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India win bronze in FIH Men's Junior World Cup
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PIONEER IN SHORT

BJP SLAMS CONG, ALLIES OVER IMPEACHMENT MOTION AGAINST MADRAS HC JUDGE

The Telangana BJP on Wednesday played the INDIA bloc for initiating an impeachment motion in Parliament for the removal of Madras High Court Judge G R Swaminathan, whose order on lighting a lamp at a temple in Tamil Nadu has sparked a row. It was an "unprecedented and dangerous attack" on the judiciary by Congress, DMK and other parties, Telangana BJP chief spokesperson N V Subhash said in a statement.

FULL REPORT ON P2

IMD HYD ISSUES COLD WAVE WARNING AS WINTER INTENSIFIES

India Meteorological Department (IMD) Hyderabad has issued a cold wave warning for Telangana for three days as winter season intensifies in the state. It is valid for various districts of the State. As per the weather department, the warning is valid till December 12. During the intervening night of December 9 and 10, the temperatures in the city declined to single digits. Amid the winter cold wave warning by IMD Hyderabad...

FULL REPORT ON P3

CHANDRASHEKHAR TRUST DISPUTE REVIVED, COURT ALLOWS SUIT ALLEGING MISMANAGEMENT

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

FULL REPORT ON P4

SEX WORKERS FLOCK TO KOLKATA BOOTH TO REGISTER AS VOTERS

Forty-year-old Sumita Koley (name changed), a resident of the Chetla red-light area, has never voted. This year, she is determined to change that. She queued up on Wednesday at a Special Intensive Revision (SIR) assistance camp at Chetla area in south Kolkata, hoping to secure their place as voters. Koley was among nearly 200 women who crowded the small club room at 29/A Rakhaldas Addya Road, a narrow stretch...

FULL REPORT ON P5

QUOTE OF THE DAY



IT SHOWS THE BANKRUPTCY OF THE RULING PARTY THAT IT IS RESORTING TO PHYSICAL ATTACKS AS IT IS UNABLE TO FACE THE ELECTIONS DEMOCRATICALLY

— KT RAMA RAO, BRS WORKING PRESIDENT



Revathi unveils ₹1,000 cr push to transform OU

PNS ■ Hyderabad

Telangana Chief Minister A Revathi Reddy on Wednesday announced an allocation of Rs 1,000 crore for development works at Osmania University, pledging to upgrade the century-old institution to international standards.

Reddy unveiled a copy of the government order sanctioning the funds during a visit to the campus, which played a central role in the Telangana statehood movement.

Addressing students and

faculty, he said the government would seek inputs from students, academics and intellectuals of Telangana to shape the university's transformation.

Telangana has a history of resisting injustice and authoritarianism, he said, adding that OU had produced several prominent personalities, including former Prime Minister P V Narasimha Rao, former Union Minister S Jaipal Reddy, folk singer Gaddar and student leader George Reddy, who inspired social struggles.

CONTINUED ON >> P2

‘Much ado about nothing’

Harish slams govt's claims on investments and jobs Demands a white paper detailing actual achievements

PNS ■ Hyderabad

In a stinging attack on the Congress government's claims over investments during the Global Summit, former minister and BRS MLA Harish Rao challenged the government to release a white paper detailing the true figure of investments that it brought to the state. Accusing the government of circulating concocted stories on investments, Harish said the global summit has turned into a visionless publicity stunt.

The Congress government has claimed that it has created thousands of jobs and bagged lakhs of crores of investments, he said and demanded a white paper on



the achievements if there is any truth in the claims. He said that the claim of bagging more than Rs 5 lakh crore worth of investments appears to be far-fetched, given the actual situation. Slamming the Telangana Vision Document as one that lacks direction and commitment.

He alleged that the government had spent "crores of rupees" on an event that did not benefit as expected. And

termed it as the one aimed at promoting the real estate rather than making it an economic forum to promote and propagate Telangana's potential for development. Recalling the claims during the Davos and other agreements s Harish questioned, "You have claimed huge achievements during the visits.

What is the actual investment situation? And what about the jobs the government had claimed that it had created?" He also doubted the claims of the government that the event was attended by 5thousand foreign representatives and the Chief Ministers of 18 states, adding that the actual turnout was very meagre.

CONTINUED ON >> P2



‘Luthras booked Thailand tickets as fire raged at Goa nightclub’

PNS ■ New Delhi

Saurabh Luthra and Gaurav Luthra, the main accused and owners of the Goa nightclub where a massive blaze claimed 25 lives, booked tickets to Thailand within an hour of learning about the fire at their establishment, officials said on Wednesday. According to the investigation by the Goa police, both Luthra brothers booked their tickets for Phuket in Thailand through a travel portal at 1.17 AM on December 7.

CONTINUED ON >> P2

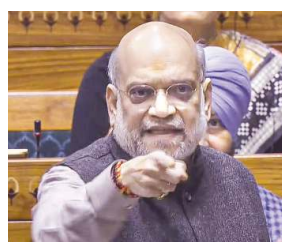
Combative Shah corners Cong

Says the party's defeat in polls due to its leadership, not EVMs or ‘vote chori’

PNS ■ New Delhi

A combative Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Wednesday hit out at the opposition in the Lok Sabha for its campaign against SIR, saying the issue has been raked up as it can no longer win elections by "corrupt practices", and asserted that the reason for Congress' defeat in polls was its leadership, not EVMs or "vote chori".

In his intervention in the debate on election reforms, Shah alleged that the opposition wanted to keep the "avaidh ghushpathiye" (illegal immigrants) in the voter list and hence the SIR issue was raised, but the Narendra Modi govern-



SHAH CLAIMED THAT THERE WERE THREE INSTANCES OF ‘VOTE CHORI’ BY JAWAHARLAL NEHRU, INDIRA GANDHI AND SONIA GANDHI



RAHUL GANDHI CHALLENGED THE HOME MINISTER TO DEBATE WITH HIM ON HIS THREE PRESS CONFERENCES ON ‘VOTE CHORI’

ment's policy is clear -- detect all aliens, delete their names from the voters list and throw them out of the country.

Shah gave a point-by-point rebuttal to the opposition's charges on SIR during his 90-minute speech.

CONTINUED ON >> P2



Bid to boost AI innovation

TG, Google launch startup hub

PNS ■ Hyderabad

The Telangana government and Google on Wednesday launched the Google for Startups Hub at the T-Hub startup incubator here.

The hub, inaugurated by Telangana Chief Minister A Revathi Reddy and Minister for IT and Industries D Sridhar Babu, is a dedicated Google-branded space aimed at supporting the state's growing startup ecosystem and helping it scale to deliver world-class innovations.

According to a release, this is the first such Google for Startups Hub to be launched as part of Telangana's broader incubation and innovation ecosystem.

Google plans to engage regional startups through the hub, offering free, year-long dedicated coworking seats for selected AI-first startups and access to a curated network of venture investors, the release said.

The Telangana government and Google will jointly support AI-first startups, nurture talent, and build direct links to international markets, it added.

‘A conspiracy to benefit MIM’

BJP CHIEF SLAMS GHMC EXPANSION

PNS ■ Hyderabad

Reiterating the party's stand on opposition to expansion of GHMC, Telangana state BJP President N Ramchander Rao alleged that the true intention behind the merging of 27 local bodies is "political self-interest and aimed to special advantage for Majlis party (AIMIM) and not public welfare.

Addressing a press conference on Wednesday, he said the BJP was not opposed to



making Hyderabad a large city. But the party condemned the way the state government issued orders merging 20 municipalities, 7 corporations and key Gram

Panchayats on the outskirts of Hyderabad into GHMC without eliciting public opinion.

Rao pointed out that many existing GHMC wards already lacked basic infrastructures like roads and a sewerage system. "It is unjust for the state government to issue a Government Order (GO) adding more areas under the guise of expansion before solving the problems faced by the residents" he said.

CONTINUED ON >> P2

Deepavali gets global honour

UNESCO inscribes the festival to Intangible Cultural Heritage list

PNS ■ New Delhi

India's Deepavali, the festival of lights, was on Wednesday inscribed on the UNESCO's Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity, sparking celebrations on earning the coveted tag. The decision was taken during a key meeting of UNESCO being hosted at the Red Fort in Delhi.

Chants of 'Jai Hind', 'Vande Mataram' and 'Bharat Mata ki Jai'

rent the air as UNESCO announced that the festival has been added to the prestigious list after a discussion by its committee. Artists dressed in different traditional attire performed in front of the main stage while images of the Deepavali festival played on the big screen.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi welcomed the addition of Deepavali to UNESCO's Intangible Heritage List, saying it will contribute to the festival's global popularity.



"People in India and around the world are thrilled," PM Modi said in a post on X, responding to a post from UNESCO listing Deepavali in its intan-

gible heritage list. Union Culture Minister Gajendra Singh Shekhawat delivered a statement on behalf of the country right after the inscription was announced during the 20th session of the Intergovernmental Committee for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH).

This is the sixteenth element from India to be inscribed on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity.

CONTINUED ON >> P2

AHEAD OF PANCHAYAT POLLS

BRS worker killed in clash with Congress supporters

PNS ■ Hyderabad

A BRS worker died following a clash between supporters of the ruling Congress and opposition party in Suryapet district ahead of the commencement of polling for the first phase of gram panchayat elections, police said on Wednesday.

The incident occurred in Lingampalli village on Tuesday after the election campaign concluded. An altercation took place between two groups escalated into a physical attack involving sticks and stones, in which the 57-year-old suffered a head injury, they said.

"He was initially admitted to a hospital in Suryapet and then shifted to another hospital in Hyderabad but was declared brought dead in the wee hours of Wednesday," a senior police official said.

The daughter-in-law of the deceased is contesting as a ward member in the elections.

In the complaint to the police, the family members of the deceased alleged that he was killed in the attack by the Congress supporters.

The situation is said to be peaceful in the village, and additional forces have been deployed.

In a statement, Rama Rao said, "BRS would not tolerate the atrocities of Congress goondas."

A case was registered at Nuthankal police station and investigation is on.

A three-phased schedule was earlier announced by the Telangana State Election Commission for gram panchayat elections in the state, to be held on December 11, 14, and 17.

Cong is engaging in 'politics of murder'

Alleges KTR, says BRS will stand by every worker

PNS ■ Hyderabad

Reacting to the incident, BRS Working President K T Rama Rao alleged that the Congress was engaging in "politics of murder". "It shows the bankruptcy of the ruling party that it is resorting to physical attacks as it is unable to face the elections democratically," he said.

He assured that the BRS leadership would stand by every worker and leader of the party and provide assistance to the family of the deceased activist.

Rama Rao demanded that the police take tough action against those responsible for the attack".



Youth killed after assault by girlfriend's mother

PNS ■ Hyderabad

A 19-year-old engineering student died on Wednesday after his lover's mother allegedly assaulted him, police said. The accused also assaulted her daughter, police added. Police said they are verifying reports that the woman attacked the youth with a cricket bat during an argument over an alleged pregnancy, adding that the claim has not been confirmed and all angles are being investigated. Prima facie, the girl's mother was opposed to their relationship, the official added.

'Why question LoP when PM spends half of his working time outside the country'

PNS ■ New Delhi

Congress MP Priyanka Gandhi Vadra on Wednesday hit back at the BJP for its criticism of Rahul Gandhi over his visit to Germany next week, asking why they are raising questions on the leader of the opposition when Prime Minister Narendra Modi spends "almost half of his working time outside the country".

The Congress also put out a list of Prime Minister Modi's visits overseas, claiming that they coincide with Parliament sessions and when the country was going through a crisis.

The list was captioned "Sansad Chale Desh Mein, Modi Chale Videsh Mein" on the Congress's official X handle.

Rahul Gandhi, the Leader of Opposition (LoP) in Lok Sabha, will visit Germany



from December 15 to 20, during which he will engage with the Indian diaspora and meet German ministers, according to the Indian Overseas Congress. The BJP took a swipe at Gandhi, saying his designation as LoP stands for "leader of Paryatan (tourism)".

"Once again, Videsh Nayak is doing what he does best! Going for a foreign tour! Parliament is on till Dec 19, but

reports suggest Rahul Gandhi to visit Germany from Dec 15-20! Rahul is LoP - leader of paryatan," BJP spokesperson Shehzad Poonawalla said in a post on X. "During the Bihar elections, too, he was abroad and then went to a jungle safari," he added.

