

CM welcomes UNESCO tag for Deepavali

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

Delhi Chief Minister Rekha Gupta on Wednesday welcomed the inclusion of Deepavali in UNESCO's Intangible Cultural Heritage list, calling it a historic global recognition of India's civilisational values.

She said the honour strengthens India's cultural standing and marks "a proud moment for Bharat," adding that Delhi will celebrate 'Bhavya Deepavali' this year to mark the achievement. "The world will now learn more deeply about Deepavali. Every state will celebrate this moment with pride. Congratulations to everyone," she said.

In a post on X, the chief minister wrote that the recognition reflects the country's journey of "Vikas bhi, Virasat bhi" under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi. "A festival that lives in our homes and hearts is today recognised by the world as a cultural treasure shared by humanity. Under the leadership of Hon'ble Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi ji, India's civilisational



CM Rekha Gupta along with Cabinet Ministers Ashish Sood, Manjinder Singh Sirsa and Kapil Mishra during an event after Delhi receives UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage inscription certificate for Deepavali

heritage is receiving historic global acknowledgement," she wrote.

Calling the inscription a "golden chapter of Indian culture on the global stage," the chief minister said the universality of India's Sanatan traditions has been honoured at the world's highest cultural platform. "Deepavali is not merely a festival, but a spiri-

tual illumination that has guided humanity for centuries along the path of truth, hope, and morality," she added, noting that the Delhi government "welcomes this historic decision with joy."

She also expressed gratitude to UNESCO and to the families, artisans and devotees who have preserved the festival's traditions. She said

the honour adds to India's cultural milestones, following the global recognition of Yoga, Kumbh, Durga Puja, and Garba in earlier years. The chief minister also said Delhi would mark the occasion with a special 'Bhavya Deepavali' celebration this year, reinforcing the national capital's cultural identity and pride.

To mark the inclusion of Diwali, the great festival celebrating the return of Maryada Purushottam Prabhu Shri Ram to Ayodhya in UNESCO's prestigious Intangible Cultural Heritage List, the Delhi government on Wednesday organised a grand ceremony today at Dilli Haat, INA. On the occasion, the chief minister lit the ceremonial lamp and performed prayers to Lord Shri Ram, extending her heartfelt greetings to the entire nation. The atmosphere of the event came alive with traditional folk dances and cultural performances.

The special programme was attended by Delhi Government Cabinet Ministers Ashish Sood, Manjinder Singh Sirsa, Kapil Mishra, MLA Anil Sharma, and several other dignitaries.

The Chief Minister noted that representatives from 180 countries are currently in India, and UNESCO's important meeting is underway at Delhi's Red Fort.

She added that Diwali being included in UNESCO's Intangible Cultural Heritage List is a matter of immense pride for 1.4 billion Indians.

CAQM inspection finds high dust levels on 15 major road stretches

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

The Commission for Air Quality Management (CAQM) has found high levels of dust on 15 major road stretches across Delhi during a fresh inspection drive.

The commission prompted strict directions to multiple agencies, including the Delhi Development Authority (DDA), Delhi Metro Rail Corporation (DMRC) and the Delhi State Industrial and Infrastructure Development Corporation (DSIIDC).

The findings, part of "Operation Clean Air," underline that road dust remains one of the capital's most stubborn and widespread sources of pollution.

The inspections were carried out on December 8 by 22 CAQM flying squads. They examined 79 road stretches, took geo-tagged and time-stamped photographs and submitted a consolidated report. The results showed that despite repeated directives and ongoing enforcement under

the Graded Response Action Plan (GRAP), several agencies continue to lag in basic dust-control measures.

According to the report, 15 stretches recorded high visible dust levels, 36 showed moderate dust and 22 low dust.

Only six stretches had no visible dust at all. The poorest performance came from DDA's stretches. Out of 57 roads inspected under its jurisdiction, 12 were marked high-dust, 27 moderate and 16 low. Only two stretches showed no dust.

The Commission said the data clearly shows that DDA needs to strengthen cleaning and mechanical sweeping, particularly on roads with repeated dust accumulation.

Among the 10 DMRC stretches inspected, none fell in the high-dust category. Two stretches had no visible dust, three recorded low dust and four were marked moderate. While DMRC performed better than others, the Commission said regular dust-suppression

measures must continue.

For DSIIDC, out of 12 inspected roads, three were found to have high-dust levels, four moderate, three low and two no dust. The agency has been told to increase vigilance and improve on-ground compliance.

The flying squads also inspected earlier-checked roads maintained by the Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD) and the New Delhi Municipal Council (NDMC). The Commission noted that MCD had reduced its high-dust category stretches by almost 50% after previous directions. However, 18 of the 35 re-inspected stretches still remained in the high-dust category. NDMC's single re-inspected road also continued to record high dust.

The CAQM said the inspection findings make it clear that both civic bodies need to reinforce their dust-control efforts. It stressed that improvements must be visible across all stretches, not just a few.

Winds improve City AQI

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

Stronger winds offered Delhi a small but welcome relief for the second day in a row, improving the city's AQI to 259 — in the 'poor' category, marking an improvement compared to the pollution spike experienced last week.

During the day, predominant surface winds blew from the northwest at speeds of up to 15 kmph in the afternoon, and are expected to slow to below 10 kmph from the same direction in the evening and night on Wednesday, according to the Air Quality Early Warning System for Delhi. At 4 pm on Wednesday, the 24-hour average AQI stood at 259, compared to 282 on Tuesday, 314 on Monday, and 308 on Sunday, accord-

DELHI SAW A MARGINAL IMPROVEMENT ON TUESDAY, WITH THE AVERAGE AQI DROPPING BELOW 300 AND INTO THE POOR CATEGORY

ing to data from the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB).

After nine days of experiencing "very poor" air quality, Delhi saw a marginal improvement on Tuesday, with the average AQI dropping below 300 and into the "poor" category. Meanwhile, the CPCB's Sameer app had not updated station-wise pollution levels until 6 pm.

According to the Decision Support System for Delhi's air-quality management, vehicular emissions con-

tributed 16.9 per cent to local pollution on Wednesday. For Thursday too, the system forecast vehicular emissions to remain the prime source of pollutants, contributing around 16.6 per cent.

Meanwhile, the maximum temperature on Tuesday settled at 25.2 degrees Celsius, about 0.4 degrees below normal, while the minimum temperature was 10 degrees Celsius, around 0.4 degrees below normal, according to the India Meteorological Department (IMD). Relative humidity stood at 79 per cent in the morning and 59 per cent in the evening.

For Thursday, the IMD has predicted partly foggy conditions, with the minimum temperature likely to be around 8 degrees Celsius and the maximum around 24 degrees Celsius.

Govt targets to cut road crashes by 50% by 2030

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

The Delhi Government on Wednesday set a target of reducing road crashes by 50 per cent by 2030.

The decision was taken at the first meeting of the State Road Safety Council in two years, chaired by Transport Minister Pankaj Kumar Singh.

According to a statement, a key priority in the Road Safety Work Plan 2025-2030 was the protection of vulnerable road users, particularly pedestrians, cyclists, and schoolchildren.

The government has announced the rollout of Safe School Zones in 100 schools in the first phase.

Road Safety Clubs are already in operation across all Delhi Government

schools, and training will be provided to their members to strengthen awareness and preparedness, the statement read.

The council directed the creation of Zero Tolerance Zones on Ring Road, Outer Ring Road, and areas under NDMC jurisdiction, with proper bus-lane markings.

Officials said 47 AI-based cameras are already functional, and the Delhi Traffic Police will work with IIT-Delhi to identify more high-risk stretches requiring round-the-clock surveillance.

Meanwhile, progress was also reviewed on the remediation of 18 identified "black spots", like Delhi Gate and ISBT Kashmir Gate, that have already shown improved safety indicators, it said.

Health ministry, WHO launch campaign on women's health

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

The Union health ministry, in partnership with the World Health Organization (WHO), on Wednesday rolled out a month-long Delhi Metro campaign on women's and girls' health and well-being from the the Sultanpur Metro station.

The campaign, which will run from December 10 to January 10, aims to reach millions of commuters with messages displayed on Metro trains and select stations, highlighting the importance of women's safety, mental health support, digital inclusion, pre-conception and pre-natal diagnostic techniques (PC-PNDT), and tuberculosis awareness.

Speaking at the launch of

the campaign, Union Health Secretary Punya Salila Srivastava said, "A family or a nation cannot truly progress unless the women are healthy. The health and safety of women are critical issues. "Through this Delhi Metro campaign, we hope to spread this message to a wide segment of people. This is a powerful medium to take the message directly to them." She added that messages on tuberculosis awareness, reducing the digital divide, the PC-PNDT Act, 1994, and other key issues have been displayed both inside the coaches and on the exterior of the trains.

On the increasing ease of access to technologies used for gender determination, the health secretary said, "Earlier, people relied on

ultrasound to determine the gender of the fetus. Now, new technologies are being used for the same purpose. These practices must stop, and people need to be sensitised accordingly."

Catharina Boehme, Officer-in-charge, World Health Organization (WHO), Southeast Asia, said, "Here at this Metro station, some journeys end and others begin. Today marks the final day of the 16 days of activism against gender-based violence. And, as that campaign ends, another begins."

"We are proud to launch the Delhi Metro campaign for women's and girls' health and well-being, rooted in two simple and enduring truths: Healthy Women = Healthy Nations, and #BecozSheMatters."

NORTHERN RAILWAY
File No- NR-HQOPERS(ACME)/42/2025 Dated 09.12.2025
Re-engagement of Retired Stenographers on Contractual Basis in NRHQ Office, Baroda House, New Delhi
Applications are invited from Retired Stenographers for Re-engagement on contractual basis in Northern Railway Headquarter Office, Baroda House, New Delhi.
Detailed advertisement with Vacancy status, terms & conditions, Format of Application form is available on Northern Railway website <https://nr.indianrailways.gov.in>
3817/2025 For General Manager/P

SERVING CUSTOMERS WITH A SMILE

NORTHERN RAILWAY
TENDER NOTICE No. 70/2025-2026 Dated: 10/12/2025
Invitation of Tenders through E-Procurement system
Principal Chief Materials Manager, Northern Railway, New Delhi - 110001, for and on behalf of the President of India, invites e-tenders through e-procurement system for supply of the following items :-

S.No.	Tender No.	Brief Description	Qty.	Closing Date
01	07251537A	PHO KIT FOR KE TYPE DISTRIBUTOR VALVE	7004 SET	31-12-25
02	19251821	SET OF OVERHAULING KIT FOR WIPER MOTOR	672 SET	08-01-26
03	04240058	LUBRICATING GREASE FOR TRACTION MOTOR BEARING	8225 KGS	08-01-26
04	02250079	BRUSHLESS DC RAILWAY CARRIAGE FAN 400MM SWEEP	4863 NOS	27-01-26

Note : 1. Vendors may visit the IREPS website i.e. www.ireps.gov.in for details. 2. No Manual offer will be entertained.
3822/2025

SERVING CUSTOMERS WITH A SMILE

PUBLIC NOTICE
It is for general information that I, MOHAMMAD RAFIK S/O ALI SEN R/O H.No. B-171, A-BLOCK, POCHAN PUR EXTENSION, BAGDOLA, SOUTH WEST DELHI, DELHI-110077 declare that name of my minor son has been wrongly written as ALE NABI in my minor son ALE NABI aged 11 years in his school records. The actual name of my minor son is AALE NABI, which may be amended accordingly.

PUBLIC NOTICE
I, Chander Shekhar Chauhan S/o Om Prakash R/o B-5/40, Paschim Vihar, New Delhi-110063 declare that names of mine and my minor daughter aged 17yrs have been wrongly written as Chander Shekhar and Swati respectively in her Schedule Caste Certificate. The actual names of mine and my minor daughter are Chander Shekhar Chauhan and Swati Chauhan respectively which may be amended accordingly.

GOVERNMENT OF ASSAM
OFFICE OF THE CHIEF ENGINEER. PWD (ROADS)
ASSAM. CHANDMARI. GUWAHATI-3
No CE/STBR/AUDIT/26/2025-26/2)
PRESS NOTICE INVITING EOI
The Chief Engineer, PWD, (Roads), Assam, Chandmari, Ghy-3 on behalf of the Governor of Assam invites "Expression of Interest" from eligible consultants registered with PWRD, Assam, for 3rd party Audit of distressed bridges divided in 4(four) zones of the state of ASSAM.
Details have been made available at website <http://assamtenders.gov.in> and further notifications shall appear in this website and also at the office of the undersigned (State Bridge Design Branch) during office hours. The Bidder must be registered with the Electronic Tendering System (ETS) of PWRD, Assam website <http://assamtenders.gov.in>
Sd/-
Chief Engineer PWD (Roads)
DIPRC/PIO/658/11-Dec-25 Assam, Chandmari, Guwahati-3.

PUBLIC NOTICE
To be known to all that my client, SHRI CHARAN SINGH S/O BARU SINGH R/O GIG Flat No.34B,PKT-V,HASTALSAL NEW DELHI,WEST DELHI-110059. Submission of document in respect of property bearing no UG Flat NO. 34B,Second Floor Hastal, Uttam Nagar, Delhi -110059. The original documents Possession Letter have been lost File No./4320089/H/ N/P. An F.I.R./NCR/LR No 331716/2025, dated 28/06/2025 to this effect has been lodged in P.S.Crime Branch, Delhi. Any person (claiming any right, interest, having any objection or found in possession of original documents, may write/contact with above named person at above Address/Phone: 9717578521, within 15 days from the date of publication of this notice. The person claiming any right, interest, objection with respect to this property, can personally inform or write to Asst. Director (LAB), DDA, Vikas Sadan, INA, New Delhi-110023.

PUBLIC NOTICE
To be known to all that my client, SHRI KUNAR ANILWALLA S/O LATE SH. SHAM, RAI R/O D-2/109, JANAQPURI, NEW DELHI-110058. Allotment/Mutatee of PLOT No. D-2/109, AREA MEASURING 126.00SQ. MTRS., BLOCK-D-2, JANAQPURI, NEW DELHI-110058, VIDE FILE No. 6610246551. The original documents i.e. Original Possession Letter, Demand-Cum-Allotment Letter of the above said Plot have been lost. An F.I.R./NCR/LR No. 3411356/2023 dated 30/10/2025 to this effect has been lodged in P.S.Crime Branch, Delhi. Any person (claiming any right, interest, having any objection or found in possession of original documents, may write/contact with above named person at above Address/Phone: No. 9810246551, within 15 days from the date of publication of this notice. The person claiming any right, interest, objection with respect to this property, can personally inform or write to Asst. Director (LAB), DDA, Vikas Sadan, INA, New Delhi-110023.

PUBLIC NOTICE
I, Vinod Kumar Jain S/o Kalyan Singh Jain R/O G-65A Second Floor, Kiran Garden Uttam Nagar, New Delhi-110059 have lost the Sale Deed vide E-Stamp Certificate No. IN-DL06562947979592J, Dated 16/12/2011, Duly Registered as Document No. 34150 in Book No.1 Vol No. 19441 on pages 94 to 102 on 23/12/2011 Regd. in the office of SR-II Janakpuri Delhi of above said property. If found by anyone please contact: 9873090775

PUBLIC NOTICE
My clients Radheyshyam S/o Sh. Niranjan Lal and Smt. Jyavati R/o H.NO.-4, 1st Floor, Gali No.-2, Block-D, Ralyia Marg, Sangam Nagar, New Delhi-110050, have severed their family relations from their sons namely Vineet Bagoria and Dinesh Bagoria both and their wives namely Shivani and Komal to their misbehavior, misconduct and out of control. My clients has also disowned all of them from their all kind of moveable and immovable properties for ever My clients shall not be responsible for their good and bad act in future.
ANJAD MALAK (Advocate), Ch. No. 867, Lawyer's Block, Saket Courts, II, Delhi-110017

DELHI TRANSCO LIMITED
NOTICE INVITING e -TENDER
Delhi Transco Ltd, a Government of NCT of Delhi Undertaking, intends to invite following online Two Part Domestic Competitive Bidding (DCB) Tender for the following works:
Tender No. T25P090661: Augmentation of 20MVA, 66/1 kV Power Transformers with 31.5 MVA, 66/11 kV Power Transformers along with 11kV switch gear panel board and associated civil works at various 220kV Sub Stations in Delhi Transco Limited on Turnkey basis.
For complete details of the tender please visit following websites:- <https://govtprocurement.delhi.gov.in> (Tender ID No. 2025_DTL_282652_1) and www.dtl.gov.in with Unique No. DTL-9804-101225
Last date for bid submission:- 28.01.2026 at 01.30 P.M.
All Corrigendum/Addendum/ Amendments/Date of Extension/Clarifications etc. to this e-tender will be hosted on the above website only. Bidders should regularly visit website to keep themselves updated.

CHANGE OF NAME
I, AANCHAL BAJAJ W/O, VIRENDER, D/O . SHRI RAMKISHAN, B - 1271. JAHANGIRPURI DELHI 110033, HAVE CHANGED MY NAME TO AANCHAL (AANCHAL BAJAJ AND AANCHAL IS SAME PERSON) PD(36216)C
I, Padma, W/o- JC-857898X Sub.(OFC) Yadav Tatyasa Shankar, R/o- At Post-Tarukh, Teh- Karad, Dist-Satara, Maharashtra- 415103, have changed my name from Padma to Yadav Padma Tatyasa, vide affidavit dated 10/12/2025 before Notary Public Delhi.
PD(36217)C
I, Shri Singh Thakur, Father of- No.14657323P Hav Ramraj Singh Thakur, R/o- Vill- Amoda, PO- Genhurash, Teh- Jaisinagar, Dist- Sagar, M.P.- 470125, have changed my name from Rama Krishna to Rama Krishna Thakur, vide affidavit dated 10/12/2025 before Notary Public Delhi.
PD(36220)C
I, Akanksha, W/o- No.16025586W L/Hav Anoop Singh, R/o- Vill- Kalyanpur, PO- Rahin, Dist- Etawah U.P., have changed my name from Akanksha to Akanksha Chauhan, vide affidavit dated 10/12/2025 before Notary Public Delhi.
PD(36221)C
I, Dilwar Singh, Father of No. 15786799P Lhav (Dmt) Basudev Singh, R/O- Vill- Kaffori, Po- Malie, Teh- Garsain, Dist- Chamoli, Uttarakhand- 246487, have changed my name from Dilwar Singh to Dilwar Singh, vide affidavit dated 10/12/2025 before Notary Public Delhi.
PD(36222)C
I, Preeti Garg, W/o- No.15443472K Nk Anurag Garg, R/o- Laskerpur Urf Chamari Kheda, Saharanpur, Uttar Pradesh- 247662, have changed my name from Preeti Garg to Preeti Singhal, for all future purposes, vide affidavit dated 10/12/2025 before Notary Public Delhi.
PD(36223)C

PUNE MUNICIPAL CORPORATION
CHIEF ENGINEER ROAD DEPARTMENT
NOTICE INVITING TENDERS (NIT) YEAR 2025-2026
Tender Sale Date :- 11/12/2025 to Date 18/12/2025 upto 2:30 PM
Bid Submission Start & End Date :- 11/12/2025 to Date :- 18/12/2025 upto 2:30 PM Technical Envelope Opening Date :- 19/12/2025 3:00 PM
Pre Bid Meeting (PMC/ROAD/2025/405) :- 15/12/2025 12:00 PM

Sr. No.	Tender No.	Name Of Work	Estimate Cost (Cr) put to the Tender Excluding GST	NIT Mode	EMD Amount	Work Period	One Envelope/ Two Envelope	New Work/ Retender Work	Concern Contact Person
1	PMC/ROAD/ 2025/385	Consultant for the work of Pre and Post tender activity to develop the road at Wanawadi smashanbhumi, Azadnagar and S. R. P. F. Wanawadi. in Pune Cantonment constituency	25CR	B-2	500/-	74 MONTH	Two Envelope (B 2)	New Work	Mr Bhandarkote Tulsidas (9405707007)
2	PMC/ROAD/ 2025/386	Appointment of Consultant for the work of Pre and Post tender activity to Construction of a new bridge at Pr. no. 25 connecting Wanawadi Kalubai Temple to Abhydaya Society and Wanawadi Tadimala also construction of a bridge at Bhairoba Nala Wanawadi	25CR	B-2	500/-	24 MONTH	Two Envelope (B 2)	New Work	Mr Bhandarkote Tulsidas (9405707007)
3	PMC/ROAD/ 2025/405	For the development of the 30-meter D.P. Road from Pand Phanta to Balbharati to obtain the required Environmental Clearance (EC) Certificate as per the directions of the Hon'ble Supreme Court	APPROX 3500000/-	B-2	500/-	24 MONTH	Two Envelope (B 2)	New Work	Mr. Shripal Jadhav (8767414187)

A) All details of Terms & Conditions of above works are incorporated in tender document which is available on website www.Mahatenders.gov.in in sales & acceptance is available by online system only
B) If sales or submission is not available on last day also & it is not been submitted will be sole responsible of tender.
C) Online tender process information will be available at Road Department, Pune Municipal Corporation.
D) As per office order No. 32, dated 22/04/2016 EMD deposit amount will be acceptable through Online Banking Only.
Tender rate for above Pre & Post tender activity works & appointment of consultant for (PMC) Project Management Consultancy to be filled on Company letter head as per financial bid in (Envelope 2) to be up loaded will be considered only.

Advt No. - 3/1462
Date - 10/Dec/2025

Sd/-
SUPERINTENDENT Engineer (Road)
Pune Municipal Corporation

Baba Farid University of Health Sciences
Sadiq Road, Faridkot-151203 Ph. 01639-256232, 256236
E-TENDER NOTICE
E-tender are invited for following works upto 24-12-2025
(1) Construction of new Faculty room and Residence room in MCH Block of GGS Medical College & Hospital, Faridkot (2) Special Repair of Medicine Unit-2 in GGS Medical Hospital, Faridkot (3) Special repair of Day Care Oncology Department in GGS Medical Hospital, Faridkot (4) Special Repair of old Gyane Ward Near De-Addiction Ward of GGS Medical Hospital, Faridkot. (5) Construction of Porch in front of Senate Block under BFUHS Faridkot (6) Providing interlock tile flooring between Medicine and Surgery Ward in GGS Medical Hospital, Faridkot (7) construction of waiting shed for patients and attendants at GGS Medical Hospital, Faridkot (8) Special Repair, Distemping & painting of 16 houses in GGS Medical Residential Campus, Faridkot 9) Extension of Registrar Office and Admission Branch in Senate Block of BFUHS Faridkot (10) construction of new washroom in Blood Bank in GGS Medical Hospital, Faridkot. (11) SITC of 4 Nos. lifts for Super Speciality Block in GGS Medical College & Hospital, Faridkot
E-tender are invited for following works upto 31-12-2025
1) Special Repair of underground water storage tanks for water supply in GGS Medical College & Hospital, Faridkot. 2) Construction of 1st floor building on Garrage near OPD in GGS Medical College & Hospital, Faridkot. 3) Construction of Road from rose Garden to Laundry Plant in GGS Medical College & Hospital, Faridkot 4) Construction/widening of road in front of MCH Block in GGS Medical College & Hospital, Faridkot (5) Special Repair of roofs of GGS Medical Hospital, Faridkot (6) SITC of 4 Nos. 15 passenger lifts 1020 KG & buyback of old lifts including 9 year CMC after 1 one year warranty at GGS Medical College & Hospital, Faridkot.
Terms and conditions can be downloaded from <http://eproc.punjab.gov.in>. The tenders will be accepted in E-Tender mode only. Bidder can also download tender notification and document from the University website i.e. www.bfhuhs.ac.in
Registrar
3108/12/2025-26/5779 Dated CHD :- 10/12/2025

IndiGo crisis: Trade, tourism sectors suffer ₹1,000 crore loss

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

The ongoing operational crisis at IndiGo has begun to ripple far beyond airport terminals, inflicting a massive blow on Delhi's economy.

The Chamber of Trade and Industry (CTI) has estimated that the airline's large-scale flight cancellations have already resulted in a business loss of nearly ₹1,000 crore to the capital's trade, industry, tourism and exhibition sectors. CTI, an umbrella body for Delhi's market associations, reported a 25 per

cent drop in footfall at major markets across the city over the past 10 days.

CTI Chairman Brijesh Goyal said that daily flight disruptions have severely impacted the movement of traders, tourists and business travellers, leading to a sharp fall in market activity across the city.

According to him, footfall in Delhi's markets has dropped by almost 25 per cent over the past 10 days as travellers from outside the city have stayed away due to uncertainty around air travel. He said that over 1.5

lakh passengers normally travel daily from Delhi airport, nearly 50,000 of whom are traders and business travellers. However, news of repeated IndiGo cancellations has drastically reduced this movement, resulting in direct losses for wholesale markets, retail hubs and commercial districts. He added that hotels, restaurants, banquets and resorts have seen thousands of cancellations over the past week alone.

The impact has been particularly severe on Delhi's exhibition and events ecosys-



tem. Over the last 10 days, large exhibitions covering automobiles, handloom, textiles, home furnishing and auto components have been underway at Pragati Maidan and Anand Mandapam. These events had drawn thousands

of traders and visitors from across the country, but a significant number were unable to reach Delhi due to last-minute flight cancellations.

Travel industry executives say the crisis has now begun spilling into the peak tourism season. Manoj Khandelwal, Director of Manoj Travels, said this period usually marks the start of Delhi's strongest tourism window, running till mid-January. However, the current disruption has already begun to hit Christmas and New Year bookings. Destination weddings have also taken a hit,

with entire wedding parties unable to reach venues in some cases, causing cascading losses to hotels, transport operators, caterers and event planners.

On Tuesday, the government ordered a 10 per cent cut in the airline's winter schedule. "The Ministry considers it necessary to curtail the overall Indigo routes, which will help in stabilising the airline's operations and lead to reduced cancellations. A curtailment of 10 per cent has been ordered. While abiding by it, Indigo will continue to cover all its

destinations as before," Civil Aviation Minister K Rammohan Naidu said. The move is also intended to send a strong signal to the aviation industry that passengers cannot be taken for granted, and that operational failures will directly impact market share.

IndiGo has been facing operational disruptions for more than one week after the new crew rostering rule came into effect allowing increased rest periods for pilots and other staff, resulting in hundreds of flight cancellations and delays.

Delhi to soon permit third-party audit for fire license: CM

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

Chief Minister Rekha Gupta on Wednesday announced that Delhi will soon permit a third-party audit for fire licence and also implement a single-window licensing regime for hotels and restaurants within the national Capital.

The chief minister also advised the hoteliers and restaurant owners to install mist fogging on the top of their properties as the move will help curtail pollution and lower down water consumption in such localities where the hotels and restaurants are situated.

Elaborating on a third-party audit, the chief minister explained that such an audit would be a key step towards ease of doing business for hoteliers and restaurant owners.

She made the announcement at the inauguration of 'Viksit Delhi, Viksit Tourism



& Hospitality: Together Towards a Viksit Bharat' summit.

Subsequently, steps and measures would be initiated to facilitate issuance of other licences from Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD), Delhi Development Authority (DDA), and the Delhi Government through a single-window system, which are required by the hotels and restaurants, she said.

The chief minister informed that the decision regarding the third-party audit for the fire license was taken at a review meeting with the fire department.

In her address at the summit, jointly organised by the Federation of Hotel and Restaurant Associations of India (FHRAI) and Hotel and Restaurant Association of Northern India (HRANI), the chief minister said that during the meeting, it was

also discovered that the previous governments had kept critical issues like the issuance of licenses pending.

She added that such pending cases are being attended to on priority by the present government.

The chief minister chaired a review meeting on Tuesday, where she directed that establishments lacking fire safety equipment or violating standards would face appropriate action. The meeting was held after the Goa nightclub fire tragedy, which claimed 25 lives.

The chief minister also advised hoteliers and restaurant owners to install mist fogging atop their properties, as it will help curtail pollution and lower water consumption in localities where hotels and restaurants are situated.

The mist fogging has already commenced in and around Delhi in certain prominent places, and this exercise will be further

expanded in other areas to drastically curtail pollution, she noted.

The chief minister also assured hoteliers and restaurant owners that more reformative steps would be taken to ensure that Delhi becomes a hub for events and conferences.

Stressing that her government wants to ensure a positive image for Delhi, she alleged that the past Governments had hardly taken measures for the development of the national capital, and the BJP, since it has returned to power after a gap of 27 years, is committed to projecting Delhi as a city that attracts every visitor.

While delivering the keynote address, Dr. Neeraj Kharwal IAS, Managing Director, ITPO, emphasised the importance of sustained policy support, infrastructure expansion, and improved ease of operations to strengthen the sector's growth outlook.

Government directs fire department to inspect hotels, nightclubs, restaurants

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

With Christmas and New Year round the corner, the Delhi Government on Wednesday directed the fire department to carry out an inspection of restaurants, hotels and clubs in the aftermath of the Goa fire incident.

In an official order issued by A Nedunchezhiyan, Principal Director, Delhi Fire Service, all divisional officers (DOs) and assistant divisional officers (ADOs) of the Delhi Fire Service are hereby directed to undertake immediate and thorough fire safety inspections of public assembly premises such as restaurants, hotels and clubs, etc.

A tragic fire at the Birch by Romeo nightclub in Goa last Saturday (December 6) resulted in the deaths of 25 people, including four tourists from Delhi.

"In view of the recent fire incident in Goa and the increased risk associated with the upcoming festive season of Christmas and New Year Celebration, all Divisional Officers (DOs) and Assistant Divisional Officers (ADOs) of the Delhi Fire Service are hereby directed to undertake immediate and thorough fire safety inspections of public assembly premises such as restaurant, hotel and clubs etc.

"The inspecting officers to verify the functional status of building by laws pertaining to fire prevention and fire safety measures as specified under Rule - 33 of Delhi Fire Service Rules, 2010," read the order.

The officers have also been asked to submit a compliance report of the order.

