

'Kakatiyam' a unique dance form of TG: DCM



TMC suspends MLA for planning Babri Mosque replica



Nikita overcomes tragedies to win gold in KIUG



Three-tier security for Global Summit reviewed

Putin rejects key US proposal on Ukraine

PIONEER IN SHORT

TGCSB BUSTS FAKE JOB RACKET IN HYDERABAD

The Telangana Cyber Security Bureau (TGCSB) arrested five persons from Hyderabad, Mysore and Visakhapatnam for allegedly trafficking unemployed young men and women to Myanmar, forcing them into organised cybercrime operations. The accused, Vasam Govardhan, from Quthbullapur (native of Warangal); Banothu Madanlal, also from Warangal; Syed Mohammad Madani from Mysore...

FULL REPORT ON P2

MERGER OF 27 CIVIC BODIES INTO GHMC COMPLETE

The merger of 20 municipalities and seven corporations in the suburbs of the GHMC has been officially completed. The Municipal Administration Department issued orders (GO-264) to this effect on Wednesday. In this context, GHMC Commissioner RV Kaman gave proceedings stating that the resolutions of the council of urban local bodies...

FULL REPORT ON P3

RULING BJP CONFRONTS ITS OWN BUREAUCRACY IN MP

Ministers and BJP MLAs in Madhya Pradesh are preparing to open a coordinated front against what they describe as an increasingly unresponsive bureaucracy. They have decided to lodge a formal complaint with the chief minister, arguing that administrative resistance is now disrupting governance and weakening the authority of elected representatives...

FULL REPORT ON P5

TERROR ATTACKS INCREASED IN PAKISTAN: REPORT

Pakistan continues to reel under terrorism with a surge of 25 per cent violence-related incidents in 2025 compared to the previous year, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa being the worst hit province, a think tank report has said. Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan together accounted for over 96 per cent of all 3,187 fatalities and 92% of all incidents of violence recorded through January...

FULL REPORT ON P8

QUOTE OF THE DAY



QUANTUM TECHNOLOGY HELD THE POTENTIAL TO BE AS TRANSFORMATIVE IN THE PRESENT CENTURY AS ELECTRICITY AND THE INTERNET WERE IN EARLIER ERAS. THE STRATEGY AIMS TO STRENGTHEN RESEARCH INFRASTRUCTURE, CYBERSECURITY SYSTEMS, LIFE SCIENCES INNOVATION AND HUMAN CAPITAL DEVELOPMENT

— D SRIDHAR BABU, IT AND INDUSTRIES MINISTER

Will take TG to a global summit of development, asserts CM

Announces Adilabad airport will be completed in a year, and also launch Airbus services

PNS ■ Hyderabad

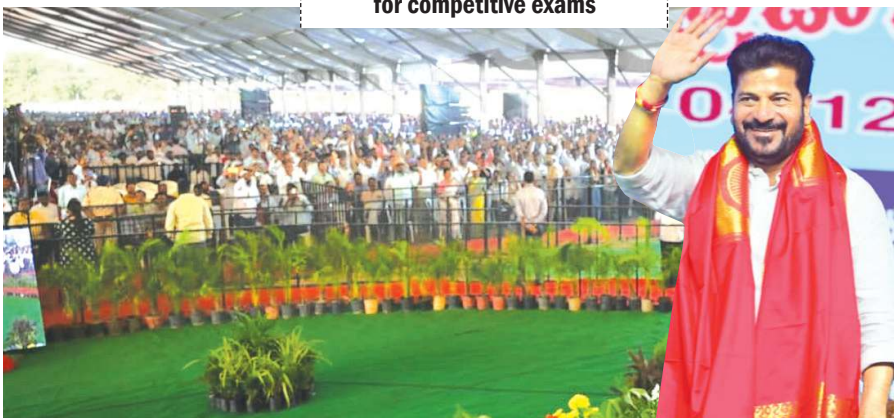
Claiming that the Global Summit is aimed at formulating much-needed plans for the comprehensive progress and development of Telangana, the Chief Minister Revanth Reddy said the government will show the world the progressive vision of the state. Since assuming power, the government has been for the welfare and well-being of everyone in the state, and to ensure a secure future for all sections of society, the Congress government has prepared a Vision Document, the CM said. After laying foundation stones for several projects to be built for Rs 262.68 crores, he addressed a public meeting at Husnabad on Wednesday as part of a victory celebration. Revanth showcased the welfare and development activities that the govern-

BRS rulers amassed wealth through commissions ignored the unemployed

KCR dumped the Pranahita - Chevella project

Job notifications soon, urges the unemployed to start preparation for competitive exams

Revanth at a public meeting in Adilabad



ment has been implementing for the last two years. He announced that the newly sanctioned Adilabad airport works will be completed in a year, and the Airbus services will also be

launched from the new airport, adding that a new university will also be established in the Adilabad district, and it would be named after Indravelli or Kumuram Bheem. The irri-

gation, education and communication facilities would be strengthened as part of the development of the district, the CM said.

Appealing to the people to elect good persons as

Sarpanches in the gram panchayat elections. "Don't spend money on elections. If possible, Sarpanchs should be elected unanimously", the CM said he will provide funds for village development.

He lambasted the last government for ignoring the Adilabad district by saying that the oppressed people dethroned the previous government and gave a big mandate to the People's Government.

Revanth Reddy fired a salvo at former Chief Minister K Chandrashekar Rao for not allowing the opposition leaders to speak in the Assembly debates. The then rulers also detained opposition leaders, including Sitakka and him, when they tried to enter the state Secretariat. Now there are no such conditions.

CONTINUED ON >> P2

BJP: TG rising only in debts, tariffs, inflation

Says people need jobs, not flashy summits, fancy acronyms

PNS ■ Hyderabad

Alleging that the two-year rule of the Congress party in Telangana has burdened the state with debts and has been marked by cheating people with fake promises, the state BJP on Thursday tore into Chief Minister A. Revanth Reddy and the Congress government for reducing Telangana to a near-bankrupt state, adding over Rs. 2 lakh crore in fresh debt — and now attempting to whitewash its failures through the so-called "Rising Telangana Global Summit."

Party's Chief Spokesperson and media in-charge, N V Subash, said the summit was nothing more than a lavish PR spectacle designed to mask the Congress government's monumental fiscal mismanagement and its total failure to honour even a single guarantee it made to the people, adding that the people of



Telangana do not need flashy summits or fancy acronyms — they need jobs, investment, irrigation, better roads, financial discipline, and an honest government. "Instead of rising, Telangana is reeling under Congress rule — rising debts, rising inflation, rising power tariffs, and rising lies. The only thing truly 'Rising' is the government's appetite for loans and its addiction to publicity," he commented. Subash said the government's newly coined slogans — CURE, PURE, RARE — were nothing but cosmetic gimmicks to distract the public from an economy collapsing under their watch.

CONTINUED ON >> P2

Govt gives ₹1L cheques to 50 Civil Services successful candidates

PNS ■ Hyderabad

As announced, the Telangana government has provided financial assistance to the candidates who are selected for the UPSC Mains exam. Deputy Chief Minister Bhatti Vikramarka Mallu provided financial assistance of Rs. 1 lakh each to 50 candidates selected for the UPSC Civil Services Mains examination.

He said that under the Rajiv Gandhi Civil Services Abhay Hastham Scheme, financial assistance will be given to all candidates who qualify for the Civil Services Mains and Interview, no matter how many there are.

CONTINUED ON >> P2

Don't fall prey to 'Aashadam sales' like land offers: KTR

WARNS INDUSTRIALISTS, SAYS BRS 'WILL EXPOSE CORRUPTION-RIDDEN HILT'

PNS ■ Hyderabad

Calling upon the workers' unions to unite and strongly oppose the government's land-grabbing policy, the BRS working president KT Ramarao termed the HILT policy as an attempt to transfer valuable lands to industrialists at a cheaper rate.

Asserting that the lands assigned for industries should not be grabbed in any manner, and there is an urgent need to protect them. KTR revealed that the BRS sent fact-finding teams to bring out the facts at the ground level to expose the Congress government's duplicity.

Announcing that BRS will oppose tooth and nail any policy that harms the state's interests, the BRS leader blasted the government for the policy, which only encourages land grabbing



under the policy protection.

He alleged that the land grabbing had been going on for the last six months, and the government made the policy public only recently. "It is the responsibility of the workers' unions to come forward to oppose the policy, which he termed as a blatant attempt at correction amounting to Rs 5 lakh crores. How can a govern-

ment grab land in the name of conservation and injustice to people and workers, whose livelihoods are dependent on it? KTR questioned the government by saying that "nobody has any right over the lands belonging to people. They should be returned to them".

Warning the industrialist s not to fall prey to the government's offers like "aashadam sales" and don't become part of Chief Minister Revanth Reddy's land scam, KTR said strongly that "Whenever BRS party comes to power the lands converted under the HILT policy will be taken back".

Describing the Chief Minister Revanth as the master of corruption KTR alleged that "To appease the Delhi party brass he is blatantly resorting to land grabbing for the sake of funds mobilisation".



Bonhomie reflects time-tested friendship

Modi warmly welcomes Putin; hosts private dinner

PNS ■ New Delhi

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Thursday warmly welcomed Russian President Vladimir Putin as he kick-started a nearly 27-hour visit to India to further shore up an eight-decade bilateral partnership that remained on a firm footing notwithstanding fractious geopolitical upheavals.

In reflection of the importance India attached to the Russian leader's first visit to India in four years,

Modi received him at New Delhi's Palam airport with a hug amid a group of artists performing traditional dances.

From the airport, the two leaders travelled to Modi's official residence in his car, nearly three months after the prime minister rode with Putin in the Russian leader's vehicle in the Chinese city of Tianjin during the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) summit.

CONTINUED ON >> P2



Min Sridhar invites K'taka CM, DCM for Global Summit

PNS ■ Bengaluru

As the date for the prestigious Global Summit is fast approaching, the Telangana Ministers started meeting the Chief Ministers of Indian states and inviting them to the summit. As part of it Telangana IT and Industries Minister, Duddilla Sridhar Babu, on Thursday formally called on the Chief Minister of Karnataka Siddaramaiah and Deputy Chief Minister D. K. Shivakumar in Bengaluru and extended a cordial invitation to attend the prestigious "Telangana Rising Global Summit", being organised by the State Government on the 8th and 9th of this month at "Bharat Future City."

'Let rare rock eagle owl hatch eggs'

WORK STOPPED AT QUARRY NEAR HYDERABAD

PNS ■ Hyderabad

In an environment-friendly gesture, quarrying has been stopped for about a month at a stone quarry in Vikarabad district in Telangana to let a rock eagle owl, a rare bird, hatch its eggs.

The Telangana forest department quickly swung into action after being alerted by wildlife photographers and conservationists about the presence of the bird and the eggs.

Vikarabad District Forest Officer Gnaneswar said on Thursday that wildlife photographer Manoj Kumar Vittapu, who visited the grassland at Yenkaithala in Vikarabad about six days ago, informed Telangana's Principal Chief Conservator of Forest (PCCF) C. Suvana about the presence of the rock eagle owl and its five eggs. The PCCF asked the Vikarabad district



forest officials to quickly take safety measures.

The forest department personnel who reached the site informed the stone crushing unit owner, Laxma Reddy, about the presence of rare bird species and the eggs, he said.

The unit owner agreed not to disturb the bird till the hatchlings fly.

The forest department personnel have been keeping a close watch on the

bird since then on a daily basis, Gnaneswar said.

The rock eagle owl, which preys on insects, rats, and others, is mainly found in Southeast Asia. Compared to other owls, it inhabits rocky areas, he said.

"It's a rare species, though it is not endangered. Its sighting is rare," the official said. Though it is not known when the bird laid the eggs at the Yenkaithala grassland, it is expected that hatching

will happen in another 15 days. The hatchlings would fly away if protective care is taken for 20-25 days, he said.

The rock eagle owl incubates the eggs and ensures that they remain warm, he added. Vittapu, who is also the joint secretary of Telangana Photographic Society, said that he visited the Yenkaithala grasslands as part of a birding visit on November 30.

He said he noticed the eggs, which were located between the quarry cliff and the ground. The earthmover driver at the quarry stopped the mining (stone crushing) after being alerted.

The driver and other personnel were aware of the presence of the bird.

"It's a miracle that we reached there at that time because mining was underway on the ground.

CONTINUED ON >> P2

Hyd possesses resources essential for transformation

Will emerge as leader of Quantum economy: Bhatti

PNS ■ Hyderabad

Deputy Chief Minister Bhatti Vikramarka Mallu stated that Hyderabad will emerge as the future leader in the quantum economy, as it possesses abundant resources such as strong infrastructure and digital skills that are essential for this transformation.

He explained that the NITI Aayog Quantum Roadmap is aligned with "Telangana Rising 2047", the state's vision to become a \$3 trillion economy by 2047.

He said Telangana will become the first state in India to have a dedicated roadmap for quantum technology through the Telangana Quantum Strategy (TQS).

The Deputy Chief Minister recalled that as early as the 1980s, discussions on artificial



intelligence took place at Hyderabad Central University, where he was a student, and how students back then anticipated that AI would shape the future of the world.

He said quantum technology will bring faster and deeper transformation across all sectors than any other technology.

Any nation aspiring for a great future must have a quantum strategy, he emphasised. Quantum will

heavily influence national security, economic size, and future growth.

He stated that Telangana's Quantum Strategy, aligned with the National Mission, aims to achieve integrated and future-focused goals in research, skills development, education, infrastructure, and cybersecurity.

With the launch of TQS, Telangana is announcing to the world its commitment to build India's most advanced quantum innovation ecosystem.

He added that the government is unveiling not just a strategy but also a detailed implementation roadmap. The Deputy Chief Minister said that the state will promote strong, deep partnerships between industry and academic institutions.

CONTINUED ON >> P2



‘Kakatiyam’ a unique dance form of TG: DCM

PNS ■ Hyderabad

Deputy Chief Minister Bhatti Vikramarka Mallu said that just as every state in India has its own distinctive dance form, Telangana too has a unique tradition — the Kakatiyam dance. He participated as the chief guest at a dance programme organised on Thursday evening at Ravindra Bharathi by Padma Shri Padmaja Reddy, along with her troupe.

He congratulated Padma Shri awardee Padmaja Reddy for her in-depth research on the Kakatiya dance tradition, for documenting it in book form, and for presenting it as a dance ballet that has brought global recognition to Telangana's cultural heritage. He noted that while most classical dance forms offer serenity, Kakatiyam



stands apart by depicting the powerful and inspiring ritual performed to motivate soldiers before they head to war—a portrayal Padmaja Reddy's team brings to life

on stage with great clarity. He also appreciated the spectacular performance of Padmaja Reddy's disciples, who vividly presented the serpent dance sequence in

the Khaliya Mardanam ballet. He wished them a bright future and expressed hope that the troupe would continue to bring pride to Telangana.

Hyd airport receives bomb threat

PNS ■ Hyderabad

The Rajiv Gandhi International Airport here on Thursday received a bomb threat email concerning an inbound Indigo flight from Sharjah, prompting authorities to activate standard safety protocols after the aircraft landed, sources said. Flight 6E 1422 landed safely here at 3.15 pm, they said.

On December 4, 2025, a Bomb threat email was received on Hyderabad airport customer support id at 2 PM for the Sharjah-Hyderabad flight 6E 1422. The Flight landed safely at Hyderabad at 3.15 PM. Standard safety protocols were initiated," sources said. The standard safety protocols include isolation of the aircraft, screening of baggage and passengers, keeping fire engines ready and pressing sniffer dogs into service, among others.

BJP to organise ‘maha dharna’ against Cong govt

PNS ■ Hyderabad

Telangana BJP will organise a 'maha dharna' on December 7 to protest the Congress government's alleged failure to implement its election promises.

The Congress, led by Chief Minister Revanth Reddy, completes its second year in office on December 7.

Telangana BJP president N Ramchander Rao on Thursday visited the Dharna Chowk at Indira Park here, the venue for the protest, to inspect the arrangements.

The Congress government is deceiving people by failing to fulfil its six poll guarantees and 66 promises, he alleged.

He appealed to the people to attend the 'maha dharna' in large numbers.

The BJP is also opposing the Congress government's recent decisions, including the Hyderabad Industrial Lands Transformation Policy



THE CONGRESS GOVERNMENT IS DECEIVING PEOPLE BY FAILING TO FULFIL ITS SIX POLL GUARANTEES AND 66 PROMISES

(HILTP) and expansion of Greater Hyderabad Municipal Corporation (GHMC) by merging 27 Urban Local Bodies (ULBs) near the city's Outer Ring Road (ORR) with the city civic body.

The BJP on December 1 submitted a memorandum to Governor Jishnu Dev Varma, urging him to immediately halt the implementation of HILTP, recently introduced by the Congress gov-

ernment. It alleged that the HILTP is an attempt by the state government "to hand over 9,292.53 acres of highly valuable land in Hyderabad to a politician–realtor nexus under the guise of policy reform."

Reacting to the allegations, Telangana IT and Industries Minister D Sridhar Babu said the policy does not affect government lands given on lease and only imposes conversion fees on lands owned by industrialists. "No land title transfer or freehold of government lands is involved under the policy," the minister had said.

Proposed power to EC to defer polls is not arbitrary

LAW PANEL TO THE SIMULTANEOUS POLLS COMMITTEE

PNS ■ New Delhi

The proposed power to the Election Commission in a Bill that seeks to lay a legal framework to hold simultaneous polls to the Lok Sabha and state assemblies is not excessive, the Law Commission is learnt to have told a parliamentary committee on Thursday. The law panel top brass briefed the joint Committee of Parliament examining the Bills on simultaneous elections.

During the briefing, members said the law panel also noted that the Constitution amendment Bill does not require ratification by at least 50 per cent of the state assemblies to come into force. Opposition MPs questioned the law commission officials on the constitutionality and adherence to the federal spirit in the Bill. The law commission officials briefed the committee members, but were not able to give a satisfactory answer to the questions, an opposition MP claimed.

Another opposition MP said during the meeting that elections at regular intervals provide a system of checks



and balances, as after the Lok Sabha, the people can review their choices in the assembly elections, but this would not be the case if simultaneous polls happen.

The MP said that voters are the basis of democracy, and elections at regular intervals strengthen democracy.

According to an opinion rendered by the law commission to the joint panel, it has "not even an iota of doubt" that the proposed Article 82A(5) does not suffer from excessive delegation.

The power conferred upon the Election Commission to recommend postponement of elections is neither arbitrary nor unbounded; rather, it flows naturally from the plenary constitutional authority that has been vested in the EC under Article 324, the law panel has said.

Free haircut campaign to lure voters!

PNS ■ Hyderabad

When elections come, offers to the people could be of any kind as campaign strategies.. The person making such offers may not be a politician. We have seen many kinds of free services by political parties as part of a campaign to lure voters. But here is an innovative offer unheard of so far in any election. As the political parties in

Telangana are gearing up for the local body polls to bag the maximum number of posts, the husband of a local body candidate, who is a barber, started a campaign for his wife, offering a free haircut if his wife wins in the local body polls. In Siddipet, the husband of a candidate announced free salon service if his wife is elected as a ward member. In the Raghothampalli village of Dubakka mandal, Shivani is currently contesting as a candidate for the sixth ward member of the village. Her husband, Srikanth, works as a barber and came up with the attractive campaign idea.

In a public announcement, he declared that he is willing to provide free haircuts and shaving services to all the people of the ward for five years.

TGCSB busts fake job racket in Hyderabad



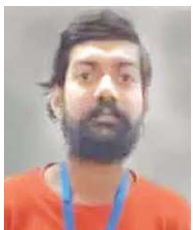
Gangala Naveen



Banothu Madanlal



Vasam Govardhan



Suggana Sudheer



Syed Mohammad Madani

PNS ■ Hyderabad

The Telangana Cyber Security Bureau (TGCSB) arrested five persons from Hyderabad, Mysore and Visakhapatnam for allegedly trafficking unemployed young men and women to Myanmar, forcing them into organised cyber-crime operations.

The accused, Vasam Govardhan, from Quthbullapur (native of Warangal); Banothu Madanlal, also from Warangal; Syed Mohammad Madani from Mysore; Suggana Sudheer Kumar from Krishna district in Andhra and Gangala Naveen, from Uppal (native of Tirupathi).

The arrests were based on a complaint by one of the victims, Charan, who stated that "agents" lured them with the promise of providing lucrative overseas jobs. "A special investigation team (SIT) was formed and the probe exposed multiple accused

persons involved in various trafficking networks," said director of Telangana State Cyber Security Bureau (TGCSB), Shikha Goel.