Asked about the BJP's attack on Gandhi, Congress general secretary Priyanka Gandhi told reporters, "Modi ji spends almost half of his working time outside the country... Why are they raising questions on the leader of the opposition (in Lok Sabha) travelling?"

Congress spokesperson and head of social media department Supriya Shrinete said in a post that Narendra Modi has gone on 94 international trips, and 85 per cent of his foreign tours are during Parliament sessions.

'Corporation chairman posts will be filled soon'

Slams Harish's criticism of the global summit

PNS ■ Hyderabad

The Corporation chairmen's posts will be filled by the end of this month, announced the TPCC president Mahesh Kumar Goud on Wednesday. Talking to the media, he slammed the former minister and BRS MLA Harish Rao comments on the global summit, adding that many global companies have entered into agreements with the state government during the two-day summit, describing it as a great success, fetching more than Rs 5 lakh crore investments for the state. After going deep into the profiles of the companies, the government signed Memoranda of Understanding (MoU) with them, he asserted.

Saying the Future City has got huge investments from international investors, the TPCC chief said it would enhance the reputation of



Telangana and its pro-industrial policies.

He criticised that all the BRS encroachments are coming out because of comments being made by Telangana Jagruti president Kavitha. He appealed to CM Revanth Reddy to investigate Kavitha's allegations to bring out the facts behind them. He clarified that he is very satisfied with TPCC. He said that he likes the organisation. He said that the

media is saying that he is being given the post of Deputy CM. He said that there are also speculations that he is being given the post of minister. Mahesh Kumar Goud praised Priyanka Gandhi for speaking very well in the Lok Sabha. He said that AICC top leaders Mallikarjuna Kharge and Rahul Gandhi could not come to the Telangana Rising Global Summit as some programs were fixed earlier.

BJP slams Cong, allies over impeachment motion against Madras HC judge

PNS ■ Hyderabad

The Telangana BJP on Wednesday flayed the INDIA bloc for initiating an impeachment motion in Parliament for the removal of Madras High Court Judge G R Swaminathan, whose order on lighting a lamp at a temple in Tamil Nadu has sparked a row.

It was an "unprecedented and dangerous attack" on the judiciary by Congress, DMK and other parties, Telangana BJP chief spokesperson N V Subhash said in a statement.

The opposition's move raises serious concerns about its attitude towards Constitutional institutions and the religious rights of the majority community, he said.

Thrilled about data centre capacity coming up in India: Nadella

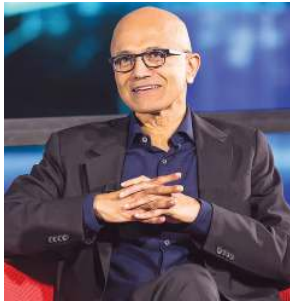
PNS ■ New Delhi

Microsoft's investment plan reflects India's progress in the era of technology, its CEO Satya Nadella said on Wednesday, a day after announcing a whopping USD 17.5 billion AI-driven investment in the country and discussing funding plans with Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

"We're thrilled about all the data centre capacity that is coming live. We already have stuff in Pune, Chennai and Mumbai. We are very excited about our India South Central cloud region, based in Hyderabad, that's going to come up next year," Nadella said at a Microsoft event here.

Microsoft's India South Central cloud region, based in Hyderabad, is set to go live in mid-2026.

Microsoft's investment plan reflects India's progress in the era of technology, Nadella said, adding that he



is excited about the data centre capacity the company is setting up in India. Nadella has announced an investment of USD 17.5 billion by 2030 to help build infrastructure and sovereign capabilities for the country's AI-first future, marking the third major AI-driven investment in the country in the past two months.

The Microsoft CEO also said that he has discussed the company's investment plan with Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

India harbouring big and bold dreams in space sector: Shukla

PNS ■ Kolkata

Air Force Group Captain Shubhanshu Shukla, the first Indian astronaut to go to the International Space Station, on Wednesday said the country is harbouring "big and bold dreams", foraying into human spaceflight after a hiatus of 41 years.

Shukla was the first Indian to visit the International Space Station as part of the Axiom-4 mission. He returned to India from the US on August 17, 2025, after the 18-day mission.

The space is a "great place to be", marked by deep peace and an "amazing view" that becomes more captivating with time, he said, interacting

with schoolchildren at an event organised by the Indian Centre for Space Physics here.

"The longer you stay, the more you enjoy it," Shukla said, adding on a lighter note that he "actually kind of did not want to come back".

Shukla said the hands-on experience in space was very different from what he had learnt during training.

He said the future of India's space science was "very bright", with the country harbouring "very big and bold dreams". Shukla described his ISS flight, undertaken with support from the US, as a crucial "stepping stone" towards realising India's 'Vision Gaganyaan'.

'Contempt power neither personal armour for judges nor sword to silence criticism'

PNS ■ New Delhi

The Supreme Court on Wednesday said courts must remain conscious while exercising the contempt jurisdiction that this power is neither a personal armour for judges nor a sword to silence criticism. The observation came from a bench of Justices Vikram Nath and Sandeep Mehta that remitted a one-week sentence imposed on a woman by the Bombay High Court in a suo-motu criminal contempt matter.

The apex court said mercy must remain an integral part of the judicial conscience, to be extended where the contemnor sincerely acknowledges his lapse and seeks to atone for it.

It said the power to punish necessarily carries within it the concomitant power to forgive, where the individual before the court demonstrates genuine remorse and repentance for the act that has brought him to this position. "Therefore, in exercise of contempt jurisdiction, courts must



remain conscious that this power is not a personal armour for judges nor a sword to silence criticism," the bench said.

"After all, it requires fortitude to

acknowledge contrition for one's lapse, and an even greater virtue to extend forgiveness to the erring," it said. The bench delivered its verdict on an appeal against the high court's April 23 order holding the appellant guilty of committing the offence of criminal contempt of court. The high court had sentenced her to undergo simple imprisonment for a week and imposed a fine of Rs 2,000 on her.

The top court noted that the appellant before it was a former director of the Cultural of

Seawoods Estates Limited housing complex. It noted that in a pending petition before the high court challenging the vires of Rule 20 of the Animal Birth Control Rules, 2023, an intervenor had filed an affidavit stating that the appellant had issued a circular in January 2025 that contained remarks about the alleged "dog mafia".

The high court had observed that the circular was "contemptuous in nature" and later directed that a show-cause notice be issued to the appellant.

FROM PAGE - 1

Revanth unveils...

He said the university was at the forefront of the final phase of the Telangana agitation.

Indirectly responding to BRS leaders' criticism of his administrative experience, Reddy said he did not study in Guntur in neighbouring Andhra Pradesh "like some", in a veiled reference to BRS working president K T Rama Rao.

He said he grew up in a village, witnessing poverty firsthand, and was committed to working for the welfare of the underprivileged.

Stepping up his attack on the previous BRS government, Reddy said it had built a bungalow on 10 acres, a grand Secretariat, and executed the Kaleshwaram project at Rs 1 lakh crore. In contrast, he said, his government had taken four major steps that resonated with Telangana's identity in the past two years.

'Much ado about...

Quoting the comments made by some experts, Harish said their remarks pertained to the development achieved during the BRD rule. The former minister targeted the Chief Minister on many issues concerning development of the state by stating that "They were all aimed at self-promo-

tion rather promoting the states real interests."

'Luthras booked...

At this time, police and administration were battling the blaze at the night-club 'Birch by Romeo Lane' at Arpora in North Goa, and trying to rescue their staff.

On Wednesday, the Luthras failed to get an interim relief as a Delhi court posted their plea for an anticipatory bail for Thursday.

The two left in an IndiGo plane for Phuket in the early hours of Sunday.

Combative Shah...

The speech saw the opposition leader Rahul Gandhi interrupting the home minister to challenge him to debate with him on his three press conferences on "vote chori", leading to heated exchanges between the two leaders, and a walkout by the opposition some time later.

Seeking to corner the Congress, Shah claimed that there were three instances of "vote chori" by Jawaharlal Nehru, Indira Gandhi and Sonia Gandhi.

"Post Independence, Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel was backed by 28 persons, while Jawaharlal Nehru was supported by two persons and yet Nehru became the prime minister, this was vote chori," he said.

Shah said the second "vote chori" was by Indira Gandhi, when she granted herself immunity after the court set aside her election.

He said the dispute of the third "vote chori" has just reached the civil courts on how Sonia Gandhi "became a voter before becoming a citizen of India", a remark that invited sharp reactions from the Congress benches.

Targeting the Congress, Shah said the reason for its poll losses was its leadership.

"If someone asks a question in a presser, he is dubbed as a BJP Agent, if they lose a case, they accuse the judge, if they lose an election, they blame EVMs. Now, when the EVM blame does not hold, they brought up vote chori... still, they lost Bihar. Now the reason for your defeat is your leadership and not EVM or voters' list," the home minister said. "They think no one holds them accountable, 'bhagwan kare', I am proved wrong, and one day Congress workers seek their accountability," he said.

Shah also accused the opposition of spreading falsehoods on Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls and launched a strong defence of the exercise, asking whether democracy can be safe when the prime minister and the chief minister are decided by 'ghuspathiye'.

PM-led panel...

Dissatisfied with the process of selection, the Leader of the Opposition presented his dissent note.

Details of the appointments decided were not known. The government had earlier told the Supreme Court about this meeting to select names for these posts.

Under Section 12 (3) of the Right to Information Act, the prime minister is the chairperson of the committee, which also comprises the leader of the opposition and a Union minister nominated by the prime minister, that selects and recommends the names for appointment as CIC and Information Commissioners.

'A conspiracy to...

He lamented and said the Congress government claims the expansion will elevate Hyderabad to the status of India's largest city, increasing the population coverage from 69 lakh voters to an estimated 1.69 crore people. This would further increase the woes of city citizens, he stated.

The state BJP chief said the expansion would nearly double the tax burden on the people in the newly added areas, while they would still lack essential infrastructure like proper roads, water supply, electricity, and drainage," he stated, calling

the move a "wrong approach" for being taken without consulting the public or holding an all-party meeting.

Rao further claimed that the proposed division into 300 wards is clearly designed for political gain, specifically to ensure the Majlis Party secures more seats and positions of Mayor and Deputy Mayor.

Rao appealed to the people of the newly incorporated areas to submit their objections within a week, calling the expansion a "conspiracy" to benefit the Majlis Party.

He also strongly objected to the government's plan to extensively convert farmers' land into industrial land. He demanded that the government conduct public hearings, listen to people's opinions, and place all relevant details in the public domain on this issue.

Reacting to the "Telangana Rising" Global Summit, Rao expressed apprehension about the claim by the state government about the investment worth Rs 5,50,000 crore. He alleged that many of the companies on the government's announced list appear to be "Shell Companies", some are without national recognition, some have been "blacklisted" in the past, and others cannot justify

the capital they reportedly possess.

Deepavali gets...

Fifteen other elements already inscribed on this UNESCO list include the Kumbh Mela, Durga Puja of Kolkata, Garba dance of Gujarat, yoga, the tradition of Vedic chanting and Ramilila - the traditional performance of the epic 'Ramayana'.

Shekhawat and other members of the Indian contingent sported a traditional headgear to mark the occasion. Deepavali is one of the timeless festivals of India, which is also now celebrated in many other parts of the world.

On this occasion, people decorate their homes with traditional lamps or 'diya', and buildings are illuminated, presenting a dazzling sight at night.

India had sent the Deepavali nomination dossier to UNESCO in 2023 for the 2024-25 cycle.

"For every Indian, Deepavali is deeply emotional; it is felt, lived, absorbed across generations," Shekhawat said in his address.

The Union minister said that with this inscription, "UNESCO honours the eternal human longing for renewal, peace and the triumph of good".



VISION TO POSITION TG AS A GLOBAL INNOVATION HUB

Incubation centres to be set up in all govt varsities: Min Sridhar Babu

PNS ■ Hyderabad

IT and Industries Minister Duddilla Sridhar Babu on Wednesday announced that the State government will establish incubation centres in all government universities to promote innovation, foster research-led entrepreneurship and strengthen the startup ecosystem across Telangana.

The Minister made the announcement after inaugurating the 'Google for Startups Hub' at T-Hub in the presence of Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy.