Meanwhile, all Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD) zonal officers have been asked to prepare a detailed

list of hotels, restaurants and bars operating without valid licences, with a warning that such establishments will face immediate shutdown and penalties once the five-day report is submitted.

After the final report is received, strict action will follow. "We may impose heavy penalties or order an immediate shutdown," Standing Committee chairperson Satya Sharma said. A zonal official from MCD's 12 zones informed PTI that they are working to prepare the list promptly to identify outlets that are operating without licenses or violating safety regulations.

On Tuesday, Sharma directed each zone to gather ward-wise data detailing the license status of each establishment, permissions regarding seating capacity, and compliance with mandatory fire safety requirements.

Goa nightclub fire: I am only a partner, says co-owner Ajay Gupta

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

Ajay Gupta, one of the co-owners of Goa's 'Birch by Romeo Lane' nightclub, said that he is "only a partner" as he was brought to Delhi's Anti-Extortion and Kidnapping Cell of the Crime Branch on Wednesday in connection with the blaze that killed 25 people.

Gupta, wearing a mask and covering most of his face, made the brief remark while entering the Crime Branch office at Sunlight Colony. Later, Gupta was taken to LNJP Hospital for medical tests, from where he would be taken to Saket court for the transit remand.

Sources said he was questioned by Goa Police and it initiated formal procedures to apprehend him and seek a transit remand. The sources



added that Gupta had been evading investigators since the December 6 blaze in north Goa's Arpora area.

"A Look Out Circular (LOC) had been issued against him after Goa Police failed to find him in Delhi during their first search. He was later located at a private hospital in Lajpat Nagar, where he had reportedly admitted himself citing spine-related medical issues. After the medical clearance, he was detained and brought to the Crime Branch office for

further procedures," the source added. He said that Gupta is likely to be placed under arrest once Goa Police completes the formalities for transit remand.

Goa Police has already arrested five staff members of the nightclub — chief general manager Rajiv Modak, general manager Vivek Singh, bar manager Rajiv Singhania, gate manager Riyanshu Thakur and employee Bharat Kohli — in connection with the tragedy. Meanwhile, two owners of the nightclub, brothers Saurabh and Gaurav Luthra, left India shortly after the incident. An Interpol Blue Corner Notice has been issued against them.

Gupta will face detailed questioning in Goa about the club's management, operational responsibilities and fire-safety compliance, the sources said.

Morning tours launched for change of guard ceremony

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

Early morning risers can now enjoy a full view of presidential grandeur, as the Delhi Government has launched a morning tour to the change of guard ceremony held every Saturday at the Rashtrapati Bhavan.

The Tourism department has also revamped its tours to iconic sites in the national capital by adding new venues, including Pradhan Mantri Sangrahalaya, Bharat Mandapam and the National War Memorial.

The tour circuit has been divided into two circuits — the morning and evening circuits. The morning circuit consists of two distinct tours — Dilli Ki Dharohar and Dilli Ka Rahasya, while the evening circuit offers tours — Dilli Ka Dil Aur Virasat and Dilli Dekho Dil Se.

The Dilli Ki Dharohar visit includes Agrasen Ki Baoli,

Purana Qila, Akshardham Mandir, with visitors driven past India Gate, Rashtrapati Bhavan, Parliament House and Bharat Mandapam.

Meanwhile, the Dilli Ka Rahasya tour covers four sites — Jantar Mantar, National Museum, Lodhi Garden and Safdarjung Tomb.

The evening circuit offers tours, including Dilli Ka Dil Aur Virasat, which takes tourists through Pradhan Mantri Sangrahalaya, National War Memorial, Kartavya Path, Qutub Complex and Dilli Haat, INA, as well as a drive past through 11 Murti statue, Embassy Area, India Gate, Rashtrapati Bhavan and the Parliament House.

The other evening tour — Dilli Dekho Dil Se — will focus on the National War Memorial, India Gate, a Light and Sound Show at Pradhan Mantri Sangrahalaya, and Dilli Haat.



Apart from witnessing the change of guard ceremony, ticket holders will also be taken to the India Gate for a photography session.

"The morning tour is pre-booked through the website of the Delhi Tourism and Transportation Development Corporation. The tickets are priced at ₹200 for both adults and children aged between five and 10 years," officials said. The response to the morning tour has been quite encouraging, they added.

"Earlier this year, the change of guard ceremony at Rashtrapati Bhavan was revamped to now feature an elaborate visual and musical performance against the backdrop of the presidential palace. We decided that we should have a morning tour to the ceremony," the official said.

The event now includes military drills by troops and horses of the President's Bodyguard (PBG), along with personnel from the cere-

EARLIER THIS YEAR, THE CHANGE OF GUARD CEREMONY AT RASHTRAPATI BHAVAN WAS REVAMPED

monial guard battalion and the ceremonial military brass band. The display will be spread over a larger area, the statement added.

Introduced as a formal military tradition in 2007 at Rashtrapati Bhavan, the change of guard ceremony allows a fresh group of the PBG to take charge.

In 2012, the ceremony was made a public event, giving citizens an opportunity to attend the event, officials said. The ceremony, once held between Jaipur Column and Gate number 1 of the Rashtrapati Bhavan, has since moved to the forecourt, expanding the capacity to over a thousand spectators.

Police dismantle two organised crime syndicates

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

The Delhi Police has dismantled two major organised crime syndicates operating across the national capital, one involved in selling illegal stickers that allowed commercial vehicles to bypass no-entry restrictions and the other running an extortion racket targeting transporters and traffic police personnel.

Police said a case under the provisions of the Maharashtra Control of Organised Crime Act (MCOCA) has been registered against mastermind Rajkumar alias Raju Meena, who was running a network

BOTH SYNDICATES WERE FUNCTIONING INDEPENDENTLY BUT USED OVERLAPPING COMMUNICATION CHANNELS AND SHARED FINANCIAL PATTERNS

that extorted money through threats, coercion and fabricated video clip-pings of police personnel.

"In a parallel syndicate, four people, including the kingpin, Jeeshan Ali, have been arrested for manufacturing and selling several 'marks/stickers' to commercial vehicle drivers for illegal movement during restricted

hours," DCP (Crime Branch) Sanjeev Kumar Yadav was quoted as saying in a statement.

The officer said the first case surfaced after a commercial LGV driver attempted to evade prosecution at Badarpur and claimed exemption by producing a sticker.

"An FIR was registered and subsequent inspection of social media groups used by drivers revealed a parallel system being run by an organised syndicate that provided stickers for ₹2,000 to ₹5,000 per vehicle per month, and also engaged in extortion of traffic personnel through doctored videos," the DCP said.

During investigation, police identified two separate networks — one operated by Rajkumar, who targeted traffic police personnel and transporters using fabricated video clips and the other run by Jeeshan, who printed and sold stickers that promised safe movement during no-entry hours.

Both syndicates were functioning independently but used overlapping communication channels and shared financial patterns.

Following a discrete inquiry, a proposal to invoke the MCOCA was moved against Rajkumar. On approval, sections 3 and 4 of the MCOCA was added to the FIR on December 8.

Once he saved a stranger, but no one stopped to help him: Family of youth killed in accident

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

The family of a 26-year-old man who died in a road accident in northwest Delhi's Ashok Vihar called him a good samaritan who once rushed an injured delivery agent to hospital, saying he might have survived if someone had stopped to help him.

The victim, Pratham Malik, died after his SUV rammed a tree when he and his friend Aditya (25) were returning from a wedding function early Tuesday, police said. Aditya remains critically injured.

Pratham's uncle Praveen

Malik told PTI that he (Pratham) made his last call to the PCR, after which he is believed to have lost consciousness due to severe head injuries. Pratham, whose father died 23 years ago, helped run the family's cosmetics business in Sadar Bazar with his elder brother.

Describing him as 'helpful, charming and jolly', Praveen said Pratham was deeply loved in the neighbourhood and among relatives.

"He had this habit of stopping to help people. Once, he saw a delivery boy injured on the road, bleeding and crying for help. Pratham immediate-

ly put him in his own car and drove him straight to the hospital. He was always ready to help someone in need," he said.

The uncle said what pains the family the most is the belief that Pratham might have survived if someone had stopped to help him. "When he needed help, no one came," he said.

"He was found lying 20 feet from the car in the middle of the road. For how long was he lying there? Did anyone even try to call police? His bracelet and wallet were missing. My boy, who spent his life helping others, got no help from

anyone," Praveen said.

The uncle broke down while speaking about the impact of Pratham's death on his mother. "His mother lost her husband when Pratham was an infant. She raised both boys on her own. Pratham was younger and he cared for her deeply."

He added that the family remains hopeful for Aditya's recovery. "The friend who was with him was taken to the hospital by a divine soul — someone who did what we wish someone had done for our child. He is fighting for his life. We pray he survives," the uncle said.

3.83 lakh traffic violations caught on CCTV in September-October: Traffic police

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

The Delhi Traffic police newsletters said that more than 3.83 lakh traffic violations were caught on CCTV cameras in Delhi in September and October this year, showing the scale of overspeeding, helmet violations and improper parking across several parts of the city.

Overspeeding alone accounted for nearly 53 per

cent of all camera-detected violations during the two-month period, the data showed.

In September, cameras caught 1,64,738 overspeeding cases by light motor vehicles, which made up around 43 per cent of the month's total CCTV notices, as per the official figures.

They also detected 70,827 riding-without-helmet violations, contributing close to 19 per cent, the second highest

in the category.

Around 66,454 improper parking cases were filed, which formed about 17 per cent of all camera-based challans issued that month, the newsletters showed.

Cameras further recorded 21,116 red-light jumping cases, accounting for roughly six per cent, and 14,272 instances of driving against the flow of traffic, around four per cent, both of which added significantly to September's overall

tally of camera-detected violations across major inter-sections and arterial roads, the data showed. October saw a high increase in speeding violations, with cameras capturing 2,18,354 overspeeding cases, making up nearly 57 per cent of all notices recorded that month, according to the figures.

Cameras also issued 56,071 improper parking notices (15 per cent), 55,326 helmet-related violations (14 per cent),

31,964 stop-line breaches (eight per cent) and 25,929 red-light jumping cases (seven per cent) across different stretches, the data revealed.

Certain violations appeared only in October's camera records, including 7,183 no-entry violations at Chandni Chowk, 3,327 triple-riding cases and 1,505 lane violations, reflecting the wider set of behaviours picked up by automated systems during that period, it added. Traffic Police

personnel on the ground also issued large numbers of challans. In September, 1,37,348 improper parking challans were issued, forming 43.4 per cent of the top five on-the-spot violations for the month, as per the enforcement data.

This was followed by 54,615 challans for driving without a PUCC (17 per cent) and 51,618 helmet-related challans (16 per cent) recorded during roadside checks, the data showed.



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IN FOCUS



A large number of Ayyappa devotees gather at the Sabarimala Sannidhanam temple in Pathanamthitta, Kerala

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

The CBI has filed a charge sheet against two Chinese nationals who were allegedly the masterminds of the HPZ Token Investment Fraud case in which over Rs 1000 crore were siphoned off through shell companies during Covid.

The CBI has alleged that Shigoo Technology Pvt. Ltd., owned and controlled by Chinese, allegedly cheated the public during the Covid lockdown using a fake mobile application titled “HPZ Tokens”, claiming that investments would be used for cryptocurrency mining and would yield very high returns. CBI’s investigation found that this was not an isolated incident but part of a large, well-coordinated cyber crime network operated by foreign nationals. This



syndicate was responsible for several cyber scams targeting Indian citizens in post Covid period using loan apps, fake investment apps and platforms offering bogus online job offers.

Wan Jun and Li Anming had come to India to set up the company and infrastruc-

ture following which they left the country and operated the company remotely from abroad, the officials said.

Both never joined the investigation and remained fugitives, they said.

The syndicate was the fountainhead of several scams though which gullible

citizens were cheated using a host of loan applications, fake investment apps and platform offering bogus online job offers. When the CBI took over investigation, it immediately cracked down on its local operations arresting six persons -- Dortse, Rajni Kohli, Sushanta Behra, Abhishek, Mohd Imdhad Husain and Rajat Jain.

The investigations revealed a massive intricate web of operation in which all the 27 involved accused were unmasked. The CBI filed charge sheet against 30 entity including the two Chinese nationals and 27 other individuals besides three companies.

“Wan Jun was the director of a company Jilian Consultants India Private Limited which was a subsidiary of a Chinese entity Jilian Consultants. Wan Jun with the help of one Dortse

successfully created several shell companies including Shigoo Technologies,” the CBI spokesperson said in a statement.

The agency dug deep into the shady operations of the company which showed that the shell companies set up under the Chinese umbrella Jilian Consultants became a conduit to collect and launder the proceeds of crime of major organized cyber frauds with over ₹1,000 crore moved within months through its accounts.

“These frauds were connected and controlled by a single organized criminal syndicate based overseas,” the spokesperson said.

The CBI probe also exposed an organised and sophisticated use of Payment Aggregators which were in nascent stages of operations in the India. The racket misused these aggregators

to launder the money “at a high speed from the accounts of one shell company to other” and also allowed them to partially disburse the money back to investors so as to gain their confidence.

“The payment aggregation systems had just taken off in India, and the payment aggregators were providing large collection and money disbursement services using technology to genuine companies. The technology had allowed the users to access large number of bank accounts simultaneously,” the spokesperson said.

Jilian Consultants also engaged professionals including company secretaries (CS) to create several shell companies which were converting the collected amounts into crypto before sending them out of the country.

BJP questions LoP Rahul Gandhi’s foreign trips

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

BJP on Wednesday raised questions on Rahul Gandhi’s foreign trips and asked the Leader of Opposition (LoP) in the Lok Sabha about his “compulsion” to often embark on “secret travels” abroad. Alleging that the itinerary of Rahul Gandhi’s “official or unofficial” trips is not shared when he goes abroad, BJP national spokesperson Tuhin Sinha also asked the Congress leader what he is “hiding” from the country.

Addressing a Press conference at the BJP headquarters here, Sinha also called Gandhi “leader of paryatan” (leader of tourism) and “leader of partying”, taking a jibe at the LoP ahead of his 6-day visit to Germany next week.

Rahul does not appear to be the Leader of Opposition with the way he embarks on foreign visits by skipping



“important occasions” in the country, the BJP spokesperson charged. Rahul will visit Germany from December 15 to 20 during which he will engage with the Indian diaspora and meet German ministers, according to the Indian Overseas Congress.

Raising questions on Gandhi’s scheduled visit to Germany, Sinha asked, “At a time when Parliament Session is underway during which 13 important bills are listed for consideration and passage, what is his compul-

sion that he finds his secret travels more important than this?” Being the LoP in the Lok Sabha, Gandhi should have been here during this Parliament session, Sinha suggested. “It has become his habit to disappear on every important occasion... When the vice presidential poll was scheduled to be held on September 9, he embarked on a foreign trip from September 4 to September 8. Possibly, he was in Malaysia,” Sinha said. BJP spokesperson also referred to Rahul

Gandhi’s other foreign visits, including the one he undertook during the Bihar assembly polls, and alleged, “Where does he go on official or unofficial visits are not shared.” “What is he hiding from country?” he asked, alleging, “Leaving aside his responsibilities in India, he keeps meeting unknown people at unknown places (abroad).”

Sinha alleged that when Gandhi visited South America earlier and there was no information about his engagements there. “During his South America visit, did he meet former President of Chile Michelle Bachelet to convince her to receive the Indira Gandhi Peace prize?” he asked. Sinha also asked Gandhi if he was engaged in preparing his retirement plan. The LoP will have to decide whether he is interested in politics in India or not, the BJP spokesperson added.

Asked if intelligence agencies are not able to keep tabs on the LoP’s foreign visits, he said, “Rahul Gandhi’s activities are being watched.” He alleged that Gandhi has been running various propaganda and he has to explain the source from where he “gathers” the idea to continuously attack the country while holding an important position of the LoP.

“But the day he crosses the limit, action will certainly be taken against him. You remain assured that security agencies must be keeping a watch,” the BJP spokesperson added. Congress MP Priyanka Gandhi Vadra on Wednesday hit back at the BJP for its criticism of Rahul Gandhi over his visit to Germany next week, asking why they are raising questions on the LoP when Prime Minister Narendra Modi spends “almost half of his working time outside the country”.

We let you down, and we are sorry: IndiGo board chairman

RAJESH KUMAR
■ New Delhi

IndiGo Board Chairman and Non-Executive Independent Director Vikram Singh Mehta on Wednesday issued an unconditional apology to passengers for last week’s large-scale flight disruptions, acknowledging that the airline failed to meet customer expectations and pledging corrective action to prevent this from happening again.

Addressing speculation around the cause of the chaos, Mehta rejected allegations that the airline had manipulated circumstances or compromised safety standards in the apology video. “The claims that IndiGo engineered the crisis, tried to influence government rules, that we compromised safety, that the board

was not involved, are incorrect,” he said in the video. He said IndiGo followed the Pilot Fatigue Rules as and when they came into effect.

In his first public remarks in a video message since the disruptions last week, Mehta said that the board has decided to involve external technical experts to work with the management and help determine the root causes that led to the disruption.

However, Mehta attributed the crisis to a combination of internal and external factors, including technical glitches, scheduling shifts linked to winter operations, weather disruptions, aviation congestion, and the transition to updated crew rostering rules. “This is not an excuse,” he said. “It is the truth.”

“On December 3, an unex-

pected chain of events led to large-scale flight cancellations ... Thousands of our passengers were left stranded ... I know how much distress this has caused. I want to say very simply and very clearly, we are sorry,” Mehta said.

He emphasised that IndiGo complied with updated pilot fatigue rules (FDTL) and operated under them in both July and November. “We did not attempt to bypass them,” he added.

The Chairman explained that he had delayed making a public statement until the airline achieved operational stability. “The board and I felt our first duty was to support the CEO, Peter Elbers, and his team in restoring operations and helping passengers,” he said.

Farmers-police clash in Hanumangarh over ethanol plant; internet suspended

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ Jaipur

A clash broke out between farmers and police in Hanumangarh on Wednesday after the farmers demolished the boundary wall of an under-construction ethanol plant with tractors.

The incident happened in Rath Kheda village of the Tibbi area, where the farmers also allegedly vandalised several vehicles and set some of them on fire. Police fired tear gas shells to disperse the crowd and used sticks on the agitators. Congress MLA Abhimanyu Poonia, who was at the post in support of the farmers, was injured and taken to the Hanumangarh district hospital.

Authorities have suspended internet services in Tibbi town and nearby villages.

Earlier in the day, farmers gathered outside the SDM office in protest against the plant. In the evening, they marched towards the factory and brought down a portion of the wall.

Farmers removed the police barricades, torched vehicles parked near the site, and vandalised an excavator inside the plant. The agitators alleged that the proposed plant would increase pollution in the region.

They had been protesting at the site for some days but were recently removed, after which a boundary wall was built. Forces have been deployed in the area to maintain law and order.

Former chief minister Ashok Gehlot, Leader of the Opposition Tikaram Jolly, and former deputy chief minister Sachin Pilot condemned police action.

“Why does the BJP Government hate farmers so much? Congress will continue to raise their voice,” Gehlot said in a post on X. Jolly called the police action “unfortunate and unacceptable.”

Nadda calls for stronger grassroots action in meeting with Gujarat MPs

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ New Delhi

Union Health Minister J P Nadda on Wednesday held a dialogue with members of Parliament (MPs) from Gujarat on advancing the national mission for a TB-Mukt Bharat.

The interaction, organised under the Parliamentarians Championing a TB Mukt Bharat initiative, took place at Garvi Gujarat Bhawan on the sidelines of the Winter Session of Parliament.

The session witnessed the presence of Union Minister of State for the Ministry of Consumer Affairs, Food and Public Distribution Nimuben Bambhaniya and MPs from both the Houses representing Gujarat. Nadda, according to a statement, highlighted India’s progress in the fight against tubercu-



losis under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi. He noted that the country has achieved an approximate 21 per cent reduction in TB incidence between 2015 and 2024, along with a treatment success rate of nearly 90 per cent, surpassing global averages as reflected in recent WHO assessments. The minister said that Gujarat, owing to its strong health systems, rapid adoption of innova-

tions, and robust programme ownership, has the potential to emerge as a leading state in implementing the next-generation TB elimination strategies. Calling upon the lawmakers to anchor constituency-level interventions, Nadda suggested a slew of measures, such as regular constituency scorecard reviews of TB indicators, and strengthening of TB reviews through District Development Coordination and Monitoring Committee (DISHA) meetings. Nadda urged the MPs to undertake efforts to counter stigma and motivate people to seek early testing and treatment. The minister encouraged setting up constituency-level Ni-kshay Shivers and expansion of the Ni-kshay Mitra network to ensure TB patients get nutrition, counselling, and welfare.

Vande Bharat sleeper trials underway: Vaishnaw

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ New Delhi

The sleeper variant of the Vande Bharat train has been designed to cater to long and medium distance overnight travel, and two such trainsets are currently under trial, Railway Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw said in a written reply in the Lok Sabha on Wednesday.

More than half a dozen MPs raised questions regarding the timeline for its rollout, asking, “whether the Government has conducted any feasibility studies or pilot projects” along with the “details of the proposed route” of its launch. “To cater to long and medium distance overnight travel, the sleeper variant of the Vande Bharat train has been indigenously designed. Two such rakes have been manufactured and are under trial/commissioning,” Vaishnaw said. The min-



ister, while highlighting its broad technological advancements and safety features, said that these trains are fitted with KAVACH, higher acceleration with a design speed of 180 kmph and an operating speed of 160 kmph, crashworthy and jerk-free semi-permanent couplers and anti-climbers, along with high fire safety standards.

Vaishnaw added that the train has fire barrier doors at the end of each coach, an

improved fire safety aerosol-based fire detection and suppression system in electrical cabinets as well as lavatories, a regenerative braking system for energy efficiency, air conditioning units with an indigenously developed UV-C lamp-based disinfection system and centrally controlled automatic plug doors and fully sealed wider gangways.

According to the railway minister, there are CCTVs in all

coaches, emergency talk-back units for communication between the passenger and train manager/loco pilot in case of emergency, special lavatories in the driving coaches on each end for Divyangjan passengers, and a centralised coach monitoring system for better condition monitoring of passenger amenities such as air conditioning, saloon lighting, etc.

On questions regarding the resumption of train operations suspended during the COVID-19 pandemic, particularly those passing through Dumka in Jharkhand and Jammu in J-K, Vaishnaw said that with a view to containing the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Indian Railways had discontinued the operation of all regular passenger carrying trains with effect from March 23 2020, and only special train services were being operated.

UAE pledges \$550 million to support UN’s 2026 global humanitarian overview

ASHOKE RAJ ■ New Delhi

The United Arab Emirates has announced a major humanitarian commitment with a pledge of \$550 million to support the United Nations’ Global Humanitarian Overview (GHO) for 2026.

The directive, issued by President His Highness Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, positions the UAE among the leading global contributors working to alleviate urgent humanitarian suffering worldwide.

The 2026 GHO aims to mobilise \$33 billion to assist an estimated 135 million people across 23 humanitarian operations. These operations span critical regions affected by conflict, displacement, natural disasters, and economic instability. They also include targeted relief for refugees, migrants, and vulnerable communities grappling with escalating global crises. Of the total amount, the UN seeks \$23 billion in immedi-



ate funding to safeguard the lives of 87 million people in dire need of urgent humanitarian support.

The UAE’s pledge reflects its longstanding commitment to international humanitarian action, an approach grounded in rapid

and effective responses to crises. Through sustained collaboration with UN agencies-chief among them the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA)-the UAE continues to prioritise equitable access

to essential aid, especially in regions where instability has severely disrupted basic services. Reem bint Ebrahim Al Hashimi, Minister of State for International Cooperation, reaffirmed this commitment, highlighting the UAE’s determination to strengthen global humanitarian solidarity. “The UAE continues its steadfast commitment to supporting global humanitarian efforts and working with our UN partners to ensure access to aid for those most impacted,” she said.

“This pledge embodies the directives of His Highness Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan and reflects our profound belief in the necessity of international solidarity in responding to urgent humanitarian appeals in an effective and sustainable manner that preserves human dignity and protects lives.” The announcement was welcomed across the UN system, with senior officials emphasising the transformative potential of the UAE’s support. Tom Fletcher, UN

Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, stated:

“Our global appeal is about saving lives where shocks have hit hardest - and turning plans into real protection. The UAE’s rapid and generous backing of our 2026 plan sends a strong signal, focused on people who need it most. We must deliver an effective, innovative response that meets the moment.” WHO Director-General Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus highlighted that the pledge comes as global health systems face unprecedented pressure.

“Warning signs of health system collapse manifest long before it occurs - outbreaks spread, malnutrition increases, and preventable deaths rise,” he said. “However, when we come together, services can be restored and lives saved. I thank His Highness Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan and the UAE for their support, which will provide

crucial humanitarian health care to millions in need.”

UNICEF Executive Director Catherine Russell stressed the significance of the UAE’s involvement for children caught in crises.

“UNICEF appreciates the UAE’s generous support, which will go a long way to save and improve the lives of children caught in humanitarian crises,” she said. “Children are always the most vulnerable when a crisis strikes.”

UN High Commissioner for Refugees Filippo Grandi also welcomed the contribution, noting:

“We value UAE’s strong commitment to humanitarian efforts. While severe funding shortfalls present a significant challenge for millions of vulnerable forcibly displaced people, contributions from governments like the UAE allow UNHCR to enhance its response efforts and provide a glimmer of hope for those in need.”

Cindy McCain, Executive Director of the World Food

Programme, described the pledge as a crucial intervention at a time when humanitarian needs are rising sharply.

“As humanitarian needs soar and resources lag dangerously behind, the United Arab Emirates’ generous pledge is a lifeline,” she said. “WFP stands ready to work with the UAE to ensure this desperately needed support reaches the millions facing acute hunger across the globe.”

This substantial commitment further strengthens the UAE’s strategic partnership with the UN humanitarian system and underscores its growing influence in global crisis response. Guided by the directives of President Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, the UAE continues to champion swift, coordinated, and impactful humanitarian action aimed at protecting lives, ensuring stability, and upholding human dignity in the world’s most vulnerable regions.

Paper ballots will revive booth capturing: BJP



Amid a push by Opposition parties to revert to paper ballot elections, senior BJP leader Ravi Shankar Prasad on Wednesday hit back, saying it would mean going back to the days of booth capturing. Participating in a debate in LS on 'election reforms', the former Union law minister said the opposition should not talk of returning to the old ballot paper system.

Congress won't reinstate expelled MLA Mamkootathil

Congress is not a party that alters its decisions based on the grant of bail, and there is no reason to reconsider the expulsion of MLA Rahul Mamkootathil, former KPCC president K Muralaeddharan said on Wednesday. Responding to questions on the anticipatory bail granted to the Palakkad MLA in a second rape case registered against him, Muralaeddharan said the Congress had no concern for someone who had already been ousted from the party.



Andhra CM Naidu seeks revamp of Govt business rules



Calling for an overhaul of existing Government business rules to improve governance, Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu on Wednesday said when the Constitution has been amended, what is wrong in changing the business rules to do good to people.

CM Reddy unveils ₹1,000 crore for Osmania University revamp

Telangana Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy on Wednesday announced an allocation of ₹1,000 crore for development works at Osmania University, pledging to upgrade the century-old institution to international standards. Reddy unveiled a copy of the Government order sanctioning the funds during a visit to the campus, which played a central role in the Telangana statehood movement.



Opposition stages walkout in RS

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

Opposition parties led by the Congress on Wednesday staged a walkout in the Rajya Sabha after a BJP MP withdrew, without explanation, a question he had posed to Home Minister Amit Shah on enhancing forensic capabilities in the country.

BJP MP Adiya Prasad had put a question to the Home Minister, which was admitted as a Starred Question, which requires ministers to give an answer orally and allows immediate follow-up (supplementary) questions.

According to the Question List available on the Rajya Sabha website, Prasad's question was number two in the sequence for the Question Hour on Wednesday. However, a correction note said the question may be treated as "withdrawn".

When Chairman CP Radhakrishnan skipped the question and moved to the next, Congress leader S Jairam Ramesh and others sought to know why the



Congress MP Jairam Ramesh speaking in the Rajya Sabha during the Winter session of Parliament

PTI

question was withdrawn. "You know the rules. Rule 53 permits a member to withdraw any question as he likes," the chairman said.

"You can also withdraw if you want. I cannot interfere in the rights of the members." As opposition MPs pressed, Radhakrishnan

told them that they have "no right to raise it." Radhakrishnan also refused their pleas to ask the concerned member to put the

question. "Why do I have to tell? I have no right to tell. It is his will. You also can withdraw tomorrow some questions, and I will not interfere in that," he said, ordering that nothing that Opposition MPs say on the issue would go on record. He asked them not to disturb the question hour and went ahead with the listed questions. Unhappy with the response, the Opposition MPs staged a walkout in the House.

Prasad had wanted to know from the Minister of Home Affairs "whether the Government is expanding Central Forensic Science Laboratories (CFSs) to collect evidence as mandated under the new criminal laws, if so, the details thereof." He also wanted to know of "the measures taken to enhance forensic capabilities under the Nirbhaya Fund in light of the new criminal laws; and the steps being taken to systematically store and manage forensic data electronically as mandated under the new criminal laws."

RS Chairman urges protection of human rights, especially for marginalised groups

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

Rajya Sabha Chairman CP Radhakrishnan on Wednesday called on elected representatives to ensure human rights remain "living, breathing realities" for every citizen, particularly the marginalised sections of society, as he marked the 77th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Speaking on Human Rights Day, he said the historic 1948 document "continues to stand as the bedrock of human dignity, freedom, equality and justice for every individual across the world." Highlighting this year's global theme 'Human Rights: Our Everyday Essentials', the chairman said it underscores three simple yet profound truths: Human rights are positive, essential, and attainable. "Human rights empower individuals and communities, prevent harm, protect dignity and transform societies for the better," he said.



