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Karat seeks President's intervention in Akhlaq lynching case



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US lawmakers introduce resolution to end 50% tariffs on India



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SPORT

Shooting nationals: Raiza Dhillon wins double gold



AGENDA

THE LIONS OF LONGEWALA

PIONEER IN SHORT

FRESH UNREST IN BANGLADESH

Bangladesh's interim Government, led by Chief Adviser Muhammad Yunus, has ordered a nationwide security clampdown after fresh unrest erupted following the shooting of right-wing cultural group youth leader Sharif Osmani Hadi in Dhaka. Hadi, leader of Inquilab Mancha and an independent candidate in the February 12 general elections, was shot in the head at close range on Friday while launching his campaign in the Bijoy nagar area. Doctors say his condition remains critical, though stable, and he is on life support at a private hospital. Home Affairs Adviser Lt Gen (Retd) Jahangir Alam Chowdhury announced the launch of the second phase of "Operation Devil Hunt" to curb illegal arms and rising violence. A reward of Tk 50 lakh has been announced for information leading to the arrest of suspect Faisal Karim Masud, identified as one of three motorcycle-borne assailants. Yunus ordered a manhunt and met Hadi's family, pledging full support. Political parties and student groups condemned the attack, warning against a return of violence ahead of the elections.

UK HONOURS DADABHAI NAOROJI

The House of Lords in London hosted a special reception to mark the 200th birth anniversary of Dadabhai Naoroji, the nationalist leader remembered as the "grand old man of India" and the first Indian elected to the British Parliament. Born in Mumbai in September 1825 to a Parsi family, Naoroji travelled to Britain in 1855 and went on to play a significant role in its political and intellectual life. The event was hosted by Lord Karan Billeoria, the Parsi peer and founder of Cobra Beer, who highlighted Naoroji's pioneering journey as a businessman, academic and politician, and his historic election to Parliament in 1892. Indian High Commissioner to the UK Vikram Doraiswami reflected on Naoroji's enduring legacy and the outsized contribution of the Parsi community to public life in India and Britain. Former UK minister Sir Vince Cable recalled Naoroji's influential "drain theory", which exposed the economic costs of British colonial rule in India. The bicentenary event also featured an exhibition tracing key milestones of Naoroji's life and career.

DELHI FUELS HEALTH CRISIS

Delhi's prolonged pollution crisis is triggering a sharp rise in health problems, with hospitals reporting a 20-30 per cent increase in respiratory patients, including many first-time cases and young adults, doctors said. On Saturday, air quality worsened from "very poor" to "severe", with the Air Quality Index crossing 400, a level that affects even healthy individuals. At 4 pm, the 24-hour average AQI stood at 431, according to official data. Doctors across the city said outpatient departments and emergency rooms are seeing a surge in patients with breathlessness, chest tightness, wheeze and persistent cough. Pulmonologists warned that symptoms are more severe and prolonged this year, often requiring higher medication doses. Alarmingly, people with no prior respiratory illness are showing reduced oxygen levels and airway inflammation. Health experts attributed the spike to sustained exposure to toxic pollutants such as PM2.5, PM10, nitrogen oxides and ozone, which penetrate deep into the lungs and bloodstream. Vulnerable groups, including children, the elderly and diabetics, are most affected. Doctors have advised residents to limit outdoor activity, use N95 masks if necessary, and seek medical care for persistent symptoms.

Messi mania ends in mayhem

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ Kolkata

GOAT's visit to the City of Joy lapsed into a colossal mess after angry spectators ransacked the Yuva Bharati Stadium in Kolkata setting parts of it on fire. Several people were injured in the melee as billboards were pulled down, seats and bottles were hurled inside the fence, requiring the police to resort to random lathi charge. Fans of Lionel Messi were upset at not being able to catch a glimpse of the world soccer star as scores of politicians, celebrities and organisers surrounded the football icon throughout his 18 minutes stay inside the stadium. The main organiser of Saturday's GOAT Tour event Shatadru Dutta was arrested, and Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee offered an impromptu apology to the fans and the footballer. The soccer star who had to fly off to Hyderabad for a second league programme was escorted out to safety, the police said adding the crowd became restless after Messi's brief appearance at the venue and their failure to see him live allegedly



Fans of Lionel Messi breaking past barriers during an event as part of G.O.A.T. India Tour 2025 at the Vivekananda Yuba Bharati Krirangan (VYBK) in Kolkata

because "he was surrounded by a host of personalities." Another person said seething in anger: "There was everything but not the man to see whom we purchased the tickets ... because he had been hijacked by the lobbyists ... He didn't take a single kick or a single penalty. They said they would bring Shah Rukh Khan too... But not even that."

The chaos and lack of organisation was such that even the Chief Minister could not reach the venue on time and failed to attend the photo session with the soccer star, sources said. Fans who came from as far as Odisha and other neighbouring States asked in desperation, "was the programme organised to fleece us only ... why did we pay as

high as ₹16,000 and came here for such far places ... not to see some riff raff netas and then get beaten up by the police." Others who resorted to sloganeering from the stands shouting "Chor ... Chor" or "we want justice" called the programme a big scam worth several hundred crores and asked the Government to investigate into it.

A political free-for-all after chaos

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Kolkata

As the Messi event turned into a mayhem, the TMC, the BJP, the Congress and the Left parties took the opportunity to settle their political scores. The BJP demanded immediate resignation of Chief Minister Mamta Banerjee for "discrediting West Bengal before the world". While the Congress also attacked the TMC Government describing the episode as "terrible mismanagement and a mockery of law and order". The CPIM called it a "black day" for West Bengal. The Congress, Left and BJP demanded a 100 per cent refund for gallery ticket-holders, arrest of those responsible. All lashed out at the organisers of the event featuring Lionel Messi in Salt Lake stadium which ended in chaos as irate spectators went on a vandalism spree for not having a proper view of the football icon. The TMC on its part demanded action against the organisers. TMC spokesperson Kunal Ghosh said that the "overzealousness" of the organisers and people close to them to



Lionel Messi during an event as part of his G.O.A.T. India Tour 2025 at the Vivekananda Yuba Bharati Krirangan (VYBK) in Kolkata

crowd Messi and take selfies with him prevented the spectators from the gallery, who shelled out hefty amounts for the event, from having a proper view of the football star, and it infuriated them. "Why should no action be taken against the organisers for this mess? Why was there no proper planning? Why did chaos break out? It forced Messi to leave the stadium and the chief minister of West Bengal could not attend and accord him a warm welcome on behalf of the people of the State," the TMC State general

secretary said. Union minister and senior BJP leader Sukanta Majumdar slammed the TMC and the State administration for the chaos. Leader of the Opposition in the State Assembly, Suwendu Adhikari, launched a scathing attack on the State Government, alleging that ministers and leaders "clung to Messi like leeches", while football fans who paid thousands of rupees were left watching him on the giant screen for barely a few minutes.

CONTINUED ON >> P4

Tax department targets bogus deductions

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

The Central Board of Direct Taxes (CBDT) has stepped up its efforts to curb bogus deduction and exemption claims, nudging taxpayers to voluntarily correct their income tax returns before stricter action follows. The Income Tax department has started sending SMS and email advisories to taxpayers for wrongful deduction claims related to unrecognised political parties or charitable institutions. The department has come across cases of fake deduction claims filed under Section 80C of the Income Tax Act, which covers a series of investments, and even Section 80GGC, which relates to donations to Registered Unrecognised Political Parties (RUPPs) or Charitable Institutions. The CBDT said through data analysis it has observed that huge amount of bogus claims have been made on account of donation to Registered Unrecognised Political Parties (RUPPs) or Charitable Institutions and reduced their tax obligations and have also claimed bogus refunds.

BJP abuzz with speculation on possible leadership shift

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi/Bhopal/Lucknow

Speculations have gained momentum over yesterday about a possible change in leadership in the BJP at the national level as well in its Uttar Pradesh unit. Union Minister of State for Finance Pankaj Chaudhary on Saturday filed his nomination papers for the post of the Uttar Pradesh BJP chief, and was the only candidate to do so. Meanwhile, it is certain that Union Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan may be tipped to take over the baton at the national level from Union Minister JP Nadda. A party functionary confirmed both the development and that Chaudhary's name as the next Uttar Pradesh BJP president is likely to be announced on Sunday by the central election officer and Union Minister Piyush Goyal. Sources said security was tightened around the Bhopal residence of Shivraj Singh Chouhan on Saturday, though officials said it could be part of a routine exercise following a periodic review. A makeshift tent was erected outside the main gate, and a number of barricades were placed along the busy Link



Union Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan speaks in the Rajya Sabha during the Winter session of Parliament, in New Delhi

Road, while additional police personnel were also seen in the residential area of Chouhan, who arrived at the residence late Friday night and left for Delhi on Saturday afternoon. Party sources said the sudden increase in security led to speculation in local political circles that Chouhan could soon be appointed as BJP president. Chaudhary submitted the papers to former Union minister and BJP State election officer Mahendra Nath Pandey and central election observer Vinod Tawde. Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, Deputy Chief Ministers Keshav Prasad Maurya and Brajesh Pathak and Jal Shakti Minister

Swatantra Dev Singh were also present for the submission, party sources said. Chaudhary's anointment is being seen in view of the upcoming panchayat elections and the 2027 Assembly elections, and the candidate with strong regional and caste equations would be chosen. Chaudhary is a seven-time MP from the Maharaiganj parliamentary constituency. A member of the Kurmi caste, categorised as Other Backwards Classes (OBC), he is considered a trusted confidante of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Home Minister Amit Shah and Defence Minister Rajnath Singh.

Lotus blooms in Thiruvananthapuram

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi/Thiruvananthapuram

The BJP-led NDA made an unexpected inroads in the Kerala civic body polls in the Thiruvananthapuram Corporation on Saturday wresting it from the CPI(M)-led LDF. Prime Minister Narendra Modi termed the mandate received by the BJP-led NDA in the Thiruvananthapuram Corporation a "watershed moment" in Kerala's politics and expressed gratitude to the BJP workers for the "spectacular results". Congress-led UDF secured a decisive victory in Kerala's local body elections, dealing a blow to the LDF while the BJP wrested the State capital civic body from decades of Left control. While Congress leaders expressed gratitude to the people of Kerala for giving the UDF a "decisive" mandate, its MP Shashi Tharoor also congratulated the BJP for its "historic performance" in the city corporation in his Thiruvananthapuram Lok Sabha constituency after BJP won 50 out of 101 seats, ending the CPI(M)-led LDF's 45-year reign in the local body. The BJP's win in the Thiruvananthapuram Corporation has come as a morale booster for the party which is preparing itself for the 2026 Assembly polls. Of the 101 wards in Thiruvananthapuram Corporation, the BJP won 50, LDF 29, UDF 19 and two by independent candidates. With this victory it is being speculated BJP will install its first Mayor in Kerala, with the State's first woman IPS officer, 64 year-old R Sreelekha being tipped for the post. PM Modi said it is a day to recall the work and struggles of generations of karyakartas (workers) in Kerala, who worked at the grassroots, which ensured today's result became a reality. "Thank you Thiruvananthapuram!



BJP members celebrate during the counting of votes for the Kerala local body elections, in Thiruvananthapuram, Saturday

The mandate the BJP-NDA got in the Thiruvananthapuram Corporation is a watershed moment in Kerala's politics," Modi remarked on social media. While the NDA won the Thiruvananthapura corporation, the UDF increased its seats in the local body as compared to the 2020 polls. This year, the UDF also won 54 of the 87 municipalities, 4 of the 6 corporations, and was significantly ahead in the village, block, and district panchayat segments till the reports last filed. In the 2020 civic polls, it had won a total of 7757 wards in the grama, block, district panchayats, municipality and corporation put together. This time it holds a commanding lead in the three-tier panchayat system, leading in 8,020 of the 17,337 grama panchayat wards, 1,241 of the 2,267 block panchayat wards, and 195 of the 346 district panchayat wards.

GRAP IV invoked as Capital turns toxic

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

The air quality commission in the Capital on Saturday, for the first time, invoked Stage IV of the Graded Response Action Plan (GRAP) restrictions. On Saturday, the overall Air Quality Index in Delhi hit close to the 450 mark, plunging large parts of the city into thick smog and triggering emergency curbs. With the Commission for Air Quality Management's (CAQM) announcement, the Delhi Government has issued directions to all Government offices under it and all private offices in the National Capital Territory (NCT) of Delhi, to work on 50 per cent strength and the rest to work from home.



Vehicles moving under a layer of smog in New Delhi on Saturday

As part of Stage-IV, there is a ban on the entry of trucks — except LNG, CNG, electric and BS-IV diesel — into Delhi, except those carrying essential commodities or provid-

ing essential services. Curb are also placed on light commercial vehicles (LCVs) registered outside Delhi, other than EVs, CNG and BS-VI diesel vehicles

Explaining the reasons for the worsening AQI, the CAQM said the feeble Western Disturbance approaching north-west India was the main contributing factor, and not local emissions.

CONTINUED ON >> P4



Prime Minister Narendra Modi paying tribute to the martyrs of the 2001 Parliament attack during a ceremony to mark its 24th anniversary at the Samvidhan Sadan on Saturday



■ New Delhi

During the investigation, police found that a major

Out of the total defrauded

and received a substantial

Further investigation is underway to identify other members of the syndicate and trace additional proceeds of crime.

PANKAJ KUMAR

■ New Delhi

Addressing the convocation on the theme 'Engineering Education for Sustainable and Inclusive Development', Lt Governor Saxena emphasised the paramount importance of ecological balance and environmental sustainability in all developmental and progressive efforts. He stated that engineering today is not limited to technical proficiency alone, but also entails providing solutions grounded in sustainability.

Referring to the inauguration of two statues of Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose at the university's campuses, the chief minister said it was a matter of pride that the institution is named after a great freedom fighter whose life and leadership continue to inspire millions even today. She said the independence secured by

in a lab but in a “moment of courage” and the willingness to listen to one’s inner voice. He then presented four key mantras for their careers, inspired by the Prime Minister: Quality, Scalability, Reliability, and Adaptability.

■ New Delhi

Citing the Education Ministry's written reply to Maliwal's question in the Upper House, Sood said that

Sood said that while NIO can be an alternative learning system, the data suggested it was not used primarily as a support mechanism.

■ New Delhi

Citing the Ram Temple movement and historical temples like Somnath, Mishra said the Sanatan

The conference focused on strengthening values of public welfare and nation-building through fasting, yoga, meditation and spiritual discipline. Mishra said the presence of spiritual masters inspires inner transformation and described austerities like fasting and meditation as the moral foundation of society.

■ New Delh

The accused, identified as Subhan Khan, was wanted in a murder case registered at Bhalswa Dairy police station in October 2024 and had been evading

fire at the residence of a man named Nasir. During the firing, two persons sustained bullet injuries, one of whom, Shahrukh, later succumbed to his injuries.

The police on Friday laid a trap near the GT Road Tikari Khurd bus stand after receiving information that the accused would arrive there to meet an associate.

"Initially, the accused tried to mislead the police by disclosing false identities, but during sustained questioning, he confessed to his role in the Bhalswa Dairy firing and murder case," the officer said. During interrogation, Subhan admitted that he was present at the scene of the crime along with his associates.

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# Delhi chokes under toxic smog, AQI hits 431

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE  
■ New Delhi

A thick layer of toxic smog blanketed Delhi on Saturday, with the air quality index slipping into the 'severe' category at 431, the worst recorded so far this year.

The 24-hour average air quality index (AQI) stood at 431, according to the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB), while the Air Quality Early Warning System predicted the AQI to remain 'severe' on Sunday as well.

Saturday recorded the worst air quality of the year so far, surpassing the earlier high of 428 recorded on November 11, official data showed.

Among the Delhi-NCR cities, Delhi's AQI was the third worst after Noida at 455 and Greater Noida at 442, reflecting severe air pollution across the region.

The Air Quality Early Warning System said conditions remained unfavourable for the dispersion of pollutants on Saturday, noting

that the ventilation index was below 6,000 square metres per second, while the average wind speed was less than 10 kmph, restricting the dilution and movement of pollutants.

According to the Decision Support System for Air Quality Management, Delhi's pollution load was led by the transport sector, which contributed 14.2 per cent, followed by Delhi and peripheral industries at 6.8 per cent. Construction activities accounted for 1.8 per cent, while residential sources contributed 3.6 per cent.

Among the neighbouring NCR cities, Ghaziabad emerged as a major contributor with 13.7 per cent, followed by Baghpat (9.8 per cent), Gautam Buddh Nagar (7.6 per cent), Bulandshahr (4.8 per cent), Sonapat (4.4 per cent) and Muzaffarnagar (2.2 per cent).

Smaller contributions were recorded from Faridabad (1.9 per cent) and Gurugram (1.3 per cent), data showed.



Smog engulfing Kartavya Path as people take a stroll amid low visibility near the India Gate PANKAJ KUMAR

Earlier in the day, a thick blanket of toxic smog hung over the national Capital as Delhi's overall AQI stood at 397 at 9 am, with haze clinging low to the ground and muting the morning skyline. Among the monitoring

stations recorded in the morning hours, 21 were in the 'severe' category with AQI readings of above 400, according to the CPCB.

Wazirpur (445) recorded the highest AQI, followed by Vivek Vihar (444) and

Jahangirpuri (442). Anand Vihar (439), Ashok Vihar (437) and Rohini (437) also reported severe air pollution. Several other areas continued to choke under hazardous air, including Narela (432), Patparganj

(431), Mundka (430), Bawana (429), ITO (429) and Nehru Nagar (429). Chandni Chowk (423) and Punjabi Bagh (423) recorded severe air pollution, while Siri Fort (424) and Sonia Vihar (424) remained close behind.

Burari Crossing (414), Karni Singh Shooting Range (409), North Campus (408), RK Puram (408) and Okhla Phase 2 (404) also stayed in the severe zone.

On the weather front, Delhi on Saturday recorded a maximum temperature of 25.5 degrees Celsius, 2.5 notches above normal, while the minimum settled at 8 degrees Celsius, 0.6 notch below normal, according to the India Meteorological Department (IMD).

For Sunday, the IMD has forecast a minimum temperature of 10 degrees Celsius and a maximum of 24 degrees Celsius, with moderate fog likely, a combination expected to further trap pollutants close to the surface.

## Doctors report 20%-30% jump in respiratory cases



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE  
■ New Delhi

Amid sustained high pollution levels, hospitals in Delhi are witnessing a 20-30 per cent spike in respiratory patients, including many first-time cases and young adults, doctors said. They emphasised that the ongoing pollution crisis is a serious public health risk rather than a seasonal inconvenience.

On Saturday, the city's air quality deteriorated further, slipping from the "very poor" to the "severe" category — a level that also affects otherwise healthy individuals — with readings crossing 400 in the red zone.

At 4 pm, the 24-hour average Air Quality Index (AQI) stood at 431, according to the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB). Similar to winters in the several past years, Delhi continues to choke due to the toxic air, with pollution levels reported above 300 on most days. As a result, hospitals across the city are reporting a sharp rise in patients with respiratory distress, chest tightness and persistent cough.

Doctors said pollution levels worsen each year, and the number of people affected by poor air quality is steadily increasing.

Several doctors in Delhi said

outpatient departments and emergency rooms have recorded a 20-30 per cent increase in patients presenting with acute and subacute respiratory symptoms over the past few weeks, coinciding with the prolonged high pollution levels.

"There is a distinct rise in patients coming in with cold, cough, breathlessness and chest tightness, which can be directly attributed to the poor air quality around us. The increase is nearly 15-20 per cent compared to earlier weeks," Dr Avi Kumar, senior consultant pulmonologist at Fortis Hospital, Okhla, said.

What is worrying, he added, is the severity and persistence of symptoms. "Many patients have relentless symptoms that are not settling despite routine treatment. They are requiring higher doses of steroids and prolonged medication. Another distinct feature is the number of new patients — people who have never had respiratory issues before. Youngsters playing outdoors are also affected," he said.

The polluted air is not a singular threat; a dangerous mix of PM2.5, PM10, nitrogen oxides, ozone, sulphur dioxide and hundreds of toxic chemicals released from vehicular emissions, industrial activity and waste burning compound the crisis.

## Over 40 start-up founders meet to discuss solutions

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE  
■ New Delhi

About 40 startup founders and business representatives met on Saturday to discuss problem-focused solutions to tackle Delhi's air pollution, a statement said.

The meeting, held at Central Park, was attended by representatives from venture capital and private equity firms. Startups working in areas such as mobility, agriculture and air purification shared their approaches and discussed challenges in expanding these interventions, the statement added.



Vishal Lavti, co-founder of carpooling and bike-pooling platform Quick Ride, said private vehicles contribute significantly to the city's pollution levels.

"While long-term solutions like electric vehicles will help, there are simple actions that can be taken immediately. Carpooling is one of the easiest and most

effective options as it requires no additional infrastructure, only awareness and participation," he said.

Another entrepreneur, Roshan Shankar of Saroja Earth, said incomplete burning of crop residue remains a major source of air pollution in North India.

"Decentralised utilisation of rice straw as fuel

pellets, fertiliser pellets, biochar and cutlery can help prevent stubble burning," said Shankar, who specialises in the study of parali burning.

Ish Anand, a Delhi resident who runs a private equity fund operating in Europe, Singapore and India, said startup founders have the ability to build

solutions at scale and said he plans to support some of the ventures discussed at the meeting.

Shradha Sharma, founder of The Bharat Project, which organised the meeting, said the focus is on building capacity over the next 11 months so that the city is better prepared to deal with air pollution next year.

She said some of the ideas will be presented to the city administration to seek support for broader adoption of the initiatives, the statement added.

Similar to winters in the several past years, Delhi continues to choke due to the toxic air, with pollution levels reported above 300 on most days.

On Saturday, the city's air quality deteriorated further, slipping from the "very poor" to the "severe" category — a level that also affects otherwise healthy individuals — with readings crossing 400 in the red zone.

## Govt directs women employees should not stay beyond office hours

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE  
■ New Delhi

Delhi Government's Women and Child Development department has directed its branches to ensure that women employees are not made to stay in office beyond working hours, until absolutely necessary.

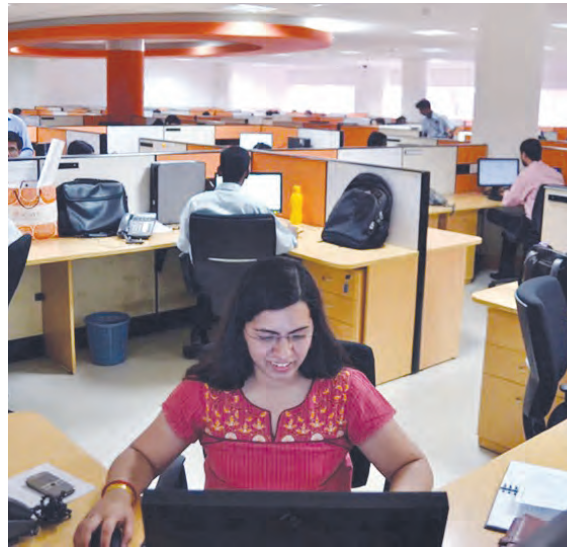
In an advisory issued earlier this week, the department also asked the branches to ensure that if women are made to work late, they should be dropped off at home safely.

The advisory said that "safety, dignity and well-being of women employees is of paramount importance",

and stressed it is the duty of the department to ensure a secure and enabling work environment at all times.

It said instances of women employees having to remain in office beyond normal working hours require clear safeguards, structured responsibility and strict oversight so that no woman is placed at risk while performing official duties.

"...It is hereby directed that no woman employee shall be required or expected to remain in office beyond normal working hours unless absolutely unavoidable. In all such exceptional circumstances, the concerned branch



head/reporting officer shall be personally responsible for ensuring her safe return," the advisory said.

The advisory directed that every branch head shall assess in advance whether work necessitating late sitting by a woman employee is essential and unavoidable. "Ensure that women employees are not asked to stay back for routine or non-time-sensitive tasks that can reasonably be taken up on the next working day," it said.

In case late sitting becomes unavoidable, the department should coordinate to make appropriate arrangements so that the woman employee is

dropped safely at her residence or at another safe and convenient point.