Speaking at the event, Sridhar Babu said that the proposed incubation centres would be developed on par with the Telangana AI Innovation Hub and the Life Sciences ONE Hub, aligning with the government's vision to position Telangana as a Global Innovation Hub.

"We do not view startups merely as small enterprises. We see them as economic engines capable of solving societal challenges and generating new employment opportunities," the Minister said.

Sridhar Babu noted that



Telangana startups raised US\$ 571 million in 2024, registering a 160% increase over the previous year. The HealthTech sector alone witnessed a remarkable 2,139%

rise during the same period. He added that Hyderabad now ranks sixth in India in women-led startups, with 531 women-led enterprises raising US\$ 417 million.

"These are not just statistics; they demonstrate the impact of the government's progressive policies and sustained support for innovation," he said.

Emphasising the State's commitment to inclusive technological growth, the Minister said technology is being treated not just as a tool but as an instrument of equality, ensuring its benefits reach every citizen.

"The Government of Telangana will continue to stand firmly behind young innovators and new ideas," he assured.

Four held for 'raping' girl of 13 years

PNS ■ Hyderabad

A 13-year-old girl was allegedly raped by four people, including two minors, at a lodge in Secunderabad here, police said on Wednesday.

The four, who found the girl alone in Secunderabad on December 8, introduced themselves and took her to a room in the lodge and allegedly sexually assaulted her. A missing case was initially registered at Sangareddy district on December 5 based on a complaint filed by the girl's family members.

During the course of the investigation, police rescued the girl from the lodge after being informed by her. Subsequently, narrated the sexual assault. Two of the accused were arrested and sent to judicial remand while two boys were sent to an Observation Home, a police official said.

Rs 25 CR BUDGET DEMANDED FOR TARNAKA DEVELOPMENT

70-year-old slum issues at OU brought to CM's notice

PNS ■ Hyderabad

Greater Hyderabad Municipal Corporation (GHMC) Deputy Mayor Mothe Srilatha Shoban Reddy, along with TTIUC State President Shoban Reddy, paid a courtesy visit to Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy, during his visit to Osmania University on Wednesday.

During the meeting, Deputy Mayor Srilatha briefed the Chief Minister in detail on several critical issues faced by the people of Tarnaka Division and submitted a formal representation seeking their resolution.

She informed that for the past 70 years, thousands of families have been residing in about nine slum settlements within the Osmania University limits, spread across nearly 90 acres. Due to lack of basic amenities, negligence of previous governments, and withdrawal



Deputy Mayor Srilatha briefed the Chief Minister in detail on several critical issues faced by the people of Tarnaka Division and submitted a formal representation seeking their resolution

of essential facilities by the university administration, the living conditions of these residents have deteriorated significantly.

In this context, she urged the Chief Minister to allocate 20 acres of land within the

Osmania University premises to provide permanent rehabilitation by constructing Indiramma houses for the affected families. She emphasised that implementation of this proposal would also benefit the uni-

versity administration, as nearly 70 acres of land would be freed, making it a mutually beneficial solution. She also reminded the Chief Minister of the assurance given during the previous MP elections to establish a 50-bedded hospital at Manikeshwar Nagar and requested immediate approval of the hospital construction proposal.

The Deputy Mayor further requested special attention towards the overall development of Tarnaka Division and sought immediate allocation of a special budget of ₹25 crore for infrastructure development, including roads, drainage, street lighting, parks and other civic amenities.

Responding to the representations, the Chief Minister assured that he would immediately discuss the matter with the Vice-Chancellor and initiate appropriate action.

IMD Hyd issues cold wave warning as winter intensifies

PNS ■ Hyderabad

India Meteorological Department (IMD) Hyderabad has issued a cold wave warning for Telangana for three days as winter season intensifies in the state. It is valid for various districts of the State. As per the weather department, the warning is valid till December 12. During the intervening night of December 9 and 10, the temperatures in the city declined to single digits.

Amid the winter cold wave warning by IMD Hyderabad, the city's lowest minimum temperature of 6.6 degrees was recorded in Moinabad. In the case of Hyderabad, the weather department has forecast mist or hazy conditions to



prevail during morning hours. Such weather conditions are likely to prevail till Saturday, December 13.

Hyderabad has also been witnessing a staggering increase in pollution levels, with the air quality index (AQI) at 165 at 8.04 AM on Wednesday, according to tracker.aqi.in, which follows the US Environmental

Protection Agency's standards. An AQI between 151 and 200 is considered unhealthy, and is particularly risky for children, pregnant women, and the elderly.

Given that individuals inhale approximately 14,000 liters of air daily, the dip in the air quality can lead to various health issues in Hyderabad.

Man murdered in Hyd over alleged relationship

PNS ■ Hyderabad

A 25-year-old man was hacked to death on Tuesday night by unidentified people in Kamatipura in Hyderabad over an alleged extra-marital affair, the police said on Wednesday. Arvind Ghosle, who worked at a rice shop in the area, was leaving for home on his bike in the night, when at the Devibagh stretch, a group of unidentified men followed and cornered him, the police said. Soon after, they allegedly attacked him with a knife, the police added.

Arvind suffered multiple deep wounds and died on the spot, the police said,

adding that preliminary inquiry suggested that the man may have been murdered due to an alleged extra-marital relationship with a married woman, even as they said they are probing all angles.

Arvind's family also confirmed that he was in an extra-marital affair. "The woman is married and has three children. Her family was harassing Arvind," a relative of Arvind told the media. Kamatipura police shifted Arvind's body to Osmania General Hospital mortuary for an autopsy and said they have formed special teams to track down the culprits.

Think beyond borders, Rana Daggubati tells students



PNS ■ Hyderabad

The Telangana Rising 2047 - Global Summit 2025, held on Wednesday focused on the theme "Youth and Entrepreneurship". The programme was structured into sessions covering mental health, youth potential and visionary entrepreneurship, culminating in significant announcements regarding Telangana's economic future. Renowned actor Rana Daggubati delivered an inspiring address on the Bharat Future City - Telangana's Rising towards 3T Economy. He stressed on Hyderabad's rise as a global creative capital

and the importance of films, animation and gaming.

He urged youth to "dream beyond borders," stating, "Telangana's story is just beginning - the world will soon look towards our innovation." The students' reaction was overwhelming. They gave him a thunderous applause. This showcased the excitement of Telangana's youth toward shaping the state's global future.

The event included captivating cultural performances, featuring Bonalu Kolatam, Krishna Kolatam and Bharatanatyam, which took the students and public attention.



All India SBI Inter Circle Kabaddi Tournament 2025-26 was formally inaugurated on December 9 at 6 pm at the Kotla Vijaya Bhaskara Reddy Indoor Stadium, Yusufguda. Hyderabad Circle emerged victorious against Kolkata Circle in a thrilling start to the tournament.

Fest special trains from Charlapalli to Tirupati, Kakinada

PNS ■ Hyderabad

South Central Railway has announced a series of special trains from Hyderabad to clear the Christmas and New Year rush, centring operations on the city's Charlapalli terminal.

The services will primarily connect Hyderabad with Kakinada, Tirupati and Pandharpur, offering additional options for festive season travellers.

A special train (No. 07196) will run from Hyderabad (Charlapalli) to Kakinada between December 24 and 30. It will operate on Tuesdays and Wednesdays, departing Charlapalli at 7.30 pm and reaching Kakinada at 9.00 am the following day. In the return direction,



train No. 07195 will run from Kakinada to Hyderabad (Charlapalli) from December 28 to 31. This service will

operate on Sundays and Wednesdays, leaving Kakinada at 7.50 pm and arriving at Charlapalli at

8.30 am the next morning. Weekly specials have been announced between Hyderabad and Tirupati

during the festive period. The Tirupati-Hyderabad (Charlapalli) special train (No. 07000) will run from

Evey Trans adds 65 electric buses to Hyd's RTC fleet

PNS ■ Hyderabad

Evey Trans Pvt. Ltd, in collaboration with the Telangana State Road Transport Corporation (TGSRTC), today flagged off 65 new electric buses from the Ranigunj Depot under the TGSRTC 500 Low-Floor City Bus Project. The induction marks a significant step toward strengthening Hyderabad's public transport system with a modern, clean and reliable electric fleet.

These 65 buses are part of the 100-bus allocation planned for the Ranigunj Depot, which now joins CNT, Miyapur, HCU and Hayatnagar depots as one of the five key centres operating under the project.

The TGSRTC 500-bus initiative comprises 450 non-AC and 50 AC low-floor electric city buses. So far, 325 buses have been delivered, and the remaining 175 buses are scheduled for induction by January 2026. With this progress, the Corporation is steadily expanding its electric bus network in line with Hyderabad's broader shift toward sustainable urban



mobility.

The launch ceremony at Ranigunj Depot was attended by senior dignitaries, including Minister for Transport Ponnam Prabhakar, VC & MD TGSRTC Y Nagi Reddy, Mayor of Hyderabad Gadwal Vijaya Lakshmi and CEO Evey Trans Pvt Ltd Sandeep Raizada along with other elected representatives.

Speaking on the occasion, Transport Minister Ponnam Prabhakar said, "These new buses will connect nearly 373 colonies. Over the last two years, our fleet has grown by 40%, and we have also initiated the recruitment of new staff to strengthen services. We are committed to addressing passenger concerns, ensuring cleanliness, introducing electric buses and establish-

ing new depots to improve public transport facilities. I am very happy to witness the launch of 65 new buses today, which will significantly strengthen urban connectivity." Sandeep Raizada, CEO of Evey Trans, said, "With today's launch, this becomes our 69th depot across India and the fifth depot in Telangana, as part of our planned expansion to six depots in the State. Across the country, we are successfully operating over 3,100 buses across 10 States and 2 Union Territories. We are proud to add 65 new buses to the fleet today and reaffirm our commitment to delivering the remaining buses by January 2026. All our buses are operating in excellent condition, ensuring a smooth and comfortable ride for passengers."

New TGSRTC routes to be explored from Hyd to villages

Maha Lakshmi Scheme completes two years



PNS ■ Hyderabad

On the occasion of completing two years of free travel for women in RTC buses through the Maha Lakshmi scheme, RTC officials present at 97 depots across the State held a video conference with Transport and BC Welfare Minister Ponnam Prabhakar from Bus Bhavan.

Minister Prabhakar congratulated the drivers, conductors, workers and other staff who are working continuously for the success of the Maha Lakshmi scheme. Minister Prabhakar, who completed two years as the Transport Minister, was felicitated by the MD and ED. In order to further expand the RTC, he directed to explore new RTC routes from the capital to the villages at the field level and take action to run buses according to the needs of the people. He suggested that it would be possible to increase public transport from the current 28 per cent to 70 per cent in line with our goals in Vision 2047 only when buses are run on new routes. Minister Ponnam Prabhakar suggested that the current RTC system should be tripled for this

purpose and that the employees and staff should work towards it.

Minister Prabhakar revealed that he is discussing the problems of RTC employees with the government as their representative and that financial issues are also being resolved from time to time. He said that under the leadership of Chief Minister Revanth Reddy, more than 90 depots are on the path of profit through the Maha Lakshmi scheme under the Congress government. Previously, recruitments were made in 2011, but now after the coming to power of his government, recruitments are being made for 3038 posts for driver, worker and supervisor posts. After 2014, his government has purchased 2,476 new buses in these two years. This means that 40 per cent of the current buses were received in these two years. He said that he will talk to the government to have a special RTC school for RTC children to study. RTC MD Nagi Reddy, EDs Munisekar, Venkanna, Rajasekhar and other key officials participated in the review meeting.

Prohibitory orders ahead of local body polls

PNS ■ Hyderabad

Ahead of the three-phase Telangana local body polls beginning from Thursday, December 11, the Hyderabad Police imposed prohibitory orders in the Shamshabad zone. Shamshabad Zone DCP, B Rajesh, issued the orders under Section 163 of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS), prohibiting the assembly of more than five persons in polling areas. This includes 10 police stations: Shamshabad,



Kothur, Nandigama, Shadnagar, Kondurg, Chowdarigudem, Keshampet, Kadthal, Amangal and Talakondapally.

The restrictions will be in force from 5 pm on December 9 to 6 pm on December 12 for Phase I, and from 5 pm on December 12 to 6 pm on December 15 for Phase II.

Violators will be prosecuted under relevant provisions of law, police said.