Drawing on India's constitutional framework and ancient philosophy, Radhakrishnan said the country has "always been a resolute champion of these universal values." He invoked the Sanskrit phrase '*Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam*' (The world is one family) and noted that India's Constitution guarantees Fundamental Rights, and Directive Principles of State Policy. "As elected representatives of the people, it is our bounden duty to ensure that human rights remain living, breathing realities for every citizen," he said, calling

on members to "pledge anew to work tirelessly towards a nation and a world where human rights are truly our everyday essentials."

Meanwhile, after papers were laid in the Upper House, Parliamentary Affairs Minister Kiren Rijiju announced that the discussion on the 150th anniversary of Vande Mataram would continue in the second half of the day and could extend until 7 pm.

The discussion on election reforms, Rijiju said, will be taken up on Thursday and is expected to conclude on Monday.

Congress slams BJP over Vande Mataram controversy

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

Congress MP Syed Naseer Hussain on Wednesday attacked BJP for creating an unnecessary controversy over the national song Vande Mataram, asking whether those who bowed their heads at Muhammad Ali Jinnah's tomb should teach nationalism to them.

Participating in the debate on the 150th anniversary of Vande Mataram in the Rajya Sabha, he claimed that it is a historical fact that the Congress party has worked to spread Vande Mataram to every nook and corner of the country.

According to him, the controversy over deletion of some stanzas in the original Vande Mataram poem was settled in the CWC meeting in 1937 and subsequently in the Constituent Assembly.

He claimed that BJP leader L K Advani visited Pakistan in 2005, and paid homage at the tomb of Jinnah by bowing his head. "Nationalism is important for every Indian born in the country. Now, will those who bowed their heads at Jinnah's tomb teach us nationalism?"

Hussain added that everyone respects Vande Mataram as India's national song. "Fringe elements will not decide who will sing



Vande Mataram and who will not."

BJP MP Ram Chander Jangra from Haryana called Vande Mataram "a source of inspiration" for everyone, while AAP member Swati Maliwal described it as the soul of the country.

Bhagwat Karad, BJP MP from Maharashtra, attacked the Congress, stating that it is in the party's culture to oppose the recital of Vande Mataram. MP Kartikeya Sharma said the British tried to suppress the song because they wanted to suppress ideas that awakened political consciousness.

"Singing it invited fines, arrests, expulsions and reprisals. Yet, the song travelled from classrooms to jails, from Bengal to the rest of India and from whisper to war cry during the Swadeshi movement of 1905," Sharma said. He added, "Vande

Mataram is not history. It is a philosophy still in motion. Its philosophy of self-reliance, moral courage, knowledge and national confidence is more relevant today than ever before."

Nareesh Bansal, BJP MP from Uttarakhand, while blaming the Congress for the partition of the country, said that Vande Mataram is a prayer to the nation. AAP MP Vikramjit Singh Sahney called the song "a mantra that paved the way for our freedom." Ramdas Athawale, Minister of State for Social Justice and Empowerment, spoke in a poetic style to convey his view that Vande Mataram gives energy.

Ramji, an MP from BSP, said that people from all regions fought for the Independence of the country, and this song runs in the blood of every Indian.

11 Naxals surrender in Maharashtra

TN RAGHUNATHA
■ Mumbai

Less than two months after prominent naxalite leader Mallojula Venugopal Rao alias Bhupathi alias Sonu, eleven more Maoist leaders — including two divisional committee members Ramesh Lekami and Bhima Kowasi — surrendered before Maharashtra Director General of Police (DGP) Rashmi Shukla in Gadchiroli district of eastern Maharashtra.

The surrendered Maoists, who included four hardcore naxalites, were carrying a bounty of ₹82 lakh on their heads.

Apart from Lekami (57) from Gadchiroli and Kowasi (35) from Chhattisgarh, the others who laid down their arms included Poriye Gota (41), Ratan Oyam (32), and Kamal Veladi (30), all from Chhattisgarh.

The others who surrendered before the State DGP comprised area committee members Poriye Veladi (36) and Ramaji Pungati (35), and platoon members Sonu Kato (19), Prakash Pungati (22), Sita Pallo (22), and Sainath Made (23).

Attributing the surrender by the eleven naxalites to their "disillusionment" by the "hollow claims" of the Maoism, the Gadchiroli police said that they were "frustrated" with the banned outfit CPI (Maoist)'s



"mindless" violence against civilians "A large number of members of the banned CPI (Maoist) are attracted to the Surrender cum Rehabilitation Policy implemented by the Government of Maharashtra since 2005," the police said. Under the state's Government's rehabilitation policy, if a group of Maoists surrenders together, they are eligible for collective assistance of ₹10 lakh announced jointly by the Centre and Maharashtra Government.

In all, 146 hardcore Naxalites have surrendered in Gadchiroli since 2022. "Thanks to the effective implementation of this Policy, a total of 783 active Maoists till date have surrendered before the

Gadchiroli Police," the police said.

Of the surrendered Maoist leaders, the surrendered Naxal leader Ramesh alias Bhima alias Bajju Guddi Lekami was carrying a reward of ₹16 announced by the Maharashtra Government, while Poriye Kumari- Bhima Veladi was carrying a reward of ₹8 lakh. The others like Sonu Podiyam alias Ajay- Sanu Kato and Sita alias Jaini Tonde- Pallo were carrying rewards of ₹4 lakh each. After surrender, Ramesh alias Bhima alias Bajju Guddi Lekami will receive ₹8.5 Lakh as reward, Bhima alias Situ alias Kiran Hidama Kowasi will receive ₹8.5 Lakh reward declared by the Central and

Maharashtra Government for rehabilitation and Poriye alias Lucky Adama Gota will receive ₹5 lakhs as reward. Other surrendered Maoists will receive different amounts as rewards.

Wednesday's is the major instance of surrender by the Maoists in recent months. It may be recalled that October 13, 2025, influential naxalite leader and senior politburo member of the Communist Party of India (Maoist) Mallojula Venugopal Rao alias Bhupathi alias Sonu, had along with 60 Maoist cadres had laid down arms in Gadchiroli district. Bhupathi was carrying a bounty of approximate ₹6 crore announced by various States.

SEVERED HEAD OF TRIBAL WOMAN FOUND ON RIVER BANK IN MALKANGIRI

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ Malkangiri

The Odisha Government on Wednesday extended the suspension of internet services for another 24 hours in violence-hit Malkangiri district, while the missing severed head of a tribal woman was recovered from a river bank, police said.

The severed head of 51-year-old Lake Podiami of Rakhelguda village was recovered about 15 km from where her body was found on December 4. The head was found on the Poteru riverbank close to a Kanya Ashram, the police said.

The prohibitory orders clamped in the two villages- Rakhelguda and MV 25 - continued to remain in force, while the Government further extended the internet service suspension period by another 24 hours based on the recommendation of the Malkangiri District Collector. The earlier ban was in force till 12 noon on Wednesday, an official said. The woman's mortal remains were buried at her village on Tuesday amid tight security and in the presence of senior officers. "After recovery of the severed head, the police was examining it and undertaking related investigation to ascertain the circumstances that led to the woman's murder," an officer said. The woman remained untraced since December 1, and her family members lodged a missing persons case on December 3. Her body was found on December 4, while the head was recovered on Wednesday, police said.

Violence erupted on Sunday afternoon after the recovery of the woman's headless body. A large number of tribals from Rakhelguda village allegedly attacked MV-26 village, a settlement of Bengalis in the district. Around 200 houses were damaged, some of them set on fire as the tribals went on a rampage at MV-26 village.

Meanwhile, the police have arrested Subha Ranjan Mandal (42) on charge of killing the tribal woman, whose killing led to violence in the tribal dominated district.

Protecting rights of fellow citizens shared duty: President Murmu

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

President Droupadi Murmu on Wednesday called upon citizens to recognise that guarding human rights are "not the sole responsibility" of Governments, the NHRC or other such institutions, rather protecting the rights and dignity of fellow citizens is a "shared duty".

In her address at an NHRC-hosted event here to mark Human Rights Day, Murmu also said this is an "occasion to remind us that the universal human rights are inalienable and they form the bedrock of a just, equitable, and compassionate society". Nations Human Rights Commission Chairperson Justice V Ramasubramanian

(ret'd) and Principal Secretary to the Prime Minister, PK Mishra, were also present on the dais.

Vice President and Rajya Sabha Chairman CP Radhakrishnan called on elected representatives to ensure human rights remain "living, breathing realities" for every citizen, particularly the marginalised sections of society, as he marked the 77th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Each year, since 1950, the world comes together on December 10 to celebrate this day, which marks the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) by the United Nations in 1948.

"Today, I call upon every



citizen to recognize that human rights are not the sole responsibility of Governments, the NHRC, civil society organisations and such other institutions. Protecting the rights and dignity of our fellow citizens is a shared duty. This duty rests with all of us as members of a compassionate and responsible society," President Murmu said in her address.

President Murmu said human rights promote social democracy, and they "encompass the right to live without fear, to learn without barriers, to work without exploitation and to age with dignity".

Speaking on Human Rights Day, Radhakrishnan said the historic 1948 docu-

ment "continues to stand as the bedrock of human dignity, freedom, equality and justice for every individual across the world." Highlighting this year's global theme 'Human Rights: Our Everyday Essentials', the chairman said it underscores three simple yet profound truths: Human rights are positive, essential, and attainable.

"As elected representatives of the people, it is our bounden duty to ensure that human rights remain living, breathing realities for every citizen," he said, calling on members to "pledge anew to work tirelessly towards a nation and a world where human rights are truly our everyday essentials."

States Focus



JAYA URGES DEDICATED AMBULANCE LANES, CITES DELAYS COSTING LIVES

Samajwadi Party MP Jaya Bachchan on Wednesday demanded dedicated emergency lanes on roads for ambulance movement, saying that in India, groceries reach doorsteps in under 15 minutes, pizzas in 30 minutes, but patients bleed to death due to the delay in reaching the hospital. Raising the issue during the Zero Hour in Rajya Sabha, Bachchan demanded that the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Health should also look into the issue of patient death due to the delay in reaching the hospital. "In a country where groceries reach doorsteps in under 15 minutes, pizzas in 30 minutes via quick commerce platforms, patients bled to death because ambulances get trapped in traffic, lacking dedicated emergency lanes, despite the Supreme Court's 2018 directive. No national data tracks these tragedies," Bachchan said.



MODI DOESN'T NEED EVMS, HE'S HACKED PEOPLE'S HEARTS: KANGANA

BJP MP Kangana Ranaut on Wednesday said in Lok Sabha that Prime Minister Narendra Modi does not need to manipulate voting systems to win elections because "he has hacked the hearts of the people". Participating in a discussion on 'Election Reforms', Ranaut said the past year had been "deeply worrying" because of what she described as daily disruptions by opposition members. She said watching them often felt "traumatic", adding that MPs had repeatedly "jumped into the Well, shouted 'SIR, SIR', created a spectacle, tried intimidation and misbehaved in every possible way". Ranaut said that the disruptions prevented Parliament from functioning. "Maybe, barring the last two or three days, they did not let the House run at all. We are representatives of the people; we come here to learn, especially as new MPs," she said, accusing the Opposition MPs of turning every session into theatre. On allegations of EVM tampering, Ranaut said Congress leaders were unwilling to accept electoral defeats. "Let me tell the Congress people that the Prime Minister does not hack EVMs, he hacked people's hearts," she said. She mocked demands for a return to the paper ballot system, calling it an "outdated relic of another era".

Sex workers flock to Kolkata booth to register as voters

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Kolkata

Forty-year-old Sumita Koley (name changed), a resident of the Chetla red-light area, has never voted. This year, she is determined to change that. She queued up on Wednesday at a Special Intensive Revision (SIR) assistance camp at Chetla area in south Kolkata, hoping to secure their place as voters. Koley was among nearly 200 women who crowded the small club room at 29/A Rakhaldas Addya Road, a narrow stretch surrounded by slums and single-storey homes that have long been inhabited by sex workers. The camp followed similar ones held a day earlier in Sonagachi, Asia's largest red-light district, in north Kolkata. Watching the turnout, Swapna Gyne, an office-bearer of the NGO Amra Padatik, said the enthusiasms masks deep anxieties. Around 3,500 sex workers earn their livelihood in Chetla, but nearly 30 per cent have stayed away from enrolment despite being Indian citizens, she said. "They have made new lives here; new relationships, whether those were accepted by the society or not. For years, they knew only the importance of Aadhaar cards, ration cards and the passbook of the Usha Multipurpose Cooperative



Society of which they are members, Gyne said. Now, for the SIR mapping, they are suddenly asked to trace parents they have not contacted in decades, she said. "Many of them fear humiliation if they go back to their old homes, which they left years ago. Some even fear physical assault," Gyne said. She stressed that Koley's case is far from unique. Women aged between 20 and 60 face the same dilemma. "Some have voter IDs and have voted before, even in the 2002 elections. But many have never voted and have no EPIC cards. They also lack school certificates or birth documents. We have requested the Election Commission to find alternatives if they meet the citizenship criteria. Where will they go if they are left out? This is their country," Gyne said. At the camp, the chal-

Bengal Govt impossible to form without me in 2026: Humayun

SAUGAR SENGUPTA
■ Kolkata

Rebel and expelled Trinamool Congress MLA Humayun Kabir — who recently shot into prominence for laying the foundation stone of a second Babri Mosque in Murshidabad district of Bengal drawing lakhs of Muslims to attend the function — on Wednesday iterated that he would emerge as the "kingmaker" post 2026 Assembly elections as no political party in the State would be able to gain majority. Kabir who is likely to announce a new political outfit on December 22, asked the "media and all other stake holders" to "watch out the names of the office bearers of my party and then make a conclusion." Slamming the Trinamool Congress for considering the Muslim population of the State as their "paternal fief" so as to perennially use them as vote banks, he said, "now on I will tell the Muslims not to be a vote bank but a stakeholder in the power politics." Disclosing that his party would field candidates in 135 seats, Kabir said that, "in Bengal Muslims voters have an influence in about 90 seats with a voter percent-



Expelled Trinamool Congress MLA Humayun Kabir

age hovering between 40 and 70 percent. so I wish to tell them to vote for me and let my party win these 90 seats. I the remaining 204 seats let the TMC and BJP fight whoever wins will have to come to me to form a Government without the support of my party no party in Bengal will be able to form a Government just wait and watch what happens in the State's electoral arena in a few months from now." Kabir was recently suspended from the TMC after he openly proposed to construct a Babri Mosque in Murshidabad. It is another matter

however that a section of the critics suspect whether he has been fielded by Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee to pull back the fleeting Muslim votes on the one hand and help Hindu votes come behind her after her suspending him on Babri Mosque issue. Referring to Kabir's "confidence" of winning 90 seats, TMC spokesperson Arup Chakrabarty said "let him first win his own seat at Rejinagar and let his party first save the deposits in the seats they would contest he is presently daydreaming let him daydream by the time he emerges from his sleep the

TMC will win and Mamata Banerjee will have formed her Government for the fourth time." Meanwhile, a section of the State leadership of All India Majlis-e-Ittehadul Muslimeen (AIMIM), of Asaduddin Owaisi which had been expanding its base in Bengal on Wednesday said that they were not presently thinking of forming any alliance with Kabir's party saying "his views and conduct are politically suspect and ideologically incompatible." Kabir however said he had kept his options for talks open for any like-minded group.

Man faces boycott for eating at Dalit's home in MP; probe underway

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ Raisen (MP)

A man from Raisen district in Madhya Pradesh has alleged that his village panchayat ordered a social boycott against him and his family after he ate food at a Dalit's family as part of a post-death ritual, prompting the authorities to launch a probe. The incident occurred in Piparia Puria village of Udaypura, around 100 km from the district headquarters around a month back and came to light on Tuesday during a "jan sunwai" (public hearing) of the matter. The village panchayat allegedly ordered the social boycott of three members of an upper caste community for consuming food at the Dalit man's house, and set certain conditions before them, including organising a feast, to avoid ostracism. While two of the three men

accepted the panchayat's conditions and performed 'penance', one of them - Bharat Singh Dhakad - approached the police and lodged a complaint against the village body, alleging that he and his family members were being treated like "untouchables" and barred from taking part in social events, a police official said. The village sarpanch, however, dismissed the allegations. Udaypura is the assembly constituency of Madhya Pradesh Minister of State for Health Narendra Shivaji Patel. Udaypura tehsildar Dinesh Bargale said that the Dhakad filed an application to the collector during the public hearing on Tuesday, accusing the panchayat of issuing the social boycott order. Dhakad made these allegations against the sarpanch, deputy sarpanch, and panchs of the concerned gram panchayat, he said.

THE PANCHAYAT ORDERED THE SOCIAL BOYCOTT OF THREE UPPER CASTE MEN FOR CONSUMING FOOD AT THE DALIT MAN'S HOUSE

"The matter is being investigated and if the allegations are found to be true, legal action will be taken against those involved," Bargale said. Dhakad said he and his fellow gram panchayat assistant secretary Manoj Patel and teacher Satyendra Singh Raghuvanshi had a meal at a Dalit family's house in the village as part of a 'shradddha' ceremony. But after the incident, the panchayat passed a resolution declaring that eating at a Dalit's house was a "greater sin than cow slaughter" and those who indulged in it must purify themselves by bathing in the Ganga river and by offering a

feast in the village, he said. Dhakad claimed that under pressure from the panchayat, Patel and Raghuvanshi bathed in the Ganga river and organised a feast in the village, but he refused to comply. After this, he and his family were socially boycotted and excluded from all events, he said. Dhakad said that he was being treated like an untouchable and barred from entering the temple. He also claimed that when he raised this issue with the panchayat, he was asked to have his head shaved to absolve himself of the sins and perform the "pind daan" (a post-death ritual) for his father while he was still alive. When contacted, sarpanch Bhagwan Singh Patel dismissed the allegations as baseless. "If someone in the village is not inviting him to their programme due to personal reasons, then it is his personal matter.

Allegations like untouchability are not correct," he said. The sarpanch said that MLA and Minister of State Narendra Shivaji Patel also came and tried to convince the people. "But if they are not listening, what can he do?" Sub-Divisional Police Officer (SDOP) Kunwar Singh Mukati said that excluding someone from social events in the village, treating them as untouchables, or imposing punishments such as bathing in the Ganga, performing feasts, and tonsuring ceremonies are punishable offences under the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS). "Spreading social animosity, forcing social punishment through pressure or threats, and preventing social participation are crimes. Every citizen has the right to live with dignity and equality. Therefore, if such a case comes to light, an investigation will be conducted and

the culprits will be prosecuted," he said. When Satyendra Singh Raghuvanshi, the teacher who ate with Dhakad at the Dalit's house, was contacted about this, he said that he is no longer facing any boycott. He said he has been posted at the Government middle school in the village for the last 16 years and the Dalit man, where he went to have meal, has been his friend. "I do not believe in the caste system, so I went to my friend Santosh Mehtar's house to eat during the 'shradddha' ceremony. Someone made a video of the incident and circulated it locally, which led to a controversy," he said. Talking to PTI, Raghuvanshi admitted that as per the panchayat's order, he went to his guru's ashram in Allahabad and came back after bathing at the sangam (confluence) of rivers. "I don't have complaints against anyone," he said.

Sai rolls out Mukhyamantri Gramin Bus Seva Yojana-II to 180 villages

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Raipur

Chhattisgarh's efforts to strengthen transportation in its remote forested regions took another significant step forward with the launch of the second phase of the Mukhyamantri Gramin Bus Seva Yojana. Chief Minister Vishnu Deo Sai inaugurated the expansion and virtually flagged off the new buses from his residential office on Wednesday. Under this phase, 24 additional buses have begun operating on 23 routes across 10 districts of the Bastar and Surguja divisions. With this rollout, 180 more villages are being brought under direct bus connectivity. Several residents from remote tribal areas arrived at the programme in the same buses introduced during the first phase of the scheme. They shared with Chief Minister that travel to block headquarters, which once demanded long and difficult journeys, is now considerably easier and more reliable. Villagers from the Sukma-Dornapal-Konta route said they travelled nearly 110 kilometers by bus to attend the event, a journey that earlier posed considerable hardship. Chief Minister Vishnu Deo Sai noted that the Government is committed to



ensuring that no village in Chhattisgarh remains cut off from mainstream development. He said the initiative is not only expanding transport services but is also helping bridge social and economic gaps by connecting rural communities to towns and essential services. The strengthened public transport network in remote regions is proving to be a milestone, offering safer, timely and more convenient transportation. Conveying good wishes to residents of the 180 newly connected villages, Chief Minister said the improved transport links are expected to ease daily life and open new pathways for growth. Transport Minister Kedar Kashyap stated that bus services are now reaching even

those forested and inaccessible pockets where no public transport had ever operated. He described the scheme as especially beneficial for the tribal-dominated belts of Bastar and Surguja. The first phase of the scheme was launched on October 4, 2025, by Union Home Minister Shri Amit Shah, connecting 250 villages. With the second phase now in operation, the coverage has expanded further, adding another 180 villages. Deputy Chief Ministers Vijay Sharma and Arun Sao along with other cabinet ministers Chief Minister's Secretary Rahul Bhagat, Transport Secretary S. Prakash and senior officials were present.

Vande Mataram debate maligns Nehru: Ramesh

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ New Delhi

The Opposition on Wednesday accused BJP leaders of distorting history, with Congress leader Jairam Ramesh saying that the whole aim of the debate on 150 years of Vande Mataram was to malign first prime minister Jawaharlal Nehru. Participating in the debate in the Rajya Sabha, Ramesh accused the BJP of insulting freedom fighters who sacrificed their lives for the country. "Those who have spoken from the other side have proved. They wanted to be historians, but they have become 'distortions'," Ramesh said. He gave details of letters exchanged between leaders including Subhas Chandra Bose, Rabindranath Tagore, Rajendra Prasad, and Jawaharlal Nehru over Vande Mataram. "Rajendra Prasad wrote to Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel on September 28, 1937, raising concerns and worries prevalent in large sections of our political system on Vande Mataram, and requesting Patel that the Congress Working Committee (CWC) take a stand. Was it appeasement? Are you accusing Rajendra Prasad, Sardar Patel of appeasement?" Ramesh said. "On October 28, 1937 CWC passed a resolution about Vande Mataram. Mahatma

Gandhi, Subhas Chandra Bose, Vallabhbhai Patel, Jawaharlal Nehru, Maulana Azad, Acharya Kripalani, GB Pant. They were all present," Ramesh said. He added that on October 30, 1927, Tagore issued a press statement that he had advised the CWC that they pass a resolution to adopt the first two stanzas of Vande Mataram as 'national anthem', and it was later adopted as the national song. He said a communal environment was created in 1937. "Many organisations were responsible. One of them is celebrating centenary now. They spread communal fire, and today they tell us Congress did appeasement," he said. Ramesh accused the ruling party of insulting Tagore, and said, "Why is the Government making this Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay vs Tagore. They wanted to insult Nehru, but they ended up insulting Tagore". The Congress leader slammed the BJP for its "appeasement" jibes at his party, and said BJP ideologue Syama Prasad Mookerjee had formed a Government with AK Fazlul Huq, who later presented the Lahore resolution for the formation of Pakistan. "A lot has been said, the aim of this whole debate is to malign Nehru. This is a part of that project. You are insulting people who sacrificed their lives for the nation," he added.

Fadnavis vows action in Pune land deal

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ Nagpur

Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis on Wednesday said that from the very beginning, the Government's stand in the Pune land deal case, involving a firm linked to Deputy CM Ajit Pawar's son Parth, was not to protect anyone, and assured that action will be taken against whoever is found guilty. He was talking to reporters on the sidelines of a programme here. Earlier in the day, the Bombay High Court raised sharp questions regarding the police probe into the controversial Pune land deal, asking whether they were protecting Parth Pawar by not naming him in the land deal FIR.

Noting that Parth, a majority partner in the firm involved, was omitted from

the FIR, a single bench of Justice Madhav Jamdar asked, "Is the police protecting the son of the deputy Chief Minister and only investigating others?" The sale of 40 acres of land in Pune's upscale Mundhwa area for ₹300 crore to Amadea Enterprises LLP, in which Parth is a majority partner, came under scrutiny after it emerged that the plot belongs to the Government and it could not be sold. The firm was also allegedly exempted from paying Rs 21 crore in stamp duty. When asked about the HC's remarks in the case, Fadnavis said, "I have not heard what the HC has said, but a proper reply will be submitted in the court about what it has asked for. From the very beginning, the Government's stand is not to protect anyone."



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Order Order

Chanda Kochhar and husband move Bombay HC challenging ED attachment of property



Chanda Kochhar Deepak Kochhar

Former ICICI Bank MD and CEO Chanda Kochhar and her husband Deepak Kochhar have moved the Bombay High Court challenging the Enforcement Directorate's (ED) attachment of their properties in a money laundering case linked to the Videocon loan scam. ED has attached ₹70 crore worth properties of Chanda Kochhar and husband. The have approached the Court against the order of the Appellate Tribunal under the Smugglers and Foreign Exchange Manipulators (Forfeiture of Property) Act (SAFEMA) which upheld the ED's attachment.

The matter was listed on Wednesday before a Bench of Justices Bharati Dangre and Shyam C Chandak which granted time to the ED to file its reply. The matter will be heard next on December 16. According to Kochhars, the attachment by the ED was in excess of the prescribed procedure.

The proceedings arose from a Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) case alleging that loans worth ₹1,730 crore were sanctioned to various Videocon Group companies between 2009 and 2011 when Chanda Kochhar was the bank's chief. Her husband was caught for taking kickbacks from Videocon for allotting loans. The loans later turned into non-performing assets, allegedly causing losses to ICICI Bank. After the loan was disbursed, ₹64 crore was transferred by Videocon to Nupower Renewables Pvt Ltd (NRPL), a firm owned by Deepak Kochhar.

SC directs Haryana to restore green land to its original State

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

The Supreme Court on Wednesday directed the Haryana urban development body to restore the green area to its original state where 40 fully-grown trees were uprooted to build an accessible road to a newly constructed BJP office in Karnal. A bench of Justices J B Pardiwala and K V Viswanathan agreed with the submissions of advocate Bhupender Pratap Singh, appearing for a 1971 war veteran that trees were felled illegally to construct an approach road for the BJP office.

The bench was not satisfied with the submission of Additional Solicitor General Vikramjit Banerjee appearing for the Haryana Government that all required permissions were taken for allotment and all green norms were followed.

He assured the court that trees would be planted in proportion to the number of trees that were felled for the approach road.

The top court gave three months to Haryana Shahri Vikas Pradhikaran (HSVP) and Karnal Municipal Corporation to restore the green land in a residential colony to its original state.

It, however, refused to go into the larger question of the legality of allotment of land in a residential colony adjoining the national highway to the Karnal unit of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), saying it is too late to go into that question.

On November 26, the top court termed as "pathetic" and pulled up the Haryana Government and its urban development body for uprooting 40 fully grown trees to build an accessible road to a newly constructed BJP office in Karnal. It sought a remedial action plan,

warning them of being "taken to task". The apex court was hearing a petition filed by a 1971 war veteran, challenging the dismissal of his plea by the Punjab and Haryana High Court on May 3 against the arbitrary allocation of a plot in a residential area to the ruling BJP in Haryana and later, the construction of an access road for its office by uprooting 40 fully grown trees situated in a green area.

It had asked Additional Solicitor General Vikramjit Banerjee, appearing for the Haryana Government, to come out with an explanation on the issue.

Singh, appearing for Col Davinder Singh Rajput (ret'd), a 1971 war veteran, contended that land was not allotted according to norms to the BJP in a residential colony.

Rajput (79) submitted in his plea that he was wounded in the war and a decorated soldier, having been awarded the Vir Chakra for gallantry.

He had purchased a plot, measuring 1,000 square yards, in Sector 9, Urban Estate, Karnal, from the Haryana Shehri Vikas Pradhikaran (HSVP), then the Haryana Urban Development Authority (HUDA).

Rajput said he was aggrieved by the arbitrary allotment of the land adjacent to his plot in a residential plotted colony to the ruling political party in the state in complete violation of the provisions of the Haryana Urban Development Act, 1977 and the relevant policies of the Department of Town and Country Planning and HUDA.

"The petitioner was also aggrieved by the felling of 40 trees in the green belt to make a 10-metre pathway through the 100-metre green belt in front of the house of the petitioner.



IndiGo crisis: Delhi HC pulls up Govt, airlines

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

The Delhi High Court on Wednesday questioned the central Government for not taking timely action to check the crisis caused by IndiGo flight cancellations and asked why the situation was allowed to precipitate, with lakhs of passengers stranded and other airlines charging hefty fares.

"The question is why, at all, this crisis arose and what have you been doing?" a bench of Chief Justice Devendra Kumar Upadhyaya and Justice Tushar Rao Gedela said and directed the Government and the airline to take steps to adequately compensate the affected persons.

The court asked the authorities if they were "helpless" or they could have taken action against IndiGo after it failed to implement Flight Duty Time Limitation (FDTL) rules, including pilot rest rules, by November 1 — which they blamed for the crisis.

The High Court said that besides the trouble and harassment caused to the stranded passengers, the question is of the losses caused to the country's economy.

Raising the issue of surge pricing, the bench also asked how other airlines could take advantage of the crisis situation and charge hefty sums for tickets from the passengers.

"The ticket which was available for ₹5,000, the prices went up to ₹30,000 to ₹35,000. If there was a crisis, how could other airlines be permitted to take advantage? How can it (ticket price) go up to ₹35,000 and ₹39,000? How could other airlines start charging? It's like a pound of flesh, how could this happen," asked the bench, which heard the matter for more than one-and-a-half hours.

The bench directed that by January 22, the next date of hearing, if the inquiry initiated by a



committee into the disruption in flight operations over the past week is complete, its report should be submitted to the court in a sealed cover.

"We appreciate the steps taken by the Ministry of Civil Aviation and the DGCA, but what bothers us is how such a situation was allowed to precipitate, leading to the stranding of lakhs of passengers unattended at airports across the country.

