss of around ₹9,600 crore was found.

Based on this, IL&FS is in



the process of recovering ₹187 crore from the directors and independent directors of the previous board, during whose tenure the company and its two subsidiaries — IFIN and ITNL — were shown in profit of ₹1,869 crore, through financial engineering, though they were in loss.

“IL&FS is now in process of filing an application with the NCLT for recovery of excess managerial remuneration from its erstwhile whole-time directors and is in the process of finalising the next steps with respect to pursuing recovery from the erstwhile Independent Directors in accordance with guidance received from its legal advisors,” according to

the latest affidavit filed before the National Company Law Appellate Tribunal. IL&FS said it will file an application before the NCLT against the erstwhile whole-time directors, who owe nearly 90 per cent of the total dues, and also seek recovery from independent directors of these three companies.

In pursuance of the audited re-casted financial statements of 2013-14 to 2017-18, three IL&FS entities had already issued notices.

IL&FS has issued 10 letters dated August 13, 2024, IFIN has issued 12 letters dated August 14, 2024 and ITNL sent 12 letters dated August 14, 2024, to their respective erstwhile directors seeking

recovery of about ₹187.02 crore as excess monies/remuneration paid to them. In this, two independent directors, each from IL&FS and ITNL, have voluntarily repaid the amounts sought, without admitting liability, while the rest are contesting the demand, according to industry observers. Moreover, its former executive and whole-time directors have responded stating, among other things, that the provisions of sections 197 and 198 and part II of Schedule V are not applicable to them.

Several other key independent directors who were on the boards of IL&FS and two step-down units are RC Bhargava, Rina Kamath, SB



SBI Chairman C S Setty

Home loan portfolio cross ₹9 lakh crore milestone: SBI Chairman

KUMAR DIPANKAR/PTI
■ New Delhi

SBI Chairman C S Setty said the bank's mortgage loan portfolio has crossed ₹9 lakh crore last month and expressed optimism that the momentum in the RAM segment will drive 14 per cent overall credit growth during the current fiscal year.

Retail, Agriculture and MSME (RAM) segment, which is 67 per cent of the total loan portfolio, has also crossed ₹25 lakh crore milestone in September. With the improvement in economic growth, SBI upped its credit growth target from earlier 12 per cent to 14 per cent for the ongoing financial year.

“We increased guidance on credit growth. We have revised it from 12 per cent to 14 per cent. We see a robust credit growth, particularly

from the RAM segment, MSME is almost growing at 17-18 per cent and agriculture and retail is around 14 per cent,” he told PTI in an interview.

Besides, he said, the bank is witnessing good growth in gold loan while express credit, which is unsecured personal loan, will have double-digit growth.

Corporate credit, which had been slow for some time, saw a turnaround with 7.1 per cent growth during the second quarter.

“Our guidance on the corporate credit would be in lower double digit, which means that overall, 12-14 per cent credit growth rate seems to be achievable,” he said.

The Reserve Bank's decision to further slash the key policy rate by 25 basis points would make loans cheaper and drive demand for fresh credit.

BRIEFLY

VIRAT KOHLI OFFER PRAYERS AT SIMHACHALAM TEMPLE



Indian cricketer Virat Kohli, his family members, all-rounder Washington Sundar, and others offered prayers at the Sri Varaha Lakshmi Narasimha Swamy temple here on Sunday, an official of the temple body said.

Team India defeated South Africa by nine wickets, sealing the series 2-1 with a dominant win in the final match at the Andhra Cricket Association-Visakhapatnam District Cricket Association (ACA-VDC) Stadium in Visakhapatnam on December 6.

Temple officials received Kohli and his family and escorted them for darshan. They first took part in the traditional Kappasthambham Alinganam (embracing the sacred pillar) ritual before proceeding to the deity's *darshan*.

CHINNASWAMY STADIUM TO HOST IPL: DK SHIVAKUMAR



Karnataka Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar on Sunday announced that Chinnaswamy Stadium will continue to host future IPL matches.

The announcement comes amid doubts over hosting the event in Karnataka following the June 4 stampede at the stadium, which occurred when a large crowd had gathered to celebrate the Royal Challengers Bangalore's victory in IPL 2025.

Speaking to reporters after casting his vote in the Karnataka State Cricket Association (KSCA) presidential elections, Shivakumar said a new large stadium will also be constructed in the future.

