

CM thanks Messi for enthralling sports lovers in Hyd 2



Ajay Devgn enters Hyd with Devgn CineX luxury multiplex 3



ED aims to end legacy FERA cases by early 2026 4



Jaishankar meets European, UK, Egyptian counterparts in UAE 8



Having Messi is a golden moment for Mumbai and India: Tendulkar 12

PIONEER IN SHORT

US TO BEGIN SOCIAL MEDIA SCREENING OF H-1B, H-4 VISA APPLICANTS
 The Trump administration will begin on Monday enhanced screening and vetting of H-1B and its dependent H-4 visa applicants, including checks of their social media profiles. In a new order, the State Department said that, from December 15, a review of the online presence for all H-1B applicants and their dependents will be conducted. Students and exchange visitors were already subject to this review and now...

FULL REPORT ON P2

WIFE, LOVER KILL HUSBAND IN CHOWDAPUR MANDAL CENTRE

A horrific incident took place in Chowdapur mandal centre. A wife, along with her lover, murdered her husband because he was obstructing their illicit relationship. She had her husband killed by having him hit by a tractor and then tried to portray it as an accident. The deceased's brother filed a complaint with the police, bringing the matter to light. According to the police, Ratnaya and Kavitha were a married couple in Chowdapur.

FULL REPORT ON P3

MP LEADER SPARKS LADLI BEHNA SCHEME CONTROVERSY

Senior Madhya Pradesh Cabinet Minister Kunwar Vijay Shah has triggered a fresh political storm after remarks made during a district-level meeting in Ratlam were widely interpreted as linking benefits under the Ladli Behna Scheme to the participation of women beneficiaries in a proposed felicitation programme for Chief Minister...

FULL REPORT ON P5

ANTI-IMMIGRANT RHETORIC ACROSS EUROPE

In the past year, tens of thousands hostile to immigrants marched through London chanting "send them home!" A British lawmaker complained of seeing too many non-white faces on TV. And senior politicians advocated the deportation of longtime UK residents born abroad. The overt demonisation of immigrants and those with immigrant roots is intensifying in the UK — and across Europe — as migration shoots up the political agenda and right...

FULL REPORT ON P8

QUOTE OF THE DAY



FOR THE PEOPLE OF TELANGANA, HIS CLOCK NEVER WORKS. IT ONLY TICKS FOR VIP EVENTS AND PHOTO OPS. A FOOTBALL STAR GETS PRIORITY OVER TELANGANA'S PAIN

BANDI SANJAY KUMAR, UNION MINISTER

GRAM PANCHAYAT POLLS
Over 85 pc turnout in second phase

46,70,972 VOTERS CAST THEIR VOTES
CONGRESS CLAIMS DECISIVE VICTORY



PNS ■ Hyderabad

Over 85 per cent of eligible voters exercised their franchise in the second phase of gram panchayat elections in Telangana on Sunday, the SEC said. The elections concluded peacefully, and the counting of votes was underway as of 8 pm. Of the 54,40,339 eligible voters, 46,70,972 cast their votes, recording a turnout of 85.86 per cent, according to a press release. "The polling was held peacefully," Additional Director General of Police (Law and Order) Mahesh M Bhagwat said. He attributed the success to coordinated efforts by ministers, MPs, MLAs and local leaders, along with well-planned campaign strategies implemented down to the village level. "People have given a clear mandate to the slogan of welfare, social justice and development. The emphatic victory of Congress candidates in the sarpanch elections is a strong symbol of this," he said. Goud added that the results of the first and second phases of the sarpanch elections reflected the positive impact of the government's welfare initiatives at the grassroots level and would serve as a guiding force to further strengthen the Congress in Telangana. The first phase of elections on December 11 recorded a voter turnout of 84.28 per cent. The Telangana State Election Commission had announced a three-phase schedule for the gram panchayat elections to be held on December 11, 14 and 17. Following the recent bypoll to the Jubilee Hills Assembly constituency, which was won by the ruling Congress, the gram panchayat elections are being viewed as a test of the popularity of the Congress, BRS and BJP, although the polls are held on a non-party basis.

CONTINUED ON >> P2



'Vote chori in BJP's DNA'
Rahul vows to remove 'Modi-RSS' govt

PNS ■ New Delhi

Alleging that "vote chori" was in the BJP's DNA, Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Sunday said his party stood with 'satya' (truth) and vowed to remove the "Narendra Modi-RSS government" from power. Addressing the party's 'Vote Chor Gaddi Chhod' rally at the Ramlila Maidan here, he launched a scathing attack on the Election Commission and mentioned the names of Chief Election Commissioner Gyanesh Kumar, and Election Commissioners Sukhbir Singh Sandhu and Vivek Joshi to allege that they were working for the BJP. "We will stand with 'satya' (truth) and will remove the Narendra Modi-RSS government from power. They have 'satta' (power), and they indulge in 'vote chori'," the Leader of Opposition in the Lok Sabha said. Claiming that truth is in the DNA of those following the Congress ideology, he alleged that there is untruth and "vote chori" in the DNA of the BJP-RSS. "You should not fear, in the end, we will remove Narendra Modi, Amit Shah and the RSS government from power by following the path of truth," he said. Asserting that it may take time, but truth will ultimately win, the former Congress chief said, "We'll work with truth and non-violence to defeat Modi and (Amit) Shah."

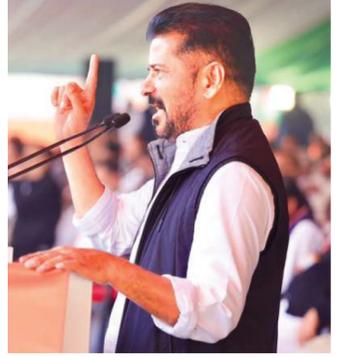
Rahul Gandhi was accompanied by Congress chief Mallikarjun Kharge and Congress Parliamentary Party chairperson Sonia Gandhi at the Ramlila ground, where party workers in large numbers gathered to protest against "vote chori". The party has collected around six crore signatures against alleged vote theft from every corner of the country, and will be presenting the same to the President of India.

CONTINUED ON >> P2

Beware of BJP's attempts to alter Constitution
Telangana CM Revanth at Delhi rally

PNS ■ Hyderabad

Telangana CM Revanth Reddy called upon the people to unite against attempts to undermine democracy and the Constitution. Speaking at Delhi on Sunday, he condemned the BJP's attempts to alter the Constitution and abolish reservations. He alleged RSS ideologues opposed voting rights for marginalized communities during the drafting of the Constitution, adding that Gandhi and Ambedkar ensured voting rights, enabling their participation in governance. The CM said the people limited the BJP to 240 seats, protecting the Constitution and reservations. He asserted that Congress leaders Rahul Gandhi and Mallikarjun Kharge stand with marginalized communities.



BRS to corner Congress on water issues
KCR to chair key meetings and sharpen strategy



PNS ■ Hyderabad

The opposition BRS is gradually turning into a war mold and is about to launch multi-cornered attacks on the ruling party for its failures on many fronts, including the key water issues. As part of its strategy to corner the Congress government, former chief minister and BRS boss K Chandrababtu Naidu will chair a joint meeting with Bharat Rashtira Samithi (BRS) and the party's state executive committee on December 19 at Telangana Bhavan to discuss Congress's 'negligence' towards irrigation projects. The BRS also plans to launch a public movement to protect the water rights of Telangana's farmers, which the party claims are being siphoned off by Andhra Pradesh. The meeting assumes great significance as KCR has not been very active since his party's defeat in the 2023 Assembly elections. In an X post, the BRS party stated that while they allocated 91 TMC of Krishna water for the

Palamuru Rangareddy Lift Irrigation Project, Congress has now compromised before the Centre, saying just 45 TMC is enough. "State Irrigation Minister Uttam Kumar Reddy agreeing to 45 TMC and returning empty-handed from the Centre is nothing but sabotaging the interests of the state's farmers. The Congress government's stance is committing a grave injustice to the state," BRS stated. It also slammed the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) for "keeping silent" when Telangana's interests are

being harmed. "Even with 8 BJP MPs from Telangana state present, not a single one has spoken up," the post said. KCR has said that direct public struggles are now the only option for Telangana as the BJP continues to support water diversion to Andhra Pradesh under the guise of river-linking projects. He said that if BRS had returned to power, water would have already reached farmers through the Palamuru Lift Irrigation Project, protecting the interests of farmers in Palamuru, Rangareddy, and Nalgonda.

Gunmen kill 11 people at Sydney's Bondi Beach

PNS ■ Sydney

Two gunmen shot dead at least 11 people on Sunday during a Jewish holiday celebration at Sydney's Bondi Beach, Australian authorities said, declaring it a terrorist attack. One gunman was fatally shot by police, and the



CONTINUED ON >> P2

MEMORY CHIPS SHORTAGE, WEAK RUPEE
TVs may be costlier from January

PNS ■ New Delhi

Prices of televisions are expected to rise by 3-4 per cent from January next year on account of the rising cost of memory chips and depreciation of the rupee, which recently crossed the 90-to-a-dollar mark for the first time. The falling rupee has put the industry in a precarious position, as the domestic value addition in an LED TV is around 30 per cent only, and major components like the open cell, semiconductor chips and motherboard, are imported. Moreover, this is coupled with the memory chip crisis, where a severe global shortage is driven by massive demand for High-Bandwidth Memory (HBM) for AI servers, tightening supply for legacy devices like TVs. Chipmakers are focusing on high-profit AI chips, tightening supply for legacy devices like TVs.

CONTINUED ON >> P2

India beat SA by 7 wickets in third T20I
PACERS SHINE BRIGHT

PNS ■ Dharamsala

Abhishek Sharma played a sparkling little innings after the pacers produced a riveting exhibition of swing bowling, powering India to a smooth seven-wicket victory in the third T20I here on Sunday. Chasing a modest 118 for a 2-1 lead in the five-match series, vice-captain Gill (28, 28 balls) and his opening partner Abhishek (35, 18 balls) added 60 runs in 5.2 overs as India achieved their target without much effort in 15.5 overs. The lone point of interest in India's chase was whether the South African pacers could emulate their Indian counterparts with the new ball, and make the opponents' task tougher. However, Abhishek and Gill never allowed the South African bowlers to settle, as the former carted Lungi Ngidi for 16 runs in the first over. In fact, the very first ball of the chase went for a six — an early indicator of the Indian openers' intention. In the second over, Gill too joined his partner to garner 16 runs as India sped to 32 for no loss in the initial two overs. Abhishek, as is his wont, batted in a single gear and it required a gem of a catch by Aiden Markram in the deep off Corbin Bosch to snap his stay.