"This has not only caused inconvenience to the passengers but also affected the economy, as in the present day, fast movement of passengers is an important aspect to keep the economy functioning," the bench said.

The court was informed by the counsel for the Centre and the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) that the statutory mechanism was totally in place and a show-cause notice was issued to IndiGo, which apologised

profusely. Additional Solicitor General Chetan Sharma, representing the ministry and DGCA, said the crisis precipitated on account of various non-compliances of the guidelines issued by the authorities from time to time, including flight duty hours of crew members.

He said the unprecedented price surge has been controlled and capped, which had never been done before. He added that from time to time, the authorities have asked IndiGo for the timely implementation of Civil Aviation Requirements (CAR) provisions.

He said repeated extensions were given to airlines to implement FDTL rules, which include pilot rest rules, and when the deadline of November 1 came, other airlines fell in line but IndiGo did not.

To this, the bench said, "In case any airline failed to adhere, what is the provision available to you? Are you helpless? So you are expressing

your inability. What action could you have taken against them for failure to adhere?"

The court, which was hearing a PIL seeking directions to the Centre to provide support and refunds to passengers affected by the cancellation of hundreds of flights by IndiGo, said these steps have been taken by the Government once the crisis erupted. "The question is why, at all, this crisis arose and what have you been doing?" it said.

Senior advocate Sandeep Sethi, representing IndiGo, informed the court that the crisis occurred on account of a multitude of factors, including unforeseen issues like technical glitches and adverse weather conditions in North India.

The court directed the airline to make immediate arrangements for compensating the stranded passengers, not only for the cancellation of flights but for other troubles caused to them.

"What about the agony? Because they faced hostile staff. Think of those who got stranded for a week," it told Sethi.

"Since a committee has already been constituted where IndiGo will have an opportunity to put forth its case, we refrain from making any observation as to the reason for the disruptions of flight operations of the airline.

"While we have taken cognisance of the issue in public interest, we make it clear that the observations are aimed to ensure that best public interest is served both by the Government and IndiGo," the bench said.

The court directed the authorities to ensure that the situation normalises soon and all airlines employ an adequate number of pilots so that FDTL provisions are followed.

It further asked the Government why it did not implement FDTL rules in time and questioned whether the failure to timely implement the rules would not compromise passengers' safety.

"If a pilot is supposed to make two landings in a night and he is doing six. This means he is compromising with passengers' safety," the bench said.

The court was hearing a PIL filed by advocates Akhil Rana and Utkarsh Sharma seeking a judicial inquiry into the IndiGo crisis. The plea also sought fair compensation to people whose flights were cancelled and relief for people stuck at the airports.

The court, however, expressed dissatisfaction over the manner in which the PIL was filed without any research and documentation.

On Wednesday, IndiGo cancelled nearly 220 flights at three major airports. IndiGo has been facing heat from both the Government and the passengers for cancelling hundreds of flights since December 2, citing regulatory changes in the pilots' flight duty.

Compensation: Expect SIT to also probe past NOIDA CEOs, says SC

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

The Supreme Court Wednesday said the SIT constituted by it to probe higher payment of compensation to farmers for their land allegedly in "connivance" and "collusion" of officials from NOIDA must also investigate the chief executive officers and others at helm of the authority for the past 10-15 years. A bench of Chief Justice Surya Kant and justices Ujjal Bhuyan and N Kotiswar Singh also gave the Special Investigation Team (SIT) two more months to complete the investigation.

Solicitor General Tushar Mehta, appearing for NOIDA, said he wants to file an affidavit to put forward the view of the authority in the matter.

The top court clarified that farmers who have been given higher payments will not be penalised and no coercive

action will be taken against them.

Senior advocate Siddharth Dave, appearing for one of the farmers who has allegedly got higher payment for his land, said that he has been receiving notices from the SIT to come and record his statement. "Kindly protect the farmers, as it is not their fault," he urged the bench.

The bench said it has already clarified in its earlier orders that investigation is not to harass the farmers but to probe the connivance and collusion of officials, who indulged in higher payments.

It took on record the status report filed by the SIT in which three months time has been sought to complete the investigation. On August 13, the top court ordered an SIT probe against NOIDA officials for allegedly colluding with builders to pay compensations to land owners beyond their entitlement. It



had accepted the findings of the SIT which found prima facie substance in the allegations and asked the recommendations of the SIT headed by senior IPS officer SB Shiradkar to be given to Uttar Pradesh chief secretary who was asked to place it before the council of ministers to consider converting Noida into a "metropolitan council". Taking serious note of the

SIT's findings, the top court had constituted a fresh SIT comprising three senior IPS officers to assess the bank accounts and assets of erring NOIDA officials and other beneficiaries of the irregularities with the help of forensic auditors and experts from economic offence wings.

"DGP, UP shall constitute an SIT comprising three police officers of IPS cadre to

investigate the issues as identified by the previous SIT..." it had said. The top court on January 23 framed four issues to be investigated by the SIT — whether the quantum of compensation paid to the land owners was higher than they are entitled to in terms of the judgments passed by the courts from time to time; if so, who were the officers/officials responsible for such exorbitant payment; whether there was any collusion or connivance between the beneficiaries and officers/officials of NOIDA; and whether the overall functioning of Noida lacks transparency, fairness and commitment to the cause of public interest.

It had directed the new SIT to immediately register preliminary enquiries and proceed to inquire into the points highlighted by the previous SIT on the issue of collusion or connivance

between the beneficiaries and officials of Noida.

"If the SIT, after preliminary enquiry, finds that a prima facie cognisable offense was committed, it shall register the case and proceed further in accordance with law," the top court had said.

In order to bring transparency and fairness in the investigation, the top court had directed the chief secretary to post a chief vigilance officer preferably from an IPS cadre or on deputation from Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) within four two weeks.

It also directed the state Government to set up a citizen advisory board in Noida immediately.

"Similarly, the chief secretary should also put up the matter before competent authority and ensure that the citizen advisory board is constituted within four weeks," it had said.

Sandesara deposits ₹5,100 crore in SC as OTS to get out of criminal cases



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

The Sandesara Group, facing several criminal cases, deposited ₹5,100 crore in the Supreme Court as One Time Settlement (OTS) to banks. With this payment as OTS, all criminal cases against the Group and its fugitive promoters filed by CBI, ED, Income Tax and SFIO and all cases will be quashed as per the Supreme Court's order dated November 19. In a statement issued on Wednesday, the Group said that they have remitted ₹5,100 crore at the apex court on December 6.

"Nitin Sandesara, Chetan Sandesara, and family have deposited 5,100 crores with the Registry of the Honorable Supreme Court of India as per the Supreme Courts order on November 19, 2025. The deposit of ₹5,100 crores has been fully made as of 6th of December 2025. This comprehensively brings closure to all cases regarding the Sandesara Family and their companies pending before multiple judicial forums and Government agencies since 2017," said the statement.

In 2017, Sandesara brothers Nitin and

Chetan and family members escaped from India and settled in Nigeria by using their illegally obtained Albanian passports. They were facing CBI and ED cases for bank loan frauds of more than ₹16,000 crore. The ED has attached properties worth ₹10,000 crore and by this OTS scheme, Government has agreed to withdraw all the cases against the fugitives.

In a curious development, the Bench comprising Justices JK Maheshwari and Vijay Bishnoi on November 19 allowed the fugitive Chetan-Nitish Sandesara brothers' firms to deposit ₹5,100 crore as OTS in the Registry by December 17 to avoid all cases, including criminal cases registered by various probe agencies. The apex court agreed to the Central Government, which submitted the OTS scheme, including withdrawing all cases in a sealed cover, on November 18. With this order Supreme Court has allowed fugitive Sandesara brothers and their Sterling Group to go scot-free from all criminal cases filed by CBI, ED and Income Tax related to bank loan frauds by paying ₹5,100 crore, which is only 1/3 of the dues.

Chandrashekhar trust dispute revived, court allows suit alleging mismanagement

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

A Delhi Court has allowed the transposition of PS Prasad as co-plaintiff and the amended memo of parties be filed within 30 days in a 15 year old litigation case related to Bharat Yatra Trust founded by late Prime Minister Chandrashekhar. The order, delivered by Dwarka District Sumit Dalal, hence resolves multiple procedural and jurisdictional objections that had stalled progress in the matter for years.

The litigation began in 2011 when three individuals — Late Indubhai C Patel, Late Ayub Khan, and HN Sharma (Political Advisor to late Prime Minister Chandrashekhar) — approached the Delhi High Court seeking judicial directions into the administration of the Trust. With the deaths of Patel and Khan in 2015 and 2016, respectively, the suit was being pursued solely by Sharma, prompting a challenge that the mandatory requirement of "two or more persons" under Section 92 CPC was no longer satisfied.

The Court rejected the argument that the proceedings had abated, clarifying that a Section 92 suit is considered "instituted" only after leave is formally granted. The court directed, With the impleadment of PS Prasad as co-plaintiff, the statutory requirement of "two or more persons having an interest in the trust" stands satisfied for the purposes of consideration of leave under Section 92 CPC.

In this context, the Court allowed the application of PS Prasad — an admitted trustee of the Bharat Yatra Trust — holding that his presence satisfies the statutory requirement. The order notes that Prasad has been associated with the Trust since 1988, filed the original written statement on behalf of the Trust in 2011, and is acknowledged as a



Chandrashekhar

trustee even in the pleadings of Ayub Khan as Defendant No. 2.

Significantly, the Court also held that Sharma (sole surviving original plaintiff) has shown a prima facie, substantial and existing interest in the affairs and administration of Bharat Yatra Trust and Prasad is an admitted trustee and, therefore, has a clear and direct interest in the Trust's due administration.

Finding that the Trust is clearly a Public Charitable Institution and that the plaintiff contains allegations of breach of trust, mismanagement, and the need for court-supervised intervention, the judge formally granted leave under Section 92 CPC.

The suit will now proceed to trial, with parties directed to complete admission and denial of documents.

The order marks another chapter in a saga The Pioneer has followed closely for decades — both during Chandrashekhar's lifetime and after. In 2006, The Pioneer reported his desire to bequeath assets and the Bharat Yatra Kendras across Delhi, Haryana, Mumbai, and Ballia to the nation.

Editor's

TAKE

India's fire safety complacency

Far from being an isolated accident, the Goa tragedy is a stark reminder of systemic lapses and the urgent need to implement fire safety regulations in letter and spirit

A devastating fire at a popular Arpora nightclub claimed at least 25 lives in Goa. Yet another fire incident has been added to the already long list of such disasters in the country. As tragic as the Goa nightclub fire is, it is not an aberration. It is a symptom of a deeper, systemic failure India has refused to confront for far too long. What makes the Goa tragedy especially tragic is that it was avoidable had a little attention been paid to fire safety. Every fire incident gives clues about how to avoid it, yet nothing is done, no lessons learnt, no action taken. Fires in public places have been happening year after year in the country – at the Uphaar cinema in 1997, the AMRI hospital in 2011, the Surat coaching centre in 2019, and countless other similar incidents. These incidents should have been enough to wake the authorities from their deep slumber and act to implement the elaborate fire safety measures mandated by law, but that, unfortunately never happens and after sometime yet another tragedy adds to the long list.

How seriously we take fire safety is visible in any government building – fire buckets used as spittoons, non-functional fire alarms, fire exits used for storing trash, and fire extinguishers missing from their slots. Besides, no one has any idea how to deal with a fire emergency, as fire drills take place only on paper. Moreover, congestion and encroachments on streets make it literally impossible for fire tenders to reach the spot. Electrical short circuits, the major cause of concern, are only waiting to happen when wiring is loosely hanging and often bearing more load than it is designed to handle.

The Goa fire is a reminder that this complacency has a deadly cost. Preliminary investigations already hint at familiar and troubling lapses: overcrowding, blocked exits, non-functional fire alarms, inadequate staff training, and possibly an electrical malfunction. These are recurring patterns repeated across public and private spaces. Our chronic disregard for fire safety norms has made preventable deaths almost routine.

In the past each of these disasters triggered outrage, promises of reform, and inquiries that did not bring about any change in the mindset. Fire safety remains the last priority.

The nightclub fire once again reveals the gap between rules on paper and enforcement in practice. India's fire codes are not the problem; lax compliance is. Safety certificates are treated as bureaucratic stamps rather than life-and-death mandates. Inspections are irregular, penalties are too light, and loopholes are plentiful. What India desperately needs is not more laws, but the will to implement existing fire safety policies in letter and spirit. That requires making safety audits mandatory and non-negotiable, introducing criminal liability for negligence, strengthening fire departments, and empowering authorities to shut down violators. Technology – such as smart sensors, automated alarms, and digital compliance tracking – must also be integrated into fire prevention systems. Equally important is public awareness. The loss of 25 lives in Goa should serve as a collective reckoning. If we cannot learn from this disaster, then we are condemned to repeat it at the cost of innocent lives.

Breaking away from Macaulay

The Prime Minister has urged the nation to fully free itself from the psychological and cultural imprint of Thomas Babington Macaulay's 1835 educational blueprint by 2035 – two centuries after it was crafted to entrench colonial dominance in India



JS
RAJPUT

The Prime Minister exhorts the countrymen to move out of its demoralising influence fully and completely by 2035, when Macaulay's strategic planning completes its 200 years in India. That the PM should be talking about it in all seriousness reaffirms once again the ingenuity and acumen in the futuristic educational planning contained in Macaulay's Minutes of 1835, intended to cement English rule in India by demolishing Indian education and knowledge systems, hitting at the very roots of India's history, culture, scriptures, and individual self-respect. One of the most well-established villains of Indian educational discourse in the post-independence era has been Thomas Babington Macaulay and the contents of his Minutes of 1835.

The great success of Macaulay in his mission is crystal clear: India acknowledges the need in 2025 to proceed in a national mission mode to move out of the influence of slavery and self-negation that has engulfed the Indian mind-set and persists even after independence, and the National Education Policies of 1968, 1986/92, and NEP 2020. The relevant challenge is to analyse why India could not wash off the influence of an alien strategy even after serious intentions to do so were expressed earlier in policies and by policymakers in their discourses.

The widespread impact of Macaulay's ingenuity and foresight was so clinical, incisive, and widespread that it impeded the spread of the strength of the Indian knowledge quest to global knowledge and its civilisational contribution to the world outside. It was demoralisingly infectious to India and Indians, though vehemently beneficial to the empire. India needs to analyse it in the contemporary context and comprehend the strength of the ingredients contained in the Minutes of Macaulay that could transform the psyche of Indians and seriously injure a great tradition of knowledge quest. Not only this, it made Indians drift away from a sense of pride in their spiritually enriched culture that firmly believes that "Truth is one; the learned reveal it in various ways".




Could we take a view on how to refurbish the sense of pride and inspiration in Indian culture to this day? The manner in which Sanatan is shamelessly despised, and even Vande Mataram is detested, says a lot about the inadequacies in the intent, civility, and culture of the admirers of Macaulay's ingenuity and influence.

Macaulay, his ingenuity, and outcomes offer a great learning opportunity for policymakers and implementers working in the arena of education, culture, social cohesion, and religious amity in India. One insists on it while fully appreciating how seriously injurious but effective were his skills in demoralising an ancient people and making them



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THE WORLD
OUTSIDE

The author is an
educationist, a Padma Shri
awardee, and works in
religious amity and social
cohesion

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 The Pioneer

shift their reverence to an alien and subjugating culture and language. The respect for the English language that traversed to every home and hearth in India-including the illiterate-owes it completely to this one-man ingenuity.

Even today, practically everyone in India is convinced that the passage to a better future lies in learning the English language. This is what made the PM mention why it is also necessary to refurbish linguistic pride, as that alone offers a sound basis for cultural renaissance. Why do we need to refer to Macaulay for it? Yes, we do, and we need to do so with real sincerity and commitment. Even after eight decades of independence and repeated emphasis in NEP 2020 on the mother-tongue medium, the rush for admissions to English-medium schools in the capital city of Delhi from day one of schooling is just rising- and rising further. It represents the national urge.

And why should it not be? In the first week of December 2025, the media reported that for 613 positions of assistant professors in Haryana government colleges, 17,195 candidates applied, but only 151 could clear the English qualifying test. In the SC category, only two out of 60 qualified. English separates them and prevents them from entering the system, which is their rightful constitutional due. This is just one of numerous instances that could be cited as the suffering inflicted by the craze for English that persists practically unswayed even after independence, in spite of assurances being made in favour of the mother-tongue medium.

The rush for English-medium private schools and the social upliftment it assures lucky families remains a queer phenomenon across the spectrum. The great rush for urbanisation has generated numerous socio-cultural contexts that indicate the urban mindset. Preferred house-

maids are those with skills to place orders in English to home suppliers and read and understand items, expiry dates, etc., English being the preferred language of most malls and other home-delivery suppliers.

It was only a casual acquaintance with Macaulay in my university days, as I was studying and researching physics in the sixties of the last century. The compulsions of the English medium were naturally serious deterrents to most of us in acquiring the desired level of comprehension, forcing refuge in learning by rote. As one transitioned from physics to the arena of professional education, teacher education, and educational administration, one had to read Macaulay in detail and in depth. It became a professional requirement with increasing involvement and association with aspects such as curriculum development, teacher preparation, education policy formulation, and institution building. It was interesting to observe that everyone around-in institutions, meetings, and conferences-was keen to blame Macaulay for practically every misery that was thrust on India and its people by the British. Macaulay was "accepted" by practically most educationists and educators in India as the father of the doctrine: "To subjugate India, Indians must be delinked from India." Macaulay's Minutes of 1835 were implemented rather ruthlessly.

The English language, Western literature, Western civilisation, and culture were to be firmly established in India as the only path to becoming advanced and superior human beings. Not that everyone who mattered agreed, as some were interested in supporting Sanskrit and Arabic, but they were ignored and left to

their fate under the argument that these needed financial support, while English schools had a rush of fee-paying students from the upper echelons of society. It is a long story that has established Macaulay even in schemes of futuristic educational planning.

He succeeded in creating "a class of people, Indians in blood and colour, but English in tastes, in opinions, in morals, and in intellect." Over the last eight decades, India could not wriggle out of the clutches of the "Western cultural superiority syndrome". Will the PM's call make a difference? It could, only if serious efforts are initiated urgently to transform the institutional work culture in a mission mode. Further, individual inspiration and recognition could work wonders. NEP 2020 has the strength to achieve the target indicated by the PM within ten years. There are, however, certain basic systemic requirements to do so: cleaning up the regulatory mechanism, streamlining teacher recruitment systems, filling up all vacant teaching positions, appointing succeeding heads of institutions one month before the incumbent relinquishes charge, and imposing a strict ban on irregular, low-honorarium-based teachers at every stage.

The Pioneer

SINCE 1865

Reimagining family for India's queer youth



SUBROTO
CHATTERJEE

2ND OPINION
THE PIONEER

Family is meant to represent safety, warmth, and unconditional love. Yet for countless LGBTQA+ youth in India, it often brings rejection, fear, and profound loss. Many grow up hiding their identity, terrified of violence, humiliation, or abandonment if they reveal who they truly are. One young person recalls, "I never knew what was harder: hiding who I am every day or finally telling my parents and losing them... The care home felt cold, but at least I could breathe" (Queerbeat, 2025).

These stories reflect a much wider crisis. Across India, queer youth face significantly higher risks of homelessness, violence, and mental-health struggles after family rejection. Studies show that LGBTQA+ youth are up to four times more likely to attempt suicide (Newport

Academy, 2024), and in India, suicidal ideation among transgender youth can reach 31% (Chandra et al., 2016). Globally, nearly half of trans and non-binary youth contemplate suicide each year (The Trevor Project, 2024).

But beneath the despair lies a profound truth: family is not defined by blood alone. Indian law increasingly recognises that belonging is created through care, dignity, and acceptance. As legal scholar Dr Vivek Divan notes, laws must acknowledge that the experience of family cannot remain confined to a single definition (Scroll, 2025). When biological families fail, the state must ensure that no child is left unprotected.

Much of this rejection is rooted in cultural expectations-rigid gender norms, heteronormative pressures, religious ideas of "honour", and deeply embedded stigma. Transgender children are blamed for shame; gay and lesbian youth are told they are immoral; bisexual and asexual youth face erasure. Many are pushed into so-called "corrections", ranging from prayer rituals to conversion-style therapy. These beliefs remain powerful, but India's Constitution offers a counterweight: the promise of equality, dignity, and protection for every child.

India's legal framework reinforces this commitment. The Constitution prohibits discrimination and guaran-

tees child welfare. India's ratification of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child commits the nation to providing safety and belonging for all children. The Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act (JJ Act), revised in 2015, remains the strongest legal mechanism protecting children who need care, rehabilitation, and alternative family placements.

After the 2014 NALSA ruling, single individuals-regardless of gender identity or sexual orientation-can adopt under secular law. Yet barriers persist: queer couples cannot adopt jointly due to the requirement of a "stable marital relationship", and single queer adopters still face bias from case workers.

Despite this, progress is taking root. Parent-support groups such as Sweekar are helping families embrace their children. Queer-affirmative therapists, legal-aid collectives, and youth helplines play critical roles in providing affirmation and safety.

India stands at a pivotal moment. The path ahead must ensure that no queer child is silenced and no chosen family is ignored. Family is love – and when biology cannot offer it, society and law must. Every child deserves a home where they can finally be themselves.

The writer is an activist and specialist in gender issues, with a focus on gender rights

PIC TALK



Artists perform a traditional dance during the UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage event at the Red Fort in New Delhi.

PHOTO: PTI

DIGITAL EXPERIENCE



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TARIFFS RISK CONSTRAINING FARMERS VIA SHORT-SIGHTED PROTECTION

President Trump's warning regarding proposed tariffs on Indian agricultural imports, particularly rice, and fertilisers from Canada. While the President's desire to protect the "backbone of America" – its farmers – is understandable, the strategy of aggressive tariffs raises serious economic concerns that warrant closer examination.

He argues that "tariffs, again, solve the problem in two minutes"; however, global trade economics is rarely so straightforward. Although tariffs may offer short-term relief to domestic rice growers by inflating import prices, their wider consequences are complex and often damaging.

First, consumers will feel the strain. Indian Basmati rice serves a distinct culinary market in the United States that domestic

varieties cannot easily replace. Excessive tariffs therefore operate as an indirect tax on households, retailers, and restaurants dependent on these products. Second, trade functions on reciprocity. India imports substantial volumes of American almonds, cotton, and pulses. Protectionism frequently triggers retaliation, and higher barriers on rice could invite countermeasures harming US exporters instead.

Finally, Indian ownership of major US rice brands shows how integrated supply chains are. Dumping claims need scrutiny, but blunt tariffs risk fuelling inflation rather than solving structural issues. Supporting farmers is essential, but lasting solutions depend on diplomacy and market expansion, not short-term barriers.

VIDYASAGAR KETHIRI | NEW DELHI

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

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Deepavali gains global heritage status

Deepavali, one of India's most cherished cultural and spiritual festivals, has been officially inscribed on UNESCO's Intangible Cultural Heritage List, the international body announced on Wednesday, 9 December. UNESCO confirmed the decision following deliberations at the 20th session of its Intergovernmental Committee for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage.

The session, which began on Monday, is being held at Delhi's historic Red Fort, marking the first occasion that India has hosted a UNESCO committee meeting of this scale. During the week-long event, 67 nominations from nearly 80 countries were examined and discussed by international representatives and cultural experts.

The Red Fort has been designated as the principal venue, hosting dignitaries, curated exhibitions, traditional performances, and ceremonial lighting of diyas highlighting the artistic practices associated with Deepavali.

Alongside Deepavali, Chhath Puja, dedicated to the Sun God, was also nominated for UNESCO's Representative List. With this inclusion, India now has 16 recognised elements, including Kumbh Mela, Durga Puja, Garba, Yoga, Vedic chanting, Ramlila, Ramman, and Kutiyattam.

BHAGWAN THADANI | MUMBAI

Protect electoral workers from intimidation

Apropos, "SC flags threats to BLOs," *The Pioneer*, December 10. The Supreme Court's stern warning that intimidation of Booth-Level Officers (BLOs) could lead to anarchy carries deep significance amid rising political hostility intruding into administrative functioning. BLOs, who constitute the backbone of India's electoral machinery, have increasingly faced obstruction, coercion, and open threats from political leaders and activists.

These pressures are particularly visible in states marked by intense partisan rivalry, where neutrality of field-level officials is routinely questioned or undermined. The Court's observation reiterates a fundamental constitutional principle.

The concern is intensified by the heavy workload borne by BLOs. From voter verification to maintaining sensitive rolls, they work under constant political pressure. Disturbingly, reports of severe stress, and even suicides, reveal a grave systemic failure needing urgent attention. By warning that intimidation of BLOs will lead to chaos, the Supreme Court has sent a clear message. It is now the responsibility of state authorities and political actors to protect and respect these officials, without whom free and fair elections are imperilled.

N SADHASIVA REDDY | BENGALURU

Patriotism reduced to hollow theatre

Parliament may shout "Vande Mataram" until its walls crack, yet the hypocrisy behind such displays remains impossible to ignore. It is deeply ironic for any government to lecture citizens on patriotism while steadily eroding the values the anthem itself celebrates. Repetition of a sacred song cannot conceal governance failures, nor can it mend a fractured nation.

"Vande Mataram" venerates the motherland – its rivers, soil, freedom, and people. Today, rivers are polluted, lands are commodified, freedoms are curtailed, and communities are deliberately polarised for electoral gain. If this is the definition of devotion, then the nation bleeds while its self-appointed guardians engage in performative nationalism. Which "Vande Mataram" is being invoked? The one that honours farmers, or the one under which farmers are driven to despair? The one that celebrates unity, or the one weaponised to enforce conformity? Invoking a revered song while violating its spirit insults both history and conscience. This controversy is not about love for the nation. It serves as a convenient smokescreen, diverting attention from unemployment, inflation, corruption, injustice, and an atmosphere of fear. Patriotism shields failing governance.

NOOPUR BARUAH | TEZPUR

Muslims have been insecure in India for a long time

Why do present-day Muslims feel ‘insecure’ in India? No one holds today’s Muslims responsible for the atrocities committed against Hindus by successive Islamic invaders. Treating figures like Babur as role models initiates an endless cycle. Much of Muslim ‘insecurity’ results from this action-reaction syndrome



BALBIR PUNJ

Are Muslims a persecuted group in India during Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s administration? Do they feel insecure under his governance? When did Muslims in the Indian subcontinent feel safe and protected? Were they comfortable while Gandhiji and Pandit Nehru dominated the Indian public space? What factors contribute to feelings of insecurity among them?

These questions have come to the forefront following two recent incidents. On December 5, the ‘secular’ crowd celebrated the return of Sunali Khatoon, a pregnant Muslim woman, and her eight-year-old son following a Supreme Court order, after they were deported earlier this year to Bangladesh. Meanwhile, another case is unfolding in the Supreme Court to determine whether the Rohingyas are refugees or illegal infiltrators who should be deported in the interest of national security.

Sunali Khatoon is jubilant, looking forward to delivering her baby in India, a move that has caught ‘secular’ media attention. She is being presented as a symbol of a Muslim woman’s love for India. Similarly, this sentiment is often invoked to portray the Rohingya refugees’ desire to seek sanctuary in India after being banished from their homeland in Myanmar.

The irony is striking, and the contradiction is too galling to ignore. The Left-liberals are now lauding Sunali’s return as a ‘historic’ event. They are also seeking the rehabilitation of the Rohingyas in India. And they are the ones who, for over a decade, have relentlessly portrayed India as a nation that is ‘anti-Muslim’, ‘intolerant’, and ‘unsafe for Muslims’ under PM Modi.




See the contradiction. If India is ‘unsafe’, why should Sunali’s decision to deliver her next child in India be celebrated? Instead, she should be warned against any such move on her part by her ‘secular’ well-wishers. Will the mother and her yet-to-be-born child be safe in BJP-dominated India? And why are there now determined efforts to settle the Rohingyas?

How does one explain this perfidious



WHY DO PRESENT-DAY MUSLIMS FEEL ‘INSECURE’ IN INDIA? NO ONE HOLDS TODAY’S MUSLIMS RESPONSIBLE FOR THE ATROCITIES COMMITTED AGAINST HINDUS BY SUCCESSIVE ISLAMIC INVADERS

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behaviour of the ‘secular’ pack? Due to its colonial mindset, this class harbours a visceral hatred towards Prime Minister Narendra Modi. One of the simplest tactics to arraign PM Modi, both domestically and internationally, is to propagate the claim that India is unsafe for minorities, especially Muslims, under his leadership.

Muslims in India indeed feel insecure. But that is not a new development. Their sense of insecurity and alienation has persisted for centuries, dating back to the death of Aurangzeb in 1707, after which the Mughal Empire began to disintegrate rapidly. As a result, Muslims’ ability to persecute Hindus waned quickly. This change in power dynamics upset them, for they could no longer torment Hindus as before and earn religious merit.

Following the collapse of the Mughal Empire, the Maratha flag was flying high across India. Muslims felt ‘insecure’ and sought help from foreign invaders. The North Indian Sufi scholar Shah Waliullah Dehlavi-whose intellectual legacy later inspired the Taliban-invited the Afghan ruler Ahmad Shah Abdali to invade India to re-establish Islamic rule over the

‘kafirs’. Abdali’s victory in the Third Battle of Panipat (1761) weakened India and facilitated the subsequent British ascendancy in Delhi by 1803. Had Waliullah not summoned Abdali, India’s history might have taken a markedly different trajectory.

However, for a while, Hindus and Muslims were on an even keel following the British colonisation of India, which completely dislodged local power structures. Both communities came together, leading to the 1857 uprising, which ended in a British victory.

To perpetuate their rule, the British began pursuing the ancient Roman adage Divide et impera, often translated as ‘divide and conquer’. The Muslim leadership, sorely missing the times when they pulverised the Hindus at will, willingly walked into the colonial trap, became British allies, and opposed Hindus and the Indian National Congress, which was leading India’s fight for independence.