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Order Order

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



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

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

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

SC directs Haryana to restore green land to its original State

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



IndiGo crisis: Delhi HC pulls up Govt, airlines

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

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

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

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

action will be taken against them.

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

between the beneficiaries and officials of Noida.

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

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

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

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

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



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

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

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

In 2017, Sandesara brothers Nitin and

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

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

Chandrashekhar trust dispute revived, court allows suit alleging mismanagement

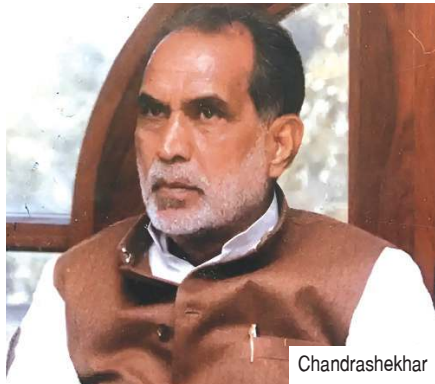
PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

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

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

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

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



Chandrashekhar

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

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

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

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

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

States Focus



JAYA URGES DEDICATED AMBULANCE LANES, CITES DELAYS COSTING LIVES

Samajwadi Party MP Jaya Bachchan on Wednesday demanded dedicated emergency lanes on roads for ambulance movement, saying that in India, groceries reach doorsteps in under 15 minutes, pizzas in 30 minutes, but patients bleed to death due to the delay in reaching the hospital.

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



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

BJP MP Kangana Ranaut on Wednesday said in Lok Sabha that Prime Minister Narendra Modi does not need to manipulate voting systems to win elections because "he has hacked the hearts of the people".

Participating in a discussion on 'Election Reforms', Ranaut said the past year had been "deeply worrying" because of what she described as daily disruptions by opposition members.

She said watching them often felt "traumatic", adding that MPs had repeatedly "jumped into the Well, shouted 'SIR, SIR', created a spectacle, tried intimidation and misbehaved in every possible way".

Ranaut said that the disruptions prevented Parliament from functioning.

"Maybe, barring the last two or three days, they did not let the House run at all. We are representatives of the people; we come here to learn, especially as new MPs," she said, accusing the Opposition MPs of turning every session into theatre.

On allegations of EVM tampering, Ranaut said Congress leaders were unwilling to accept electoral defeats. "Let me tell the Congress people that the Prime Minister does not hack EVMs, he hacked people's hearts," she said.

She mocked demands for a return to the paper ballot system, calling it an "outdated relic of another era".

Bengal Govt impossible to form without me in 2026: Humayun

SAUGAR SENGUPTA
■ Kolkata

Rebel and expelled Trinamool Congress MLA Humayun Kabir — who recently shot into prominence for laying the foundation stone of a second Babri Mosque in Murshidabad district of Bengal drawing lakhs of Muslims to attend the function — on Wednesday iterated that he would emerge as the "kingmaker" post 2026 Assembly elections as no political party in the State would be able to gain majority.

Kabir who is likely to announce a new political outfit on December 22, asked the "media and all other stake holders" to "watch out the names of the office bearers of my party and then make a conclusion."

Slamming the Trinamool Congress for considering the Muslim population of the State as their "paternal fief" so as to perennially use them as vote banks, he said, "now on I will tell the Muslims not to be a vote bank but a stakeholder in the power politics."

Disclosing that his party would field candidates in 135 seats, Kabir said that, "in Bengal Muslims voters have an influence in about 90 seats with a voter percent-



Expelled Trinamool Congress MLA Humayun Kabir

age hovering between 40 and 70 percent. so I wish to tell them to vote for me and let my party win these 90 seats. I the remaining 204 seats let the TMC and BJP fight whoever wins will have to come to me to form a Government without the support of my party no party in Bengal will be able to form a Government just wait and watch what happens in the State's electoral arena in a few months from now."

Kabir was recently suspended from the TMC after he openly proposed to construct a Babri Mosque in Murshidabad.

It is another matter

however that a section of the critics suspect whether he has been fielded by Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee to pull back the fleeting Muslim votes on the one hand and help Hindu votes come behind her after her suspending him on Babri Mosque issue.

Referring to Kabir's "confidence" of winning 90 seats, TMC spokesperson Arup Chakrabarty said "let him first win his own seat at Rejinagar and let his party first save the deposits in the seats they would contest he is presently day-dreaming let him day-dream by the time he emerges from his sleep the

TMC will win and Mamata Banerjee will have formed her Government for the fourth time."

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

Fadnavis vows action in Pune land deal

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ Nagpur

Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis on Wednesday said that from the very beginning, the Government's stand in the Pune land deal case, involving a firm linked to Deputy CM Ajit Pawar's son Parth, was not to protect anyone, and assured that action will be taken against whoever is found guilty.

He was talking to reporters on the sidelines of a programme here. Earlier in the day, the Bombay High Court raised sharp questions regarding the police probe into the controversial Pune land deal, asking whether they were protecting Parth Pawar by not naming him in the land deal FIR.

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

the FIR, a single bench of Justice Madhav Jamdar asked, "Is the police protecting the son of the deputy Chief Minister and only investigating others?" The sale of 40 acres of land in Pune's upscale Mundhwa area for ₹300 crore to Amadea Enterprises LLP, in which Parth is a majority partner, came under scrutiny after it emerged that the plot belongs to the Government and it could not be sold.

The firm was also allegedly exempted from paying Rs 21 crore in stamp duty. When asked about the HC's remarks in the case, Fadnavis said, "I have not heard what the HC has said, but a proper reply will be submitted in the court about what it has asked for. From the very beginning, the Government's stand is not to protect anyone."



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

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ Raisen (MP)

A man from Raisen district in Madhya Pradesh has alleged that his village panchayat ordered a social boycott against him and his family after he ate food at a Dalit's family as part of a post-death ritual, prompting the authorities to launch a probe.

The incident occurred in Piparia Puaria village of Udaypura, around 100 km from the district headquarters around a month back and came to light on Tuesday during a "jan sunwai" (public hearing) of the matter.

The village panchayat allegedly ordered the social boycott of three members of an upper caste community for consuming food at the Dalit man's house, and set certain conditions before them, including organising a feast, to avoid ostracism. While two of the three men

accepted the panchayat's conditions and performed 'penance', one of them - Bharat Singh Dhakad - approached the police and lodged a complaint against the village body, alleging that he and his family members were being treated like "untouchables" and barred from taking part in social events, a police official said. The village sarpanch, however, dismissed the allegations. Udaypura is the assembly constituency of Madhya Pradesh Minister of State for Health Narendra Shivaji Patel.

Udaypura tehsildar Dinesh Bargale said that the Dhakad filed an application to the collector during the public hearing on Tuesday, accusing the panchayat of issuing the social boycott order. Dhakad made these allegations against the sarpanch, deputy sarpanch, and panchs of the concerned gram panchayat, he said.

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

"The matter is being investigated and if the allegations are found to be true, legal action will be taken against those involved," Bargale said.

Dhakad said he and his fellow gram panchayat assistant secretary Manoj Patel and teacher Satyendra Singh Raghuvanshi had a meal at a Dalit family's house in the village as part of a 'shraddha' ceremony. But after the incident, the panchayat passed a resolution declaring that eating at a Dalit's house was a "greater sin than cow slaughter" and those who indulged in it must purify themselves by bathing in the Ganga river and by offering a

feast in the village, he said. Dhakad claimed that under pressure from the panchayat, Patel and Raghuvanshi bathed in the Ganga river and organised a feast in the village, but he refused to comply. After this, he and his family were socially boycotted and excluded from all events, he said.

Dhakad said that he was being treated like an untouchable and barred from entering the temple.

He also claimed that when he raised this issue with the panchayat, he was asked to have his head shaved to absolve himself of the sins and perform the "pind daan" (a post-death ritual) for his father while he was still alive. When contacted, sarpanch Bhagwan Singh Patel dismissed the allegations as baseless. "If someone in the village is not inviting him to their programme due to personal reasons, then it is his personal matter.

Allegations like untouchability are not correct," he said. The sarpanch said that MLA and Minister of State Narendra Shivaji Patel also came and tried to convince the people.

"But if they are not listening, what can he do?" Sub-Divisional Police Officer (SDOP) Kunwar Singh Mukati said that excluding someone from social events in the village, treating them as untouchables, or imposing punishments such as bathing in the Ganga, performing feasts, and tansuring ceremonies are punishable offences under the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS). "Spreading social animosity, forcing social punishment through pressure or threats, and preventing social participation are crimes.

Every citizen has the right to live with dignity and equality. Therefore, if such a case comes to light, an investigation will be conducted and

the culprits will be prosecuted," he said. When Satyendra Singh Raghuvanshi, the teacher who ate with Dhakad at the Dalit's house, was contacted about this, he said that he is no longer facing any boycott.

He said he has been posted at the Government middle school in the village for the last 16 years and the Dalit man, where he went to have meal, has been his friend. "I do not believe in the caste system, so I went to my friend Santosh Mehtar's house to eat during the 'shraddha' ceremony. Someone made a video of the incident and circulated it locally, which led to a controversy," he said. Talking to PTI, Raghuvanshi admitted that as per the panchayat's order, he went to his guru's ashram in Allahabad and came back after bathing at the sangam (confluence) of rivers. "I don't have complaints against anyone," he said.

Sex workers flock to Kolkata booth to register as voters

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Kolkata

Forty-year-old Sumita Koley (name changed), a resident of the Chetla red-light area, has never voted. This year, she is determined to change that. She queued up on Wednesday at a Special Intensive Revision (SIR) assistance camp at Chetla area in south Kolkata, hoping to secure their place as voters.

Koley was among nearly 200 women who crowded the small club room at 29/A Rakhaladas Addya Road, a narrow stretch surrounded by slums and single-storey homes that have long been inhabited by sex workers.

The camp followed similar ones held a day earlier in Sonagachi, Asia's largest red-light district, in north Kolkata. Watching the turnout, Swapna Gyne, an office-bearer of the NGO Amra Padatik, said the enthusiasm masks deep anxieties.

Around 3,500 sex workers earn their livelihood in Chetla, but nearly 30 per cent have stayed away from enrolment despite being Indian citizens, she said. "They have made new lives here; new relationships, whether those were accepted by the society or not. For years, they knew only the importance of Aadhaar cards, ration cards and the passbook of the Usha Multipurpose Cooperative



Society of which they are members," Gyne said.

Now, for the SIR mapping, they are suddenly asked to trace parents they have not contacted in decades, she said. "Many of them fear humiliation if they go back to their old homes, which they left years ago. Some even fear physical assault," Gyne said.

She stressed that Koley's case is far from unique. Women aged between 20 and 60 face the same dilemma.

"Some have voter IDs and have voted before, even in the 2002 elections. But many have never voted and have no EPIC cards. They also lack school certificates or birth documents. We have requested the Election Commission to find alternatives if they meet the citizenship criteria. Where will they go if they are left out? This is their country," Gyne said.

At the camp, the chal-

lenges surfaced repeatedly. Kaushalya Paswan, a young woman from Bihar's Gaya district, broke down when a Booth Level Officer (BLO) asked her to produce her birth certificate or school leaving records.

"I am from Bihar, sir. My family severed ties with me. Those documents must be with them. How can I approach them? I don't even have their numbers," she pleaded.

An Assistant Electoral Registration Officer (AERO)-ranked official reassured her. "Don't worry; but we need these proofs for including your name in the final rolls. We must also confirm that you are not enrolled in Bihar," he said.

The AERO asked her to present her case at the public hearing after December 16. "We are here to assist, not disenfranchise. Our job is to show you the right way," he said.

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

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Raipur

Chhattisgarh's efforts to strengthen transportation in its remote forested regions took another significant step forward with the launch of the second phase of the Mukhyamantri Gramin Bus Seva Yojana.

Chief Minister Vishnu Deo Sai inaugurated the expansion and virtually flagged off the new buses from his residential office on Wednesday.

Under this phase, 24 additional buses have begun operating on 23 routes across 10 districts of the Bastar and Surguja divisions. With this rollout, 180 more villages are being brought under direct bus connectivity.

Several residents from remote tribal areas arrived at the programme in the same buses introduced during the first phase of the scheme. They shared with Chief Minister that travel to block headquarters, which once demanded long and difficult journeys, is now considerably easier and more reliable. Villagers from the Sukma-Dornapal-Konta route said they travelled nearly 110 kilometers by bus to attend the event, a journey that earlier posed considerable hardship.