Saraswat clinches maiden super 100 title at Guwahati Masters

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ Guwahati

India's Sanskar Saraswat clinched his maiden Super 100 title after eking out a three-game victory over compatriot Mithun Manjunath in the men's singles final of the Guwahati Masters on Sunday.

The 19-year-old from Jodhpur showcased grit and firepower while unleashing a barrage of smashes to outwit former national champion Manjunath 21-11, 17-21, 21-13 in an all-Indian final that lasted 50 minutes.

However, Tanvi Sharma, a world junior championships silver medalist, registered a runner-up finish in women's singles after losing 18-21, 18-21 to Tung Ciou-Tong of Chinese

Taipei in the finals. The 16-year-old from Punjab had reached the semi-finals at the Syed Modi International Super 300 last week. She had reached the Odisha Masters final last year and finished runner-up at this year's US Open Super 300 and the World Junior Championships as well.

Indian men's doubles pair of Pruthvi Krishnamurthy Roy and Sai Pratheek K also finished second best after losing 13-21, 18-21 to Malaysia's sixth seed Kang Khai Xing and Aaron Tai in a lop-sided final.

Saraswat, who trains at the National Centre of Excellence in Guwahati, has been making rapid strides on the domestic circuit. He won his maiden senior national doubles title alongside Arsh

Mohammad in Bengaluru last year and had earlier claimed a junior singles crown. The duo also finished runners-up in the under-19 event at the 31st Smit Krishna Khaitan Memorial Badminton Tournament in September last year.

Playing with his right leg heavily taped, Saraswat stayed marginally ahead at the outset before Manjunath clawed back to 7-7 in the opening game. While the rallies lacked prolonged exchanges, both players capitalised on each other's errors.

Saraswat carried a slim 11-9 lead into the interval before stretching it to 14-10 with a burst of attacking shots. Manjunath struggled to read his opponent's cross-court and down-the-line smashes as Saraswat surged to nine game points and



closed out the opener comfortably.

The second game saw Saraswat continue on the offensive, racing to an 8-2 lead with his steep smashes leaving Manjunath under pressure. However, the Karnataka shuttler staged a strong comeback, reeling off five consecutive points to level at 7-8 and edging ahead 11-10 at the interval. Momentum then swung decisively as Manjunath overturned a deficit to grab an 18-16 advantage before Saraswat's errors handed him three game points, which he converted to force a decider.

In the third game, Saraswat came out firing, storming to a 7-0 lead with aggressive intent. Manjunath managed to close the gap briefly, but Saraswat maintained control to take an 11-5 lead at the interval.

Gary Kirsten appointed consultant for Namibia men's team

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ New Delhi

World Cup-winning former India head coach Gary Kirsten has been appointed consultant for Namibia's men's national teams and will work alongside head coach Craig Williams in the build-up to next year's T20 World Cup.

The global showpiece is scheduled to be held in India and Sri Lanka in February-March 2026. "It is indeed a privilege to work with Cricket Namibia. I have been thoroughly impressed with the



dedication and determination to create a high-performance cricket environment," Kirsten said in a Cricket Namibia statement.

"Their new state-of-the-art cricket stadium is a testament to their commitment to making sure their national teams are competing with the best cricket countries in the world. "Their senior men's national team is performing well, and I look forward to adding value to their preparation for the T20 World Cup in February next year."

A former South Africa opener, Kirsten took to coaching

after retiring in 2004 and was appointed India's head coach in 2007. Under his tenure, India famously won the 2011 ODI World Cup.

He later served as head coach of South Africa and has worked with several teams in T20 franchise leagues around the world. Most recently, Kirsten had a brief stint as head coach of Pakistan's men's team in 2024. "Kirsten's appointment as consultant reflects Cricket Namibia's commitment to strengthening its high-performance environment and supporting the existing

coaching structure," a statement from the board said.

"His blend of international playing experience, coaching success, and passion for player development brings valuable insight and added depth to the Eagles [men's national team] setup."

Namibia have qualified for each of the last three T20 World Cups in 2021, 2022 and 2024 and is also in contention for the upcoming edition. They will be one of the three host nations for the 2026 tournament, along with South Africa and Zimbabwe.

Smriti Mandhana, Palash Muchhal announce end of relationship; urge privacy

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ New Delhi

India batter Smriti Mandhana on Sunday announced that her wedding had been called off and urged fans and media to stop the speculation, while music composer Palash Muchhal confirmed that he had "decided to move on" from the relationship.