"Remain fully accountable for ensuring that such arrangements are actually made and executed in a timely manner," it said.

The advisory also reminded all officers, branch heads, "to maintain a humane, gender-sensitive and responsible managerial approach, keeping foremost the safety and dignity of women employees".

"This advisory is expected to be complied with in letter and spirit, ensuring that the safety of women employees remains a non-negotiable for all," it read.

5-POINT ACTION PLAN
● Stop entry of BS-IV truck traffic into Delhi (except for trucks carrying essential commodities/providing essential services). All LNG/CNG/Electric/BS-VI Diesel trucks shall, however, be permitted to enter Delhi.
● Enforce a strict ban on plying of Delhi-registered diesel-operated BS-IV and below Heavy Goods Vehicles (HGVs) in Delhi, except those carrying essential commodities/providing essential services.
● Ban C&D activities, as in the GRAP Stage-III, also for linear public projects such as highways, roads, flyovers, overbridges, power transmission, pipelines, tele-communication, etc.
● State Governments in the NCR and the GNCTD to mandatorily conduct classes in schools for children even for higher classes ie from class VI to IX and XI in a "Hybrid" mode ie, both in physical and online mode (wherever online mode is feasible) in the territorial jurisdiction of the NCT of Delhi and in the districts of Gurugram, Faridabad, Ghaziabad and Gautam Buddha Nagar.
● State Governments may consider additional emergency measures like closure of colleges/educational institutions and closure of non-emergency commercial activities, permitting running of vehicles on an odd-even basis of registration numbers, etc.

## Speed limit on Noida and Yamuna Expressway reduced

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE  
■ New Delhi

The speed limit for light vehicles on the Noida-Greater Noida Expressway and the Yamuna Expressway has been lowered from 100 kilometres per hour (kmph) to 75 kmph. The new speed restriction will come into effect on December 15. The Gautam Buddha Nagar Traffic Police on Saturday issued a traffic advisory reducing speed limits on major roads and expressways in the district to prevent accidents during foggy winter conditions.

The advisory followed a pile-up on the Eastern Peripheral Expressway on Saturday morning, in which several people were injured after multiple vehicles collided amid dense fog. Poor visibility due to thick fog led to the crash, which involved several vehicles.

According to the advisory, the revised speed limits will remain in force from December 15 to February 15, 2026. On the Yamuna Expressway, the maximum speed has been capped at 75



kmph for light motor vehicles and 60 kmph for heavy motor vehicles.

On the Noida-Greater Noida Expressway, light motor vehicles will be allowed to travel at a maximum speed of 75 kmph, while the limit for heavy motor vehicles has been reduced to 50 kmph. The upper speed limit otherwise on the two crucial expressways is 100 km per hour for light vehicles and 80 km per hour for heavy vehicles, according to officials.

The advisory further stated that on the Noida Elevated Road, the maximum permissible speed is 50 kmph for light motor vehicles and 40

kmph for heavy motor vehicles. The traffic police have appealed to motorists to strictly adhere to the prescribed speed limits on these roads in the interest of road safety during the winter season. Traffic police officials said strict enforcement will be carried out during the period, and vehicles found overspeeding will be penalised. Drivers have also been advised to use fog lamps, maintain safe distances and avoid sudden lane changes during low-visibility conditions.

Meanwhile, two separate accidents were reported on Saturday on the Eastern Peripheral Expressway under

the Dadri police station area due to dense fog. Police said three vehicles collided at the Chakrasenpur flyover, while around a dozen vehicles were involved in a pile-up at the Samadhipur flyover. Local police teams rushed to the spots and cleared the damaged vehicles from the roadway, parking them at safe locations.

"There were no casualties in these accidents and traffic is flowing normally. Necessary legal action is being taken," a police spokesperson said. Following the collision, traffic movement on the stretch came to a standstill.

Police, with the help of toll plaza management, deployed cranes to remove the damaged vehicles from the roadway and gradually clear the congestion. Visuals from the accident site show a white car that had climbed onto the divider with its bonnet severely damaged. A truck stands adjacent to it. Another car is seen stuck under a truck. Vehicles appear to have rammed into one another owing to reduced visibility amid thick smog.

## Mounting financial stress, pressure to vacate house pushed family to commit suicide: Police

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE  
■ New Delhi

A day after a family of three allegedly committed suicide in their home in southeast Delhi's Kalkaji, police suspect that mounting financial stress and sustained pressure to vacate their rented house may have pushed the family into depression.

Anuradha Kapoor (52) and her sons Ashish Kapoor (32) and Chaitanya Kapoor (27) were found hanging in their home on Friday.

Ashish was an engineer, while Chaitanya Kapoor was preparing for the civil services examination, police said. Both of them were unemployed. Their father had died a few years ago, following which the family largely kept to itself and had minimal contact with relatives.

The post-mortem examinations of the three bodies are scheduled to be conducted on Monday.

Police said the incident came to light around 2.47 pm when a police team reached the flat to execute a court order related to possession of the property, after the landlord filed a case over non-payment of rent.

According to investigators, the family had not paid a monthly rent of Rs 35,000 for the past one-and-a-half years.

"When repeated knocks went unanswered, the staff used a duplicate key to open the door," Deputy Commissioner of Police (Southeast) Hemant Tiwari said earlier.

Inside the house, officers found all three bodies hanging from ceiling fans. In the drawing room, where two fans were installed, Anuradha Kapoor and her elder son Ashish were found hanging, while the younger son, Chaitanya, was found hanging from a fan in one of the rooms, police said.

A handwritten note

recovered from the spot indicated that the family had been suffering from depression. "The note suggests emotional distress faced by the family, due to which they may have taken the extreme step," a senior police officer said.

Police sources said the family had been under severe mental stress due to prolonged financial difficulties and repeated requests to vacate the flat.

Officers had earlier visited the premises in connection with the eviction process, they said.

Relatives who were informed after the incident told police they had not been in touch with the family for several years and were unaware of the extent of their financial and emotional distress. Investigators are also verifying details of loans and liabilities amounting to several lakhs of rupees, police said.

Residents of the neigh-

bourhood said the family was quiet and rarely interacted with others. Some neighbours also claimed that the two sons had attempted suicide around 15-20 days ago, following which police and ambulances had arrived, a claim that police said is being verified.

The bodies have been shifted to the All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS) mortuary for post-mortem examination and other legal formalities under Section 194 of the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita (BNSS), police said.

Police said the case prima facie appears to be one of mass suicide, but all angles are being thoroughly examined. Statements of relatives, neighbours and the landlord are being recorded to ascertain whether any form of pressure or harassment was involved.

Further investigation is underway, officials said.



IN FOCUS



COAS General Upendra Dwivedi with others during the Passing Out Parade ceremony at the Indian Military Academy in Dehradun

Prayer meet held for Dharmendra in Mathura

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
■ Mathura

People gathered in large numbers here on Saturday to offer prayers for legendary actor Dharmendra at a prayer meet organised by Mathura MP and actor Hema Malini.

Dharmendra died on November 24, just weeks shy of his 90th birthday after prolonged illness.

Addressing the gathering in an emotional speech, Hema Malini said she never imagined she would have to organise a prayer meeting for her “beloved Dharm ji”. “It was an inconsolable shock. We shared an association of 57 years and worked together in 45 films, more than 25 of which were super hits,” she said. Describing him as simple, humble and joyful, Hema Malini said Dharmendra remained deeply connected to his roots despite immense stardom. “I still feel surprised and happy that my onscreen love became my life partner in real life. Since our love was

true, we faced challenges together and got married,” she said, calling Dharmendra a loving husband, devoted father to daughters Esha and Ahana, and an affectionate grandfather to his five grandchildren. Hema Malini’s daughters Esha and Ahana Deol could not attend due to personal reasons.

Recalling his illustrious career, the Mathura MP said Dharmendra was passionate about acting and appeared in over 300 films, excelling in action, romance, comedy and intense roles, though comedy remained his favourite. She also highlighted his lesser-known talent as an Urdu poet and said she would ensure the publication of a book of his Urdu shayari, a project he had planned.

Hema Malini also recalled that Dharmendra won the Bikaner Lok Sabha seat in 2004 but later left politics as acting remained his true love. “He campaigned for me in the 2014 and 2019 Lok Sabha elections,” she added.

Ex-bureaucrat Raj Kumar Goyal to take oath as CIC

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
■ New Delhi

Former IAS officer Raj Kumar Goyal will be sworn in as Chief Information Commissioner (CIC) by President Droupadi Murmu on Monday, officials said.

A three-member panel headed by Prime Minister Narendra Modi had recommended Goyal’s name, they said on Saturday.

Goyal is a 1990-batch (retired) Indian Administrative Service (IAS) officer of Arunachal Pradesh-Goa-Mizoram-Union Territories (AGMUT) cadre. He superannuated as Secretary, Department of Justice under the Ministry of Law and Justice, on August 31. He also served as Secretary (Border Management) in the Home Ministry and held key posts both at the Centre and in the erstwhile state of Jammu and Kashmir. President Murmu will administer the oath of office and secrecy to Goyal on Monday, the offi-



cials said. The post of CIC fell vacant after Heeralal Samariya completed his term on September 13.

The panel, headed by PM Modi, has also recommended the names of eight Information Commissioners (ICs) in the transparency watchdog Central Information Commission during its meeting held on Wednesday. With this, the Commission will be in its full strength, after a gap of over

nine years, once the newly selected CIC and ICs join, according to transparency activists. The Commission is headed by a CIC and can have a maximum of ten ICs. At present, Anandi Ramalingam and Vinod Kumar Tiwari have been working as the Information Commissioners.

Former Railway Board chief Jaya Verma Sinha, former Indian Police Service (IPS) officer Swagat Das, who

held key posts in Intelligence Bureau, Home Ministry and Cabinet Secretariat, among others, the then Central Secretariat Service (CSS) officer Sanjeev Kumar Jindal, former IAS officer Surendra Singh Meena and ex-Indian Forest Service officer Khushwant Singh Sethi have been recommended for appointment as Information Commissioners, the officials said. Senior journalists PR Ramesh and Ashutosh Chaturvedi, and Sudha Rani Relangi, Member (Legal), Petroleum and Natural Gas Regulatory Board (PNGRB) have also been selected by the panel for appointment as ICs, they said.

Relangi has also worked as Director of Prosecution, Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) and Joint Secretary & Legislative Counsel, Ministry of Law and Justice, Government of India, the officials said. These eight Information Commissioners will subscribe to oath of office before the newly sworn in CIC, they said.

Shinde announces new plan for slum dwellers in Mumbai

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
■ Nagpur

Maharashtra Deputy Chief Minister Shinde on Saturday said slum redevelopment schemes will now be implemented collectively on private, Government, or semi-Government lands measuring 50 acres or more.

Speaking in the legislative council, Shinde also made a few announcements about slum redevelopment projects in Mumbai, including the declaration of SRA (Slum Rehabilitation Authority) group redevelopment projects and extension of the ‘SRA Amnesty Scheme’.

The announcements come ahead of elections to civic bodies, including the cash-rich Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation, which are to be completed



before January 31 next year. The deputy CM heads the Urban Development and Housing departments.

In recent days, Shinde has announced additional housing relief measures for Mumbaiers, such as the occupancy certificate (OC) amnesty scheme to regularise nearly 20,000 buildings in Mumbai and a new regulatory framework to redevelop buildings under the “Pagdi” system (a traditional tenancy rental model) in the metropolis.

“Slum redevelopment schemes will now be implemented collectively on private, Government, or semi-Government lands measuring 50 acres or more,” said Shinde in the Upper House of the state legislature on Saturday.

In the first phase, he said, 17 major locations across

Mumbai have been selected, including Antop Hill, Krishna Nagar and Kettkipada (Borivali), Gopikrishna Nagar (Dahisar), Oshiwara, Govandi, Chitta Camp (Trombay), Chembur, Tagore Nagar (Vikhroli), Vikhroli Parksite, and Bhandup.

“This initiative is expected to provide significant relief to lakhs of slum dwellers in Mumbai,” he said.

Shinde said the state will implement the initiative on a joint venture basis with the assistance of Government bodies such as MMRDA, CIDCO, MIDC, MSRDC, MHADA, and the BMC. In the second phase, additional projects will be undertaken, which will help transform Mumbai’s landscape and promote well-

planned urban development, he added.

Shinde extended the SRA Amnesty Scheme till December 31, 2026. The scheme is meant to resolve technical difficulties faced by citizens in the sale, purchase, or transfer of slum structures.

The deputy CM also announced an increase in the number of “Apex Grievance Redressal Committees” to ensure quicker resolution of complaints. Additionally, the Government has extended the OC amnesty scheme of the Maharashtra Housing and Area Development Authority (MHADA) by one more year and will introduce a new scheme for houses built by municipal employees on BMC’s leased plots, he said.

AIIMS conducts India’s first dedicated clinical trial of advanced brain stent

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
■ New Delhi

AIIMS Delhi has achieved a milestone in stroke care by conducting the country’s first dedicated clinical trial of a cutting-edge and advanced brain stent made for treating severe strokes.

The GRASSROOT trial, which evaluated the Supernova stent (Gravity Medical Technology), has found excellent safety and efficacy outcomes in the treatment of severe strokes, officials said.

The results were published in the ‘Journal of Neurointerventional Surgery’ (JNIS), part of the prestigious British Medical Journal group. AIIMS Delhi was the national coordinating centre and the lead enrolling site for the GRASSROOT trial – India’s first clinical trial of a new and advanced stroke treatment device, the Supernova stent, the officials said.

“This trial is a turning point for stroke treatment in India,” Dr Shailesh B Gaikwad, professor and head, Department



of Neuroimaging and Neuroradiology, AIIMS, and national principal investigator of the GRASSROOT trial, said. According to the JNIS, the GRASSROOT trial evaluating the Supernova stent has found excellent safety and efficacy outcomes in the treatment of severe strokes.

Earlier this year, data from the GRASSROOT trial were accepted by the Central Drugs Standard Control Organisation (CDSCO) and the Supernova stent-retriever was approved for

routine use in India.

“This is the nation’s first stroke device cleared based on a domestic clinical trial. The approval follows the GRASSROOT India trial, which confirmed the device’s safety and efficacy in treating life-threatening strokes,” AIIMS said in a statement.

“Conducted across eight centres, the trial marks a milestone for the Make-in-India initiative and positions India as a global player in advanced stroke care,” it said. Noting that it produced

world-class clinical evidence entirely within the country, Dr Ashutosh Jadhav, Chief Scientific Officer, Gravity Medical Technology, said the effort built a “robust framework for future large-scale, high-quality trials”. Dr Deepti Vibha, professor of neurology, AIIMS Delhi, emphasised the role of patients and families whose participation will “bring faster, more affordable treatments to millions”.

Dr Shashvat M Desai, Chief Technology Officer at Gravity Medical Technology, described the approval as “more than just a regulatory milestone”. “This achievement demonstrates that India can design and deliver clinical trials of global significance, accelerating access to advanced therapies while upholding equity,” he said.

Desai noted that the trial and subsequent device approval stand as a testament to the expertise of Indian leaders such as Dr Gaikwad and his team, who bring over three decades of experience in advancing stroke treatment.

Bajwa slams SEC for ‘inaction’ over ‘misuse’ of Govt machinery

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
■ Chandigarh

Senior Punjab Congress leader Partap Singh Bajwa on Saturday slammed the State Election Commission (SEC) for its alleged “inaction” despite detailed written representations to it, flagging “blatant misuse of police machinery, voter intimidation, and systematic attempts to vitiate” the Zila Parishad and Panchayat Samiti elections.

Voting for the Zila Parishad and Panchayat Samiti polls will be held on Sunday. In a statement, Bajwa said more than 24 hours have passed since he formally wrote to the state election commissioner, placing on record serious apprehensions about violence, booth capturing, vote rigging and partisan policing at sensitive polling stations across the Gurdaspur district. He had sought deployment of adequate security forces, quick reaction teams, mandatory CCTV coverage with live streaming on the SEC website, and assured



access to footage for candidates to ensure transparency. However, despite the urgency of the situation and the ongoing election process, no action whatsoever has been taken by the SEC so far, he said.

The leader of opposition (LoP) in the Punjab Assembly further said that he had also brought to the commission’s notice an incident from the Alma village, where police officials allegedly conducted an “intimidation-driven raid” at the residence of a Congress worker at the behest of senior police lead-

ership “acting under political pressure”. Women family members were harassed, properties were forcibly searched, and no incriminating material was found, clearly exposing the intent to “terrorise” opposition workers, he said.

Bajwa said he had categorically demanded stern disciplinary action and immediate transfer of “partisan” police officers, warning that their continued presence would destroy the fairness of elections in the Qadian constituency.

After fake ID crackdown, IRCTC daily new accounts down to 5,000 from one lakh

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
■ New Delhi

With a new, stringent system to establish user identity, the number of new user IDs being added daily on the IRCTC website has declined to about 5,000 from nearly one lakh, officials said on Saturday.

Union Railway Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw noted that the crackdown by Indian Railways on train ticket booking through fake identities is yielding positive results, according to a press note. Before the latest reforms, this number had touched nearly one lakh new user IDs per day, it said.

“Following the introduction of a stringent system to establish user identity and detect fake IDs, about 5,000 new user IDs are now being added daily on the IRCTC website,” the note said.

The officials stated that these steps have already helped Indian Railways deactivate 3.03 crore fake accounts. “Another 2.7 crore user IDs have either been temporarily suspended or identified for suspension based on the suspicious activities they are indulging in,” they said.

The Union minister directed officials to ensure that the ticketing system is reformed to a level where all travellers are able to book tickets easily through a real and genuine user ID, the press note added.

Additionally, Railway Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw has directed officials to provide local cuisine of the region in Vande Bharat trains. Introducing local cuisine that reflects the culture and tastes of the regions being traversed will significantly enhance the passenger experience, officials said.

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A political free-for-all after chaos

BJP State president and Rajya Sabha MP Samik Bhattacharya alleged that “some fraudsters, in their greed to mint money, created this situation”. Stating that the entire responsibility for this mess lies with the State Government, he alleged that TMC leaders indulged “greedy organisers, who were busy with self publicity, depriving people, who bought tickets, to have a proper view of the football icon”. Bhattacharya said that the incident tarnished the image of the State.

West Bengal Congress president Subhankar Sarkar described the episode as “terrible mismanagement and a mockery of law and order”. He alleged that in the name of Messi, tickets were sold at exorbitant prices to innocent fans, while the footballer was surrounded only by TMC leaders and members of their families.

Describing the incident as a big let-down for the sport-lovers of the State, Ghosh said that in 2011, when Messi came to the stadium for the first time, the event was so well-organised.

CPI(M) leader Sujana Chakraborty termed the mismanagement a “black day” for West Bengal, blaming the TMC Government for failure of law and order. Drawing a contrast with the visits of football legend Diego Maradona during the Left Front regime, Chakraborty alleged that the Government was more focused on making money in Messi’s name than ensuring spectators’ safety and experience.

GRAP IV invoked as Capital turns toxic

“This prevailing meteorological condition has (seen a) marked reduction in wind speed, at times becoming calm, a shift in wind direction from westerly to easterly, and an increase in moisture content in the lower atmosphere. Such conditions during the winter season are conducive to the formation of smog and fog, resulting in poor dispersion and trapping of pollutants near the surface. Owing to these adverse meteorological conditions, a sudden deterioration in air quality has been observed,” a CAQM statement read.

Akhilesh alleges company involved in SIR mapping donated electoral bonds

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
■ Lucknow

Samajwadi Party national president Akhilesh Yadav on Saturday alleged that a company, which had donated electoral bonds to the BJP, was involved in the SIR-related mapping.

Addressing a press conference in Hyderabad after the Vision India AI Summit, Yadav claimed, “The company knows where the data is going. The BJP is conducting Special Intensive Revision (SIR) to win elections through manipula-

tion.” Yadav questioned the credibility of the mapping app being used in the exercise, alleging discrepancies in the data. Yadav said the Government is using the SIR of electoral rolls as an “NRC”, claiming that the exercise can potentially affect the votes of nearly three crore people.

The SP chief said, “The Election Commission’s job is to make votes, not cut them. No one’s vote should be deleted, but in the name of SIR, the Government is conducting the NRC. In Uttar Pradesh, votes of nearly three crore people are

being cut.” Yadav further said politics in the country should be based on “vision, not division”. “We want to do politics of vision. The politics of division and polarisation in the country must be stopped,” he said. Speaking about technology and artificial intelligence (AI), Yadav said Party believed in development politics. He said rapid technological changes were taking place globally and stressed that the benefits of technology should reach everyone without discrimination on the basis of caste or religion.



## Bhagwat urges Hindus to follow Vivekananda’s vision



RSS chief Mohan Bhagwat on Saturday urged Hindu society to draw inspiration from Swami Vivekananda’s message that every nation has a mission to fulfil and a destiny to reach. Addressing a public meeting organised by the Virat Hindu Sammelan Samiti at the Netaji Stadium here, Bhagwat said strength, rather than truth alone, shaped global recognition in the present times.

## Naveen Patnaik to forgo enhanced LoP salary

Leader of Opposition (LoP) in Odisha Assembly Naveen Patnaik on Saturday announced to forgo the recently hiked salary and allowances and urged the State Government to utilise the amount for the welfare of the poor people. Patnaik was entitled to receive a monthly salary and allowance of ₹3.62 lakh after the House passed a bill enhancing the salary and allowance of chief minister, speaker.



## Jharkhand’s Usri waterfall to welcome eco-tourists soon



Popular tourist destination Usri Waterfall in Giridih district of Jharkhand will be developed as an eco-tourism site, officials said. State Tourism Minister Sudiyya Kumar on Saturday laid the foundation for an eco-tourism project at Giridih Sadar Block. The Hemant Soren-led Government is committed to the overall development of tourism, he said.

## HP bans mobile in schools from next academic session

Himachal Pradesh Chief Minister Sukhvinder Singh Sukhu on Saturday announced that there would be a complete ban on students carrying mobile phones in school premises from pre-nursery to Class XII from the upcoming academic session. Speaking on the occasion, CM said these advanced facilities would not only enhance administrative and academic efficiency but would also mark the beginning of a new era of digital education.



# VP pays tribute to 2001 Parliament attack martyrs

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE  
■ New Delhi

Vice President CP Radhakrishnan on Saturday led Parliamentarians in paying floral tributes to those who died fending off terrorists who attacked the Parliament House in 2001. On the 24th anniversary of the attack, Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Radhakrishnan, who is also the Rajya Sabha Chair, were among the first to offer tributes. A function was held outside the now old Parliament building (Samvidhan Sadan) every December 13 to mark the day. Separately, President Droupadi Murmu paid tributes to the “courageous heroes” who laid down their lives while protecting Parliament, and said the country remains indebted to them and their families. “On this day, we reaffirm India’s commitment to fight terrorism in all its forms,” Murmu said in a social media post. Modi said on this day, “Our nation remembers those



Vice President CP Radhakrishnan paying tribute to the martyrs of the 2001 Parliament attack during a ceremony to mark its 24th anniversary at Samvidhan Sadan in New Delhi on Saturday

PTI

who laid down their lives during the heinous attack on our Parliament in 2001.” “In the face of grave danger, their courage, alert-

ness and unwavering sense of duty were remarkable. India will forever remain grateful for their supreme sacrifice,” he said while

sharing photographs of the homage ceremony. CISF personnel presented a salute or “samman guard” at the venue, after which a

moment of silence was observed to mark the anniversary. Till 2023, the CRPF used to offer ‘*salami shastra*’ (present arms).