Prime accused Vasam Goverdhan set up YUGA, a consultancy company that promised overseas jobs. He neither registered this company as a protector of immigrants under government law, nor have valid documents or licenses to run. Through social media, he targeted desperate job seekers.

His friend and another accused, Banoth Madhanlal, met Sudheer Kumar, who provided an Instagram ID through which interviews were conducted. "Madanlal was interviewed online by a woman who sent him flight tickets to Myanmar, where he joined a Chinese-run fraud centre," Goel said.

Once there, Madanlal realised that these fraud centres offered between USD

3000 and USD 5000 as commission for every recruit.

Upon knowing, Govardhan began advertising employment opportunities and started scouting candidates online. He also set up an office in Warangal to facilitate recruitment.

It is through these advertisements that Charan contacted Goverdhan for a job. He gave a huge amount of money and travelled to Myawaddy in Myanmar. There, the young man found himself with many others like him, forced into cybercrime operations, including investment frauds, digital arrests, OTP harvesting, and honey traps.

When they resisted, they were threatened and asked to pay an amount of USD 5000, leaving them with no choice but to work. Charan and others were confined, their passports seized and forced to work 16-18 hours a day in online scam operations run by foreigners.

Diwali likely to be inscribed on UNESCO list

A CRUCIAL STEP FORWARD NEXT WEEK
DELHI GOVT TO ILLUMINATE MONUMENTS

PNS ■ New Delhi

India's bid to secure UNESCO recognition for Deepavali will take a crucial step forward next week when the festival's nomination comes up for examination at a major UNESCO meeting in Delhi, officials said. The Delhi government is planning to illuminate major historical monuments in the city with Diwali-like decorations on the likely inscription of the festival in the UNESCO's list of intangible cultural heritage, officials said on Thursday. The Ministry of Culture has contacted the Delhi government in this regard, they said. "We will illuminate major historical monuments as well as the Delhi government's buildings with diyas and other items. The main event will be held at the Red Fort," Delhi Culture Minister Kapil Mishra said.

India has submitted the nomination of Diwali to be inscribed in the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) representative list of intangible cultural heritage of humanity. "The festival is expected to be inscribed on December 10, Union Culture Minister Gajendra Shekhawat wrote to Delhi Chief Minister Rekha Gupta recently. "In this context, it is requested that Deepavali be commemorated suitably on December 10," the minister said in the letter. India is hosting the 20th session of the Intergovernmental Committee for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage (IGC20COM) from December 7-13 at the Red Fort.

Will take TG to a...

He criticised KCR for shelving the Pranahita – Chevella project, taken up with an investment of Rs. Rs 38,00 crores by former CM YS Rajashekhar Reddy in the erstwhile united Andhra Pradesh to provide irrigation facility to 16 lakh acres with 38 thousand crores. Hundreds of crores were spent to provide water to Adilabad. After the BRS came to power, the former CM abandoned the project and changed the name, village and the estimates.

The CM also took a swipe at KCR for threatening the farmers who cultivated Paddy. The People's government was giving a bonus to the farmers. 3.10 crore people were also eating fine rice.

With an estimated cost of Rs 1.50 Lakh crores, the BRS government constructed the Kaleshwaram project, which collapsed in just three years, saying that the KCR family amassed wealth through commissions from the project.

Coming down heavily on the last government for not providing jobs, the chief minister said that the people's government gave appointment letters to 61,000 selected candidates in just one year. We reformed the TGPS and filled 562 Group One and Group two jobs. The CM said more notifications will be issued to fill the vacan-

cies and the unemployed youth should start preparations for competitive exams. "My wish is that the youth of Telangana should become IAS and IPS"

The Chief Minister pointed out that Maharashtra agreed to construct a barrage at 150 meters near Tammidihiatti, but the project was shelved by the previous government and lakhs of crores have been wasted. Now, KCR family members are fighting for assets and moving on different paths.

Bonhomie reflects...

"Delighted to welcome my friend, President Putin to India. Looking forward to our interactions later this evening and tomorrow. India-Russia friendship is a time-tested one that has greatly benefited our people," the prime minister said on social media.

In the evening, Modi hosted a private dinner for the Russian president in a reciprocal gesture to the hospitality extended to the prime minister by Putin during his visit to Moscow in July last year. Modi's official residence was decorated with bright lights and flowers on the occasion.

The conversation between the two leaders over dinner is expected to set the tone for the 23rd India-Russia summit talks on Friday, which is expected to produce several tangible out-

comes to further broaden the time-tested relationship.

Boosting defence ties, insulating India-Russia trade from external pressure and exploring cooperation in small modular reactors are set to be the focus of the summit between the two leaders that is expected to be closely watched by Western capitals.

The Russian leader's visit to New Delhi has assumed greater significance as it is taking place against the backdrop of rapid downturn in India-US relations.

Following the summit, the two sides are expected to seal several agreements, including in the areas of trade.

On Friday, Putin will be accorded a ceremonial welcome and a tri-services guard of honour at Rashtrapati Bhavan, before he goes to Raj Ghat to pay homage to the memorial to Mahatma Gandhi.

It will be followed by talks between the two leaders in a restricted format and with their delegations at Hyderabad House, the venue for the summit.

Modi and Putin will also attend a business event jointly organised by the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI) and Roscongress at Bharat Mandapam.

In the evening, Putin will attend a state banquet to be hosted in his honour by

President Droupadi Murmu. The Russian leader is expected to leave India at around 9 pm on Friday.

In the summit talks, New Delhi is expected to press for addressing the increasing trade deficit caused by India's procurement of large volumes of Russian crude oil. The Russian president's trip to India is taking place at a time when India-US relations are going through possibly the worst phase in the last two decades after Washington imposed a whopping 50 per cent tariff on Indian goods, including 25 per cent levies for New Delhi's procurement of Russian crude oil.

The impact of American sanctions on India's procurement of Russian crude oil is likely to be discussed at the summit. Kremlin spokesperson Dmitry Peskov on Tuesday said New Delhi's purchase of crude oil from Russia may decline for "a brief period" in view of Western sanctions, but, at the same time, he said Moscow is taking steps to enhance the supplies.

BJP: TG rising...

Calling the highly hyped summit a "complete smoke-screen," Subash said it was shameful that a government which cannot clear pending bills, pay salaries, or fulfil its Six Guarantees is now plurg-

ing crores of public money on a summit meant solely to mislead investors and misguide the public.

He said Telangana enjoyed global respect for a decade, but within just 24 months of Congress rule, the state has been pushed into desperation, begging for investments with glossy brochures and hollow slogans.

Govt gives ₹1L...

He addressed the gathering on Thursday evening after distributing cheques to 50 candidates selected for the UPSC interview at Praja Bhavan.

The Deputy CM congratulated all those aspiring to succeed in the Civil Services and serve the state and the nation. He expressed that the more candidates from Telangana succeed, the better it is for the state, and hence, the government is extending financial support.

He explained that although many talented candidates possess immense merit, they fail to clear the Civil Services exams due to financial difficulties. To address this, the Rajiv Gandhi Civil Abhyas Hastham Scheme has been launched under the aegis of Singareni. Candidates selected for Mains receive ₹1 lakh, and those selected for the Interview receive another ₹1 lakh along with accommodation facilities in Delhi.

The government believes this assistance helps candidates meet essential expenses such as books, travel, and coaching.

In the first year, 140 candidates qualified for Mains and 20 for interviews, and all of them received financial aid in both phases. Last year, 20 candidates went to the interview, and 7 were selected for the Civil Services, which he described as commendable. The Chief Minister Revanth Reddy and the entire cabinet will personally congratulate them, he added.

This year, the number has increased significantly—around 202 qualified for Mains, and 50 candidates have been selected for interviews. He noted that while last year only 20 reached the interview stage, this year's number has risen to 50, and next year it should cross 100.

He said that although the cheques could be distributed routinely, the government arranged this interaction session to understand candidates' feedback and make the scheme more effective in the future. This interaction, he said, would inspire many.

The Deputy CM expressed hopes that all 50 candidates attending interviews this year will succeed. Even if they get allotted to other states, their love for Telangana and their parents would inspire them to contribute to the state's

development in the long run.

He reminded candidates that the financial support of ₹1 lakh each comes from the taxes paid by crores of people of Telangana. He urged them to be as responsible to society as they are toward their parents who raised them. He advised them that once they join the Civil Services, their signature should bring positive change to the lives of lakhs of citizens.

He encouraged candidates selected for Mains to immediately join good coaching centres, avoid complacency since time is limited, and prepare diligently.

He assured that a special representative of the Telangana Government would be present in Delhi to provide any support needed during the interview stage. The Deputy CM said they had decided to set up an interview board with senior bureaucrats, and he had already discussed this with the Chief Secretary.

‘Let rare rock...

Had mining continued, the eggs would have fallen on the ground and broken. People there were not aware of the presence of the eggs," Vittapu said. The WWF and animal activists reached out to forest department officials to take measures to safeguard the rock eagle owl and the eggs, he said. The quarry owner said he

halted the work at the site after being told about the presence of eggs of the rare bird.

Hyd possesses...

Quantum technology will be a major driver of economic growth for both Telangana and India. It will help attract and retain global investments across sectors and is vital for research and innovation initiatives. He noted that quantum will also play an important role in helping startups achieve their goals.

He announced that the state is setting up a Young India Startup Fund of ₹1,000 crore, with quantum startups being a key focus.

He assured that Telangana will work towards becoming a model for building a complete quantum value chain—from research in laboratories to business applications in the market. Quantum is not just for business or economic growth but is also crucial for strengthening capabilities in computing, communications, and cybersecurity.

He said Telangana's strong scientific depth, policy vision, and execution capacity will together help build a powerful ecosystem in which academia, startups, industry, and government work as partners. The Deputy Chief Minister called upon everyone to celebrate this important day, as the country is taking a major "quantum leap".



Hyd to be developed as 'Quantum City'

PNS ■ Hyderabad

The Telangana government on Thursday unveiled a comprehensive plan to develop Hyderabad as a 'Quantum City' and unveiled India's first long-term quantum strategy, aimed at positioning the State as a national and global hub for quantum technologies.

The NITI Aayog Roadmap for Quantum and Telangana Quantum Strategy was formally released at the International Institute of Information Technology, Hyderabad (IIIT-H), Gachibowli, by Deputy Chief Minister Bhatti Vikramarka, in the presence of IT and Industries Minister Duddilla Sridhar Babu.



Addressing the gathering, Sridhar Babu said quantum technology held the potential to be as transformative in the present century as electricity and the internet were in earlier eras. He said the State government had adopted a focused and long-term vision to ensure

Telangana emerged as a global leader in quantum technologies, alongside artificial intelligence and advanced digital systems.

The strategy, he said, aims to strengthen research infrastructure, cybersecurity systems, life sciences innovation, and human capital

development, while promoting cutting-edge research in quantum computing, quantum communication, sensing, and cryptographic security. The framework has been designed not merely as a policy document for the State, but as a directional roadmap for India's engagement with quantum science and technology.

As part of the initiative, the government will establish a dedicated Centre of Excellence in Quantum Technologies to serve as a national benchmark for research, testing, and high-end skills development. A Fund of Funds to support deep-tech startups and emerging technology enterprises will be launched from

the next financial year, Sridhar Babu announced.

The Minister also announced the institutionalisation of an 'Industry Day' programme, under which senior government officials will interact weekly with industry representatives, while Ministers will hold monthly consultations with business leaders to resolve operational challenges and jointly frame sector-specific growth strategies.

The event was attended by NITI Aayog Chief Executive Officer BVR Subrahmanyam, Member VK Saraswat, industry leader Debjani Ghosh, Special Chief Secretary Sanjay Kumar, senior bureaucrats, academic experts and technology entrepreneurs.

Merger of 27 civic bodies into GHMC complete

PNS ■ Hyderabad

The merger of 20 municipalities and seven corporations in the suburbs of the GHMC has been officially completed. The Municipal Administration Department issued orders (GO-264) to this effect on Wednesday.

In this context, GHMC Commissioner RV Karnan gave proceedings stating that the resolutions of the council of urban local bodies, minute books should be seized, bank accounts should be frozen and the money in them should be transferred to the GHMC account, and a board should be set up in the name of GHMC for the offices.

The proceedings came at 6 pm, handing over responsibilities to 30 Deputy Municipal Commissioners (DMCs), and the DMCs went into action at night. They went to the offices and seized records. Letters were prepared to freeze the accounts.

Administrative affairs were frozen by not issuing construction permits and not



paying bills. The proceedings stated that the municipality's structure, employees and staff details, fixed and movable assets, deposits, investments, taxes, non-tax income, ongoing schemes, works undertaken, bills to be paid, and details of building construction/layout permits issued in the last three years should be collected. Zonal Commissioners were instructed to monitor the process of acquiring records.

On Tuesday, Karnan wrote a letter to the Commissioner and Director of Municipal Administration to cooper-

ate in the acquisition and transfer of data of municipalities and corporations. The proforma for collection of details and acquisition of records was clearly mentioned in the orders. Comprehensive information related to merged municipalities will be collected. It was suggested that the details of area, grade, population as per 2001 and 2011 census, existing families, wards, slums, employees, income, expenditure, markets, etc. for the past three years should be collected in the format specified in the proceedings.

Major ganja bust: Khammam court imposes 20-year jail term

PNS ■ Khammam



Two high-profile cannabis cases in Khammam have ended with stringent jail sentences, sending a strong message against drug trafficking.

In major crackdown, Bagchand Bairwa (31) from Rajasthan was sentenced to 20 years in prison and fined Rs 1 lakh for transporting over 22 kg of cannabis from Khammam to Rajasthan on January 9, 2024. The accused was caught by DTF CI Vijender and his team, following detailed investigation by Excise officials.

In another case, Kanukarthi Sai Naveen and Nerella Sriramulu received 10-year jail terms with Rs 1 lakh fine each for carrying 7 kg cannabis near Khammam new bus stand on April 10, 2022.

Two other accused Muruswar Reddy and Battu Harish are still absconding. Khammam Deputy Commissioner Janardhan Reddy praised the efforts of the Excise and police teams for their meticulous work in cracking these cases.

37 Indigo flights cancelled from Hyd

PNS ■ Hyderabad

A chaotic situation prevailed at the Rajiv Gandhi International Airport here for the second consecutive day on Thursday as IndiGo cancelled 37 outbound flights, leaving aggrieved flyers stranded without alternative arrangements or clear communication, sources said.

A similar number of incoming flights were also cancelled by the carrier during the day, they said.

Several videos circulating on social media showed frustrated passengers arguing with the airline's staff over the cancellations and taking out protest marches inside the airport. IndiGo cancelled 19 flights from Hyderabad on Wednesday.

"Witnessing a sham service by @IndiGo6E. No officials, help desk or information available. It's chaos at @RGIAHyd, never imagined I would witness such



scenes first hand after 25 years of being a frequent flyer," Shabd Mishra Director, Renaissance eServices Ltd said in post on X along with a video purportedly showing a group of passengers chanting slogans like "Indigo bandh karo... Indigo Mordabad".

"We have been at Hyderabad Airport from yesterday at 6:00 PM until today at 9:00 AM—over 12 hours—with no action taken by IndiGo regarding the Pune flight. This situation has caused significant inconvenience," a netizen said in a post on Thursday.

Another flyer said, "Total chaos at Hyderabad airport

today — flights delayed 12+ hours. To not give accommodation, they kept pushing it by "just 2 more hours" every single time for 12 hours. Same excuse: crew is coming soon. Unacceptable."

In a statement on Wednesday, RGIA said some IndiGo flights at the airport have been impacted due to airline-related technology and operational issues, resulting in delays and cancellations. Requesting the passengers to contact IndiGo's customer service team directly for the latest updates on flight status, the airport had said that operations remain normal.

Govt clears ticket fare hike for Akhanda 2

PNS ■ Hyderabad

The Telangana government has formally approved a temporary increase in cinema ticket prices for the much-awaited film Akhanda 2, setting the premiere show ticket at Rs 600 and authorising higher fares for the first three days of its run.

According to the Government Order, a special 8:00 pm premiere show on December 4 has been sanctioned at ₹ 600 (inclusive of GST). From December 5 to December 7, ticket rates will be temporarily elevated: single-screen theatres may charge an extra Rs 50 per ticket, while multiplexes may levy an extra Rs 100.

As a condition for granting this hike, the government has mandated that 20% of the additional revenue collected from the raised ticket rates be deposited into the corpus of the Movie Artists Welfare Association aimed at supporting film workers and industry staff.

Telangana intensifies war on narcotics

PNS ■ Hyderabad

Telangana's underworld of ganja and narcotics trafficking is facing unprecedented pressure as the state's Excise Department intensified its crackdown. Officers believe that crime declines only when punishment becomes certain - and this belief is now reflected in the department's aggressive enforcement and rising conviction rates. Under the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic substances (NDPS) Act, agencies like the Excise Department, Police and investigative units have broad powers to raid, seize illegal substances and prosecute offenders. Officials emphasize that accurate chargesheets, detailed pan-channamas and reliable witness statements are crucial to securing convictions.

As more offenders face real sentences, fear among traffickers is finally beginning to grow. Upon assuming office, Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy declared a firm goal: "Make Hyderabad drug-free and eliminate narcotics across Telangana." Acting on this directive, Prohibition & Excise Commissioner C Harikiran and Excise Enforcement Director Shahnawaz Qasim launched

intensified operations.

Their teams now target ganja networks, synthetic drug suppliers, illicit liquor sellers and country-made alcohol traders with renewed vigilance. Between 2021 and 2025, the Excise Department achieved record breaking results. During this period 4,194 cases were registered, 7,131 accused were arrested, 1,824 vehicles were seized, 24,236 kg of ganja confiscated, 21,035 ganja plants destroyed.

Major drug seizures included 2,803.13 grams of MDMA, 689 LSD blots, 46.47 kg of hash oil, 383 grams of cocaine, 701.3 grams of heroin and 227.6 grams of opium. These figures highlight the department's widespread disruption of narcotics networks. Convictions are the real measure of success. Telangana has seen 22 convictions between 2014 and 2022, and from 2023 to 2025, 49 cases led to 152 offenders being convicted.

In 2025 alone, a record 22 cases resulted in punishment. Overall, 71 cases have led to convictions, giving the Excise Department a conviction rate of 3.23 per cent, higher than the 2.29 per cent recorded by the police.

Cyber criminals hack police websites in city

PNS ■ Hyderabad



Cyber criminals have shocked the police, who are constantly raising awareness and alerting the public about cyber crimes. Two websites of the police department have been hacked by hackers. Cyberabad and Rachakonda police websites have been hacked by cyber criminals. As a result, the police websites of the two commissionerates have not been working for a week.

The police suspect that malware has infiltrated the websites. It seems that the contact numbers of police officers along with the details of police stations have also been hacked. With this, the IT teams of the two commissionerates have immediately stepped into the field. They are working to resolve the problem quickly. Representatives of a Delhi-based cyber security company are working under the supervision of the National Informatics Centre (NIC) to restore the websites.

The police are updating the necessary software for the websites of the two commissionerates. The IT team is auditing the advanced firewalls so that they do not fall victim to hacking again. The cyber crime police are trying to catch the gang that hacked the websites of the two commissionerates.

Three-tier security for Global Summit reviewed

Rachakonda CP Sudheer Babu inspects arrangements



PNS ■ Hyderabad

Rachakonda CP Sudheer Babu, Additional DG Fire Vikram Singh Man and Shashank held a review meeting with various department officials on security arrangements for the Global Summit to be held in Future City, Kandukur mandal, Rangareddy district on Thursday at the Future City.

Rachakonda CP discussed with them the steps that should be taken in case of a fire and inspected the meeting venue. He advised the officials not to make any mistake in the matter of security and to work in coordination. Since this summit is being organised at an international level under the auspices of the Telangana Chief Minister, strict security arrangements should be made with the Law and Order, Traffic Police, as well as Special Branch, Intelligence, Octopus, Greyhounds, Dog and Bomb Squads.

The officials discussed the facilities required for this summit, including basic facil-

ities like barracks, mess, kitchen and toilets. Officials revealed that about 600 delegates including representatives of international investment institutions, heads of multinational corporations, prominent domestic organisations and industrial giants will be present.

There will be a three-tier security around the VIP delegates. More than a 1,000 CCTV cameras are being installed to monitor every step in the area where the Global Summit will be held. All these will be connected to the Central Police Control Room. About a 1,000 traffic police will be deployed for traffic regulation. Traffic marshals will be deployed for diversion of roads, installation of barricades and management of vehicle parking.