Muchhal also warned of legal action against those spreading defamatory rumours.

Mandhana, one of India's most prominent women cricketers, issued her first public statement on social media after rumours about

her personal life had intensified over the past month.

She was supposed to marry Muchhal on November 23 but the wedding was postponed after Mandhana's father, Shriniwas was hospitalised due to a heart ailment.

"I need to clarify that the wedding is called off. I would like to close this matter here and implore all of you to do the same," she wrote.

"Over the past few weeks there has been plenty of speculation around my life and I feel it is important for me to speak out at this time," she said in an Instagram post.

Calling herself a "very

private person", Mandhana said the need to set the record straight compelled her to speak.

She requested fans and the public to "respect the privacy of both families" and allow them the "space to process and move on".

Mandhana, who is preparing for India's upcoming international season, said her focus remains firmly on cricket.

"I believe there is a higher purpose driving us all and for me that has always been representing my country at the highest level. I hope to continue to play and win trophies for India for as long



as possible," she said. Soon after Mandhana's post, Palash Muchhal issued his own statement, confirming that he had "decided to move on" and expressing anguish over what he described as baseless online chatter.

"I have decided to move on in my life and step back from my personal relationship. It's been very difficult for me to see people react so easily on baseless rumours about something which has been most sacred to me.

"It's the most difficult phase of my life and I will deal with it gracefully holding on to my beliefs," he wrote.

He urged the public to

reflect before amplifying unverified claims.

"I truly hope we, as a society, learn to pause before judging someone based on unverified gossip, whose sources are never identified. Our words can wound in ways we may never understand," he added.

Muchhal also said his team would take legal action against those spreading defamatory content.

"My team will be taking strict legal action against those spreading false and defamatory content," he said, thanking those who had supported him with "kindness" during this period.

Rohit, Kohli experience important: Gambhir

G UNNIKISHANAN
■ Visakhapatnam

At this moment, the Indian think tank is doing a tough balancing act of building the team around a new set of players without completely cutting ties with the old guard.

In that context, head coach Gautam Gambhir, who oversees this process, was a delighted man to see both parties chipping in with handy contributions.

Giving heft to the senior side, Virat Kohli emerged player of the series in the ODIs against South Africa, scoring two hundreds and a fifty — a quick ride back to his incredible peaks of 2015 onwards.

Rohit Sharma helped himself to a couple of fifties to underline his fine touch.

Gambhir hoped the two stalwarts would continue to churn out such perfor-

mances, which would keep the ODI outfit in good shape.

"Look, they're quality players. I've said it many times as well that they're world-class players. They are quality players in this format, and their experience is really important in the dressing room," said Gambhir at the press meet after India beat SA by nine wickets to bag the one-day series 2-1.

"They're doing what they do. They've been doing it for such a long time for Indian cricket. Hopefully, they can continue doing the same, which is always going to be important come the white ball format and the 50-over format," he added.

The rest given to seniors Jasprit Bumrah and Mohammad Siraj, and the injury-enforced absence of Shubman Gill and Hardik Pandya, gave India a chance to test the skillsets of some young tyros.



Gambhir was particularly delighted with the growth of Harshit Rana as a bowling all-rounder.

"That's one of the reasons why we are trying to probably develop someone like

Harshit, who can actually bat at Number 8 and contribute with a bat.

"That's how we need to find the balance, because come the South Africa in two years (2027 ODI WC), we

would be needing three proper seamers as well. And if he can continue to develop as a bowling allrounder, it's going to give us a massive boost," he said.

Similarly, Gambhir was also

impressed by the outings of seamers Arshdeep Singh and Prasidh Krishna in the series.

"With Jaspreet Bumrah coming back and what we saw of Arshdeep, Prasidh and Harshit in this series was incredible because all these three guys do not have a lot of experience, especially in the 50-over format. They've hardly played, what, less than 15 ODIs. But they've done a fabulous job," he said.

Gautam Gambhir's penchant for shuffling cricketers has often come under sharp scrutiny, but the head coach insisted that "batting order is overrated" in white ball cricket, strongly hinting of him sticking to his trusted ways.