## Congress slams Govt over MGNREGA name change

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE  
■ New Delhi

Congress on Saturday questioned the need for renaming the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) scheme and asked “what is wrong with the name Mahatma Gandhi” that the Government had to take this step. Reacting to the development, Congress general secretary in-charge communications Jairam Ramesh said the Modi Government is a “master” at renaming schemes and laws. “They renamed the Nirmal Bharat Abhiyan to Swachh Bharat Abhiyan, and the rural LPG distribution programme to Ujjwala. They are experts in re-packaging and branding,” he said. “They hate Pandit Nehru but it seems they also hate Mahatma Gandhi. What’s wrong with the name Mahatma Gandhi, why rename the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act to Pooja Babu Employment Guarantee Scheme?” Ramesh said. The Union Cabinet on Friday approved a Bill to rename the MGNREGA and increase the number of work days, sources said. According to them, the scheme will now be renamed as ‘*Pooja Babu Grameen Rozgar Yojna*’, and the number of work days under it would be increased from 100 days at present to 125 days. Congress general secre-

tary in-charge organisation K C Venugopal said the PM, who once called MGNREGA a “monument of failure”, is now renaming it to claim credit for the revolutionary scheme. “It’s yet another way of erasing Mahatma Gandhi from our national psyche, especially from the villages, where, he said, India’s soul resides,” he alleged. “This move is also nothing but a cosmetic change to paper over the deliberate neglect being meted out to this scheme,” Venugopal said. MGNREGA workers have been demanding higher wages, but the Centre has been reducing allocated funds for the scheme year after year, he said. “The arrears keep piling up, and it seems to be a carefully planned strategy to engineer a slow death for the scheme. In reality, this Government has no intent of delivering welfare — and is merely putting up a pretence when it has run out of ideas,” Venugopal alleged. “But Modi, rename it all you want, the people know it was Dr Manmohan Singh and Smt Sonia Gandhi ji who brought this transformative scheme to every village of India,” he said. The scheme, better known as MGNREGA or NREGA, is a flagship scheme of the Government aimed at enhancing livelihood security of households in the rural areas by providing at least 100 days of guaranteed wage employment.

## PM renamed MGNREGA to change its spirit, not name: BJP

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE  
■ New Delhi

BJP on Saturday said Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s decision to rename the rural job guarantee scheme was not to alter its name but to change its “spirit”. Hitting back at the Congress following its criticism on renaming MGNREGA, BJP national spokesperson Sudhanshu Trivedi said the Opposition party and its leaders cannot understand the decision as they function with a sense of entitlement. “The name on which the Congress considers its exclusive right belongs to the entire country,” the BJP leader said in an apparent



reference to Mahatma Gandhi’s name. The Union Cabinet approved a Bill on Friday to rename the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) as ‘*Pooja Babu Grameen Rozgar Yojna*’. “The prime minister is not changing

the name (of the scheme) but its spirit,” Trivedi said. Prime Minister Modi has dedicated his entire life to the service of the nation and the people and he works with this spirit, the BJP leader said. “But the Congress, which has worked with the principle of ‘aage-

peeche hamri sarkar, hum hain yahan ke rajkumar’ (we are in rule everywhere, we are the royals), cannot understand the spirit with which the prime minister works,” he said, when asked about the Congress’s criticism of renaming MGNREGA. On the Congress’s charge that the Government was claiming credit for the scheme, Trivedi said the Congress has neither done any work that is useful nor worth taking any credit for. “You renamed Kingsway as Rajpath because of the sense of raj (power). After Prime Minister Modi renamed it as Kartavya Path, it brought in a sense of duty,” Trivedi said.

## Akhlaq lynching case: Karat seeks President’s intervention in UP Govt’s move

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE  
■ New Delhi

Senior CPI(M) leader Brinda Karat on Saturday wrote to President Droupadi Murmu, demanding her intervention in the Uttar Pradesh Government’s move to withdraw charges against the accused in the 2015 mob lynching of Mohammad Akhlaq. In a letter to the President, Karat called it a “politically motivated” step by the Government, and also questioned the role of the governor. “I write to draw your urgent attention to the role of the Uttar Pradesh governor

in the matter of the mob lynching case of Md Akhlaq, which occurred in September 2015. The governor has given written permission to the UP Government to go ahead in its wholly illegal and unjust attempt to subvert the processes of justice and to withdraw the entire case even though the main witness has already given evidence,” Karat said. She said the Government has filed an affidavit in the Greater Noida district court to withdraw the case, with the governor’s permission. “I regret that I am forced to write to you on this matter, but since the governor has

been appointed by you and is answerable to you, I felt it in the interests of justice to inform you of the facts and to request your urgent intervention,” she said. On September 28, 2015, a mob gathered outside Akhlaq’s house in Uttar Pradesh’s Bisahada village after an alleged announcement from a village temple claiming that he had slaughtered a cow. He, along with his son Daanish, was dragged out of their home and assaulted, leading to Akhlaq’s death. “Even today, Danish has not fully recovered and carries the impact of the grievous wounds inflicted on him,”



Karat said. The CPI(M) leader said the daughter of the victim gave evidence and named and identified all the accused.

“In other words, evidence against the accused has been presented and recorded in the court. The case is going on,

and two other direct witnesses are to give their statements,” she said. “At such a time, the UP Government has taken a decision to withdraw the case on utterly indefensible grounds, such as *lathis* were used, not guns, there was no personal animosity with the victim, continuing the case will lead to communal disharmony and so on,” the letter read. Karat alleged that the case has been delayed by the prosecution — by not giving notice to the witnesses to appear — and now the delay has been cited as the grounds to withdraw the case.

## AIIMS-Delhi survey reveals alarming rise in substance abuse among school children

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
■ New Delhi

School-going children are picking up drug and smoking habits and engaging in consumption of alcohol, with the average age of introduction to such harmful substances found to be around 13 years, suggesting a need for earlier interventions as early as primary school, a multi-city survey by AIIMS-Delhi said. The findings also showed substance use increased in higher grades, with grade XI/XII students two times more likely to report use of substances when compared with grade VIII students. This emphasised the importance of continued prevention and intervention through middle

and high school. The study led by Dr Anju Dhawan of AIIMS’s National Drug Dependence Treatment Centre, published in the National Medical Journal of India this month, looks at adolescent substance use across diverse regions. The survey included 5,920 students from classes 8, 9, 11 and 12 in urban Government, private and rural schools across 10 cities Bengaluru, Chandigarh, Delhi, Dibrugarh, Hyderabad, Imphal, Jammu, Lucknow, Mumbai, and Ranchi. The data were collected between May 2018 and June 2019. The average age of initiation for any substance was 12.9 (2.8) years. It was lowest for inhalants (11.3 years) followed by heroin (12.3 years)

and opioid pharmaceuticals (without prescription; 12.5 years). Overall, 15.1 per cent of participants reported lifetime use, 10.3 per cent reported past year use, and 7.2 per cent reported use in the past month of any substance, the study found. The most common substances used in the past year, after tobacco (4 per cent) and alcohol (3.8 per cent), were opioids (2.8 per cent), followed by cannabis (2 per cent) and inhalants (1.9 per cent). Use of non-prescribed pharmaceutical opioids was most common among opioid users (90.2 per cent). On being asked, “Do you think this substance is easily available for a person of your age” separately for each sub-



stance category, nearly half the students (46.3 per cent) endorsed that tobacco products and more than one-third of the students (36.5 per cent) agreed that a person of their age can easily procure alcohol products. Similarly, for Bhang (21.9 per cent), ganja/charas (16.1 per cent), inhalants (15.2 per cent), sedatives (13.7 per cent), opium and heroin (10 per cent each), the students endorsed that these can be easily procured. About 95 per cent of the children, irrespective of their grade, agreed with the statement that ‘drug use is harmful’. The rates of substance use (any) among boys were significantly higher than those of girls for substance use (ever), use in the past year

and use in the past 30 days. Compared to grade VIII students, grade IX students were more likely, and grade XI/XII students were twice as likely to have used any substance (ever). The likelihood of past-year use of any substance was also higher for grade IX students and for grade XI/XII students as compared to grade VIII students. About 40 per cent of students mentioned that they had a family member who used tobacco or alcohol each. The use of cannabis (any product) and opioid (any product) by a family member was reported by 8.2 per cent and 3.9 per cent of students, respectively, while the use of other substances, such as inhalants/sedatives by

family was 2-3 per cent, the study found. A relatively smaller percentage of students reported use of tobacco or alcohol among peers as compared to among family members, while a higher percentage reported inhalants, sedatives, cannabis or opioid use among peers. Children using substances (past year) compared to non-users reported significantly higher any substance use by their family members and peers. There were 25.7 per cent students who replied ‘yes’ to the question ‘conflicts/fights often occur in your family’. Most students also replied affirmatively to ‘family members are aware of how their time is being spent’.





States Focus



MP TO GIVE SPECIAL PACKAGE TO FORMER NAXAL-HIT DISTRICTS

After declaring the State to be free of Naxalism, Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister Mohan Yadav on Saturday said his Government would provide a special package to the districts of Balaghat, Mandla and Dindori, once affected by Maoist violence. The elimination of Naxalism was the biggest achievement of his government's tenure so far, Yadav said in an interview on completing two years in office. "A special package will be provided for Naxal-affected Balaghat, Mandla and Dindori for development. We want them to become model districts for the future. The last 20-25 years have been very bad, so we are preparing a concrete plan to bring them closer to the rest of the advanced districts," he said.



J&K CM ABDULLAH INAUGURATES ASIA'S LONGEST SKI DRAG LIFT

Jammu and Kashmir Chief Minister Omar Abdullah on Saturday threw open Asia's longest ski drag lift at Gulmarg, widely known as the 'skiing capital of India', officials said. Abdullah also inaugurated the world's highest revolving multi-purpose hall in the Affarwat area of Gulmarg, which also houses a restaurant, they said. Abdullah said the ski drag lift at Kongdori in Gulmarg in Baramulla district will significantly enhance the skiing infrastructure in the hill station and strengthen its standing on the international winter sports map.

Nadda targets Himachal Congress Govt over funds

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE Shimla

BJP President JP Nadda on Saturday alleged that the Congress Government in Himachal Pradesh has failed to utilise the funds allocated by the Centre and therefore has no right to remain in power, accusing the State administration of functioning with a carefree mindset.

"Congress Government in Himachal Pradesh is working with a mindset of 'Khao Piya Mauj karo, aage kisne dekha hai' (indulge in merry making, who has seen the future)," he said and stressed that "double engine Government is the only way to ensure development of the State".

Addressing an event, Nadda accused the State Government of corruption and misutilisation of funds given by the Centre under



BJP National President and Union Minister JP Nadda with LoP in the Himachal Pradesh Assembly and party leader Jairam Thakur during a public meeting in Shimla, Himachal Pradesh on Saturday

various heads, including building of houses, repair of roads and smart city.

Refuting the allegations of the Congress Government that the Centre is not giving enough funds to the State, Nadda claimed, "₹3,789 crore were given for disaster relief, over ₹1,000 crore for Smart Cities besides funds for Vibrant Village development, medical colleges, AIIMS Bilaspur, a bulk drug park, four-lane highways and developed Baddi as a pharmaceutical hub in the State yet the Congress continues to spread falsehoods and mislead the innocent people of Himachal."

Targeting the Sukhu-led Government for its incompetence, he claimed that the Centre has sent over ₹2,000 crore as special assistance and approved ₹1,442 crore under JICA funding, but the Congress Government utilised only

about 50 per cent of the funds in several schemes.

Taking a jibe at the Congress, Nadda said that Himachal's treasury is frequently shut, the entire administration runs on ad-hoc arrangements with the chief secretary and director general of police working on additional charge and there is no coordination between the chief minister and his ministers.

The Congress Government has not brought even a single concrete project to the Centre, he said, and called upon BJP workers to take these facts and truths to every village and town, so that the "people of Himachal can free themselves from Congress misrule" and move decisively towards development and good governance.

Nadda alleged that "earlier the Government used to come to power with the support of all but used to

be limited to a particular caste, segment and religion, but 11 years back Prime Minister Narendra Modi changed the political scenario of the country by becoming the 'Pradhan Sevak' of the nation and moved from Rajpath to Kartavya Path."

He said the "BJP Government is a performance (report-card) based government, what it promised, it delivered and in contrast, the UPA politics revolved around casteism, appeasement and nepotism, while BJP politics is rooted in accountability and good governance."

State BJP president Rajiv Bindal said that Congress was reduced to only six seats in Bihar, which is proof of its declining credibility and claimed that the same situation will prevail in the upcoming 2027 Himachal Pradesh assembly elections, where the Congress will not even reach double digits and will be reduced to only two seats.

CM Nitish allocates portfolios of new departments

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE Patna

Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar has allocated portfolios of newly created departments among ministers, keeping Civil Aviation with himself, an official notification said.

The Bihar cabinet on December 9 approved proposals to create three new departments — Youth, Employment and Skill Development Department, Higher Education Department and the Civil Aviation Department — and changed the names of three other departments.

The Animal and Fisheries Resource Department was renamed as Dairy, Fisheries and Animal Resources Department; the Labour Resources Department as Labour Resources and Migrant Workers Welfare Department, and Art, Culture and Youth Department as Art and Culture Department.

According to the notification, issued on December 12, the CM allocated the portfolio of Youth, Employment and Skill Development Department to Sanjay Singh 'Tiger', who is holding the portfolio of Labour Resources and Migrant Workers Welfare Department.

State Education Minister Sunil Kumar has been given the portfolio of the newly created Higher Education Department. The CM has kept the Civil Aviation Department with himself, the notification said. The CM had recently announced on social media platforms the State government's decision to create three new departments.

"We have set a target to provide jobs to one crore youth over the next five years (2025-30). For this, it's essential that more youth be trained for skill development. Instructions have been given to create three new departments: Youth, Employment and Skill Development



Department, Higher Education Department, and Civil Aviation Department," the CM had said.

On the need for a dedicated Higher Education Department, Kumar had said its objective was to "bring about qualitative improvement in learning, promote research and innovation, develop technical and vocational education, and ensure that youth from all sections of society receive quality employment-oriented education".

On the Civil Aviation Department, the CM had written, "All of you know that the construction of several new airports is underway in the State, and in the future, under the UDAN scheme, construction of many new airports has been proposed. The creation of the Civil Aviation Department will accelerate this, enhance the industrial environment, create employment opportunities, and help in the export of products manufactured in the State".

Jointness, self reliance, innovation key to combat power: CDS

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE Hyderabad

General Anil Chauhan on Saturday said the country's future combat power would be driven by the three pillars — jointness, *Atmanirbharta* and Innovation (IAI), what the Chief of Defence Staff (CDS) described as JAI.

General Chauhan, who reviewed the Combined Graduation Parade (CGP) at the Air Force Academy at Dundigal near here, without referring to any country, said developments that indicate institutional fragility and reactive adjustments are often seen around us.

"Wars cannot (be) won by rhetoric, but by purposeful action. Around us, we often witness developments that signal institutional fragility and reactive adjustments. In contrast, India's strength rests on the robust institutions, democratic stability and unwavering professionalism of our armed forces," he said. The CDS told the newly commissioned officers that



Chief of Defence Staff General Anil Chauhan reviews the Combined Graduation Parade of the 216th course at the Air Force Academy (AFA) in Dundigal, near Hyderabad, Telangana on Saturday

they are entering the Indian Air Force during a phase of deep transformation of the armed forces. Integrated structures, joint operations and national pursuit of *Atmanirbharta* (self reliance) in defence are shaping the future of India's military

strength, he said. The journey ahead of the newly commissioned officers will be guided by JAI, the first word of *Jai Hind*, he said.

Jointness signifies fighting as one nation and one force and *Atmanirbharta* indicate trusted platforms and

systems made not just for India but for the world. Innovation signifies daring to think ahead and to be ahead of the curve, he said. "These three pillars will shape India's future of combat power," he said.

The intensity of operations

may have ebbed, but Operation Sindoor continues, he said. "You (new officers) also join the Air Force at a moment when a new normal has firmly taken shape. An era defined by a high degree of operational preparedness, 24-7, 365 days. The intensity of operations may have ebbed, but Operation Sindoor continues," he said.

Asserting that war and warfare are at the cusp of a major revolution, General Chauhan said the Defence forces are committed to adapt to changing environment and imbuing reforms to remain ready and relevant.

He further said battles in the older domains will always remain contested, often brutal. But in the new domains, they will be smart, swift, and shaped by intellect, innovation, and initiative. The force that masters new frontiers is more likely to prevail in future conflicts. General Chauhan reviewed the Combined Graduation Parade of 216 Course.

IMA Passing Out Parade: 491 cadets join Indian Army

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE Dehradun

After undergoing rigorous training at the Indian Military Academy (IMA) in Dehradun, 491 cadets participated in a grand Passing Out Parade on Saturday and will now be commissioned as officers in the Indian Army.

The spectacular parade, held at the historic Drill Square in front of the academy's Chatwood Building, was reviewed by Army Chief General Upendra Dwivedi, who served as the reviewing officer. Along with 491 Indian cadets, 34 foreign cadets from 14 friendly countries also participated in the Autumn Term 2025 Passing Out Parade.

A total of 525 officer cadets from the 157th Regular Course, 46th Technical Entry Scheme, 140th Technical Graduate Course, 55th Special Commissioned Officers Course, and Territorial Army Online Entrance Exam 2023



Indian army's newly-commissioned officers celebrate during the POP ceremony at IMA in Dehradun, Uttarakhand on Saturday

Course participated in the Passing Out Parade.

The 'Sword of Honour' and gold medal for securing first place during training was awarded to ACA Nishkal Dwivedi, the silver medal to BUO Badal Yadav for second place and the bronze medal to SUO Kamaljeet Singh for third place.

The silver medal for securing first place in the 'Technical Graduate Course' was awarded to Officer Cadet Jadhav Sujit Sampat, and the

silver medal for first place in the 'Technical Entry Scheme-46' was awarded to WCC Abhinav Mehrotra. The silver medal for the 'Special Commission Officer Course' was given to Officer Cadet Sunil Kumar Chhetri.

Among the foreign cadets, the first place in merit was secured by Bangladesh's JUO Mohammad Safin Ashraf. The Army Chief's Banner for overall best performance in the Autumn Term was awarded to Imphal Company.

New meditation hall opens for pilgrims at Vaishno Devi shrine

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA Jammu

Shri Mata Vaishno Devi shrine Board (SMVDSB) has dedicated a *Sadhana Kaksh* (Meditation Hall) to the pilgrims visiting the revered shrine atop Trikuta hills in Reasi district of Jammu and Kashmir, officials said on Saturday.

The newly set up meditation hall was opened for the devotees amidst vedic chanting at the Bhawan area, marking a significant initiative aimed at further enriching the spiritual ambience and facilitating deeper devotional engagement among the visitors, the officials said.

Chief Executive Officer, SMVDSB, Sachin Kumar Vaishya, said the establishment of a dedicated *Sadhana Kaksh* in proximity to the sanctum of Mata Vaishno Devi forms part of the Board's broader endeavour to strengthen the spiritual



infrastructure at Bhawan.

"Lakhs of devotees undertake the *Yatra* every month with deep faith and devotion. The provision of a serene space for meditation significantly enhances the overall pilgrimage experience," he said.

Located in the lower basement of the Ram Mandir along the exit cave route at Bhawan, the *Sadhana Kaksh* has been developed with emphasis on simplicity and devotional sanctity.

Spread over an area of approximately 1,500 square feet, the facility can accom-

modate around 170 devotees at a time, the officials said, adding that special care has been taken to maintain silence and sanctity within the *Kaksh* (hall), ensuring an atmosphere of calm and spiritual focus.

The shrine board has issued detailed operational guidelines for the *Sadhana Kaksh*. As per these guidelines, the Shrine Board shall provide basic materials for use by devotees, including prayer beads (malas), cloth pouches (guthis) and other essential accessories.

ED finds ISIS module linked to Khair wood smuggling in Maharashtra

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE New Delhi

An alleged ISIS module operating from Maharashtra's Padgha village in Thane district was involved in the illegal cutting and smuggling of Khair wood from the local reserve forests, an ED probe into a terror financing-linked money laundering case has found.

The federal probe agency conducted searches in the twin villages of Borivali-Padgha on December 11, apart from locations in Delhi, Kolkata, Hazaribagh (Jharkhand) and Prayagraj (Uttar Pradesh), among others.

The money laundering probe stems from a November 2023 case filed by the National Investigation Agency (NIA) against a "highly radicalised" module of the banned global terrorist outfit ISIS, based in Padgha, and its late self-proclaimed leader in India, Saquib Nachan.

The agency said in a state-

ACACIA CATECHU (KHAIR) WOOD IS USED TO EXTRACT KATTHA (CATECHU), COMMONLY USED IN PAAN, AYURVEDIC MEDICINES

ment on Saturday that it seized ₹3.70 crore in cash apart from gold jewellery and bullion worth ₹6 crore during the raids.

A financial analysis, as per the Enforcement Directorate (ED), found that "various individuals linked with the Borivali-Padgha ISIS module were involved in illegal cutting and smuggling of Kaith trees from the reserve forest areas of the said area".

The wood of Acacia catechu, locally known as Khair, is used to extract Kattha (catechu) that is widely used in 'paan' and as an ingredient in Ayurvedic medicines.

The ED said the searches covered various companies

and entities linked with the production of Kattha that were procuring the wood from suspects. Some wood that was recovered during the Thursday searches was handed over to the forest department by the ED.

The NIA had alleged that the Padgha module was engaged in recruitment, training, procurement of weapons and explosives, and raising funds to sustain their operations.

It has named 21 people in the chargesheet in the case on charges of conspiracy to recruit and radicalise vulnerable youth into the ISIS ideology and fabrication of improvised explosive devices (IEDs).

According to the NIA, the accused had self-declared the Padgha village in rural Thane as a "liberated zone" named 'Al Sham', and they were motivating impressionable Muslim youth to relocate to Padgha from their place of residence to strengthen their base.

J&K Govt again skips Sheikh Abdullah, Martyrs' Day holidays



MOHIT KANDHARI Jammu

For the second consecutive year, an elected Government headed by Omar Abdullah in Jammu and Kashmir has failed to fulfill its poll promise of restoring public holidays on the occasion of the birth anniversary of Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah on December 5, and Martyrs' Day on July 13.

On Saturday, when the Union Territory administration issued the holiday calendar, both these public holidays were once again found missing in the list of holidays for 2026.

For the first time, the two-

State holidays on July 13 and December 5 were deleted from the list of public holidays by the LG administration on December 28, 2019, after the Abrogation of Articles 2019 and 35-A.

The restoration of these two holidays was included in its election manifesto by the National Conference during the Assembly polls.

After forming the government, many leaders and legislators, including the party's general secretary, had passionately appealed to the LG to declare December 5, 2024 as a public holiday, but in vain.



PROSPECT



Swami Avimukteshwaranand Saraswati Ji Maharaj felicitating New Delhi Station Manager Rakesh Sharma with the Martand Honour for dedicating his selfless service to hundreds of railway passengers during his three decades as a serving Rail-man. The honour was bestowed in the event organised by Kurukshetra Gurukul Foundation led by its Founder President Sandeep Deo. Sharma is credited with reaching out to people/passengers and help them in searching for lost and found items in trains, platforms

Raj Kumar Goyal to be sworn in as new CIC

Former IAS officer Raj Kumar Goyal will be sworn in as Chief Information Commissioner (CIC) by President Droupadi Murmu on Monday.

Former Railway Board chief Jaya Verma Sinha, former IPS officer Swagat Das, former CSS officer Sanjeev Kumar Jindal, former IAS officer Surendra Singh Meena and ex-Indian Forest Service officer Khushwant Singh Sethi have been recommended as Information Commissioners.

Senior journalists P R Ramesh and Ashutosh Chaturvedi, and Sudha Rani Relangi, Member (Legal), PNGRAB will take oath as ICs by newly sworn in CIC.

Cooperatives key to India’s self-reliance: Minister Gurjar

**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE**  
■ Guwahati

Union Minister Krishan Pal Gurjar on Saturday emphasised the role of the cooperative movement in making the country self-reliant, with States like Assam to play a special part in it. He was speaking at the opening of the 4th Cooperative Mela 2025, organised by the State's Cooperation department, under the guidance of the Ministry of Cooperation.

The three-day event will showcase the strength, diversity and potential of the cooperative movement in the State. Gurjar, the Union Minister of State for Cooperation, said that the cooperative movement in Assam is a natural extension of the State's deep cultural and spiritual ethos.

He paid tribute to the great Vaishnavite saints, Srimanta Shankaradev and Madhavdev, whose teachings on unity, equality and service to society form the very foundation of the cooperative spirit.