Once the left-hander was dismissed, India's chase of the remaining 58 runs settled into a much more sedate rhythm as Gill, who was saved by a DRS call early in his innings, and Tilak Varma (26 not out) did not look for any adventure. Gill's run-a-ball 28 will certainly not rank among his fluent ones, but it might have boosted his confidence after two lukewarm outings in the first two matches of the series. He eventually dragged a Marco Jansen delivery back on to his stumps, and skipper Suryakumar Yadav too failed to remain till the end. But those were the minor aberrations on the night.

CONTINUED ON >> P2

Monday Mirchi

WHEN DOES THIS 'ORDEAL' FOR IAS OFFICERS END?

All said and done, the cadre allocation of the officers between the Telugu states is still with unending twists and turns! The Centre finalised the general allocation of IAS officers between Telangana and Andhra Pradesh in March 2015 based on the Pratyush Sinha Committee recommendations. However, the issue is not fully settled as individual cases of officer re-allocation are still being litigated in the Central Administrative Tribunal (CAT) and the Telangana High Court. The Department of Personnel and Training (DoPT) issued a final gazette notification in March 2015, allocating 133 IAS officers to the Telangana cadre and 161 to the Andhra Pradesh cadre. But the problem surfaced as several officers challenged their allocations, leading to a series of court cases. The legal battle continues to this day, with judgments and counter-judgments in various individual cases. The CAT ruled in favour of some of these officers (e.g., Amrapali Katta, Vani Prasad), directing their allotment to Telangana. Most recently, the Telangana High Court stayed the CAT's order regarding IAS officer Amrapali Katta's allocation, meaning the legal battle is ongoing and has not reached a final resolution for all officers involved. Courts have also issued notices regarding the posting of IPS officers in IAS cadre posts due to a shortage, indicating ongoing cadre management issues. It appears that unless the individual legal challenges go through the full judicial process, there will not be any chance of their complete resolution. In the meantime, officers caught in this legal wrangle are suffering a lot.

ENTREPRENEURIAL BUREAUCRAT

Political decisions need administrative acumen to get the desired result. Jayesh Ranjan, a senior IAS officer, was instrumental in the success of the Global Summit, attracting a record Rs 5.75 Lakh Crore in investments and significant global attention. From preparations to showcasing the state's potential, his administrative capabilities and vision were visible throughout. Bringing together over 400 startups and experts from 80 countries, solidifying Hyderabad's image as a global hub for digital innovation is not a mean task. Jayesh proved it once again. For the record, in 2024, he was instrumental in launching the Global AI Summit. Highly regarded for his extensive work and contributions, particularly as the former IT and Industries Secretary, Jayesh currently holds an important position in the Chief Minister's Office (CMO) as the Special Chief Secretary for the

Industry & Investment Cell and CEO of SPEED, maintaining a strong presence within the state's top administrative circles. After the Global Summit, Jayesh is termed as an Entrepreneurial Bureaucrat who can organise Mega events successfully. As a 1992-batch IAS officer, he has a service tenure until September 2027, and we can expect many more damaka events to Telangana's credit.

SHIVADHAR REDDY TO BE THE HOPF

The line is clear for B Shivadhar Reddy to become a full-term DGP as the government has decided to send the proposal to the Centre. Since the Congress came to power in December 2023, it has not appointed any full-time DGP. All those assigned the role so far were only in charge of DGPs. M Mahendar Reddy was the last IPS officer who held the full-time post of DGP (HOPF) till Dec 2022. The BRS government selected him in 2018 in line with SC guidelines. Since then, Anjani Kumar (he was appointed by the BRS govt), Ravi Gupta and Jitender, who were posted as DGP (coordination) with full additional charge of DGP (HOPF). The Revanth Reddy government will give a one-year statutory term to Shivadhar Reddy and appoint another DGP before the elections in 2028. Three name panels will be sent to the Centre, comprising the names of CV Anand, Shivadhar Reddy and Apte Vinayak Prabhakar.

WHAT IS HOLDING BACK THE AP CHIEF MINISTER?

Known as the task master and skilled administrator with manoeuvrability that hurts none and gets things done, the Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister is said to be in a dilemma as to how to go about the transfers concerning senior IAS and IPS officers, which have been pending for a long time. Though some key departments need immediate overhaul and better management, the long wait for CM's nod for transfers is puzzling. Sources attribute the procrastination to the fact that the CM doesn't want to disturb the system, as any change in their posts may amount to inviting trouble, as some officers have become more powerful! Caste, seniority and regional issues are said to be the major hurdles in effecting the transfers. Apart from it, the ministers' demands for specific officers are also creating chaos in the administration. Similarly, seniors in IAS are also making it clear that they are not keen to work with some ministers who are known to be corrupt. With all these issues, the transfers of senior officers are not seeing the light even after three months.

--- Yours truly

BRS sweeps Siddipet local polls

PNS ■ Hyderabad

In the second phase of panchayat elections held on Sunday, BRS-supported candidates secured 78 out of 91 seats in the Siddipet con-

stituency. Congratulating the winning candidates, BRS MLA Harish Rao, said that people have rejected opposition parties, and urged the candidates to serve people diligently.

"Winning is a responsibility; serve people with dedication," says Harish Rao. He thanked people for their overwhelming support, pledged continued service.

Over 85 pc...

Owing to legal hurdles related to the Congress government's proposal to provide 42 per cent reservation to Backward Classes in local bodies, the Telangana government, on November 17 decided to conduct elections only for gram panchayats, deferring polls to other rural local bodies, including Zilla Parishad Territorial Constituency (ZPTC) members.

'Vote chori in...

Later, in a post on X, Rahul Gandhi said, "Theft is in the BJP's DNA." "Money theft - land theft - institution theft - rights theft - employment theft - Mandate theft - government theft - election theft - vote theft. Theft from the people is the ladder to power for the BJP," he said. Referring to the recent speech of RSS chief Mohan Bhagwat in Andaman and Nicobar Islands, Rahul Gandhi said that "Mohan Bhagwat says the world does not see truth but power, and whoever has power is regarded."

"Vishwa satya ko nahi, shakti ko dekhta hai, jiske pas shakti hai, usko manta hai...bhale mann se nahi, par manta jaroor hai (The world does not acknowledge only truth; it also acknowledges strength. It may not accept the strength

from the heart, but it does accept it)," Bhagwat had said on Saturday.

Gandhi said, "Our ideology, our country's ideology and our Hindu religion and other religions say that truth is most important, but Mohan Bhagwat says truth has no significance, only power is important."

"This fight is between 'satya' and 'asatya'," he said.

Gandhi also claimed that the BJP transferred Rs 10,000 during Bihar elections, but the poll authority did not take any action against them. "In this fight between truth and untruth, the Election Commission is working with the BJP government," he claimed.

"(Prime Minister) Narendra Modi brought a new law to give immunity to EC... We are telling you clearly that this law is to protect you and we will change this law retroactively and take strict action against you," Gandhi said.

The Congress leader claimed that people from Uttar Pradesh and even Brazilian women voted in the Haryana polls.

He said the EC did not answer even a single question posed to them about Haryana and other elections, which were "stolen" by the BJP.

"Look at Narendra Modi's face, and you'll realize that his confidence has run out. They know that their 'vote theft'

has been caught. You all must have seen that Amit Shah's hand was trembling in the (Parliament) House. Amit Shah is brave only as long as he holds power. The day power is gone, his bravery will also vanish on that very day," he said.

Alleging that the BJP government works for two-three crore capitalists, he said these signatures have been collected from across the country and at every corner, there is a slogan 'vote chor, gaddi chhod'.

"We showed how votes were added and deleted, but the EC never replied to us. It may take time, but the truth shall win in India... Mahatma Gandhi has shown the path of truth, and we will move on that path

Gunmen kill 11...

The massacre at one of Australia's most popular and iconic beaches followed a wave of antisemitic attacks that have roiled the country over the past year, although the authorities didn't suggest those episodes and Sunday's shooting were connected. They said one of the gunmen was known to the security services, but that there had been no specific threat.

Prime Minister Anthony Albanese declared it "an act of evil, antisemitism, terrorism that has struck the heart of our nation."

'Rahul does not feel TG pain'

Bandi hits out at 'prioritising' Messi event

PNS ■ Hyderabad

Union Minister Bandi Sanjay Kumar on Sunday attacked Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi for attending the GOAT India Tour event featuring football legend Lionel Messi here, alleging that a soccer star gets priority over Telangana's "pain".

The Minister of State for Home, in a post on X, said that Rahul Gandhi promised that he would be in Telangana in a minute when people need him. However, that minute clearly runs on a "luxury" time zone.

"For the people of Telangana, his clock never works. It only ticks for VIP



events and photo ops. A football star gets priority over Telangana's pain", Kumar said.

Rahul Gandhi, who landed here on Saturday afternoon, joined Messi and his Inter Miami teammates, Luis Suarez and Rodrigo de Paul

and Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy at the felicitation towards the end of the event. Kumar further slammed Rahul Gandhi, alleging that the Congress government is playing with people's lives in Telangana.

He alleged that the Congress party's six guarantees and several promises were unfulfilled. The union minister tagged a video of the speech by Rahul Gandhi promising that he would be in Telangana in a minute when people needed him. He further claimed that Rahul Gandhi was "absent during suffering. On vacation during chaos. Fully present when the spotlight is on."



CM thanks Messi for enthralling sports lovers in Hyderabad

PNS ■ Hyderabad

Telangana Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy on Sunday thanked Argentine football icon Lionel Messi and his Inter Miami teammates, Luis Suarez and Rodrigo de Paul, for enthralling sports lovers, especially youth, during the second leg of Messi's GOAT India Tour 2025 here.

Messi's programme in Hyderabad on Saturday evening ended on a positive note thanks to thorough preparations, sound planning, and discipline.