Forced by the combination, Rituraj Gaikwad, a genuine opener, had to bat at Number 4 in the just-concluded ODI series, while all-rounder Washington Sundar has been a perennial floater in the line-up. (PTI)



Smith's propels Australia to a victory in 2nd test

ASSOCIATED PRESS
■ Brisbane

Steve Smith took a brilliant reflex catch to swing momentum, got into a heated exchange with Jofra Archer and then slogged the winning runs Sunday as Australia beat England again to take a 2-0 Ashes lead.

prospect. England had resumed Sunday at 134-6, and took an hour and 36 minutes — 18.2 overs — to erase the first-innings deficit.

The Australian attack bowled a tight line and length and mixed it up with some short-pitch deliveries in an attempt to entice the usually aggressive England batters to have a go.

Set a target of 65 for victory in the second test after dismissing England for 241 in the second innings, Australia raced to an eight-wicket win late on Day 4 as storms brewed in and around the stadium. Archer was bowling around 150 kph (93 mph) under the lights, and it only fired up Smith.

"The adrenaline was pumping at the end of the end, yeah. Jofra was bowling pretty quickly," Smith said. "It was a huge win. Great to go 2-nil up."

Stokes (50) and Will Jacks (41) resisted the temptation for the entire first session, knowing that a wicket would expose the tailenders. It was a completely different approach to England's usual attack-at-all-costs mentality that has attracted wide criticism in the first two Ashes tests so far.

There were some theatrics involving the Australia captain and England's strike pace bowler, with Smith ducking under a short ball and then critiquing Archer for bowling "fast when nothing is going on, champion." He then hit a four and a six to bring up 1,000 test runs at the Gabba.

With Australia at 63-2 and needing just two runs to win the day-nighter, Smith hit a six to seal it and finished unbeaten on 23 from nine deliveries.

The seventh-wicket pair put on a 96-run stand to get England to the brink of the night session, but that ended when Smith — Australia's stand-in captain — took a stunning one-hander diving to his left at slip off Michael Nesar's bowling to dismiss Jacks. That was the momentum changer. The subsequent slide happened quickly, with England losing its last four wickets for 17 runs and Nesar finishing with a five-wicket haul.

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With Australia at 63-2 and needing just two runs to win the day-nighter, Smith hit a six to seal it and finished unbeaten on 23 from nine deliveries.

Stokes reached his 50 from 148 balls, the second-slowest half-century of his career. It was only four balls behind the 152 he took to make 50 at Headingley in 2019, where he scored an unbeaten 135 to guide England to a one-wicket Ashes victory.

This time, he didn't go on. The 34-year-old was incredibly caught behind by wicket-keeper Alex Carey standing up to the stumps to Nesar (5-42).

Stokes twirled his bat in the air in disbelief before striding back to the pavilion. Smith took two more catches as England's lower-order crumbled.

Bazball shelved

Day 4 was a tale of two captains. England skipper Stokes curbed his attacking instincts, dispensing with Bazball and pragmatically setting about reviving England's Ashes

Simranpreet wins 25m pistol gold in ISSF World Cup

Aishwary Tomar wins 3P silver

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

■ Doha

Young Simranpreet Kaur Brar overcame a challenging field to win the women's 25m pistol gold, while men's 50m rifle 3-position exponent Aishwary Pratap Singh Tomar bagged a silver on ISSF World Cup Final debut on Sunday, completing a full set of medals at all possible world and continental championships in the sport.

Simranpreet, whose father left his Government job to support his daughter, did her parents proud with the biggest achievement of her career by shooting a superb 41 in the final, equalling the World junior record in the process. The other Indian to qualify for the eight-shooter final, Esha Singh, finished seventh. Double Olympic bronze medallist Manu Bhaker could not make the final after finishing ninth in the qualification round with a score of 581.

In the qualification round, 21-year-old Simranpreet, who had won a silver at the World Cup in Lima earlier this year, shot 585, while Esha tallied 585 to finish fifth and fourth, respectively and make the final. Simranpreet began slowly, missing three targets in the first series of five shots to slip to eighth and last position. But she rallied thereafter and fired three perfect 5s in the competition to jump to the China's ace shooter and



Simranpreet Kaur Brar (centre)

reigning 10m air pistol world champion Yao Qianxun, who finished a distant second with 36 points, and former world champion Doreen Vennekamp of Germany, who took the bronze.

In men's 50m rifle 3-positions, Aishwary finished 0.9 points behind Czechia's Jiri Privratsky, who shot 414.2 in the final played in the new ISSF format of 40 shots. Olympic champion Liu Yukun won bronze. Aishwary, who is a double Olympian, former junior world champion, and reigning Asian champion, has also won a silver medal in the World Championship last month.