There will be strong police presence on the respective routes to avoid any traffic disruption or problems. There will be road diversions for the general public and motorists on the respective routes for two days.

Bordeaux team explores Hyd's heritage; GHMC presents key urban projects

PNS ■ Hyderabad

A high-level delegation from Bordeaux Métropole, led by Anne-Laure Moniot, Head of Architecture and Urban Heritage, along with Pascal Loreau, Deputy Consul of France in Hyderabad, and Hugo Cauvet, Coordinator and Focal Point for Bordeaux Métropole in Hyderabad, met GHMC Mayor Gadwal Vijayalakshmi at the GHMC Head Office on Thursday.

The Mayor and the delegation engaged in a detailed discussion on Hyderabad's rich architectural legacy and its potential to be recognised as a World Heritage City, drawing from the city's unique blend of Qutb Shahi, Asaf Jahi and modern urban heritage. The delegation later held meetings with GHMC Commissioner RV Karnan, Additional Commissioner Anurag Jayanti, QOSUDA, and NIUM to review ongoing initiatives in urban heritage conservation, infrastructure improvement and development projects—particularly those underway in the Old

City under QOSUDA. The Musi Riverfront Development Project was also presented to the team. As part of the field study, the delegation visited key heritage assets including Osmania General Hospital, Old MCH Office, Sardar Mahal, Khurshheed Jah Devdi, and iconic landmarks such as



visited key heritage assets including Osmania General Hospital, Old MCH Office, Sardar Mahal, Khurshheed Jah Devdi, and iconic landmarks such as

Dog attack: Minister Adluri visits injured boy, announces Rs1 lakh aid

PNS ■ Hyderabad

SC, ST & Divyang Welfare Minister Adluri Lakshman visited Prem Chand, the boy injured in a dog attack at Shivaganga Colony, LB Nagar, and assured full government assistance.

Acting on directions from Chief Minister Revanth Reddy, the Minister handed over an immediate relief cheque of ₹ 1 lakh to the family at Niloufer Hospital. The Minister announced that the family will receive an Indiramma house, while the child will be provided special school admission, disability ID card, and disability



pension.

He also confirmed that the government will take responsibility for the boy's complete medical treatment

and rehabilitation.

Lakshmi instructed officials to respond swiftly to similar incidents in future and ensure timely support to

affected families. Senior officials from the Welfare Department and Niloufer Hospital staff were present during the visit.

TGHRC takes cognizance of stray-dog attack on child

PNS ■ Hyderabad

The Telangana State Human Rights Commission (TGHRC), chaired by Dr Justice Shameem Akther, has initiated suo motu proceedings (SR No. 3907/2025) following multiple news reports on a horrific stray-dog attack on an eight-year-old speech-disabled boy, Premchand, from Sivaganga Colony in Hayathnagar.

According to reports, the child suffered grievous injuries - including the severing of an ear - after being mauled by a pack of stray dogs on December 3. The incident has sparked serious concerns regarding public safety, gaps in stray-dog control mecha-

nisms and possible violations of the child's fundamental right to life and dignity.

Taking note of these concerns, the Commission has sought comprehensive reports from the Commissioner of GHMC and the District Collector of Rangareddy. The authorities have been asked to detail the circumstances surrounding the attack, the boy's current medical condition, the status of sterilisation and preventive measures in the area, and compliance with Supreme Court guidelines on stray-dog management. The Commission has directed that the reports be submitted by December 29 at 11 am.



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Order Order

HC declines to put on hold order allowing lighting of oil lamp on TN hill



The Madurai Bench of the Madras High Court on Thursday declined to stay an order of a single judge allowing the lighting of traditional "Karthigai Deepam" oil lamp at a stone pillar, meant for that purpose, on the Thirupparankundram hill, housing the Lord Subramaniya Swamy temple. A bench led by Justice G Jayachandran and Justice KK Ramakrishnan declined to interfere with the order of Justice GR Swaminathan allowing the lighting of the lamp on the hill.

On December 1, Justice Swaminathan allowed writ petitions that sought a direction for appropriate arrangements to light the Karthigai Deepam at the "Dheepathoon," which is the stone pillar. A devotee Ram Ravi Kumar approached the High Court, represented by Advocate MR Venkatesh. By lighting the lamp at Deepathoon, which is meant for that purpose, the structure of the Dargha is not in any way affected and the Dargha is located at a safe distance of not less than 50 meters away from the stone pillar, the judge had said in the order.

Ensure 30 per cent quota for women lawyers in State Bar Councils, SC to BCI



The Supreme Court on Thursday asked the Bar Council of India (BCI) to ensure 30 per cent reservation for women in the upcoming State bar council elections. The top court, while hearing a petition seeking mandatory women's representation in state bar councils, was told by the apex bar body BCI that implementing such reservation would require amendments to the Advocates Act.

"We expect that the BCI will construe the rules in such a manner that it will ensure 30 per cent reservation in State Bar Councils; such a position should also be available for some posts of office bearers," said the bench comprising Chief Justice Surya Kant and Justice Joyimalya Bagchi.

When the lawyer for the BCI expressed uncertainty on whether sufficient number of women lawyers would contest, the bench referred to a workshop held by the Supreme Court Bar Association based on a survey among women lawyers. "You were not there in yesterday's workshop. 83 per cent of the women want to be members in the SCBA," the CJ said.

Delhi HC asks MEA to facilitate communication between Celina, her brother detained in UAE

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

The Delhi High Court on Thursday asked the Centre to facilitate communication between actor Celina Jaitley and her brother, a former Indian Army officer detained in the UAE for more than a year.

The court was hearing a plea filed by the actor seeking effective legal representation for her brother Major Vikrant Kumar Jaitley (ret'd).

The actor's application claimed that her brother has been residing in the UAE since 2016. She said that he was employed with the MATITI Group, which is engaged in trading, consultancy, and risk management services.

Major Vikrant had been "illegally abducted and detained" in the UAE on September 6 last year, the petition said.

However, despite the passage of over one year, the Ministry of External Affairs



Celina Jaitley

(MEA) has failed to secure basic information about the actor's brother, including his welfare conditions and legal status, the plea alleged.

On November 3, the court had directed the Government to file its response.

On Thursday, Justice Sachin Datta directed the MEA to inform Major Vikrant in the next consular access that his sister wished to talk to him.

Besides, Justice Dutta also asked the MEA to facilitate Celina's communication with her brother via the TAMM

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SC asks States to provide more staff to ECI

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

Taking note of a plea alleging extreme work pressure faced by the Booth Level Officers (BLOs) engaged in the time-bound special revision of the electoral rolls, the Supreme Court directed the States on Thursday to consider deputing additional employees for reducing their working hours.

The court was hearing an application filed by actor Vijay's party, Tamilaga Vetri Kazhagam (TVK), seeking a direction to the Election Commission of India (ECI) not to take coercive actions under the Representation of the People (RP) Act against the BLOs for not performing the duty in a time-bound manner and pointing out that many of them have committed suicide due to the work pressure.

A bench of Chief Justice Surya Kant and Justice Joyimalya Bagchi took note of the submissions made by senior advocate Gopal Sankaranarayanan, who appeared in the matter for the TVK, that some instructions are needed to be issued as many BLOs, who are either teachers or anganwadi workers, have died due to the extreme pressure exerted on them by EC officials.

Sankaranarayanan said moreover, the EC officials are also getting FIRs lodged against the BLOs if they fail to perform their duties.

The CJ said the States may consider deploying additional staff, so that the work pressure is eased. "In

case they are facing hardships, including being overburdened with their routine duties as well as the additional duties assigned by the Election Commission, the State Government can obviate such hardships," the bench noted.

The States may consider the "desirability of deputing additional staff at the disposal of the EC, so that the working hours can be proportionately reduced", an order issued by the court said.

The bench said if any employee has any "specific reason" for seeking exemption from the SIR duty, the competent officer of the state can consider such requests on a case-to-case basis and replace such an employee with another.

"However, it shall not be construed or understood as if they can withdraw the employees who have been assigned the duty if their substitutes are not provided," it added.

The court further said the States where the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of the electoral rolls is underway, "shall be obligated to deploy the requisite workforce at the disposal of the EC, though the strength of such employees can be increased as explained above".

The bench disposed of the plea, saying the other prayers like seeking ex-gratia compensation for the BLOs who died during SIR duties can be revived later, either by the aggrieved persons or the petitioner, by filing another application at a later stage. During the hearing, Sankaranarayanan said FIRs under section 32 of the RP Act



have been filed by the poll panel against BLOs.

Section 32 of the Act deals with a breach of official duty by electoral officers, making it punishable with imprisonment and fines for neglecting their duties related to the electoral rolls.

The senior lawyer said BLOs are not equipped to perform the SIR duties in such a short span of time and moreover, there are internet-related issues. He said the teachers and anganwadi workers have to go for SIR duties early morning or late at night, before or after their regular work.

He said a youngster, who had to go on leave for his wedding, was denied leave and suspended.

"He committed suicide.... When

you are doing this, at least show the human side. Criminal action is harsh, it should not be initiated," the lawyer said. The bench said the state Governments cannot run away from their obligation.

"If there is a difficulty being experienced, then on a case-to-case basis, the State Government can exempt employees and provide an alternative," the CJ said. "Why should the Election Commission register FIRs?" Sankaranarayanan asked. "It is not for the first time, earlier also they have been registering it," the CJ said.

Senior advocate Kapil Sibal said the pressure on the BLOs is a "harsh reality". Citing the example of Uttar Pradesh, the CJ said the election in the State is due in 2027, yet the BLOs

are asked to complete the exercise in a time-bound manner.

The bench said no state has so far approached the court citing difficulties. Senior advocates Rakesh Dwivedi and Maninder Singh, appearing in the matter for the EC, said in Tamil Nadu, more than 90 per cent of the enumeration forms have been supplied.

Dwivedi said the poll panel resorted to criminal proceedings only when the BLOs showed reluctance to perform their duties. He said such arguments are used to create a particular kind of political narrative.

On November 30, the EC extended the entire schedule for the ongoing SIR exercise in nine States and three Union territories by a week, amid allegations by opposition parties that the "tight timelines" were causing problems for people and ground-level poll officials.

The EC announced the SIR in the nine states and three Union territories on October 27. Nearly 51 crore electors will be covered in the massive voter-list cleanup exercise.

These states and Union territories are — the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, Lakshadweep, Chhattisgarh, Goa, Gujarat, Kerala, Madhya Pradesh, Puducherry, Rajasthan, Tamil Nadu, Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal.

Among these, Tamil Nadu, Puducherry, Kerala and West Bengal are scheduled go to polls in 2026. For Assam, where polls are also due in 2026, the revision of the electoral rolls was announced separately.

No GST on leasing out residential premises as hostel for students: SC

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

The Supreme Court on Thursday held that leasing out of residential premises to an entity which is using it as hostel for students and working professionals is exempted from GST.

A bench of justices JB Pardiwala and KV Viswanathan upheld the verdict of the Karnataka High Court which said that leasing out of residential premises to an entity which is using it as hostel to students and working professionals is exempt under GST.

"In the case on hand, the ultimate use of the property as residence remains unchanged. However, if 18 per cent GST is levied on this transaction between the respondent No. 1 and the lessee ie, M/s DTwelve Spaces Private Limited, the same would ultimately be passed on to the students and working professionals which would lead to a situation where the legislative intent behind granting exemption for residential use is defeated," the bench said.

The top court was hearing a plea filed by a co-owner of the residential property having 42 rooms in Bengaluru.

The petitioner along with

other co-owners executed a lease deed in favour of the lessee, namely M/s D Twelve Spaces Private Limited.

The lessee leased out the aforesaid residential property as hostel for long term accommodation to students and working professionals with the duration of stay ranging from three to 12 months.

The petitioner sought clarification with regard to its eligibility to seek exemption for the renting services provided and filed an application before the Authority of Advance Ruling, Karnataka.

The AAR, Karnataka held that the renting of residential dwelling for use as residence is not covered under entry 13 and the benefit of exemption according to notification is not available.

The petitioner filed an appeal before the Appellate Authority for Advance Ruling which held that the property rented out is a hostel and cannot be termed as residential accommodation or residential dwelling and denied the benefit of exemption.

The Karnataka High Court held that the leasing out of residential premises to an entity who is using it as 'hostel' to students and working professionals is exempt under GST.

SC asks all High Courts to submit details of pending acid attack cases in four weeks

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

Terming tardy trials in acid attack cases as a "mockery of the system", the Supreme Court on Thursday directed all the High Courts to submit details of such pending cases across the country within four weeks.

Mooting the idea of setting up special courts for expeditious disposal of acid attack cases, the top court also asked the Centre to consider amending the law through legislation or even an ordinance so that the survivors are formally included within the definition of persons with disabilities under the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act to avail welfare schemes. A bench comprising Chief Justice Surya Kant and Justice Joyimalya Bagchi also issued notices to the Centre and the Department of Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities on a PIL filed by acid attack survivor Shaheen Malik that the victims be categorised as persons with disabilities to ensure access to welfare schemes.

Solicitor General Tushar Mehta assured the court that the issue would be taken up with "due seriousness" by the Government.

The bench termed as "national shame" the prolonged delay of 16 years in Malik's own case, which has been pending since 2009 before a Rohini court here.

Malik, who also argued personally, said that she was attacked in 2009, yet the trial has still not concluded. 'Mere saath 2009 mein attack hua tha, abhi tak trial chal raha hai' (I was attacked in 2009; the trial is still going on)," she said. Till 2013, nothing happened in the case and the trial, which is now taking place in Rohini in Delhi, is now at the stage of final hearing, she said. Expressing surprise over the delay of over 16 years, the CJ said, "The offence is of 2009 and the trial is not completed! If the National Capital cannot respond to these challenges, then who will deal with them? It is a shame on the system! This is a national shame."

The CJ asked Malik to file an application in the PIL itself explaining why the matter has not been concluded, assuring her that the court may even take suo motu cognisance. The CJ said the trial in her case must be held on a day-to-day basis. "Issue notice. Learned Solicitor General who was present in the court has graciously accepted notice.

"He has also expressed concern

about the causes raised in the instant petition. We also direct the registrar generals of all high courts to furnish the details of pending trials in the cases of acid attack victims in their respective jurisdiction," the bench ordered.

The CJ said that the aspect of pendency of cases and covering acid attack victims within the definition of persons with disabilities will be taken up after four weeks. The bench, however, said that it will take up next week the issue of the delay in the trial in Malik's case at a Rohini court here.

During the hearing, Malik highlighted the plight of victims who are forced to ingest acid, often surviving with artificial feeding tubes and severe disabilities. The CJ expressed shock and said he had heard about the incidents of acid-throwing but had never come across cases where victims were forced to consume acid. CJ Kant further remarked that these offences ought to be tried in special courts, given the gravity and the impact on survivors. "This is a mockery of the system. There should be no sympathy for such persons (accused)," he said.

The perpetrators "should meet with the same ruthlessness as done by them," the solicitor general said.

States Focus



CENTRE BEGINS 100-DAY PUSH FOR CHILD MARRIAGE-FREE INDIA

Union Minister of Women and Child Development Annapurna Devi on Thursday said child marriage snatches childhood away from daughters and pushes them towards early maternity and "unimaginable suffering". She was speaking at the launch of a '100-day Intensive Awareness Campaign for a Child Marriage Free Bharat', where she stressed that the country must adopt "zero tolerance" towards child marriage. The minister urged states, civil society groups, and community leaders to unite with an "unwavering commitment" to eliminate the practice. She said India had made "historic progress", but that far more remained to be done. "Even one child marriage is unacceptable for us," she said.



ODISHA GOVT SANCTIONS ₹1 CRORE FOR DHANU JATRA FESTIVAL

The Odisha Government on Thursday sanctioned ₹1 crore for Baragarh's Dhanu Jatra, during which the town transforms into an open-air theatre with the life of Lord Krishna being enacted over 11 days. The decision was taken at a meeting chaired by Odia Language, Literature & Culture Minister Suryabanshi Suraj. The festival is scheduled to be held from December 24 to January 3.

Chaos at West Bengal CEO office as BLOs protest SIR deadlines

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ Kolkata

There quite a commotion outside the office of the State Chief Electoral Officer (CEO) when a large section of the Trinamool Congress backed booth level officers — engaged in the special intensive revision (SIR) of electoral rolls on Thursday staged a restive demonstration demanding extension of the submission of enumeration forms.

A group of 400 strong officials of BLO Protection Committee shouted slogans against the Election Commission of India (ECI) and breached the barricades trying to enter the CEO office where they were stopped by the security forces forcing them to stage a sit-in.

Accompanied by the family members of the BLOs who had died during the SIR they complained "we have been running against time and are on the verge of a breakdown. We have to attend to our duties in schools, remain awake all night to digitise the enumeration forms the ECI has not been extending the deadline despite our appeal to do so they are issuing fresh notifications and orders over WhatsApp every day," one of the agitating BLOs said.

Incidentally about 99 per cent of the enumeration forms had been digitized in Bengal which stood fourth behind Lakshwadeep, Rajasthan and Goa in terms of digitizing the forms. Meanwhile, Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee once again thundered from a rally in Murshidabad district accusing once again Union Home Minister Amit Shah for creating a panic of President's Rule in Bengal so as to enforce an "unplanned SIR" in two months "which is a work of two years." She said "it was Amit Shah's trick to enforce SIR with a hidden threat of President's Rule if we had blocked SIR then they would have enforced a President's Rule," adding however that till she was there she would not allow anyone to

TMC suspends MLA for planning Babri Mosque replica

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ Kolkata

The Trinamool Congress (TMC) has finally suspended maverick yet, powerful party legislator and former minister from Murshidabad Humayun Kabir for trying to "communalise" the political situation by announcing his plans to construct a Babri Mosque in his district and later in all the districts of the State.

Announcing the decision senior party leader Firhad Hakim on Thursday said that despite being cautioned against making communal remarks Kabir chose to remain indifferent to the party line leading to his suspension.

"We cautioned him twice and asked him to refrain from communally sensitive remarks but he still refused to mend his ways that is why we have taken the decision to suspend him, the party will have no relation with him hence forward," Hakim who besides being the Mayor of Kolkata and a senior member



West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee during a public rally at Berhampore in Murshidabad district West Bengal on Thursday

of Mamata Banerjee Cabinet as well as the TMC's Muslim face said.

Kabir a former Congress leader was initially mentored by the then Behrampur MP Adhir Chowdhury before the both parted ways and the

former joined the TMC.

Considered a leader with considerable following is an MLA from Bharatpur constituency of Murshidabad district.

"The party leadership noticed that an MLA from

Murshidabad had been making unnecessary, irresponsible and communal remarks he was cautioned thrice but he would not listen then he suddenly declared that he would construct a Babri Masjid in his district

Shiv Sena leader alleges theft from Karnataka bank locker

TN RAGHUNATHA ■ Mumbai

In a shocking development, Shiv Sena (Shinde) deputy leader and former MLA Krishna Hegde has lodged a complaint with the police alleging a 'theft' of valuables from his safe deposit locker in the strong-room of the Parle East branch of Karnataka Bank in north-west Mumbai.

In his complaint lodged with the Vile Parle Police Station, Hegde said he had kept in his ban locker several valuables — including his mother's jewellery, cash and some key documents — on September 19 and when he opened the locker on October 22, he found many of the items in it had gone missing.

Apart from his mother's jewellery, cash and some key documents, the other items kept in his burgled bank locker included his licensed revolver and watches. "Some of the items in my locker have gone missing," Hegde said. He however did not disclose the estimated value of the articles lost.

Following the "theft", he had taken up the matter with bank's branch manager Manish Kumar, Cluster Manager Hari Sarin, DGM Rajgopala Bhatt and others on November 27.

On the following day, he submitted a formal theft complaint with Vile Parle Police Station Senior Police Inspector Gabaji Chintre; and

a probe is underway.

Accusing the bank management of delaying the internal probe and attempting him to deter him from lodging a complaint, Hegde said: "The bank officials did not act quickly on my complaint. They called a Godrej key-maker and involved the bank's internal vigilance. This was not to probe the theft, but to bury the matter and somehow deter me from filing a police complaint".

"There is utter lack of response from the Karnataka Bank's top brass. I have sent several emails to the Managing Director and CEO, Raghvendra Bhat, but I have not received a single reply from him. The only responses I have received are from

the very branch where my locker was burgled".