When the British realised they would have to leave soon, with help from communists, they exploited Muslim ‘insecurity’ sentiments. The ‘insecure’ Muslim leadership once again raised the fear that

Hindu Raj would follow and Islam would be in danger after the British departure and the Congress leadership taking over independent India.

The doubting Thomases should read the 1938 report of the Pirpur Committee, set up by the Muslim League. Succinctly put, the report documents evidence condemning the Congress as a Hindu revivalist party with a strong anti-Muslim bias. It may shock some readers to learn that the allegations made by the Committee read the same as those made today against Modi and the BJP by Islamists and ‘secular’ parties, especially the Congress.

During that period, Congress leaders such as Mahatma Gandhi, Pandit Nehru, Acharya Kripalani, and Sardar Patel went to great lengths to reassure the ‘insecure’ Muslim community that it would be protected in independent India. Despite their heartfelt pleas, Muslims continued to feel ‘insecure’.

The ‘insecure’ Muslims organised and led violent protests in support of their demand for an independent Islamic nation. The result: timeless India was divided, and Pakistan was born after an internecine bloodbath in which lakhs of innocents were killed, millions were uprooted, and limitless pain and humil-

iation were inflicted.

So, the narrative that Muslims feel ‘insecure’ in India ruled by the Prime Minister is no surprise. Muslims have been ‘insecure’ long before even Modi or the RSS were born.

Muslims in India-whether Shia or Sunni, Deobandi or Bareilvi-enjoy not only equal rights but often greater constitutional protections than the Hindu majority. This is not merely a product of a “secular Constitution”. India’s pluralism is rooted in a civilisation that has, for millennia, embraced multiplicity and coexistence. In contrast, hundreds of Muslims are killed by fellow Muslims every year in fratricidal violence in Afghanistan and Pakistan.

Why do present-day Muslims feel ‘insecure’ in India? No one holds today’s Muslims responsible for the atrocities committed against Hindus by successive Islamic invaders. But why does a significant section of the subcontinent’s Muslims glorify and identify with figures like Ghaznavi, Ghoris, Babur, Aurangzeb, and Tipu Sultan? Celebrating a character (mythical or historical) implies validation of its actions and a strong desire to emulate them. A recent development adds to the substance of this argument. On 6 December, suspended Trinamool Congress MLA Humayun Kabir laid the foundation stone for a “Babri Masjid” in Murshidabad, with a massive crowd in attendance. Building a mosque is not the issue-India’s pluralistic ethos welcomes all faiths. But why name it after Babur? His memory evokes the destruction of the Shri Ram Janmabhoomi temple at Ayodhya by his associate, Mir Baqi, and the endless struggle by successive generations of Hindus to reclaim it, in the Indian psyche. Babur established Mughal rule through jihad, calling himself a “Ghazi”-an Islamic warrior dedicated to fighting infidels.

Treating figures like Babur as role models initiates an endless cycle. Much of Muslim ‘insecurity’ results from this action-reaction syndrome. A segment of Muslims, influenced by ‘secularists’, seeks to celebrate Islamic ‘heroes’, aspires to imitate them and their deeds, which inevitably leads to conflict with a resurgent India determined to oppose this medieval, jihadi mindset.

It is not rocket science to realise that building genuine friendships with Jews while praising Hitler and overlooking his horrific genocide is not a workable proposition.

AI-powered threats demand overhaul of India’s coastal defence and security



KRIPA NAUTIYAL

India must urgently modernise its coastal security infrastructure to counter an emerging generation of AI-enabled threats that could render traditional maritime security apparatus and defences obsolete. With artificial intelligence democratising advanced military capabilities, hostile actors now have access to autonomous underwater vehicles, coordinated drone swarms, and cyber-physical attack systems that were exclusively superpower territory just years ago.

We face a fundamentally different security environment than existed even five years ago. The convergence of AI, autonomous systems, and sophisticated cyber capabilities creates threats that can materialise with unprecedented speed and lethality along our 11,098-kilometre coastline.

The Invisible Underwater Menace

Perhaps most alarming are autonomous underwater vehicles-sophisticated submarine drones capable of operating for weeks without surfacing while maintaining minimal acoustic signatures that challenge conventional sonar detection. Security analysts warn of scenarios where torpedo-sized AUVs could be launched from vessels over 100 nautical miles offshore, using AI navigation to autonomously infiltrate major ports. Once positioned, these systems could attach explosives to naval assets, conduct prolonged reconnaissance of underwater defences, or remain dormant as sleeper weapons activated on command.

Larger AUVs pose direct threats to critical underwater infrastructure including submarine communication cables carrying 99 per cent of international data traffic, oil and gas pipelines, and desalination plant intake systems. The AI advantage is significant: these systems learn from each mission, make autonomous decisions without detectable communications, recognise optimal attack timing based on traffic patterns, and adapt tactics when they encounter countermeasures.

China’s deployment of underwater autonomous systems in the South China Sea, combined with commercially available AUV technology requiring minimal modification and accessible 3D-printed components, has lowered the barrier to entry dramatically.

Swarm Intelligence and Saturation Attacks

While single-drone incidents have garnered attention following recent security events, AI introduces exponential complexity through swarm intelligence. Defence experts envision scenarios involving 50 to 100 coordinated drones overwhelming point defences through saturation attacks, with distributed decision-making eliminating any central control point vulnerable to jamming.

Maritime applications include simultaneous strikes on multiple naval and coast guard targets, with AI coordination identifying and engaging vessels while electronic warfare drones jam communications and radar. Port infrastructure becomes vulnerable to precision attacks on fuel depots, coastal security chains of static sensors, control towers, and cargo terminals, with thermal imaging identifying high-value targets and adaptive re-targeting if primary objectives are defended.

The technology remains disturbingly accessible: commercial drones modified with open-source AI software, facial recognition technology repurposed for ship identification, and gaming industry processors providing the computational power for AI operations.

The Cyber-Physical Convergence

Security analysts have identified the integration of cyber warfare with physical autonomous systems as perhaps the most dangerous scenario-a three-phase attack chain beginning with AI-powered malware penetrating port management systems, followed by AUVs, surface vessels, and drones positioning during the cyber preparation phase while maintaining radio silence. The synchronised final phase would see cyber attacks disabling port security systems and communications while physical autonomous systems execute coordinated strikes, with AI-driven adaptive tactics responding in real time to defensive measures.

Real-world precedents demonstrate the viability of such attacks. Stuxnet demonstrated cyber-physical attack capabilities against Iranian nuclear facilities. Iran captured a U.S. drone through GPS spoofing. Russia has launched cyber attacks on Ukrainian infrastructure. Chinese advanced persistent threats have infiltrated maritime industry networks globally.

Adversaries are also using AI defensively-training algorithms to identify and exploit blind spots in surveillance systems, generating synthetic radar signatures mimicking benign vessels, creating false AIS location data, and producing jamming patterns that appear as technical malfunctions rather than attacks.

The Professional Recruitment Threat

Recent security incidents involving educated professionals-doctors, engineers, and IT specialists-have raised concerns about recruitment for AI-enabled operations. Data scientists could develop sophisticated algorithms for weapon systems, robotics engineers could build and modify autonomous platforms, and cybersecurity experts could create malware and conduct reconnaissance.

Security officials have expressed particular concern about operatives who could play significant technical roles in cyber operations, drone piloting from safe houses, and intelligence gathering while maintaining lower suspicion profiles. Remote operation capabilities eliminate traditional suicide attack requirements, fundamentally changing the threat landscape.

Encrypted communication platforms enable pre-programmed autonomy where AI systems receive initial instructions through dead-drop emails and secure messaging, with no real-time communication during operations, eliminating intercept risk.

Global Best Practices

International response models offer templates for Indian adaptation. The United States Navy has deployed advanced sonar arrays tuned for small AUV detection, AI-powered acoustic analysis, defensive drone swarms, and autonomous underwater vehicles for harbour protection. Israel’s multi-layered defence includes the Drone Dome system with AI radar classification distinguishing bird flocks from drone swarms, electronic warfare jamming, and laser interception. Singapore’s smart port security integrates autonomous patrol boats, underwater monitoring, AI-powered cargo screening, and comprehensive cyber defence.




A Comprehensive Implementation Strategy

A three-phase implementation strategy for India spanning five years may be considered:

- Phase 1 (0-12 months) should focus on deploying underwater sensor arrays at five major ports, installing counter-drone systems at critical infrastructure, integrating AI-enabled systems with the existing National Coastal Security Operations Centre, and procuring autonomous underwater defence vehicles.

Please read the complete article online at <https://www.dailypioneer.com>

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Why India needs its own LLMs: beyond using AI tools



ASHVATHAMAN

Artificial intelligence is reshaping global progress, and at the centre of this transformation is the Large Language Model, or LLM. Unlike a human mind, which begins with a thought and then searches for the right words, an LLM learns in the reverse direction. It reads billions of sentences across countless topics, discovers patterns in how humans communicate, and gradually forms a system that can respond in ways that resemble human reasoning. In simple terms, an LLM becomes a compressed version of humanity’s written knowledge.

This idea reflects a long-standing principle. Societies grow faster when knowledge is shared, reused, and expanded, instead of being rediscovered repeatedly. LLMs multiply our collective understanding by making knowledge instantly accessible and reusable. But the true foundation of this intelligence is language. Human civilisation stores everything that matters, including laws, culture, values, science, memories, and identity, inside language. When AI learns a language deeply, it also learns the worldview behind that language. This makes language-based LLMs essential to any community that wishes to remain relevant in the AI era.

India faces a major challenge here. Public conversations about AI focus mainly on tools like image generators, video creation apps, filters, templates, and quick content systems. These tools represent only the visible layer of AI, the part people interact with. Underneath these tools sits the real engine-the LLM. It is the LLM that provides reasoning, knowledge, context, understanding, and logical structure. If a nation learns only to operate AI tools, it remains a user. If a nation builds the intelligence behind those tools, it becomes a leader. In the AI era, leadership will belong to those who build foundational models, not those who merely use applications built by others.

This becomes particularly important for Indian languages. As the founder of the TamilAI project, I often face this question: if global systems like ChatGPT and Gemini already answer in Tamil, why should we build our own Tamil models?

It is a fair doubt, but the answer is crucial for India’s technological future.

While global systems can output Tamil text, the intelligence beneath those answers is shaped by English-heavy data and Western logical structures. These models learn mostly



from English-speaking societies, absorb their patterns of thought, and then convert the final output into Tamil. The script is ours, but the mind behind the words is not. This results in Tamil expressed through a foreign cognitive framework-a translation rather than native reasoning.

It is Tamil translation of English reasoning, not Tamil reasoning itself.




For a language with the antiquity and depth of Tamil, this is not enough. A language that survives only at the output layer risks losing its natural worldview and its cultural logic. To protect a civilisation’s knowledge, the language must exist inside the intelligence layer itself. Only when an LLM learns Tamil at its core, including its grammatical logic, philosophical foundations, idioms, poetry, history, and cultural reasoning, can Tamil survive as a thinking system in the AI age.

This perspective is influencing global AI policy. Europe is building LLMs for European languages to protect cultural sovereignty. China has multiple national LLMs. Japan and Korea have government-funded language models. These countries recognise that without native-language AI, technological and cultural dependence becomes unavoidable.

India stands at a similar crossroads. Tamil, Hindi, Telugu, Kannada, Bengali, and other major Indian languages must have indigenous LLMs built from their own knowledge systems. Only then can India move from being a user of foreign technology to a creator of global intelligence.

TamilAI is one early step in that direction, but the larger mission is national. India has the talent, the vision, and the cultural depth to build its own AI foundations. If we invest in our languages and create our own LLMs, we can not only participate in the AI era but lead it with confidence. The future is wide open for nations that build their own intelligence, and India is ready to rise to that challenge.

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BLASÉ CAPITAL

HOWDY, INDIA

As with several issues, one can see wide and visible oscillations in the US' look-East policy, especially on how to deal with India and China, separately and collectively. Washington plays the carrot-and-stick game with New Delhi, as the former tightens screws in some areas, and its leaders verbally praise the Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi. America changed its stock-and-stick policy vis-à-vis China to a stick-and-carrot one, after President Donald Trump inked a temporary, but sweet deal with the Chinese counterpart, Xi Jinping.

Now, a White House document reflects a pivot to deepen ties with India, despite the tariff overdose, and delays in signing a bilateral trade deal, as a counterweight

to China in the Indo-Pacific region. The "National Security Strategy of the United States of America November 2025" states, "We must continue to improve commercial (and other) relations with India to encourage New Delhi to contribute to Indo-Pacific security, including through continued quadrilateral cooperation with Australia, Japan, and the United States." Quad representatives recently met in New Delhi for a counter-terrorism conference, despite the US sanction on India over Russian oil.

"Moreover," adds the security document, "we will also work to align the actions of our allies and partners with our joint interest in preventing domination by any single competitor nation." Note the reference to "any single competitor nation," whose inherent meaning obviously refers to China. The relationship with China may be framed as a strategic competition with episodic summitry, marked by deep economic interdependence alongside tensions over trade and technology. These include tariffs, export controls, and restrictions on advanced semiconductors, with a security posture focused on deterrence around Taiwan and maritime disputes.

Ties with India are increasingly cooperative and transactional, driven by expanding commercial links, and supply-chain partnerships, growing technology collaboration, and a security partnership that emphasises Quad cooperation, and defence interoperability. The US thus uses trade, investment, and joint exercises to deepen alignment, and enlist India as a partner in shaping the Indo-Pacific balance. "America should similarly enlist our European and Asian allies and partners, including India, to cement and improve our joint positions in the Western Hemisphere and, with regard to critical minerals, in Africa," states the report.

However, such grand rhetoric, and vision is punctuated by what seems like a caveat. "America's economic partners should no longer expect to earn income from the United States through overcapacity and structural imbalances but instead pursue growth through managed cooperation tied to strategic alignment and by receiving long-term U.S. investment," adds the report. President Trump's "G-2" moment with Jinping revived an old idea of US-China co-leadership, even as Indian analysts cautioned that the remark was possibly rhetorical, and did not erase deep structural rivalry.

Washington's codified posture in the National Security Strategy appears to balance a desire to manage competition with a clear push to deepen commercial and strategic ties with India. The US hopes to explicitly link improved economic relations to India's contribution to regional security, and continued Quad cooperation. However, the language signals a shift from bilateral hedging to coalition-building using trade, technology partnerships, and defence ties to align like-minded states against coercive behaviour by "rivals."

'Love you not-maybe love you' appears' to be Washington's alternating relationship with Beijing, depending on the need of the hour. It swings from an economic interdependence, and global coordination to rivalry over technology, allegations of human rights, among others. "A related security challenge is the potential for any competitor to control the South China Sea," observes the White House. It adds, "This could allow a potentially hostile power to impose a toll system over one of the world's most vital lanes of commerce or, worse, to close and reopen it at will."

The mentions of "South China Sea," "potentially hostile power", among other phrases possibly point to a single nation, but can be a matter of interpretation, and conclusion. For Washington, either of the two outcomes, a toll system, or willfully closing or opening the channels, is harmful to the US economy, and broader US interests. The White House advocates "strong measures... along with the deterrence necessary to keep those lanes open, free of "tolls." It admits that this will require not just further investment in our military, especially naval, capabilities, but strong cooperation with every nation that stands to suffer, from India to Japan and beyond.

One of the points that emerges is the ongoing spat between Beijing and Tokyo over the latter's stand on Taiwan. With India, which possibly believes in quiet accommodation if it serves its interests, the dynamic shifts more towards strategic convergence on Indo Pacific security, supply chain resilience, and technology despite trade frictions. New Delhi can leverage ties with Washington with an emphasis on trade, investments, and technology to deepen interoperability and align incentives for regional security. While rhetorical gestures like "G-2" can ease tensions between America and China, it requires backing through crucial agreements.

However, pushing partners to choose sides risks fracturing multilateral institutions, and complicating cooperation on global issues. The Trump-Xi meeting, White security document, and ongoing India-US trade talks reflect an American approach through engagements, if possible, and competition, where necessary. The aim is to build partnerships, and shape a stable Indo-Pacific order. This will define Washington's diplomacy in the future, and determine whether rivalry hardens into containment or is managed.

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BUSINESS10

Mee too as an investor, Meesho

The new target price, ₹200, is 80 per cent higher than offer price

Despite an explosive debut on the Indian exchanges, or possibly because of it, a few analysts scaled up the stock's target price to ₹200, or 80 per cent higher than the offer price (₹111). The listing gain for Meesho Ltd, an e-commerce platform, was more than ₹50, or over 45 per cent, and higher than the pre-listing grey market premium of ₹43. On the first trading day, Day Zero as CEO Vidit Aatrey described it, the stock scaled a high of over ₹177, and ended at just over ₹170, or over 50 per cent higher than the offer price.

At the listing ceremony, Aatrey said that there were still millions of Indians who had never transacted online, and this section that the firm wished to serve was just beginning to open. The narrative is backed by the events that began less than 10 years ago. Meesho started in a two-bedroom apartment in Bengaluru, where the founders worked on a dining table to find an entry point into online commerce. The original idea, FashNear, was a hyperlocal women's fashion concept that never scaled up. Only when it targeted small makers, home-based sellers, and buyers in the smaller cities like Surat, Jaipur, and Panipat that the trajectory shifted.

This helped the platform to reach nearly 200 million transacting users in 2024-25, of which more than 170 million were from outside India's top eight cities. The growing number of sellers, buyers, and orders excited the investors. The IPO was oversubscribed on the first day, with the final figure being nearly 80 times. The portion for the qualified institutions was oversubscribed by 120 times. The response from the retail investors was substantial, though less muted. The Net Market Value (Marketplace), or cumulative checkout value of successfully-delivered orders, went up from less than \$200 billion in 2022-23 to nearly \$300 billion in 2024-25.

However, the run-up to the listing day witnessed several debates, and controversies.

During the pre-IPO anchor-investor allocation process, global funds like Capital Group and Norges Bank Investment Management, and domestic institutions like ICICI Prudential and Nippon India Mutual Fund withdrew from it. They were peeved because nearly a quarter of the anchor portion was allocated to a single entity, SBI Mutual Fund. They claimed that this raised an issue of fairness, and indicated discretionary and opaque allocation. Meesho and its bankers maintained that they had merely honoured prior commitments to SBI Mutual Fund.

As is usually the case with tech firms, the IPO valuation attracted attention. At ₹111, Meesho's worth is more than ₹50,000 crore, which is now higher due to the gains on the first day. Whether such premium is justified, or can be sustained was the question that critics asked. They highlighted the financials. Although revenues were up by more than 60 per cent between 2022-23 and 2024-25, the annual losses were up by 135 per cent. But when one compares the first six months of 2024-25 and 2025-26, the revenues were up by nearly 30 per cent, and losses were down by more than 70 per cent.

Despite incurring losses, their reduction creates the perception that Meesho is undergoing a shift in financials, and profitability. Still, the firm's average order value (AOV) was ₹274 in 2024-25. A low AOV model requires extraordinary levels of operational precision, and cost control because each order implies a low margin. Small disruptions can distort the economics. Meesho processed 1.83 billion orders in 2024-25, with more than two billion in the 12 months ended June 2025. While this places it among the highest-volume platforms, the concentration of orders in mass market fashion and home categories makes volumes vulnerable to changes in discretionary spending.

Valmo, the parent firm's logistics arm, grew

into a massive parcel delivery operation. Media reports indicate that the former shipped 296 million parcels in Q1-FY26, which places it among the top handlers of e-commerce parcels. The share of shipments handled by Valmo rose from about two per cent in 2022-23 to 48 per cent in 2024-25, as Meesho moved more volume in-house. This increased density allows the delivery at lower costs compared to third-party logistics partners. This change is crucial for AOVs of ₹274, where costs related to deliveries, and returns cannot escalate.

Such strength in logistics is a potential point of fragility. A surge in the return rates, for example, which is common in low-priced fashion, can raise reverse costs. Disruption in

routing algorithms, fleet availability, or workforce supply can affect service levels. Regulatory scrutiny around how platforms use related-party arms can add to compliance costs, and complexity. Meesho depends on a network of small sellers, whose quality can vary widely, and the draft prospectus identifies this, and seller compliance as explicit risks.

Technology is a primary lever to stabilise such variables. The company's discovery engine, cataloguing systems, and AI-driven classification tools are designed to handle fragmented inputs. In investor interactions before the IPO, Aatrey claimed that the technology was built to eliminate friction for the small sellers, rather than to replace them. This includes tools that standardise product attributes, match buyers to inventory pockets, and reduce failed deliveries. These backend systems may not be visible, but sit at the centre of the claims that Meesho can scale up low-value commerce.

Analysts contend that India's e-commerce market is ₹6 trillion, and will reach ₹15-18 trillion by 2030. This indicates an annual growth rate of 20-25 per cent. The bulk of this growth is expected to come from Tier 2, and 3 cities, and smaller towns. Meesho's user base in these smaller markets makes it a proxy for consumption trends beyond the metros. This positioning will play a role in how sellers, buyers, and investors frame the company in the future. Strong adoption may make it a long-term bet. Any slowdown in rural or small-town spending can, however, magnify the challenges.

The quarter-to-quarter path in the future will be shaped by several scenarios. If Meesho can continue improving its take rate through value-added services, advertising, and logistics, and maintain cost discipline, it is positioned to strengthen cash flows. If competition intensifies in the mass market segment, discounting pressures may rise. Regulatory oversight of market-places and logistics compulsions, especially around quality and accountability, may hike compliance costs. If consumer sentiments weaken, the spend on discretionary categories that anchor Meesho's volumes may witness volatility. The experience may establish whether mass market e-commerce can deliver financial viability for firms, valuation gains to investors, and easy product accessibility for the consumers.

KAUSHIK MOITRA

NANDINI TYAGI

India's data-protection landscape is undergoing a necessary reset. The Digital Personal Data Protection (DPDP) Act, 2023, and DPDP Rules, 2025, now partially in force, represent a significant shift in how personal information is processed, protected, and governed. For those familiar with the mechanics of data, and ease with which ambiguity has historically been exploited, this transition is overdue. The framework is the country's first comprehensive digital privacy regime, which is citizen-centric, consent-driven, and innovation-aligned. It is built on seven principles: consent and transparency, purpose limitation, minimisation, accuracy, storage limits, security, and accountability.

The Government has opted for a phased implementation. Provisions establishing the Data Protection Board are operational; it will investigate violations, and impose penalties. The remaining obligations such as consent notices, retention standards, safeguards, breach reporting, grievance handling, and protections for children and persons with disabilities will happen within 18 months after the notification. This staggered rollout is intended to give citizens and companies realistic adjustment timelines.

The new regime seeks to transform personal data from something passively surrendered to something users actively control. Platforms must explain, in a user's preferred language, what data they collect, why and how they will use it, and how consent may be modified or withdrawn. However, the DPDP Rules stop short of mandating disclosures on recipient categories, cross-border protections, or retention periods, thereby undermining fully-informed consent. Concentration of appointment powers for the Data Protection Board in the Executive has drawn criticism for diluting independence.

Firms must promptly report breaches to both the Board, and affected users, with fuller details within 72 hours. Users must be told what happened, and how to mitigate harm. Additional safeguards apply where users lack the capacity to give consent. Processing children's or disabled persons' data requires verifiable guardian consent, and are subject to narrow welfare-based exceptions.

Republic strikes back; data reset

A data privacy regime with focus on citizens, consent, and innovation

Platforms cannot monitor children's behaviour or target them with advertising.

Research and archiving enjoy limited allowances but must meet baseline privacy standards. The Rules remain silent on whether AI (Artificial Intelligence) training qualifies as 'research,' leaving a significant issue as unresolved. Significant Data Fiduciaries, or entities processing high-risk or large-scale personal data, face heightened compliance. These include annual impact assessments, independent audits, and scrutiny of systems, algorithms, and hosting infrastructure. Cross-border transfers are permitted in principle, but the Government may restrict datasets processed by these fiduciaries, and impose conditions on access requests from foreign authorities. This reflects a shift toward risk-sensitive data mobility.

The Act introduces strict retention logic. Data must be erased when consent is withdrawn, or the purpose ends. Organisations must retain personal data, and logs for at least one year to support legitimate state functions. After this period, erasure is the default mode, unless another law requires retention. E-commerce, gaming, and social-media platforms must delete users' data after three years of inactivity, with a notice, and an opportunity to re-engage. This curbs extreme data accumulation but may entrench prolonged monitoring by both the corporations and State.

The State may ask for information for reasons that may range from national security to compliance reviews, sometimes without notifying the users, which raises concerns over broad surveillance powers. A new rights ecosystem obliges organisations to explain how users may access, correct, or erase data, with a uniform 90-day limit for grievance resolution. Consent managers, who are modelled on India's account-aggregator framework, will allow users to centrally view, and revoke permissions across platforms while remaining data-blind and audit-compliant.

Modern platforms behave like industrial-scale data refineries, and aggregate vast

behavioural datasets with little transparency or consent. Dark patterns continue to push users toward maximal data sharing. Apps rely on third-party tools that transmit their own streams of information. Cross-border cloud routing adds opacity. Even pricing models are influenced by surveillance logic. Reports suggest differential pricing based on device type or battery level.

Courts are beginning to address these practices. In the US, a ruling accepting Meta's use of books from 'shadow libraries' for AI training as fair use highlights the asymmetric treatment between the individuals and large platforms. Indian regulators have flagged this imbalance: WhatsApp's 2021 policy update was deemed abusive because the users lacked real choice. When combined with opaque AI training datasets, the ANI versus OpenAI dispute, and government advisories on dark patterns, it is clear that several entities continue data practices that they cannot defend or trace.

Surveillance extends into hardware. Smart TVs monitor viewing habits, phones continuously generate telemetry, wearables store intimate health metrics, and cars generate behavioural data. These are monetised abroad. Across the ecosystem, data capture is continuous, consent fleeting, and deletion rarely meaningful.

The Act requires organisations to justify what they collect, why they do it, who accesses it, and how long it is retained. This challenges the default-to-accumulate existing models, which have existed for the past decade. Sectoral frameworks intersect with these expectations. The Reserve Bank of India mandates strict security, storage, and audit standards. KYC (Know-Your-

Customer) data cannot be repurposed without fresh consent. The regulatory practices in European Union and the US treat lawful basis, retention limits, and algorithmic transparency as routine obligations.

Healthcare and the related platform economy face additional scrutiny. Medical data is already fenced by multiple laws, and guidelines that require explicit consent, and encrypted exchange. Children's data now faces heightened protection under the DPDP regime, which must be harmonised with the IT Act's obligations on harmful, and algorithmically-curated content. Proposed amendments to the IT Act will require labelling synthetic content, and impose provenance duties on platforms distributing AI-generated media.

Connected devices, which silently ingest telemetry, audio, and location trails must now implement layered permissions, real deletion mechanisms, and strict purpose limitation. Engineering teams will need to redesign systems on the principle that legality, and not technical capability, governs what companies may collect.

India's privacy regime is evolving, and leaves major questions open. These are related to AI governance, state access boundaries, regulatory capacity, and the copyright implications of training on protected works. Yet the shift is unmistakable. For an economy where behavioural data has operated as an unpriced asset, and digital infrastructure underpins both growth and governance, the new DPDP framework marks the beginning of a disciplined, purpose-bound data order. It does not settle all the debates, but it sets the first durable boundaries within which India's data economy must mature. The era of data drifting without form is giving way to one defined by structure, intention, and accountability.

Kaushik is a Partner & Practice Lead for Regulatory, IP-TMT & Practice Development; Nandini is an Associate in Regulatory & IP-TMT Practice. Both work for Bharucha & Partners, a leading full-service law firm with offices in Mumbai, Delhi, and Bengaluru, and which caters to a wide array of clients in India and overseas

Help local kirana stores with dedicated tech platform: FRAI

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ New Delhi

Small and medium retailers, facing heat from intense competition from e-commerce and quick-commerce platforms, through their association FRAI, have urged the government to create a dedicated technology platform, which will help them to compete with hyper-local delivery platforms on an equal footing.

The Federation of Retailer Association of India (FRAI) has sought creating a Bharat Taxi-like digital system where customer orders are routed to nearby kirana shops, with the order going to the first store that accepts it.

The rapid growth of e-commerce and hyperlocal delivery platforms, such as Blinkit and Zepto, have caused a decline in income and livelihoods for thousands of local grocery and kirana shop owners, the FRAI said.

At least two lakh kirana stores closed last year as consumers shifted to quick commerce platforms, FRAI said, while citing a

market study. Moreover, in cities like Mumbai, a whopping number of 60 per cent offline grocery stores (kirana stores) witnessed a decline in sales volume due to the mushrooming of dark stores of quick commerce platforms, as per a December 2024 study by JP Morgan.

According to FRAI, over the past few years, digital platforms have reshaped consumer behaviour through deep discounts, rapid delivery promises, and aggressive marketing campaigns, leaving small retailers struggling to compete. “As a result, many kirana stores are witnessing dramatic reductions in footfall and sales,” FRAI, which claims to represent 80 lakh micro, small and medium retailers from across the country with a membership of 42 retail associations, said a statement.

The association further said these hyperdelivery platforms, most of which are foreign-funded, engage with the small-retailer ecosystem.

Instead of empowering shop owners to grow their independent businesses, many of these platforms are turning them into



delivery personnel or last-mile service agents, it said.

“Without intervention, the backbone of India’s informal retail economy risks collapsing — along with the livelihoods of millions of small-scale shop owners who have long served as the heart of community commerce,” FRAI said on the occasion of the 9th National

Retailers Day here.

They also recognised the growing demand for faster delivery, greater convenience, and competitive pricing, and affirmed their readiness to embrace digital tools and enhance efficiency.

However, they also emphasised that without proactive government intervention to balance the

competitive landscape, small retailers will continue to struggle against the vast financial and technological advantages of large e-commerce platforms.