Aishwary shot 595 in qualification to finish second behind China's Tian Jiaming, who blazed the Lusail shooting ranges with a world record 598. Athlete of the Year Jon-Hermann Hegg of Norway and Hungarian ace

Istvan Peni were the other top guns in the top eight, which again saw three Chinese go through.

Aishwary was fourth with a score of 102.8 after the 10 shots in the first kneeling position, shot over two series of five shots each.

The next 10 shots of the second prone position are where Aishwary found his momentum and climbed up to second on the leaderboard with a strong series of 52.9 and 52, respectively.

Privratsky, meanwhile, was charting a course of his own, 3.3 ahead of Aishwary at the stage. Olympic champion Liu was third with 20 standing position shots still to be played. Aishwary then out-gunned Privratsky over the next 10 shots to bring the difference down to 1.5. After the 31st, it went down to 0.5 as Privratsky was finding it difficult to get into the 10-ring.

Peni and Tian were first to exit the final as Aishwary went into the lead after the 33rd shot. The young Frenchman Romain Aufrere then lost the battle for bronze with the Olympic champion, as Privratsky caught up with Aishwary and went 0.5 ahead again after the 37th shot with a couple of high 10s, as the Indian faltered a bit.

The gap was, however, a mere 0.3 ahead of the final two shots, and Aishwary fired a 10.1 to the Czech's 10.3 and then a 10.6 for his 40th, putting Privratsky decisively ahead to land gold, his third ISSF yellow metal of the year.

Aishwary, too, ended the year on a strong note after a barren first half. It was also India's fourth medal of the event in Doha. Sift Kaur Samra in the women's 3P shot 584 in her relay to finish 10th and failed to qualify for the final.

Sepp Straka surges past Scottie Scheffler to lead in Bahamas

ASSOCIATED PRESS

■ Nassau

Sepp Straka made three birdies and two eagles on the par 5s for an 8-under 64 and seized on some late misses by Scottie Scheffler to take a one-shot lead going into the final round of the Hero World Challenge. Straka chipped in for eagle on the par-5 sixth and played great golf just to keep pace with Scheffler, who had five straight 3s on his scorecard to start the third round and was 9 under for his round through 15 holes.

Scheffler, going for a third straight win at Albany Golf Club, has stumbled over the final three holes every day this week—a double bogey on the 16th on Thursday, a bogey on the 16th on Friday, and then a bogey-par-bogey finish. He still had a 65 and will be in the final group with Straka on Sunday.

Straka seized on the par 5s. Along with his chip-in on the sixth hole, he holed an 18-foot eagle putt on the downwind, par-5 15th. He also hit a 3-wood that landed perfectly in front of the green at the par-5 ninth that rolled out to 15 feet for a two-putt birdie. He trailed Scheffler by three shots through five holes, and by two shots with four holes left. But Straka was bogey-free on the day and finished at 18-under 198.

"He definitely got it going quick," Straka said of the world's Number 1 player. "It didn't look like he was going to miss a putt there for a little bit. But it's golf, it usually evens out a lot and I just tried to focus on my own game."

Neergaard-Petersen claims first major title at Australian Open

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■ Melbourne

Rasmus Neergaard-Petersen won the Australian Open for his first major professional title Sunday when his scrambled par on the final hole crushed the hopes of hometown favourite Cam Smith, who was chasing his first win in more than two years.

Smith and Neergaard-Petersen came to the 72nd hole tied at 15-under after a thrilling contest over the last nine holes. Neergaard-Petersen shanked his drive into difficult rough on the right with a bunker between his ball and the green.

Smith found the green with his second, but with a long, sloping putt to the hole. Matter of fact, as he has been throughout the week, Neergaard got up and down for par while Smith missed his difficult putt for birdie, then a 1.5-meter return putt to force a playoff.

The 26-year-old Danish player won by a single shot at 15-under 269 after rounds of 67, 66, 66 and 70. Smith started the last round two shots behind the leader, drew level by the turn and led outright after sinking a three-metre put for birdie on the 10th hole.

After a birdie at the 11th, Smith bogeyed the 12th and was level with Neergaard-Petersen at 13 under. The pair stayed locked together until the final hole, when Smith missed a par putt, handing his opponent a career-changing victory.