He maintained that under the leadership of the Prime Minister, and the focused guidance of the Union Minister of Cooperation, the national vision of 'Sahkar Se Samridhhi' (Prosperity through Cooperation) is transforming into a vibrant reality.

Gurjar highlighted the establishment of the Ministry of Cooperation in 2021 as a historic step, providing the necessary institutional impetus and a clear blueprint for an all-round, world-class cooperative system in the country. Praising Assam's reforms in this sector, the Union minister said this State-level proactive implementation has posi-

tioned it as a leader in key national initiatives, including the 100 per cent computerisation of Primary Agricultural Credit Societies (PACS), with over 800 PACS already adopting the new Model Byelaws.

He said that this progress is empowering youth and women, fostering entrepreneurship in diverse sectors and contributing to financial inclusion for over 32 lakh members. Assam is now firmly aligned with the National Cooperative Policy 2025's goal of establishing one cooperative in every village by 2026, Gurjar said, urging collective effort to build a prosperous, self-reliant and cooperative-led future for the State.

State Minister for Cooperation Jogen Mohan, also speaking on the occasion, said the exhibition is a celebration of grassroots empowerment. He praised the participants for achieving self-dependence and demonstrating remarkable resourcefulness by successfully turning waste into valuable resources using locally available materials.

He detailed the comprehensive benefits these cooperatives are bringing to the people, spanning diverse sectors – from the production of essential goods to the success of women's Self-Help Groups.

The Cooperative Mela features participation from 160 cooperative societies representing key sectors such as handloom, fishery, dairy, agriculture and youth, and women-led enterprises, providing a vibrant platform for showcasing local products, innovations and cooperative success stories.

CJI seeks unified judicial policy, tech for courts

**PRESS TRUST OF INDIA**  
■ Jaisalmer

Pushing for a “unified judicial policy”, Chief Justice of India Surya Kant on Saturday said technology can help align standards and practices across courts, creating a “seamless experience” for citizens, regardless of their location.

He said high courts — due to the federal structure — have had their own practices and technological capacities, and “regional barriers” can be broken down with technology to create a more unified judicial ecosystem.

Delivering the keynote address at the West Zone Regional Conference in Jaisalmer, Kant proposed the idea of a “national judicial ecosystem” and called for an overhaul of India's judicial system with the integration of technology.

“Today, as technology reduces geographical barriers and enables convergence, it invites us to think of justice not as regional systems operating in parallel,

but as one national ecosystem with shared standards, seamless interfaces, and coordinated goals,” he said.

He emphasised how the role of technology in the judiciary has evolved over time.

“Technology is no longer merely an administrative convenience. It has evolved into a constitutional instrument that strengthens equality before the law, expands access to justice, and enhances institutional efficiency,” he said, highlighting how digital tools can bridge gaps in the judicial system.

Kant pointed out that technology enables the judiciary to overcome the limitations of physical distance and bureaucratic hurdles.

“It allows the judiciary to transcend physical barriers and bureaucratic rigidities to deliver outcomes that are timely, transparent and principled,” he said, adding that the effective use of technology can modernise the delivery of justice and make it more accessible to citizens across the country.

The CJI called for implementing a “unified judicial policy”.

He said India's judicial system has long been shaped by its federal structure, and different high courts have their own practices and technological capacities.

“India's vast diversity has led to different high courts evolving their own practices, administrative priorities and technological capacities. This variation, though natural in a federal democracy, has resulted in uneven experiences for litigants across the country,” he said.

Kant underscored that predictability is crucial for building trust in the judicial system.

“A core expectation citizens place upon the courts is predictability,” he said, adding that citizens should not only expect fair treatment but also consistency in how cases are handled across the country.

He pointed to the potential of technology in improving predictability.

“Technology enables us to

track systemic delays and make problems visible rather than concealed,” he said.

By identifying areas where delays occur, such as in bail matters or cases involving certain types of disputes, courts can take targeted action to address these issues and improve efficiency, Kant said.

The CJI explained that data-driven tools could identify the reasons behind delays or bottlenecks, allowing for faster, more focused solutions.

“Technology enables prioritisation by flagging sensitive case categories, monitoring pendency in real time and ensuring transparent listing protocols,” he said.

Justice Surya Kant also discussed the importance of prioritising urgent cases where delays could result in significant harm. He highlighted his recent administrative order that ensures urgent cases, such as bail petitions or habeas corpus cases, are listed within two days of curing defects.

“Where delay causes deep

harm, the system must respond with urgency,” he Stated, explaining that technology can help courts identify and expedite such cases. Kant also raised the issue of the clarity of judicial decisions.

He noted that many litigants, despite winning cases, often struggle to understand the terms of their judgment due to complex legal language.

“Although the orders had gone in their favour, they remained unsure of what relief they had actually secured because the language was too technical, vague or evasive to understand,” he said.

He advocated for more uniformity in how judgments are written. “A unified judicial approach must therefore extend to how we communicate outcomes,” he said.

The CJI also discussed the role of AI and digital tools in improving case management. He pointed to the potential of AI-based research assistants and digital case management

systems to streamline judicial processes.

“Emerging technological tools are now capable of performing once-unthinkable functions. They can highlight missing precedent references, cluster similar legal questions, and simplify factual narration,” he said, explaining how these technologies can help judges make more consistent decisions.

He also highlighted tools like the National Judicial Data Grid and e-courts, which are already helping to standardise processes like case filings and tracking.

Kant reiterated that the integration of technology into the judicial process is not just about improving efficiency but about upholding the integrity of the system and strengthening public trust. “The measure of innovation is not the complexity of the software we deploy, but the simplicity with which a citizen understands the outcome of their case and believes that justice has been served,” he said.

Papon lights up IRFC 40th Foundation Day

**GYANVI SHARMA**  
■ New Delhi

The Indian Railways Finance Corporation (IRFC) celebrated its 40th foundation day on December 12, 2025 in a spectacular evening filled with music, joy and nostalgia. The highlight of the evening was none other than the renowned singer Papon (Angaraag Mahanta), whose performance left the audience mesmerised.

The night began with a captivating short film showcasing Papon's journey – glimpses of his blockbuster hits, achievements and memorable past performances. The cinematic introduction seamlessly led to his grand entry on stage, greeted by the roaring applause of the audience.

Setting the tone for the evening, Papon opened with his iconic song “Kyon” from the movie Barfi, instantly winning hearts and raising the energy in the auditorium.

What followed was a performance that combined raw enthusiasm with a soft, enduring charm. Papon's voice resonated deeply, touching not just the ears but the hearts of everyone present. Among the highlights was his rendition of the latest hit “Qayde Se” from the movie Metro In Dino, which had the audience swaying to the rhythm, their flashlights illuminating the hall like a sea of stars.

He delighted the crowd further with a surprise selection of ghazals by Jagjit

Singh, including the soulful “Tum Itna Jo Muskura Rahe Ho,” along with evergreen classics like “Pehla Nasha Pehla Khumar,” originally rendered by Sadhana Sargam and Udit Narayan. Each note and each verse carried a serene and almost magical quality that held the audience spellbound.

The energy peaked when the crowd passionately requested the chart-topping song “Bulleya” from the movie Sultan. Papon answered with an intriguing performance, doing full justice to the audience's excitement.

Accompanied by a talented team of musicians, including a skilled guitarist, flute player and percussionists, Papon's ensemble delivered flawless musical synergy,

creating an unforgettable experience.

As the evening drew to a close, Papon and his band members were felicitated with mementos and warm appreciation from Indian Railways CEO Satish Kumar and the entire IRFC team led by CMD Manoj Kumar Dubey, recognising their remarkable contribution to the celebration.

The event was more than a musical performance, it was a celebration of talent, emotion and the enduring power of music to bring people together. The 40th foundation day of IRFC will be remembered not only for its milestone but also for the magical night when Papon's voice transformed the evening into a heartfelt musical journey.



Chennai dams full: 27-year record broken after monsoon and cyclone

**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE**  
■ Chennai

For the first time in nearly 27 years, water in three chief dams supplying drinking water to Chennai have reached their full reservoir level. Three other dams, too, are brimming with water as their levels have reached the maximum level, thanks to the northeast monsoon and cyclone Ditwah. The combined storage of water in all six dams accounted for a total 12,273.40 mcf (million cubic feet), which is 92.83 per cent, on December 12, as against a storage of 10,068.42 mcf of water during the corresponding period last year.

Poondi and Puzhal dams have 100 per cent storage, while Chembarambakkam has 99.37 per cent water. As per the data available with the Chennai Metropolitan Water Supply and Sewerage Board, levels of water in Poondi and Puzhal reservoirs have reached the FRL of 140 feet (3,221 mcf storage) and 50.20 feet

(3,300 mcf storage), respectively.

The Chembarambakkam with a full tank level of 85.31 feet (3,645 mcf storage), currently has 3,622 mcf of water. All three reservoirs continue to receive inflows from the catchment areas.

“The water levels reached the maximum level due to cyclone Ditwah that triggered intense rainfall in Chennai and neighbouring districts during the northeast monsoon,” officials said.

Cholavaram dam (65.50 feet height), Kannankottai Theruvu Kandigai (115.35 feet), and Veeranam (47.50 feet) have water up to 59.22 feet, 114.33 feet, and 46.10 feet, respectively.

In 2015, when the city and suburbs reeled under massive floods, the water level at Poondi dam stood at 139.26 feet, which was 98.91 per cent of the storage (i.e. 2,905 mcf), Puzhal stood at 48.60 feet - 88.85 per cent (2,932 mcf), and Chembarambakkam stood at 83.05 feet with 83.07 per cent storage (3,028 mcf).

India in talks with Mexico on high tariffs; reserves right to act to protect exporters

**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE**  
■ New Delhi

India is engaged with Mexico over the South American nation's decision to unilaterally raise tariffs on a number of products to find mutually beneficial solutions, even as New Delhi reserves the right to take appropriate measures to safeguard the interests of its exporters, an official said on Saturday.

These duties are announced against countries that do not have free trade agreements with Mexico, including India, China, South Korea, Thailand and Indonesia. The official said that India, in fact, was engaged with Mexico during the initial tabling of a bill in this regard. The Embassy of India in Mexico raised the issue with the Ministry of Economy on September 30, 2025, itself, seeking special concessions to shield Indian exports from the new tariffs.

“India values its partnership with Mexico and stands ready to work collaboratively toward a stable and balanced trade environment that benefits businesses and consumers in both countries,”

the official added. Further, both the countries are looking to start negotiations for a free trade agreement, and terms of reference (ToR) to initiate the talks formally are expected to be finalised soon. Experts said that the trade agreement will help insulate Indian companies from these tariffs, which were imposed under pressure from the US to align with America on increasing tariffs against China and prevent transshipment to America. Mexico's Senate has approved a new tariff measure on December 11, 2025, and it has since been cleared by both chambers of Congress. It is aimed at boosting manufacturing and reducing trade imbalances.

Under the decision, Mexico will impose steep import tariffs - ranging from about 5 per cent to as high as 50 per cent on a wide range of goods (about 1,463 tariff lines) from countries that do not have free trade agreements with Mexico, including India, China, South Korea, Thailand and Indonesia.

However, the list of items covered is yet to be officially notified. The higher duties

will take effect on January 1, 2026. “The Department of Commerce is engaged with Mexico's Ministry of Economy to explore mutually beneficial solutions which align with global trade rules,” the official said. A high-level meeting in this regard between Commerce Secretary Rajesh Agrawal and Mexico's Vice Minister of Economy Luis Rosendo has already taken place and follow on technical meetings are expected soon.

“India reserves the right to take appropriate measures to safeguard the interests of Indian exporters, while continuing to pursue a solution through constructive dialogue,” the official added.

The Government official further said that the actual impact on Indian exports will depend on the criticality of Indian exports to domestic supply chains in Mexico and ability of Indian companies to secure exemptions or pass on the tariff cost to the Mexican consumers.

India believes that unilateral increases in MFN (most favoured nation) tariffs, without prior consultations, do not align with the spirit of our cooperative economic

engagement or with the principles of predictability and transparency underpinning the multilateral trading system.

The official also said that the Government is currently examining the details and implications of Mexico's tariff revisions and remains engaged with all stakeholders to monitor the evolving situation. Federation of Indian Export Organisations (FIEO) Director General Ajay Sahai said that Mexico's decision is a matter of concern, particularly for sectors like automobiles and auto components, machinery, electrical and electronics, organic chemicals, pharmaceuticals, textiles and plastics. “Such steep duties will erode our competitiveness and risk disrupting supply chains that have taken years to develop,” Sahai said, adding that this development also underlines the little urgency for India and Mexico to fast-track a comprehensive trade agreement. Domestic auto component manufacturers will face enhanced cost pressures with Mexico hiking duties on Indian imports, according to industry body ACMA.

UNESCO meet at Delhi’s Red Fort concludes; 67 new elements added to ICH lists

CORRIGENDUM

GURU NANAK DEV UNIVERSITY, AMRITSAR

(All India Service Centre of Preparation for Competitive Examination)

Online applications are invited from the candidate for admission in All India Service Centre of Preparation for Competitive Examinations (AIS-CCE) for preparation of UPSC/PCS, UGC(NET/JRF). The last date for admission of online applications is 15.01.2026. For online registration and more details, visits website <http://gndu.ac.in/aic/> (Deputy Director)

RO 2426/12/2025-26/5911

Dated CHD :- 12/12/2025

**PRESS TRUST OF INDIA**  
■ New Delhi

A key UNESCO meet on safeguarding intangible cultural heritage (ICH) being held at Delhi's Red Fort ends on Saturday, with the panel adding 67 new living heritage elements from various countries during the nearly week-long session.

The next session of the Inter Governmental Committee (IGC) for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage will be hosted in December 2026 in China's Xiamen city, a senior official of UNESCO said on Friday.

The closing ceremony was

hosted in the evening by India at the temporary pavilion, Plenary Hall, at the fort complex, as delegates will head out for sightseeing on Saturday after days of intense discussion.

The session was held for the first time in India with the Red Fort, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, as its venue. Fumiko Ohinata, Secretary, UNESCO 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, in her address at the ceremony, described the Mughal-era fort complex as a “magnificent backdrop” for the meeting.

The Mughal-era monu-

ment is famous for its massive fortified walls. “We enjoyed all India moments,” Ohinata said.

Later, interacting with PTI, she said the next session of the IGC will be held in China.

Sixty-seven cultural elements, including India's Deepavali, Iran's art of mirror-work in Persian architecture, the UAE's traditional art form that blends performing arts with oral tradition and Switzerland's yodeling, have been added to UNESCO's various intangible heritage lists over the period of December 9-11.

Nominations were sent by nearly 80 countries.

In a Statement, UNESCO

said over the course of the week, the 24 member States of the committee examined 67 living heritage elements, including, 11 elements inscribed on the List of Intangible Cultural Heritage in Need of Urgent Safeguarding; 53 elements inscribed on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity; and one programme selected on the Register of Good Safeguarding Practices.

Furthermore, in response to the positive impact of the safeguarding measures put in place since their inscription, two elements

have also been transferred from the List of Intangible Cultural Heritage in Need of Urgent Safeguarding to the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity, and their corresponding safeguarding programmes have been added to the Register of Good Safeguarding Practices.

With this year's inscriptions, 849 cultural practices in 157 countries are now part of UNESCO's living heritage lists, UNESCO said.

“Fragile yet essential, living heritage remains a pillar of cultural diversity in a world that can at times feel fragmented and divided. Living, creative, and carried

by communities, it reminds us of what binds us together.” UNESCO Director-General Khaled El-Enany was quoted as saying in the Statement.

“Let us keep alive the hope that unites us today: to share knowledge, strengthen connections, and build bridges across borders,” he said.

The 20th session of the panel began on December 8. The opening ceremony was held on December 7, with External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar attending it as the chief guest. “We have reaffirmed the extraordinary diversity, creativity, and living wisdom of communities across the world. Each

inscription is not merely an addition to a list but a renewed commitment to safeguarding practices that give meaning, identity, and continuity to human societies,” India's Ambassador and Permanent Delegate to UNESCO, Vishal V Sharma, said in his address at the closing ceremony. Union Culture Secretary Vivek Aggarwal said this session has reaffirmed the significance of intangible heritage in “sustaining communities, nurturing continuity and fortifying social cohesion, particularly at a time when globalisation, conflict and climate pressure challenge our cultural ecosystems”.



FROM THE WORLD

BOLIVIA

Ex-leader jailed for corruption

A Bolivian court on Friday ordered the country's former President Luis Arce to remain detained for five months while he awaits trial on corruption charges, the latest development in a case that threatens to exacerbate Bolivia's political tensions. Arce, 62, a leader from Bolivia's Movement Toward Socialism party, was elected in 2020 and left office a month ago following the election of Bolivia's first right-wing leader in nearly two decades. He strongly denies the charges of breach of duty and financial misconduct. He faces up to six years in prison if convicted. Two days after Arce's sudden arrest on the streets of Bolivia's capital of La Paz, a judge ordered his detention in a virtual hearing Friday. Arce was transferred to one of Bolivia's largest prisons in La Paz at night.

USA

Clintons face contempt threat

The Republican chair of the House Oversight Committee on Friday threatened to begin contempt of Congress proceedings against former President Bill Clinton and Hillary Clinton if they refuse to appear for depositions as part of the committee's investigation into Jeffrey Epstein. James Comer, a Kentucky Republican, said that the Clintons had "delayed, obstructed, and largely ignored the Committee staff's efforts to schedule their testimony" for several months and said the committee would begin proceedings to try to force them to testify if they do not appear next week or schedule an appearance in January. Comer's statement came just hours after Democrats on the committee had released dozens of photos they had received from Epstein's estate, including images of Clinton and President Donald Trump.

Fighting rages on Thai-Cambodian border

ASSOCIATED PRESS  
■ Surin

Fighting continued to rage on Saturday morning along the border of Thailand and Cambodia, even after US President Donald Trump, acting as a mediator, declared that he had won agreement from both countries for a ceasefire.

Thai officials have said they did not agree to a ceasefire, and Cambodia has not commented on Trump's claim. Its defence ministry instead said Thai jets carried out airstrikes Saturday morning, Cambodian media reported Trump's claim without elaborating.

The latest large-scale fighting was set off by a skirmish on Dec. 7 that wounded two Thai soldiers and derailed a ceasefire promoted by Trump that ended five days of earlier combat in July over longstanding territorial disputes. The July ceasefire was brokered by Malaysia and pushed through by pressure from Trump, who threatened to withhold trade privileges unless Thailand and Cambodia agreed. It was formalised in more detail in October at a regional meeting in Malaysia that Trump attended.

About two dozen people have officially been reported killed in this past week's fighting, while hundreds of thousands have been displaced on both sides of the border. The Thai military acknowledges 11 of its troops have been killed, while estimating there have been 165 fatalities among Cambodian soldiers. Cambodia has not



Children raising their hands while receiving donation from charity as they take refuge in Banteay Menchey provincial town on Cambodia

AP

announced military casualties, but has said at least 11 civilians have been killed and 76 wounded.

Trump, on Friday, after speaking to Thai Prime Minister Anutin Charnvirakul and Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Manet, announced an agreement to restart the ceasefire.

"They have agreed to CEASE all shooting effective this evening, and go back to the original Peace Accord made with me, and them, with the help of the Great Prime Minister of Malaysia, Anwar Ibrahim," Trump said in his Truth Social post.

Trump's claim came after midnight in Bangkok. Thai Prime Minister Anutin had, after his call with Trump, said he had explained Thailand's reasons for fighting and said peace would depend on Cambodia ceasing its attacks first.

The Thai foreign ministry later explicitly disputed Trump's claim that a ceasefire had been reached. Anutin's busy day on Friday included dissolving Parliament, so new elections could be held early next year. Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Manet, in comments posted early Saturday

morning, also made no mention of a ceasefire.

He said he held phone conversations on Friday night with Trump, and a night earlier with Malaysia's Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim, and thanked both "for their continuous efforts to achieve a long-lasting peace between Cambodia and Thailand." "Cambodia is ready to cooperate in any way that is needed," Hun Manet wrote. Thailand has been carrying out airstrikes on what it says are strictly military targets, while Cambodia has been firing thousands of medium-range BM-21 rockets

that have caused havoc but relatively few casualties.

BM-21 rocket launchers can fire up to 40 rockets at a time with a range of 30-40 kilometres (19-25 miles). These rockets cannot be precisely targeted and have landed largely in areas from which most people have already been evacuated.

However, the Thai army announced Saturday that BM-21 rockets had hit a civilian area in Sisaket province, seriously injuring two civilians who had heard warning sirens and had been running toward a bunker for safety.

Fire breaks out in 12-storey building in Dhaka

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
■ Dhaka

A massive fire broke out early on Saturday on the ground floor of a 12-storey mixed-use building in a market in Bangladesh's capital city, officials said.

However, no casualties were reported in the blaze at Jabal E Nur Tower, and fire service officials rescued at least 42 people from the building, the State-run BSS news agency reported.

The incident marks the second major fire in a multi-storey building in Dhaka in two months. On October 14, a massive blaze ripped through a chemical ware-



house and an adjacent garments factory in the capital, killing at least 16 people.

According to news portal tbsnews.Net, the Fire Service and Civil Defence received information about the blaze

at 5:37 am local time and fire-fighting units reached the scene at around 5:45 am.

Fire service media officer Anwarul Islam said 18 fire-fighting units were deployed to bring the blaze under

control. Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB) personnel were also deployed at the site to assist in maintaining law and order, controlling crowds and ensuring the smooth movement of emergency responders, BGB public relations officer Shariful Islam said.

Senior Staff Officer (Media Cell) of the Fire Service, Md Shahjahan Shikdar, said the fire-hit structure consists of several separate buildings sharing a single basement.

The ground and first floors house a market with garment product shops and small scrap warehouses, while the upper floors contain residential apart-

ments. The basement has only two entry points, he said. Firefighters were forced to cut open the locks and shutters of most shops to douse the flames, which slowed down the operation.

The cause of the fire could not be determined immediately. Locals and business owners said scrap clothes stored in the basement may have fuelled the blaze, but officials said the origin of the fire was yet to be ascertained. The Daily Star newspaper reported.

Bangladesh has a history of industrial disasters. Past industrial tragedies have often been attributed to safety lapses.

Gaza amputees struggle to rebuild lives

ASSOCIATED PRESS  
■ Nuseirat

Sitting in her wheelchair, Haneen al-Mabhouh dreams of rebuilding her family, of cradling a new baby. She dreams of walking again. But with her leg gone, her life in Gaza is on hold, she says, as she waits to go abroad for further treatment.

An Israeli airstrike in July 2024 smashed her home in central Gaza as she and her family slept. All four of her daughters were killed, including her 5-month-old baby. Her husband was severely burned. Al-Mabhouh's legs were crushed under the rubble, and doctors had to amputate her right leg above the knee.

"For the past year and a half, I have been unable to move around, to live like others. For the past year and a half, I have been without children," she said, speaking at her parents' home.



Palestinian Mohammed al-Jabri, 58, warming himself next to the fire as he sits on the rubble of a building destroyed during the Israeli air and ground operations in the Sheikh Radwan neighborhood, in Gaza City

AP

The 2-month-old ceasefire in Gaza has been slow to bring help for thousands of Palestinians who suffered amputations from Israeli bombardment over the past two years. The

World Health Organisation estimates there are some 5,000 to 6,000 amputees from the war, 25 per cent of them children.

Those who lost limbs are struggling to adapt, faced

with a shortage of prosthetic limbs and long delays in medical evacuations out of Gaza. The WHO said a shipment of essential prosthetic supplies recently made it into Gaza. That appears to be

the first significant shipment for the past two years.

Previously, Israel had let in almost no ready-made prosthetic limbs or material to manufacture limbs since the war began, according to Loay Abu Saif, the head of the disability program at Medical Aid for Palestinians, or MAP, and Nevin Al Ghusseini, acting director of the Artificial Limbs and Polio Center in Gaza City.

The Israeli military body in charge of coordinating aid, known as COGAT, did not respond when asked how many prosthetic supplies had entered during the war or about its policies on such supplies.