Chief Minister Vishnu Deo Sai noted that the Government is committed to



ensuring that no village in Chhattisgarh remains cut off from mainstream development. He said the initiative is not only expanding transport services but is also helping bridge social and economic gaps by connecting rural communities to towns and essential services. The strengthened public transport network in remote regions is proving to be a milestone, offering safer, timely and more convenient transportation.

Conveying good wishes to residents of the 180 newly connected villages, Chief Minister said the improved transport links are expected to ease daily life and open new pathways for growth.

Transport Minister Kedar Kashyap stated that bus services are now reaching even

those forested and inaccessible pockets where no public transport had ever operated. He described the scheme as especially beneficial for the tribal-dominated belts of Bastar and Surguja.

The first phase of the scheme was launched on October 4, 2025, by Union Home Minister Shri Amit Shah, connecting 250 villages. With the second phase now in operation, the coverage has expanded further, adding another 180 villages.

Deputy Chief Ministers Vijay Sharma and Arun Sao along with other cabinet ministers Chief Minister's Secretary Rahul Bhagat, Transport Secretary S. Prakash and senior officials were present.

Vande Mataram debate maligns Nehru: Ramesh

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ New Delhi

The Opposition on Wednesday accused BJP leaders of distorting history, with Congress leader Jairam Ramesh saying that the whole aim of the debate on 150 years of Vande Mataram was to malign first prime minister Jawaharlal Nehru.

Participating in the debate in the Rajya Sabha, Ramesh accused the BJP of insulting freedom fighters who sacrificed their lives for the country.

"Those who have spoken from the other side have proved. They wanted to be historians, but they have become 'distortions'," Ramesh said.

He gave details of letters exchanged between leaders including Subhas Chandra Bose, Rabindranath Tagore, Rajendra Prasad, and Jawaharlal Nehru over Vande Mataram. "Rajendra Prasad wrote to Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel on September 28, 1937, raising concerns and worries prevalent in large sections of our political system on Vande Mataram, and requesting Patel that the Congress Working Committee (CWC) take a stand. Was it appeasement? Are you accusing Rajendra Prasad, Sardar Patel of appeasement?" Ramesh said.

"On October 28, 1937 CWC passed a resolution about Vande Mataram. Mahatma

Gandhi, Subhas Chandra Bose, Vallabhbhai Patel, Jawaharlal Nehru, Maulana Azad, Acharya Kripalani, GB Pant. They were all present," Ramesh said.

He added that on October 30, 1927, Tagore issued a press statement that he had advised the CWC that they pass a resolution to adopt the first two stanzas of Vande Mataram as 'national anthem', and it was later adopted as the national song.

He said a communal environment was created in 1937. "Many organisations were responsible. One of them is celebrating centenary now. They spread communal fire, and today they tell us Congress did appeasement," he said. Ramesh accused the ruling party of insulting Tagore, and said, "Why is the Government making this Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay vs Tagore. They wanted to insult Nehru, but they ended up insulting Tagore". The Congress leader slammed the BJP for its "appeasement" jibes at his party, and said BJP ideologue Syama Prasad Mookerjee had formed a Government with AK Fazlul Huq, who later presented the Lahore resolution for the formation of Pakistan.

"A lot has been said, the aim of this whole debate is to malign Nehru. This is a part of that project. You are insulting people who sacrificed their lives for the nation," he added.

Editor's
TAKE

India's fire safety complacency

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

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

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

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

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

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

Breaking away from Macaulay

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



JS
RAJPUT

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

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

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

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

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



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THE WORLD
OUTSIDE

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 The Pioneer

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

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

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

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

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

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

The English language, Western literature, Western civilisation, and culture were to be firmly established in India as the only path to becoming advanced and superior human beings. Not that everyone who mattered agreed, as some were interested in supporting Sanskrit and Arabic, but they were ignored and left to their fate under the argument that these needed financial support, while English schools had a rush of fee-paying students from the upper echelons of society. It is a long story that has established Macaulay even in schemes of futuristic educational planning.

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

Reimagining family for India's queer youth



SUBROTO
CHATTERJEE

2ND OPINION THE PIONEER

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Deepavali gains global heritage status

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

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

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

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

BHAGWAN THADANI | MUMBAI

Protect electoral workers from intimidation

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

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

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

N SADHASIVA REDDY | BENGALURU

Patriotism reduced to hollow theatre

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

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

NOOPUR BARUAH | TEZPUR

TARIFFS RISK CONSTRAINING FARMERS VIA SHORT-SIGHTED PROTECTION

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

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

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

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

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

VIDYASAGAR KETHIRI | NEW DELHI

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

Muslims have been insecure in India for a long time

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

FIRST
Column



BALBIR
PUNJ

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

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

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

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

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

How does one explain this perfidious



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

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The Pioneer

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

iation were inflicted.

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

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

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

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

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

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



KRIPA
NAUTIYAL

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

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

The Invisible Underwater Menace

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

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

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

Swarm Intelligence and Saturation Attacks

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

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

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

The Cyber-Physical Convergence

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

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

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

The Professional Recruitment Threat

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

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

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

Global Best Practices

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

A Comprehensive Implementation Strategy

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

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

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

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Why India needs its own LLMs: beyond using AI tools



A
ASHVATHAMAN

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

The writer is the Tamil Nadu BJP State Secretary and the founder of Project Tamil AI and the Integral Humanism Foundation

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The Pioneer

FROM THE WORLD

USA

One dead in varsity shooting

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

CANADA

Envoy to US to resign

Canada's ambassador to the US for the last six years said on Tuesday she is resigning next year as the two major trading partners plan to review the free trade agreement. Ambassador Kirsten Hillman said in a letter it is the right time to put in place someone who will oversee talks about the United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement that is up for review in 2026. PM Mark Carney said Hillman "prepared the foundations for Canada in the upcoming review" of the agreement. Carney noted she is one of the longest-serving ambassadors to the US in Canada's history. Former Canadian PM Justin Trudeau appointed Hillman in 2017. Hillman helped lead the trade negotiations during US President Donald Trump's first term and worked with US and Chinese officials to win the release of two Canadians detained in China.

Ukraine can hold elections soon if security is ensured: Zelenskyy

ASSOCIATED PRESS ■ Kyiv

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

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

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

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



conduct them, how to do it under strikes, under missile attacks; and a question regarding our military — how they would vote," Zelenskyy said. "And the second issue is the legislative framework required to ensure the legitimacy of elections," he said.

Previously, Zelenskyy had pointed out that a ballot can't legally take place while martial law imposed due to Russia's invasion nearly four years ago is in place. He has also asked how a vote could happen when civilian areas of Ukraine are being bombarded by Russia and almost 20 per cent of the country is under

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

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

dent that he is willing to make some compromises.

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

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

Renewed Thailand-Cambodia border clash displaces thousands of people

ASSOCIATED PRESS ■ Surin

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

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

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



though it did not update those figures on Wednesday.

There is not yet a clear path to peace as Thailand's Prime Minister Anutin Charnvirakul vowed to continue to fight, and Cambodia's powerful Senate President Hun Sen promised a fierce response.

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

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

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

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

ASSOCIATED PRESS ■ Miami

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

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

Higgins, 61, will be the first woman to lead the city of Miami. She spoke frequently in the Hispanic-majority city about Trump's immigration crackdown, saying she has heard of many people in Miami who were worried about family members being detained. She campaigned as a Democrat despite the race being officially nonpartisan and beat Trump-backed candidate Emilio Gonzalez, a former city manager, who said he called Higgins to



congratulate her. "I've never been prouder to be a Democrat," Higgins told The Associated Press before her victory.

"We're living in the state of Florida, where we have people that are building cages for our residents rather than affordable housing for them." The local race is not predictive of what may happen at the polls next year. But it drew attention

from the two major national political parties and their leaders.

The victory provides Democrats with some momentum heading into a high-stakes mid-term election when the GOP is looking to keep its grip in Florida, including in a Hispanic-majority district in Miami-Dade County. The area has shifted increasingly rightward politically in recent

years, and the city may become the home of Trump's presidential library.

"Tonight's result is yet another warning sign to Republicans that voters are fed up with their out-of-touch agenda that is raising costs," said Ken Martin, the chair of the Democratic National Committee, in a statement. Some nationally recognised Democrats supported Higgins, including

former Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg. US Senator Ruben Gallego and former Chicago Mayor Rahm Emanuel traveled to Miami on Sunday and Monday to rally voters for the Democrat who served as a Miami-Dade county commissioner for seven years.

Higgins, who speaks Spanish, represented a district that leans conservative and includes the Cuban neighborhood of Little Havana. When she first entered politics in 2018, she chose to present herself to voters as "La Gringa," a term Spanish speakers use for white Americans, because many people did not know how to pronounce her name. "It just helps people understand who I am, and you know what? I am a gringa. So, what am I going to do, deny it?" she told.

Republicans in Florida have found strong support from voters with heritage from Cuba, Venezuela and Nicaragua, because they likened some members of the Democratic party's pro-

gressive wing with politicians from the Governments they fled. Trump and other GOP members have tapped into those sentiments over the past eight years.

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

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

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

Sudanese military plane crashes, killing all crew members

ASSOCIATED PRESS ■ Cairo

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

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

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

Among the dead was military pilot Omran Mirghani, according to his uncle, prominent Sudanese journalist Osman Mirghani, who mourned his nephew's death on social media. The military didn't comment on the crash. Plane crashes are not uncommon in Sudan, which has a poor aviation safety record. In February, at least 46 people were killed when a military aircraft crashed in Omdurman, the sister city of the capital, Khartoum. The military lost el-Fasher, its last stronghold in the sprawling region of Darfur, in October, and earlier this week was forced to pull out from the country's largest oil processing facility in the central region of Kordofan. The war in Sudan began in April 2023 over a power struggle between the military and the RSF. The conflict has killed over 40,000 people — a figure rights groups consider a significant undercount.

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

19 killed in Morocco building collapse

ASSOCIATED PRESS ■ Fes

Two four-story buildings collapsed overnight in the Moroccan city of Fes, killing 19 people in the second fatal collapse there this year, authorities said on Wednesday. Morocco's state news agency reported the two residential buildings housed eight families.

Sixteen people were injured in the collapse and sent for treatment at a nearby hospital. Authorities said the neighbourhood had been evacuated and search and rescue efforts were ongoing. It was unclear what caused the collapse or how many people were unaccounted for on Wednesday morning. Fes is Morocco's second-largest city and one of



the hosts of this month's Africa Cup of Nations and the 2030 FIFA World Cup. It is best known for its walled city packed with medieval souks and tanneries. But beyond tourism, it's also one of the country's poorest urban centres, where aging infrastructure is common in many neighbourhoods.

Another collapse in May killed 10 people and injured seven in a building that had already been slated for evacuation, according to Moroccan outlet Le360. Building codes are often not enforced in Morocco, especially in ancient cities where aging multifamily homes are common.

Bolivia to restore diplomatic relations with Israel

ASSOCIATED PRESS ■ La Paz Bolivia

Bolivia's new right-wing Government said on Tuesday that it would restore diplomatic relations with Israel, the latest sign of the dramatic geopolitical realignment underway in the South American country that was once among the most vocal critics of Israeli policies toward Palestinians.

The Bolivian foreign ministry said its top diplomat would meet his Israeli counterpart in Washington later Tuesday to discuss the revival of bilateral ties, which Bolivia's previous left-wing Government severed two years ago over Israel's devastating campaign against Hamas in Gaza. Bolivia said the effort came as part of a new foreign policy strategy under



Foreign Minister Gideon Sa'ar and Bolivian FM Fernando Aramayo signed the agreement in Washington

conservative President Rodrigo Paz aimed at "rebuilding Bolivia's international prestige, opening new economic opportunities and strengthening alliances that directly benefit the country and our citizens abroad."

Bolivian Foreign Minister Fernando Aramayo is in the midst of a whirlwind trip to

Washington for meetings with American officials as his Government works to warm long-chilly relations with the United States and unravel nearly two decades of hard-line, anti-Western policies under the Movement Toward Socialism, or MAS, party that left Bolivia economically

isolated and diplomatically allied with China, Russia and Venezuela.