"It's hard. I'm really at a loss for words. It's been a battle all day," Neergaard



said. "Even from the outside, you can look calm, but it was a storm inside (for me) all day. "But I managed to keep battling and to get it up and down to make that putt on the last. I don't know what to say, to be honest."

Smith, the 2022 British Open champion who ended his streak of missing seven consecutive cuts this year on Friday, shot 66 Saturday and was tied for second, two strokes off the lead.

After all his missed cuts, Smith said that it was "nice being in contention" entering the final round.

"It's been a while since I've had this feeling, to be honest," he said. "I love that it's the Australian Open. I couldn't think of a better place to get back into form. It would shut a few people up." Smith has won the Australian PGA twice but has yet to win the Stonehaven Cup as the champion of his national open.

His last tournament victory came at the LIV tournament in Bedminster,

England, in August 2022, and his previous top-10 finish was in July.

Rory McIlroy's 11 bogeys over four days, including an unfortunate encounter with a banana peel on Saturday, kept him out of contention. On Sunday, the Northern Irishman had a final round 69, with five birdies and three bogeys, to finish in a tie for 10th.

McIlroy calls for better slot for Australian Open

McIlroy, the Race to Dubai winner and who completed his career Grand Slam when he won the Masters this year, was making his first appearance at the Australian Open since 2015. He won it in 2013. Speaking after his final round on Sunday, the world Number 2 called for a more favourable schedule to attract more of the game's top players.

While he thought the sandbelt courses held massive appeal, the scheduling didn't help the tournament attract the top overseas players.



Inter Miami's Lionel Messi, centre, carries the trophy to celebrate with his teammates after defeating the Vancouver Whitecaps during the MLS Cup final soccer match in Fort Lauderdale

PTI

Messi leads Inter Miami to first MLS Cup title

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■ Fort Lauderdale

Thomas Müller has often enjoyed the upper hand in his longtime rivalry with Lionel Messi. The German star has come out on top in seven of 10 head-to-head matchups between the two, and his teams have twice eliminated Messi and Argentina in the World Cup.

But on Saturday, in the latest marquee showdown between the two stars, it was Messi's turn. The Argentine super star capped his third Major League Soccer season

with the 47th trophy of his career, guiding Inter Miami to a 3-1 win over Müller's Vancouver Whitecaps in the MLS Cup final.

"Three years ago, I decided to come to MLS, and today we are MLS champions," Messi said in a quote distributed by MLS. "We reached the semifinals of the (CONCACAF) Champions Cup. Last year we went out early in the league and were eliminated in the first round. This year, winning MLS was one of our main objectives."

Messi set up the go-ahead goal — a feed to

Rodrigo De Paul in the 72nd minute — then added another assist in stoppage time to deliver Inter Miami its first championship in franchise history.

"The team made a huge effort — it was a very long year, with many matches — and we were up to the task all season," Messi said. "This is the moment I had been waiting for, and that we, as a team, were waiting for. It's very beautiful for all of us. They deserved it."

Both Messi and Müller had already secured their soccer legacies long before

Saturday's match. Each is a World Cup and Champions League winner. And both are Club World Cup winners.

They arrived in MLS with a similar goal: to add a league title to their already overflowing resumes. And even with little left to prove in their careers, it was evident how much the chance to lift the MLS Cup mattered to both veterans.

During the ensuing trophy ceremony, Müller smiled, clapped and gave a thumbs up as Messi was crowned the match's most valuable player.

Lando Norris clinches his first F1 title at Grand Prix



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■ Abu Dhabi

McLaren driver Lando Norris clinched his first Formula 1 title at the season-ending Abu Dhabi Grand Prix on Sunday. Red Bull driver and defending champion Max Verstappen won the race with Norris placing third behind his McLaren teammate Oscar Piastri in second, which allowed Norris to finish two points ahead of Verstappen in the season-long standings.

Piastri was also in contention for his first F1 title and finished third in the standings, 13 points behind Norris. The 26-year-old Norris became the first British champion since Lewis Hamilton in

2020, and he also denied Verstappen a fifth straight title. Norris entered the three-way battle 12 points ahead of Verstappen and 16 ahead of Piastri.

Verstappen started from pole position for Red Bull with Norris on the front row beside him and Piastri third on the grid. Verstappen needed Norris to be fourth or lower and Norris had to finish outside the top five if Piastri won.