Al-Mabhouh was asleep with her baby girl in her arms when the strike hit their home in Nuseirat, she said. For several weeks while recovering in the hospital, al-Mabhouh had no idea her children had been killed.

Ready to deal with external and internal threats, says Asim Munir

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
■ Islamabad

Chief of Defence Forces and Chief of Army Staff Field Marshal Asim Munir on Saturday said his forces were ready to deal with the threats posed by the external and international elements.

Munir visited Gujranwala and Sialkot garrisons, where he was briefed on the formation's operational readiness and key initiatives for strengthening combat preparedness, according to a statement by the army. "Pakistan Army remains fully focused on both internal and external challenges, including hostile hybrid campaigns, extremist ideologies, and divisive elements seeking to undermine national stability," he emphasised on the occasion. India launched Operation Sindoor on May 7,



targeting terror infrastructure in Pakistan and Pakistan-occupied Kashmir in retaliation for the Pahalgaon attack that killed 26 civilians.

The strikes triggered four days of intense clashes that ended with an understanding on stopping the military actions. In an internal challenge, the government last year notified the banned

Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan as "Fitna al-Khawarij", a reference to a group in earlier Islamic history which was involved in violence.

While interacting with officers and soldiers, Munir lauded their high morale to national security while underscoring the importance of rigorous and mission-oriented training.

South Africa eases regulations on Starlink

ASSOCIATED PRESS ■ Cape Town

South Africa's communications minister ordered a policy change on Friday that allows Elon Musk's Starlink and other foreign-owned satellite internet providers to operate in the country without selling 30 per cent of their local equity to Black or other non-white owners. The policy change published in a Government gazette allows foreign companies seeking licences to operate in South Africa's communications sector. That option is also available for foreign-owned companies in other sectors in South Africa. Musk, who was born in South Africa, accused his home country of having "openly racist ownership laws" by requiring at least 30 per cent local ownership by Black or other races that were denied opportunities under South Africa's apartheid system of white minority rule.



UN-sanctioned migrant smuggler killed in Libya

ASSOCIATED PRESS ■ Cairo

A notorious militia leader in Libya, sanctioned by the UN for migrant trafficking across the Mediterranean Sea, was killed on Friday in a raid by security forces in the west of the country, according to Libyan authorities. Ahmed Omar al-Fitouri al-Dabbashi was killed in Sabratha. The raid came in response to an attack on a security outpost by al-Dabbashi's militia, which left six members of the security forces severely wounded, according to a statement issued by the Security Threat Enforcement Agency, a security entity affiliated with Libya's western government. Al-Dabbashi, who was also sanctioned by the US Treasury for trafficking, was the leader of a powerful militia, the "Brigade of the Martyr Anas al-Dabbashi," in Sabratha, the biggest launching point in Libya for Europe-bound African migrants.





# 19 US States challenge Trump’s \$100,000 H-1B fee

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
■ New York/Washington

Nineteen US states have sued the Trump administration over its “unlawful” decision to impose a \$100,000 fee on new H-1B visa petitions, warning that the move will worsen labour shortages in key sectors such as health care, education and technology. New York Attorney General Letitia James, along with 18 other attorneys general, on Friday filed the lawsuit in the US District Court for the District of Massachusetts, challenging what they termed a “massive” increase in H-1B fees without legal authority or due process.

The H-1B visa programme allows highly skilled foreign professionals to work temporarily in the US and is widely used by Indian nationals. The coalition argued that the new fee would make the programme effectively inaccessible for Government and non-profit employers that depend on H-1B workers to provide essential services in health care, education, technology, and other fields.

“H-1B visas allow talented doctors, nurses, teachers, and other workers to serve communities in need across our country.” The administration’s illegal attempt to ruin this programme will make it harder for New Yorkers to get health care, disrupt our children’s education, and hurt our economy. I will keep fighting to stop this chaos



and cruelty targeting immigrant communities,” James said in a statement.

In September, US President Donald Trump announced that his administration would levy a one-time USD 100,000 fee on all new H-1B applications, which the attorneys general described as a “sudden” and “massive” increase over existing charges. The attorneys general contended that the imposition of the new fee is “unlawful” and the move violates the Administrative Procedure Act as well as the Immigration and Nationality Act, as it was imposed

without congressional approval or the required rule-making process.

Joining James in the lawsuit are the attorneys general of Arizona, California, Colorado, Connecticut, Delaware, Hawaii, Illinois, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, North Carolina, New Jersey, Oregon, Rhode Island, Vermont, Washington, and Wisconsin. The coalition said the new fee on H-1B visas will severely restrict states’ ability to hire new workers under the programme to address labour shortages, disrupting access to education,

health care, and other critical services. This shortage of workers would be devastating for rural and underserved communities already facing shrinking workforces, it warned. In New York alone, more than a third of health care workers are immigrants, while public universities and hospitals rely heavily on H-1B professionals, according to the lawsuit. In New York’s 16 rural counties, there are currently four primary care physicians for every 10,000 people. New York’s hospitals already face a pervasive nursing shortage estimated to reach 40,000 nurses by

2030. A reduction in H-1B visa holders would only exacerbate this shortage, it said.

Nationwide, the American Medical Association estimates the US will face a shortage of 86,000 physicians by 2036, a shortage that H-1B workers will be critical in filling, the lawsuit said. Across the US, at least 930 colleges and universities employ staff on H-1B visas. More than half of these institutions are public four-year universities, and more than 10 per cent are medical schools. In New York, the State University of New York (SUNY) employs 693 employ-

ees on H-1B visas, including many who serve students in rural and suburban areas of New York State.

The coalition argues that limiting access to H-1B visas will lead to more crowded classrooms for students and disrupt critical research at leading universities.

Other critical industries in New York, such as technology, finance, and the arts, also rely on H-1B visa holders to fill essential roles. Across the state, more than 13,000 people on H-1B visas work in these sectors.

California Attorney General Rob Bonta said Trump’s \$100,000 H-1B visa fee creates “unnecessary” and “illegal” financial burdens on California public employers and other providers of vital services, exacerbating labour shortages in key sectors.

“The Trump administration thinks it can raise costs on a whim, but the law says otherwise. We are going to court to defend California’s residents and their access to the world-class universities, schools, and hospitals that make Californians proud to call this state home,” Bonta said. Since the 1950s, the US has had a visa programme that allows skilled workers to temporarily live in America and work in specialised fields. The current version of the H-1B programme was created in the 1990s and allows employers to hire workers in a “specialty occupation” for a maximum of six years.

## UK honors Naoroji’s 200th birth anniversary



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
■ London

The House of Lords in London played host to a special reception in honour of the 200th birth anniversary of Dadabhai Naoroji, the nationalist leader who became the first Indian to win a popular election to the British Parliament during the colonial era. Naoroji was born in September 1825 to a Parsi family in Mumbai and first travelled to England in 1855 for business reasons before going on to become an influential figure in its political landscape. Lord Karan Bilimoria, a fellow Parsi parliamentarian, hosted Friday’s reception in honour of the life and legacy of the polymath who straddled multiple roles of a Zoroastrian priest, businessman, academic and politician. “In many ways, I have followed in the footsteps

of Dadabhai Naoroji, who came initially for business to the UK,” said Bilimoria, founder of Cobra Beer. “He was also an academic as a professor at Elphinstone College and, of course, he was a politician – the first Indian, first ethnic minority ever to be elected to this Parliament,” he noted. Bilimoria revealed that the bicentenary commemoration was initially planned for September, to coincide with the month of Dadabhai Naoroji’s birth 200 years ago, but had to be postponed due to strike action. “But we were adamant in making sure that this event would take place during the year of his 200th birth anniversary, and here we are,” he added. The Indian High Commissioner to the UK, Vikram Doraiswami, reflected upon the legacy of Naoroji and the impact of the Parsi community in the political and social life of India.

## Bulgaria’s president will start talks on new cabinet



ASSOCIATED PRESS ■ Sofia

Bulgaria’s president will start consultations with parliamentary groups next week on forming a new cabinet following the collapse of the Government in nationwide anti-corruption protests. Rosen Zhelyazkov’s minority Government had survived six no-confidence votes since it was appointed in January, only to be toppled in the street protests on Thursday by tens of thousands. President Rumen Radev is set to invite the biggest group in parliament for talks on forming a Government. If that fails, the second-largest grouping will get its chance before the president chooses a candidate. If all attempts fail – which is likely – he will appoint a caretaker cabinet

until a new election is held in two months. Analysts expect another election – the eighth since 2021 – would likely produce a deeply fragmented parliament and more political instability as Bulgaria readies to join the common European currency on January 1. Fears of inflation, reportedly fuelled by a disinformation campaign by Moscow, have dampen enthusiasm for the euro. Bulgaria joined the European Union in 2007. In a last-moment effort to block the country’s path to the euro, the pro-Russian Vazrazhdane party submitted in parliament a draft resolution requesting a one-year postponement of Bulgaria’s entry into the eurozone, citing the absence of a new budget and political instability.

# Three US lawmakers introduce resolution to end 50% tariffs imposed by Trump on India

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
■ New York/Washington

Three influential US lawmakers have introduced a resolution in Congress aimed at ending the tariffs imposed by President Donald Trump on India, saying the “irresponsible tariff strategy” toward Delhi is a counterproductive approach that “weakens a critical partnership”.

Representatives Deborah Ross of North Carolina, Marc Veasey of Texas and Raja Krishnamoorthi of Illinois introduced the resolution on Friday in the House of Representatives to terminate Trump’s national emergency authorising tariffs of up to 50 per cent on imports from India, helping to restore Congress’ constitutional authority over trade.

Trump has imposed a 50 per cent tariff on India, the highest in the world, including 25 per cent for Delhi’s purchases of Russian oil. The resolution would terminate



Representative Deborah Ross of North Carolina

FILE PHOTO

the national emergency that Trump invoked to impose sweeping tariffs on Indian goods under the International Emergency Economic Powers Act (IEEPA) and rescind the additional 25 per cent “secondary” duties that took effect on August 27 on top of earlier reciprocal tariffs. Together, these measures raised duties on many

Indian-origin products to 50 per cent, a statement issued by Ross said.

Krishnamoorthi said that Trump’s “irresponsible tariff strategy toward India is a counterproductive approach that weakens a critical partnership.” “Instead of advancing American interests or security, these duties disrupt supply chains, harm

American workers, and drive up costs for consumers. Ending these damaging tariffs will allow the United States to engage with India to advance our shared economic and security needs,” the Indian-American lawmaker said. The resolution follows a bipartisan Senate-passed measure to end Trump’s Brazil tariffs and rein in his abuse of emergency powers to raise duties on imports, the statement said. “North Carolina’s economy is deeply connected to India through trade, investment, and a vibrant Indian American community,” Ross added.

She said that Indian companies have invested over a billion dollars and created thousands of good-paying jobs in our state – especially in the Research Triangle’s life sciences and technology sectors. North Carolina manufacturers export hundreds of millions of dollars in goods to India each year.

## UN chief visits Iraq

ASSOCIATED PRESS  
■ Baghdad

United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres was in Baghdad on Saturday to mark the end of the political mission set up in 2003 following the US-led invasion of Iraq that toppled Saddam Hussein.

The UN Security Council, at Iraq’s request, voted last year to wind down the mandate of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Iraq (UNAMI) by the end of 2025. The mission was set up to coordinate post-conflict humanitarian and reconstruction efforts and help restore a representative Government in the country. Iraqi caretaker Prime Minister Mohammed Shia al-Sudani said his country “highly values” the mission’s work in a region “that has suffered for decades from dictatorship, wars, and terrorism.” He said its conclusion showed Iraq had reached a stage of “full self-reliance.”

“Iraq emerged victorious thanks to the sacrifices and courage of its people,” he said in a joint statement with Guterres.

The ending of UNAMI’s mandate “does not signify the end of the partnership between Iraq and the UN,” Sudani said, adding that it represents the beginning of a new chapter of cooperation focused on development and inclusive economic growth.

The prime minister said a street in Baghdad would be named “United Nations Street” in honour of the UN’s work and in recognition of 22 UN staff who were killed in an Aug. 19, 2003, truck bomb attack on the Canal Hotel in Baghdad, which housed the UN headquarters.

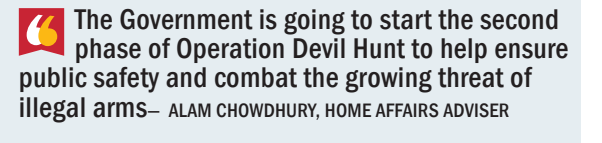
Guterres praised “the courage, fortitude and determination of the Iraqi people” and the country’s efforts to restore security and order after years of sectarian violence and the rise of extremist groups, including the Islamic State group.

## Bangladesh Govt orders security clampdown

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
■ Dhaka

Chief Adviser Muhammad Yunus-led interim Government on Saturday ordered a nationwide security clampdown as fresh unrest gripped Bangladesh following the shooting of a youth leader of a right-wing cultural group, also a candidate in the February 12 general elections.

“The Government is going to start the second phase of Operation Devil Hunt to help ensure public safety and combat the growing threat of illegal arms,” Home Affairs adviser Lt Gen (rtd) Jahangir



Alam Chowdhury told a press conference. The announcement came after three assailants shot Inquilab Mancha leader Sharif Osmann Hadi on Friday, as he initiated his election campaign at central Dhaka’s Bijoynagar area – from where he is contesting as an independent candidate. According to doctors, his condition is very critical. Chowdhury announced a

reward of Taka 50 lakh for information leading to the arrest of one of the suspects who shot Hadi, while police issued his picture, identifying him as Faisal Karim Masud.

The interim Government first launched the Operation Devil hunt in February this year, following protests over an attack on the private house of a former minister in the northern suburb of the capital.

# Belarus releases Nobel prize laureate in exchange for US sanctions relief

ASSOCIATED PRESS ■ Vilnius

Belarusian authorities have released Nobel Peace Prize laureate Ales Bialiatski and key opposition figure Maria Kolesnikova from prison, Pavel Sapelka, human rights advocate with the Viasna rights group.

Their release comes as authoritarian President Alexander Lukashenko seeks to improve relations with Washington. The US earlier on Saturday announced lifting sanctions on the country’s potash sector. In exchange for sanctions relief, Lukashenko pardoned 123 pris-

oners, the Belta State news agency reported.

A close ally of Russia, Minsk has faced Western isolation and sanctions for years.

Lukashenko has ruled the nation of 9.5 million with an iron fist for more than three decades, and the country has been repeatedly sanctioned by Western countries both for its crackdown on human rights and for allowing Moscow to use its territory in the invasion of Ukraine in 2022. Belarus has released hundreds of prisoners since July 2024.

Earlier Saturday, the United States said it was lifting sanctions on Belarusian potash in

the latest sign of a thaw between Washington and the isolated autocracy.

John Coale, the US special envoy for Belarus, made the announcement after meeting Lukashenko in Minsk on Friday and Saturday.

Speaking with journalists, Coale described the two-day talks as “very productive,” Belarus’ state news agency Belta reported Saturday.

The US envoy said that normalising relations between Washington and Minsk was “our goal.”

“We’re lifting sanctions, releasing prisoners. We’re constantly talking to each other,”

he said, according to Belta. He also said that the relationship between the countries was moving from “baby steps to more confident steps” as they increased dialogue.

The last time US officials met with Lukashenko in September 2025, Washington announced easing some of the sanctions against Belarus while Minsk released more than 50 political prisoners into Lithuania.

Overall, Belarus released more than 430 political prisoners since July 2024, in what was widely seen as an effort at a rapprochement with the West. Belarusian opposition leader Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya —

Bialiatski’s wife — told The Associated Press on Saturday that sanctions relief was part of a deal between Minsk and Washington, in which another large group of political prisoners in Belarus were expected to be released.

“The freeing of political prisoners means that Lukashenko understands the pain of Western sanctions and is seeking to ease them,” Tsikhanouskaya said. She added: “But let’s not be naive: Lukashenko hasn’t changed his policies, his crackdown continues, and he keeps on supporting Russia’s war against Ukraine.”



## Iran raises gasoline prices after deadly 2019 protests

ASSOCIATED PRESS ■ Tehran

Iran introduced a new pricing tier on Saturday for its nationally subsidised gasoline, attempting to rein in spiralling costs for the first time since a price hike in 2019 that sparked nationwide protests and a crackdown that reportedly killed over 300 people. Cheap gasoline has been viewed for generations as a birthright in Iran, sparking mass demonstrations as far back as 1964 when a price increase forced the shah to put military vehicles on the streets to replace those of striking taxi drivers. But Iran’s theocracy faces a growing squeeze from the country’s rapidly depreciating rial currency and economic sanctions imposed due to Tehran’s nuclear program. That has made the cost of having some of the world’s cheapest gasoline at a few pennies per gallon that much more expensive.



## US removes Brazilian SC justice from sanctions list

ASSOCIATED PRESS ■ Washington

The US removed Brazilian Supreme Court Justice Alexandre de Moraes from its sanctions list after initially adding him over his role in leading the trial against former Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro De Moraes’ wife and the Lex Institute, which she leads, were also taken off the list, according to documents from the Treasury Office of Foreign Assets Control. The Treasury Department did not immediately return a message seeking comment on why de Moraes had been taken off the list. The Trump administration had sanctioned the judge in July, accusing him of using his position to authorize arbitrary pretrial detentions and suppress freedom of expression in Brazil. Bolsonaro was accused of masterminding a plot to stay in power despite his 2022 election defeat to current President Luiz Inácio Lula.



# Gill to face three-game Test to secure T20I future

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
■ Dharamsala

The countdown to save his place in the playing XI begins for a beleaguered Shubman Gill, who is likely to get three matches against South Africa to prove his worth before the Indian team management switches to a 'Plan B' ahead of the T20 World Cup, starting in six weeks.

As India gear up to play the third T20I against the Proteas on Sunday in sub-10-degree temperatures in the lap of the ice-clad Dhauladhar range, things are suddenly heating up in the Indian dressing room, with the prolonged poor form of skipper Suryakumar Yadav coming under the scanner.

Worse, his deputy Shubman Gill, who was pushed into the XI at the expense of a settled Sanju Samson, is not inspiring much confidence.

The South African pace attack featuring Anrich Nortje, Marco Jansen, Lungi Ngidi, Ottniel Baartman and Lutho Sipamla — has shown how to bowl on Indian tracks, and the HPCA Stadium strip, offering extra bounce and some movement off the surface, will certainly keep them interested.

Among all T20 sides, South Africa, in terms of personnel, appears to have the requisite balance to win the trophy in the Indian subcontinent this time. Quinton de Kock's return, along with the likes of



India's Shubman Gill, Jitesh Sharma and Abhishek Sharma during a training session ahead of the third T20I cricket match between India and South Africa at HPCA Stadium in Dharamshala, Himachal Pradesh

Aiden Markram, Dewald Brevis, Donovan Ferreira, David Miller and all-rounder Jansen, gives their batting an intimidating look.

With only eight games, starting from the third T20I, left before the start of the T20 World Cup title defence, India's under-fire head coach Gautam Gambhir won't be able to afford, two out-of-form top-order batters in the starting line-up.

Being the skipper of the side, Surya will certainly have immunity going into the T20 World Cup despite being

completely out of form for the past one year but same can't be said about Gill, who wasn't the original choice as an opener.

Gill's entry into the T20 set-up was a classic case of trying to fix something that ain't broken and things haven't looked good so far. In this backdrop, Gill would need to bat out of his skin to prove that Ajit Agarkar-led committee wasn't wrong in throwing Samson under the bus for one bad series against England.

The stylish Indian Test and

ODI skipper will have to find his T20 game and at least score in two of the three matches if he doesn't want Samson to get his rightful place back or for that matter, find Yashasvi Jaiswal, with a fabulous T20I strike-rate of 165, enter the fray during New Zealand series.

While head coach Gambhir is too proud a person to admit but sending Axar Patel as a one drop batter during the second T20I was a "tactical brain fade" from the team's think-tank.

The kind misstep that was taken with Axar's promotion is unlikely to be repeated in the third game where skipper is expected to go back to number 3 where he has got a lot of success in his first few years at the international level.

Similarly, Shivam Dube being sent at number eight due to the shuffling of batting order was another poor call which would need course correction in the next game.

Kuldeep Yadav is one bowler who has consistently troubled the Proteas batter

but in an Indian team where batting till number 8 is non-negotiable, the left-arm wrist spinner often finds himself getting the rough end of the stick.

At Dharamsala too, he might have to sit out as Kuldeep and Varun Chakravathy, two non-batters can't be clubbed in the same T20 playing eleven as that would lead to compromise in batting depth.

While Arshdeep hasn't had a good series so far, it will be interesting to find if team management can find a place for Kuldeep in the playing eleven with Hardik Pandya sharing the new ball with Jasprit Bumrah.

The five-match series is currently tied 1-1.

**Teams:**

**India:** Suryakumar Yadav (captain), Shubman Gill, Abhishek Sharma, NT Tilak Verma, Axar Patel, Hardik Pandya, Shivam Dube, Jitesh Sharma (wk), Varun Chakravathy, Arshdeep Singh, Jasprit Bumrah, Sanju Samson (wk), Harshit Rana, Kuldeep Yadav, Washington Sundar.

**South Africa:** Aiden Markram (captain), Quinton de Kock, Reeza Hendricks, Dewald Brevis, David Miller, Tristan Stubbs, Donovan Ferreira, Marco Jansen, Lutho Sipamla, Ottniel Baartman, Anrich Nortje, Lungi Ngidi, Corbin Bosch, Keshav Maharaj, George Linde. Match Starts at 7 pm.

# Uthappa calls out clarity issues in Indian batting



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
■ New Delhi

Former India batter Robin Uthappa has flagged a lack of role clarity in India's batting approach during a big chase, saying excessive flexibility early in the innings made run-scoring more complicated.

India suffered a 51-run loss in the second T20I against South Africa after folding for 162 in 19.1 overs while chasing a target of 214 at Mullanpur on Thursday.

Uthappa said the issue was not the loss of early wickets but the strategy adopted after Shubman Gill's dismissal, particularly with a deep batting line-up at India's disposal.

"When Shubman Gill got out, Axar Patel walked in with plenty of batting still to come. At that stage, he had to play the role of a pinch-hitter — someone you are willing to risk early to get quick runs and take pressure off

Abhishek Sharma," Uthappa said on Jio Hotstar.

Instead, Uthappa felt Axar's cautious run-a-ball 21 failed to ease the pressure, forcing a shift in approach as wickets fell around him and slowing the chase further.

"At the international level, batters need clear roles and a clear idea of how they're going to construct an innings," he said.

"Flexibility with match-ups after the first six to eight overs is fine, but you still need a solid foundation before you can chase a big score — you can't build a skyscraper without a base.

"Asking players to prepare for multiple roles in the same game makes run-scoring more complicated, and that's where India are missing a trick. I don't agree with being overly flexible so early in the innings beyond the openers," said the key member of the 2007 T20 World Cup winning side.

# Desert Vipers cruise to easy eighth wicket victory over Gulf Giants

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
■ Dubai

Khuzaima Tanveer grabbed four wickets before Sam Curran and Max Holden stitched an unbeaten 123-run partnership as Desert Vipers registered an easy eight-wicket win over Gulf Giants for their fifth straight win in the DP World ILT20 Season 4.

Tanveer finished with 4/10 in the first innings, the best by a UAE bowler in DP World ILT20 history, and also became the first to claim four wickets in the power-play. His early attack kept the Giants on the backfoot throughout, restricting them to 157/7 in 20 overs at the Dubai International Cricket Stadium on Friday.

Then, Curran's unbeaten 67 off 43 balls with five fours and three sixes complemented Max Holden's 64 runs off 41 balls, as they chased down the target with ease.

Fakhar Zaman (14 off 8) was the first Vipers batter to fall in the second over, courtesy a beautiful ball by Chris Wood.



Holden kept the runs flowing, and other than a run out of Hasan Nawaz (7 off 9) in the fourth over, the Vipers looked in control of the run-chase. They finished the powerplay at 53/2.

Curran joined the attack in the 11th over, smashing 19 runs off left-arm spinner Liam Dawson's bowling, including three sixes, considerably reducing the required run-rate.

His power-hitting continued off Kyle Mayers' bowling, completing his half century in just 32 balls with a lovely

four, scoring 18 runs in the 14th over.