Hegde alleged that the modus operandi behind the lock theft could be that the miscreants had made duplicate keys of mostly dormant lockers with the help of some unscrupulous locksmiths as the banks already hold the 'master key' to all lockers.

While seeking stringent action is needed against all the offenders, Hegde said that banks must modernize security and surveillance systems. Bank customers deserve protection, not excuses.

Hegde said that he had approached the ombudsman of the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) for necessary action in the matter.

Tezpur University shutdown enters 6th day as proposal rejected

TONY DAS ■ Guwahati

The shutdown by students of Tezpur University in Assam entered its sixth day on Thursday over their demand for the removal of the vice-chancellor, while staffers of the varsity rejected Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma's proposal for the appointment of a pro VC.

State Congress president Gaurav Gogoi has also accused Sarma of "masking the failures" of current VC Shambhu Nath Singh by suggesting the appointment of a pro vice chancellor.

The students of the varsity have been protesting since mid-September for alleged corruption and financial irregularities, and have started the shutdown of all academic activities on the campus from November 29 for an indefinite period. A faculty member said the shutdown has been relaxed for departmental emergencies and pending work for a few hours in the morning for three days since Wednesday.



Sarma on Wednesday said he had spoken to Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan regarding the shutdown of Tezpur University and urged him to appoint a pro VC immediately, pending an impartial enquiry into the conduct of the present VC.

"The Tezpur University fraternity strongly rebuts the Assam chief minister's recent statement regarding the ongoing crisis on the campus. His suggestion to appoint a pro vice chancellor reflects a clear misunderstanding of the movement's

long-standing and repeatedly communicated demand: the urgent appointment of an acting vice chancellor," Tezpur University United Forum (TUUF) said in a statement late on Wednesday.

The ongoing agitation in the central varsity in Sonitpur district is being carried out under the aegis of the TUUF.

The forum also claimed that the university has been in "turmoil" for 76 days, and during the entire period, the chief minister "chose to remain silent".

"His sudden involvement

- only after the situation gained national attention - raises serious concern about whether he is acting out of genuine responsibility or political self-preservation," the TUUF questioned.

The chief minister "ignored the crisis for weeks" despite continuous protests, appeals and institutional paralysis, the forum alleged, adding that "leadership demands timely engagement, not last-minute statements".

"Our demands remain unchanged - immediate suspension of the current vice chancellor, pending enquiry, appointment of an acting vice chancellor — not a pro VC and publication of all inquiry reports already submitted to authorities," the TUUF added.

Gogoi has also expressed his 'disappointment' with the chief minister's stand on the issues.

"Real leadership would have meant that the chief minister would have stood with the faculty, staff and students of this prestigious uni-

versity. Instead, the chief minister is masking the failures of the current vice chancellor by suggesting a pro vice chancellor," he said in a post on X on Thursday.

Citing old news reports, Gogoi claimed that there were "enquiries about financial irregularities from the office of Principal Accountant General" during Singh's term as VC of Patna University in Bihar.

"It would be best that the prestige of Tezpur University should be paramount, and a new Vice Chancellor be appointed. Stop using the University of Northeast for posting controversial VCs," the Congress deputy leader in the Lok Sabha added.

All end-term examinations have been cancelled, and other activities have also stopped in the varsity.

The Tezpur University Teachers' Association (TUTA) and Tezpur University Non-Teaching Employees' Association (TUNTEA) have extended their support to the agitation.

BJP MLAs walk out of Himachal Assembly over alleged lathi charge on ABVP workers

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE

■ Dharamshala/Shimla

BJP legislators walked out of the Himachal Pradesh Assembly on Thursday in protest of the alleged lathi charge on ABVP workers near the Zorawar Stadium in Dharamshala.

Raising a point of order after the question hour, Leader of Opposition Jai Ram Thakur said the sub-divisional magistrate (SDM), Dharamshala, had granted permission to the Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad (ABVP) to organise the protest march to the Zorawar Stadium, yet the police resorted to lathi charge on the protesters.

He also accused the chief minister of misleading the House, saying Sukhu had earlier told the assembly that the ABVP had not been granted permission for the protest demonstration.

Several people were



Leader of Opposition in Himachal Pradesh Assembly Jai Ram Thakur speaking with the media during the Winter session of the State Assembly in Dharamshala on Thursday

injured following a scuffle between ABVP activists and the police at the Zorawar ground on Wednesday after workers of the RSS-affiliated students' organisation arrived in large numbers to gherao the Vidhan Sabha to press for their demands.

The ABVP workers alleged that women activists were

kicked by male police personnel and demanded action against the police, specifically the suspension of station house officer, Dharamshala, for taking the ABVP workers to a community hall after the protest, and allegedly threatening and thrashing them.

As per Chief Minister

soon announce my formal decision to float a new political party and will field candidates in all the districts I don't believe in blank fires I am saying this with enough confidence that the Muslim people of Bengal are disgusted with the TMC and its leadership they do not want to be exploited any more...My will be a truly secular party evenly represented by all the communities now we will show what we can do," Kabir who is likely to lay the foundation stone of his proposed Babri Mosque on December 6 said.

Meanwhile, Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Thursday said that there were some leaders who were in the payroll of the BJP and were trying to harm the secular ambience of the State. Though she would not name anyone she said, "we will not tolerate communalisation of politics by anyone or members of any community these people are being paid by the BJP to communally divide the voters" to make way for the saffron party.

Ruling BJP confronts its own bureaucracy in MP

GIRISH SHARMA ■ Bhopal

Ministers and BJP MLAs in Madhya Pradesh are preparing to open a coordinated front against what they describe as an increasingly unresponsive bureaucracy. They have decided to lodge a formal complaint with the chief minister, arguing that administrative resistance is now disrupting governance and weakening the authority of elected representatives.

The latest flashpoint surfaced at the Madhya Pradesh BJP headquarters, where two ministers are stationed each day under a new coordination mechanism meant to improve interaction with party workers. Minister of State for Housing and Urban Development Pratima Bagri, who handled the outreach on Thursday, said the arrangement helps workers raise issues directly with ministers. But she stressed that the core problem lies in the functioning of the bureaucracy.

Bagri said ministers and MLAs are routinely facing situations where officials ignore their calls or fail to act on instructions. This, she said, has slowed file movement, delayed constituency work and created unnecessary pressure on elected representatives. Bagri also noted that she had recently raised a similar concern during a cabinet meeting, stating that officials "do not listen to ministers," a remark that drew attention to a widening internal governance rift.

The decision to approach the chief minister comes after months of complaints from lawmakers across regions. MLAs from Malwa, Bundelkhand, Gwalior-Chambal and tribal districts report a growing pattern of



administrative officers taking unilateral decisions without political consultation. Many say district-level functioning has become excessively rigid, with approvals and clearances moving at a pace far slower than what developmental targets require.

This strain comes at a critical time. Madhya Pradesh is entering a heavy implementation cycle for infrastructure, urban development, agriculture-linked interventions and welfare expansions for 2025-26. Any breakdown in coordination between the political leadership and the administrative machinery risks delaying flagship projects and weakening service delivery in high-need areas.

Public frustration mirrors these concerns. Citizens in several districts report long delays in land records, housing approvals, ration updates, pension processing and municipal permissions. In many cases, appeals routed through MLAs or ministers have failed to accelerate action, strengthening the perception that bureaucracy — not elected representatives — is controlling governance outcomes.

The emerging confrontation has triggered internal debate within the ruling BJP. Senior leaders argue that democratic accountability must guide administrative behaviour, not the other way around.

Sukhwinder Singh Sukhu's statement on Wednesday, one male and three female police constables were injured in the scuffle and six people were injured due to the agitation.

During the protest, ABVP workers also misbehaved with a female constable, which the Government has taken seriously, he said.

The leader of opposition also raised the issue of Youth Congress workers burning and kicking an effigy of Prime Minister Narendra Modi outside the Raj Bhavan earlier in November.

Terming the incident as unfortunate, he questioned whether the authorities had taken any action against the Youth Congress workers responsible for this.

He then said the BJP legislative party was walking out of the House in protest of the lathi charge on the ABVP activists.



Editor's
TAKE

Putin visit: Reaffirming Indo-Russian solidarity

Russian President's visit carries significance beyond ceremony, reinforcing India's strategic autonomy and its pursuit of an independent foreign policy

India and Russia have been friends since the cold war days when India refused to join the western bloc and charted its Non-aligned course. It came at its own peril as the US sided with Pakistan and was suspicious of India's intention. But the gamble paid off as India maintained its independent foreign policy without budging to the US pressure. Russia supported it in the times of crisis and the friendship endured.

In the present context too, this holds good as India has refused to bow to the US pressure and maintained steady relation with Russia. Russian President Vladimir Putin's state visit to New Delhi will go a long way in cementing this relationship as both countries need each other than ever before. For India, the visit is far more than a diplomatic formality. It is a reaffirmation of a long-standing partnership, a signal of continuity in a turbulent world, and above all, a clear articulation of India's strategic autonomy at a time when Western world continue to frown upon India's import of discounted Russian oil. The visit is packed with symbolism and substance — from a ceremonial welcome at Rashtrapati Bhavan to paying homage at Raj Ghat, and from restricted talks at Hyderabad House to the annual India-Russia Summit, every segment reflects the depth of a relationship that has withstood vagaries of time and pressure from external actors.

This is also an occasion for balancing a heavily skewed trade basket. Although bilateral trade touched \$68 billion last year, driven largely by India's purchase of Russian oil, India's exports amounted to less than \$5 billion. The business forum organised jointly by FICCI and Roscongress was therefore crucial. Defence cooperation, traditionally the bedrock of the partnership, is set to deepen further following the visit. Just ahead of the visit, the Russian Duma ratified the Reciprocal Exchange of Logistics Agreement (RELOS), which will facilitate the movement and support of warships, military aircraft, and personnel to India. Modeled on India's Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement (LEMOA) with the US, Reciprocal Exchange of Logistics (RELOS) with Russia represents a modernisation of the defence relationship, enabling more joint exercises, humanitarian missions, and interoperability. Ongoing discussions over the supply of S-400 systems, Su-57 aircraft, and small modular nuclear reactors further underline Russia's continuing relevance to India's military and energy security architecture.

Besides, the geopolitical context of the visit cannot be ignored. Since the Ukraine conflict began, India has faced sustained pressure from Western countries to reduce its economic and strategic engagement with Moscow. Yet New Delhi has resisted these demands, choosing instead to prioritise its national interest. Putin's visit, therefore, is a reminder that India's foreign policy is shaped neither by the US pressure nor by ideological factors but by its national interest. With agreements spanning trade, agriculture, defence, academia, and media — one message stands out: the India-Russia relationship is evolving and is here to stay.



PRAFULL
GORADIA

Lately, Shri Mohan Bhagwat, RSS chief, has been speaking with renewed urgency about the unity of India. His concerns are not new. In truth, questions about the cohesion of the subcontinent have echoed since the passing of Akbar. During his nearly half-century rule, Akbar ensured that the people of northern India - and indeed their very souls — breathed in a common rhythm. The south, though geographically distant, shared a civilisational bond that had endured for centuries. Yet since the end of the 12th century, this bond was never fully spontaneous. Every ruler who ascended the throne of Delhi, including the remarkable Razia Sultan, was quietly scrutinised with a single question: is this monarch a sovereign first and a Muslim second — or the other way round?

Akbar was exceptional precisely because he answered this question with unusual clarity. For him, kingship was not a secondary identity — it was the first and the last. His life offered little room for confusion. At just thirteen, he found himself in the storm of the Second Battle of Panipat.

Over the next five years, as he consolidated his power, he thought deeply about the nature of his rule. He realised that he was destined to govern an empire in which nearly 97 per cent of his subjects were Hindu. His long-term success required not merely their obedience but their goodwill. This did not mean antagonising Muslims, but it certainly meant displeasing an orthodox clergy that envisioned the empire under the Nizam-e-Mustafa, where political authority followed religious guidance. Akbar chose a different path — one that placed the stability of the realm above sectarian demands.

Most rulers of the Delhi Sultanate and later the Mughal Empire, however, presided over a realm that resembled what Tipu Sultan would later proudly call a "religious state." The consequence was a deep and often painful divide: rulers and their beneficiaries stood on one side, while the vast Hindu populace remained on the other.

Hindus were routinely called kafir — a term denoting a non-believer, but one that soon came to be understood as an insult in daily life. They were tolerated as taxpayers, artisans and the economic backbone of the empire. For military service, they were summoned when necessary, but rarely trusted with command. A sense of distance persisted, even when peace prevailed.

In medieval India, ideas such as "the souls of all citizens breathing together" to define nationality had not yet been articulated; such expressions would arise much later in Europe.

India's civilisational cohesion

What emerges from this long arc of history is a simple truth: India's unity has never rested on sameness, but on a civilisational ethos that embraces plurality while sustaining a shared rhythm of life



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SWAMI
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DURING HIS VISIT
TO THE UNITED
STATES, CHOSE TO
USE THE TERMS
"VEDANTA" AND
"VEDANTISM"

The writer is a well-known columnist, author, and former member of the Rajya Sabha

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The Pioneer

Yet India had its own notion of unity - dosti ki ekta, the harmony of friendship and coexistence. This unity was not spoken of daily, but it revealed itself in moments of crisis: in the long turmoil of Kashmir, or even in the occasional tensions in Tamil Nadu that could reverberate across the subcontinent. Indians instinctively sensed that unity was not a poetic abstraction but a lived necessity.

The trauma of 1947 was the most severe test of this idea of unity. One-third of the country broke away to follow Mr Jinnah's vision. Yet within twenty-four years, in 1971, more than half of Pakistan rejected that very vision, abandoning the dream of a "New Medina."

The episode demonstrated that religious identity alone cannot hold a country together. What many in the subcontinent failed to grasp — then or now — is that Hinduism, with its inductive, voluntary and internally diverse nature, forms a deeper and more enduring basis for unity than a rigid, prescriptive ideology.

The Hindu ethos, often described simply as "culture", has historically fostered an implicit unity across India's immense diversity. One example is the idea of karma.

A Hindu is taught to believe that one's circumstances are shaped by one's own past actions. Whether or not one remembers the details of past lives, the underlying philosophy encourages introspection rather than blame. A Hindu tends to hold oneself responsible for adversity, instead of attributing calamity to

others or to the state. This worldview, for centuries, prevented large-scale politicisation of suffering. Had the population of western Pakistan embraced such a view, its violent break from its eastern wing might have unfolded very differently.

The greatest virtue of Hinduism is that it is rarely against anyone. Precisely for this reason, Swami Vivekananda, during his visit to the United States, chose to use the terms "Vedanta" and "Vedantism." He wanted to make it clear that Hinduism was not a negation of other faiths but a vast philosophical tradition.

Significantly, India has never witnessed a Hindu-Christian riot, even in regions like Nagercoil where conversions have been widespread. Scuffles may have occurred, but not large-scale communal violence. The more frequent historical clashes were between Hindus and Muslims, often triggered by anxieties nurtured by sections of the clergy. From time to time, religious leaders warned their communities that a relaxed attitude might allow Hindus to grow complacent — or even to grow in number. Partition, however, dramatically reduced the political potency of this rhetoric.

Across these centuries, one truth has quietly endured: the unity of India does not rest on uniformity of religion, language or ethnicity. It rests on a civilisational ethos — rooted in Hindu thought yet open to all — that absorbs difference without erasing it. Akbar sensed this. Modern India, too, must remember it.

The Pioneer
SINCE 1865

Gen Z inspires carefree living and confidence



ASHA IYER
KUMAR

2ND OPINION
THE PIONEER

Pushing into the second half of my fifties can feel like either a renaissance after a lifetime of plodding or a slow slide into becoming a relic condemned to decrepitude. For me, navigating this terrain has taken an unexpected turn. I now find myself looking up to a generation many decades younger, with equal measures of wariness and admiration. Gen Z has me quite jazzed these days. There is something about them that intrigues me, even drawing me to emulate certain aspects of their disposition.

The criticisms laid against them by older generations are plentiful. The cavernous gap that exists between them and us manifests in many ways. There is a mutual 'sus' that pervades our interactions, and their presence invariably makes me feel like I lack the 'rizz'. Like many in my generation, I

too have had qualms about the way they conduct the business of life, but I now wonder if their new ways are being misunderstood and dismissed by us rather too quickly.

Gen Z has grown up in a world that demands constant self-presentation on social media, in academics, in job markets, and in every space they inhabit. They don't have it easy anywhere. Confidence, for them, is not vanity; it is a survival skill. Even when they're unsure, they must sound sure. Older generations mistake that certitude for arrogance. That very conviction mirrors back the diffidence I carried through my youth, even in a world far less competitive than theirs. I envy the self-assurance they possess. I wish I could borrow a fragment of it now, to keep myself afloat in a world that seems to be in rush hour all day.

There are traits that mark them as products of a modern age to which we are somewhat alien. Yet they get several things right—skills that help them navigate life with striking ease. They do not glorify suffering and are unapologetic about setting boundaries. They keep toxicity at bay and walk away from manipulation without hesitation. You cannot arm-twist them; they know better. I find this deeply admirable. Gen Z has no desire to appear perfect. They are cavalier in their ways and do not take critics too seriously. Their humour and candour often mask a quiet sensitivity to self-worth. They care about how they are

treated and cannot tolerate dismissal, even if it sometimes reads as haughtiness. They are less apologetic about who they are and what they want from life. It is an attitude I often wish to emulate, for remaining unbothered when judgement flies in your face is a rare liberation. There is also a breeziness in how they handle personal affairs. Permanent relationships are not assumed. They enter them knowing endings are possible. They invest, but do not chain themselves. They prioritise emotional safety over emotional endurance. They avoid deriving identity solely from relationships and steer clear of over-sentimentality. Their low-intensity connections do not break them when they end; they simply move on, letting bygones be bygones. This is not detachment but self-preservation—a clarity that helps them distinguish between being kind and being merely nice. They are not frivolous; they are cautious and self-loving. Yes, they have traits old-schoolers may disapprove of, but they also possess a knack for making the most of whatever life offers—lemons or laughter. They show me how to live with more ease, openness and a dash of flair. One day, when I am ready, I will take a leaf from the Gen Z scrapbook and learn to be carefree.

The Pioneer
SINCE 1865

The writer is a Dubai-based author, columnist, independent journalist and children's writing coach

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Ignoring soil pollution costs lives

Soil pollution has not received adequate attention. Land degradation inevitably leads to soil contamination, and chemicals released through industrial and agricultural activities are the primary culprits. Untreated waste and wastewater have already destroyed thousands of species of fish, birds, plants and other organisms. Although soil has the natural ability to filter contaminants, it can do so only to a limited extent. Remaining pollutants may seep into the atmosphere, contributing to air pollution, or into water bodies, compounding water pollution. Direct human contact with contaminated soil is also a serious possibility. As more than ninety per cent of food comes from soil, its conservation is vital for the ecological chain.

The crippling effects of soil pollution—including congenital disorders, infectious diseases and non-communicable illnesses such as cancer — have alerted health professionals to its dangers. Environmental scientists possess various remedies, such as surface leaching, bioremediation, thermal remediation, mycoremediation and phytoremediation. Nonetheless, on World Soil Day, observed on December 5, the responsibilities of individuals in preventing and eliminating soil pollution cannot be overstated.

GANAPATHI BHAT | AKOLA

Internship scheme fails to deliver

The Centre's ambitious Prime Minister's Internship Scheme has failed to attract the majority of unemployed youth, as confirmed by official data submitted to Parliament.

Harsh Malhotra, Minister of State for Corporate Affairs, informed the Lok Sabha that only 33,300 young people accepted internships during the first two rounds, of whom 6,618 dropped out midway. Companies offered 82,000 internships in the first phase and 83,000 in the second. It is worth noting that the government launched this scheme with great fanfare during the last Lok Sabha elections.

Interns were promised a one-time payment of ₹6,000 and a monthly allowance of ₹5,000 for twelve months. The government also claimed that the initiative would train ten million young people over five years, making them more employable.

The first two years' outcomes are plainly disappointing, as such superficial measures cannot address the unemployment crisis. What is needed is a fundamental shift in economic thinking, with sustained investment in the real economy and human development. Without tackling these structural issues, the government's assurances offer little substance.

ABHIJIT ROY | JAMSHEDPUR

Justice cannot be negotiated away

The recent ruling in the Sandesara case raises troubling questions about the state of our criminal justice system. Allowing fugitives to return, repay a negotiated amount and see multiple criminal proceedings erased may strengthen bank books, but it does little to strengthen public confidence.