Reddy also thanked and congratulated all officers, security personnel, organizers, and staff on duty across the city for ensuring Telangana was able to showcase to the world that "Telangana means sports, Telangana means excellence, and Telangana means hospitality".

On behalf of the government, the Telangana CM further thanked all sports lovers and fans for their best conduct and disciplined manner in which "we played hosts to our guests". The celebrated Argentine footballer mesmerized the Hyderabad crowd at a nearly-packed Rajiv Gandhi International Stadium as he showed off some of the skills that made him one of the greatest ever to play the sport.

Messi, Luis Suarez, and Rodrigo de Paul took part in a GOAT Cup penalty shootout, with Reddy also turning up in football attire, and conducted football clinics with children before leaving the stadium. Senior Congress leader Rahul Gandhi joined the visiting trio of players and Reddy at the felicitation towards the end of the event.

Sangeeta Barooah elected first woman president of PCI

PNS ■ New Delhi

Senior journalist Sangeeta Barooah Pisharoty was on Sunday elected as the first woman president of the Press Club of India.

Pisharoty's team swept all office-bearers and managing committee positions, scoring an emphatic 21-0, in the elections held on Saturday. The counting of votes took place on Sunday.

Afzal Imam was elected as the secretary general of the Club, while Jatin Gandhi



Pratap Singh, Manoj Sharma, Nyamima Basu, P B Suresh, V P Pandey, Prem Bahukhandi, Sneha Bhura, Javed Akhtar, Rezaul Hasan Laskar, and Sunil Kumar.

emerged victorious as the vice-president. Aditi Rajput (Treasurer) and P R Sunil (Joint Secretary) were elected unopposed.

The managing committee members are Niraj Kumar, Abhishek Kumar Singh, Jahnvi Sen, Ashok Kaushik, Kallol Bhattacharjee, Praveen Jain, Agraj P B Suresh, V P Pandey, Prem Bahukhandi, Sneha Bhura, Javed Akhtar, Rezaul Hasan Laskar, and Sunil Kumar.

US to begin social media screening of H-1B, H-4 visa applicants today

PNS ■ New York/Washington

The Trump administration will begin on Monday enhanced screening and vetting of H-1B and its dependent H-4 visa applicants, including checks of their social media profiles.

In a new order, the State Department said that, from December 15, a review of the online presence for all H-1B applicants and their dependents will be conducted.

Students and exchange visitors were already subject to this review and now the department has expanded this requirement to vet social media profiles to include

H-1B applicants and their dependents on H-4 visas.

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

The F, M and J visas are used by students and exchange visitors to come to the US.

Several H-1B visa holders have had their interviews in India rescheduled in the wake of this new guideline to vet their social media profiles.



Underscoring that a US visa is a privilege, not a right, the State Department has said that it uses all available information in visa screening and vetting to identify visa applicants who are inadmis-

sible to America, including those who pose a threat to the country's national security or public safety.

"We conduct thorough vetting of all visa applicants, including online presence review of all student and exchange visitor applicants in the F, M, and J nonimmigrant classifications," it said, underlining that every visa adjudication is a national security decision.

"The United States must be vigilant during the visa issuance process to ensure that those applying for admission into the United States do not intend to harm Americans and our national interests, and that all applicants credibly establish their eligibility for the visa sought, including that they intend to engage in activities consistent with the terms for their admission," it added.

FROM PAGE - 1

Modi condemns terror attack in Australia

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday condemned the terrorist attack in Australia and expressed solidarity with the people of that country in their hour of grief. "Strongly condemn the ghastly terrorist attack carried out today at Bondi Beach, Australia, targeting people celebrating the first day of the Jewish festival of Hanukkah," the prime minister said.

"On behalf of the people of India, I extend my sincere condolences to the families who lost their loved ones. We stand in solidarity with the people of Australia in this hour of grief," he said.

The prime minister said India has "zero tolerance" for terrorism and supports the fight against all its forms and manifestations.

Two gunmen shot dead at least 11 people at a Jewish event being held at Sydney's Bondi Beach. Australian authorities declared it a terrorist attack.

TVs may be...

Haier Appliances India President NS Satish told PTI that prices of LED TV sets will increase by 3 per cent because of shortage of memory chips and weak rupee.

Some TV manufacturers have already communicated

to their dealers about the expected hike in prices.

Super Plastics Pvt Ltd (SPPL), a TV manufacturing company having licences of several global brands including Thomson, Kodak, and Blaupunkt, said: "Memory chip prices have gone up by 500 per cent in the last three months."

According to its CEO Avneet Singh Marwah, there could be 7-10 per cent price hike in televisions from January, predominantly due to memory chip crisis and the impact of depreciating rupee.

He also warned that if memory chip prices in the next two quarters remain the same, "then there could be further hike in TV prices."

According to experts, this upcoming hike may mitigate the boost received on sales of smart TVs, after the rationalisation of GST. The government has slashed GST on TV screens of 32 inches and larger sizes to 18 per cent from the previous 28 per cent, reducing price by around Rs 4,500.

Similarly, Videotex, a homegrown ODM (Original Design Manufacturer) for several brands, and which has its own brand Daiwa, said it is also facing sustained pressure due to sharp increase in memory chip prices, with availability emerging as a critical challenge. "We are currently facing sustained pressure

due to sharp increase in memory chip prices, with availability emerging as a critical challenge. Flash memory and DDR4 prices at the sourcing level have risen by up to 1,000 per cent, driven largely by supply being diverted to AI data centres," said Arjun Bajaj, Director of Videotex.

This pressure is anticipated to continue until at least Q2 of the coming year, after which some stability may return depending on global memory chip supply dynamics.

"The situation is further exacerbated by the depreciation of the rupee, which has significantly increased import costs. These increases will be reflected in the market in the coming weeks as older inventory moves out," said Bajaj.

Though Videotex is adjusting production schedules and optimising inventories to manage the impact, the "prolonged nature of this cycle makes it challenging to fully absorb the cost escalation".

Videotex manufactures smart TVs for Reliance Group (BPL & Reconnect), Havells (Lloyd), Vijay Sales (Vise), Hyundai, Toshiba, Compaq, Daiwa and over 25+ other prominent Indian and international brands.

According to the latest report from Counterpoint Research, India's smart TV shipments decreased 4 per

cent YoY in Q2 2025. The slowdown was driven by saturation in the smaller-screen segment, limited new demand catalysts, and weaker consumer spending. India's TV market was valued at USD 10-12 billion in 2024 and is projected for strong growth, driven by smart TVs, increased disposable income, and demand for larger screens and OTT content.

India beat SA by...

All the credit for this center should go to India's pacers, who produced a mesmerizing spell of swing bowling to bundle out South Africa for a below-par 117.

Leading India's show with early wickets were Arshdeep Singh (2/13), Harshit Rana (2/34) and Hardik Pandya (1/23) after the hosts chose to bowl.

Skipper Markram offered a tiny spark for South Africa with a spirited 46-ball 61. Undoubtedly, the brightest stars under a cool sky were India's quick bowlers, who procured lethal swing and lateral movement with the new ball.

It had its effect on the low-key power play effort of South Africa -- 25 for three -- and the phase contained just two fours.

Arshdeep, who had a horror outing at Mullanpur a couple of days back,

redeemed himself with a dream first spell (3-0-9-1).

He bowled three deliveries which angled away from Reeza Hendricks and then jugged one back to trap the South African opener leg before with the help of DRs.

Rana did precisely the same to Quinton de Kock, a nip-backer, trapping the frozen-legged left-hander inside the crease.

Deward Brevis was slightly unfortunate to get castled while attempting a release shot off a wide delivery from Rana.

South Africa suddenly found themselves at 7 for 3 in 3.1 overs, and it was always going to be an uphill climb for them from there.

Markram crunched a couple of sweet drives in between to keep the board moving but Tristan Stubbs and Bosch departed in quick succession to further derail South African innings.

Stubbs' wicket helped all-rounder Pandya to complete 100 wickets in T20Is, the third Indian bowler to do so after Arshdeep and Jasprit Bumrah, who did not play this match after returning home to attend to a personal situation.

The BCCI said his availability for the remainder of the series will be announced in due course. Kuldeep Yadav too came into the eleven for an unwell Axar Patel.



Ajay Devgn enters Hyd with Devgn CineX luxury multiplex

PNS ■ Hyderabad

Hyderabad is witnessing a rapid rise in new multiplexes, premium theatres, and advanced movie formats, as the city continues to attract major investments from film stars and cinema brands. With audiences embracing luxury screens, immersive sound, recliner seating, and next generation viewing experiences, more stars are adding high end theatres to Hyderabad's growing cinema map. Joining this trend, Bollywood star Ajay Devgn is bringing his luxury multiplex brand, Devgn CineX, to the city.

Devgn CineX, earlier known as NY Cinemas, is known for offering a premium movie watching experience. The brand is set to open a seven screen luxury multiplex at Coliseum Mall, Karmanghat. Expected to launch in 2026, the property will feature Dolby immer-



THE BRAND IS SET TO OPEN A SEVEN SCREEN LUXURY MULTIPLEX AT COLISEUM MALL, KARMANGHAT

sive sound, 3D viewing, luxury recliner seating, gourmet food options, and a refined ambience. Ajay Devgn aims to revive the classic theatre experience



while combining it with modern cinema technology. Hyderabad's multiplex culture has grown steadily alongside the city's infrastructure development. Several leading Telugu film stars already own premium cinemas here. In association with Asian Cinemas, Mahesh Babu, Allu Arjun, and Ravi Teja have launched AMB, AAA, and ART Cinemas. Venkatesh and

Mahesh Babu are also set to open AMB Classic soon, while the Allu family is planning another multiplex. Ajay Devgn now becomes one of the few Bollywood stars to invest in Hyderabad's theatre business.

Ajay Devgn has also partnered with the Telangana government to develop a world class film city in Hyderabad.

Announced at the Telangana Rising Global Summit in December 2025, the project will include advanced production studios, VFX and animation facilities, AI powered smart studios, and a skill development institute. The initiative aims to make Telangana a leading hub for film production.

On the professional front, Ajay Devgn was last seen in Son of Sardaar 2 and De De Pyaar De 2. His upcoming films include Drishyam 3, Dhamaal 4, and Ranger.