This gave the Vipers momentum as Holden joined Curran on the half century list, in just 31 balls, also with a four. The two batters kept the scoreboard ticking as they found the regular boundaries while also rotating the strike.

The likes of Chris Wood and Mark Adair were unable to keep them in check and they smashed an unbeaten 123-run partnership in just 77 balls to chase down the target in 16.5 overs.

# Most players are ready to bat anywhere: Tilak Varma

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
■ Dharamsala

India batter Tilak Varma on Saturday underlined the team management's push for a flexible batting order, saying most players are ready to bat anywhere depending on match situations.

The hosts eye an edge in the five-match T20I series against South Africa, locked 1-1 ahead of the third game to be played on Sunday.

With India continuing to experiment in the middle-order in the build-up to next year's T20 World Cup, Tilak said adaptability has become a key requirement in the shortest format.

"Everyone is flexible except the openers. I am up for batting at 3, 4, 5 or 6 — wherever the team prefers for me," Tilak said during the pre-match press conference. "If the team feels a particular move is tactically best, everyone goes with the team."

Drawing parallels with recent examples, Tilak said such decisions are situation-based rather than role-driven. "One-off games keep happening. Axar Patel has

already done the same thing and he did well there. It depends on the situation," he said, citing examples of similar roles being successfully executed in recent international tournaments.

Providing context to the conditions in Dharamsala, the 23-year-old said the surface could still favour batters despite the cold weather.

"I have played an Under-19 India series here before. We are watching the wicket and I feel it will be a high-scoring one," he said.

However, he cautioned that low temperatures could offer some help to bowlers early on.

With dew expected to play a role as the match begins at 7 pm, Tilak said India are mentally prepared for the challenge.

"We don't have the toss in our hands. We are preparing for the dew and have practised with a slightly wet ball," he said.

Addressing concerns about playing in unfamiliar cold conditions, Tilak said mental strength is key.

"It's very cold here, but we are prepared mentally and physically. Those who



Tilak Varma during a training session ahead of the third T20I cricket match between India and South Africa in Dharamshala

are mentally strong succeed everywhere," he said.

Tilak added that moving across the batting order does not affect his preparation.

"We follow the basics in practice. I always think about what I can do for the team," he said.

On the toss factor, Tilak felt batting first or second may not make a major difference.

"In the first two matches,

the team batting first won because there was some seam and swing in the cold. Overall, there isn't much difference as dew comes in early," he said.

Confident of India's approach, the left-hander said the side would stick to its attacking template.

"We will play with the same intent we have shown in the last 15-20 matches. We are confident of winning the series," he said.

# PCB MIFFED OVER AGHA'S OMISSION FROM ICC T20 WC POSTER

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
■ Karachi

The Pakistan Cricket Board is unhappy with the International Cricket Council after the global governing body released a promotional poster of next year's T20 World Cup ticket sales without the country's captain Salman Ali Agha on it.

A reliable source in the PCB said the matter had been taken up with the ICC as the promotional poster featured only five captains — Suryakumar Yadav (India), Aiden Markram (South Africa), Mitchell Marsh (Australia), Dasun Shanaka (Sri Lanka) and Harry Brook (England).

"We faced the same issues when the Asia Cup was held a few months back and that time the broadcasters had started a promotional campaign without our captain featuring in it," the source said.

He said it was only after the PCB spoke to the Asian Cricket Council (ACC), the situation changed.

"We are facing a similar situation this time as the ICC has not projected our captain on the promotional poster for ticket sales," he added.

He said while Pakistan was not in the top five teams in the ICC T20 rankings but it had a rich legacy and remains one of the top draws in the World Cup.



# Hooda, Isharani reach Odisha Masters final



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
■ Cuttack

Top seed Unnati Hooda and compatriot Isharani Baruah set up a women's singles final clash at the Odisha Masters Super 100 after registering counter-attacking semifinal victories on Saturday.

The 18-year-old Hooda, a winner of the 2022 edition and 2023 Abu Dhabi Masters, was stretched by former junior world number 1 Tasnim Mir before prevailing 18-21, 21-16, 21-16 in a hard-fought encounter that lasted an hour. After conceding the opening game, Hooda raised her intensity, controlled the rallies better and showed superior tem-

perament in the closing stages of the next two games to book her place in the final.

In the other semifinal, Assam's Isharani produced a strong comeback to defeat Tanvi Hemanth 18-21, 21-7, 21-7. In the men's singles, second seed Kiran George and Rounak Chouhan, who were part of India's historic World Junior Championships medal-winning squad, will clash in the semifinal to decide the finalist. In the mixed doubles semifinals, India's S Kanapuram and R Uthayasooryan bowed out after going down 16-21, 19-21 to fifth seeds Dejan Ferdinansyah and B Wardana of Indonesia.

# Shooting nationals: Raiza Dhillon wins double gold

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
■ New Delhi

Paris Olympian Raiza Dhillon gave a commanding performance on way to clinching the skeet gold in both women's senior and junior categories in the National Shooting Championship on Saturday.

The 21-year-old shot 56 in the women's final to secure the top-podium place ahead of Yashasvi Rathore, who settled for silver with 55. Fellow Olympian Ganemat Shekhon finished third after shooting down 45 targets.



Darshna Rathore (36), Risham Kaur Guron (27) and Vanshika Tiwari (18) finished fourth, fifth and sixth respectively.

Earlier in the qualification round, Yashavi topped the standings with 118 hits while Raiza and Ganemat shot 116 each, with the former finishing second on a shoot-off score of plus-5, while Ganemat was placed third at plus-4.

Darshna Rathore finished fourth with 115, while Risham Kaur Guron and Vanshika Tiwari followed closely with 114 apiece, their positions decided on shoot-off scores. In the women's team event,

Rajasthan clinched gold, with Yashasvi Darshna and Olympian Maheshwari Chauhan aggregating 343 to top the standings.

Madhya Pradesh (Vanshika Tiwari, Mansi Raghuvanshi, and Oshmi Shrivats) finished second with a total score of 328, while Punjab (Ganemat Shekhon, Parinaaz Dhaliwal and Asees Chhina) claimed the bronze medal with 325.

Raiza continued her dominant run in the junior skeet final as well, shooting 55 to finish one ahead of Vanshika Tiwari, who took silver with 54. Mansi Raghuvanshi won the bronze medal with 45.

# Lindsey Vonn runner-up day after becoming oldest World Cup winner

ASSOCIATED PRESS  
■ St Moritz (Switzerland)

Lindsey Vonn nearly did it again. The 41-year-old American finished second in a World Cup downhill on Saturday, a day after becoming the oldest winner in the circuit's history.

After winning the season's opening downhill by nearly a full second on Friday, Vonn was beaten by only one racer this time: Emma Aicher of Germany was 0.24 seconds faster.

Vonn attributed a mistake

landing a jump midway down her run for the gap, when she nearly lost her balance for an instant and leaned heavily on her left leg to raise herself back up.

"I'm a little bit tired from yesterday, there was a lot of emotion," Vonn told Swiss broadcaster RTS. "I thought I skied pretty well on top then I was just out of balance, I fell on my hip. Yeah, didn't ski the bottom the way I wanted to."

Sofia Goggia, the 2018 Olympic champion from Italy, finished third, 0.29 behind, and Breezy Johnson, the

American world champion, was fourth, 0.40 back.

Vonn, who is preparing for the Milan Cortina Olympics, went into first position with her run down the sun-drenched Corviglia course. But the 22-year-old Aicher came down next and quickly pushed Vonn out of the leader's seat.

Vonn returned to skiing last season after nearly six years of retirement — following a partial replacement surgery on her right knee, which included inserting two pieces of titanium.



Vonn's results are shaping up to make her a top medal contender at the Olympics — and able to compete with skiers half her age. Women's Alpine skiing at the Feb. 6-22 Winter Games will be contested at Cortina d'Ampezzo, where Vonn holds the record of 12 World Cup wins.

Vonn registered the top speed of 102.45 kph (64 mph) on the top section; increased her speed to 110.02 kph (68 mph) on the bottom and flew a massive 41 meters (yards) off a jump toward the end of her run





# The Carnival of Cinema

## TEAM VIVA

Cinema, at its core, is a collective experience. It draws strangers into a shared space, invites them to observe, reflect and respond together, and in doing so, shapes public imagination. For more than seven decades, the International Film Festival of India has functioned as a vital platform for this exchange, bringing global cinema into conversation with India's evolving cultural identity. Founded in 1952 as a modest showcase of international films, IFFI has grown into South Asia's most significant film festival, mirroring the country's changing relationship with storytelling, technology and creative ambition.

The 56th edition of IFFI, held in Goa from November 20 to 28, 2025, marked a deliberate shift in scale and intent. Anchored in the theme "Convergence of Creativity and Technology," the festival positioned cinema not only as an artistic practice but as a strategic driver of cultural influence and economic growth. Its timing alongside the Golden Jubilee year of the National Film Development Corporation further underscored this moment of transition, reinforcing NFDC's renewed role in preserving legacy while actively shaping the future of Indian cinema.

## The history that underpins IFFI

To appreciate the festival's importance, one must first look at the foundations of Indian cinema. The nation's screen story began in 1913 with Dadasaheb Phalke's silent landmark, Raja Harishchandra, which used mythological narratives to establish a powerful, indigenous storytelling form. The coming of sound in 1931 with Alam Ara permanently embedded music and dialogue, forging the complex, multi-genre identity of Indian film. The artistic maturity of the 1950s and 60s saw the rise of visionaries like Satyajit Ray, whose profound humanism earned India enduring and respected status in the global artistic domain.

This dedication to cultural exchange led to the establishment of the IFFI in 1952. Inspired by the ancient philosophy of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam ("the world is one family"), its purpose was to build bridges across nations through film. IFFI achieved competitive status in 1965 and holds the distinction of being the sole South Asian film festival accredited by the International Federation of Film Producers' Associations (FIAPF). Since permanently moving to its tropical home in Goa in 2004, IFFI has become Asia's most crucial annual forum for artistic, commercial, and policy dialogue.

## The Festival Chronicle

The 56th edition made a bold opening statement by commencing with the Historic Grand Parade in Panaji, rather than an exclusive indoor event. This unprecedented move instantly rendered the opening ceremony accessible and inclusive, dissolving the traditional boundary between an elite festival and the general public.

The procession was a powerful display of cultural federalism, featuring magnificent floats and vibrant state tableaux from Andhra Pradesh, Haryana, and Goa. The emotional peak was the "Bharat Ek Soor" collective-over a hundred folk artists from sixteen states whose combined rhythms and synchronized movement culminated in a breathtaking, living tribute to the national flag.

In his official address, Chief Minister Dr Pramod Sawant cemented the state's long-term vision, formally declaring Goa's ambition to become the "Creative Capital of India." The ceremony also paid profound respect to the industry's icons, honouring legendary actor Nandamuri Balakrishna for his fifty-year screen career.

The choice of films set an immediate standard



of artistic and intellectual engagement: **INTERNATIONAL OPENING FILM: THE BLUE TRAIL (O ÚLTIMO AZUL)**

- The competitive section was led by this Brazilian dystopian drama, directed by Gabriel Mascaro. Having previously won the Silver Bear Grand Jury Prize at Berlinale 2025, the film, which follows an odyssey through the collapsing Amazon, compelled audiences to confront climate anxieties through a singular, human lens.

## INDIAN PANORAMA:

- Feature Film: Rajkumar Periasamy's Tamil film, *Amaran*, was selected to showcase the sophisticated craft and storytelling depth emerging from India's regional powerhouses.
- Non-Feature Film: Kamlesh K Mishra's Hindi film, *Kakori*, reaffirmed the festival's dedication to powerful, non-fiction narratives dealing with crucial historical and social moments.

## Incubation and economic strategy

The immediate transition from public ceremony to focused industry activity, solidifying IFFI's function as a talent incubator and nexus for global partnership.

- Masterclass Series Inauguration: The Union Minister of State for Information & Broadcasting, Dr L Murugan, inaugurated the Masterclass Series at Kala Academy. This session was strategically opened to the general public for the first time, democratizing access to expert knowledge and drawing international professionals from Australia, Japan, Germany, and Canada.
- The Launch of CMOT 2025: The fifth edition of the Creative Minds of Tomorrow (CMOT) commenced, challenging 125 emerging creators with an intensive 48-hour filmmaking competition. Dr Murugan highlighted that this high-pressure environment was intended to refine their craft, linking the programme directly to larger governmental support for creative industries, such as

the new Indian Institute of Creative Technologies.

- Ambassadors' Roundtable on Co-Production: The festival served as a crucial diplomatic and commercial hub. The Roundtable was held to facilitate international co-production agreements and technology partnerships. Secretary Shri Sanjay Jaju emphasised India's growing role as a global production centre. Dr Murugan underscored co-production as a vital pillar of growth, citing the projected expansion of India's Media and Entertainment sector to USD 31.6 billion in 2025, a growth driven by technological advancements in VFX and robust anti-piracy efforts.
- Red Carpet & Dialogue: The Red-Carpet segment continued to draw high-profile talent (Anupam Kher, Jackie Shroff, Manoj Bajpayee), providing vital exposure for various film premieres. A deeply insightful "In-Conversation" session, "Cinema and Culture: Reflections from Two Eras," featured filmmakers Muzaffar Ali and Shaad Ali, providing a critical lens on the evolution of artistic practice across generations.
- The Engine Room The WAVES Film Bazaar was operating at peak efficiency as South Asia's largest film market, creating a robust ecosystem for deal-making, co-productions, and project funding.
- The groundbreaking CinemAI Hackathon continued its focused work on applying Artificial Intelligence to cinematic innovation and critical areas like anti-

piracy solutions.

- The IFFI Cultural Showcase provided the evening's rich public engagement, seamlessly integrating the experience of global cinema with the celebratory, living traditions of Indian folk arts.

## Resilience and Reflection

The Day became a day of intellectual and emotional climax, dedicated to the sheer tenacity required to sustain an artistic career.

- The Masterclass of Willpower: The most significant event was the Masterclass delivered by the veteran actor and speaker Anupam Kher, powerfully titled: "Giving Up is NOT a Choice!" Held at Kala Academy, the session transcended mere acting technique, offering a profound, motivational blueprint for sustaining a life in the arts through conviction and perseverance.
- Creative Minds Present: The intensive 48-hour Challenge of CMOT officially concluded, with the young filmmakers presenting their final works—a raw demonstration of their ability to execute a creative vision under rigorous pressure.

Global Press Narratives: The PIB Media Centre hosted a marathon of cross-cultural dialogue:

- International Voices were heard from the teams behind films like *De Tal Palo*, *Pike River*, *Karla* (Christina Theresa Tournatzes), and *Renoir* (Hayakawa Chie).
- Asian Cinema found a strong platform with the makers of *Seaside Serendipity* and *Tiger* (Anshul Chauhan), emphasizing regional artistic momentum.
- Indian filmmakers

representing diverse regional and documentary work, including Sandesh Kadur (Nilgiris — A Shared Wilderness), Paresch Mokashi (Mukkam Post Bombilwadi), and Debangkar Borgohain (Sikaar), engaged the media.

- A Sound Legacy: The day concluded with an intellectual tribute during the Lata Mangeskar Memorial Talk, "The Rhythms of India: From the Himalayas to the Deccan," where composers Vishal Bhardwaj and B. Ajaneesh Loknath discussed the complex, emotional, and structural role of music in shaping the identity of Indian cinema.

## Why does a festival like IFFI matter in today's world of cinema?

The 56th IFFI, through its radical public opening, focused diplomatic efforts, and masterclasses, showcased films while shaping the future ecosystem of film creation and distribution. In a fragmented, digital world saturated with content, IFFI emerged as an essential physical nexus — a place where deals are struck, co-production treaties are signed, and the human spark of a young creator is ignited through mentorship. It stood as a powerful international corrective, reaffirming that cinematic value lies in cultural depth, technological innovation, and artistic excellence, not commercial returns alone.

As technology grows capable of replicating spectacle with ease, the festival leaves behind a quieter, more urgent reflection: how will global cinema protect the human heart of storytelling in a future increasingly shaped by machines?







(L-R) Actor Kamal Haasan, filmmaker Shekhar Kapur, actor Ranveer Singh, actor Vineet Singh, actor Kishore Kadam from the film 'Gondhal,' German actress Katherina Schüttler, actress Tran Quân, and director Ash Mayfair of the film 'Skin of Youth on the red carpet at IFFI 2025

# Moments from IFFI 2025

For nine days, Goa lived cinema as filmmakers, audiences and stories from across the world came together, sharing screens, streets, conversations and memories



### TEAM VIVA

Flashbulbs popped as Goa's evenings slipped into festival mode at the 56th International Film Festival of India, with the red carpet setting the pace each day. Cinema legends and emerging faces moved through the same space, turning it into the festival's most visible meeting point.

Across nine days, daily premieres reflected the breadth of Indian and global cinema. Rajinikanth, Ranveer Singh, Rishab Shetty and Aamir Khan appeared alongside teams from *Gustaakh Ishq* and *Tere Ishq Mein*. Highlights included the world premiere of *The Family Man* (Season 3) with Manoj Bajpayee, Nimrat Kaur, Sharib Hashmi, Priyamani and Jaideep Ahlawat; a special showcase of *120 Bahadur* featuring Farhan Akhtar, Raashi Khanna and Sparsh Walia; and the Marathi film *Asambhav* with Sachit Patil, Mukta Barve, Priya Bapat and Sandeep Kulkarni. Filmmaker Vidhu Vinod Chopra

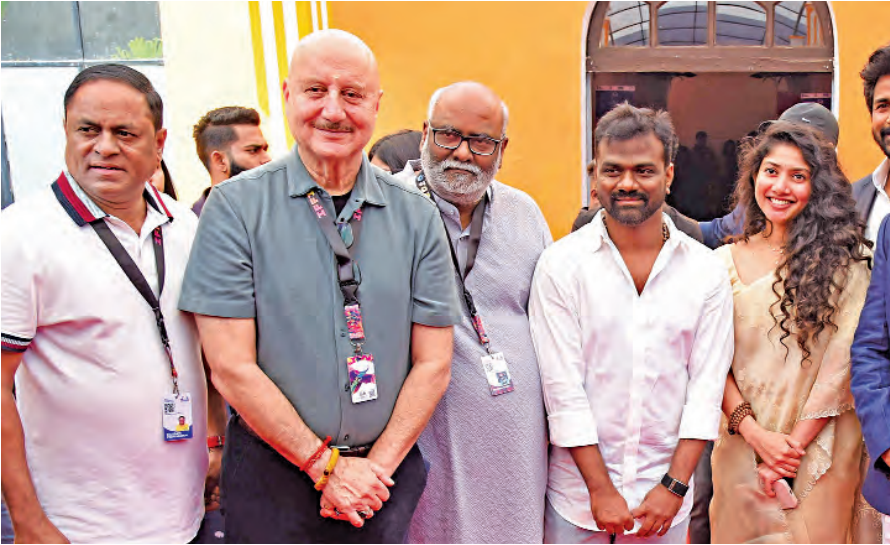


also attended the special screening of his restored classic 1942: *A Love Story*.

A defining feature of IFFI 2025 was its effort to place new cinema alongside traditions of craft, performance and exhibition. The Vintage Camera Exhibition offered a tactile glimpse into the tools that shaped early filmmaking, while the Handloom Sarees in Motion showcase linked cinematic presentation with India's textile heritage. Adding to this was a Photo Exhibition inaugurated by Indian actress Amiee Baruah and Goa Chief Minister Dr Pramod Sawant at the Kala Academy, showcasing photographs from IFFI's 22-year journey in Goa. The exhibition also featured a collection of antique cameras, tracing the visual and technological evolution of the festival and cinema itself.

The intellectual core of IFFI remained strong through masterclasses and in-conversation sessions at the Kala Academy. Filmmakers such as Vidhu Vinod Chopra, Anupam Kher and Shekhar Kapur spoke about filmmaking as an emotional, ethical and technical practice. The festival also paid tribute to legendary actor Dharmendra, acknowledging his remarkable range and contribution to Indian cinema. A special celebration marked 50 years of *Sholay*, with director Ramesh Sippy's landmark film revisited as a defining moment in popular cinema and collective memory.

The penultimate evening belonged to Aamir Khan, who closed the festival's final Fireside Chat with candour and wit. Speaking to a packed hall, Khan described his instinct-driven approach to cinema, saying he liked to surprise both his audience and himself. Calling himself "a complete film personality, not an activist," he stressed that entertainment remained his primary objective, adding that the day he consciously chose to direct, he would likely stop acting. IFFI 2025 also advanced international collaboration through industry engagement. A Memorandum of



Understanding signed between IFFI, NFDC and the Indian Film Festival of Melbourne marked a step towards strengthening Indo-Australian screen relations. Tributes and restored classics provided continuity across generations, with films by Guru Dutt, Ritwik Ghatak and V Shantaram screened alongside contemporary works.

As the festival drew towards its conclusion, participation took on a personal dimension through India Post's 'My Stamp' initiative. Visitors converted their photographs into official, postage-valid stamps using an IFFI-themed template, taking home a tangible memory of the event.

Together, screenings, performances, learning sessions, industry initiatives and personal mementoes shaped an experience that extended beyond the screen. IFFI 2025 presented cinema as an art form shaped by history, refined by craft and sustained through collective experience, while remaining open to new voices and future possibilities.



### IFFI 2025 Official Awards (Key Winners)

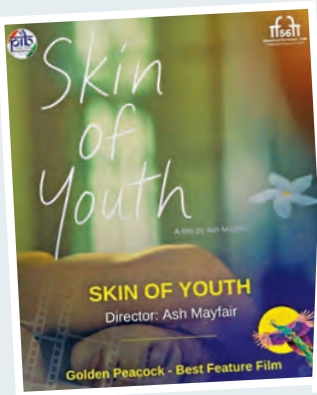
- International Competition**
- Golden Peacock - Best Feature Film: *Skin of Youth* (Vietnamese film by Ash Mayfair) – a bold romance featuring a transgender protagonist.
  - Silver Peacock - Best Director: Santosh Davakahar for *Gondhal* (Indian Marathi thriller).
  - Silver Peacock - Best Actor (Male): Ubeimar Rios for *A Poet*.
  - Silver Peacock - Best Actor (Female): Jara Sofija Ostan for *Little Trouble Girls*.
  - Special Jury Award: Akinola Davies Jr for *My Father's Shadow*.
  - Best Web Series (OTT): *Bandish Bandits 2* – commended for making arts and music accessible through OTT.
  - ICFT-UNESCO Gandhi Medal: *Safe House* - recognised for promoting peace, nonviolence and intercultural dialogue.
  - Best Debut Director (International/Indian): *Kesari Chapter 2* (Hindi) - Karan Singh Tyagi.
- Special Felicitations**
- Lifetime Achievement / Special Recognition: Superstar Rajinikanth honored for 50 years in Indian cinema.

### Select Top Films & Screenings at IFFI 2025

International Films (Competition & Gala)

- Skin of Youth (Vietnam/Singapore/Japan) - Golden

- Peacock winner.
- My Father's Shadow - Special Jury recognition.
  - Safe House - Gandhi Medal winner (Norwegian/International).
  - A Poet - Performance-winning film.
  - Little Trouble Girls - Best Actress performance film.
- Indian Competition & Panorama Highlights**
- IFFI's Indian Panorama section featured a rich selection of contemporary Indian cinema across languages (films chosen from hundreds of submissions).
- Notable Indian films included:
- Gondhal (Marathi) - Best



- Director award.
- Amaran (Tamil) - major Tamil film featured, also nominated for Golden Peacock.
  - Sarkeet (Malayalam) - Malayalam title in the selection.
  - Committee Kurrollu (Telugu) - in Best Debut Director nomination category.
  - Shape of Momo (Nepali) - noted Indian Panorama nominee.
  - ARM (Malayalam) - Best Debut Director nominee.
  - Binodini Ekti Natir Upakhyann (Bengali) - featured nominee.

- Special & World Premieres**
- Oslo: A Tail of Promise - documentary world premiere presented by John Abraham, screened in Indian Panorama.
  - The Blue Trail - opened the festival (international selection).