Creating a Bharat Taxi-like digital system could also include a customer-rating feature for participating kirana stores, motivating them to maintain high service standards and fostering healthy competition within the local retail ecosystem. Bharat Taxi is India’s new cooperative ride-hailing platform, launched with a zero-commission mode. This is the world’s first national mobility service fully owned and run by drivers, and is designed to provide an alternative to private companies like Ola and Uber. FRAI Spokesperson Abhay Raj Mishra said, “We believe the government must urgently step in to create a fair competitive environment and empower local retailers with the right technology. Platforms like ONDC show immense promise in restoring balance by giving small businesses greater visibility, digital access, and a level-playing field.”

IMF urges China to address economic imbalances as trade surplus hits \$1 trillion

ASSOCIATED PRESS
■ Hong Kong

The head of the International Monetary Fund has urged China to fix its economic imbalances, saying the country of 1.4 billion people is too big to rely on exports for its growth.

China’s global exports have been rising while shipments to the United States have contracted after President Donald Trump hiked taxes on imports from China and many other countries. Earlier this week, Beijing reported its trade surplus for 2025 had already exceeded a record \$1 trillion.

IMF Managing Director Kristalina Georgieva said the heavy reliance on exports risks provoking more moves by its trading partners to curb imports from China.

“(China’s) continuing to depend on export-led growth risks furthering global trade tensions,” Georgieva told a press conference on Wednesday. “China is now too big to rely on exports as a source for growth... and (it has) a large domestic market that can be a big aspiration for growth in the years to come.”

At a high-level meeting in October aimed at drawing up plans for the next five years, China’s leaders highlighted the need to boost domestic consumption. The ruling Communist Party has long sought to rebalance the economy away from heavy dependence both on exports and on massive investment in infrastructure.

But the COVID-19 pandemic intervened, along with a prolonged downturn in the real estate market that has slowed activity for that once powerful engine for growth. Meanwhile, Beijing has pushed hard to expand manufacturing in high-tech industries, struggling to rein in excessive capacity in some areas such as automaking.

Morgan Stanley recently predicted that by 2030,

China’s market share in global exports could reach 16.5%, up from about 15% currently, supported by its advanced manufacturing and high-growth segments like robotics, electric vehicles and batteries.

Georgieva was visiting Beijing for an annual economic forum involving the heads of major international organisations. The IMF also was concluding its annual review of China.

Softening domestic consumption and demand in China has contributed to a weakened yuan versus the dollar and other currencies. That has made China’s exports cheaper compared with those of other countries, reinforcing trade imbalances.

The IMF said comprehensive policies are needed to encourage Chinese people to spend more.

While China’s market is huge and still growing at a nearly 5% annual pace, domestic demand has weakened as consumers cut back on spending due to job and income losses during and after the pandemic.

The years-long property downturn also has hit household wealth, crimping shoppers’ appetites for spending and sapping demand for imports, amplifying the trade imbalance.

Helping to offset the decline in exports to the US, China is selling more in other countries in Africa, Latin America, Southeast Asia and Europe. That has led to complaints from China’s trading partners as its imports have failed to keep pace.

Wednesday, the EU Chamber of Commerce in China also warned its substantial trade surplus is raising worries.

The IMF’s remarks followed Chinese Premier Li Qiang’s comments to the international group of financial experts Tuesday that higher tariffs have “dealt a severe blow” to the global economy.

India, US officials discuss trade pact issues

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ New Delhi

India and the US on Wednesday reviewed the ongoing negotiations for a proposed bilateral trade agreement to further strengthen economic ties, according to the commerce ministry.

The two-day talks that began here are aimed at finalising a mutually beneficial trade pact.

On the first day, Commerce Secretary Rajesh Agrawal met US Deputy Trade Representative Rick Switzer.

“The two sides exchanged views on matters related to India-US trade and economic ties, including on the ongoing negotiations for a mutually beneficial Bilateral Trade Agreement,” the Department of Commerce said in a social media post.

The discussions will conclude on December 11.

The talks are important as the Donald Trump administration has imposed a steep 50 per cent tariff on Indian goods entering American markets.



Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri meets US Deputy Trade Representative Rick Switzer, in New Delhi. on Thursday. PTI

Indian industry and exporters are eagerly waiting for the conclusion of the negotiations and announcement of a deal, as the high import duties are hurting their shipments to America.

Though they are exploring other markets to maintain their export profits, the US is a key destination for them as

it accounts for about 18 per cent of the country’s exports.

Initially, the US imposed a 25 per cent duty on Indian goods, citing trade deficit concerns with India, which stood at around USD 46 billion in 2024-25. An additional 25 per cent tariff was imposed later as a penalty on India for buying Russian

crude. India has stated that the resolution of these tariffs would be key to firming up the first phase of the trade deal.

As part of the pact, the US is seeking duty concessions on agricultural products and industrial goods. India has strongly opposed any concessions on the agri and

dairy sectors.

Speaking at the sidelines of the Pravasi Rajasthani Divas in Jaipur, Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal on Wednesday said talks with the US on the proposed bilateral trade agreement are progressing.

“Talks are continuously progressing with them. We are moving forward towards a bilateral trade agreement,” Goyal told reporters.

The US’ chief negotiator for the pact, Assistant US Trade Representative for South and Central Asia, Brendan Lynch, is also part of the US delegation. India’s chief negotiator is the Joint Secretary in the Department of Commerce, Darpan Jain.

This is the US officials’ second trip since the imposition of high tariffs.

The US officials last visited India on September 16.

While noting that the Bilateral Trade Agreement (BTA) will take time, Agrawal has earlier said that India is engaged in protracted negotiations with the US on a framework trade deal that will address the reciprocal tariff challenge faced by

Indian exporters.

India and the US are having two parallel negotiations — one on a framework trade deal to address tariffs and another on a comprehensive trade deal.

In February, leaders of the two countries directed officials to negotiate an agreement. It was planned to conclude the first tranche of the pact by the fall of 2025. So far, six rounds of negotiations have been held. The agreement aims to more than double bilateral trade to USD 500 billion by 2030, from the current USD 191 billion.

The US remained India’s largest trading partner for the fourth consecutive year in 2024-25, with bilateral trade valued at USD 131.84 billion (USD 86.5 billion exports). The US accounts for about 18 per cent of India’s total goods exports, 6.22 per cent of its imports, and 10.73 per cent of its total merchandise trade.

India’s merchandise exports to the US declined for the second consecutive month in October, falling by 8.58 per cent to USD 6.3 billion.

Kotak Securities expects Nifty at 29,000 pts in 2026

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ Mumbai

Domestic brokerage firm Kotak Securities on Wednesday said it expects a 12 per cent jump in Nifty in 2026 on the back of better earnings growth from India Inc.

In the base case, NSE’s 50-share benchmark will reach 29,120 points by end-2025, its Managing Director and Chief Executive Shripal Shah told reporters here. This will be driven more by an acceleration in earnings growth to 17 per cent next year, Shah said, adding that this increase will be a strong affirmation of fundamentals influencing capital markets and ensures that no bubble gets built up.

“We expect stronger earnings growth next year, supported by a solid macro environment, positive policy actions, and rising domestic flows. Even with global geopolitical

and trade tensions, India’s long-term market story remains strong and intact,” Shah said.

He said the level of optimism is very high, and the brokerage expects even foreign portfolio investors to turn positive on India after a challenging 2025.

In a bull case, the Nifty estimate is pegged at 32,032 points while in a bear case, it can go down to 26,208 points, the brokerage said.

Shah said the rally in stocks, which is being seen right now is not broad-based, and it is only the Nifty stocks that are witnessing buying while the scrips in the mid and small cap space are far away from their highs.

A senior official from the brokerage said it expects interest in large caps to be high till the Budget, and added that the small and midcap space will rise March onwards.

Commercial tower in Dubai named after Shah Rukh Khan sold out for over ₹5K cr

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ Dubai

Danube Group has sold a one million sq ft premium commercial tower in Dubai, named after Bollywood star Shah Rukh Khan, for over ₹5,000 crore on strong demand for office space.

Dubai-based Danube Properties is developing a commercial tower ‘SHAHRUKHZ by Danube’ on Sheikh Zayed Road here at a total cost of around ₹3,500 crore. At an event held on late Tuesday at the Dubai Exhibition Centre, Danube Group Founder and Chairman Rizwan Sajjan announced that the tower has been completely sold out. The event, which was attended by Shah Rukh Khan, saw participation of around 7,000 people, including real estate brokers. The company has achieved sales bookings of AED 2.1 billion (over ₹5,000 crore) from the tower, much higher than initial estimates.

“To see a project of this scale in Dubai carry my name is both an honour and a reminder of how generosity and vision can come together. Dubai has always embraced me

with warmth — it’s a city built on courage, imagination, and the belief that nothing is impossible,” Khan said.

Last month in Mumbai, Danube Group in presence of the Bollywood actor had launched the 55-storey commercial tower for sale. The company will complete this tower by 2029.

When asked about the total project cost, Sajjan on Monday had told PTI that it would be around Rs 3,500 crore including land, and construction among other expenses.

He said the investment would be met through internal accruals and advances from customers against sales.

“The commercial project is set to become one of the most prestigious business landmarks in Dubai,” said Rizwan Sajjan, who is an Indian, born in Mumbai. Considering the success of this project, Both Rizwan Sajjan and Shah Rukh Khan hinted that there could be more towers named after him.

Adel Sajjan, Managing Director of the Danube Group, said this celebrity tower has been conceptualised and designed after studying more



than 100 prime commercial projects across the world.

Out of one million sq ft area in this upcoming tower, more than 9 lakh sq ft would be office spaces.

Adel noted that there is a scarcity of Grade A office space in Dubai while the demand is strong from multi-national companies that want to set up base here.

The MD strongly feels that the demand for both residential and commercial space in the Dubai market would remain strong in the coming years. Danube Properties, a subsidiary of the Danube Group, is one of the leading private real estate developers in Dubai.

Founded in 1993, Danube group entered the real estate development business in 2014. It is also into building materials.

The company has so far launched 40 real estate projects, of which 18 are already delivered and the rest are at different stages of construction. Adel Sajjan said the company is expecting to achieve sales of properties worth ₹22,000 crore this calendar year, and out of that 25 per cent will be from customers of Indian nationality.

US bankruptcy court reverses USD 1 bn damages against Byju Raveendran

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ New Delhi

A US bankruptcy court has reversed a USD 1 billion damages ruling against Byju Raveendran, according to a statement from the founders of Think and Learn Pvt Ltd - the parent firm of ed-tech platform Byju’s. The Delaware Court had, in a default ruling last month, ordered Raveendran to pay more than USD 1 billion, saying the former corporate star who set up the eponymous Indian edtech and tutoring company, had refused to cooperate with legal efforts to locate almost half the proceeds from a USD 1.2 billion US term loan made in 2021.

He, however, contested the grounds, saying the court did not give him the 30 days he had sought to arrange for a US attorney to argue his case. He vowed to appeal against the order.

“The Delaware Court has reversed the

USD 1 billion Judgement against Byju Raveendran, in view of fresh submissions made by Byju Raveendran through a motion to correct the Judgement of 20 November 2025. The Court agreed that damages had not been determined and ordered a new phase to commence in early January 2026 to determine any damages related to claims against Byju Raveendran,” the statement said. The court in the December 8 order said it will “amend its Default Judgment Opinion to remove those sections assessing damages against Byju Raveendran.” It directed parties to provide their respective positions on the issue on January 7. “An appropriate judgment order will be entered by the court following the completion of briefing on damages,” it said.

Earlier this year, Byju’s creditors, including GLAS Trust, sued and accused Raveendran, along with his co-founder wife Divya Gokulnath and another

accomplice Anita Kishore of “masterminding the theft” of USD 533 million in loan proceeds.

The founders had previously called the allegations “completely baseless and untrue” and that the entire loan proceeds were ploughed back into Think and Learn Pvt Ltd (TLPL), which used it to pay for the USD 3 billion acquisitions it did that year.

“GLAS Trust and the lenders withheld or misrepresented information, misleading courts and the public, and contributing to the collapse of the business, the loss of roughly 85,000 jobs, impacting 250 million students, and the destruction of tens of billions in enterprise value,” the statement on Wednesday said. Raveendran is considering further action against GLAS Trust and others for that conduct, it said without elaborating. He had previously said he would sue GLAS Trust for USD 2.5 billion. His litigation advisor Michael McNutt said, “Byju

Raveendran today has not been found liable to pay a single dollar in damages to the Plaintiffs (GLAS Trust Co LLC).”

“During the damages proceedings starting January 2026, we intend to demonstrate to the Court that not only have the Plaintiffs suffered no damage whatsoever due to actions of Byju Raveendran, but also that the Plaintiffs have intentionally misled the Court in this proceeding and other adversary proceedings. “We also intend to demonstrate that these Plaintiffs have sought to mislead Courts in India and elsewhere to gain advantage in those Court proceedings by harassing and damaging Byju Raveendran, Divya Gokulnath, and Riju Ravindran,” he said.

Stating that the defendants reserve the right to seek sanctions against GLAS Trust’s counsel for their conduct in these proceedings, he said, “We will seek the necessary remedy in the Delaware Courts and through the USD 2.5 billion

lawsuit that we intend to file prior to the end of the year.”

The statement said Raveendran will submit “clinching evidence” before the US Courts, proving that GLAS Trust and the Resolution Professional (now managing Byju’s) repeatedly misled the Delaware Court, Indian and other Courts, and the public by falsely alleging that USD 533 million (Alpha Funds) was diverted by the founders for their personal benefit.

“GLAS Trust’s sworn statements that it ‘does not know’ where the money went are simply false. A review of information in the possession of GLAS Trust since at least April 2025 clearly demonstrates that the monies lent to Alpha (and sent by OCI to companies owned by Byju Raveendran) were indeed invested in Think & Learn in compliance with all relevant Indian laws and not ‘siphoned off to the founders,” it said.

The evidence obtained by GLAS Trust’s

own lawyers in other adversarial proceedings and later obtained by Raveendran and his counsel clearly demonstrates that GLAS Trust and Shailendra Ajmera — the Resolution Professional of TLPL — had full visibility into the use of the funds from the Alpha Loan guaranteed by TLPL, it said.

“In addition, the financial records of TLPL available publicly verify that Byju Raveendran and entities controlled by him invested in excess of USD 475 million by purchasing shares in TLPL in the same period,” it said.

“This evidence will be submitted as part of a full appeal against the entire amended judgment of the Delaware Bankruptcy Court of December 8, 2025, and as part of the claim to be filed against relevant parties previously announced with a value of over USD 2.5 billion. Byju Raveendran will also share the same evidence with the Indian Courts in the coming weeks.”

FROM THE WORLD

USA

One dead in varsity shooting

One student was killed and another was critically wounded in a shooting at a residence hall at Kentucky State University (KSU) on Tuesday, and a suspect who is not a student at the school has been arrested, officials said. The shooting happened around 3 p.m. and was an “isolated incident,” Scott Tracy, assistant chief of police for Frankfort, said during a news conference Tuesday evening. Tracy said police swiftly responded to the shooting. “There are no active safety concerns on campus at this time,” he said. Authorities haven’t publicly addressed a motive. Frankfort police said Jacob Lee Bard was booked into jail on murder and first-degree assault charges in connection with the shooting. Police said Bard is from Evansville, Indiana, which is about 150 miles west of Frankfort.

CANADA

Envoy to US to resign

Canada’s ambassador to the US for the last six years said on Tuesday she is resigning next year as the two major trading partners plan to review the free trade agreement. Ambassador Kirsten Hillman said in a letter it is the right time to put in place someone who will oversee talks about the United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement that is up review in 2026. PM Mark Carney said Hillman “prepared the foundations for Canada in the upcoming review” of the agreement.

Ukraine can hold elections soon if security is ensured: Zelenskyy

ASSOCIATED PRESS

■ Kyiv

Ukrainian officials were expected to hand their latest peace proposals to United States negotiators on Wednesday, according to President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, who also said Ukraine would be ready for elections within three months if partners can guarantee a safe vote during wartime and if its electoral law can be altered.

Zelenskyy was responding to comments by US President Donald Trump in which he questioned Ukraine’s democracy and suggested the Ukrainian leader was using the war as an excuse not to hold an election.

Zelenskyy told reporters late Tuesday that he is “ready” for an election but would need help from the US and possibly Europe to ensure security for a vote to happen. He suggested that Ukraine could be ready to hold balloting in 60 to 90 days if that proviso is met.

“To hold elections, two issues must be addressed: primarily, security—how to



conduct them, how to do it under strikes, under missile attacks; and a question regarding our military — how they would vote,” Zelenskyy said. “And the second issue is the legislative framework required to ensure the legitimacy of elections,” he said. Previously, Zelenskyy had pointed out that a ballot can’t legally take place while martial law imposed due to Russia’s invasion nearly four years ago is in place. He has also asked how a vote could happen when civilian areas of Ukraine are being bombarded by Russia and almost 20 per cent of the country is under

Russian occupation. Zelenskyy said he has asked lawmakers from his party in Parliament to draw up legislative proposals that would allow elections while Ukraine is under martial law.

Ukrainians have on the whole supported Zelenskyy’s arguments, and there has been no clamor in Ukraine for an election. Under the Ukrainian law that is in force, Zelenskyy’s rule is legitimate. But with Trump pressing hard for a deal between Kyiv and Moscow, Zelenskyy is walking a tightrope between defending Ukrainian interests and showing the American presi-

dent that he is willing to make some compromises.

Russian President Vladimir Putin has repeatedly complained that Zelenskyy can’t legitimately negotiate a peace settlement because his five-year term in office that began in 2019 has expired. “I think it’s an important time to hold an election. They’re using war not to hold an election,” Trump said in an interview with Politico, echoing Moscow’s stance.

A new US national security strategy released last Friday made it clear that Trump wants to improve America’s relationship with Moscow.” The document also portrays European allies as weak. Russia’s Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov on Wednesday praised Trump’s role in the Ukraine peace effort, saying in a speech at the Federation Council, the upper house of Russia’s Parliament, that Moscow appreciates his “commitment to dialogue.” Trump, Lavrov said, is “the only Western leader” who shows “an understanding of the reasons that made war in Ukraine inevitable.”

Renewed Thailand-Cambodia border clash displaces thousands of people

ASSOCIATED PRESS

■ Surin

Renewed border fighting between Thailand and Cambodia showed no signs of abating on Wednesday, leaving hundreds of thousands of displaced people in both countries living in strained conditions as more flooded into temporary shelters. Associated Press reporters on the Thai side of the border heard sounds of outgoing, indirect fire on Wednesday.

About 400,000 people have been evacuated from affected areas in Thailand, and around 700 schools closed while fighting was ongoing in four border provinces, Thai military spokesperson Rear Adm. Surasant Kongsiri said Wednesday. Cambodia evacuated more than 127,000 villagers, and hundreds of schools closed, the defence ministry said.

Thailand’s military announced that casualties this week include five soldiers killed and dozens wounded. Cambodia said seven civilians died and 20 others were wounded,



though it did not update those figures on Wednesday. There is not yet a clear path to peace as Thailand’s Prime Minister Anutin Charnvirakul vowed to continue to fight, and Cambodia’s powerful Senate President Hun Sen promised a fierce response.

A knock-on effect of the fighting and bad blood between the nations was Cambodia’s withdrawal of its entire team from the 33rd Southeast Asian Games, which began Tuesday in Thailand. A Wednesday announcement from the National Olympic Committee of Cambodia said it regretted the action,

but the families of competitors were concerned about their safety. The new, widespread fighting followed a skirmish on Sunday that wounded two Thai soldiers and derailed a ceasefire pushed by US President Donald Trump that ended armed combat in July.

The five days of fighting over territorial disputes left dozens dead on both sides and forced the evacuation of thousands of civilians. The ceasefire was brokered by Malaysia and pushed through by pressure from Trump, who threatened to withhold trade privileges from the two nations unless they agreed.

Democrat wins Miami mayor’s race for the first time in nearly 30 years

ASSOCIATED PRESS

■ Miami

Democrat Eileen Higgins won the Miami mayor’s race on Tuesday, defeating a Republican endorsed by President Donald Trump to end her party’s nearly three-decade losing streak and give Democrats a boost in one of the last electoral battles ahead of the 2026 midterms.

“Tonight, the people of Miami made history,” Higgins said in a statement after the results were announced.

Higgins, 61, will be the first woman to lead the city of Miami. She spoke frequently in the Hispanic-majority city about Trump’s immigration

crackdown, saying she has heard of many people in Miami who were worried about family members being detained. She campaigned as a Democrat despite the race being officially nonpartisan and beat Trump-backed candidate Emilio Gonzalez, a former city manager, who said he called Higgins to congratulate her. “I’ve never been prouder to be a Democrat,” Higgins told The Associated Press before her victory.

“We’re living in the state of Florida, where we have people that are building cages for our residents rather than affordable housing for them.” The local race is not predictive of what may

happen at the polls next year. But it drew attention from the two major national political parties and their leaders. The victory provides Democrats with some momentum heading into a high-stakes mid-term election when the GOP is looking to keep its grip in Florida, including in a Hispanic-majority district in Miami-Dade County. The area has shifted increasingly rightward politically in recent years, and the city may become the home of Trump’s presidential library.

“Tonight’s result is yet another warning sign to Republicans that voters are fed up with their out-of-touch agenda that is raising costs,” said Ken Martin, the chair of the Democratic National Committee, in a statement. Some nationally recognised Democrats supported Higgins, including former Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg. US Senator Ruben Gallego and former Chicago Mayor Rahm Emanuel traveled to Miami on Sunday and Monday to rally voters for the Democrat who served as a Miami-Dade county commissioner for seven years.

Higgins, who speaks Spanish, represented a district that leans conservative and includes the Cuban neighborhood of Little Havana. When she first



entered politics in 2018, she chose to present herself to voters as “La Gringa,” a term Spanish speakers use for white Americans, because many people did not know how to pronounce her name.

“It just helps people understand who I am, and you know what? I am a gringa. So, what am I going to do, deny it?” she told.

Republicans in Florida have found strong support from voters with heritage from Cuba, Venezuela and

Nicaragua, because they likened some members of the Democratic party’s progressive wing with politicians from the Governments they fled. Trump and other GOP members have tapped into those sentiments over the past eight years.

However, some local Republicans are growing increasingly frustrated since November’s elections when Democrats scored wins in New Jersey and Virginia, where both winning gubernatorial candidates performed strongly with non-white voters.

The results from those races were perceived as a reflection of concerns over rising prices and the Trump administration’s aggressive immigration policies.

Republican Maria Elvira Salazar, a Republican whose district is being targeted by Democrats and includes the city of Miami, called the elections elsewhere a “wake-up call.” She said Hispanics also want a secure border and a healthy economy but some relief for “those who have been here for years and do not have a criminal record.”

कार्यालय नगर पालिक निगम, (यांत्रिक विभाग) भोपाल

निविदा आमंत्रण सूचना

क्रमांक.193/यां.वि./2025

भोपाल, दिनांक. 09/12/2025

निम्न कार्य हेतु म.प्र. लोक निर्माण विभाग में पंजीकृत ठेकेदारों से अनलाइन निविदा आमंत्रित की जाती है। विस्तृत विवरण website <https://www.mptenders.gov.in> पर है।

क्रमांक	निविदा क्रमांक	कार्य का संक्षिप्त विवरण	अनुमानित लागत (रु.में)	निविदा क्रय करने का अंतिम दिनांक	समय
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नोट- संशोधन वेबसाइट पर ही देखे जा सकेंगे समाचार पत्रों में प्रकाशित नहीं होंगे।

कार्यपालन यंत्र (सिविल)

नगर निगम भोपाल

नि.क्र. 2770/025/026

PUBLIC NOTICE
It is for general information that I, GEETANJALI NAGOURI D/O GOVIND NAGOURI R/O A-332, A-BLOCK, J.J. COLONY, MADIPUR, PASCHIM VIHAR S.O., WEST DELHI, DELHI-110063 declare that name of my mother has been wrongly written as SANDHYA in my 10th and 12th class educational documents. The actual name of my mother is SANDHYA NAGOURI, which may be amended accordingly.

PUBLIC NOTICE
The general public is hereby informed that Axis Bank Limited, having its branch at First Floor, Himalaya House, K.G. Marg, New Delhi-110001, is proposing to extend a loan facility in favour of Smt. Bhavana Bhargava (hereinafter referred to as the “Borrower”) against Commercial Suite Flat No. 405, addressing 1045.75 sq. ft., situated on the Fourth Floor of the multi-storied office-cum-commercial complex known as “The Peach Tree”, located in C-Block, Sustant Lok, Gurugram, Haryana (hereinafter referred to as the “Said Property”). As per the available records, Sh. Hanumanth Talwar, son of Sh. R.N. Talwar, was the recorded owner of the Said Property by virtue of a Sale Deed registered as Document No. 5948 dated 03.06.2013. Subsequently, Sh. Hanumanth Talwar expired on 20.07.2021, whereupon his legal heirs, namely Smt. Meena Talwar, wife of Late Hanumanth Talwar and Sh. Ujjwal Sagar Talwar, son of Late Hanumanth Talwar, executed a Relinquishment Deed in favour of Sh. Utsav Sagar Talwar, son of Late Hanumanth Talwar. The said deed stands registered as Document No. 12393 dated 06.10.2022. It is further stated that the original Relinquishment Deed (Document No. 12393 dated 06.10.2022) has been lost, and an FIR/Complaint has been lodged vide Application No. 132270312500668 through the Haryana Police Citizen Service Portal. Any person(s) who may be in possession of the aforesaid original document, or who may have found or recovered the same, or any person(s) having any claim, objection, right, title, or interest in respect of the Said Property, or having any objection to the proposed transfer in favour of the Borrower, is hereby called upon to notify and contact the undersigned within seven (07) days from the date of publication of this notice; failing which, Axis Bank Limited shall proceed with the proposed loan transaction and shall not be held responsible or liable for any claim(s), objection(s), or encumbrance(s) arising thereafter.
Himanshu Ahuja (Advocate)
Contact No.: 011-41830049
E-mail Address: alolegals@gmail.com

SOUTH EASTERN COALFIELDS LIMITED

“A MINI RATNA COMPANY”

NOTICE

All the tenders issued by SECL for procurement of Goods, Works and Services are available on website of SECL <http://www.secl-cil.in>. CIL e-procurement portal <http://coalindiatenders.nic.in> and Central Public Procurement Portal <http://eprocure.gov.in> In addition, procurement is also done through GeM portal <http://gem.gov.in>. SECL’s mining services tenders are also now available on GeM portal <http://gem.gov.in>

DELHI TRANSCO LIMITED

NOTICE INVITING e -TENDER

Delhi Transco Ltd, a Government of NCT of Delhi Undertaking, intends to invite following online Two Part Domestic Competitive Bidding (DCB) Tender for the following works :
Tender No. T25P090662: Augmentation of 33/11 kV, 1x20 MVA & 1x16 MVA transformer with 2x25 MVA transformer including replacement of outlived 01 no. 11kV switchgear panel board with new 11 kV Panel Board and complete civil works at 220 kV Substation Patparganj alongwith supply of 02 nos. spare 11 kV panel board - Turnkey package.
For complete details of the tender please visit following websites:-
<https://govtprocurement.delhi.gov.in> (Tender ID No. 2025_DTL_282655_1) and www.dtl.gov.in with Unique No. DTL-9805-101225
Last date for bid submission:- 29.01.2026 at 01.30 P.M.
All Corrigendum/Addendum/ Amendments/Date of Extension/Clarifications etc. to this e-tender will be hosted on the above website only. Bidders should regularly visit website to keep themselves updated.

PARADIP PORT AUTHORITY

e-TENDER CALL NOTICE

No. EM/PED-35/2025

No.EM/PED/TECH-26/2025/967 Date: 02.12.2025

Name of the work: Design, supply and installation of LED flood lights as replacement of HPSV fittings on high mast towers at Paradip Port prohibited area. Estimated cost: Rs.1,71,23,700/-

Last date & time of submission of bid: 07/01/2026 up to 18:00 Hrs. Refer our website for details <https://eprocure.gov.in/eprocure/app>.

Sd/- Executive Engineer (Elect.), PED-III

PPA/PR/57/2025-26 dtd.05.12.2025

प्रीति सेक्टर डीपार्टमेंट, ईस्ट डेल्ही

REGIONAL OFFICE, Ph. : 011-23448773

APPOINTMENT OF FINANCIAL LITERACY COUNSELLORS ON CONTRACT BASIS

Bank of Baroda, a Government of India Enterprise, invites Online/Offline application from interested candidate who are an ex-banker (Officer Cadre) with minimum 5 years of experience in any Nationalised Bank/RRB/Pvt. Bank or Business correspondent/BC Coordinator with minimum 5 years of experience or Ex RSETI Director with minimum 3 years of experience/Faculty with minimum 5 years of experience in banking/with related fields, NBFCs/FIs etc and age at the time of application should not exceed 64 years, for appointment as Financial Literacy Counsellor on contract basis at the Shahdara, (Shahdara District) center in Delhi State. For full details visit our Bank's website: www.bankofbaroda.in
Last Date of application received at our office: 20.12.2025
Date : 03.12.2025 Regional Manager

PUBLIC NOTICE

This public notice is issued by Jasmeet Singh Wallia S/o Lt. Charanjeet Singh Wallia R/o C-165, Vivek Vihar, Phase-1, Delhi-110095 being the Attorney of Shri Gaurav Bajaj s/o Late Tisak Raj Bajaj and Smt. Veena Rani, W/o Late Tisak Raj Bajaj, the promotor directors and shareholders holding 64.36% shares of the company namely M/s Sanskriti Villas Private Limited.
Public at large is put to notice that Shri Gaurav Bajaj has filed a complaint bearing no. C-484/25 against those who have misappropriated the funds of the company and have illegally sold the assets of the company including two of its directors namely Mr. Naveen Wadhwa and Mrs. Neelima Wadhwa before Economic Offence Wing, Delhi. The Wadhwas have sold half portion of one of the properties of company (i.e. property bearing no. A-16, Naraina Vihar, Delhi-110028), much below market value to themselves (i.e. Mrs. Neelima Wadhwa who is wife of Mr. Naveen Wadhwa and another half to Jaswant Singh, Gurjeet Singh and Indrajeet Singh.
Take notice that the company is owner of various other properties including following immovable properties.
PROPERTY ADDRESS
1 Flat no. 87/1, G.F. CAT-1/IGB BLK-C-4, Safdarjung, Development Area, New Delhi-110016.
2, Q.6, First & Second Floor, Model Town Part 1, New Delhi-110009
3 Farm No. 9G, Gadajpur Village, Near Sultanpur Metro Station, Mehrauli, New Delhi-110030
Take notice that promotor directors and shareholders are in process of filing a petition of oppression and mismanagement before NCLT, Delhi inter alia against Wadhwas and to remove them from directorship of Company.
The public and financial institutions at large are put to notice that no one except the company acting through Shri Gaurav Raj Bajaj and Veena Rani has any right to deal or transact with respect of any of the present/past assets of the company namely M/s Sanskriti Villas Private Limited.
In case anyone deals with the same, they shall do the same at their own cost, risk and consequence and the said deal or transaction shall not be binding on the company in any manner whatsoever.
SANSKRITI VILLAS PVT LTD
Office No. 2, Tower 708, Narayana Community Centre, Narayana Vihar, New Delhi-110028

New Okhla Industrial Development Authority

Administrative Building, Sector-6, Noida, (U.P.)