AIMIM will lose kingmaker status with GHMC expansion

PNS ■ Hyderabad

The Congress-led Telangana government's decision to merge 27 municipalities into the Greater Hyderabad Municipal Corporation (GHMC) limits has not gone down with the All India Majlis-e-Ittehadul Muslimin (AIMIM). The decision will increase the GHMC wards from the existing 150 to 300, double its size.

The Asaduddin Owaisi-led party has been a dominant force in the GHMC area as it has been retaining close to 50 out of the 150 wards in the GHMC elections until now. However, with the seats increasing to 300 now, the AIMIM will lose its status as kingmaker or even king perhaps, as other parties will now no longer need its support if it wins half the seats on its own.

The main opposition Bharat Rashtra Samithi (BRS) had won 99 out of 150 wards, while the AIMIM won 44 seats in the 2015 GHMC polls. The BRS then did not



need any support to bag the position of the GHMC Mayor and deputy Mayor. Subsequently in the 2020 elections, the AIMIM retained its 44 seats, while the BRS won 56, and the BJP 48.

With the BRS emerging as the single largest party, but without a clear majority, it was able to still bag the GHMC Mayor and deputy Mayor positions with support from the AIMIM. With the total wards now going above 300, bigger parties can try and win more seats on their own. More importantly, the AIMIM will also have to fight

more for funds for the Old City in Hyderabad, where civic infrastructure is always in question.

"How are they doing this expansion? It is being done on the basis of voters. The 2015 delimitation of GHMC wards was done on the 2011 census basis of population. Earlier there were 100 wards in the old MCH area, and it was expanded to 150 under the Congress in the joint Andhra Pradesh State. In 2015, census enumeration data was used and the 150 GHMC seats were reorganised to make each one uniform," said a senior AIMIM functionary.

ACB crack down on hostels reveal unhygienic conditions

PNS ■ Hyderabad

The Rangareddy unit of the Anti-Corruption Bureau (ACB) on Friday, December 12, conducted surprise checks at the Mahatma Jyotiba Phule Telangana BC Welfare Residential School and Hostel for boys in Medchal-Malkajgiri district, following reports on food poisoning cases that day.

During inspection, the ACB teams, along with Inspector Legal Metrology, Sanitary Inspector, food inspector, and the auditor, checked the quality and quantity of the food in the MJPT BC welfare boys' hostel.

They further checked the sanitation conditions, students' health, and the hostel records.



In an official statement, the ACB stated they found several flaws in the premises.

"During the inspection, several irregularities were found in the hostel, including unhygienic conditions in the kitchen and bathrooms, as well as poor maintenance of records," the statement read.

They added that a report would be submitted to the government regarding the concerned officials for appropriate action.

Techie challenges IT firm's ₹5 lakh exit bond rule in High Court

PNS ■ Hyderabad

A Hyderabad-based software engineer has approached the Telangana High Court, challenging what he termed as coercive and illegal exit bond practices followed by an IT company, prompting sharp observations from the court on the treatment of software employees.

Justice Nagesh Bheemapaka, while hearing a petition filed by Potnuru Rajesh, a software engineer from Nallagandla, came down heavily on Algonox Technologies for allegedly forcing employees to sign multiple minimum service agreements and demanding Rs 5 lakh as compensation on resignation.

The petitioner alleged that the company made him sign three consecutive "minimum service surety agreements" and later harassed him by insisting on payment of Rs



5 lakh as liquidated damages if he chose to resign.

Taking serious note of the allegations, the High Court criticised the conduct of the company and expressed strong displeasure over the inaction of the Labour department. The court observed that senior officials, including the Principal Secretary of the Labour

TAKING SERIOUS NOTE OF THE ALLEGATIONS, THE HIGH COURT CRITICISED THE CONDUCT OF THE COMPANY AND EXPRESSED STRONG DISPLEASURE OVER THE INACTION OF THE LABOUR DEPARTMENT

department, the Labour Commissioner, and the Ranga Reddy district Joint Commissioner, had "miserably failed" to address the grievance despite serious complaints of illegal bargaining.

The bench questioned the legality of demanding a fixed amount as liquidated damages without any formula or calculation linked to the

employee's tenure or alleged loss suffered by the company. It noted that such arbitrary demands appeared to be aimed at harassing employees. Directing labour authorities to examine whether such exit bond clauses amount to an illegal bargain under labour laws, the court posed a pointed question: "Do labour laws not apply to software employees?"

The High Court also remarked on the contrast between the public image of the IT sector and the ground realities faced by employees. While modern offices, high salaries, and perks are visible, the court said software professionals are often left without even basic social security.

Highlighting the significant contribution of software professionals to the country's economic growth, the court suggested that the Telangana government consider bringing in special legislation to protect the welfare and rights of IT employees.

SCR introduces special trains for Sankranti

PNS ■ Hyderabad

During the Sankranti festival season, reservations for several trains travelling to various parts of the Telugu states have been completely booked.

Reservations on RTC buses have also been filled. During this festive period, the prices of private travel buses in the Telugu states are skyrocketing. Even for these buses, passengers are queuing up to make reservations. As a result, it has become difficult to find seats or berths on private travel buses. In this situation, South Central Railway has given good news to the passengers. It announced that it will be operating an additional 41 special trains between the two Telugu states.



Major fire breaks out in fertiliser shop

PNS ■ Hyderabad

A major fire broke out at a fertiliser shop in Dharur mandal centre of Vikarabad district on Sunday. The flames rose high due to the intensity of the fire. Significant property damage is reported to have occurred in this incident. Locals immediately became alert and are trying to extinguish the flames with water. They also informed the fire department.

Firefighters have arrived at the scene and are

attempting to put out the fire. Meanwhile, the police have also launched rescue operations. They have informed the fertilizer shop owners about the incident. The police have registered a case and are investigating the accident. They are inquiring into the cause of the incident and suspect that a short circuit may have caused the fire. The police are examining nearby CCTV footage. Further details regarding this incident are awaited.

Three drug peddlars arrested, 11 gms of MDMA drugs seized

PNS ■ Hyderabad

Drug use is increasing day by day in the Hyderabad Metropolis. The number of people becoming addicted to drug use is doubling constantly. Despite the numerous measures taken by the police to curb drug use, drugs are being seized in one area or another in Hyderabad at regular intervals.

In such a situation, on Sunday, the Hyderabad Narcotics Enforcement Wing (HNEW) and Masab Tank Police jointly conducted an operation in Hyderabad. During this operation, they arrested one peddler and two sub-peddlers who were selling MDMA. They seized 11 grams of MDMA drugs, along with three mobile phones, a bike, and a car from them.



HNEW officials said that the seized drugs are worth Rs 4.65 lakh. They stated that the accused revealed during questioning that they were bringing the MDMA drugs from Bengaluru to Hyderabad and selling them.

The accused have been identified as Karthik alias Alex, Balaji, and Deepak. They revealed that they were packing and selling the MDMA drugs in 1-gram sachets.

HNEW officials stated that Balaji was previously an accused in an NDPS case. He was arrested in that case, later released, and then returned to the drug trade. They revealed that a case has been registered at the Masab Tank police station under the NDPS Act in connection with this drug case. On this occasion, HNEW officials warned the youth to be vigilant.

Rowdy sheeter murdered in Pahadi Sharif

PNS ■ Hyderabad

A murder occurred in the Pahadi Sharif police station area on Saturday night.

A 32-year-old rowdy sheeter named Shaik Amer was killed by unknown individuals in Shaheen Nagar, Pahadi Sharif police station limits. Amer was involved in the Mubarak Sigar murder case in 2024. The Pahadi Sharif police have started an investigation and sent the body for post-mortem examination to Osmania Mortuary. Senior officials visited the crime spot.

Relatives of the man informed the police that 10 to 12 persons came on two wheelers, called Shaik Amer to a secluded place for discussion on some issue, and attacked him with knives and daggers, leading to his death.



460 held for drunk driving in city over the weekend

PNS ■ Hyderabad

As many as 460 people were held for drunk driving in Hyderabad over the weekend. The Hyderabad traffic police conducted a special drive on December 12 and 13.

Out of these, 350 were two-wheeler riders, 25 three-wheeler riders, and 85 four-wheeler riders. As many as 185 offenders recorded a Blood Alcohol Concentration (BAC) ranging from 51-100; 99 had a BAC ranging from 101-150. As

many as 98 offenders recorded BAC of 30-50. A total of 48 offenders had BAC levels ranging from 151-200; 16 offenders had BAC level 201-250, 10 had 251-300, and four had BAC levels above 300.

The traffic police have warned that if anyone is found driving in an inebriated condition and causes a fatal accident they will be booked under Section 105 of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS). The maximum punishment under this section is 10 years of imprisonment along with a fine.

Wife, lover kill husband in Chowdapur mandal centre

PNS ■ Hyderabad

A horrific incident took place in Chowdapur mandal centre. A wife, along with her lover, murdered her husband because he was obstructing their illicit relationship. She had her husband killed by having him hit by a tractor and then tried to portray it as an accident.

The deceased's brother filed a complaint with the police, bringing the matter to light. According to the police, Ratnayya and Kavitha were a married couple in Chowdapur. Kavitha developed a relationship with Ramakrishna, a resident of the same village. This led to an illicit affair between



them. When Ratnayya found out about this, he reprimanded Kavitha.

Consequently, Kavitha and her lover Ramakrishna plotted to murder Ratnayya, who was hindering their illicit relationship. In the morning, as Ratnayya was returning home from the fields, Ramakrishna deliberately hit him with a tractor. He died on the spot due to severe injuries. The police registered a case and launched an investigation.

Initially, the police believed that Ratnayya had died in an accident.

However, Ratnayya's brother expressed doubts to the police regarding his death. The police conducted a thorough investigation. Several crucial details came to light during the police inquiry.

The illicit relationship between the wife, Kavitha, and her lover, Ramakrishna, was revealed. They confessed to the police that they had murdered Ratnayya because he was obstructing their illicit relationship. They were then taken to the police station. Ratnayya's body was shifted to the district government hospital for post-mortem.