What message does this deliver to those who have complied with the law? Banks are forced to absorb significant losses, enforcement agencies are left adrift midway through their efforts, and the perception grows that financial crime can be bargained away if one can produce a sufficiently large cheque. Even more concerning is the possibility that other absconders may now attempt similar "settlements", further straining an already burdened system.

A justice system must impose consequences for wrongdoing, not merely attach a price tag to it. Without transparent findings, proportionate penalties and a firm commitment to prosecute where culpability is clear, such outcomes risk becoming blueprints for evasion rather than models of resolution. Judicial leniency is admirable, but when it eclipses criminal responsibility, it weakens the very rule of law it is meant to uphold.

GOPALASWAMY J | CHENNAI

PIC TALK



Hands that pick the world's favourite morning brew. In Assam's Nagaon district, a tea worker continues a craft handed down through generations.

PHOTO: PTI

DIGITAL EXPERIENCE



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RUSSIA TWISTS PEACE EFFORTS TO SUSTAIN ITS IMPERIAL AMBITIONS

Russia is clearly toying with peace efforts from the West and elsewhere. Behind this lies a layered blend of strategy, politics and narrative shaping. Its core instinct remains geopolitical: Moscow views control over its neighbourhood as essential strategic depth, making any concession in Ukraine a setback rather than a diplomatic trade-off.

This outlook is further strengthened by domestic politics. The war has evolved into a tool for regime consolidation and political control at home. Economic adaptation has also inured Russia to sanctions that were expected to bite much harder.

Energy reorientation towards Asia, deeper strategic ties with China and the creation of alternative supply chains have

significantly reduced the pressure on Moscow to negotiate.

Russia now believes that time favours its attritional strategy. Incremental territorial gains, fortified defensive lines and the perception of gradual advantage leave it with little incentive to alter course. China's quiet but steady support helps dilute its sense of international isolation.

At the same time, Western inconsistency, political shifts in Washington, wavering European unity and growing public fatigue reinforce the Kremlin's ideological framing.

The conflict is portrayed as a civilisational resistance to Western intrusion. For Moscow, peace has become a tactical convenience—no longer a strategic objective.

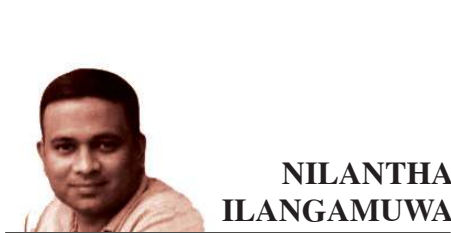
R NARAYANAN | MUMBAI

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

The lost art of ethical rule: Revisiting Milinda’s inquiry

Democracy today resembles a circus, where rulers mistake spectacle for statesmanship and genuine governance remains elusive. Anarchist thought is misread as disorder, Buddhist nations drift from ethical foundations, and corruption corrodes institutions. In this vacuum, the Milinda Pañha offers a rare philosophical corrective and moral compass

FIRST
Column



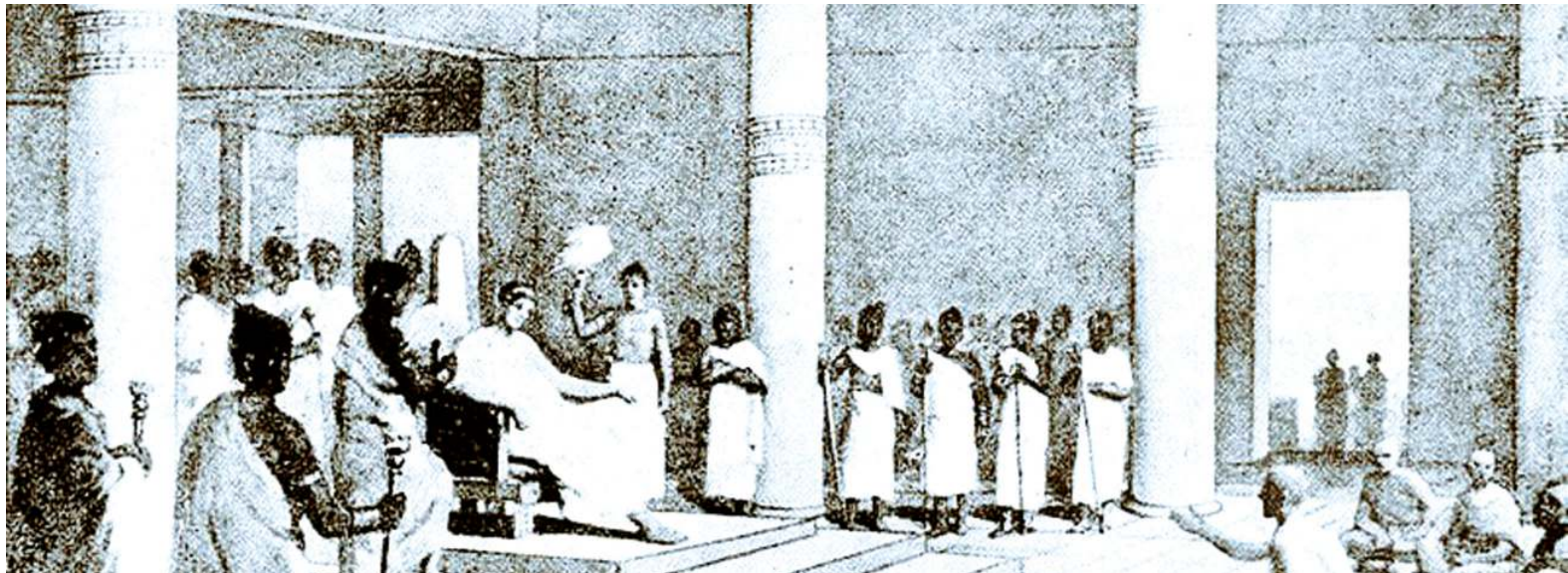
NILANTHA
ILANGAMUWA

Most of the time, what we see in modern rulers is reminiscent of a Turkish proverb: when a clown enters a palace, he imagines he will become a king, but the palace instead turns into a circus. Democracy is ironically crumbling, yet a new form of governance has not yet emerged. The most pragmatic governance, as outlined in anarchist thought, has been grievously distorted, and the popular conception now equates anarchism with violence and disorder. However, seminal texts and contemporary interpretations by thinkers such as Noam Chomsky reaffirm that anarchism, properly understood, offers mechanisms to dismantle structural inequalities and bureaucratic apathy, enabling participatory and decentralised decision-making. Yet the gestation of a new paradigm of governance inevitably exceeds the temporality we anticipate, and perhaps only in the coming decades might an unprecedented, universal mode of administration take shape.

Meanwhile, it is lamentable to observe what has transpired in nations nominally anchored in Buddhist principles. Presently, most Buddhist-majority countries suffer from extreme corruption, with political systems that have ossified into nearly irreparable constructs. Leaders no longer trust monastic institutions; temples have transformed into quasi-financial conglomerates sustaining the ostentatious lifestyles of monks.

The ethical substratum the Buddha enjoined — equanimity, compassion and selfless service — has largely vanished. As Aravind Adiga remarks in his novel *The White Tiger*, if the Buddha were to witness the contemporary state of his religious progeny, he would depart immediately without a backward glance. Societies that once pursued ethical coherence and dharmic governance have now become distorted caricatures of their philosophical ideals.

It is precisely here that the *Milinda Pañha* provides an intellectual corrective, a text of extraordinary lucidity and profundity which, while ostensibly a religious-philosophical dialogue, contains the kernel of a gover-



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MILINDA PAÑHA

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nilanthaillangamuwa

nance ethos that modern rulers might desperately need. The text chronicles the engagement between King Menander I, the Indo-Greek sovereign remembered in Buddhist tradition as Milinda, and the venerable monk Nagasena. Menander, who reigned c. 165-130 BCE, roughly a century after Emperor Ashoka, presided over a geographically modest realm encompassing parts of north-western India and Afghanistan. Unlike Ashoka, whose Mauryan empire was vast and centrally administered, Menander ruled a fragmented polity more reflective of Hellenistic city-state governance. His coins, with Greek inscriptions and iconography fused with Indian motifs, and surviving inscriptions attest to a sovereign both culturally syncretic and administratively shrewd. While no extant source suggests he learned directly from Ashoka, the philosophical and religious atmosphere shaped by Ashoka's dissemination of Buddhism undoubtedly influenced the intellectual milieu Menander inhabited. The *Milinda Pañha* thus enshrines a historic cross-cultural encounter: a Hellenistic king engaging rigorously with Indian philosophical traditions, adopting an epistemological humility and openness that modern rulers conspicuously lack.

The dialogues themselves exemplify a method of inquiry that parallels the Socratic and Platonic traditions. Milinda's questions are probing, sometimes sceptical, at times provocative, much like

Plato's interlocutors in *The Republic* or Meno. Nagasena responds with meticulous reasoning, often employing analogies such as the chariot, the rope and snake, the river and the lamp. Consider the famous opening exchange: "Venerable sir, what is your name?" asks Milinda. Nagasena replies, "I am called Nagasena, Majesty. But this is only a name, a designation, a convenient expression. In the ultimate sense, there is no Nagasena here." When Milinda presses, "How can you say there is no Nagasena? Are your robes Nagasena is your bowl Nagasena? Is your body Nagasena Is your mind Nagasena?" Nagasena elucidates, "No, Majesty. None of these is Nagasena. Yet because all these parts occur together, people use the name 'Nagasena', just as one speaks of a chariot, though no single piece is the chariot." The sophistication of this method, rooted in Buddhist epistemology and the doctrine of impermanence, mirrors the Socratic elenchus, where a proposition is deconstructed through critical questioning and dialectical reasoning.

What makes this dialogue extraordinary for contemporary governance is that it instantiates an ethos of disciplined inquiry and ethical reflection that is evidently absent in today's political apparatus. Milinda's probing mirrors the inquisitiveness that should guide a state's executive: questions not merely about power or prestige but about the self, ethical action and the consequences of policy. The text

repeatedly foregrounds the impermanence and interdependence of phenomena, as exemplified in Nagasena's extended metaphors: "A fruit tree does not bear fruit the moment you plant it; it must mature. In the same way, karma ripens when conditions are right." Here, the philosophical principle of conditionality offers a remarkable lesson for policymakers: outcomes depend on the interplay of multiple variables, and rash or short-sighted interventions invariably yield unintended consequences.

Historically, Menander's engagement with Buddhist philosophy was not mere ornamentation; it influenced his governance ethos. While his kingdom remained smaller than Ashoka's, it displayed a striking pragmatism intertwined with ethical deliberation, a feature reinforced in the *Milinda Pañha*. By contrast, modern Buddhist-majority nations frequently conflate religiosity with ceremonial display or institutional patronage rather than ethical governance. The erosion of dharmic principles is compounded by excessive bureaucratisation, monetisation of monastic institutions and prioritisation of personal or party gain over collective welfare. A Milinda-inspired polity would not conflate the symbolic with the substantive; it would foreground reflective engagement with moral and structural consequences.

Interestingly, the questioning method in the *Milinda Pañha* is anticipated in earlier Buddhist texts such as the *Kalama Sutta*, wherein the Buddha exhorts practitioners not to rely on tradition, hearsay

or authority alone, but to test teachings through reasoned analysis and direct experience. "Do not go upon what has been acquired by repeated hearing; nor upon tradition; nor upon rumour; nor upon what is in a scripture," the Buddha advises, encouraging a culture of scrutiny and empirical ethical reasoning. This same epistemological rigour underpins Nagasena's dialogues: the king is urged not merely to accept Buddhist doctrine but to interrogate it until understanding is internalised. In contemporary governance, such a principle is strikingly absent; policy decisions are rarely subjected to sustained dialectical examination or reflective critique, and when they are, incentives for superficial compliance often outweigh those for substantive analysis.

The parallels with Greek philosophical methodology deepen here. Socrates, in the Platonic dialogues, similarly interrogates interlocutors to reveal inconsistencies in their understanding of justice, virtue and knowledge. Menander, although a foreign king in a non-Greek land, essentially embodies a Hellenistic inquirer transported into the Buddhist epistemological universe. In both traditions, authority is decoupled from truth: the king's power or the interlocutor's status does not confer correctness. This detachment is precisely what is missing in today's political spheres, where charisma or inherited office substitutes for reflective ethical reasoning, and where institutional and religious oversight often becomes perfunctory or complicit. Moreover, the *Milinda Pañha* demonstrates that inquiry is inseparable from ethical imagination. Questions about the self, impermanence and moral causality are not abstract; they carry direct implications for governance. Policies enacted without such reflection are analogous to rulers attempting to drive a chariot without understanding its wheels or axles: the structure may move, but direction and integrity are compromised. Modern Buddhist-majority nations, by ignoring this model, have allowed corruption, patronage networks and institutional sclerosis to metastasise. Practically, this has meant temples act as financial hubs, civic oversight is subordinated to political expediency, and the teachings of the Buddha are commodified into ritualised spectacle, divorced from ethical praxis. Without the missing links of Milinda's wisdom, can modern Buddhist rulers ever move beyond a hollow performance?

Tackling Delhi’s air pollution: A Systems problem demanding a systemic reform



PRAVIN
KAUSHAL

Each winter, Delhi descends into its now-familiar public health emergency. As temperatures fall and winds weaken, a heavy grey blanket settles over the NCR, pushing daily life into crisis mode — schools shut, construction halts, and citizens track AQI readings as routinely as the time of day. Yet this seasonal panic obscures a deeper truth: Delhi's pollution is not a winter anomaly but a year-round structural failure. Meteorology merely exposes what governance has failed to fix.

Having worked within the Delhi government ecosystem and now leading a data and AI centre, it is clear to me that the science of the problem and the strategy of our response remain misaligned. To move beyond temporary relief, the capital needs systems-level interventions that tackle the roots of emissions - not only their winter manifestations.

A Misdiagnosed Crisis

Much of the public discourse reduces Delhi's air problem to a single culprit: stubble burning in Punjab and Haryana. There is truth in this - data from the Ministry of Earth Sciences' Decision Support System shows that during peak episodes, crop-residue fires can contribute up to one-fourth of Delhi's PM2.5 load. But this is only a part of a much broader emissions landscape. The more uncomfortable reality is that the pollutants choking Delhi in winter are present all year. What changes in October and November is the atmosphere: cold air sinks, moisture captures particulates, and stagnation prevents dispersion. Vehicles, industries, waste burning and construction dust continue producing the same pollutants in summer and monsoon — but winter's inversion conditions magnify their impact. This is why emergency measures such as smog guns, cloud seeding or the hasty implementation of the Graded Response Action Plan (GRAP) offer limited relief. They treat symptoms, not the disease.

The GRAP Paradox

GRAP was designed as a last-mile emergency protocol, not a primary strategy. Its annual invocation signals a governance gap: if the baseline emissions were lower, winter conditions would not plunge Delhi into the "severe" category so

quickly. Even when fully implemented, GRAP yields only marginal improvements. Halting truck entry or shutting schools disrupts daily life but barely shifts average air quality because the underlying emission load remains unchanged. GRAP is, at best, a tourniquet - useful during haemorrhage, but not a substitute for long-term treatment. The real work must focus on three structural sectors: mobility, industry and waste.

1. Mobility: Move People, Not Cars
Vehicles remain among the largest contributors to Delhi's internal PM2.5 load. The adoption of BS-VI fuel — reducing sulphur content dramatically — was a significant achievement. But the gains are being cancelled out by sheer volume: Delhi registers nearly 2,000 new vehicles daily, a figure that overwhelms any technological improvement. A transformative mobility strategy must include:

Fleet Replacement: A targeted, time-bound scrappage and replacement programme is essential — particularly for ageing commercial vehicles, which are big emitters. Incentivising transitions to electric, CNG or compliant engines is far more effective than periodic bans.

Public Transport Revitalisation: No city can fight pollution while expanding private vehicle dependence. Delhi's public transport — buses, metro, last-mile services - needs capacity expansion, better frequency and integration. The policy focus must shift from "restricting cars" to "enabling people to not need cars".

2. An Economics Problem
A persistent misconception is that Delhi has minimal industrial activity. In reality, the NCR's industrial belt — Ghaziabad, Faridabad, Gurugram, Bhiwadi - burns large volumes of dirty fuel. The barrier to clean energy adoption is economic, not technological. Natural gas, the cleaner alternative, becomes prohibitively expensive due to high taxation outside the GST regime. As long as dirty fuels remain cheaper, compliance will remain sporadic. Bringing natural gas under GST would be one of the most impactful policy reforms for clean air. By aligning economic incentives with environmental goals, industry will transition voluntarily instead of under coercion.

3. The Missing Scale
Crop burning persists not because farmers prefer it, but because alternatives lack the scale, infrastructure or economic reward. Technologies exist — baling, in-situ decomposition, biogasification, ethanol production - but deployment remains fragmented. Similarly, within Delhi, waste burning often continues because segregation at source remains inconsistent. Landfills routinely smoulder, and municipal systems struggle with volume.

Addressing this requires:

- Assured procurement and incentives for biomass-based fuels,
- Statewide logistics for residue collection and

processing.

- Strict enforcement coupled with community-level waste segregation,
- Modern waste-to-energy and composting capacity.

Without addressing biomass and municipal waste, Delhi cannot sustainably lower its particulate load.

Lessons from Beijing

Cities like Beijing demonstrate that clean air is not an impossible aspiration. Their gains did not come from symbolic measures but from structural transitions:

- Shifting industries from coal to natural gas
- Phasing out old vehicles through aggressive scrappage schemes,
- Managing construction and road dust with strict, technology-driven enforcement,
- Creating a unified regional governance

A Systems Approach

Pollution in Delhi is not a local issue; it is a regional systems problem involving meteorology, agriculture, mobility, fuel economics and governance architecture. Solutions must therefore be structural and coordinated, not reactive.

A sustainable roadmap should include:

- A regional clean-air council integrating Delhi, Punjab, Haryana, UP and Rajasthan for unified action,
- Adaptive agricultural policies responsive to meteorological forecasts and residue-management capacity,
- Year-round mobility reforms prioritising public transport and fleet renewal,
- GST reform for clean fuels, enabling industries to switch affordably,
- Community-level participation supported by micro-monitoring and transparency dashboards.

When policy, science and public will align, Delhi's air can improve dramatically - just as other global megacities have shown.

The Path Ahead
Delhi's pollution crisis is often portrayed as inevitable. It is not. It is the result of fragmented planning, delayed decisions and reactive governance. But just as the smog reveals the consequences of inaction, it also reveals a path forward. Clean air is not a seasonal aspiration - it is a constitutional right and a collective responsibility. The transition demands structural honesty, regional cooperation and a willingness to move to systemic reform. India has the knowledge, the institutions and the civic energy to achieve this. What remains is the resolve to treat clean air not as an annual headline, but as a national mission.

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Reclaiming India’s role as a global education hub

VK PAUL,
SHASHANK SHAH
& OSHIN DHARAP

India carries a formidable legacy as the cradle of ancient knowledge systems and universities such as Takshashila, Nalanda, Vallabhi, Vikramshila and Odantapuri. For millennia, it has sustained multidisciplinary higher learning that reached far beyond the subcontinent. Today, the global skills and talent landscape is being reshaped at a dramatic pace. This moment offers India an opportunity to reclaim its heritage as a civilisational educator and position its higher education institutions as global hubs of knowledge, research and innovation in the 21st century.

Over the last seventy-five years, India's higher education system has expanded enormously. With the launch of the National Education Policy 2020, the country has taken a decisive step towards future readiness by identifying the internationalisation of higher education—especially "internationalisation at home" — as a key driver of systemic transformation. An overwhelming 97 per cent of Indian students study in Indian institutions.

They will form the backbone of India's workforce and contribute to the global talent pool as well. Ensuring that their academic experience meets world-class standards is therefore not just a matter of educational quality but of national competitiveness. Yet, a sharp disparity persists in student mobility. Outbound student numbers have surged, with more than 13.35 lakh Indians studying abroad in 2024, predominantly in Anglophone destinations such as Canada, the United States, the United Kingdom and Australia. In contrast, India hosted only about 47,000 foreign students in 2022, nearly a third of them from Nepal. For every international student studying in India, approximately twenty-eight Indian students are enrolled abroad. This is despite regulatory provisions that allow supernumerary seats for international students and a variety of scholarships to support their education in India. The imbalance underscores both the challenge of retaining talent within the country and the difficulty of positioning India as an attractive host destination.