Website: www.noidaauthorityonline.in

E-TENDER NOTICE

E-Tenders are invited from eligible contractors/firm for the following jobs against which bids can be uploaded and same shall be opened/downloaded as per schedule mentioned. The details and conditions of all tenders are available on Noida Authority's official Website: www.noidaauthorityonline.in & <https://etender.up.nic.in>. Please ensure to see these websites for any changes/ amendments & corrigendum etc.

A) Fresh - Tender Work:

S. No.	Jobs No.	Name of the Work	Tender Amount (Rs. Lacs)
1.	19/SM (WC-4)/ET /2025-26	M/o Road (R/o) Potholes Patches, Crack Sealing and C/o Table Top Speed Breaker Thermo Plastic Paint Cateye and Direction Board etc. in Sector-64, 65 & 69), Noida	76.06
2.	20/SM (WC-4)/ET /2025-26	M/o Road (C/o) Approach road to Hindon Pusta at 24.00 mtr. wide road Sector-63A, near Hanuman Temple Behlolpur), Noida	38.71
3.	22/DGM/SM (WC-9)/ 2025-26	M/o Road (Filling Pot Holes & Patch repair of Work Circle -9 area), Noida	45.22
4.	13/DGM/SM (WC-10)/ET/ 2025-26	M/o Road (R/o) Patch Work in WC-10 area), Noida	79.96
5.	22/DGM/SM (WC-3)/ 2025-26	M/o Drain (C/o) RCC Drain and Culvert in front of Plot No. PP-01 (Petrol Pump) in Sector-47, Noida	64.02

The above tenders can be uploaded by dated 26.12.2025 upto 5:00 PM. Pre-qualification shall be opened/downloaded on dated 27.12.2025 at 11:00 AM.
Dy. General Manager (Civil)
Noida
CLEAN, GREEN, SAFE & SECURE NOIDA

Sudanese military plane crashes, killing all crew members

ASSOCIATED PRESS

■ Cairo

A Sudanese military aircraft crashed while attempting to land in the east of the country, killing all the crew, military officials said on Wednesday, in the latest plane crash in the war-torn African nation.

The Ilyushin Il-76 cargo plane experienced technical failure while attempting to land on Tuesday in the Osman Digna Air Base in the coastal city of Port Sudan, two officials said.

They said the crew were killed but didn’t disclose how many personnel were on board. The officials spoke on condition of anonymity because they weren’t authorised to brief the media.

Among the dead was military pilot Omran Mirghani, according to his uncle, prominent Sudanese journalist Osman Mirghani, who mourned his nephew’s death on social media.

The military didn’t comment on the crash. Plane crashes are not uncommon in Sudan, which has a poor aviation safety record. In February, at least 46 people were killed when a military aircraft crashed in Omdurman, the sister city of the capital, Khartoum. The military lost el-Fasher, its last stronghold in the sprawling region of Darfur, in October, and earlier this week was forced to pull out from the country’s largest oil processing facility in the central region of Kordofan.

The war in Sudan began in April 2023 over a power struggle between the military and the RSF. The conflict has killed over 40,000 people — a figure rights groups consider a significant undercount.

The fighting has wrecked urban areas and has been marked by atrocities, including mass rape and ethnically motivated killings, that amount to war crimes, especially in the western region of Darfur, according to the United Nations and international rights groups.

The war has also created the world’s worst humanitarian crisis and pushed parts of the country into famine.

Bangladesh insists on Hasina extradition

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ Dhaka

Bangladesh's interim Government on Wednesday said it will continue diplomatic efforts to bring back from India deposed prime minister Sheikh Hasina, who has been convicted and sentenced in multiple cases.

The 78-year-old Awami League leader has been living in India since she fled Bangladesh on August 5 last year in the face of the massive protests.

"We will try to convince India to send her back to Dhaka," Foreign Adviser Md Touhid Hossain was quoted as saying by the state-run BSS news agency.

Touhid noted that Hasina's repatriation ultimately depends on India's decision.

On Saturday, External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar said Hasina came to India "in a certain circumstance and I think that circumstance clearly sort of is a factor in what happens to her. But again, that is something which she has to make up her mind." Responding to reports suggesting possible third-country resettlement for the former premier, Touhid said he had only seen such claims in media coverage. "I did not receive any information through diplomatic channels," he added.

Touhid had earlier said



Foreign Adviser Touhid Hossain

FILE PHOTO

Bangladesh was not ruling out a response from India.

On November 17, the International Crimes Tribunal sentenced Hasina and former Home Minister Asaduzzaman Khan Kamal to death for "crimes against humanity" committed during the July-August mass uprising last year.

Following the court verdict, Bangladesh sent a letter to India seeking her

extradition. India said it is examining a request by Bangladesh's interim Government to extradite Hasina, asserting that New Delhi is committed to ensuring the best interests of the people of that country. Hasina has said the judgment has been made by a "rigged tribunal established and presided over by an unelected Government with no democratic mandate".

On November 27, another court sentenced Hasina to 21 years in jail in three corruption cases related to irregularities in allocations of land in a Government housing project.

On December 1, Hasina was convicted by a court which sentenced her to five years in jail and her niece, British parliamentarian Tulip Siddiq, to a two-year jail term in a land scam case.

2 ADVISERS OF INTERIM GOVERNMENT RESIGN

Dhaka: Two student leaders turned advisers of the interim government in Bangladesh tendered their resignations on Wednesday ahead of the Election Commission's announcement of the schedule for the polls in February. The resignation by M Mahfuj Alam and Asif Mahmud Shojib Bhuyain comes in wake of the Election Commission's (EC) decision that no adviser can contest the polls while holding a position in the interim government. "Adviser for Information and Broadcasting M Mahfuj Alam and Adviser for Local Government, Rural Development & Cooperative and Youth & Sports Asif Mahmud Shojib Bhuyain have tendered their resignation letters at around 5 pm to the Chief Adviser Muhammad Yunus," a statement from the chief adviser's office said. Both Alam and Bhuyain were inducted as representatives of Students Against Discrimination (SAD), the organisation which led a violent street movement that toppled former prime minister Sheikh Hasina's government on August 5, 2024. "The nation will remember your leadership and contribution to the 'revolution' (uprising) remaining at its frontline to

free the nation from fascist (Awami League) rule," the statement quoted Yunus as saying while accepting their resignation. "The nation will never forget what you gave to it in such a short time," Yunus said. Of the three SAD leaders appointed as advisers by Yunus, Nahid Islam quit in February to form the National Citizen Party (NCP), a political offshoot of the students' organisation. Bhuiyan earlier said he would resign to take part in upcoming elections, but Alam so far has made no comment in public about his future plans. However, neither of them have officially disclosed any link with NCP or any other political party. The EC on Tuesday said Chief Election Commissioner AMM Nasir Uddin would announce the schedule for the upcoming polls in the next two days. The EC had earlier clarified that no adviser can contest the polls while holding a position in the interim government. Bangladesh's top electoral officials on Wednesday met President Mohammed Shahabuddin, who assured "optimum support and cooperation" to the Election Commission to conduct the February general elections in a "free, fair and meaningful" manner.

European nations set to discuss tightening of migration rules



ASSOCIATED PRESS ■ Brussels

European leaders will call for a toughening of migration policies on Wednesday in a move critics say bends to pressure from far-right groups and harms basic human rights protections for vulnerable people. Ministers from 27 EU member nations are meeting in Brussels to discuss countering migrant smuggling, with a keynote speech by European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen. In Strasbourg, France, representatives from the Council of Europe – 46 countries from Iceland to Azerbaijan – are expected to debate making deporting migrants easier for signatories to key treaties. Denmark was part of a nine-nation attempt last year to curtail the power of

the European Court of Human Rights, the independent legal arm of the Council of Europe. Austria, Belgium, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania and Poland argued that the court's interpretation of rights obligations prevented them from expelling migrants who commit crimes. That effort ultimately failed, but support for its basic tenets has since grown. The European Court of Human Rights handles complaints against the Council of Europe, under the European Convention on Human Rights, including many cases involving migrants and asylum-seekers. The inter Governmental organisation is not an EU institution and was set up in the wake of World War II to promote peace and democracy.

Critics of army go on silent strike in Myanmar



ASSOCIATED PRESS
■ Bangkok

Opponents of military rule in Myanmar staged a joint protest on Wednesday calling on people to stay indoors to show they are boycotting elections scheduled for late this month.

They defied harsh legal penalties for attempting to disrupt the polls. The military Government has announced charges against 10 pro-democracy activists who staged a rare street protest last week in Mandalay, the country's second biggest city.

Critics say the Dec 28 polls will be neither free nor fair and are an effort by the military to legitimise its rule after seizing power from the elected Government of Aung San Suu Kyi in February 2021.

The General Strike Coordination Body, the leading non-violent organization opposing army rule, had urged people to join a "silent strike" on Wednesday. It called on the public to stay inside homes or workplaces from 10 am to 3 pm on International Human Rights Day. The tactic has been used on special occasions since the military takeover.

Images on social media showed uncrowded streets in Yangon, Myanmar's largest city, and elsewhere.

Also on Wednesday, the State-run *Myanma Alinn* newspaper reported that authorities were seeking

the arrest of the 10 activists under a section of a new election law that carries a maximum penalty of 10 years in prison for disrupting the electoral process.

They are charged with allegedly misleading the public by distributing leaflets against the election around a crowded morning market in Mandalay on December 3. The brief flash-mob protest in Mandalay, where heavy security and frequent crackdowns have made open dissent nearly impossible, drew widespread attention. Most of the activists made no effort to hide their faces while they tossed leaflets and shouted slogans.

Among those charged are well-known activists Tayzar San, Nan Lin and Khant Wai Phyo. They led the protest calling for the public to reject elections, abolition of the military conscription law and the release of political prisoners.

Tayzar San, a physician-turned-activist, organized the first public protest in Mandalay a few days after the military seized power in 2021. That helped spark nationwide resistance, and an arrest warrant was issued for him. "Although it has been five years, the public's mobilization is the main obvious evidence that it has not become complacent and has not cowardly given up under the oppressive mechanisms of the military dictatorship," Tayzar San told after last week's Mandalay protest.

Machado's daughter accepts Nobel Peace Prize

ASSOCIATED PRESS
■ Oslo

Venezuelan opposition leader Maria Corina Machado's daughter accepted the Nobel Peace Prize on her mother's behalf Wednesday, hours after officials said Machado would miss the ceremony.

Machado has been in hiding and has not been seen in public since Jan. 9, when she was briefly detained after joining supporters in a protest in Caracas, Venezuela's capital.

Jorgen Watne Frydnes, chair of the Norwegian Nobel committee, told the award ceremony that "Maria Corina Machado has done everything in her power to be able to attend the ceremony here today – a journey in a situation of extreme danger." "Although she will not be able to reach this ceremony and today's events, we are profoundly happy to confirm that she is safe, and that she will be with us here in Oslo,"



he said to applause.

The director of the Norwegian Nobel Institute and Machado's spokesperson said earlier Wednesday that she wouldn't be able to attend the ceremony. Her daughter Ana Corina Sosa did instead. Maria Corina Machado said in an audio recording of a phone call published on the Nobel website that many people had "risked their lives" for her

to arrive in Oslo.

"I am very grateful to them, and this is a measure of what this recognition means to the Venezuelan people," she said before indicating she was about to board a plane.

"I know that there are hundreds of Venezuelans from different parts of the world who were able to reach your city that are right now in Oslo, family, my team, so many colleagues,"

Machado added.

"And since this is a prize for all Venezuelans, I believe that it will be received by them. And as soon as I arrive, I will be able to embrace all my family and my children that I've not seen for two years, and so many Venezuelans, Norwegians that I know that share our struggle and our fight."

Latin American leaders present in solidarity Prominent Latin American figures attended on Wednesday in a signal of solidarity with Machado, including Argentine President Javier Milei, Ecuador's President Daniel Noboa, Panama's President Jose Raul Mulino and Paraguayan President Santiago Peña.

The 58-year-old's win for her struggle to achieve a democratic transition in her South American nation was announced on Oct. 10, and she was described as a woman "who keeps the flame of democracy burning amid a growing darkness."

H-1B visa interviews for Indians deferred as US tightens social media vetting rules

ASHOKE RAJ ■ New Delhi

The processing of H-1B visas for thousands of Indian applicants has hit a major roadblock after the United States introduced stricter social media screening requirements.

A wave of interview appointments has now been pushed into 2026, creating uncertainty for professionals and families planning to relocate for work.

On Tuesday night, the US Embassy in India issued a fresh advisory informing applicants that their previously confirmed appointment dates may no longer stand. The embassy said that anyone who has received a reschedule notification must appear only on the new date assigned to them.

"If you have received an email advising that your visa

appointment has been rescheduled, Mission India looks forward to assisting you on your new appointment date," the advisory stated.

The embassy also cautioned that applicants will not be allowed to enter the consulate if they show up on their earlier appointment date despite receiving a reschedule alert. "Arriving on your previously scheduled appointment date will result in your being denied admittance to the Embassy or Consulate," it said.

According to a media report, several interviews slated for mid to late December have now been postponed to March next year, though the exact number of affected applicants is unclear.

Immigration attorney Steven Brown from a promi-

nent US firm confirmed that Mission India has cancelled "a significant number" of upcoming appointments and shifted them to March to make room for the new vetting procedures.

New Social Media Rules Now Mandatory

Beginning December 15, the US State Department is requiring H-1B applicants and their H-4 dependents to set all social media accounts to public visibility. Officials will examine applicants' online activity as part of an expanded vetting programme aimed at identifying individuals who may be inadmissible or pose national security risks.

This level of scrutiny had previously been applied to students and exchange visitors, but the latest update brings employment-based visa applicants squarely

under the same framework. "Every visa adjudication is a national security decision," the State Department said, underscoring the rationale behind the new policy.

Part of Wider Crackdown on Skilled Worker Immigration

The new screening measures come at a time when the H-1B programme—considered the most critical pathway for skilled foreign workers in the US—has been facing tightening restrictions.

In September, the Trump administration introduced a one-time \$100,000 fee on all new H-1B work visas, a move widely expected to raise costs for both applicants and employers, particularly Indian IT and consulting companies. The administration has framed the fee as necessary for national security,

though critics have labelled it a deterrent to global talent.

More recently, the US paused the processing of Green Card, citizenship, and other immigration applications from individuals originating from 19 "countries of concern" following an incident in which a National Guard member was killed by an Afghan national. Though the suspension does not directly target Indian applicants, it signals a broader tightening of immigration policies across categories.

Impact on Indian Professionals

India is the single largest source of H-1B talent for the US, and visa appointment delays can significantly disrupt project timelines, job transitions, and family planning for thousands of skilled

workers. With interviews now deferred by months, many applicants are left scrambling to reorganise travel plans and employer commitments.

Recruitment specialists say the backlog may grow in the coming weeks as US authorities prioritise the rollout of social media vetting.

For companies with high dependence on Indian talent, the delays could add pressure to already strained onboarding schedules.

For now, the Embassy's message remains clear: applicants must rely solely on the new dates issued to them and should not attempt to walk in on previously scheduled appointments. As the new screening regime takes full effect, applicants are preparing for longer wait times and heightened scrutiny in the months ahead.

North Korea's ruling elite prepares for party meeting

ASSOCIATED PRESS ■ Seoul

North Korean leader Kim Jong Un and other top officials have gathered to discuss preparations for the ruling party's first full congress in five years, state media reported Wednesday. The top-level meeting will set new priorities as the U.S. and South Korea seek a resumption of talks with North Korea. The Korean Central News Agency reported that Kim presided over a plenary meeting of the Workers Party's Central Committee on Tuesday. It said participants began discussing unspecified key issues related to the party congress and reviewing this year's state policies. KCNA gave no further details, but observers say the plenary meeting will likely last a few days and set an official agenda for the party congress, which is expected to be held in January or February.



Lavrov lauds India for pursuing independent foreign policy

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Moscow

Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov on Wednesday lauded "good friend" India for pursuing an independent multi-vector foreign policy. "Other countries of the global majority are pursuing this policy, and our good friend India, which maintains relations with all players, is indicative of this," Lavrov said while addressing the Federation Council, the upper chamber of parliament. "We also believe that promoting the solution of the problem of domestic development is the main goal of our foreign policy. The coincidence of the strategic assessments and goals of our two countries was confirmed during President Vladimir Putin's visit to New Delhi and his talks with the Indian leaders last week," he said. Putin visited India from December 4-5. It was his first visit to India since 2021.



PROSPECT

Parliamentary panel urges faster green clearances for coal mining projects

A parliamentary panel on Wednesday said that efforts should be intensified to reduce the average time taken for seeking green clearances for coal mining projects in both public and private sectors. The panel also sought the reasons for the differences in the average time required to obtain environment clearance (EC) and forest clearance (FC) for the projects.

The Standing Committee on coal, mines and steel chaired by Anurag Singh Thakur said that the average time taken for EC for Central Public Sector Undertakings (CPSUs) is roughly 15 to 18 months and the same for commercial coal blocks of private sector is around 26 months, whereas, the average time taken for FC approvals ranges from 24-30 months for CPSUs and up to 34 months for commercial coal blocks of private sector. "The Committee therefore may be apprised of the reasons for this difference in average time taken and are of the view that efforts may be made to reduce the average time taken for environment and forest clearances for public and private sectors," it said.

NGT conducts Regional Environment Conference in Chennai



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

The Regional Conference on Environment – 2025, organised by the National Green Tribunal, Southern Zone Bench, Chennai, in collaboration with the Southern State Pollution Control Boards and Committees at Kalaivanar Arangam, Chennai. The event was conducted under the leadership of Justice Prakash Shrivastava, Chairperson, NGT, with the guidance of Justice Pushpa Sathyanarayana, Judicial Member, NGT, Southern Zone Bench. The Conference was formally inaugurated by Justice

MM Sundresh, Judge, Supreme Court of India. The inaugural session commenced with Justice Pushpa Sathyanarayana extending a warm welcome to the dignitaries and participants. In his address, Justice Prakash Shrivastava emphasised that environmental protection is not merely a constitutional mandate under Articles 21, 48(A) and 51(A)(g), but also a shared moral responsibility. He highlighted that the NGT's initiatives extend beyond adjudication to creating awareness and guiding institutions toward sustainable environmental practices.

ED seizes 13 bank accounts of Reliance Infra

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

The Enforcement Directorate on Wednesday said it has seized more than a dozen bank accounts, holding about ₹55 crore worth deposits, of Anil Ambani Group company Reliance Infrastructure as part of a hawala-linked FEMA investigation. The ED in a Statement that Reliance Infrastructure Ltd (R-Infra), through its special purpose vehicles (SPVs), siphoned public funds from highway construction projects awarded by the National Highways Authority of India (NHAI) and sent them to the UAE illegally.

The investigation pertains to a 2010 tender that was awarded to the company as an EPC (engineering, procurement and construction) contract to build the JR Toll Road (Jaipur-Reengus highway). The agency said

13 bank accounts having a balance of ₹54.82 crore of R-Infra have been seized for "contravention" of the Foreign Exchange Management Act (FEMA). R-Infra said in a regulatory filing on Wednesday that it has received an order from the ED "whereby it has placed lien in the Company's bank accounts for ₹77.86 crore in relation to alleged violations under FEMA".

The ED had summoned Anil Ambani (66) for questioning in this case last month but he did not depose saying he could only make a "virtual appearance". It was not clear if the agency called him again.

A Statement issued by Ambani's spokesperson last month said this was "a purely domestic contract with no foreign exchange component involved whatsoever". "The JR Toll Road has been fully completed and, from 2021 onwards,



has been with the NHAI," the Statement had said.

Describing the alleged fraud, the ED said funds were diverted under the guise of sham sub-contracting arrangements to shell companies in Mumbai and these entities were set

up in a coordinated manner using dummy directors at specific bank branches in Mumbai.

These funds, according to the agency, were "layered" through a network of other shell entities and remitted to the UAE in the guise of

import of polished and unpolished diamonds without receipt of any equivalent goods or documentation.

The UAE entities to which funds were remitted had bank accounts in both the UAE and in Hong Kong.

These entities were found to be controlled by individuals engaged in international hawala transactions, it said. "The shell entities through which these funds were siphoned are found to be involved in international hawala transactions worth more than ₹600 crore," the ED said.

This diversion of the project funds led to "severe" financial stress in the affected SPVs, resulting in bank loans turning into non-performing assets (NPAs), thereby causing losses to lenders and jeopardising public financial interests, it said.

The November Statement from the businessman's spokesperson said Ambani served the company (R-Infra) for about 15 years, from April 2007 to March 2022, only as a non-executive director and was never involved in its day-to-day management.

Realme launches Watch 5 with independent GPS at ₹4,499

ABHINAV KUMAR JHA
■ New Delhi

Realme has launched the Watch 5 in India at a starting price of ₹4,499, positioning it as a budget smartwatch with features that are usually seen in costlier adventure and sports watches. The device is available on sale from December 10, with an introductory price of ₹3,999. The company is pairing the launch with a broader push into India-led manufacturing of its IoT products, signalling the start of a major shift in its operations.

A senior Realme executive said the company plans to manufacture its entire range of IoT devices, including smartwatches, earbuds and accessories, in India by 2027. The brand has tied up with Optiemus Electronics Limited for local production and aims to turn India into a key export hub for markets in South Asia, the Middle East, Russia and the European Union.

Realme expects the expansion to generate more



than 2,000 direct jobs and bring down overall production costs. The Watch 5 is central to this strategy. Realme is pitching it as a capable outdoor and fitness-focused wearable rather than just another notification device.

The watch features a 1.97-inch AMOLED display, inde-

pendent multi-system GNSS positioning and an IP68 rating, placing it ahead of most devices in its price segment. The larger screen supports a 60 Hz refresh rate, offering smoother interaction and better visibility outdoors.

Independent GPS tracking is one of the watch's

headline features. Most budget smartwatches rely on smartphones for location data, but the Watch 5 connects directly to multiple satellite systems. According to Realme, the technology improves route accuracy for activities such as running, cycling and walking. The feature is aimed at users

who prefer to leave their phones behind during workouts.

Battery life is another area where Realme is betting big. The company claims up to 16 days of typical use. Even with GNSS tracking enabled, the watch is designed to minimise energy drain during long outdoor sessions. Realme is targeting travellers and fitness enthusiasts who prefer fewer charging cycles.

On the health front, the Watch 5 includes continuous heart-rate monitoring, SpO2 measurement, sleep mapping and stress tracking. It also introduces a "body energy" score that merges activity, rest and stress indicators into a single daily metric. The companion app has been overhauled to present data in a simpler and more structured manner.

The watch supports 108 sports modes. Running, walking and cycling benefit the most from the onboard GPS, while gym-based modes use motion detection for rep counting.

Realme says it has improved accuracy over previous models but acknowledges that complex movements may still challenge the sensors.

The company has also emphasised design. The Watch 5 features a refined aluminium-alloy crown, a sturdier body and a new 3D wave strap that improves grip and reduces sweat accumulation. More than 300 watch faces are available at launch.

Realme's broader IoT roadmap ties directly into this product cycle. The company said India will play a central role in designing, testing and producing its next generation of IoT devices. The goal, the executive added, is to become one of the top IoT brands in the country within the next two to three years.

With the Watch 5, Realme is aiming to redefine expectations in the sub-₹5,000 smartwatch category while simultaneously building a long-term manufacturing base in India that will support its global ambitions.

Assam Chief Minister Sarma lauds martyrs as Swahid Smarak Kshetra opens

TONY DAS
■ Guwahati

Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Wednesday inaugurated the magnificent Swahid Smarak Kshetra at Paschim Boraigaon on the solemn observance of Swahid Divas. The ceremony was filled with reverence, set to the melody of Dr Bhupen Hazarika's timeless creation, 'Swahid Pranamu Tumak'.

Speaking on the occasion, CM Sarma paid glowing tributes to the martyrs of the historic Assam Movement, which focused on the expulsion of foreigners. He asserted that the movement holds a decisive place in the State's history, reflecting the patriotism, sacrifice and major struggle to protect the identity, pride, language, culture and heritage of the Assamese people. The Chief Minister stressed that each martyr remains revered and their lives serve as a perpetual inspiration. Sarma vividly recalled the background of the first martyr, Khargeswar Talukdar.

He explained that the movement was spurred when, on 2 December 1979, the Chief Election Commissioner decided to proceed with elections against the will of the people, who demanded the removal of foreign nationals' names from electoral rolls.

Ignoring this appeal, the Congress candidate for the Barpeta constituency, Begum Abida Ahmed, left Guwahati to file her nomination on the morning of 10 December.

Sarma recalled how, as a fifth-grade student, he joined the widespread protest to resist her journey. Police apprehended Khargeswar Talukdar, a first-year arts student of Howly College and tragically threw him into a roadside canal, leading to his death later that night. Inspired by his courage, 860 brave Assamese youths eventually gave their lives in the struggle.

The Chief Minister noted that on this sacred day, the grateful people of Assam remember the martyrs' sacrifice with deep respect. He confirmed that construction



Assam CM Himanta Biswa Sarma inaugurated the Swahid Smarak Kshetra at Paschim Boraigaon, Guwahati, offered shradhdhanjali to the Bir Swahids of the Assam Movement at Swahid Pranam Jyoti and interacted with the families of the martyrs. Union Minister Sarbananda Sonowal, Assam Ministers Atul Bora, Chandra Mohan Patowary, Keshab Mahanta also participated the function on wednesday

of the Swahid Smarak Kshetra began in Guwahati on 10 December 2019, a memorial now built on 150 bighas of land at a cost of ₹170 crore.

He Stated that this year's observance carries special significance. He observed that long after the Accord, the people lacked security and fresh threats to their land

and identity emerged due to the lack of courage in implementing the provisions of the Assam Accord.

He lamented that strangers illegally entered Assam, encroaching upon the land of sacred namghars and satras, including the birthplace of Srimanta Sankardev at Bardowa. These elements also infiltrated

Kaziranga, where rhinos were killed and attacked the cultural heritage and economic independence of the Assamese people, creating widespread despair.

Sarma Stated that during that difficult period, the people of Assam drew strength from the martyrs' sacrifices and prepared to fight back. He observed that

in the elections of 2014, 2019 and 2021, the populace collectively resolved not to hand Assam's political future to anyone other than the Assamese, preparing for a fight on political, cultural and economic fronts. He asserted that ten years of steady effort and continued struggle have strengthened the Assamese people, who

are now ready to challenge any threat to the State.

He highlighted key Government achievements: rhino poaching in Kaziranga has stopped, encroachers have been removed from forest land and the Government is actively pushing back illegal intruders. He affirmed that Assam is now safer than ever before but cautioned that the struggle continues due to the persistent threat of demographic aggression. He appealed to the people not to sell land to outsiders, even during financial hardship and requested they refrain from engaging outsiders in trade, industry, farming, or employing them as drivers, or allowing them to run businesses on footpaths.

The Chief Minister informed that over the past five years, the State freed lakhs of bighas of land from encroachers and created a system preventing outsiders from securing Government jobs. He revealed that the Government is considering a law to bar land purchases in minority areas unless the buyer belongs to a family

that has lived in Assam for three generations, urging the protection of namghars, satras and forest land.

Recalling the days of the Assam Movement, he urged the people to join a new struggle—one that is political, cultural and economic. He concluded by calling on every Assamese to visit the Swahid Smarak Kshetra at Boraigaon and take the pledge to protect the community and safeguard the State and the nation.

Union Minister of Ports, Shipping and Waterways Sarbananda Sonowal, Minister Implementation of Assam Accord etc Atul Bora, Minister Water Resources etc Pijush Hazarika, Minister Environment and Forests Chandramohan Patowary, Minister Revenue etc Keshab Mahanta, MP Bijuli Kalita Medhi, Deputy Speaker of the Assam Legislative Assembly Dr. Numal Momin, Chief Secretary Dr. Ravi Kota, Director General of Police Harmeet Singh, several legislators, members of the martyr families and many distinguished guests were present on the occasion.

Assam delivers nation's fastest limestone project launch

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Guwahati

Under the leadership of Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma, Assam achieved a remarkable feat on Wednesday, demonstrating exceptional speed in industrial project commencement.

The North Boro Hundong Limestone Block at Humdong, Umrangsoo, auctioned to M/S Dalmia Bharat Ltd, became fully operational in just nine months. This rapid commissioning made it the nation's fastest LOI-to-operation project.