Godrej sells properties worth ₹2,600 crore in their first year in Hyd

PNS ■ Hyderabad

Godrej Properties has sold housing properties worth Rs 2,600 crore in the first year of operation in Hyderabad and it is looking to expand business in the city that offers huge growth opportunities, a top company official said.

In January this year, Godrej Properties announced entry into the Hyderabad housing market with the launch of its first project at Kokapet.

In an interview, Godrej Properties Executive Chairperson Pirojsha Godrej highlighted that the company has per-

formed exceedingly well in the Hyderabad market.

"We launched our first project in Hyderabad during January-March quarter. We launched our second project in July-September quarter. Between these two projects, we have achieved sales bookings of more than Rs 2,600 crore of in our first calendar year of operation in the city," said Pirojsha.

Noting that the Hyderabad market has a "huge growth potential", he said the company would like to expand business in this city to tap strong demand for premium and luxury residential properties.

Auto driver attacks RTC driver in Mahabubabad

PNS ■ Hyderabad

ATGSRTC driver was attacked by an auto driver in Telangana's Mahabubabad on Sunday.

The incident occurred in Ilandu mandal when the bus driver, identified as Sudhakar, was checking a tire of the bus after parking at the Ilandu bus stand. The auto driver, identified as Farooq, had allegedly rammed into Sudhakar from behind.

When Sudhakar questioned Farooq, the latter abused the RTC driver and punched him. The attack happened before Sudhakar's colleagues could reach the spot. RTC staff informed the police, who immediately arrived at the scene, took the auto



driver into custody, and began an investigation.

Following the incident, Sudhakar was shifted to a hospital. A video shared on social media shows injury to Sudhakar's ear. While addressing the media, Sudhakar said, "Please forgive me, I can't hear properly. I have been working as an RTC driver for 15 years in

Mahabubabad". He further said that he asked Farooq why he hit him. "What are you doing? Will you run away just like that?" Sudhakar asked the auto driver. As Sudhakar stopped Farooq, the latter began threatening him.

When the RTC driver asked Farooq to step out of the auto rickshaw, the accused did not pay heed. As Sudhakar pulled Farooq forcefully, the latter got down and began punching the RTC driver. Following the incident, Sudhakar went to the area hospital in Mahabubabad. However, the driver was referred to a private hospital as the doctors said they did not have the facility to treat his injuries.



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Unauthorised coke plants demolished in Meghalaya's East Jaintia Hills



The East Jaintia Hills district administration on Sunday demolished unauthorised coke plants operating in the area, an official said.

Deputy Commissioner Shivansh Awasthi said a joint team comprising officials of the Meghalaya State Pollution Control Board and police under the supervision of Sub-Divisional Officer Manish Kumar was constituted to carry out the demolition drive.

He said 16 coke plants were identified in the district as having been set up without mandatory authorisations under Government norms, of which five had been demolished earlier. Notices were issued in October 2025 to the remaining 11 units, directing their owners to submit compliance documents for regularisation, but no response was received, the deputy commissioner said.

Following this and in pursuance of the Meghalaya High Court's directions, the demolition drive was launched on December 13.

As of the latest report, seven of the 11 coke plants were demolished by the authorities, while the remaining four were found to have already been dismantled by their owners. "All 11 unauthorised coke plants are now non-operational," Awasthi added.

SC to hear plea on protection of persons with autism today



The Supreme Court is scheduled to hear on December 15 a plea seeking the constitution of a national expert committee to formulate comprehensive guidelines for care, rehabilitation and protection of persons with autism and other intellectual disabilities.

The petition has also sought directions to the Centre and others to establish population-based residential facilities for persons with autism and other intellectual disabilities in every district, and to frame comprehensive and binding standard operating procedures (SOPs) for their establishment, regulation and monitoring.

According to the Supreme Court's cause list of December 15, the plea is slated to come up for hearing before a bench of Justices BV Nagarathna and R Mahadevan. The plea has sought directions "to constitute a national expert committee comprising representatives of autistic persons, parents' associations, disability-rights experts and medical professionals to formulate and finalise comprehensive guidelines for the care, rehabilitation and protection of such persons across the country". The plea has also sought directions to the authorities to ensure proper medical facilities, regular health check-ups and continuous access to qualified doctors, therapists and trained caregivers for persons with autism and other intellectual disabilities residing in residential homes. The plea has urged the Supreme Court to issue appropriate directions for regular audits, monitoring and accountability mechanisms to prevent abuse, neglect or exploitation in such facilities.

Kerala Governor questions SC, says institutions must know, respect their limits in democracy

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
Thiruvananthapuram

Days after the Supreme Court decided to go ahead with the selection of Vice Chancellors, Kerala Governor Rajendra Vishwanath Arlekar on Sunday said that in a democracy, every institution has its limits and that the health of democratic functioning depends on knowing and respecting those limits.

The Governor was speaking after conferring the Justice VR Krishna Iyer Award on former Chief Justice of India and former Kerala Governor Justice (retd) P Sathasivam.

The award was instituted by the LAW Trust (Legal

Assistance and Welfare Trust). Arlekar's remarks come in the backdrop of a recent Supreme Court direction appointing a committee headed by Justice (retd) Sudhanshu Dhulia to recommend one name each for the appointment of vice chancellors to two technical universities in Kerala, in an attempt to resolve the deadlock between the Governor and the Kerala Chief Minister over the issue.

The Governor moved the top court challenging the order of the division bench of the Kerala High Court disposing of a plea filed against a single judge's order setting aside the November 27, 2024, notification appointing

Professor K Sivaprasad of Cochin University of Science and Technology as vice-chancellor, APJ Abdul Kalam Technological University.

A statement issued by Lok Bhavan here said that the Governor deplored the tendency of one institution usurping the role of another in a democracy.

"He said that the power to amend the Constitution is vested with the Parliament and elected legislature, and the courts are there to 'interpret the Constitution and not to amend the Constitution'," the statement read.

The Governor said that contradictory interpretations/verdicts on the same matter/issue are not in the

true spirit of the Constitution.

"He was referring to the three-member Supreme Court judgement on Kannur University Vice Chancellor appointment earlier, which upheld the supremacy of the Chancellor in the appointment process," the statement said.

The Governor is the Chancellor of most state universities in Kerala.

Accepting the award, Sathasivam said that courts have to remain committed to Justice Krishna Iyer's humanist ideals, even when society is turning increasingly 'digital'. Judges of the Kerala High Court, H Nagaresh, K Babu, and A Badarudeen, were present on the occasion.

Supreme Court's conflicting decisions on bank fraud settlements creates dilemma



RANJIT KUMAR
SINHA

In November 2025, two decisions of the Supreme Court garnered nationwide attention. Both of them were on the issue of quashing criminal proceedings related to bank fraud on the basis of One Time Settlement (OTS).

The first was the Supreme Court judgment in Central Bureau of Investigation versus M/s. Sarvodaya Highways Ltd and Others (Nov 11, 2025), and the second was the order in the Sandesara brothers (Sterling Biotech Ltd) cases (Nov 19, 2025).

The two decisions were contradictory on the application of the principle of OTS. While in the Sandesara case, the Supreme Court proposed to quash all criminal proceedings on the condition of ₹5,100 Crore deposit, the Apex Court restored the criminal proceedings in the Sarvodaya Highways Ltd case, explicitly holding that an OTS is not a ground to quash charges of fraud and corruption.

Although the Sarvodaya judgment by a Bench of Justices VikramNath and Sandeep Mehtawas delivered a week before the Sandesara order by a bench of Justices JKMaheshwari and Vijay Bishnoi, the latter was widely reported as unprecedented. It is only now that the Sarvodaya judgment is gaining attention, as critics question how there can be two standards when the ultimate relief sought was identical.

The reading of the two decisions makes it clear that the Sandesara case reached the Supreme Court through an Article 32 petition, in which, without mentioning, the bench concerned applied the inherent power under Article 142 in the peculiar facts of the case to do complete justice and made it clear that it cannot be cited as a precedent.

In the Sarvodaya case, the Supreme Court set aside the Punjab and Haryana High Court's order, which had quashed the criminal proceedings against the company based on OTS with the bank. The Supreme Court essentially held that a one-time settlement does not erase criminal liability for serious economic offences like fraud and corruption under Section 482 of the Criminal Procedure Code (CrPC).

Besides other findings and observations, the bench concerned emphasised that serious economic offences, especially those involving financial fraud against a nationalised/public sector bank, are not merely private disputes between the bank and the customer. They constitute a public wrong



because they impact the public exchequer and harm society at large.

Further, the Supreme Court, in its judgment, specifically noted that the settlement amount of ₹41 crore was significantly lower than the actual outstanding liability of approximately ₹52.50 crore, resulting in a deficit, a loss to the public exchequer, even after the settlement. This was a key factor in the Supreme Court's decision to restore the criminal proceedings. A notable feature in which the two decisions have come is that one case involves a smaller company (M/s. Sarvodaya Highways Ltd) and the other involves a large, fugitive-run conglomerate (Sandesara brothers — Nitin and Chetan).

While the Sandesara brothers had fled the country in 2017, reports do not indicate that the accused/offenders in the Sarvodaya case are out of the reach of law enforcement agencies, rather, the judicial process is actively moving forward against the named individuals (Gurinder Kumar Garg, ArunaGarg, AashutoshGarg, AayushGarg, and the then Branch Manager of the Bank, NishantLal).

Also, there is no explicit report linking the accused or the fraud itself in the Sarvodaya case to any specific politician or established political connection. In contrast, the Sandesara case has been connected to several politicians, bureaucrats, and other influential people, leading to a political controversy that ran parallel to the financial fraud investigations. Consequently, if the proceedings are quashed against the Sandesara brothers, this may automatically shield their alleged co-conspirators and facilitators, who

were also under investigation, raising further concerns about the full scope of the investigation being curtailed. Comparing the outcome of the two cases at the highest court in no way means siding with any party, but the contradictory nature of the two Supreme Court decisions creates several serious issues within the legal system and public domain.

Do the conflicting judgments from the Benches of the Supreme Court shake the public's confidence in the stability and uniformity of the law? Does it not create a perception that justice depends on the bench rather than the established law?

Further, critics raise the question of two standards — one for minor offenders or small amounts and another for high-profile, high-value offenders, where cases can be settled for a price, as proposed in Sandesara. Does it not suggest that serious economic offences can be resolved by wealth, not by law?