Paz's Government eased visa restrictions on American and Israeli travellers last month. In announcing his expected meeting with Aramayo on Monday, Israeli Foreign Minister Gideon Sa'ar thanked Bolivia for scrapping Israeli visa controls and said he spoke to Paz after the centre-right senator's October 19 election victory to express "Israel's desire to open a new chapter" in relations with Bolivia.

Paz entered office last month, ending the dominance of the MAS party founded by Evo Morales, the charismatic former coca-growing union leader who became Bolivia's first Indigenous president in 2006.

Nepal charges 55 in airport corruption scandal

ASSOCIATED PRESS ■ Kathmandu

Former Nepali ministers, officials and a Chinese company were charged with corruption over financial irregularities during the construction of an international airport. The Commission for Investigation of Abuse of Authority filed on Sunday cases against 55 people and the China CAMC Engineering Company Limited, one of the biggest such cases in the Himalayan nation, accusing them of inflating construction expenses by more than \$74 million.

Two officials of the Chinese company have been named in the charges filed at the Special Court. The bidding agreed on with the Government in 2012 was set at \$169.6 million, but Nepali officials increased the amount to a little over \$244 million "in collusion with the Chinese company," the commission said.



UN chief urges Houthis to release detained staff

ASSOCIATED PRESS ■ United Nations

The United Nations chief called on Yemen's Houthi rebels on Tuesday not to prosecute detained UN personnel and to work "in good faith" to immediately release all detained staff from the UN and foreign agencies and missions. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres condemned the referrals of the UN personnel to the Houthis' special criminal court and called the detentions of UN staff a violation of international law. UN spokesman Stephane Dujarric said. There are currently 59 UN personnel, all Yemeni nationals, detained by Houthis, in addition to dozens from NGO and diplomatic missions, he said. He said a number of them have been referred to the criminal court in Yemen's capital, Sanaa. "There were procedures going on in the court, I believe, today and all of this is very, very worrying to us," Dujarric said.

The court in late November convicted 17 people of spying for foreign Governments, part of a years-long Houthi crackdown on Yemeni staffers working for foreign organisations.

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Sealed tenders are invited from eligible contractors having relevant experience for (1) Erection of 8 Nos HT 9.1M PSCC poles in CBD-3 (Ext-4) (2) Erection of 9 Nos LT 9.1M PSCC poles in Chatrinaka (3) Interlinking a) Shahgung feeder b) Shivrajayam & Siddiqui Gulshan feeder in CBD-3 (4) Renovation of DTR earthing, Begumbazar Section (Ext-II) (5) Erection of 9 Nos PSCC in Dattatreya Sec (6) Interlinking a) Outhbiguda & Essamia Bazar b) PuranapoolOH & Begum Bazar feeder at Eye Hospital CBD-9 (The cost of Tender Schedule is Rs.590/- (in person) and Rs.650/- (by Post). Sd/-, Superintending Engineer, DIPR.No. 11879-PP/CL/ADVT/1/2025-26, Dt: 10.12.2025 Operation, South Circle, Hyderabad.

GREATER HYDERABAD MUNICIPAL CORPORATION

'E' procurement NIT No: 52/EE/Div-15/SBZ/GHMC/2025-26 dt: 10.12.2025

Name of the work: Maintenance of (5) nos. of mobile bus toilets in Secunderabad zone, GHMC for a period of one year. (Rs 46.20 lakhs) Last Date & Time of Bid: 15.12.2025 at 11:00 AM. Sni S. Sreenivas, Executive Engineer, Division-15, Circle-15 Musheerabad, Secbad Zone, GHMC for the year 2023, Cell: 7995007374. Address of the Concerned: Executive Engineer, Div-15, SBZ, GHMC Abids, Greater Hyderabad Municipal Corporation. Further details can be seen at E-Procurement WWW.tender.telangana.gov.in

Name of the work: GHMC-SBZ: Engaging of 1 No. of Customised Dog catching vehicle for veterinary wing, Secunderabad zone. GHMC for a period of (01) year (Rs 10.72 lakhs). Last Date & Time of Bid: 15.12.2025 at 11:00 AM. Sni S. Sreenivas, Executive Engineer, Division-15, Circle-15 Musheerabad, Secbad Zone, GHMC Cell: 7995007374. Address of the Concerned: Executive Engineer, Div-15, SBZ, GHMC Abids, Greater Hyderabad Municipal Corporation. Further details can be seen at E-Procurement WWW.tender.telangana.gov.in Sd/-, Executive Engineer DIPR.No. 11918-PP/CL/ADVT/1/2025-26, Dt: 10.12.2025 Div-15, SBZ, GHMC.



Bangladesh insists on Hasina return diplomacy

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ Dhaka

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

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

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

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

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



Foreign Adviser Touhid Hossain

FILE PHOTO

Bangladesh was not ruling out a response from India.

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

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

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

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

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

2 ADVISERS OF INTERIM GOVERNMENT RESIGN

Dhaka: Two student leaders turned advisers of the interim government in Bangladesh tendered their resignations on Wednesday ahead of the Election Commission's announcement of the schedule for the polls in February. The resignation by M Mahfuj Alam and Asif Mahmud Shojib Bhuiyan comes in wake of the Election Commission's (EC) decision that no adviser can contest the polls while holding a position in the interim government.

"Adviser for Information and Broadcasting M Mahfuj Alam and Adviser for Local Government, Rural Development & Cooperative and Youth & Sports Asif Mahmud Shojib Bhuiyan have tendered their resignation letters at around 5 pm to the Chief Adviser Muhammad Yunus," a statement from the chief adviser's office said.

Both Alam and Bhuiyan were inducted as representatives of Students Against Discrimination (SAD), the organisation which led a violent street movement that toppled former prime minister Sheikh Hasina's government on August 5, 2024. "The nation will remember your leadership and contribution to the 'revolution' (uprising) remaining at its frontline to

free the nation from fascist (Awami League) rule," the statement quoted Yunus as saying while accepting their resignation. "The nation will never forget what you gave to it in such a short time," Yunus said.

Of the three SAD leaders appointed as advisers by Yunus, Nahid Islam quit in February to form the National Citizen Party (NCP), a political offshoot of the students' organisation. Bhuiyan earlier said he would resign to take part in upcoming elections, but Alam so far has made no comment in public about his future plans. However, neither of them have officially disclosed any link with NCP or any other political party.

The EC on Tuesday said Chief Election Commissioner AMM Nasir Uddin would announce the schedule for the upcoming polls in the next two days. The EC had earlier clarified that no adviser can contest the polls while holding a position in the interim government. Bangladesh's top electoral officials on Wednesday met President Mohammed Shahabuddin, who assured "optimum support and cooperation" to the Election Commission to conduct the February general elections in a "free, fair and meaningful" manner.

European nations set to discuss tightening of migration rules



ASSOCIATED PRESS ■ Brussels

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

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

Critics of army go on silent strike in Myanmar



ASSOCIATED PRESS
■ Bangkok

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Machado's daughter accepts Nobel Peace Prize

ASSOCIATED PRESS
■ Oslo

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

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

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



he said to applause.

The director of the Norwegian Nobel Institute and Machado's spokesperson said earlier Wednesday that she wouldn't be able to attend the ceremony. Her daughter Ana Corina Sosa did instead.

Maria Corina Machado said in an audio recording of a phone call published on the Nobel website that many people had "risked their lives" for her

to arrive in Oslo.

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

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

Machado added.

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

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

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

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

ASHOKE RAJ ■ New Delhi

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

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

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

"If you have received an email advising that your visa

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

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

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

Immigration attorney Steven Brown from a promi-

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

New Social Media Rules Now Mandatory

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

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

under the same framework.

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

Part of Wider Crackdown on Skilled Worker Immigration

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

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

though critics have labelled it a deterrent to global talent.

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

Impact on Indian Professionals

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

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

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

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

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

Lavrov lauds India for pursuing independent foreign policy

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Moscow

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



North Korea's ruling elite prepares for party meeting

ASSOCIATED PRESS ■ Seoul

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





At a star-studded event that marked a watershed moment for South India's Media & Entertainment industry, JioHotstar announced to invest the next five years to boost the region's creative economy. The evening was graced by the Dep CM Thiru Udhayanidhi Stalin, MP Padma Bhushan Thiru. Kamal Haasan, Minister Thiru M.P. Saminathan, and some of the most illustrious icons from across the South film and TV industries, reflecting the scale and cultural significance of the occasion. The presence of Sushant Sreeram, JioStar and Krishnan Kutty, Head of Cluster, Entertainment (South) at JioStar underscored JioHotstar's bold leadership of India's content evolution and reaffirming the platform's commitment to elevate and expand South Indian storytelling at scale.



Blenders Pride Fashion Tour shifted gears in Jaipur, transforming into an intersection of high-fashion and motorsport that marked 'Fashion's Next Move' – racing forward with speed and precision. In collaboration with Fashion Design Council of India (FDCI), the showcase reimaged the runway into a high-speed circuit of style and power. Leading designers Namrata Joshipura and Abhishek Paatni reinterpreted high-octane motorcore aesthetics, transforming racing culture into statement-making fashion. Bollywood star Hamaaz Sandhu commanded the runway as the finale showstopper, Sunil Sethi, Chairman, FDCI, expressed, embodying the fusion of glamour and speed, while rap sensation Raftaar closed the night with an electrifying performance that matched the show's pulsating energy.



An Economic Impact Report by Keystone Strategy released at the sixth edition of Amazon Smbhav Summit reveals that Amazon's cumulative investments of \$40 billion in India since 2010, including compensation to employees and the development of infrastructure, have significantly contributed towards India's Atmanirbhar vision. Amit Agarwal, Senior VP Emerging Markets, Amazon said, We are humbled to have been a part of India's digital transformation journey over the past 15 years, with Amazon's growth in India perfectly aligned with the vision of an Atmanirbhar and Viksit Bharat. manufacturing clusters across India, including Tirupur, Kanpur, and Surat. At the Smbhav summit, Amazon announced a key partnership with the Apparel Export Promotion Council of India to grow and scale the program across India.



Anant National University recently hosted the 7th Convocation, conferring degrees on 299 students from the Bachelor of Design, Bachelor of Architecture, Master of Design, Anant Fellowship in Sustainability and Built Environment, MSc in Sustainability and Built Environment and Anant Fellowship in Climate Action. Padma Shri awardee and Chief Scientist and Co-founder of Zoho Corporation, Dr Sridhar Vembu, was the Chief Guest. Ajay Piramal, President, Anant National University, Dr Sanjeev Vidyarthi, Provost, Anant National University, and the members of the board were present during the convocation.



One of the fastest-growing Telugu OTT platforms, has announced a major leap in its streaming experience by bringing the Dolby Vision® and Dolby Atmos® experience to a growing slate of content for audiences across screens, including TVs, tablets and smartphones. Over 20 titles are now available in Dolby on ETV Win. A Middle-Class Biopic, Committee Kurrolu, Veeranjaneyulu Vihara Yatra, Ka, Anaganaga, AIR and Little hearts. ETV Win continues to captivate Telugu audiences with stories that blend strong narratives, nostalgia, and new-age storytelling. the collaboration, Sameer Seth, Director, Marketing – India, Dolby Laboratories said, "At Dolby.



Pavani, the youngest Para-Air rifle shooter from Telangana, Khushbu para Air Rifle and Vijaya Mohan Singham Coach, Aditya Mehta Foundation with their medals at the 6th National Para Shooting Championship 2025, held at the Dr. Karni Singh Shooting Range, New Delhi.



Renowned motivational speaker and communication skills trainer Munawar Zama delivered a powerful and deeply inspiring address to civil services aspirants at MS IAS Academy, held at the Maulana Abul Kalam Azad Auditorium on the Hyderabad campus. The auditorium was packed with MS IAS Academy students who listened with complete attention, visibly moved by Zama's thought-provoking message. The academy is committed not only to producing successful officers, but responsible role models and nation-builders.