- Emerging Voices**
- IFFI 2025 screened 240+ films from around 81 countries with world, Asian and international premieres across multiple sections.
  - The Indian Panorama featured around 25 feature films and 20 non-feature films selected from a large national pool.
  - Creative Minds of Tomorrow (CMOT), a youth-focused program, concluded during the festival with emerging talent at center stage.

### Key Themes and Initiatives

- Focus on AI and Technology: CinemAI Hackathon spotlighted AI-driven filmmaking and storytelling
- Global Reach and Collaborations: The festival screened over 240 films from 81 countries, with Japan as Country of Focus and Spain and Australia featured as partner and spotlight countries.
- Inclusivity and Emerging Talent: Aligned with the theme 'Nari Shakti', over 50 films by women directors were showcased, alongside a strong focus on debut filmmakers and a dedicated Best Debut Indian Director award.
- WAVES Film Bazaar: The revamped film market boosted co-productions with a tech pavilion and cash grants.
- Accessibility: The festival incorporated various accessibility measures, including sign language interpreters and audio descriptions at venues, ensuring a more inclusive experience for all delegates.
- Cultural Engagement: The festival opened with a street carnival in Panaji, alongside the four-day cultural showcase IFFIesta.



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# The Pioneer AGENDA

War is an act of violence pushed to its utmost limits  
- Carl von Clausewitz



Fought in the unforgiving sands of the Thar Desert, the Battle of Longewala remains one of the most extraordinary defensive stands in military history. From December 4-7, 1971, a small Indian Army company—vastly outnumbered and facing overwhelming armour—held its ground against a major Pakistani offensive. Longewala is now regarded globally as a case study in battlefield strategy, leadership and grit. It is celebrated as Vijay Diwas in December every year.

## The Lions of Longewala

### A Pivotal Engagement in the 1971 Indo-Pak War

The Battle of Longewala, immortalised in the film *Border*, was one of the most decisive engagements of the 1971 Indo-Pakistani War. Fought between December 4 and 7 in the Thar Desert of Rajasthan, it showcased the extraordinary courage, tactical brilliance, and resilience of the Indian Army. This defensive victory not only halted a major Pakistani armoured thrust but also reshaped the outcome of the war. Owing to its unique character, Longewala is now taught as a case study in leading military academies across the world. The 1971 war was triggered by the Bangladesh Liberation movement, as East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) fought for independence from West Pakistan. As Indian forces advanced rapidly in the East, Pakistan-anticipating imminent defeat—planned a major offensive in the Western theatre. The strategy was to capture Indian territory and use it as leverage during post-war negotiations.

In Rajasthan, the Pakistani Army launched attacks along the border, with its main and most formidable thrust directed at the Longewala post. This post was defended by Alfa Company of the 23rd Battalion of the Punjab Regiment, commanded by Major Kuldip Singh Chandpuri. On December 4, 1971, Captain Dharam Vir of Alfa Company was on patrol along the International Border. Around 8:00 pm, he detected the unmistakable sound of tank movement across the border—indicating a large mechanized column approaching Longewala. He immediately relayed the information to Major Chandpuri, who at first found the scale hard to believe. But repeated confirmations from Capt Dharam Vir soon made it clear: an enemy infantry brigade supported by a tank regiment and an armoured squadron was advancing towards them.

This timely intelligence allowed the Indian defenders to quickly assume battle positions. Capt Dharam Vir was ordered to shadow the enemy column, provide continuous updates, and then withdraw to join the main defensive stand. Battalion Headquarters at Sadhewala rushed two recoilless guns to reinforce the post.

**Defence Against Impossible Odds**  
As darkness descended, the Pakistani armour advanced towards Longewala. Outnumbered and outgunned, Alfa Company held its fire until the enemy came within striking distance. Major Chandpuri moved across the defences, encouraging his men and coordinating urgently requested reinforcements and air support. Throughout the night of December 4, Alfa Company withstood repeated enemy assaults, repelling them with fierce determination. Their

defensive stance prevented Pakistani forces from overrunning the post before dawn—a critical factor that would change the course of the battle.



GAURAV BHAKHRI  
Lt Colonel

#### The Turning Point

At first light on December 5, the Indian Air Force launched a devastating air campaign. Hawker Hunter and HF-24 Marut aircraft, guided by a Forward Air Controller, conducted precise bombing runs. Pakistani tanks, stranded in the dunes and unable to manoeuvre effectively, became easy targets. By evening, the Pakistani advance had collapsed. They abandoned the battlefield, leaving behind 37 destroyed tanks and numerous vehicles. The Indian Army had secured a resounding victory.

#### Honours and Legacy

Major Kuldip Singh Chandpuri was awarded the Maha Vir Chakra for exceptional leadership. Many soldiers of Alfa Company received honours for their valour. The battle stands as a powerful reminder of the importance of defending sovereignty, adapting under pressure, and leveraging joint operations.

#### Strategic Significance

- Decisive Defensive Victory: Longewala demonstrated India's ability to repel a major armoured offensive with minimal resources.
- Protection of Rajasthan: The stand at Longewala prevented Pakistani forces from advancing towards Ramgarh and Jaisalmer.
- Impact on the Eastern Theatre: By failing in the West, Pakistan lost its only potential bargaining tool during the liberation of



Major Kuldeep Singh Chandpuri, Company Commander, with Captain Dharamveer Singh

#### Bangladesh.

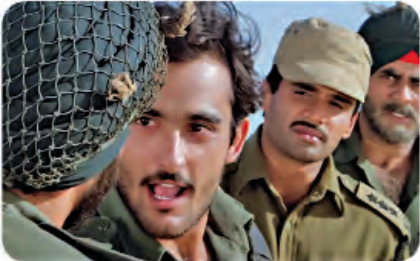
- Morale Booster: The victory significantly uplifted Indian Army morale.
- Global Military Lessons: Longewala continues to be studied for its exemplary use of defensive tactics, intelligence, and air-land coordination.

#### Key Factors Behind the Victory

**Timely Intelligence:** Capt Dharam Vir's early detection of Pakistani armour was critical in preparing the defences.  
**Effective Air Support:** The Indian Air Force's relentless assaults played a decisive role in neutralising enemy armour.  
**Strong Defensive Positioning:** The Indian Army's well-prepared positions and coordinated firepower proved superior despite being heavily outnumbered.  
The Battle of Longewala remains one of the greatest examples of courage under fire. It is a testament to how determination, leadership, and strategic clarity can overcome overwhelming odds—and how a single night's stand can alter the destiny of a nation.



IN RAJASTHAN, THE PAKISTANI ARMY LAUNCHED ATTACKS ALONG THE BORDER, WITH ITS MAIN AND MOST FORMIDABLE THRUST DIRECTED AT THE LONGEWALA POST. THE POST WAS DEFENDED BY ALPHA COMPANY OF THE 23RD BATTALION, THE PUNJAB REGIMENT



### Behind the Scenes: The Making of *Border*

The 1997 war epic *Border*, directed by JP Dutta, remains one of Indian cinema's most iconic portrayals of patriotism. Based on the Battle of Longewala during the 1971 Indo-Pak War, the film's creation is filled with fascinating behind-the-scenes stories that shaped its authenticity and legacy.

#### Inspired by a True Hero

JP Dutta drew heavily from the real-life experiences of Major (later Brigadier) Kuldip Singh Chandpuri, who commanded the outnumbered Indian troops at Longewala. The film's character played by Sunny Deol is closely modelled on him, and the officer himself visited the sets during shooting.

#### Shot in Real Desert Terrain

To recreate the harsh conditions of the Thar desert, the crew

shot extensively in Bikaner and Jaisalmer. The temperatures soared above 45°C, posing challenges for actors and crew, but lending the visuals a raw, authentic feel.

#### Authentic Military Support

The Indian Army offered extensive support to the film, providing tanks, artillery, vehicles, and access to border posts. Many soldiers even appeared as extras, adding remarkable realism to the battle sequences.

#### A Tribute Born from Personal Loss

Director J.P. Dutta dedicated *Border* to his brother, Squadron Leader Deepak Dutta, who lost his life in the 1971 war.

This personal connection infused the film with emotional depth and sincerity.

#### Real Tanks, Real Explosions

Modern CGI-heavy battle films, *Border* used real explosives, controlled blasts, and actual military hardware. This practical approach gave the combat scenes their gritty impact.

#### The Iconic Music Was Almost Different

The now-classic soundtrack by Anu Malik—featuring "Sandese Aate Hain" and "Mere Dushman"—was recorded with live orchestration. Interestingly, the producers initially considered a different composer, but Malik's patriotic melodies became immortal.

#### Sunny Deol's Powerful Dialogue Delivery

It was one of the best performance by Sunny Deol who shined in his role, his powerful dialogues are still remembered and float on social media.

#### A Massive Ensemble Cast

Putting together the star-studded team—Sunny Deol, Jackie Shroff, Suniel Shetty, Akshay Khanna, Tabu, and others—was a logistical feat. Many actors agreed to reduced fees due to the film's patriotic subject.

#### One of India's Biggest Blockbusters

Despite being over three hours long, *Border* became one of the highest-grossing films of 1997 and remains a benchmark for Indian war cinema.



“ALL DAY LONG I KEEP WISHING, LET  
PARTITION BE A PAST NOW. IT SHOULD ONLY  
REMAIN A PART OF HISTORY.”  
— GULZAR

# Partition of India A Human Catastrophe

In August 1947, India was partitioned into India and Pakistan. What was intended to be a political solution to terminate colonial control resulted in one of history's largest, most violent, and most inhumane partitions, fuelled by religion. Millions were uprooted; communal riots, massacres, abductions, forced conversions, and sexual assault ensued as people fled over hastily formed borders. The human toll—lives lost, families fractured, and communities torn apart—became the defining tragedy of the subcontinent's fall from empire.

## A History of Cultural Integration

Long before 1947, the Indian subcontinent was a layered, composite civilisation. Over many centuries it assimilated migrants and conquerors. India developed as a cross-cultural civilisation; Greeks, Kushans, Huns, and Persians all contributed to the development of India's culture; Amir Khusrau shaped early Hindavi-Urdu; Akbar's Din-i-Ilahi and Sulh-i-Kul promoted pluralism; Dara Shikoh connected Sufism and Vedanta; and Jayasi's Padmavat combined Islamic mythology with Indian ethos, creating a shared, composite civilisation that transcended strict boundaries.

## The Tragic Anomaly

Sheikh Ahmad Sirhindi opposed syncretism; Altaf Hussain Hali emphasised a distinct Muslim identity; Sir Syed Ahmad Khan advocated for separate Muslim sociopolitical interests; Muhammad Iqbal envisioned autonomous Muslim destiny; Muhammad Ali Jinnah turned this into political separatism; extremist sects later inflamed hostility—but some humane stories of partition emerged amidst the chaos.

## Their swords were gleaming, icy, and ruthless

I was only 12 years old when Pakistan was formed, but those moments still live inside me as if they happened yesterday. My mother, Gyanvati; father, Anant Ram; uncle, Santaram; older brothers, Ramnath and Prannath; and my six-month-old baby sister all resided in Bahdemalli at the time. Before everything turned red one day, life was straightforward and tranquil.

I can recall the thudding footsteps of men hurrying into our home and the sound of angry voices. Their swords were gleaming, cold, and ruthless. They attacked and killed my father, my uncle, and my older brother Ramnath before I could comprehend anything. I saw firsthand how repeatedly they struck them. I can still hear their cries of “hai, hail!” They cried out, but nobody responded. As a small child witnessing her world being torn apart, I was frozen.

My brother Prannath grabbed my hand, crying and shouting. We ran. My mother carried my infant sister in her arms and ran. She looked for a well to jump into to save their honour. To her shock, the well was already filled with women's dead bodies. Unfortunately, my little sister died due to suffocation. My mother survived, along with around thirty-five other women. Hours later, the military arrived and pulled the 35 survivors out of the well. From there, they were taken to the refugee camp, where my mother and I were reunited—thanks to the jawans of the Gorkha Rifles.

Even now, when I try to talk about it, the words break on my tongue. My heart starts to shake. I survived, but I lost my father, uncle, brother, and my youngest sibling at home, whom I never saw again. That youngster inside me is still looking for them.

**Name: Darshana Rani**  
**Born: 1935 Baddomalli, Tehsil Shakargarh,**  
**Now lives in: Ghuman, Punjab**

## Terror consume even the toughest men

I was around thirteen or fourteen when Partition tore through our lives. We lived near Shakargarh, in a community where Hindus and Muslims had coexisted for years. My father, Ram Lal; my mother, Chaman Dai; and all of our relatives were present. We never anticipated that one day we would be running for our lives.

I visited Gota Sarajwali with my maternal grandparents a few days before the actual violence began. I had no idea that I would be separated from my entire family. When the killings began, people in my community started fleeing on foot—afraid, unarmed, and trying to save their children. My family crossed the Rawi Bridge and arrived in Sarajwali. There, Muslims urged us, “If you want to save your life, convert,” and we all converted to Islam. For nearly a month, this continued, and I witnessed terror consume even the toughest men. “Many who converted then used to go to the masjid for namaz, adopting a distinct identity.”

One day, Indian military vehicles entered the village. Their voices broke through the dread like a miracle. They saved the surviving Hindus and led us to safety. I was reunited with my mother and brothers in a refugee camp, and it felt as though I had been given my life back.

Years later, we rebuilt our lives in Ghuman. I married there, my family expanded, and life progressed. Her son Rajakumar has narrated this account.

**Name: Kamala Rani**  
**Born: c. 1933-34 Kanjur area, Tehsil Shakargarh**  
**Ghuman, Punjab**

## They gave the girls poison pills

My father, Sardar Gulab Singh, was an industrialist. He owned a cotton factory. We were four brothers and five sisters. The population of the Sillanwali mandi was about 10,000. More than half of them were Muslims. Inside the town there were Hindus, and around the outside were Muslim bastis. There were mostly bhatti (labourer) Muslims there. There was a municipality.

We had a very big *haveli*. The *haveli*'s name was “Guru Arjun Building.” There were many servants.

Nawab Allahbakhsh, who was the uncle of CM Malik Khizar Hayat Tiwana and happened to be my father's friend, told us that we need not worry as long as he was with us. My father told all of us brothers and sisters that if ever there was an attack on our *haveli* by the Muslims, how would we face it? What should we do in that situation? Above all, he worried about his three daughters, who were aged about 12 to 17. He gave them, one by one, small sachets of poison (*zehir ki pudiya*) and told them that if such a situation arose and they fell into the hands of Muslims, then at that time they should take this poison.

Pakistan was formed, and conditions became worse and worse. Nawab Allahbakhsh said, “Sardar ji, now it is not right for you to remain

here. Now you must leave this place.” Another friend from the bhatti also said, “Now you should leave and sell your kothi to me; I will give fifty thousand rupees for it.” But my father said that he would give him the *haveli* without him purchasing it and come back later on when all this ended—little did he know that we would not be able to return.

So one day we decided to leave the place and went to the station in the dark. Others soon followed, saying, “If you leave, we will leave as well.” Unfortunately, we could not leave because the train was full of dead bodies. By mid-August 1947, tensions in Punjab were rising, with allegations of looting and killings. Many Muslims' behaviour in Sillanwali had also changed, causing concerns.

We fled in a truck to Sargodha and from there to Amritsar, then spent a year in Rajasthan before settling in Ludhiana. There my father reopened our ration depot and rebuilt life from scratch. In 1963, I joined the Punjab Police, later serving in anti-terror operations and eventually becoming IGP. I also led the RAF and handled communal crises, retiring with Partition's memories still engraved in my soul.

**Name: Charanjit Pal Singh**  
**Born: 2 December 1936, Sillanwali Mandi, District Sargodha. Now lives in: Sector-40, Noida**

THE 1947 PARTITION WAS A TRAGEDY ON A MASSIVE SCALE. SIR CYRIL RADCLIFFE, THE BRITISH LAWYER WHO DREW THE LINES, WAS UNFAMILIAR WITH INDIA'S GEOGRAPHY. HE DIVIDED THE PROVINCES OF PUNJAB AND BENGAL BASED ON MAPS AND RELIGIOUS/CASTE DATA. A TASK HE CARRIED OUT WITHOUT EVER VISITING INDIA. AROUND 15 MILLION PEOPLE WERE DISPLACED, AND AROUND 1-2 MILLION PEOPLE WERE KILLED.

## Diljit Rai Wadhawan

I was born in Gujranwala, in my nanaka, in 1936. My Nana ji, Nand Lal Chopra, was always ill, and I mostly remember him lying on his bed. Nani ji, Goma Devi, was active in Congress—always going to meetings. I spent my first four years with them before returning to Muraliwalla, our village in Gujranwala district. As 1947 approached, the atmosphere worsened. Muslims in nearby villages began turning

hostile. Even the local police were Muslim, so their “assurances” meant nothing.

One day, some friends came to warn my father: Muslims were planning a raat ka hamla, a midnight attack. My father refused to put Hindu guards outside; he did not want to provoke anyone. But the attack still came. Around midnight, hundreds surrounded our *haveli*. Cries of “maar do, kaat do!” echoed from all sides. Rain began pouring, making the chaos even darker. My father shouted, “Musalm? no? ne dhokha de diya!” as we scrambled inside. Father locked my mother, siblings, and me inside a small room, saying, “Main apne

saamne tumhe marta hua nahi dekh sakta.” He and my elder brother hid elsewhere.

I was looking through the tiny ventilation hole, at the faces who were very well known to us from our neighbouring houses, assassinating my relatives and family members in wrath. We heard blows, screams, and the pounding of doors through the night.

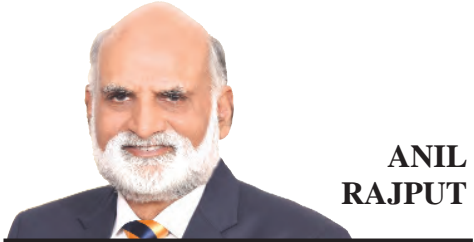
Even today, that night feels like it never truly ended.

**Name: Diljit Rai Wadhawan**  
**Born: 20 May 1936, Khu Wali Gali, Abadi Hakimrai, Gujranwala**  
**Now lives in: Sector-26, Noida**

We extend our heartfelt thanks to the author, Krishnanand Sagar, who wrote the book titled *Witnesses of Partition-era India*, and who preserved these precious testimonies with such dedication and care. Because of your patient interviews, sensitive listening, and commitment to documenting lived memories, we were able to compile these stories with depth, authenticity, and respect. These voices—once scattered by violence and displacement—have found a place, a dignity, and a permanence through your work, ensuring that these experiences are not forgotten and giving future generations the chance to understand the courage, loss, and resilience of Partition survivors.



# Mizoram: Where scenic splendour meets soulful cuisine



ANIL  
RAJPUT

Mizoram, a strikingly beautiful state of North-East India is known as much for its brave people as it is for its breathtaking landscape. As if defining this character, its name derives from two Mizo words, mi meaning people and ram meaning land, together meaning the land of the Mizo people. Situated in the eastern Himalayan region, Mizoram is bordered by Myanmar to the east and south, Bangladesh to the west, and the Indian states of Tripura, Assam and Manipur to the north, making it a strategic and cultural cross-road between South and Southeast Asia.

Much of Mizoram lies at elevations ranging from 2,000 to over 7,000 feet above sea level, giving the state a cool and welcoming climate for much of the year. Aizawl, the capital city, is situated along a ridge at an elevation of 3,714 feet, as if to keep watch upon the rest of the state, and is among the highest state capitals in India. The terrain is rugged and marked by narrow valleys and steep slopes and almost 85 per cent of the state is covered by emerald green forests making it one of the most forested states in the country. This geography has encouraged carefully planned systems of habitation and food production that respected the contours of the land. Rivers such as the Tlawng, Chhimtuipui also known as the Kaladan, and Tuiwawl flow through the hills, supporting fishing, small-scale farming and are used effectively as transport routes to connect remote towns and regions.

The historical roots of Mizoram can be traced to the migratory movements of Tibeto-Burman people who travelled southward over centuries from, between approximately 1000 BCE and 500 CE. Oral traditions, clan genetics, and linguistic evidence suggest a gradual settlement process rather than a single migration. These early communities formed the foundations of what later came to be known collectively as the Mizo people. These clans shared similar languages, customs and agricultural practices while maintaining their own distinct identities. Settlements were built along hill ridges for protection and ease of defence while village life facilitated close and intimate social interaction. An enduring feature of this community was mutual support and a strong sense of collective identity that extended to sharing in the preparation and consumption of food making it an ideal community-based life.

These groups initially established settlements between the 4th and 7th centuries CE, across the Lushai Hills, and were governed by hereditary chiefs known as Ial. Each village functioned as an independent political unit, with land allocated by the chief. This system governed patterns of agriculture, food sharing and rituals. Loyalty to the village and clan formed the backbone of social organisation and inter-village relations were defined by alliances, common celebrations and at times conflict, which were often settled by sharing food and reconciliation. Communal feasting also marked important occasions such as harvests, victories and funerals, reinforcing food as a social binding force long before formal state structures emerged.

The famed forests of Mizoram are rich with bamboo, wild greens, medicinal



herbs and edible roots. Bamboo forests in particular dominate much of the landscape and influence many aspects of Mizo life, from housing and tools to food and ritual practices. The state's high rainfall also nourishes this ecosystem, and determines its agricultural patterns and produce. This intimate connection between forests and hills shaped not only how people lived and moved, but also how they cooked, ate and preserved food, giving rise to a cuisine that is austere but nourishing and deeply connected to nature.

Agriculture in Mizoram historically relied on jhum or shifting cultivation, locally known as lo. Land in forests were cleared and cultivated for a few years at a time and then allowed to regenerate, ensuring fertility and sustainability. Traditional jhum cycles were carefully balanced with long fallow periods that allowed forests to recover fully and retain their natural nutrients. Rice, maize, millets, colocasia, legumes and chillies formed the backbone of crops, and were supplemented by forest foraging and hunting. The agricultural patterns were naturally determined by the seasons and the local festivals, songs and rituals revolved around them ensuring that cooking methods were adapted in harmony with seasonal availability.

Social life in traditional Mizo society was centered around the zawlbuk, a youth center that transmitted traditional community led practices in decision-making, cooperation and culture over generations. This served well in perpetuating their distinctive lifestyle, customs, morality and rituals. Food played a vital role in this process, reinforcing traditional communal bonds. Meat obtained from hunting, vegetables gathered from forests and grains harvested from jhum fields were shared and celebrated among the people

and communities. This collective approach shaped a cuisine that valued simplicity, honesty of flavour and nourishment over complexity or excess.

The 19th century CE marked a period of profound political transformation. Following a series of expeditions, the British formally annexed the Lushai Hills in the 1890s, integrating the region into colonial administrative frameworks. The introduction of written records, census practices and new economic systems altered traditional structures, yet everyday life within villages remained largely rooted in customary practices, especially in food and traditions. Missionaries, however, introduced formal education and Christianity, bringing changes to social structure and belief systems. Over time, Christianity became the dominant faith (87.16% of the population as per the 2011 census) though traditional lifestyles endured and older values of community cooperation, respect for nature and disciplined living remained intact and continued to influence the lives of the people.

Christianity also reshaped festival calendars and dietary customs, even as traditional agricultural rhythms persisted. Sunday gatherings, church feasts and communal meals became new markers of social life. Meat consumption, especially pork, gained prominence during celebrations, even while everyday meals retained their characteristic simplicity. The Mizo ethos of moderation and humility found expression in the kitchen, where food remained functional, nutritional and rooted in local produce rather than indulgence.

The strategic position of Mizoram also connected it historically to trade routes linking present-day Myanmar and Bangladesh. Salt, dried fish, forest produce and textiles moved along these hill pathways, bringing subtle culinary influences without altering the core simplicity of Mizo cooking. Even today, the cuisine reflects a seamless blending of influences from neighbouring hill cultures and Southeast Asia, that filtered into local tastes.