Another question arises that when two Benches of equal strength pass contradictory rulings on the same principle (OTS vs Criminal Liability), it creates an impossible dilemma for High Courts and Trial Courts. Subordinate courts are left confused about the correct legal position, stalling trials and increasing the burden of litigation as they await clarification.

The contradiction creates a serious challenge to the stability, predictability, and integrity of the judicial system, particularly in the critical area of combating large-scale economic fraud. Irrespective of the public perception of the outcome of two bank fraud cases, Supreme Court advocate

Madhumita Bhattacharjee prefers to provide a purely legal perspective.

She stated that in the Sandesara case, it is apparent that since its inception, this Court has been of the view that if the petitioners are willing to deposit the amount as settled in OTS and public money is returned to the lender banks, the continuation of the criminal proceedings would serve no useful purpose.

"The tenor of the proceedings apparently indicates peculiarity, with intent to protect the public money and interest and to get deposited the defalcated amount. In furtherance, the consensus has been arrived at as indicated above. In this view, in the peculiar facts and situation of the present case, discretion as prayed, deserves to be exercised for granting the relief, as prayed and to direct for quashment of all the proceedings," Bhattacharjee opined.

She said this observation in the judgment would show that there has been no deliberation on the settled position of law and in the peculiar facts and circumstances of the case, which means that it shall not form any precedent, and without going into the merits, the relief has been granted as the case proceeded from the very beginning on this basis.

Whereas the judgment written by Justice Mehta in the Sarvodaya case deals with the legal position of law and is a judgment under Article 141 of the Constitution of India, and hence, both cannot be compared, as the previous one (Sandesara) is only based on the facts and in the peculiar facts and circumstances of the case.

Bhattacharjee, who is Advocate-on-Record in the Supreme Court, said she had gone through both the judgments in extensive detail. She said in her view, the judgment in the Sarvodaya case also lays down the correct position of law, as upholding the sanctity of law is the primary duty of the constitutional court. Section 482 is an inherent power which was designed to ensure that there is no abuse of the process of law. Therefore, before invoking this provision, a glaring abuse of the process of law is mandatory.

On the contrary, she accepted that in the Sandesara case, a huge financial fraud committed with an intention was being settled on the basis of the power of money, which, if permitted, would send a very wrong message to society at large. "Therefore, in my view, this (Sarvodaya) judgment lays down the correct position of law. However, with two divergent views of concurrent benches, the final settled position can be enunciated by a larger bench only," Bhattacharjee said.

The writer is a senior journalist covering legal affairs

ED aims to end legacy FERA cases by early 2026

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
New Delhi

The Enforcement Directorate (ED) has decided to bring to a conclusion cases registered under the Foreign Exchange Regulation Act (FERA), which was repealed by the country more than 25 years ago in 1998. The criminal sections-loaded FERA of 1973 was replaced in June 2000 by the Foreign Exchange Management Act (FEMA) of 1999, a civil law.

Officials told media that the federal probe agency has begun identifying about 400-500 cases in which adjudication proceedings pending before various courts under the FERA can be fast-tracked for closure, as the individuals under prosecution have either died or gone untraceable, or the assets under question have been liquidated or have ceased to exist.

The officials said the aim is to complete the exercise in the next few months — the first quarter of 2026 being the immediate deadline.

The last show cause notices under the FERA were issued in May 2002.

ED Director Rahul Navin, during a recent conference of the agency officers held in Gujarat, had also reiterated his directions for "fast-tracking" of old FERA adjudication cases as he emphasised the "completion of lifecycle" of all pending cases in various



forums. The officials said that the closure of FERA cases over the "next few months" will end the legacy of litigation and redundancy going on for more than two decades.

They said that the FERA had an avatar even before 1973 which was first brought in 1947.

The Central Government had, in 1956, established the ED as an "enforcement unit" under the Department of Economic Affairs (DEA) to handle violations and cases registered under the

FERA of 1947. This law was then repealed and replaced by the FERA of 1973 and subsequently by the FEMA law of 1999 as part of the economic liberalisation policy of India.

The FEMA focuses more on the management of foreign exchange rather than its regulation and control (like in FERA).

Most of the violations under the FEMA are treated as civil offences as compared to criminal proceedings under the FERA.

President Murmu rejects mercy plea of man convicted for rape, murder

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
New Delhi

President Droupadi Murmu has rejected the mercy plea of a man convicted of kidnapping, raping and killing a two-year-old girl in Maharashtra in 2012, officials said on Sunday.

This is the third mercy plea rejected by the President after assuming office on July 25, 2022. The Supreme Court on October 3, 2019, affirmed the death sentence awarded to Ravi Ashok Ghumare, saying he had no control over his "carnal desires" and surpassed all natural, social and legal limits just to satiate his sexual hunger.

In its verdict, a three-judge bench comprising Justice Surya Kant (now chief justice of India), by a majority verdict of 2:1, said the man had "ruthlessly finished" a life which was yet to bloom and his act of committing unnatural offence with the two-year-old exhibits "a dirty and perverted mind, showcasing a

horrifying tale of brutality".

Ghumare's mercy plea was rejected by the President on November 6, 2025, according to the status of the mercy petition disclosed by the Rashtrapati Bhavan. "Having said that, it may be seen that the victim was barely a two-year-old baby whom the appellant (Ravi) kidnapped and apparently kept on assaulting for over four to five hours till she breathed her last.

"The appellant, who had no control over his carnal desires, surpassed all natural, social and legal limits just to satiate his sexual hunger. He ruthlessly finished a life which was yet to bloom," Justice Surya Kant had said, while writing the verdict for himself and (now retired) Justice Rohinton Fali Nariman. The appellant, instead of showing fatherly love, affection and protection to the child against the evils of society, made her the victim of lust, the majority verdict said.

Technology should amplify human judgment, not replace it: CJI Surya Kant

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
Cuttack

Chief Justice of India Surya Kant on Sunday said technology should amplify human judgment and not replace it.

He was addressing a symposium on "Ensuring justice for the common man: strategies for reducing litigation costs and delays" here.

"Pendency of cases in courts clogs every level of the judicial structure, from the trial court to the constitutional court. And when a blockage occurs at the top, the pressure only intensifies below," he said.

He also stressed the need to strengthen judicial infrastructure to reduce pendency. "This is because without sufficient courts, even the most sincere judicial system will collapse under logistical strain," he said.

Justice Kant said technology was very useful during the COVID pandemic.



CJI Surya Kant

He, however, said that one cannot afford to forget that technology comes with its own shadows.

"In an age of deep fakes and digital arrests, courts cannot afford naive optimism... A reform that excludes the poor, elderly, or digitally unfamiliar is

not reform at all, it is regression. That is why I have always maintained that technology must remain a servant of justice, not its substitute. It should amplify human judgment, not replace it," the CJI said.

He said a system where the executive, legislature and judiciary do not move in harmony resembles a tricycle missing a wheel — the rule of law cannot balance, let alone move forward.

"And the consequences are stark — laws may be enacted, offences registered, even liberty curtailed, yet the citizen is left waiting for the one thing that completes the promise of justice: a timely trial that the infrastructure is simply too frail to deliver," he added.

Among others, Orissa High Court Chief Justice Harish Tandon, and judges from high courts across India attended the event, which was also joined by Advocate General Pitambar Acharya.

States Focus



CORRUPTION CAUSED CONGRESS DOWNFALL: RAJASTHAN CM

Rajasthan Chief Minister Bhajanlal Sharma on Sunday asserted that those involved in graft would not be spared under any circumstances and pointed at the Congress to assert that corruption led to the "downfall" of the party that once ruled from Parliament to panchayats. Addressing a state-level cleanliness awareness and labour donation programme held at Jal Mahal here, he said that public money should be used for the welfare of the people. "Public funds are not meant for corruption; they should serve the interests of the common people, including farmers, labourers, and the poor." Targeting the Congress, Sharma said, "The party once ruled from Parliament to Panchayats, but its corruption, appeasement, and lies have brought it down."



VAJPAYEE'S VISION GUIDES SELF-RELIANT INDIA: CM DHAMA

Uttarakhand Chief Minister Pushkar Singh Dhama on Sunday said that former Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee's values, governance model and national vision continue to inspire India's journey towards self-reliance under the leadership of PM Narendra Modi. Addressing a public meeting as the chief guest at the Atal-Modi Good Governance Yatra here, Dhama spoke after unveiling a statue of Vajpayee at Annamaya Circle, Madanapalle in Annamaya district. "Vajpayee's values, governance framework and national vision continue to guide India's march towards self-reliance under Prime Minister Modi's leadership," Dhama said.

MP leader sparks Ladli Behna scheme controversy

GIRISH SHARMA ■ Bhopal

Senior Madhya Pradesh Cabinet Minister Kunwar Vijay Shah has triggered a fresh political storm after remarks made during a district-level meeting in Ratlam were widely interpreted as linking benefits under the Ladli Behna Scheme to the participation of women beneficiaries in a proposed felicitation programme for Chief Minister Mohan Yadav.

The controversy has erupted at a time when Shah is already facing legal and political scrutiny over an earlier objectionable comment related to an Indian Army officer, further intensifying pressure on the BJP leadership.

Madhya Pradesh Congress president Jitu Patwari launched a scathing attack, accusing the BJP of insulting women beneficiaries and displaying an 'anti-women mindset'. Former chief minister Kamal Nath also weighed in, alleging that the minister's remarks treated Ladli Behna beneficiaries as bonded labour and amounted to an attack on the civil rights and dignity of women in the state.

The latest row stems from Shah's comments while chairing the District Development Advisory Committee meeting in Ratlam on Saturday evening. Referring to the Ladli Behna Scheme — a flagship women-centric programme credited with playing a decisive role in the BJP's victory in the 2023 Assembly elections — Shah said the district had around 2.5 lakh beneficiaries and suggested that at least 50,000 of them should come forward to felicitate the Chief Minister for completing two years in office. He proposed that the event be organised in the New Year and asked officials to make arrangements accordingly.