Several forces continue to push Indian students overseas: the appeal of immersive international exposure, the lure of post-study work opportunities and the perception of higher academic quality abroad. The financial implications of this trend are significant. Indian families spend between US\$47-70 billion annually—equivalent to ₹3.8-6 lakh crore—on overseas education in tuition fees and living expenses alone. This outflow is estimated to be eight to twelve times the central government's higher education budget. Addressing this imbalance makes internationalisation at home not merely desirable but necessary, both

for fiscal prudence and systemic strengthening.

Recognising this urgency, India has initiated several major reforms in recent years. The establishment of the IFSCA GIFT City framework in 2022 and the UGC's regulatory framework in 2023 paved the way for international universities to enter India. Deakin University and the University of Wollongong became the first foreign institutions to start operations in GIFT City. The University of Southampton set up the first international branch campus in Gurugram, and several more—including the University of Liverpool, University of York, University of Aberdeen, University of Western Australia, Illinois Institute of Technology and Istituto Europeo di Design — have announced plans to launch campuses in Bengaluru and Navi Mumbai's emerging International Education City.

The National Forensic Sciences University opened a campus in Jinja, Uganda, in 2023. IIT Madras and IIT Delhi have launched campuses in Zanzibar and Abu Dhabi, while IIM Ahmedabad has established a presence in Dubai and IIT Bombay in Sendai, Japan. Joint, dual and twinning degree programmes are now possible through collaborations between Indian and foreign universities, and the newly notified Equivalence Regulations 2025 offer clarity on recognising foreign qualifications. For India to evolve into a genuine global education destination, it must strengthen the larger ecosystem. This requires world-class infrastructure, cutting-edge research ecosystems, globally competitive curricula and the ability to attract and retain top faculty, including members of the Indian diaspora.

Regulatory processes — from visa facilitation to qualification recognition — must be simplified, and internship opportunities for international students must become more accessible. India must also strategically fund international research collaborations, global teaching exchanges and faculty mobility to ensure sustained knowledge flows. Equally important is a strong branding and outreach strategy that communicates India's distinctive academic strengths and showcases the achievements of global alumni who studied at Indian institutions. Tailored academic offerings — whether STEM and Bharatiya Gyan Parampar programmes for Western learners or specialised courses in agriculture, healthcare, education and digital finance for African students—can help India address diverse global needs. Looking ahead, India must aim to triple inbound international student enrolment to at least 1.5 lakh by 2030. With the right systemic reforms, regulatory coherence and institutional strategies, India has both the heritage and the capability to re-emerge as a global centre of learning—well before 2047.

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FROM THE WORLD

CHILE

Phones in schools banned

Chile has passed a bill outlawing the use of mobile phones and other smart devices during classes at elementary and middle schools. The new law will take effect next year, making Chile the latest country to restrict smartphone use among young students to reduce its harmful effects and curb classroom distractions. Other nations with various levels of restrictions on smartphone use at schools include France, Brazil, Hungary, the Netherlands and China. "We are advancing a cultural change for children and adolescents who today, more than ever, need to see each other's faces again, socialise during recess, and regain concentration to further boost learning," Education Minister Nicolás Cataldo wrote on social media after the decision.

PAKISTAN

Afghan militant killed in raid

Security forces on Thursday killed an Afghan militant belonging to the banned Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan in northwestern Pakistan's restive Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, police said. The deceased militant was killed in an intelligence-based operation carried out in the Loi Mamond area of Bajaur district of the province, an official added. According to the security sources, the militant was an Afghan national belonging to Afghanistan's Nangarhar province and was involved in many disruptive activities in Bajaur. Pakistan continues to reel under terrorism with a surge of 25 per cent terror incidents in 2025 compared to the previous year, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa being the worst hit province, according to a report by Islamabad-based Centre for Research and Security Studies on Wednesday.

Putin rejects key US proposal on Ukraine

ASSOCIATED PRESS
■ Moscow

Russian President Vladimir Putin says some proposals in a US plan to end the war in Ukraine are unacceptable to the Kremlin, indicating in comments published Thursday that any deal is still some ways off. US President Donald Trump has set in motion the most intense diplomatic push to stop the fighting since Russia launched the full-scale invasion of its neighbour nearly four years ago. But the effort has once again run into demands that are hard to reconcile, especially over whether Ukraine must give up land to Russia and how it can be kept safe from any future aggression by Moscow. Trump's special envoy, Steve Witkoff, and son-in-law Jared Kushner are set to meet with Ukraine's lead negotiator, Rustem Umerov, later Thursday in Miami for further talks, according to a senior Trump administration official who wasn't authorised to comment publicly and spoke on condition of anonymity. Putin said his five-hour talks Tuesday in the Kremlin with Witkoff and Kushner were "necessary" and "useful," but also "difficult work," and some proposals were unacceptable. Putin spoke to the India Today TV channel before visiting New Delhi on Thursday. Before the full interview was broadcast, Russian state news agencies Tass and RIA Novosti quoted some of his remarks in it. Tass quoted Putin as saying



that in Tuesday's talks, the sides "had to go through each point" of the US peace proposal, "which is why it took so long." "This was a necessary conversation, a very concrete one," he said, with provisions that Moscow was ready to discuss, while others "we can't agree to." Trump said Wednesday that Witkoff and Kushner came away from their marathon session confident that he wants to find an end to the war. "Their impression was very strongly that he'd like to make a deal," he added. Putin refused to elaborate on what Russia could accept or reject, and none of the other officials involved

President Volodymyr Zelenskyy's hometown damaged more than 40 residential buildings, a school and domestic gas pipes, Vilkul said. A 6-year-old girl died in the southern city of Kherson after Russian artillery shelling wounded her the previous day, regional military administration chief Oleksandr Prokudin wrote on Telegram. The Kherson Thermal Power Plant, which provides heat for over 40,000 residents, shut down Thursday after Russia pounded it with drones and artillery for several days, he said. Authorities planned emergency meetings to find alternate sources of heating, he said. Until then, tents were erected across the city where residents could warm up and charge electronic devices. Russia also struck Odesa with drones, wounding six people, while civilian and energy infrastructure was damaged, said Oleh Kiper, head of the regional military administration. Overall, Russia fired two ballistic missiles and 138 drones at Ukraine overnight, officials said. Meanwhile, in the Russia-occupied part of the Kherson region, two men were killed by a Ukrainian drone strike on their vehicle Thursday, Moscow-installed regional leader Vladimir Saldo said.

UN warns of new wave of atrocities in Sudan's Kordofan region

ASSOCIATED PRESS
■ Cairo

The UN's top human rights official issued a stark new warning on Thursday about Sudan, saying he fears "a new wave of atrocities" amid a surge in fierce fighting in the Kordofan region. UN Human Rights Chief Volker Turk urged "all states with influence over the parties to take immediate action to halt the fighting, and stop the arms flows that are fueling the conflict." Fighting between the paramilitary group the Rapid Support Forces, also known as the RSF, and the Sudanese military, who have been at



war for over two years, has recently shifted to the oil-rich Kordofan region after the paramilitary group took over el-Fasher in Darfur. According to the UN, the conflict in Sudan has killed 40,000 people — though

some rights groups say the death toll is significantly higher — and has created the world's worst humanitarian crisis with over 14 million displaced. The RSF's takeover of el-Fasher, the Sudanese military's last stronghold in shelling, and summary executions since the end of October, but that the numbers could be higher because telecommunications and internet outages have made numbers hard to verify. He called for "the restoration of telecommunications to facilitate lifesaving assistance and to allow essential information to flow to civilians." His statement said an RSF drone strike on November 3 killed 45 people, mostly women, in a tent in el-Obeid in Kordofan, and that Sudanese military aerial strikes killed at least 48 people, mostly civilians, in Kauda, South Kordofan.

Flood death toll in Asia surpasses 1,500 as calls grow to fight deforestation

ASSOCIATED PRESS
■ Padang

Deaths from last week's catastrophic floods and landslides in parts of Asia surged past 1,500 Thursday as rescue teams raced to reach survivors isolated by the disaster with hundreds of people still unaccounted for across the region. The tragedy of so much death and destruction was compounded by warnings that decades of deforestation caused by unchecked development, mining and palm oil plantations may have worsened the devastation. Calls grew for the Government to act. "We need the Government to investigate and fix forest management," said Rangga Adiputra, a 31-year-old teacher whose home in West Sumatra was swept away. The hills above his village on



the outskirts of Padang city had been scarred by illegal logging. "We don't want this costly disaster to happen again," he said. Authorities said 837 people were confirmed dead in Indonesia, 479 in Sri Lanka and 185 in Thailand, as well as three in Malaysia. Many villages in Indonesia and Sri

Lanka remained buried under mud and debris, with 861 people still unaccounted for in both countries. Thousands reportedly faced severe shortages of food and clean water in cut off areas. The floods and landslides washed away roads and bridges and knocked out telecommunications, leaving many communities inaccessible. Indonesian television showed images of huge amounts of felled timber carried downstream in North Sumatra, West Sumatra and Aceh provinces. The leading Indonesian environmental group WALHI said that decades of deforestation —

driven by mining, palm oil plantations, and illegal logging — stripped away natural defences that once absorbed rainfall and stabilised soil. "The disaster was not just nature's fury, it was amplified by decades of deforestation," said Rianda Purba, an activist with the group. "Deforestation and unchecked development have stripped Sumatra of its resilience." The group recorded more than 240,000 hectares (nearly 600,000 acres) of primary forest were lost in 2024 alone, leaving Sumatra's small river basins dangerously exposed. Another environmental group, Global Forest Watch, has said the flood-inundated Indonesian provinces of Aceh, North Sumatra and West Sumatra have since 2000 lost 19,600 sq km (7,569 square miles) of forest, an area larger than the state of New Jersey. "Unless restoration begins now, more lives will be lost," Purba warned. Massive piles of neatly cut timber lay scattered among the debris across Parkit Beach, a sight that stunned emergency crews deployed to the area. "From their shape, it was clear these were not just trees torn out naturally by the flood, but timber that had been deliberately cut," said a member of a clean-up crew, Neviana, who goes by a single name. Another resident of Padang, Ria Wati, 38, observed the same. "The logs carried by the floods weren't the kind you get from a flash flood," she said, "If old trees were uprooted, you would see roots and fragile bark. But these were clean, neatly cut pieces of wood... They looked like the result of illegal logging."

Lithuanian court convicts leader for antisemitic speech

ASSOCIATED PRESS ■ Vilnius

A Lithuanian court on Thursday convicted the leader of one of the parties in the country's coalition Government for making antisemitic comments and fined him 5,000 euros (about \$5,800). The district court in the capital, Vilnius, found that Remigijus Šeimaitis incited hatred against Jews, grossly downplayed Nazi Germany's crimes and grossly minimized the Holocaust in an offensive and insulting manner. The punishment fell short of prosecutors' call for him to be fined 51,000 euros (around \$60,000) and ordered to pay into a fund for victims of crimes. The case relates to social media posts and public statements from May and June 2023 in which, among other things, he wrote: "Apparently, for our journalists and local Lithuanian Jews, the demolition of schools in Palestine is yet another pastime?"



One dead in targeted shooting in Washington

ASSOCIATED PRESS ■ Oxon Hill

A man was killed in a targeted shooting at the food court at MGM National Harbor hotel and casino in the Maryland suburbs of Washington, police said. Detectives were working to determine the circumstances, and Prince George's County Police Chief George Nader said at a news conference that they are searching for the shooter, who was captured on video. Officers responded to the shooting just before Wednesday noon and found one victim, a man, who died, Nader said. The shooting was not random, he said. The shooter went to the food court to find the victim, who was ordering food when the suspect appeared and opened fire, he said. The shooter and victim did not exchange any words before the shooting.

Terror attacks increased in Pakistan: Report



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ Karachi

Pakistan continues to reel under terrorism with a surge of 25 per cent violence-related incidents in 2025 compared to the previous year, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa being the worst hit province, a think tank report has said.

Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan together accounted for over 96 per cent of all 3,187 fatalities and 92 per cent of all incidents of violence recorded through January to November 2025, according to the Islamabad-based Centre for Research and Security Studies (CRSS). "Till November, an overall surge of 25 per cent was observed in violence, which resulted in 3,187 deaths in comparison to 2,546 casualties in 2024, a rise of around 20 per cent," the report, published on Wednesday, by CRSS, a non-profit, independent think tank, said. In 2024, 2,546 deaths and 1981 injuries were reported. The figures include civilians, security personnel, and militants killed in anti-terror operations. The fatalities reported were from 1,188 recorded incidents of violence, including terror attacks and counter terrorism operations, mainly concentrated in the northwestern Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan provinces. After clashes and tense relations with Afghanistan, violence has been at its peak in recent months in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, observed the report by CRSS, founded by civil society activists to monitor the security landscape in the country. The Pakistan Government accuses the banned terror

CLASHES AND TENSE RELATIONS WITH AFGHANISTAN, VIOLENCE HAS BEEN AT ITS PEAK IN RECENT MONTHS IN KHYBER PAKHTUNKHWA

outfit Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) of carrying out terror attacks after its ceasefire deal ended in November 2022. Khyber Pakhtunkhwa was the worst hit region with around 68 per cent (2,165) of the total deaths, and over 62 per cent (732) of the incidents of violence, followed by Balochistan, accounting for over 28 per cent of the total fatalities (896) and over 30 per cent of the incidents reported (366).

The remaining regions of Pakistan — Sindh, Punjab, Pakistan-occupied Kashmir and Islamabad Capital Territory (ICT) — collectively experienced 90 incidents, with 126 lives lost, constituting just 4 per cent of all fatalities, the report said. The CRSS said on average there were approximately 15 casualties per day throughout the reporting period. It also said that counter terrorism operations by security forces were impactful in the first 11 months of 2025, resulting in 1,795 militant fatalities — approximately 30 per cent more than the 1,392 lives lost in terrorist attacks. However, in Balochistan, terrorist attacks by mainly banned insurgent groups were responsible for 517 fatalities among security forces personnel and civilians, outnumbering the militants killed in security operations by 36 per cent.

Critically ill former Bangladesh PM Zia to be taken to London: reports

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ Dhaka

Family of former Bangladesh prime minister Khalada Zia, who remains in a critical condition here, is preparing to transfer her to London, where her son and BNP acting chairperson Tarique Rahman lives, media reports said Thursday. Zia, the 80-year-old Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) chairperson, was admitted to a private hospital on November 23 when she developed a chest infection that affected both her heart and lungs. Four days later, the three-time prime minister was shifted to the coronary care unit (CCU) after several of her health complications worsened. BBC Bangla Service and Ittefaq newspaper said Zia's son and BNP's self-exiled acting chairperson Tarique Rahman's wife Zubaida Rahman, a doctor herself, is expected to arrive in Dhaka soon to oversee the transfer of her ailing mother-in-law. "After arriving in Bangladesh, Zubaida Rahman will take

her to London (after) assessing Zia's physical condition," at the Dhaka hospital, the BBC Bangla reported saying, several BNP leaders confirmed the decision without mentioning their names. Qatar, meanwhile, said it is ready to provide an air ambulance for Zia for taking her to London even as two military and air force helicopters on Thursday staged landing tests at the rooftop of Dhaka's Evercare Hospital, where she is admitted. "If madam's (Zia) health is suitable for travel, we plan to take her to London tomorrow morning. It all depends on her health," Zia's adviser Enamul Haque Chowdhury told The Daily Star newspaper. A four-member Chinese medical team, comprising doctors Chi Jiang, Fang, Yan Xin, Zhong Yuhui, and Meng Huang Wu, arrived at the Evercare Hospital late on Wednesday night and met with the medical board to review treatment options for the BNP chairperson, the state-run BSS news agency reported.

GREATER HYDERABAD MUNICIPAL CORPORATION

NIT No. 'e' Procurement Tender Notice No.06/EE-2(H)/GHMC/2025-26, Dt: 03-12-2025

Name of the Work : "Schindler" Lifts (44 Nos) Repair works.

Estimated amount (Rs.In Lakhs) : 36.82. Start Date/ Last Date & Time for Receipts of Bids : Start Date : 05.12.2025 03.00PM. Last Date & Time for Receipt of Bids: 11.12.2025, 03.30PM. Name & Address Officer Cell No: O/o Executive Engineer-2 (Housing), GHMC, 1st Floor, Municipal Building, Hari Hara Kala Bhavan, Secunderabad - 500003. Total : 01 Work. Further details can be seen at e-procurement @ www.tender.telangana.gov.in

Sd/- Executive Engineer-2 (Housing), GHMC

DIPR.No.11705-PP/LC/ADVT/1/2025-26, Dt: 04.12.2025

Thai worker’s remains returned from Gaza

ASSOCIATED PRESS
■ Jerusalem

Remains that militants in Gaza handed to Israel as part of the first phase of the ceasefire deal were those of a Thai agricultural worker, Israeli and Thai officials said Thursday. The return of Sudthisak Rinthalak’s remains leaves just one more hostage to be returned under the agreement.

Sudthisak was an agricultural worker who had been employed at Kibbutz Be’eri, one of the hardest-hit communities in the attack. Israeli officials said the 42-year-old was killed on October 7, 2023, during the Hamas-led attack in Israel that triggered the Israel-Hamas war and that his body was taken by the militant group Islamic Jihad.

He was officially declared dead on May 16, 2024. Sudthisak’s remains were returned on Wednesday, a day after militants handed over remains that didn’t match either of the last two hostages. Thai Foreign Ministry spokesperson Nikorndej Balankura said Sudthisak’s family has been notified and thanked the Israeli Government for assistance that led to the release of all 31 Thai hostages taken at the start of the war. Of those, 28 were returned alive, and three were dead.

Thais were the largest group of foreigners to be held in captivity. The Thai Foreign Ministry has said that, in addition to the



Hamas hand over a body bag believed to contain the remains of a deceased hostage to the Red Cross for transfer to Israeli authorities, in Beit Lahiya, in the northern Gaza Strip

hostages, 46 Thais have been killed during the war. Israeli Ran Gvili is now the last hostage whose remains have yet to be returned. Gvili was an Israeli police officer who helped people escape from the Nova music festival during the Oct. 7 attack and was killed fighting at another location.

Since the October 10 start of the ceasefire, 20 living hostages and the remains of 27 others have been returned to Israel. In exchange, Israel has released the bodies of hundreds of Palestinians to Gaza. Most remain unidentified.

The return of all the hostages is an essential

element of the first phase of the US-brokered ceasefire that began in October, which both Hamas and Israel have accused the other of breaking. In exchange, Israel has been releasing Palestinian prisoners.

The plan is still in the early stages, and many questions linger over its implementation. The plan to secure and govern the territory authorises an international stabilisation force to provide security, approves a transitional authority to be overseen by US President Donald Trump and envisions a possible future path to an independent Palestinian state.

More violence reported in Gaza

In Gaza, the Kuwait Speciality Hospital in Rafah said on Thursday it had received the bodies of five people, including two children, following an Israeli airstrike in the south of the strip late Wednesday.

Another 32 people were treated for wounds sustained in the strike on the town of Muwasi, the hospital said. Israel said it launched an airstrike targeting a Hamas militant in retaliation for an attack earlier in the day that wounded five Israeli soldiers. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said Hamas vio-

lated the ceasefire when, according to the army, militants emerged from a tunnel and attacked Israeli soldiers in an area under their control.

Relatives angry at ceasefire violation

Relatives of the dead Palestinians wept and waited over their loved ones’ bodies being transported in white body bags through the city of Khan Younis on Thursday.

All five of the dead belong to the same family. Blood stains still marked the mattresses on the floor of a tent encampment that was struck.

Some relatives voiced their outrage that people are still being killed during what’s supposed to be a cessation of fighting. Aisha Abu Jazar, a woman living near where the Palestinians were killed, said she was shocked to hear “unusually intense fire” by Israelis overnight.

“They fired a missile at a tent made of cloth, plastic, and wood. The children were asleep. What did the children do to deserve being torn apart in their sleep? What did they do to deserve this?” she said. “We were supposed to be in a ceasefire,” she added.

Israel names new spy chief

Netanyahu appointed his military secretary, Maj. Gen. Roman Goffman, as chief of the country’s Mossad spy agency, the prime minister’s office said in a statement Thursday. Goffman replaces outgoing agency boss David Barnea,

whose five-year term ends in June 2026. The appointment will be put to the Advisory Committee for Appointments to Senior Positions for ratification. Goffman served as commander of several Israeli army brigades, battalions and divisions before leading the country’s National Ground Training Centre and the Government Operations Headquarters in the Territories, the statement said.