Verstappen's astounding late-season charge came close to unseating both McLaren drivers after they had shared the lead throughout the season and then were undone by driver and team-strategy errors.

Thauvin shines as Lens keeps top spot in France with win at Nantes

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■ Paris

Lens remained atop Ligue 1 after Florian Thauvin proved decisive once again, scoring the opening goal in a 2-1 win at Nantes.

Defending champion Paris Saint-Germain stayed one point behind after thrashing Rennes 5-0 at Parc des Princes.

Wesley Saïd scored the winner in the 81st minute as Lens extended its winning streak to five matches. Youssef El-Arabi leveled the scoring for the host.

Lens moved to the top of the standings for the first time in 21 years last weekend after Thauvin's brace in a 2-1 win at Angers. The 2018 World Cup winner is enjoying a revival since

his return to the league from Italian side Udinese this summer.

The 32-year-old winger has five goals and two assists in 15 league matches. His performances have earned him a recall from France following a six-year absence.

Mbaye lights up Parc des Princes After suffering its second Ligue 1 loss of the season at Monaco, PSG rebounded in style at Rennes' expense ahead of next week's Champions League trip to Athletic Bilbao.

PSG initially struggled to find space in the five-man Rennes defense and the visitor had the first big chance. Goalkeeper Matvei Safonov kept PSG afloat, stretching to tip Esteban

Lepaul's shot onto the post.

PSG broke the deadlock seconds later on the break with a slick move concluded by Khvicha Kvaratskhelia. The Georgia winger scored twice, adding another in the second half after Senny Mayulu doubled PSG's lead. Ibrahim Mbaye, who is just 17, made it 4-0 in the 88th minute with the goal of the night — a superb strike from outside the box into the top corner. Goncalo Ramos capped the win in added time.

In Nantes, Lens dominated early and Thauvin put the visitors ahead in the 34th minute with a header from Ruben Aguilar's excellent cross.

Lens could not hold onto its lead for long, though, as Matthis Abline was fouled in



Spain beat Argentina 2-1, seal maiden entry into FIH Jr World Cup final

SAUMJOYOTI S CHOUDHURY

■ Chennai

Spain edged out two-time champions Argentina 2-1 in a hard-fought match to enter their maiden FIH Junior World Cup final on Sunday.

Dominating the game early on, Spain secured the first penalty corner of the match in the seventh minute, and Mario Mena scored from a rebound to take the lead.

A minute later, Argentina too got their first penalty

corner, but they could not capitalise on the opportunity. Spain continued their attacking game and earned a short corner in the 17th minute, which was brilliantly saved by Argentina goalkeeper Joaquin S Ruiz.

Argentina finally drew level through a perfectly executed penalty conversion by Juan Fernandez in the 21st minute. The Argentines had another chance in the first half in the form of a penalty corner in the 28th minute, but the stopper failed to control the ball. Argentina



Spain's Mustaros Nicolas (9), Prado Juan (11) and other players celebrating after defeating Argentina in the semi-final match of the FIH Hockey Men's Junior World Cup 2025, at Mayor Radhakrishnan Hockey Stadium in Chennai on Sunday

PTI

secured their fourth penalty in the 43rd minute, but they wasted the chance.

Seven minutes later, another short corner came Argentina's way, but that also failed to produce any result. Spain scored the winner against the run of play in the 56th minute through Albert Serrahima, who got a slight deflection from a long ball.

Two seconds from the final hooter, Argentina had a chance to draw level through their sixth penalty corner, but they wasted the

chance as Spain came out winners and stormed into the final.

Belgium beat France to enter 5th-6th place

Belgium defeated last edition's runner-up side, France 3-2 to progress to the fifth-sixth classification match.

Mathis Lauwers (26th minute), Maximilian Langer (46th) and Hugo Labouchere (58th) scored for Belgium. France's goals were scored by James Liddiard (22nd) and Tassilo Sura (35th).

Belgium will play the Netherlands in the fifth-sixth classification match after the Dutch beat New Zealand 6-3.

Casper van der Veen (4th, 8th, and 36th) struck a hat-trick for the Netherlands, while Peppe Veen (4th) and Joppe Wolbert (26th) were the other goal getters for the Dutch. Jonty Elmes (18th, 29th, and 59th) also scored a hat-trick for New Zealand, but his effort went in vain.

New Zealand will take on France in the 7-8 classification match. (PTI)