However, a video clip of the meeting that later went viral sparked controversy. In the footage, Shah is heard telling officials that beneficiaries who fail to attend the proposed programme could face scrutiny of their documents, including Aadhaar verification, and that their applications could be kept pending. The remarks were quickly seized upon by the Opposition, which accused the minister of using a welfare scheme as a tool for political mobilisation and intimidation. The Ladli Behna Scheme was launched in June 2023, a few months ahead of the Assembly elections, and currently provides monthly financial assistance of Rs 1,500 to more than 1.26 crore women.



According to Shah, the discussion focused on the need for proper verification to ensure that only eligible beneficiaries continue to receive assistance and that ineligible names are filtered out in a transparent manner. He maintained that the intent was administrative correction and accountability, not pressure on beneficiaries. Despite the clarification, the episode has added to a growing list of controversies surrounding the senior minister, reviving debate over the language and conduct of public representatives. With the Ladli Behna Scheme occupying a central place in the BJP's political narrative, the controversy has also sharpened the Opposition's attack, setting the stage for a prolonged political confrontation over welfare, accountability and the dignity of beneficiaries.

CM Himanta invites VP to witness Assam's progress

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma paid a courtesy call on the Vice President of India, CP Radhakrishnan, in the national Capital on Sunday.

During the meeting at Vice President's enclave, Chief Minister Sarma personally congratulated Radhakrishnan on his assumption of the august office of the Vice President of India.

The Chief Minister also extended a formal invitation to the Vice President to visit Assam and witness the state's transformation and developmental progress achieved in recent years.

The Vice President appreciated the gesture and interacted warmly with the Chief Minister during the meeting which lasted for around 30 minutes.



Later taking to X, formerly Twitter, Chief Minister Sarma wrote, "Honoured to call upon Vice President of India, CP Radhakrishnan in New Delhi today."

I personally congratulated him on assuming the august office of @VPIIndia and invited him to visit Assam to witness the State's transformation in recent years."

ISRO plans seven launches by March including Gaganyaan test

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) has lined up seven launch missions by March next year, including one to demonstrate home-built electric propulsion systems for satellite and quantum key distribution technologies, and the first uncrewed mission of the Gaganyaan project.

The first of the seven launches is expected to take place next week. India's heaviest rocket LVM3 will place in orbit the Bluebird-6 communication satellite for US-based AST Spacemobile through a commercial agreement with ISRO's New Space India Limited (NSIL), Union minister Jitendra Singh recently

told Parliament. The human-rated LVM3 will soar into the sky early next year carrying the first uncrewed mission of India's human spaceflight Gaganyaan with a robot 'Vyommitra' onboard the crew module.

One more uncrewed mission is planned later next year before ISRO sends Indian astronauts into low earth orbit in 2027. "First uncrewed mission of Gaganyaan to demonstrate end-to-end mission, including aerodynamics characterisation of human rated launch vehicle, mission operations of Orbital Module, re-entry and recovery of Crew Module," Singh said.

Next year will also see the launch of India's first industry-built Polar Satellite Launch Vehicle (PSLV) that will put in

orbit Oceansat satellite. The PSLV will have two more passengers — Indo-Mauritius Joint Satellite and LEAP-2 satellite of Dhruva Space.

To increase commercial launches of satellites, NSIL had given a contract to a HAL-L&T consortium to manufacture five PSLV rockets, under a technology transfer agreement signed in September this year.

An ISRO-built PSLV will put in orbit an earth observation satellite (EOS-NI) for a strategic user and 18 smaller satellites of Indian and international customers. The GSLV-Mk II rocket is expected to launch the EOS-5 satellite or GISAT-1A, which will be a replacement for GISAT-1 which failed to reach the intended orbit in 2021.

Arunachal sets stage for panchayat and civic polls

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Itanagar

The stage is set for elections to panchayati raj institutions and civic bodies of Itanagar and Pashighat in Arunachal Pradesh with the deployment of over 40,000 personnel to ensure the smooth conduct of polls on Monday, officials said. Polling will begin at 7 am and continue till 4 pm, State Election Commissioner (SEC) Rinchin Tashi said.

The ruling BJP won 58 zilla parishad constituencies unopposed, and the National People's Party (NPP) bagged one seat, while four saffron party candidates were elected to the Itanagar Municipal Corporation (IMC) without any contest.



Altogether 5,037 BJP candidates for gram panchayat seats have also been declared elected unopposed.

In total, 440 candidates are in the fray for 186 zilla parishad seats, while 39 are contesting for 16 IMC wards and 21 for eight wards in Pasighat Municipal Council (PMC). The SEC said 13 gram panchayat constituencies

received no nominations, while all nominations in 14 gram panchayat constituencies were rejected during scrutiny.

Polling in the Dumba Singpho gram panchayat seat has been countermanded following the death of a candidate. Altogether 8,31,648 voters, including 7,59,210 for panchayat bodies and 72,438

for municipal elections, are eligible to cast their ballots.

There will be 2,171 polling stations for panchayat elections, 67 for IMC and 12 for PMC, the SEC said.

"In the panchayat polls, female voters outnumber male voters," Tashi said.

Upper Subansiri district has the highest number of panchayat voters at 58,764, while Dibang Valley has the lowest at 3,854 electors.

In the municipal polls, Itanagar's Ward 19 has the highest number of voters at 5,106, whereas Pasighat's Ward 6 has the lowest with 812 voters.

The SEC has deployed over 40,000 personnel, including 15,000 polling staffers, to ensure the smooth conduct of the polls.

NMA frames rules for conservation of Sher Shah Suri's tomb

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Patna

Bylaws have been made for the 480-year-old tomb of Sher Shah Suri, an Afghan king who ruled parts of north India, to help the authorities resolve the problem of protecting the monument in Bihar's Sasaram, and developing the locality in its vicinity at the same time.

The National Monuments Authority (NMA) has enacted the legislation after obtaining objections and suggestions from various stakeholders of the memorial of the Afghan ruler, who was also known for his exceptional administrative skill.

Built between 1540 and 1545 CE, the tomb stands in the middle of an artificial lake



at Sasaram, a historical town in the south-western district of the state. Designed by Mir Muhammad Aliwal Khan, it is popularly referred to as the 'second Taj Mahal of India'.

According to experts, the bye-law will bridge the gap between managing the ambient environment near a protected site and the requirements of the populace inhabiting immediate

vicinity of such monuments. It is expected that with a site-specific bye-law, common people as well as administrative and local stakeholders would find it easy to meet their construction, repair and other development-related requirements.

However, according to the bylaw, new constructions should be in harmony with the existing architectural

style and compatible with the surrounding historic character and streetscapes.

No intrusive materials like cladding or use of panelling on the exterior facade should be permitted, it said, adding that the use of coloured glazing should also be discouraged.

OP Jaiswal, former Professor in the Department of Ancient History and Archaeology, Patna University, welcomed the bye-laws for the tomb of Sher Shah Suri in Sasaram.

"The Central Government and other authorities must come out with such bye-laws for other protected monuments in the state. Protection of such monuments is important for our next generation," Jaiswal said.

BARC plans 3,000-acre research, development campus in Andhra

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Amaravati

Bhabha Atomic Research Centre (BARC) is planning to set up a new Research and Development campus spread over 3,000 acres in Anakapalli district.

The premier multi-disciplinary nuclear research centre has approached the Andhra Pradesh Government for the diversion of 148.15 hectares (0.366 acres) of land for the new campus, according to sources from the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change.

An Expert Appraisal Committee (EAC) under the ministry examined the proposal earlier this month and recommended it for 'in-principle' approval for the diversion of the first land parcel. "Bhabha Atomic Research Centre is setting up a new campus on the east coast near Visakhapatnam for strategic reasons. The selection of the site was based on recommendations from the Site Selection Committee and approved by the Atomic Energy Commission," the EAC noted in the minutes of the meeting.

Over 1,200 hectares (about 3,000 acres) of revenue land

have already been acquired for the project.

The 148.15 hectares of forest land proposed for diversion is adjacent to this acquired land and lies between the project site and the sea, the EAC added.

The project is a strategic initiative of the central Government, and hence, the Detailed Project Report is protected from disclosure.

The proposal involves the construction of a perimeter compound wall, zonal security fencing, patrolling roads, a pump house, watch towers, drains, service lines, and area development works, according to the minutes, without specifying the nature of the activity.

As many as 1,722 of the 21,244 trees on the land will be felled. However, those located in areas close to the sea will not be cut, and the EAC said this will not affect the general ecosystem. "This centre will contribute to nation-building by conducting research in the nuclear field with applications in energy security, health, agriculture, water, and other strategic areas as mandated by the Centre," the EAC said.

BNHS trains staff ahead of vultures release in MTR

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Mumbai

Ahead of the release of vultures in Maharashtra's Melghat Tiger Reserve (MTR), the Bombay Natural History Society (BNHS) has conducted a workshop to sensitise forest staff and other personnel on bird conservation and post-release management.

As part of the reintroduction programme, 15 long-billed vultures were brought from Pinjore in Haryana in April 2025 and housed in a pre-release facility in Melghat (in Amravati district).



The birds have undergone training over the past eight months to feed independently and acclimatise to local environmental conditions and are expected to be released in the reserve soon, a BNHS release said.

Indian Coast Guard carries out medical evacuation

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Kochi

The Indian Coast Guard became a lifesaver for a 75-year-old by carrying out an urgent medical evacuation from Lakshadweep to Kochi, officials said on Sunday.

A statement by the Coast Guard said that the patient diagnosed with acute subacute subdural hematoma on oxygen support was airlifted from Agatti in Lakshadweep and shifted to a private hos-

pital in Kochi in an operation that started late Saturday night and was completed by Sunday early morning.

The urgent request, received post-closure of runaway operations at Agatti airfield, activated the ICG distress and HADR response mechanism, the Coast Guard said. "To facilitate the medical evacuation, ICG launched a Dornier aircraft from ICG Air Enclave at Kochi Airport at 10 pm."

The aircraft landed at Agatti island at 11.20 pm,

where the patient, along with the medical support team and spouse, was embarked swiftly considering the urgency of distress," the statement said.

According to the Coast Guard, the aircraft took off within 25 minutes and landed safely at Kochi airport at about 1.10 am on Sunday.

Subsequently, the patient was shifted to Amrita Hospital and is receiving advanced medical care and support, it said.