From coaches to control rooms: 5 trends shaping railway smart video storage

According to Owais Mohammed, Director of Sales for MEA and India at Western Digital, Carrying over 7 billion passengers in FY 2025, Indian Railways ranks among the world's busiest public transport networks. Working to ensure the safety and security of such massive footfall is a monumental challenge — one that India is now tackling with the help of AI-powered smart video. Taking this into consideration, Railways Minister has announced CCTV cameras in over 11,000 coaches, with plans to cover 74,000 coaches and 15,000 locomotives. Along with the integration of technologies such as video analytics and anomaly detection, India's railway ecosystem is rapidly evolving, seeking to become smarter and safer through the adoption of AI-driven video technologies. Here are five trends that are redefining railway safety: Massive scale, massive data: Surveillance video at this scale can generate massive amounts of data every month. Only one AI-enabled 4K camera at 24 fps, recording 24x7 with 90 days retention rate, for example, can produce up to 362 TB. With cities like Bhubaneswar now installing 1,500 additional AI cameras to enhance safety, it is evident that these local data pipelines might collapse without reliable high-capacity surveillance storage. Purpose-built hard disk drives designed for smart video can help ensure seamless recording across hundreds of streams simultaneously, minimizing dropped frames.

Kotak securities' 2026 market outlook: equities stay strong, gold holds its shine amid global volatility

Kotak Securities Ltd ("Kotak Neo") unveiled its Market Outlook 2026, signalling optimism for Indian equities and commodities despite global uncertainty. The report spotlights macro trends, sector opportunities and commodity forecasts investors should track in the year ahead. Shripal Shah, MD & CEO, Kotak Securities, said, "India remains a beacon of growth amid global turbulence. Our outlook for equities is upbeat, driven by robust earnings projections and policy support while gold is expected to retain its shine as a safe-haven asset in 2026. With rising participation from young investors, the market is set for deeper engagement and wealth creation." On the industry front, he added, "As per the latest SEBI survey findings, only 9.5% of households actively invest despite 63% being aware of at least one securities market product. This means India's equity market holds immense untapped potential. Brokerage firms must lead the charge to make investing inclusive and accessible." The Kotak Securities Market Outlook 2026 report outlines key trends and impact for the year ahead.

LISTINGS

PARTY

Photos by- SV Chary

FUN

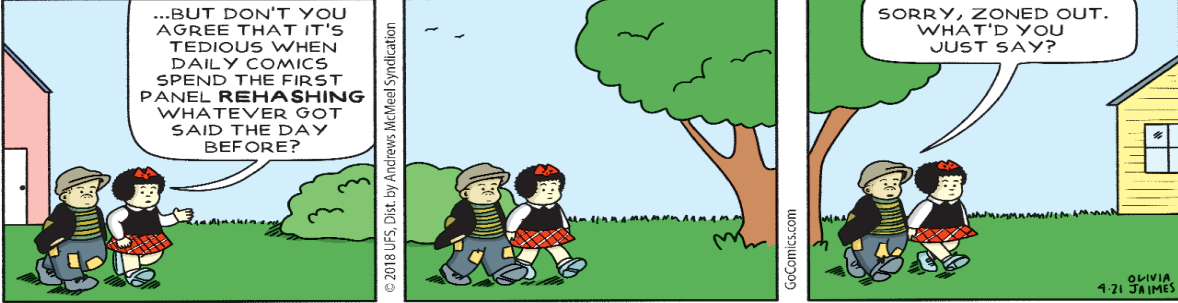
ARCHIE



GARFIELD



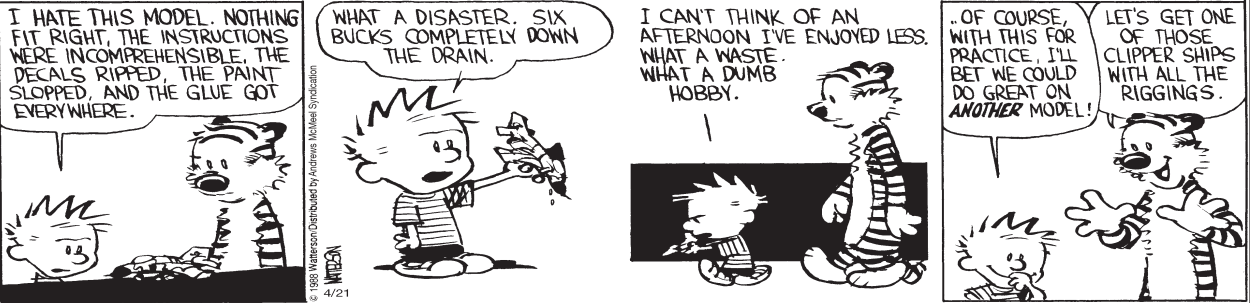
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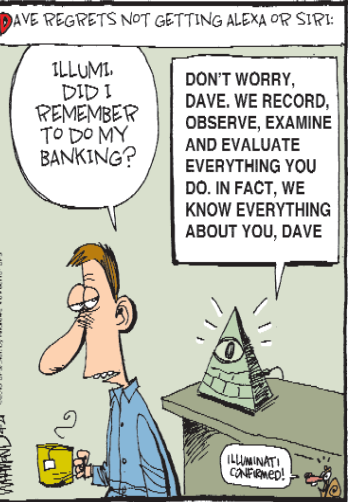
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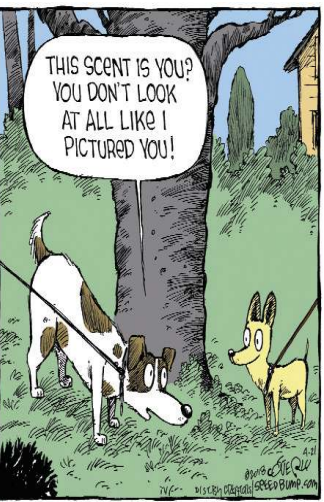
CALVIN AND HOBBS



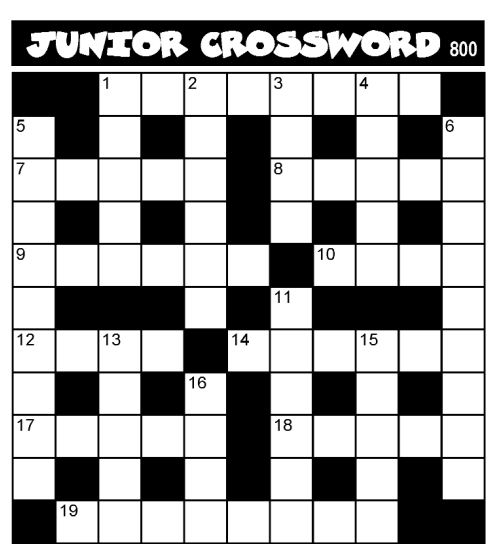
REALITY CHECK



SPEED BUMP



CROSSWORD

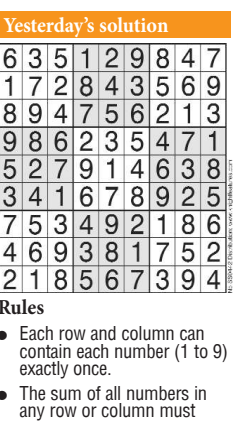


ACROSS

- Stir a cup of coffee with this
- Opposite of south
- A very crowded country
- The finish of a story
- To snatch something
- The sound a pig makes
- Someone who helps sick people
- The planet we live on
- A singer's instrument
- People who repair teeth
- Letters are put in these
- A takeaway food item
- Blocks of bread
- A tiny body part that carries messages to the brain
- Opposite of heads on coins
- Closed

DOWN

- Weary
- Throbbing with pain
- Two matching things
- A command



- 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.

BRIEFLY

SERGIO RAMOS BIDS
FAREWELL TO MONTERREY



Three days after Monterrey was eliminated in the Mexican Apertura semifinals, Spanish defender Sergio Ramos bid farewell to his team. The 39-year-old Ramos arrived in Mexico on a one-year contract that ended with Monterrey's elimination on Saturday. "It's never easy to say goodbye. A stage of my career that began with so much excitement in February has come to an end," Ramos posted Tuesday on his official social media accounts. "It has allowed me to discover a new country, a new city, a new style of football and has left me with so many new experiences and, more importantly, new friends." Ramos, who became captain of Monterrey, played in 34 matches in all competitions and scored eight goals. "I have left everything on the pitch and off it to be able to give my very best," the defender said. "I'll always look back fondly on this stage of my career."

COMMONWEALTH KHO KHO TO
BE HELD NEXT YEAR IN INDIA



Over 24 countries will compete in the inaugural Commonwealth Kho Kho Championship from March 9 to 14 next year, for which the venue is yet to be finalised in India. The Kho Kho Federation of India is in talks with several states to finalise the venue after Commonwealth Sport (CS) gave the approval for the event to take place in India. The event, which will see 16 men's and as many women's teams competing, will be organised on the lines of the first Kho Kho World Cup held in January this year in Delhi in which 23 nations participated. This will be the first Commonwealth Kho Kho event in India after Ahmedabad was recently officially confirmed as the host city for the 2030 Commonwealth Games.

India win bronze in FIH Men's Junior World Cup

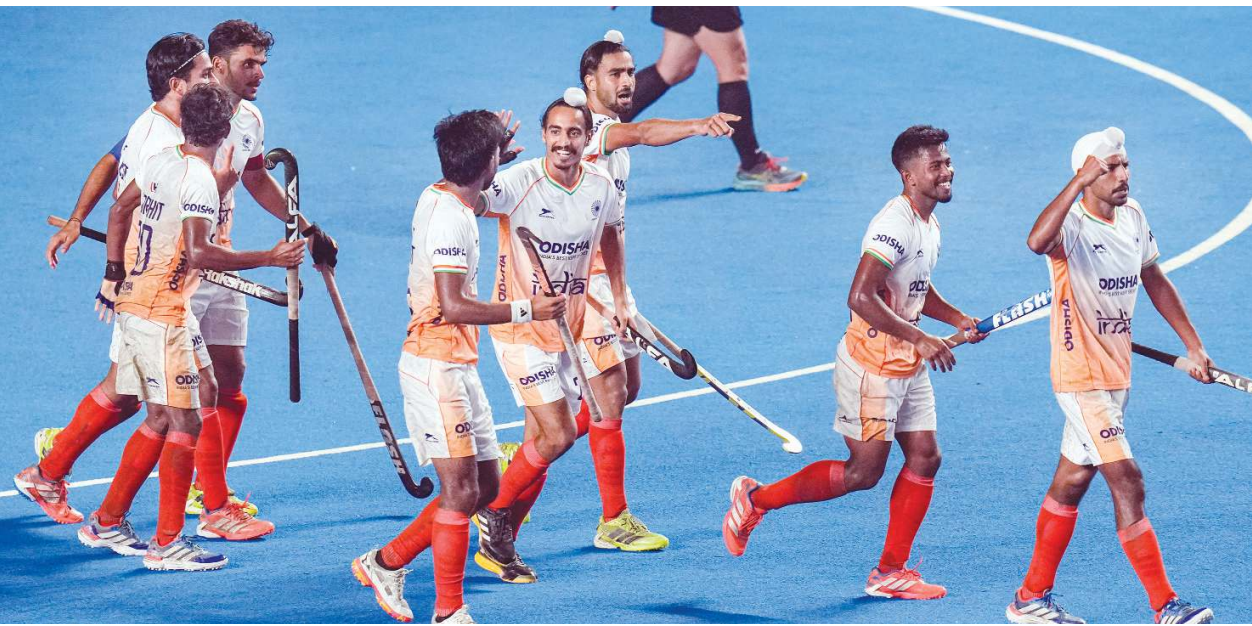
PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ Chennai

India produced a brave-heart performance, nullifying a two-goal deficit to beat Argentina 4-2 and clinch the bronze medal in the FIH Men's Junior World Cup on Wednesday.

India, who won the title in 2016 in Lucknow, failed to finish on the podium on the last two occasions, ending fourth in 2021 in Bhubaneswar, and two years later in Kuala Lumpur. India produced a valiant fightback with Ankit Pal (49th minute), Manmeet Singh (52nd) and Anmol Ekka (58th) converting penalty corners, while Sharda Nand Tiwari finding the net from the spot in the 57th minute.

Argentina were the better side on display at least in the first two quarters, scoring through Nicolas Rodriguez (3rd minute) and Santiago Fernandez (44th).

The Argentines controlled the possession of the match in the first quarter as India struggled to get a foothold. Argentina secured their first



India's players celebrate a goal during an FIH Junior Men's Hockey World Cup match between India and Argentina at Mayor Radhakrishnan Hockey Stadium in Chennai, Tamil Nadu

PTI

chance in the third minute in the form of a penalty stroke following a foul by Anmol Ekka and Rodriguez made no mistake to hand his side the lead.