Minister Kaushik Rai performed a puja at the site and



flagged off the first truck of limestone, officially marking the start of work.

The occasion was graced by several dignitaries, reflect-

ing the collective commitment behind this achievement, including Debolal Gorlosa, CEM of Dima Hasao Autonomous Council; Ajay

Tewari, Additional Chief Secretary; Paragmani Mahanta, DGM; and Pranjit Warry, Additional Secretary (Mines).

Sebi relaxes NRI re-KYC; drops physical presence

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ New Delhi

Markets regulator Sebi on Wednesday eased the re-KYC process for Non-Resident Indians (NRIs) by removing the requirement for them to be physically present in India during digital verification.

The relaxation is aimed at making the re-KYC process smoother and more accessible for NRIs. In its circular, Sebi has decided to modify the existing provisions to ease re-KYC access for NRIs after receiving references

from multiple stakeholders. Under this, the requirement of physical location of the client being in India during digital onboarding has been relaxed for undertaking re-KYC for existing clients, the regulator said.

Re-KYC (Re-Know Your Customer) is the process of updating or revalidating a customer's KYC details with a financial institution or intermediary. The digital KYC app will still need to use tools like random prompts, time-stamping and geo-tagging to ensure the interaction is genuine.

Chhatrapati Sambhajnagar Municipal Corporation
(Electrical) Section.

Contact No.0240-2333536-40

Office Address:- Chhatrapati Sambhajnagar Municipal Corporation.
(Electrical) Section.
Town Hall, Aurangabad.431001
Email:- eelight@aurangabadmahapalika.org

Name of work		Bid Submission End Date
1.	Shifting of MSEDCIL DTC, Pole, HT/LT line due to road widening and obstruction to traffic at newly developing roads in Chhatrapati Sambhajnagar (Tender Amount 23,70,51,217/-) by the e-tendering, detailed information /NIT documents are available on the website https://www.mahatenders.gov.in	Date:20.12.2025 Time 5.00 PM

Advt. : 624/2025
Date : 10/12/2025

Executive Engineer
(Electrical)
Chhatrapati Sambhajnagar
Municipal corporation.

BRIEFLY

SERGIO RAMOS BIDS
FAREWELL TO MONTERREY



Three days after Monterrey was eliminated in the Mexican Apertura semifinals, Spanish defender Sergio Ramos bid farewell to his team. The 39-year-old Ramos arrived in Mexico on a one-year contract that ended with Monterrey's elimination on Saturday. "It's never easy to say goodbye. A stage of my career that began with so much excitement in February has come to an end," Ramos posted Tuesday on his official social media accounts. "It has allowed me to discover a new country, a new city, a new style of football and has left me with so many new experiences and, more importantly, new friends." Ramos, who became captain of Monterrey, played in 34 matches in all competitions and scored eight goals. "I have left everything on the pitch and off it to be able to give my very best," the defender said. "I'll always look back fondly on this stage of my career."

COMMONWEALTH KHO KHO TO
BE HELD NEXT YEAR IN INDIA



Over 24 countries will compete in the inaugural Commonwealth Kho Kho Championship from March 9 to 14 next year, for which the venue is yet to be finalised in India. The Kho Kho Federation of India is in talks with several states to finalise the venue after Commonwealth Sport (CS) gave the approval for the event to take place in India. The event, which will see 16 men's and as many women's teams competing, will be organised on the lines of the first Kho Kho World Cup held in January this year in Delhi in which 23 nations participated. This will be the first Commonwealth Kho Kho event in India after Ahmedabad was recently officially confirmed as the host city for the 2030 Commonwealth Games.

India win bronze in FIH Men's Junior World Cup

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ Chennai

India produced a brave-heart performance, nullifying a two-goal deficit to beat Argentina 4-2 and clinch the bronze medal in the FIH Men's Junior World Cup on Wednesday. India, who won the title in 2016 in Lucknow, failed to finish on the podium on the last two occasions, ending fourth in 2021 in Bhubaneswar, and two years later in Kuala Lumpur. India produced a valiant fightback with Ankit Pal (49th minute), Manmeet Singh (52nd) and Anmol Ekka (58th) converting penalty corners, while Sharda Nand Tiwari finding the net from the spot in the 57th minute.

Argentina were the better side on display at least in the first two quarters, scoring through Nicolas Rodriguez (3rd minute) and Santiago Fernandez (44th).

The Argentines controlled the possession of the match in the first quarter as India struggled to get a foothold. Argentina secured their first



India's players celebrate a goal during an FIH Junior Men's Hockey World Cup match between India and Argentina at Mayor Radhakrishnan Hockey Stadium in Chennai, Tamil Nadu

PTI

chance in the third minute in the form of a penalty stroke following a foul by Anmol Ekka and Rodriguez made no mistake to hand his side the lead.

The Indians were guilty of giving away the ball too easily, which put paid to their chances in the first 15 minutes.

India had their best shot at the goal in the 20th minute but

Dilraj Singh's shot from top of the circle was finely saved by Argentina goalkeeper Joaquin Ruiz. The Indians started brightly after the change of ends and secured four back-to-

back penalty corners in the 31st minute but failed to execute a single one with Anmol Ekka flicking the final one over the post. Argentina kept up the pressure on the Indian defence

and secured their first penalty corner in the 37th minute but Indian goalkeeper Princedeep Singh made a brilliant double save to keep the hosts in the hunt. Argentina secured two more short corners in the 40th minute but failed to get past the Indian defence.

The visitors secured their fourth penalty corner in the 41st minute but Rodriguez flick was off target.

The Indians didn't lose heart and maintained the pressure in the final quarter and drew level, converting two penalty corners through deflections in the span of four minutes.

Ankit Pal reduced the margin in the 49th minute by deflecting in Anmol Ekka's flick from India's fifth penalty corner. Manmeet Singh drew parity for India four minutes later, deflecting in another Ekka's flick from India's sixth penalty corner.

With momentum on their side, India pressed hard on the Argentine defence thereafter and Tiwari scored from a penalty stroke three minutes from the final hooter.

India beat Uruguay in FIH Junior Women's World Cup

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ Santiago (Chile)

Goalkeeper Nidhi made several brilliant saves as India defeated Uruguay 3-1 in shootout after an intense 1-1 draw to stay in contention for a ninth place finish in the hockey Junior Women's World Cup.

Manisha (19') scored for India while Justina Arregui (60') slammed the equaliser for Uruguay on Tuesday in the 9/12 qualification match.

The first quarter saw India control the game, creating multiple chances early on. However, Uruguay won the first penalty corner in the fifth minute but squandered the chance.

India earned a penalty corner in the 18th minute and played an interesting variation by passing the ball to Sakshi Rana on the near post. But her shot was blocked by the rival goalkeeper.



Moments later, India broke the deadlock with Manisha (19') striking the ball from a distance as India took the lead.

The game opened up in the final quarter with Uruguay playing a lot more freely. With two minutes left on the clock, Uruguay switched their goalkeeper for an outfield player to push ahead in numbers and it paid off.

With two seconds left on

the clock, Uruguay won a penalty stroke. Justina Arregui converted the it to take the game into shootout.

India emerged victorious in the shootout as Purnima Yadav, Ishika and Kanika Siwach scored while goalkeeper Nidhi denied Uruguay thrice to ensure her team progresses in the tournament.

India will next play Spain on Thursday in the 9th/10th place match.

IOA and Italy's CONI sign MoU to strengthen bilateral sports cooperation

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ New Delhi

The Indian Olympic Association (IOA) and the Italian National Olympic Committee (CONI) on Wednesday signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to strengthen bilateral cooperation in sports with a focus on training, infrastructure sharing and sports science collaboration.

The agreement provides a "structured framework for joint promotion of sports, exchange of expertise and mutual access to each nation's elite sporting infrastructure and high-performance centres for athletes, coaches and sports science professionals".

The signing ceremony was attended by Italy's Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation

Antonio Tajani and Union Minister for Youth Affairs and Sports Mansukh Mandaviya.

"Today marks a proud moment for the Indian Olympic movement. This partnership with CONI opens new horizons for our athletes to train, learn, and excel within one of the world's most respected sporting systems," PT Usha, IOA President, said in a release.

"The exchange of knowledge, expertise, and infrastructure will play a pivotal role in elevating India's global sporting performance. We look forward to a long and inspiring collaboration with our Italian counterparts."

The MoU outlines structured plans for joint training camps, coaching exchanges, collaborative sports science programmes, and development pathways for emerging athletes, signalling a new era of cooperation between the two Olympic committees.

"This partnership arrives at a crucial moment for India's sporting ambitions. Access to world-class facilities and joint training programmes will significantly strengthen our athletes' preparation for future Olympic cycles," Mandaviya said.

"The Government of India welcomes this initiative and is committed to supporting meaningful international collaborations that uplift Indian sport." Luciano Buonfiglio, President of CONI, said, "Italy and India share a deep passion for sport, and this MoU represents an important step in strengthening that bond."

"By opening our high-performance facilities and expertise to each other, we are building a bridge of excellence that will benefit both nations' athletes for years to come. CONI is delighted to join hands with IOA in this forward-looking initiative."

Liverpool 1-0 win over Inter Milan in Champions League

ASSOCIATED PRESS
■ London

Even from the penalty spot, Liverpool managed just fine without Mohamed Salah.

After leaving the Egypt forward in England, Liverpool got a much-needed boost with a 1-0 win over Inter Milan in the Champions League on Tuesday. Barcelona and Bayern Munich celebrated comeback wins and Chelsea lost.

With regular penalty taker Salah out of the squad following his public criticism of the club last week, Dominik Szoboszlai stepped up instead to score the 88th-minute penalty which earned a 1-0 win over one of the competition's best-performing teams.

It was all the more valuable for coming after a run of one win in six games in all competitions for Arne Slot's under-pressure team, which moved up to eighth and is now back in contention for a direct spot in the round of 16. Inter dropped to fifth.



Liverpool's players thought they had taken the lead with Ibrahima Konate's header in the 31st minute. After a video review that lasted several minutes, it was ruled out for handball as Virgil van Dijk had earlier nodded the ball on to the arm of Hugo Ekitike.

Having taken away a goal from Liverpool, VAR came to the visitors' aid when it spotted that Alessandro Bastoni had tugged Florian Wirtz's shirt in the area, with the midfielder failing to the ground. Szoboszlai converted the penalty.

Bayern's new star shines

Bayern's 17-year-old midfielder Lennart Karl produced an audacious bit of skill to continue his high-scoring start to life in the Champions League in a 3-1 win over Sporting Lisbon which lifted Bayern to second behind Arsenal.

Karl scored his third goal in four career Champions League games, controlling a pass from Konrad Laimer in mid-air before volleying a shot from a tight angle over two onrushing defenders and past the goalkeeper.

It was part of a 12-minute, three-goal turnaround for Bayern after Joshua

Kimmich's own-goal handed Sporting the lead. Serge Gnabry leveled for Bayern when he was left unmarked at a corner in the 65th, before Karl scored Bayern's second in the 69th and defender Jonathan Tah made it 3-1 in the 77th.

Widely viewed as German soccer's best young talent this season, Karl became Bayern's youngest-ever Champions League scorer in October on his first start in the competitions.

Late on, Alphonso Davies came off the bench for the Canadian left back's first game since March after a serious knee injury.

Chelsea loses
Chelsea was beaten in the Champions League for the first time in nearly three months as Belgium forward Charles De Ketelaere set up the equalizer and scored an 83rd-minute winner as Atlanta came from behind to win 2-1.

Chelsea, which went ahead through Joao Pedro, dropped out of the top eight

automatic qualifying spots to 11th with its second loss. It was a fourth win for Atalanta, which climbed to third.

Gianluca Scamacca made it 1-1 by heading home a cross from De Ketelaere, who then drove in a shot that Chelsea goalkeeper Robert Sanchez got a hand to but couldn't keep out.

Koundé scores 2, Yamal sets record

Headers by Jules Koundé three minutes apart gave Barcelona a 2-1 comeback victory over Eintracht Frankfurt. Marcus Rashford assisted in the first goal in the 50th and Lamine Yamal with a cross in the second in the 53rd. That took Yamal to 14 career combined goals and assists in the Champions League, breaking a tie with Kylian Mbappe for the most by a player aged under 19, UEFA said.

The visitors had taken the lead with a goal by Ansgar Knauff in a 21st-minute breakaway at the renovated and only partially open Camp Nou stadium.

ASSOCIATED PRESS
■ Barcelona (Spain)

Barcelona coach Hansi Flick downplayed Lamine Yamal's reaction to being substituted late in the team's 2-1 win over Eintracht Frankfurt in the Champions League.

Yamal was replaced by Roony Bardghji in the 89th minute of the league-phase game. He walked off with a serious expression and appeared to be complaining to himself. He also didn't look happy after getting back to the bench.

"We changed Lamine with a few minutes to go because he was booked and it was late," Flick said. "If he was a bit annoyed, then I fully understand and I like it. I was a player too. It's fully acceptable, not a problem." Yamal was shown a yellow card in the 56th minute for a foul and will miss the team's next Champions League match.

His cross led to Jules Koundé's second goal in the 53rd to give Barcelona the come-from-behind victory



after the visitors had gone ahead in the 21st. Koundé also scored in the 50th.

The 18-year-old Yamal has produced more goal involvements — assists and goals — than any other player aged under 19 in Champions League history from group stage or league phase to final, according to UEFA. He has 14 — seven goals and seven assists. That is one more than Kylian Mbappé's previous record of 13 — 10 goals and three assists.

"It's great to have Jules scoring ... His talent and his

mentality are so important," Flick said. Koundé said it was "fun" to be able to make many forays into the attack.

"My first job is to defend well so I have to keep a balance," he said. "And there are games when we play against a back five — today Frankfurt were very deep, so you have to attack the spaces in behind, which is what I tried to do. I had success with those two goals."

It was the fifth consecutive match in which Barcelona conceded first. It rallied to victories in its last four games.

Real Madrid beat Wolfsburg in champions league

ASSOCIATED PRESS
■ London

Linda Caicedo raced clear from halfway to score the goal that clinched Real Madrid a 2-0 win over Wolfsburg in the Women's Champions League on Tuesday, while there were also victories for defending champion Arsenal and Juventus.

Paris Saint-Germain (PSG) stayed winless after five rounds after a 0-0 draw with OH Leuven, however, and cannot now progress to the knockout stage with one match remaining.

The 20-year-old Caicedo, regarded as one of the top younger players in the women's game, recently signed a long-term deal with Madrid and showcased her



talents with the second goal against Wolfsburg.

Played through by Caroline Weir, the Colombia striker outpaced the last defender after setting off inside her own half, rounded the goalkeeper, and slotted home a finish in the 67th minute. T

hat added to the opening goal in the 19th by Maria Méndez for Madrid, which finished the match with nine players. Maëlle Lakrar collected a second yellow card in first-half stoppage time, while Iris Santiago received a straight red in second-half

stoppage time.

Madrid moved above Wolfsburg and into third place — one of the four automatic qualifying places — with the win and is assured of at least a spot in the playoffs. So is Arsenal after a 1-0 home win over Twente, secured thanks to Beth Mead's deflected 10th-minute strike.

Juventus, meanwhile, thrashed St. Pölten 5-0 and climbed to second place, on the same points as Madrid and first-place Barcelona, which plays Benfica on Wednesday in its game in hand.

Cristiana Girelli scored two of Juve's goals — one of which was from the penalty spot.

PSG, a two-time runner-up and a semifinalist as recently as two seasons ago, will not even make it to the playoffs.

SIL to be held from February 16-26

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ New Delhi

The inaugural edition of the Shooting League of India (SLI) will be held from February 16 to 26 next year, the National Rifle Association of India (NRAI) said on Wednesday.

The dates have been finalised in alignment with the International Shooting Sport Federation's (ISSF) 2026 calendar to avoid clashes with major international competitions. The league had previously been deferred to early 2026.

The franchise-based league will feature several top Indian and international shooters competing in a mixed-team format across pistol, rifle and shotgun disciplines. "The SLI



is a milestone for our sport, franchise-built, athlete-first, and aligned to the global calendar to maximise participation," NRAI President Kalikesh Narayan Singh Deo said in a release.

"With mixed-team formats, compelling story-

lines, and a premium broadcast, we're set to deliver a world-class opening season that welcomes international stars and inspires India's next generation."

The competition will feature mixed team events in multiple categories —

pistol (10m, 25m), rifle (10m, 50m 3P), and shotgun (trap and skeet). The franchise-based teams will be divided into two pools for the league stage, followed by knockout rounds.

Players are drafted across four tiers — Elite Champions, World Elite, National Champions, and Junior & Youth — ensuring a mix of international stars, top Indian shooters, and emerging talent.

"With tighter formats, mixed-team dynamics, and a premium broadcast, the SLI can translate fine margins into compelling drama. It's the kind of platform that turns technical excellence into (a) must-watch sport," former World Champion Ronjan Sodhi said.

India to push ahead against SA in second T20I

BHARAT SHARMA
■ Mullanpur (New Chandigarh)

Yet to stamp his authority in the shortest format, Shubman Gill would be eying major gains on home soil when a well-rounded India look to extend their dominance over South Africa in the second T20 International on Thursday.

With only a travel day separating the first two games of the five-match series, Gill won't mind getting straight into the middle in search of a substantial knock.

India steamrolled South Africa in the series opener but the middling returns from Gill, since his T20 comeback in Asia Cup back in September, remains a talking point.

Following an impressive debut as Test captain in the UK, Gill was brought back into the T20 setup.

Even though Sanju Samson and his Punjab teammate Abhishek Sharma were doing the job at the top of the order, the team management showed immense faith in Gill's abilities as a T20 opener. The batter from Kerala was displaced and he has since then struggled to find a place in the playing eleven.

The Test and ODI captain can seamlessly perform the role that Virat Kohli performed for India till the T20 World Cup last year but the team, with batting options



Staff prepares the ground ahead of the second T20 International cricket match of a series between India and South Africa, at Maharaja Yadavindra Singh International Cricket Stadium in New Chandigarh

till number eight, has doubled down on its fearless approach since the triumph in Barbados, leaving little room for an anchor.

Gill certainly can't go hammer and tongs like Abhishek Sharma in the powerplay and therefore needs to figure out what works best for him. Besides Gill, captain Suryakumar Yadav, who has failed to find consistency over the past 12 months, is also facing additional scrutiny.

Couple of months down the line, Suryakumar would be leading India's World Cup defence at home and considering the added responsibility, flow of runs from his bat form a crucial piece of the puzzle heading into the ICC showpiece.

In the colder environment of New Chandigarh, India are unlikely to tinker with the winning combination. Returning to national duty from injury, Hardik Pandya reaffirmed his status as the

leading all-rounder in the game. His 28-ball 59 made a massive difference on a sticky wicket while it took him one ball to make an impact with the ball.

The selection on Tuesday also indicated that two strike bowlers, Arshdeep Singh and Kuldeep Yadav, will not be part of the same eleven due to the need for batting till number eight.

Arshdeep got the nod on this occasion and India's leading wicket-taker in the

format was once again able to provide the early wickets bowling alongside Jasprit Bumrah.

South Africa, on the other hand, would be looking for a drastically better outing with the bat after being bundled out for 74 in the run chase of 176. There is no time to reflect on the scale of the defeat and that can only be a good thing for the visitors.

"Nowadays in T20 cricket, there's not much time to look around and absorb. But

the biggest factor was obviously not being able to build partnerships, settling after losing wickets and getting some momentum on our side. So yeah, we'll have brief conversations," said skipper Aiden Markram.

The venue would be hosting its first ever T20 International after hosting two women's ODIs back in September.

During the last IPL, the pitches produced were not the easiest to bat on with scores ranging from excess of 200 to as low as 101.

On the sidelines of the fixture, stands named after Yuvraj Singh and Harmanpreet Kaur would also be unveiled.

Teams:

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

South Africa: Aiden Markram (captain), Quinton de Kock (wk), Tristan Stubbs, Dewald Brevis, David Miller, Donnovan Ferreira, Marco Jansen, Keshav Maharaj, Lutho Sipamla, Anrich Nortje, Lungi Ngidi, George Linde, Kweni Maphaka, Reeza Hendricks, Corbin Bosch, Tony de Zorzi, Ottneil Bartman.

Kohli rises to No 2 in ICC ODI rankings



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ Dubai

India great Virat Kohli's push to regain the top ODI batter spot received a boost as he moved up to the second place in the latest ICC rankings released on Wednesday.

Kohli hasn't held the No.1 position for ODI batters since he was displaced by Pakistan's Babar Azam in April 2021.

But the right-hander is closing in on the top spot following his superb recent efforts for India in the three-match ODI series against South Africa.

The 37-year-old was adjudged Player of the Series for his 302 runs across the three matches and he was duly rewarded on the latest set of rankings as he improved two places to second overall behind teammate Rohit Sharma.

Rohit amassed 146 runs across the series to hold on to his spot at the top of the rankings, with Kohli closing to within eight rating points on the back of his unbeaten innings of 65 not out in the series finale in

Visakhapatnam.

It helped India clinch the three-match series 2-1.

India ODI skipper Shubman Gill retained his fifth spot despite missing the three-match series while stand-in skipper KL Rahul rose two places to 12th overall after making two fifties in the rubber.

Left-arm spinner Kuldeep Yadav moved up three spots to third in the bowlers' chart. South Africa trio of Quinton de Kock (up three rungs to 13th), Aiden Markram (up four places to 25th) and Temba Bavuma (up three spots to 37th) also made gains on the rankings for ODI batters.

In the T20I rankings, the trio of Axar Patel (up two spots to 13th), Arshdeep Singh (up three places to 20th) and Jasprit Bumrah (up six rungs to 25th) made gains, following their comprehensive 101-run victory in Cuttack.

All of them had a good outing in the first T20I, taking two wickets apiece as India bowled out the Proteas for 74, their lowest-ever total in the shortest format.

Healthy competition brings out A-game: Jitesh

TAPAN MOHANTA
■ Cuttack

Jitesh Sharma, who has emerged as India's preferred wicketkeeper-batter in T20 format with less than two months left for the World Cup, has played down his 'competition' with Sanju Samson in the squad, saying it only brings out his "A-game" to the fore, strengthening the side.

India once again preferred Jitesh over Sanju for the opening T20I of the five-match series against South Africa, a game the hosts won convincingly by 101 runs at Barabati Stadium on Tuesday.

"He (Sanju) is a great player. If you have to compete against him and play shoulder to shoulder, then I have to bring my A-game. I think we both are trying to play for India, not for other teams," the 32-year-old said at the post-match interaction.

Sanju, who finished last year as India's leading T20I run-getter with 436 runs including three centuries, had formed a formidable opening pairing with Abhishek Sharma.

But the return of Shubman Gill to the T20I top order has unsettled the batting line-up, pushing Sanju lower than his preferred opening position.

In the last three T20Is against Australia, the management leaned towards Jitesh, seeing him as a natural middle and lower-order option more suited to finishing games.

India's T20I captain Suryakumar Yadav had also said Gill "deserved" to return as opener, a comment widely read as another hint that Sanju's role in the XI is uncertain under the current team plan. But Jitesh played down the individual competition, choosing instead to emphasise camaraderie and shared ambition.

"I am very grateful that he



is in the team and I'm under him. Frankly speaking, he is like an elder brother to me. I think because of healthy competition, your talent comes out. I think it's good for the team also.

"There is so much talent in this Indian team. You can feel it that Sanju is out and I'm playing. "We are like brothers. We share lots of experience with each other. He helps me a lot whenever I do keeping or batting."

Jitesh contributed an unbeaten 10 off five balls in an unbroken 38-run partnership with Hardik Pandya as India plundered 71 runs in the final six overs to finish on 175/6.

A reliable lower-order option since his debut at the Asian Games in 2023, Jitesh said he thrives in the finishing role -- something he has repeatedly taken up in the IPL and recent bilateral series.

Dinesh Karthik joins London Spirit in Hundred as mentor, batting coach

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ London

Former India batter Dinesh Karthik joined London Spirit as the Hundred franchise's mentor and batting coach, the team management announced on Wednesday.

This is Karthik's maiden foray into a support staff role outside the Indian Premier League, where he works in a similar role with champions Royal Challengers Bengaluru.

"It's a pleasure to welcome DK to the London Spirit. He is a truly original thinker and his vast experi-



ence in short-format and franchise cricket will be invaluable to us," Spirit director of cricket Mo Bobat said in a statement.

"He's also great fun to work with and brings an infectious energy and enthusiasm to everything he does," said Bobat, who is also RCB's director of cricket.

Karthik has finished his playing career after the IPL 2024, but appears in other leagues. The 40-year-old is currently in the roster of Sharjah Warriorz in the UAE's ILT20.

Karthik had also appeared for Paarl Royals in the pre-

SA batters criticised after historic collapse



TAPAN MOHANTA
■ Cuttack

At a loss to explain South Africa's capitulation in the series-opener, their batting coach Ashwell Prince said the visitors simply failed to answer the questions posed by India's "formidable" bowlers while being dismissed for their lowest T20I total of 74. Chasing 176, South Africa folded in 12.3 overs in a 101-run defeat in the opening match of the five-match series that marked the beginning of the two sides' build-up towards the global showpiece in India and Sri Lanka from February 7. "Obviously after a batting performance as such, that is one department that we will have to improve on quickly," Prince said at the post-match media interaction at the Barabati Stadium, on Tuesday.

"I thought the Indian bowlers, quite a formidable bowling attack, asked a lot of good questions. Ultimately, as a batting unit, we're not able to answer the questions. Tonight we weren't up to the task."

The two-paced wicket with the odd one rearing up also troubled the South African batters as Indian bowlers exploited the conditions beautifully.

Prince said the bounce should not be an excuse as they are used to playing on lively wickets back home.

"I think any score that you keep to under 180 in T20 cricket is a chaseable score absolutely. There was a bit of bounce, it seemed like, but being South Africans, we should be accustomed to bounce. "As I said, the Indian bowlers asked a lot of good questions. Ultimately, we weren't able to answer," he said blaming the batting unit. The decision to bowl first after winning the toss seemed to have backfired but Prince said they did well to keep India's total in

check. "I thought the pitch was good. Not every pitch that you bat on is supposed to be a 220 pitch," he said.

India also had their share of struggles and kept losing wickets before Pandya's late heroics lifted them to 175/6. "They had to work hard for the first part of the innings. Then, obviously Hardik came in and played a brilliant knock to give them a competitive score."

"I don't think in any cricket match you can decide at the halfway stage if you have a winning score. But what you can do is put up a competitive score and obviously it turned out to be enough."

All praise for Pandya's comeback fifty, Prince said the all-rounder is a calm six-hitter and his clarity in execution stood out once again.

"Hardik obviously played an outstanding innings. I think we have to give him a lot of credit. He has come back from an injury."

"He has come back looking sharp. He picked the right moments to attack with a spin on initially. There wasn't a lot of spin on offer so he got a couple of early sixes away," Prince acknowledged. "Against the seamers towards the end, he put the pressure on to them. He struck the ball as cleanly as ever so a lot of credit has to go to him."

Clarity in shot-execution was the key to Hardik's success, felt Prince.

"He is a six-hitter but he is also calm. I think identifying the right balls to attack comes with a lot of experience. As soon as the ball was in areas that he is very strong at, he put a good swing on it, no half measures. "I think most of the time when Hardik hits it, he is not tentative. There is clarity in his thinking and there is clarity in his execution. It was an outstanding innings."

CA DELEGATION REVIEWS T20 TOUR SECURITY IN LAHORE

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ Lahore

A Cricket Australia (CA) delegation is in Lahore to review security arrangements ahead of the team's three-match T20I series against Pakistan in January. The delegation includes an independent security advisor and an official of the Australian Cricketers' Association. Australia will tour Pakistan in early next year for a white-ball series, scheduled to be played in two phases. The first phase comprises a three-match T20I series in January. Though the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) has not yet announced the venues and dates, it appears that all three games will be held in Lahore.

The delegation's programme includes visits to the Gaddafi Stadium and the LCCA Ground in Lahore, as well as the hotel where the Australian team will stay.

They are also scheduled to meet PCB officials and Government and security representatives. Australia is set to tour Pakistan again in March next year for a three-match ODI series, but indications are that the series may be moved to another window ahead of the 2027 ODI World Cup.

New Zealand bowl out West Indies for 205 in the second test

ASSOCIATED PRESS
■ Wellington (New Zealand)

New Zealand fast bowler Blair Tuckner was helped from the field with a shoulder injury after taking 4-32 on the first day of the second test against the West Indies on Wednesday in the latest cruel blow in a career flecked with tragedy.

Tickner fell heavily while fielding a ball at fine leg in his first test in more than two years and only the fourth of his career. He lay motionless while being assisted by medical staff



before being carefully lifted from the field on a stretcher. The teams played to a draw in the series opener at Christchurch.

Tickner bowled well in tandem with Michael Rae who took 3-65 on debut as New Zealand bowled out the West Indies for 205 in 75 overs. Devon Conway and Tom Latham were tested in the last 40 minutes but saw New Zealand to stumps at 24 without loss.

"I guess on the first day of a test match if you've rolled the other team for 200 and you're 20 or so without loss,

you're happy," Tickner said. "It's been a really surreal couple of days for me since I knew I was going to play. Pinch me."

"Today if someone asked me when do you get comfortable bowling. You don't." Tickner's injury adds to a growing catalog for New Zealand who already are without pacers Matt Henry, Will O'Rourke, Ben Sears, Nathan Smith and Kyle Jamieson. Mitchell Hay also was handed a test debut Wednesday in place of wicketkeeper Tom Blundell who has a hamstring strain.

The injury to Tickner is particularly poignant, given the setbacks he has had to overcome throughout his career. Just before his test debut, his father's house was destroyed in a cyclone. And while playing for Derbyshire, his wife Sarah was diagnosed with leukemia.

"Things are bigger than cricket," Tickner told media before the current match.

He learned of Sarah's diagnosis as he was about to start a four-day match for Derbyshire in the English county championship.