Netanyahu believes Goffman is the most worthy and capable candidate who possesses “exceptional professional abilities” and demonstrates “creativity, initiative, cunning, deep knowledge of the enemy, absolute discretion and secrecy,” the statement said. Gaza’s Health Ministry says 366 Palestinians have been killed there since the start of the ceasefire. Israel still carries out strikes in response to what it has called violations of the truce, and bodies from earlier in the war are being recovered from the rubble.

The war began with a Hamas-led attack on southern Israel on October 7, 2023, in which around 1,200 people were killed, and more than 250 others were taken hostage. Almost all of the hostages or their remains have been returned in ceasefires or other deals. The Palestinian death toll has surpassed 70,100 [since the war began, according to Gaza’s Health Ministry, which operates under the Hamas-run Government.

It is staffed by medical professionals and maintains detailed records viewed as generally reliable by the international community.

Mexican farmers protest new water law proposal



ASSOCIATED PRESS
■ Mexico City

Dozens of farmers drove their tractors in a caravan to Mexico City and blocked an entrance to Mexico’s Congress to protest a new national water law that imposes stricter controls on water use. The farmers amassed outside the congressional chamber on Wednesday to protest the General Water Law proposal, which they say will take water away from the countryside and re-allocate it for discretionary use. They say the proposal threatens their livelihoods and chips away at their fundamental right to water. “If it affects the countryside, it affects the city!” read a banner hanging from two tractors. “We are protesting against the imposition by the federal

Government of a new water law, a reform that puts at risk the ownership of our lands,” said Jorge Robles, a farmer from the northern state of Chihuahua. The proposal backed by Mexican President Claudia Sheinbaum is being discussed in the Chamber of Deputies, where the president’s Morena Party has a majority. The law aims for the federal Government to impose stricter penalties for water-related crimes and regulate water concessions — a sector plagued by high-profile corruption cases.

The farmers brought their demonstrations to the country’s capital less than a week after they and groups of truck drivers lifted road and highway blockades in at least seven of the country’s 32 States.

EU’s former chief diplomat quits amid fraud probe

ASSOCIATED PRESS
■ Brussels

The European Union’s former foreign policy chief resigned on Thursday as head of a prestigious institute of European studies after becoming embroiled in a fraud investigation over a training programme for junior diplomats. Federica Mogherini said she was stepping down as Rector of the College of Europe, based in the Belgian city of Bruges, and as of the European Union Diplomatic Academy.

Mogherini’s statement gave no reason for the resignation, saying only that she had done so “in line with the utmost rigor and fairness with which I always carried out my duties.” “I am proud of what we have achieved together, and I am deeply grateful for the trust, esteem, and support that students, faculty, staff, and Alumni of the College and the Academy have shown

and are showing to me,” she said. As the EU’s top diplomat from 2014 to 2019, Mogherini was responsible for supervising the Iran nuclear talks, leading efforts to improve long-strained relations between Serbia and Kosovo, and a host of other foreign policy and security issues.

The arrest and resignation of the former Italian foreign minister could tarnish the EU’s image on the world stage as it seeks to assert influence in negotiations aimed at ending the war in Ukraine. The bloc has been urging Ukraine to tackle rampant corruption. Mogherini was detained for questioning Tuesday, along with a senior college staff member and a senior official from the European Commission, after authorities in Belgium raided the offices of the EU diplomatic service in Brussels and the college in Bruges.

Massive power outage hits Cuba



ASSOCIATED PRESS
■ Havana

A blackout hit Havana and the rest of the western half of Cuba on Wednesday afternoon, leaving millions of people without power on an island struggling with chronic outages blamed on a crumbling electric grid.

Lázaro Guerra, general director of the Ministry of Energy and Mines, said the massive outage was caused by a failure on a transmission line that connects two major plants.

The power grid was operational once again by Wednesday afternoon, but the Government warned that the restoration of electricity would not be immediate and that generation deficits persisted.

The nearly 12-hour blackout snarled activities in the capital and beyond. In Havana, dozens of police officers tried to direct traffic while many students who were already in school were sent back home. Small businesses that have generators resumed their sales, especially of food.

Some areas had intermittent internet service, so many residents were left wondering what had happened. “There’s no connec-

tion. No one knows why the power is out. They’re not saying anything; it’s all silence,” grumbled Raúl Calderón, an 82-year-old retiree, as he waited to hear official reports on the radio. The outage followed two days of peak-hour power shortages across the island.

A total blackout hit Cuba in September, with officials blaming aging infrastructure and fuel shortages at power plants. The ongoing outages also affect water service and impact the island’s fragile business sector. “Things are bad. The power plants are breaking down a lot. I have two children, and food is hard to come by,” said Liubel Quintana, a 47-year-old cafe owner. “It’s very tough everywhere you look.”

Cuba is going through a severe economic crisis that deepened during the coronavirus pandemic, which paralysed the key tourism sector, and was exacerbated by an increase in US sanctions and a failed internal financial reform to unify the currency.

Meanwhile, thermal power plants have been operating for over 30 years and receive little maintenance, which is expensive for Cuban budgets.

Trump administration orders H-1B, H-4 visa applicants to make social media profiles public

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ New York/Washington

The US Government has expanded screening and vetting measures for H-1B visa applicants and their H-4 dependents, directing them to keep the privacy settings on all their social media profiles set to “public.”

In a new order issued Wednesday, the State Department said beginning December 15, a review of the online presence for all H-1B applicants and their dependents will be conducted. Students and exchange visitors were already subject to

such scrutiny, which has now been extended to include those applying for H-1B and H-4 visas.

“To facilitate this vetting, all applicants for H-1B and their dependents (H-4), F, M, and J nonimmigrant visas are instructed to adjust the privacy settings on all of their social media profiles to ‘public,’” the State Department said.

Underlining that a US visa is a privilege and not a right, the department said it uses all available information in screening and vetting to identify visa applicants who are inadmissible or

pose a threat to America’s national security or public safety. “Every visa adjudication is a national security decision,” it said.

The department said the US “must be vigilant” to ensure applicants do not intend to harm Americans and that all visa applicants credibly establish eligibility and intent to comply with the terms of their admission.

The directive is the latest in a series of steps by the Trump administration to tighten immigration rules.

The administration has launched a massive crackdown to check abuse of the

H-1B visa programme, used largely by US technology companies to hire foreign workers. Indian professionals, including tech workers and physicians, form one of the largest groups of H-1B visa holders.

In September, US President Donald Trump issued a proclamation, titled ‘Restriction on Entry of Certain Nonimmigrant Workers’, imposing a one-time \$100,000 fee on new H-1B work visas, an order that could significantly impact Indian workers seeking temporary employment in the US.

Pak lifts ban on festive kite flying after 20 years

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ Lahore

Amid pressure from artists and civil society members, a ban on kite flying during the Basant festival has been lifted in Pakistan’s Punjab province after 20 years.

The decision by Maryam Nawaz led the administration has evoked widespread excitement across cities and villages in the province of 13 million people.

Celebrated towards the end of winters to mark the arrival of spring (Basant) season, the Basant festival has been an occasion for community celebrations across the province.

Kite flying during Basant festivities was an integral part for centuries but was banned about two decades ago. Announcing the details of the decision made on

Wednesday, Punjab’s Minister for Information and Culture Azma Bokhari said on Thursday that there will, however, be several restrictions and fines for those violating new rules regarding the same.

“After 20 years, the joy of Basant has finally returned to Punjab. But this time, it comes under strict safety regulations. No one will be allowed to break the law during the festival,” Bokhari said in a statement.

In 2005, the Government imposed the ban on kite-flying following several deaths, especially of motorcyclists and children, in accidents when the kite’s sharp glass-coated strings got entangled around their necks leading to serious injuries.

Azma added that children under 18 will not be allowed to fly kites.

Trump hosts leaders of Congo, Rwanda to sign key deal for peace in eastern Congo

ASSOCIATED PRESS
■ Washington

US President Donald Trump will host the leaders of the Democratic Republic of Congo and Rwanda on Thursday for a deal-signing aimed at ending the conflict in eastern Congo and opening access to the region’s critical minerals for the US Government and American companies.

The moment provides Trump—who has repeatedly and with a measure of exaggeration boasted of brokering peace in some of the world’s most entrenched conflicts—another chance to tout himself as a dealmaker extraordinaire on the global stage and make the case that he’s deserving of the Nobel Peace Prize. The US leader hasn’t been shy about

CONGO HAS BEEN BATTERED BY FIGHTING WITH ARMED GROUPS, THE MOST POTENT BEING THE RWANDA-BACKED M23

his desire to receive the honour. Trump is welcoming Presidents Felix Tshisekedi of Congo and Paul Kagame of Rwanda, as well as several officials from other African nations travelling to Washington to witness the signing, in the same week he contemptuously derided the war-torn country of Somalia and said he did not want immigrants from the East African nation in the US.

Lauded by the White House as a “historic” agreement brokered by Trump, the

pact between Tshisekedi and Kagame follows monthslong peace efforts by the US and partners, including the African Union and Qatar, and finalises an earlier deal signed in June. But the Trump-brokered peace is precarious. The Central African nation of Congo has been battered by decades-long fighting with more than 100 armed groups, the most potent being the Rwanda-backed M23 rebels.

The conflict escalated this year, with M23 seizing the region’s main cities of Goma and Bukavu in an unprecedented advance, worsening a humanitarian crisis that was already one of the world’s largest, with millions of people displaced.

Fighting, meanwhile, continued this week in the conflict-battered region with

pockets of clashes reported between the rebels and Congolese soldiers, together with their allied forces. Trump, a Republican, has often said that his mediation has ended the conflict, which some people in Congo say isn’t true. Analysts say deal also isn’t expected to quickly result in peace. A separate peace deal has been signed between Congo and the M23.

“We are still at war,” said Amani Chibalonza Edith, a 32-year-old resident of Goma, eastern Congo’s key city seized by rebels early this year. “There can be no peace as long as the front lines remain active.” Pact will also build on a Regional Economic Integration Framework that officials have said will define the terms of economic partnerships involving the three countries



Pilot safely ejects before F-16 crashes in US

ASSOCIATED PRESS ■ Trona

A fighter jet with the Air Force’s elite Thunderbirds demonstration squadron crashed in the Southern California desert, but the pilot managed to eject safely, the military said. The pilot was being treated at a hospital for injuries that were not life-threatening, according to the San Bernardino County Fire Department. The F-16C Fighting Falcon crashed around 10:45 am on Wednesday during a training mission “over controlled airspace in California”, according to a statement from Nellis Air Force Base in Nevada. The fire department said it had responded to an “aircraft emergency” near Trona, an unincorporated community in the Mojave Desert about 180 miles (290 kilometers) north of Los Angeles. In 2022, a Navy F/A-18E Super Hornet crashed near Trona, killing the pilot.



Officers wounded, suspect killed in US shooting

ASSOCIATED PRESS ■ Omaha

Three Omaha police officers have been wounded and a suspect killed in an exchange of gunfire at a gas station. The suspect, a man in his 20s, had earlier shot a 61-year-old man several times in the chest about noon at a grocery store, Police Chief Todd Schmaderer said. Officers obtained a license plate number from the scene and followed the suspect’s car to the gas station, he said. The officers watched the suspect get out and enter a restroom on Wednesday. He then left the room and began firing on the officers, the chief said. Two officers were hit, and a third was hit by shrapnel. The officers returned fire, and the suspect was killed. “This is a very dangerous day involving this suspect in the city of Omaha,” Schmaderer said. The officers suffered non-life-threatening injuries and were taken to a local hospital.



Ramanareddy and Seshu Brahnamam



Kala yajna, Nest makers, Srushti art academy organize Ongole Art Fest – 2025 "Traditional Houses of India" OAF-25 Art Exhibition inauguration by Sekhar Kammula, Film director and screenwriter, M. V Ramana Reddy, Eminent sculptor, President, Artist Seshu Brahnamam, M. L. Anand Rao, Associate professor & principal i/c, College of Fine Art, Dr Priti Samyukta, Associate Prof, Fulbright Nehru postdoc fellow, Felicited Guests, Gouri Vemula, Contemporary Artist, National Award Winner, Sabbani Ramakrishna, Monika Nigotie Sabbani, Production designers, Yedida Taraka Ravi Kumar, Sculptor. At Nehru Arts Gallery, Masab Tank, Hyderabad, Telangana, The Exhibition will be on view till 5th December from 11 am to 5 pm



Ramani



Anusha



Lavanya



Sravani



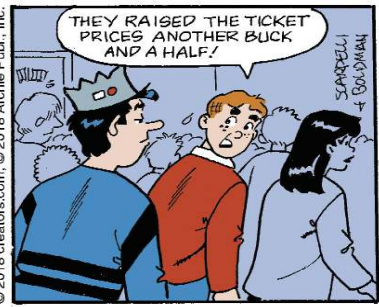
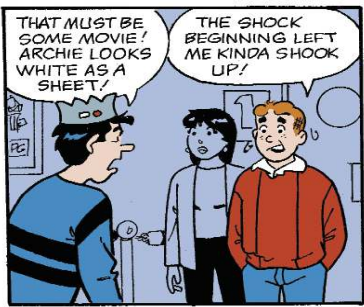
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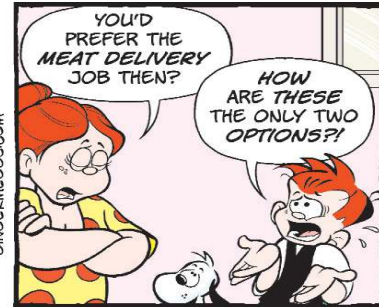
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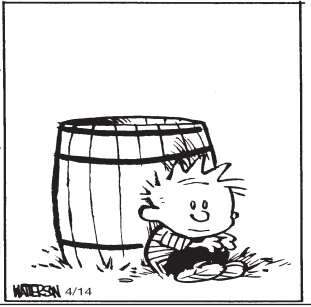
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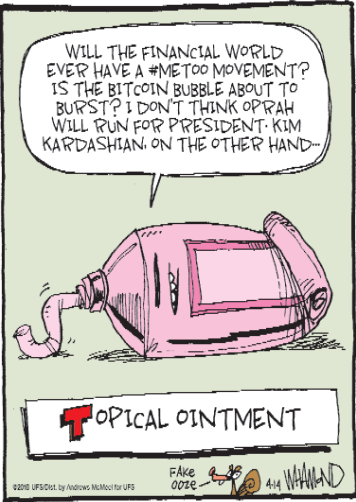
GINGER MEGGS



CALVIN AND HOBBS



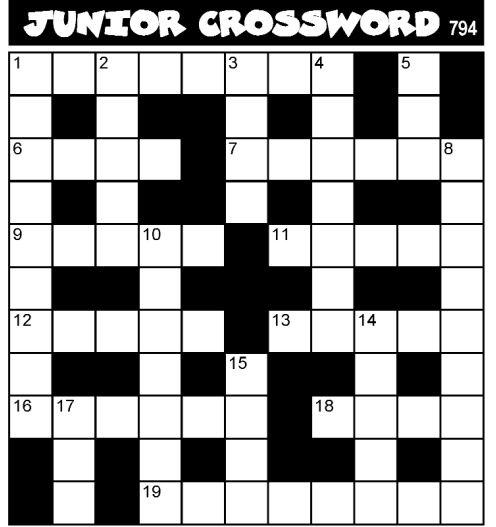
REALITY CHECK



SPEED BUMP



CROSSWORD



ACROSS

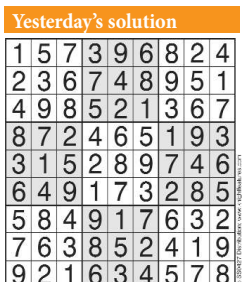
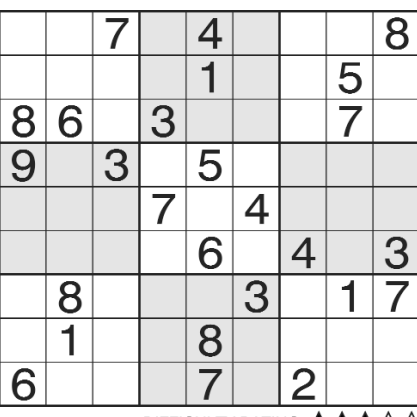
- Sick people in hospital
- A feeling that makes you scratch
- Ran after trying to catch
- One of your five senses
- Pimples on the face
- Requires
- Opposite of winner
- Attend classes here
- Young child
- Studied closely
- Wash your hair with this
- Frozen water
- Smashed to pieces
- This turns into a frog
- The country of the Spanish
- A biting insect
- A popular pet

DOWN

- See these at an art gallery
- Small nails for carpets
- Pleasant



SUDOKU



- Rules
- Each row and column can contain each number (1 to 9) exactly once.
 - The sum of all numbers in any row or column must equal 45.

DIFFICULTY RATING: ★★★★★

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BLASÉ CAPITAL

DEFICIT TRADE



As Russia's powerful Vladimir Putin lands in India, there is huge excitement about the potential and possibilities to further concretise the trade, cultural, social, and business links between the two nations. Media reports talk about massive deals in areas such as energy, defence, and other areas. A few days before his visit, there were reports that despite the new US and European sanctions, crude oil imports from Russia went up after a brief drop. Indians, it seems, have mastered the art and science to use grey ships, or illegal smuggling shipments to import oil. Since the global sanctions are against the exports of petrochemicals that use Russian crude, Indian refiners can use the latter to make petroproducts to cater to domestic demand. Thus, in both legal and grey areas, the partnership and friendship between the two nations is on the rise.

Yet, there are a few issues that India needs to contend with in its seemingly-blind pursuit of Putin's pacts. The first is that even as the two nations talk about increasing the annual trade between them by more than 40 per cent to \$100 billion within five years, the current balance is clearly lopsided. Of the nearly \$70 billion trade now, Indian exports constitute a mere seven per cent of the total. The large proportion of the value is about the goods that India imports. Indeed, most of its defence needs, despite purchases from non-Russia suppliers in the recent past, is focused on Russia. The industry and commerce minister, Piyush Goyal rightly analysed the situation, although in a slightly-garbled way, as one where "we cannot rest, we need to grow, we need to balance that." What he means is that India needs to export more goods and services to Russia.

Of course, on paper, there are several areas where India can emerge as an attractive supplier of world-class products. According to Goyal, in manufacturing, there are huge opportunities to expand the trade, and reduce the huge deficit. These include consumer goods, food products, automobiles, tractors, heavy commercial vehicles, consumer electronics, industrial components, and textiles. Similarly, there is a latent potential to push services exports. If India can sell services to the US, and Europe, and the rest of the world, why not Russia? The Russian side seconded Goyal's assessment, and talked about India can increase its current two per cent share in Russia's overall imports. However, there are several problems which, as the Indian commerce secretary, pointed out includes process simplification. The policy-makers on both sides need to sit together to ferret out solutions, which are not likely to be easy, or simple.

Let us start with agriculture and food products. This is a contentious issue, both for exports and imports. Indian policy-makers have articulated the need to increase exports to push up farm incomes. However, exports rarely help the farmers. They mostly benefit the middlemen, and industry, who buy cheap, and sell dear. The second is that as soon as India enters the market, global prices swing wildly. If India is a purchaser, prices zoom. If it is a seller, prices dip, and both happen because of the high volumes in question. Thus, the full benefit of global prices, either high or low, do not accrue to Indians. Finally, there is a strong industry lobby against exports, which invariably sways the other way for cheaper imports. In addition, the current atmosphere, where India is being pushed by America to import higher farm products, is not conducive.

Now, let us move to consumer electronics, and telecom equipment. One of the biggest exports in this area is of the smartphones, especially the iPhones. But, as most of us know, the iPhones are being shipped to the US by Apple, which is under pressure to make more of them in the US. Obviously, while Apple will continue to 'Make in India,' it will surely not export to Russia from India, given the current stalemate between Putin and America's Donald Trump. Unless Russia agrees to a ceasefire in Ukraine, the US, and other global sanctions, prevent American and European firms from trading directly with Russia. So, essentially, iPhones are out of the India-Russia trade equation, especially over the next two years. India makes some components, and assembles the Chinese phones. But China may not wish to export to Russia from India. It will want to use the factories in its country for this purpose.

Despite the cultural affinities, and cultural exchanges between India and Russia, language is a huge barrier in the services sector. Indian IT and outsourcing firms have performed well in nations that are either fluent in English, or comfortable with it. In the case of, say, Russia, and China, one needs to know the local language. Decades ago, we had several Russian-speaking Indians but the tribe has slowly vanished. Russian, since the age of economic reforms, has not been a top priority for the Indians, who wanted to acquire English skills. If the services firms wish to expand in Russia, they need to focus on the language, as well as soft skills that are specific to the Russian culture. The soft-skill training that they impart to fresh hires need to be expanded to include possible entry into Russia.