The Indians were guilty of giving away the ball too easily, which put paid to their chances in the first 15 minutes.

India had their best shot at the goal in the 20th minute but

Dilraj Singh's shot from top of the circle was finely saved by Argentina goalkeeper Joaquin Ruiz. The Indians started brightly after the change of ends and secured four back-to-

back penalty corners in the 31st minute but failed to execute a single one with Anmol Ekka flicking the final one over the post. Argentina kept up the pressure on the Indian defence

and secured their first penalty corner in the 37th minute but Indian goalkeeper Princedeep Singh made a brilliant double save to keep the hosts in the hunt. Argentina secured two more short corners in the 40th minute but failed to get past the Indian defence.

The visitors secured their fourth penalty corner in the 41st minute but Rodriguez flick was off target.

The Indians didn't lose heart and maintained the pressure in the final quarter and drew level, converting two penalty corners through deflections in the span of four minutes.

Ankit Pal reduced the margin in the 49th minute by deflecting in Anmol Ekka's flick from India's fifth penalty corner. Manmeet Singh drew parity for India four minutes later, deflecting in another Ekka's flick from India's sixth penalty corner.

With momentum on their side, India pressed hard on the Argentine defence thereafter and Tiwari scored from a penalty stroke three minutes from the final hooter.

India beat Uruguay in FIH Junior Women's World Cup

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ Santiago (Chile)

Goalkeeper Nidhi made several brilliant saves as India defeated Uruguay 3-1 in shootout after an intense 1-1 draw to stay in contention for a ninth place finish in the hockey Junior Women's World Cup.

Manisha (19') scored for India while Justina Arregui (60') slammed the equaliser for Uruguay on Tuesday in the 9/12 qualification match.

The first quarter saw India control the game, creating multiple chances early on. However, Uruguay won the first penalty corner in the fifth minute but squandered the chance.

India earned a penalty corner in the 18th minute and played an interesting variation by passing the ball to Sakshi Rana on the near post. But her shot was blocked by the rival goalkeeper.



Moments later, India broke the deadlock with Manisha (19') striking the ball from a distance as India took the lead.

The game opened up in the final quarter with Uruguay playing a lot more freely. With two minutes left on the clock, Uruguay switched their goalkeeper for an outfield player to push ahead in numbers and it paid off.

With two seconds left on

the clock, Uruguay won a penalty stroke. Justina Arregui converted the it to take the game into shootout.

India emerged victorious in the shootout as Purnima Yadav, Ishika and Kanika Siwach scored while goalkeeper Nidhi denied Uruguay thrice to ensure her team progresses in the tournament.

India will next play Spain on Thursday in the 9th/10th place match.

IOA and Italy's CONI sign MoU to strengthen bilateral sports cooperation

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ New Delhi

The Indian Olympic Association (IOA) and the Italian National Olympic Committee (CONI) on Wednesday signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to strengthen bilateral cooperation in sports with a focus on training, infrastructure sharing and sports science collaboration.

The agreement provides a "structured framework for joint promotion of sports, exchange of expertise and mutual access to each nation's elite sporting infrastructure and high-performance centres for athletes, coaches and sports science professionals".

The signing ceremony was attended by Italy's Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation

Antonio Tajani and Union Minister for Youth Affairs and Sports Mansukh Mandaviya.

"Today marks a proud moment for the Indian Olympic movement. This partnership with CONI opens new horizons for our athletes to train, learn, and excel within one of the world's most respected sporting systems," PT Usha, IOA President, said in a release.

"The exchange of knowledge, expertise, and infrastructure will play a pivotal role in elevating India's global sporting performance. We look forward to a long and inspiring collaboration with our Italian counterparts."

The MoU outlines structured plans for joint training camps, coaching exchanges, collaborative sports science programmes, and development pathways for emerging athletes, signalling a new era of cooperation between the two Olympic committees.

"This partnership arrives at a crucial moment for India's sporting ambitions. Access to world-class facilities and joint training programmes will significantly strengthen our athletes' preparation for future Olympic cycles," Mandaviya said.

"The Government of India welcomes this initiative and is committed to supporting meaningful international collaborations that uplift Indian sport." Luciano Buonfiglio, President of CONI, said, "Italy and India share a deep passion for sport, and this MoU represents an important step in strengthening that bond."

"By opening our high-performance facilities and expertise to each other, we are building a bridge of excellence that will benefit both nations' athletes for years to come. CONI is delighted to join hands with IOA in this forward-looking initiative."

Liverpool 1-0 win over Inter Milan in Champions League

ASSOCIATED PRESS
■ London

Even from the penalty spot, Liverpool managed just fine without Mohamed Salah.

After leaving the Egypt forward in England, Liverpool got a much-needed boost with a 1-0 win over Inter Milan in the Champions League on Tuesday. Barcelona and Bayern Munich celebrated comeback wins and Chelsea lost.

With regular penalty taker Salah out of the squad following his public criticism of the club last week, Dominik Szoboszlai stepped up instead to score the 88th-minute penalty which earned a 1-0 win over one of the competition's best-performing teams.

It was all the more valuable for coming after a run of one win in six games in all competitions for Arne Slot's under-pressure team, which moved up to eighth and is now back in contention for a direct spot in the round of 16. Inter dropped to fifth.



Liverpool's players thought they had taken the lead with Ibrahima Konate's header in the 31st minute. After a video review that lasted several minutes, it was ruled out for handball as Virgil van Dijk had earlier nodded the ball on to the arm of Hugo Ekitike.

Having taken away a goal from Liverpool, VAR came to the visitors' aid when it spotted that Alessandro Bastoni had tugged Florian Wirtz's shirt in the area, with the midfielder falling to the ground. Szoboszlai converted the penalty.

Bayern's new star shines

Bayern's 17-year-old midfielder Lennart Karl produced an audacious bit of skill to continue his high-scoring start to life in the Champions League in a 3-1 win over Sporting Lisbon which lifted Bayern to second behind Arsenal.

Karl scored his third goal in four career Champions League games, controlling a pass from Konrad Laimer in mid-air before volleying a shot from a tight angle over two onrushing defenders and past the goalkeeper.

It was part of a 12-minute, three-goal turnaround for Bayern after Joshua

Kimmich's own-goal handed Sporting the lead. Serge Gnabry leveled for Bayern when he was left unmarked at a corner in the 65th, before Karl scored Bayern's second in the 69th and defender Jonathan Tah made it 3-1 in the 77th.

Widely viewed as German soccer's best young talent this season, Karl became Bayern's youngest-ever Champions League scorer in October on his first start in the competitions.

Late on, Alphonso Davies came off the bench for the Canadian left back's first game since March after a serious knee injury.

Chelsea loses
Chelsea was beaten in the Champions League for the first time in nearly three months as Belgium forward Charles De Ketelaere set up the equalizer and scored an 83rd-minute winner as Atalanta came from behind to win 2-1.

Chelsea, which went ahead through Joao Pedro, dropped out of the top eight

automatic qualifying spots to 11th with its second loss. It was a fourth win for Atalanta, which climbed to third.

Gianluca Scamacca made it 1-1 by heading home a cross from De Ketelaere, who then drove in a shot that Chelsea goalkeeper Robert Sanchez got a hand to but couldn't keep out.

Koundé scores 2, Yamal sets record

Headers by Jules Koundé three minutes apart gave Barcelona a 2-1 comeback victory over Eintracht Frankfurt. Marcus Rashford assisted in the first goal in the 50th and Lamine Yamal with a cross in the second in the 53rd. That took Yamal to 14 career combined goals and assists in the Champions League, breaking a tie with Kylian Mbappe for the most by a player aged under 19, UEFA said.

The visitors had taken the lead with a goal by Ansgar Knauff in a 21st-minute breakaway at the renovated and only partially open Camp Nou stadium.

Barcelona beat Eintracht Frankfurt

ASSOCIATED PRESS
■ Barcelona (Spain)

Barcelona coach Hansi Flick downplayed Lamine Yamal's reaction to being substituted late in the team's 2-1 win over Eintracht Frankfurt in the Champions League.

Yamal was replaced by Roony Bardghji in the 89th minute of the league-phase game. He walked off with a serious expression and appeared to be complaining to himself. He also didn't look happy after getting back to the bench.

"We changed Lamine with a few minutes to go because he was booked and it was late," Flick said. "If he was a bit annoyed, then I fully understand and I like it. I was a player too. It's fully acceptable, not a problem." Yamal was shown a yellow card in the 56th minute for a foul and will miss the team's next Champions League match.

His cross led to Jules Koundé's second goal in the 53rd to give Barcelona the come-from-behind victory



after the visitors had gone ahead in the 21st. Koundé also scored in the 50th.

The 18-year-old Yamal has produced more goal involvements — assists and goals — than any other player aged under 19 in Champions League history from group stage or league phase to final, according to UEFA. He has 14 — seven goals and seven assists. That is one more than Kylian Mbappe's previous record of 13 — 10 goals and three assists.

"It's great to have Jules scoring ... His talent and his

mentality are so important," Flick said. Koundé said it was "fun" to be able to make many forays into the attack.

"My first job is to defend well so I have to keep a balance," he said. "And there are games when we play against a back five — today Frankfurt were very deep, so you have to attack the spaces in behind, which is what I tried to do. I had success with those two goals."

It was the fifth consecutive match in which Barcelona conceded first. It rallied to victories in its last four games.

Real Madrid beat Wolfsburg in champions league

ASSOCIATED PRESS
■ London

Linda Caicedo raced clear from halfway to score the goal that clinched Real Madrid a 2-0 win over Wolfsburg in the Women's Champions League on Tuesday, while there were also victories for defending champion Arsenal and Juventus.

Paris Saint-Germain (PSG) stayed winless after five rounds after a 0-0 draw with OH Leuven, however, and cannot now progress to the knockout stage with one match remaining.

The 20-year-old Caicedo, regarded as one of the top younger players in the women's game, recently signed a long-term deal with Madrid and showcased her



talents with the second goal against Wolfsburg.

Played through by Caroline Weir, the Colombia striker outpaced the last defender after setting off inside her own half, rounded the goalkeeper, and slotted home a finish in the 67th minute. T

hat added to the opening goal in the 19th by Maria Méndez for Madrid, which finished the match with nine players. Maëlle Lakrar collected a second yellow card in first-half stoppage time, while Iris Santiago received a straight red in second-half

stoppage time.

Madrid moved above Wolfsburg and into third place — one of the four automatic qualifying places — with the win and is assured of at least a spot in the playoffs. So is Arsenal after a 1-0 home win over Twente, secured thanks to Beth Mead's deflected 10th-minute strike.

Juventus, meanwhile, thrashed St. Pölten 5-0 and climbed to second place, on the same points as Madrid and first-place Barcelona, which plays Benfica on Wednesday in its game in hand.

Cristiana Girelli scored two of Juve's goals — one of which was from the penalty spot.

PSG, a two-time runner-up and a semifinalist as recently as two seasons ago, will not even make it to the playoffs.

SIL to be held from February 16-26

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ New Delhi

The inaugural edition of the Shooting League of India (SLI) will be held from February 16 to 26 next year, the National Rifle Association of India (NRAI) said on Wednesday.

The dates have been finalised in alignment with the International Shooting Sport Federation's (ISSF) 2026 calendar to avoid clashes with major international competitions. The league had previously been deferred to early 2026.

The franchise-based league will feature several top Indian and international shooters competing in a mixed-team format across pistol, rifle and shotgun disciplines. "The SLI



is a milestone for our sport, franchise-built, athlete-first, and aligned to the global calendar to maximise participation," NRAI President Kalikesh Narayan Singh Deo said in a release.

"With mixed-team formats, compelling story-

lines, and a premium broadcast, we're set to deliver a world-class opening season that welcomes international stars and inspires India's next generation."

The competition will feature mixed team events in multiple categories —

pistol (10m, 25m), rifle (10m, 50m 3P), and shotgun (trap and skeet). The franchise-based teams will be divided into two pools for the league stage, followed by knockout rounds.

Players are drafted across four tiers — Elite Champions, World Elite, National Champions, and Junior & Youth — ensuring a mix of international stars, top Indian shooters, and emerging talent.

"With tighter formats, mixed-team dynamics, and a premium broadcast, the SLI can translate fine margins into compelling drama. It's the kind of platform that turns technical excellence into (a) must-watch sport," former World Champion Ronjan Sodhi said.