In keeping with this adaptation but also the availability of local produce determined by its geography and weather, Mizo cuisine is deeply seasonal and unique to its people. It is defined by boiling, steaming and light smoking rather

than frying. Oil is used sparingly, spices are minimal and flavours rely on freshness and natural taste. Food is prepared to sustain, mindful of nutrition rather than flavours that overwhelm the senses. This culinary philosophy aligns closely with the Mizo lifestyle that values restraint, discipline and harmony with nature.

Rice is the staple and forms the basis of most meals. It is normally eaten plain, accompanied by an assortment of vegetables, meat or fish. One of the most iconic components of Mizo food is bai, a light stew that is prepared in many variations across households and regions. Bai is usually made by boiling seasonal vegetables such as pumpkin leaves, jungle greens, beans or mustard leaves with herbs, bamboo shoots and sometimes fermented soybean paste. Pork fat or smoked meat is sometimes added for flavour, but the dish remains gentle and nourishing. Bai reflects the Mizo approach to cooking that allows ingredients to express themselves with minimal intervention.

Another important dish is sawhchiar, a rice porridge cooked with meat, usually pork or chicken, and seasoned lightly with ginger and local herbs. It is both a normal household meal but also a dish offered during community gatherings. Variants like sawhchiar chawhpaw, enriched with rice flour, are prepared during festivals or for those recovering from illness, underlining food's role as curative and sustenance. Meat occupies a prominent place in Mizo cuisine, particularly pork, which is a preferred option. Traditional Mizo households often preserved meat by smoking it over kitchen fires. Smoked pork, known for its firm texture and deep aroma, is used in stews, bai preparations or eaten simply with rice and boiled greens. Smoking not only ensured preservation in humid climate but also added complexity without the need for spices.

Forest produce plays an equally vital role. Bamboo shoots, known locally as mautak or rawtawl, are used fresh, fermented or dried. Fermented bamboo shoot preparations add depth and mild acidity to otherwise plain dishes. Bamboo shoot chutneys, stews and accompaniments are common during particular seasons, reinforcing the link between forest cycles and food.

Leafy greens gathered from hillsides and forests are also standard in Mizo meals. Leaves of mustard, colocasia, pumpkin and wild herbs are used by lightly boiling and sometimes mashing them into coarse pastes. These greens provide essential nutrients and are also valued for their medicinal properties. The emphasis on greens reflects an intuitive understanding of curative and nutritional diets long before formal nutritional science became popular knowledge. I believe these are lessons from our ancient traditions that we should make known with a view to preserving their memory and informing future generations of our wise ancestors.

Besides meat, fresh water fish is also an important culinary delicacy specially in areas closer to rivers such as the Chhimtuipui. Small river fish are boiled or smoked and added to vegetable stews while dried fish is also relished, lending intensity to mild dishes. Fish preparation remains simple, focusing on texture and natural taste rather than being overpowered by spices.

Chillies are often used in Mizo cooking but not

excessively. They are added fresh or roasted and mashed into simple accompaniments rather than elaborate curries. One common side dish is a crushed chilli and herb mix, sometimes combined with fermented bamboo shoot or dried fish, served in small quantities to add heat to bland staples. In the southern districts inhabited by the Lai and Mara communities, culinary practices show subtle variations. Rice remains central, but greater use of fermented ingredients and local herbs is preferred. Pork and chicken stews are slightly richer, though still restrained. Bamboo shoot fermentation techniques here are more pronounced, producing sharper flavours that complement plain rice.

In eastern regions near the Myanmar border, rice noodle preparations appear, reflecting cross-border cultural exchanges. These noodles are served in light broths with greens, herbs and bits of meat or fish. The cooking methods remain aligned with Mizo sensibilities, emphasising boiling and steaming rather than heavy seasoning, suggesting influence without cultural dilution.

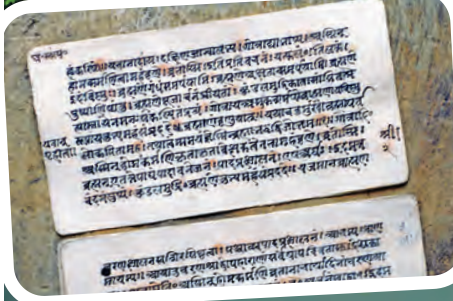
Fermentation occupies an important place in Mizo gastronomy, though in a quieter form than in some neighbouring cuisines. Fermented bamboo shoots and soybean paste are used sparingly, also unlike neighbouring states, to add depth and preserve nutrients. Traditional fermentation methods rely on ambient temperatures and natural microbes, demonstrating empirical knowledge passed down through generations. These techniques ensured food security during lean periods and allowed forest abundance to be extended across seasons.

Traditional beverages brewed from rice and using local fermentation techniques have existed for long in the region. However, some anthropological studies show that rice-beer and traditional alcoholic beverages lost their social and ritual status in Christian households who preferred tea or other non-alcoholic drinks. Food rituals have also shifted towards church-centred gatherings, but even these occasions bring communities together in faith, bonding and goodwill. In contemporary times, Mizoram's cuisine is witnessing renewed interest and revival specially among the youth. Cafes and home kitchens are retaining traditional dishes with pride, adapting presentation without altering core practices. Smoked pork, bai, bamboo shoot preparations and sawhchiar are appearing in curated menus in contemporary cafes and restaurants seeking to highlight both heritage and health. Its low oil content, liberal use of greens and reliance on natural preservation has aligned well with mindful dietary habits. This is indeed a welcome development and must be encouraged.

It is my belief, therefore, that preserving Mizo cuisine in its simplicity and traditions is not about nostalgia but about recognising its relevance for future generations. They are a narrative of a people shaped by hills, rain and forests, who learned to live with what the land offered rather than in depleting it. Each bowl of bai, each serving of smoked pork or plain rice accompanied by forest greens reflects generations of practical wisdom, discipline and respect for balance.

To value this cuisine is to value the cultural intelligence of the Mizo people and their ability to adapt without excess. By safeguarding these food traditions, we honour a way of life that sees nourishment not only as sustenance for the body but as an expression of harmony between people, land and belief. Let us all play a role in ensuring that Mizoram's culinary heritage continues to nourish, instruct and inspire those who inherit its hills and forests and, indeed, even beyond.

(The writer is Secretary, Cuisine India Society)



## A passage through ritual

MYTHRI TEWARY

When a soul crosses the river, a grand-daughter's journey through the Vedic art of saying goodbye.

To everyone who loves quietly and loses suddenly.

In the quiet, early hours of 4 November, before the day could even break, my grandfather - as we fondly called him 'Baba' — exhaled for one final time. And in that silent moment, something arose within the walls of our Patna home: a language of grief older than our memories, older than the family he built and left behind. Something far older than desolation, cries, and silence awakened. It was the Vedic language of leave-taking: a departure in honour of the one who not only lived but completed the cycle of life given, and guidance to the one leaving the physical world.

A pilgrimage, a process. A process of returning, cleansing, remembering, releasing, and finally transcending. In our part of existence, passing away is not an ending. It is a journey, undertaken not by the living but accompa-

nied by them — at every step, every ritual, every breath, until the soul proceeds on its journey to the next world. A set of traditions that do not rush sorrow, nor fear departure, and that do not let the soul take its leave unattended. A subtle way of being, a gentle whisper: 'You were not alone here, neither shall you walk ahead alone, even there.'

The thirteen days that followed my Baba's transcendence seemed like walking on a land unknown, following a map across an unseen terrain. It brought not just grief, loss, 'ifs' and 'buts' or a desperate 'one last time', but a philosophy of a sequence of customs, elaborate and unexpectedly tender. The loss is personal yet felt civilisational. An entire community of people gathered together in mourning and support, reciting a story of how it is not one man's departure but a reminder that 'you do not walk through this alone'. Not only us, but the soul. It is eerie, but comforting.

This is the story of that journey: of petals and pyres, of pepper and jaggery, of hidden lamps and clay pots hung under ancient trees; every step, every tear, every symbol and the world it carries forward. Of how humanity helps the living walk alongside the gone, one step at a time.

### Life to Light

The morning our Baba left this world, time shifted its rhythm. What happened behind the mocha-brown iron gates of our residence was not panic or haste but quiet. A soft glance of affirmation among each other to place him in the earth he belonged to. He was lifted from the cot, along with his pillow and comforter, and placed gently on the floor to make sure he had a departure of utmost comfort. The Vedas call it not floor or ground but

'prithvi', the primordial mother, who absorbs the turbulence of the 'prana' as it leaves. Holding true to its essence and meaning came to mind with an unusual clarity Longfellow's 'A Psalm of Life': "Dust thou art, to dust returnest." Drawing a sharp connection to the Vedas and literature, science agrees - though unknowingly — that ground is the most stabilising conductor that helps discharge the final residual electrical impulses of a human system, ultimately bringing it into equilibrium.

Maybe this is what alignment actually is. Every aspect of what comprises the earth, science, faith and literature, in their own ways, align in perfect symmetry for one last time.

### South, the Soul, and the Lord of Time

The Indian Vedic belief is to lay the departed to rest in a specific direction: south. The belief, as it elucidates, is that south has been considered the direction of Yama, the deity who receives the soul once it leaves the physical world. Contrary to the widely known, south is not negative; it is simply the correct spiritual orientation for a soul that has begun its divine journey.

It is also said that the soul subtly remains connected for some time, and that placing the head towards the south is a gentle symbolisation of closure, of peaceful surrender, an acceptance of the greatest transition. South ensures the soul follows the correct cosmic pathway, preventing the soul from wandering back.

Southward movement is for those who have completed their earthly cycle and are now moving to the realm of ancestors, called Pitrioka. Every gesture in Hindu funerary rites is designed not only spiritually but also psychologically to help the living



release the departed. Facing south becomes a quiet act of letting go, a way of saying that we do not intend to pull you back energetically.

Science, yet again, remains in alignment with the cosmic order. The human body still holds some bioelectromagnetic charge for a few hours after it stops breathing. The earth's magnetic field runs from north to south; if placed towards the north, the remaining currents may cause disturbances leading to rigidity, while facing south makes it stable and electrically grounded.

### The Touch of Ganga, the Sanctity of Tulsi

Born from the locks of Lord Shiva, the Ganga is said to represent piousness, a transition, the eternal cycle of life and beyond. She is a goddess, the locus of Hindu mythology, whose waters are believed to sanctify everything they touch. It is a symbol of purification, spiritual merit, a pristine passage from the material world to the divine.

As Baba rested there, still, we were asked to put a few drops of this holy water — gangajal — in his mouth. Vedic literature calls it 'amrita' (the divine nectar of immortality). This symbolic final sip denotes that the soul has

begun its next journey with utmost purity. When one turns to science regarding this, it can be noted that Ganga water contains self-purifying bacteriophages, surprisingly. Thus, both realities — mystical and scientific — co-exist without conflict.

With 'amrita' in his mouth and Tulsi beside him, he slept. His sleep was deep, peaceful but most significantly heavenly. Tulsi is a sacred plant in Vedic Hindu households dating back to its origin. It is believed to guide the departing consciousness onto the state of being. Contemporary studies have shown that the fragrant oil of this plant slows down the initial process of decay for a brief and blessed interval. The faith of our ancestors is now chemistry for us, but what remains constant is the tenderness and intention behind following the system. Translucent grey spirals of lit incense sticks rose around him all through the day and the night.

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

(Mythri Tewary writes to reach anyone who carries their grief silently - grandchildren, children, parents, and all those who heal alone. Through her work, she hopes to offer companionship, gentleness, and a reminder that loss is a shared human truth)



# The 15 second rule: A pause is powerful

GURUDEV SRI SRI RAVI SHANKAR

A long time ago, a CEO called me and said, "Gurudev, you saved my job. Once, I had written a nasty letter to my boss, and I was going to send it off. Then I remembered what you said: 'Give yourself a 15-second pause before you are about to do anything important.' I took a 15-second pause. And when I read through the letter again, I couldn't send it! I had written such a nasty letter that, if I had sent it out, I would have lost my job."

If you look back at your own life, you will notice that all mistakes happen at the spur of the moment due to a lack of awareness. When you are in a great rush and under a lot of stress, you are bound to make mistakes. Also, when you are in the midst of a storm of emotions, you are more likely to make mistakes. See, for example, when you are upset, what do you want to do? You just want to pick up the phone and yell at somebody! You want to get it off your chest. Before you do that, just give yourself 15 seconds. Freeze for those 15 seconds. What happens when you do that? Your emotions get time to settle; you regain your awareness and alertness. And your whole attitude changes. Everything changes around you. When you hold your breath, the mind stops too.

Let's do an exercise. Are you breathing? Continue to breathe. Now stop the breath for a few seconds. Breathe again. Stop. Hold your breath. Continue breathing. Did you observe what was happening within? Stillness dawns in you. Stillness is the precursor to infinity. In this moment of stillness, awareness blossoms inside you.

Taking that little time, that 15-second gap, can make a big difference. You can do this several times during the course of the day. As children, we used to play a game called 'Statue', where we would be running and someone would say 'Statue', and we had to stand still wherever we were. This game is a brilliant activity to help bring the mind to the present moment. Just a few seconds of pausing transports the mind from a state of impulsiveness to greater centredness.

How important are these momentary pauses? Everything emerges from silencing the mind. The purpose of speech is to create silence within you. If it doesn't, then the speech hasn't fulfilled its purpose. Whenever you say 'Yes!' or whenever you have a sense of wonder, your mind pauses. In such a state, you want to know about that object or person more closely. When you know something, it leaves you with a deeper sense of wonder. And wonder is the doorway to a mental pause. When you are amazed at the whole of creation - with all that you see, smell, or taste — each of these experiences that we derive from our senses leads us to a space of absolute tranquillity. And that is what meditation is.

When you start meditating regularly for a few minutes, when you are calm and collected, you become spontaneous and intuitive, which is quite different from being impulsive, which happens when you are emotional and

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**“WHAT HAPPENS WHEN YOU ARE SURPRISED OR SHOCKED? THE MIND DRIFTS INTO SILENCE. SOMETHING STUNNING TAKES YOU INTO SILENCE. WORDS DISAPPEAR”**

– GURUDEV

restless. Once you calm your emotions, the decisions you take are spontaneous, intuitive, and correct.

No matter how busy you are, take a few moments and observe your breath. Using simple meditation techniques, calm down your mind. Bring it to this moment, relax each part of your body, relax your mind, your senses. You'll find such peace, so much love gushing from within. We are all born with this gift of love and peace. And somehow, we forget to look within. That is most important. Take a few moments to see what is happening inside.

Very ambitious people cannot have deep sleep because the mind isn't free. The more anxious you are about doing or achieving something, the tougher it becomes to sleep. Before going to sleep, if you pause, surrender your worries and ambitions to some Higher

Power, and simply let go of everything, only then are you able to rest, isn't it? Why not apply the same thing to life as you live from one moment to another? When you want to sit for meditation, let go of everything.

The human mind is very complex; it has both delicate and tough aspects. If you have had a misunderstanding with a friend or colleague at work, you can become stiff inside, and this can distort your emotions, leading to negativity, which you carry wherever you go. In your day-to-day activities, the mind gathers many such impressions, anxieties, and tensions. They do not allow you to be happy; they block your intuition and your joy. These impressions strain and burden the mind, and eventually they can lead to many psychosomatic issues. But when you pause the mind with meditation, its tendency to hold on to negative emotions

simply disappears. You gain the ability to live happily in the present moment and let go of the past. Pausing the mind for a few minutes every day is how you move it from a state of chaos to a state of bliss and clarity, and from restlessness to deep restfulness. And it is only from this state of deep rest that something creative can emerge. Deep silence is the mother of creativity. No creativity can come from one who is too busy, worried, over-ambitious, or lethargic.

The mind vacillates between the past and the future. It is either occupied with what has happened or busy thinking, planning, or feeling uncertain and anxious about what is to come. Wisdom is being aware of this phenomenon of the mind - of what is happening right now in your mind as you are reading this column. Information can be acquired by reading books or browsing the internet. You can open a book on any subject — how to lose weight, how to prepare for an interview, success 101, and so on. There are innumerable volumes on countless topics, but awareness of your own mind cannot be learnt from a book. That can come



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only from meditation.

Total rest is meditation. Only when the mind settles down can total rest happen. Restlessness, agitation, desire, and ambition stir up the mind and keep it busy planning for the future or feeling regretful and angry about the past. A mind in the present moment is meditation. A mind without agitation is meditation.

Why have practices like meditation and silence been given so much importance in our spiritual traditions? Greater awareness alone can root out misery from our lives and break the patterns we live with. Nothing helps achieve this more than stepping into brief periods of meditative silence. This is not something alien to us; it is built into our nature. The human body is made that way. You'll notice that when you are faced with something too much for the mind to take, the mind goes into silence. What happens when you are surprised or shocked? The mind drifts into silence. Something stunning takes you into silence. Words disappear. At the helm of every emotion, at the peak of every event, there is silence. And by recognising it, practising it, and manifesting it in your life, you cross the ocean of 'samsara', the sea of misery.

## The Indian paradox of power, participation, and exclusion

TEAM AGENDA

In *Democracy for Winners Only*, retired civil servant Raj Kumar Srivastava presents a deeply reflective and unsettling account of how India's democratic journey has drifted away from its founding ideals. Drawing on over thirty years in public service across India's forests, villages, and administrative corridors, Srivastava offers a powerful meditation on the widening gap between democratic participation and democratic power. The core argument is arresting: India's democracy increasingly privileges the victorious rather than the virtuous. Electoral triumphs, he argues, have evolved into tools that legitimise centralisation, weaken institutions, and reduce citizens to spectators. Participation remains high, yet its influence on decision-making diminishes. This is the paradox at the heart of what Srivastava terms a "winner's democracy".

### Democracy from the Ground Up

What distinguishes this book from typical political commentaries is its grounded storytelling. Srivastava draws from village panchayat meetings, forest rights disputes, drought relief interventions, and encounters with marginalised communities. These vignettes reveal the asymmetry between those who govern and those who bear the weight of governance. They illustrate how structural inequities—caste, class, bureaucracy, and political patronage—continue to shape democratic outcomes at the grassroots level.

His training as both a forester and administrator allows him to see democracy not as an abstract theory but as a lived ecosystem. Forest clearances, land conflicts, and community rights become windows through which the reader glimpses the contradictions of democratic practice.

### The Digital Illusion of Participation

Srivastava's exploration of the digital age is particularly compelling. He warns that India's expanding online and participation-tweets, hashtags, and reform agenda grounded in constitutional values:



**Title:** Democracy For Winners Only  
**Author:** Raj Kumar Srivastava  
**MRP:** ₹200  
**Publisher:** Orangebooks Publication

illusion of empowerment without the substance of influence. When narratives overpower nuance and algorithms amplify majoritarian sentiment, the democratic conversation becomes shallow, polarised, and easily manipulated.

### Institutions Under Strain

From legislatures to the media, from civil services to citizen forums, the book traces how key institutions struggle under the pressure of populism and speed-driven politics. Srivastava argues that institutional resilience—not electoral arithmetic—is the true measure of a functioning democracy. When institutions bend too easily, power becomes personalised and accountability erodes.

### A Blueprint for Reclaiming Democracy

Despite its sharp critique, the book is not despairing. Srivastava lays out a path forward, grounded in constitutional values:



- revitalising local governance structures
- ensuring transparency in political finance
- strengthening the autonomy of regulatory and oversight bodies
- embedding community voice in development decisions
- rebuilding civic education and democratic culture

His message is clear: democracy must be continuously defended, renewed, and reclaimed.

### A Timely and Courageous Work

Democracy for Winners Only stands out for its clarity of thought, graceful prose, and rare combination of practitioner insight and philosophical depth. It challenges readers without overwhelming them and urges introspection without cynicism. In a time of loud slogans and shrinking democratic space, Srivastava's voice is steady, principled, and necessary.

This book is essential reading for policymakers, administrators, scholars, and any citizen who cares about the future of India's democratic experiment. It raises a question that cannot be ignored: If democracy serves only those who win, what remains of its promise to the rest of us?

## Why states act the way they do: A defence of rationality in global politics

KANISHK SHEKHAR

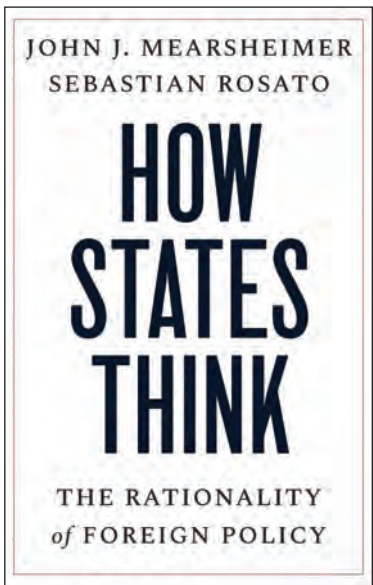
To comprehend global politics, it is essential to grasp the mind-set of states. A significant portion of international relations theory wants us to believe that states act rationally. However, numerous scholars contend that political leaders seldom behave rationally.

This question is vital for both the analysis and application of international politics, as only if states are rational can scholars and policymakers effectively understand and anticipate their actions. In contrast to individuals, states do not act impulsively; rather, policymakers evaluate threats in a strategic manner. Based on this reasoning, they argue that states typically place a higher value on survival and security than on any other considerations.

John J Mearsheimer and Sebastian Rosato assert that rational choices in international politics are based on credible theories regarding the functioning of the world and arise from thoughtful decision-making processes. By applying these standards, they conclude that the majority of states act rationally most of the time, even if they do not always achieve success.

Mearsheimer and Rosato support their argument by investigating whether historical and contemporary world leaders, such as George W. Bush and Vladimir Putin, have made rational decisions in the context of significant historical events, including both world wars, the Cold War, and the post-Cold War period. This book presents the concept of the decision-maker as homo theoreticus, an individual who is directed by coherent theories regarding the functioning of the world.

Mearsheimer is recognised for his ground-breaking contributions to the theory of offensive realism. With a notable career, he has written many influential works, including his magnum opus *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*. Rosato, an emerging talent in the field, contributes his expertise in international relations to this collaboration. Together, they delve



**Title:** How States Think: The Rationality of Foreign Policy  
**Author:** John Mearsheimer & Sebastian Rosato  
**MRP:** ₹1,257  
**Publisher:** Yale University Press

into the intricacies of state decision-making, challenging established beliefs and offering fresh insights into the rationale behind foreign policy. Through thorough investigation and persuasive arguments, the authors illuminate the complex processes that shape state behaviour in the international sphere.

In the initial chapter, the authors contend that states typically act rationally in their pursuit of foreign policy objectives, rather than being irrational entities motivated solely by emotions or ideologies. The book evaluates alternative theories such as liberalism and constructivism, claiming that the fundamental driving force behind state actions is a rational reaction to security issues rather than ethical principles or cultural influences.

Although liberal theories — including democratic peace, interdependence, and



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constructivist concepts — possess some validity, they ultimately fall short when compared to fundamental security concerns. Realism's emphasis on material factors serves as the most dependable framework for understanding state behaviour. States place a premium on survival over other aims, and failure to do so results in their classification as non-rational. Through a variety of examples, the authors illustrate that states adhere to the theory of expected utility maximisation, making calculated choices to enhance their security and interests.

In the subsequent chapter, the authors examine strategic rationality within the context of international relations, addressing the challenges faced by policymakers and states in a world filled with uncertainties. This is illustrated through historical instances such as American policy during the Second World War, strategies in East Asia, the post-Cold War era, Japanese decisions prior to the Pearl Harbor attack, and American actions during the Cuban Missile Crisis. They underscore the widespread uncertainty and lack of information that complicate decision-making processes. Whether in military strategy, diplomacy, or alliance formation, decision-makers encounter uncertainties that hinder risk assessment and rational choice. Mearsheimer and Rosato recognise the constraints of state rationality, investigating instances where external factors might affect decision-making. They contend that although states aim for rationality, internal dynamics and external pressures can occasionally result in irrational actions. The authors delve into the complexities of state decision-making processes, scrutinising the influence of leaders, bureaucracies, and other elements in determining foreign policy choices.

They emphasise the necessity of comprehending these processes to accurately evaluate state behaviour. Furthermore, the authors underscore the significance of goal rationality in the context of rational decision-making.

For the complete book review  
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(The writer is a columnist and an educator who trains aspirants for the Civil Services Examination)