A story of boom, gloom and doom

Opposing factors will influence Indian indices and equities in 2026

Marc Faber, the stock soothsayer who is famous for his 'Gloom, Boom, Doom' report, feels that the Indian stock market is not going anywhere in 2026. This view is contradictory to those of the analysts, and brokerage houses that believe that the Sensex, the Bombay Stock Exchange index, may gain more than a quarter by December 2026. As we prepare to step into the new year, there are reasons that can be used by both sides, the bulls and bears, and optimists and pessimists. Like the Indian economy's 'Alice in Wonderland' story, the country stock markets imply another trip down the rabbit hole.

One of Faber's main concerns revolves around the value of the rupee, and its exchange rate vis-à-vis the dollar. Already, the Indian currency is below ₹90, and has shed several percentage points this year. This is why the investor-predictor claims that Indian equities gave negative returns if one considers their worth in dollars, rather than in rupees. In contrast, a few markets have registered positive returns in dollar terms. Brazil, for example, went up by 5.5 per cent. Indeed, despite the recent rise, the Indian stock market was one of the worst performers among emerging markets, and Asian peers.

Next year may not see any worthwhile changes. There is a growing fear among currency traders that the rupee may dip to ₹100-a-dollar within a year. The efforts by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) to protect the currency has not yielded results. Despite temporary upward blips, the rupee has continued its free fall. Faber feels that the returns from Indian equities in 2026 in dollar terms, largely due to the state of the

rupee, may be marginally positive, or even negative. Hence, he is not enthused about them, as he is not about equities elsewhere, except for a few niche segments.

However, there are several players who think that Faber's gloom-and-doom tale is a fable. The former experts argue that there is momentum in the Indian economy, as indicated by the GDP growth in the first two quarters, low inflation, adequate space for the RBI to intervene, positive consumer sentiments, and good monsoons that will benefit agriculture. This year (2025) was a bad one for equities, but it is behind us. There will be a re-rating of the stocks, as corporate earnings perk up. Valuations are still high, but are down from their post-Covid peaks. There is bullish steam left.

Another way to see the stock market as either half-full or half-empty glass is to go beyond the overall indices, and look at the entire universe of listed stocks. A media report indicates that the bulk of the hikes in share prices is limited to the stocks that comprise the Sensex and Nifty. If one looks at the top 500 scrips by market cap, more than half are in the negative in 2025. It is not a secular uptrend. Indeed, most of the positive activity is concentrated around the large caps, with problems in midcaps, and small caps.

Of course, the die-hard optimists argue that this is how a new bull run begins. After the post-Covid frenzy, when the Sensex rose from below 30,000 in early 2020 to 85,000 now, the index took a break in 2025. It converged with the growth slowdown in GDP. As valuations have eased, and there is fresh energy and excitement

in the economy, the bull run may pick up, and gather speed. This will lead to another mini-bull run in 2026, whose future will be decided by several domestic and external factors, including the India-US trade deal.

What is more immediate, and scarier than the rupee, or the secular nature of the upcoming boom or doom, is the massive exodus of money from the equity market. In the first three days of December 2025, foreign investors withdrew more money than they did in the entire month of November. Over the past two months, according to reports, Indian retail investors have turned sellers to book profits. During 2025, when foreigners largely remained net sellers, the Indians saved the day as they poured in huge sums in mutual funds, which invested in stocks. If the ongoing dual-selling trend continues, it can derail the indices over the next few months.

One of the reasons for the retail sales, apart from profit-booking, is the switch from the secondary to primary market. Suddenly, given the plateauing trends in listed stocks, IPOs (Initial Public Offerings) offer the chances to earn better returns. In the recent past, listing gains have touched 50 per cent and more, even if the stocks have subsequently languished at lower prices. This allows the risk-takers to make 30-50 per cent within a few weeks. Apart from the Indian retail investors, foreigners too have adopted these tactics. They sell in the secondary market, and queue up for the IPOs.

Given these contradictory views, Faber advises investors to stay in cash, i.e., get out of stocks, and invest the money in gold, silver, and platinum. He contends that the dollar returns from the precious metals, and bullion, are higher. For Indians, as the rupee slides against the dollar, and if this trend continues in 2026, the metals offer more attractive propositions. Apart from normal increase in prices, as gold and silver have witnessed in 2025, the returns are higher due to the rupee-dollar exchange rate. It is a double-bonanza.

Clearly, the bullion investment strategy can turn into a lot of bull, if the metal prices come down. As trade disruptions, and accompanying disruptions ease, if the Russia-Ukraine war stalls, and if China and the US agree to a more permanent truce, the yellow metal will lose its lustre. Central banks may ease off buying, as will institutional investors. In such a scenario, buying gold or silver now may be fraught with risks. Of course, if one is already invested in them, it will make sense to buy more, after selling equities.

Evidently, stock investors have two options. Either they take the risks, and push further into equities, but trade regularly, almost daily, based on domestic and global events, to reap some rewards, albeit smaller but regularly. Or they can stay away, take a break, and look at other assets, and investment options. It is almost impossible to time a market, any market. Even the best need to be lucky to achieve it. It may be better to wait-and-watch, and assess the stock market before deciding which way it plans to move.



The Tech Wrecker

Censorship vs immigration

No visas for those who post anti-right wing and anti-US views



Already, Indians, who have some strong and ongoing connections with the US, are cagey about attaching themselves to seemingly-anti-US views and opinions. For example, professionals, whose family members work in the US, refuse to associate with controversial issues. Indian students in American colleges refuse to talk on the phone, even on encrypted platforms, about what is happening in that country. Parents and spouses of those living in the US refuse to engage in the so-called sensitive conversations. There is a fear to like, or even attach a thumbs up icon to social media posts.

In a recent cable that was sent to the US missions across the world, consular officers were urged, according to a media report, to see if the visa applicants, and family members who may travel with them, had "worked in areas that include activities such as misinformation, disinformation, content moderation, fact-checking,

compliance, online safety, among others." The cable adds, "If you uncover evidence an applicant was responsible for, or complicit in, censorship or attempted censorship of protected expression in the United States, you should pursue a finding that the applicant is ineligible."

Although the language relates to suppression of free speech through misinformation or disinformation, its practice will have a far-reaching effect. This is because, as media reports indicate, Trump's White House defines the lack of free speech as the "stifling of conservative voices online." Given this context, if you are a liberal with left leanings, you may be suppressing the freedom of expression. The same rules will apply in practice to those who oppose the new America's opinions on social and health issues like the efficacy of vaccines. Indeed, any views contrary to Trump will be included.

In May this year, the US secretary of state

threatened to ban visas for foreigners who censor speech by Americans. Now, this context offers quite a long rope to the consulars, and officials, to stop certain kinds of foreigners. In such cases, any form of anti-US, rather anti-Trump, and anti-conservative views can lead to visa bans. It may have happened years, and decades ago. But if it is still alive on the Internet, and it is difficult to kill content on the web, one can be in trouble. Thus, a thorough clean-up will be required to remove it.

Over the past few months, Trump and his allies and loyalists have even accused the former Democratic president, Joe Biden, of encouraging the suppression of free speech. In this context, the former implies the latter's attempts to counter the false claims by sections of conservatives that the Biden elections were rigged. If a former president can be charged in this manner, one can only imagine what a foreigner, whose visa is rejected, can do. The idea, it seems, is deep. It is to make America home for Americans, and those who think like Americans, or rather hardcore republicans.

There may be a deep-rooted plan, and the advisory to the consulars on H-1B visas may be a part of the larger, universal, all-encompassing strategy to increase the voter base of the republicans. Experience shows that most of the recent immigrants are democrat voters, and include huge swathes of recent foreigners. By limiting entries in universities, tech firms, and corporate America to the so-called conservative, or those with republican-like views, the future electorate will reflect this change. In a sense, most of the new voters will vote republicans, and increase the party's victory chances.

H-1B visas have become a huge target for the Trump administration, which sees all the ills and evils concentrated in the regime. Limiting and changing the regime will solve most of the existing problems, change America the way Trump's wants, and 'Make America Great Again.' A new visa system will help Americans find more jobs, restrict entry to high-skilled and highly-paid foreigners, allow mostly conservatives to enter the country, and make the US more productive. It will influence the future presidential elections.

BRIEFLY

GAGANJEET BHULLAR BAGS THIRD IGPL TITLE IN STYLE



Gaganjeet Bhullar, who modestly began the week, closed it in a masterly fashion to become the first player to win three times on the IGPL Tour.

Bhullar, who opened the week with a round of 1-under 71, which included a hole-in-one, added solid rounds of 67-67 on the last two days to total a winning 11-under.

The highly talented 21-year-old Raghav Chugh gave it all, but with three pars in the last three holes, he fell one short and ended a creditable sole second.

Chugh shot 4-under 68 and totalled 10-under for the week. Three internationals, Filipino Justin Quiban, Mexican Santiago de la Fuentes and Indian-American Manav Shah, all hoping to become the first international to win on the IGPL, were thwarted at the finish and ended tied third at 8-under.

SANDHU LEADS BY THREE SHOTS IN JAIPUR



Indian golfer Yuvraj Sandhu carded an impressive third-round score of four-under 66 to establish a three-shot lead with a total of 16-under 194 at the Jaipur Open here on Thursday.

Sandhu (65-63-66), who was in second place and one shot off the lead at the start of round three, produced an eagle, four birdies and two bogeys during his 66 to take control in the penultimate round.

Sandhu is in pursuit of his sixth PGTI title this season. If Yuvraj does go on to bag his sixth win of 2025, he would match the PGTI record for most titles in a season set by Manu Gandas in 2022.

Kalikesh begins first full term as NRAI president

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Mohali

Kalikesh Narayan Singh Deo began his first full four-year term as president of the National Rifle Association of India (NRAI) after he was elected unopposed during its general body meeting here on Thursday.

Pawan Singh, a well-known administrator and technical expert of the precision sport, was elected as the new secretary general as the results of the sports body's elections were officially declared.

The elections were conducted by Justice (Retd) Nirmaljit Kaur, who was the returning officer. The elections also put in place a new executive committee and a new governing body.

Sharing his first reactions, Singh Deo said, "Indian shooting has currently seen its most successful phase in history over the last couple of years, both in terms of



success and popularity and that increases our responsibilities manifold.

"I wholeheartedly thank the entire general body for restoring faith in my team and me, and we promise to leave no stone unturned to accelerate this growth momentum even further and to maximise the potential that our extremely talented shooting athletes possess.

"With the flag paramount in our thoughts, let us all work together to make India number one in the world in our beloved sport." Odisha's

Singh Deo has been in charge of the federation since former president Raninder Singh completed his three terms in the post.

Pawan Singh said, "All the functions in the NRAI are already online, from registration to results, and now the next step is to use technology efficiently. We want to leverage AI and performance data to identify talented shooters across the country.

"My focus will be on using technology to find and nurture promising athletes from every corner of India."

Nikita overcomes tragedies to win gold in KIUG

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Jaipur

Young women's hockey player Nikita Toppo stands out not just for her exploits in the midfield but also for her resilience in overcoming tough times and a career-threatening injury early in her playing career.

The 22-year-old skipper played a pivotal role in helping Kalinga Institute of Industrial Technology (KIIT) clinch the women's hockey gold in the institution's maiden appearance at the Khelo India University Games here.

Nikita lost her parents when she was five years old, while one of her elder brothers died in an accident when she was on her way to U-23 Five-Nations Cup in Ireland three years ago. A year later,

she suffered a career-threatening injury and soon after her other brother met with an accident and suffered a skull injury from which he hasn't completely recovered yet.

But instead of getting bogged down by the series of setbacks, Nikita found solace in hockey.

"Before this (success at the KIUG), we would not clear our zone as there are many good university teams in Odisha. But from last year onwards, me and my coach have been working on building a strong team by getting good players to take admission in our university. "Before we came here, we were determined to win the title here," Nikita said after her team defeated ITM University, Gwalior, to take the top spot.

Nikita controlled the pace



of the game in the final in the defensive midfielder's role and ensured the ITM players could not penetrate her team's citadel.

However, it's not just Nikita's hockey skills but the clarity of thought and resilience that set her apart.

"I believe what happened, happened, and we can't change it. I focus on the present and accept the situation. I remain strong for my team and my family, or what's left of it, and I don't shed a tear because I don't want my insecurities and unfortunate incidents to take over me and cloud my mind," she said about her personal setbacks.

"What happened to my brother in 2022 was heart-breaking. But I didn't let it pull me down, and I didn't want

my team to suffer because of me. No matter how much I miss him, he won't come back," added Nikita, who could not even attend his last rites. The Indian team then won a silver medal in the U-23 Five-Nations Cup.

Nikita, whose hockey career started when she joined the Government Sports Hostel in Panposh, Rourkela, in 2016, was also part of the Indian U-21 team that won four matches and drew one during their South Africa tour in 2023.

But a ligament tear during a Khelo India Youth Games training camp in 2023 and an accident to her other surviving brother meant that she took almost a year to recover both physically and mentally to start performing on the field again.

Won't ask Piastri for F1 title help: Norris

ASSOCIATED PRESS

Abu Dhabi

Lando Norris says he won't ask his McLaren teammate Oscar Piastri to give up a place to favour him in the three-way Formula 1 title fight with Max Verstappen at the season-ending Abu Dhabi Grand Prix.

Norris has a 12-point lead over Verstappen going into Sunday's race, with Piastri four points further back.

If Verstappen is far ahead of both McLarens, it's possible Piastri could be in a situation where he can't take the title himself but can aid Norris' title bid. If Verstappen wins on Sunday, a top-three finish would be enough for Norris.

"Honestly, I mean, I would love it, but I don't think I would ask it because it's up to Oscar if he would allow it. I don't think it's necessarily down to me," Norris said, sitting alongside Piastri and Verstappen at a pre-race news conference on Thursday.

Norris added he believed



he would help out Piastri if the roles were reversed, but said they hadn't discussed any such situations within the team.

"Personally, I think I would, just because I feel like I'm always like that and that's just how I am, but this,

it's not really up to me," Norris said. "I'm not going to ask it. I don't want to ask it because I don't think it's necessarily a fair question."

Piastri left the issue open. "It's not something we've discussed," he said. "I don't really have an

answer until I know what's expected of me."

Norris had the chance to wrap up the title at last week's Qatar Grand Prix, but a pit strategy blunder by McLaren handed Verstappen the win to boost his title defence chances.

Gayatri-Treesa's reclaim their beat at Syed Modi

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi

The title defence at Syed Modi International has done more than just place another trophy on Gayatri Gopichand and Treesa Jolly's shelf. It has restored the rhythm the duo had been searching for through a fragmented season.

The two-time All-England semifinalists opened 2025 in promising fashion, reaching the All England quarterfinals and then the Swiss Open semifinals. But by June, a persistent shoulder issue caught up with both, forcing them to step off the circuit after the Macau Open.

Gayatri and Treesa returned in style, winning in just their second event at Lucknow, something which has given the young Indian pair the clarity and confidence as they prepare for a physically demanding 2026, when their first aim will be to regain their place in the top echelons of women's doubles.

"For me, Syed Modi felt like a reward for staying

patient and trusting the process," Gayatri told PTI in an interview. "I just started playing again, and it gave me a lot of confidence that my game is moving in the right direction."

A painful shoulder injury was followed by a long rehabilitation phase, and Gayatri said the mental grind was equally demanding.

"Even before Macau, it was there, and it was still hurting. After Macau, it was a proper two-month break... It has been a tough, challenging situation," Gayatri said.

"You focus on rehab, stay positive, lean on coaches, physios, family... Mentally, if I stay strong, that helps me."

Her father, former All England champion and national chief coach Pullela Gopichand, remains her anchor. "He talks about his injuries and tells me what to look at... It's a huge confidence for me," she said.

A five-week block to rebuild power

With just a month to go for the next season, Gayatri and Treesa know physical prepa-



ration will shape results more than appearances. "Strength wise I have to build a lot of strength, endurance as well. We've got a good five-week time now, so it's a good time to build strength, agility, endurance—all of that. It's an upward journey," Gayatri said.

The Indian pair was ranked world Number 9 for 13 weeks earlier this year, and they see 2026 as the season to reclaim that zone. "I think our biggest goals are to break into the top bracket of world doubles, win more world titles, and perform well at world championships. And of course,

work towards Olympic qualification as well," Gayatri said. "And yeah, I think improving consistency is a big thing for us right now."

Treesa's doubles stint added new dimension

While Gayatri was rebuilding, Treesa, who recovered in two months, kept herself match-ready through mixed doubles, partnering Hariharan Amsakarunan and winning the Turkiye International Challenge in October.

"Yeah, mixed doubles actually... When Gayatri was injured, I just wanted to get

a tournament feel," Treesa said. "That's how I started playing mixed doubles. I can say I'm really enjoying it."

But she admits scheduling could get complicated once the bigger tournaments begin. "We don't really have any world ranking right now to get entries for 1000s and 750s. That's why I'm a little bit confused... How to manage mixed doubles also."

Yet the stint helped her sharpen net play, anticipation and rotation awareness — elements that were visible in Lucknow. The win in Lucknow showcased Gayatri and Treesa's improved clarity in rotations.

"On court, we've developed a good understanding of each other's strengths," Gayatri said. "I know when Treesa is taking charge, and she knows when I'm going to move in. We're comfortable discussing anything, which helps us stay united through tough phases."

While the title defence signals readiness, the 21-year-olds know well that building deeper consistency at the highest level will be the key.

Marseille's prolific attack faces in-form Lille in Ligue 1

ASSOCIATED PRESS

Paris

The two highest scoring teams in Ligue 1 face off on Friday when nine-time champion Marseille travels north to take on Lille.

Marseille missed the chance to move to the top of the standings last weekend after being held to a home draw. On a four-match unbeaten run across all competitions, it has another opportunity to take the lead with a win. Roberto De Zerbi's Marseille sits third in the table, two points behind leader Lens.

Lille is in fourth place, five points off the pace.

With 35 goals in 14 matches, Marseille boasts one of the best attacking records in Europe this season and its highest tally at this stage in the French top flight

since 1970. Lille is also enjoying positive momentum, having won its past three matches across competitions.

Key matchups

Leader Lens plays at Nantes on Saturday on the back of a 2-1 win at Angers that moved the club to the top of the standings for the first time in 21 years. Following its second loss of the season at Monaco, second-placed Paris Saint-Germain is at home against Rennes before a trip to Athletic Bilbao in the Champions League next week.

Players to watch

Florian Thauvin's flair and efficiency have been crucial assets for Lens.

The 2018 World Cup winner is enjoying a revival since his return to the league from Italian side Udinese this summer. The 32-year-old



winger has four goals, including a brace last weekend, and produced two assists.

His performances have earned him a recall for France following a six-year absence.

If he continues to impress there are good chances he will be playing at another World Cup next summer.

"What is new today is being top of the league,"

Thauvin said. "But it is way too early to get carried away. Will we be able to compete with PSG? We'll see."

Who's out?

PSG said on Thursday that goalkeeper Lucas Chevalier is still nursing a right ankle injury. Chevalier was injured in the loss against Monaco after a violent tackle from Lamine Camara. PSG is also missing Désiré Doué, Nuno Mendes, Achraf Hakimi and Lucas Beraldo.

Off the field

Nice made headlines for the wrong reasons this week after shocking acts of violence from its fans. After a sixth consecutive loss across all competitions on Sunday, players and staff were assaulted when they returned to the club's training and academy centre.

Toyota moves further into partnership for 2026 with Haas Formula 1 team



ASSOCIATED PRESS

Tokyo

The Haas Formula 1 team will get a new name next season, further showcasing its relationship with Japanese automaker Toyota.

In a statement Thursday, the team said its name in 2026 will be TGR Haas F1

Team. The TGR stands for Toyota Gazoo Racing, which is the racing division of the Toyota Motor Corporation.

Taking over the title sponsorship means Toyota is now more involved in F1 than at any time since it pulled its team out after the 2009 season.

Haas and Toyota entered

into the first stages of this technical partnership a year ago and the Haas car has been carrying Toyota's branding since.

The partnership involves design and technical services but does not include a Toyota engine. Haas will run next year with Ferrari power, but it does move the company ever deeper into Formula 1.

Toyota ran a team in F1 until the end of the 2009 season. It failed to win a race despite spending heavily.

This move does not appear to mark a return to that level of involvement.

"It's naturally a privilege to deepen our relationship with TGR through this new title partnership agreement," Ayao Komatsu, team principal of Haas, said in a statement from Haas.