Jharkhand to procure 60 lakh quintals of paddy

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Ranchi

The Jharkhand Government has set a target to procure around 60 lakh quintals of paddy and will begin the exercise from December 15, an official said on Sunday. Altogether 783 procurement centres have been set up across the state to carry out the exercise, he said.

State Food, Public Distribution and Consumer Affairs Minister appealed to his cabinet colleagues, MPs and MLAs to visit the procurement centres in their respective areas and inaugurate the initiative.

He said the Government will purchase paddy at ₹2,450 per quintal from farmers.

The authorities have set a target to procure around 60 lakh quintals of paddy, according to the state's e-uparjan portal.

The Jharkhand Cabinet had on December 8 decided that farmers of the state will get a bonus of ₹81 per quintal of paddy in addition to the Centre's minimum support price (MSP) for the crop in the 2025-26 fiscal.

The state council of ministers also approved ₹48.60



crore as a bonus against paddy procurement from the farmers.

The MSP and a bonus have been fixed at ₹2,450 per quintal, the official said. The farmers will also receive a one-time payment for paddy to be purchased by the Government, and not in instalments as was the practice earlier, he said.

The BJP, however, accused the Government of delaying the paddy procurement and forcing farmers to sell their produce at a minimal price.

Leader of Opposition and Jharkhand BJP chief Babul Marandi, during the winter session, which concluded on Thursday, had alleged, "Farmers are forced to sell their paddy at a meagre price of ₹1,500 and ₹1,600 per quintal in the open market, as Government procurement has not yet started."

In 2024-25, the Government had procured the highest 40.08 lakh quintal of paddy against the target of 60 lakh quintals.

However, in 2023-24 and 2022-23, the procurement was 17.02 and 17.16 lakh quintals, respectively. The state had faced drought situations during the period, as per the e-uparjan portal.



Editor's TAKE

A dispute written in stone

The clashes between two otherwise peaceful countries underscore how unresolved historical disputes can turn heritage sites and borderlines into flashpoints

The year 2025 has been turbulent throughout. From the war in Ukraine to the Gaza conflict and renewed hostilities along the Pakistan-Afghanistan frontier, the year has witnessed conflict on multiple fronts. Even in its final month, unrest persists, with unexpected clashes erupting between Cambodia and Thailand — two otherwise peaceful neighbours bound by shared borders and intertwined histories.

The latest flare-up along the Thailand-Cambodia border is a grim reminder that unresolved issues have a habit of erupting into armed conflict. Sporadic skirmishes on the border escalated into air strikes and artillery exchanges, leading to large-scale evacuations on both sides and leaving at least 20 dead. If there is a conflict anywhere in the world, US President Donald Trump has an uncanny urge to get involved and become a self-appointed peace broker, often with detrimental effect. This time too, US President Donald Trump announced that both sides had "agreed to cease all shooting", a statement that proved rather premature, as neither side appeared very keen on it.

At the heart of the confrontation lies the long-disputed border region surrounding the 11th-century Preah Vihear temple complex. Though the International Court of Justice awarded the temple to Cambodia decades ago, divergent interpretations of boundary lines and provocative statements on both sides have fuelled public anger. Periodic flare-ups, including violent clashes in 2008-11 and again earlier this year, demonstrate how fragile past ceasefires have been.

This week's violence followed the collapse of October talks, after Thailand accused Cambodian forces of laying landmines in the region. What is clear is that deep mistrust, militarised borders, and domestic political pressures in both countries continue to fuel this conflict, which is more emotive than real. The involvement of Donald Trump as a self-styled mediator adds another dimension to the problem. Announcing the ceasefire on his Truth Social platform, Trump cast himself as an indispensable power broker, positioning himself as the principal mediator. His eagerness to insert himself into every global conflict often appears driven less by a commitment to peace than by the pursuit of personal legacy. By sidelining regional diplomacy and framing himself as a Nobel Peace Prize contender, Trump ultimately does more harm than good to the cause of peace. For India, the conflict is not a distant Southeast Asian squabble but a matter of tangible concern. New Delhi's immediate worry has been the reported damage to conservation facilities at the Preah Vihear temple, a UNESCO World Heritage Site where the Archaeological Survey of India has been leading a \$5.5 million restoration project since 2022. Beyond heritage, India has strategic stakes in regional stability under its Act East policy. Prolonged instability between two ASEAN members threatens trade routes, economic integration, and the broader balance in a region already under pressure from great-power rivalry. For India and the wider region, the lesson is stark: history ignored does not fade — it flares up, often with consequences far beyond the battlefield.

How a Jaish network was uncovered

What began as a routine investigation into Jaish-e-Mohammed posters in Srinagar's Nowgam area spiralled into the exposure of a chilling, multi-state terror network involving radicalised doctors, clerics and overground workers



ANIL BHAT

On October 19, 2025, when Jammu & Kashmir (J&K) Police began an investigation into Jaish-e-Mohammed (JeM) posters threatening attacks on security forces that appeared in Srinagar's Nowgam area, a terror network involving Kashmiri doctors was exposed. Persistent police work, including analysis of CCTV footage, led to the identification and arrest of three local overground workers (OGWs) with prior records of stone-pelting. Their interrogation led the police to a cleric and former paramedic named Maulvi Irfan Ahmad from Shopian.

Irfan's interrogation revealed a wider Jaish-e-Mohammed network operating across multiple states, including J&K, Haryana, and Uttar Pradesh. He had allegedly used his position as an imam to radicalise educated professionals, including doctors. Maulvi Irfan's phone contacts included several doctors, raising police suspicion. His interrogation, along with that of another arrested individual, Zameer Ahmad Ahanger, exposed a network of radicalised medical professionals. Based on these leads, police conducted a series of raids across different states.

Dr Adeel Ahmad Rather was arrested in Saharanpur, Uttar Pradesh, where he had moved after working at Government Medical College (GMC), Anantnag. An AK-47 rifle was recovered from his old locker at GMC, and his interrogation led the police to Dr Muzammil Ganaie at Al-Falah University in Faridabad, Haryana.

Raids on two houses rented by Ganaie in Faridabad uncovered a massive cache of explosives — nearly 2,900 kg of materials, including ammonium nitrate, two AK-series rifles, and other bomb-making equipment.

The multi-agency crackdown caused panic among the network members, which, it is believed, led another doctor, Dr Umar Ul Nabi, who worked with Drs Adeel and Muzammil, to prematurely detonate a vehicle-borne explosive device near Delhi's Red Fort on November 10, 2025, resulting in 13 fatalities and his own death. On November 10, 2025, at about 6:52 pm, a white Hyundai i20 car parked near the Red Fort Metro rail station in Delhi exploded, killing at least eight people and injuring many more. Reportedly, a probable reason was that its driver, Dr Umar Nabi, whose accomplices were already under investigation and some of whom had been arrested, may have panicked and prematurely caused the detonation of the device.

Immediately afterwards, Delhi Police, forensic teams, and fire engines rushed to the scene. CCTV footage from the scene and nearby areas was collected to trace the car's movements and ownership. On November 11, 2025, the Ministry of Home Affairs handed over the probe to the



WHITE-COLLAR TERRORISTS ARE CERTAINLY NOT NEW IN THE KASHMIR VALLEY. ONE CLASSIC CASE IS YASIN MALIK, HEAD OF THE JAMMU KASHMIR LIBERATION FRONT (JKLF), WHO SPEARHEADED SEPARATIST IDEOLOGY AND VIOLENT ACTIVITIES IN THE VALLEY SINCE 1988, WHEN THE TERM 'WHITE-COLLAR TERROR' WAS NOT CURRENT

National Investigation Agency (NIA), indicating that it was being treated as a terror attack. J&K Police collected DNA samples from Nabi's family in Pulwama for matching with the remains from the blast site. On November 12, 2025, DNA results confirmed that Dr Umar Nabi was the driver and sole occupant of the exploded car. It was revealed that Drs Nabi and Ganaie had visited the Red Fort in January 2025, possibly for reconnaissance. A red Ford EcoSport car linked to the accused was also found in Haryana. On November 13, 2025, J&K Police's Counter Intelligence Kashmir wing conducted further raids at 13 locations across the Kashmir Valley in connection with the terror module.

On November 15, 2025, an explosion occurred inside the Nowgam police station in Srinagar while police and forensic teams were handling the seized explosive materials brought from Faridabad as evidence in the Red Fort case, resulting in nine deaths and numerous injuries among police personnel and civilians.

It is believed that Nabi's panicked actions inadvertently set off an explosion and thereby prevented a larger, planned series of attacks in many other parts of the country.

Wider investigations also revealed Dr Shaheen Saeed, a doctor and teacher from Lucknow, who raised ₹20 lakh for procuring raw materials for IEDs; Amir Rashid Ali, arrested for arranging the Hyundai i20 car used in the attack and helping prepare the explosives; and Jasir Bilal Wani, a technician tasked with exploring ways to attach explosives to drones. Authorities also reportedly questioned over 50 doctors in Kashmir in connection with the case, including Drs Sajjad Ahmed and Sajad Malik. The doctors were reportedly radicalised through online channels such as Telegram and through trips to countries like Turkey. Funds were allegedly raised under the guise of social or charitable causes.

Al-Falah University, a private university in Faridabad, Haryana, established in 2014 by the Al-Falah Charitable Trust, is headed by Jawad Ahmad Siddiqui, chairman-cum-chancellor

of Al-Falah University and founder of the Al-Falah Group. While it aims to provide "quality education, promote research, and prepare students for successful careers" and is officially recognised by the University Grants Commission, it has been a hub of Kashmiri doctors involved in terror.

White-collar terrorists are certainly not new in the Kashmir Valley. One classic case is Yasin Malik, head of the Jammu Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF), who spearheaded separatist ideology and violent activities in the Valley since 1988, when the term 'white-collar terror' was not current. He was the mastermind behind the purging of Kashmiri Pandits and was responsible for their genocide and the exodus of at least 400,000 from the Kashmir Valley. He and his colleagues were known to boast about murdering Indian Air Force officers and many innocent non-Muslims. After all that, they masqueraded as 'separatists' and enjoyed being hosted at taxpayers' expense by Congress governments.

It should also not be forgotten that political leaders ruling J&K were responsible for allowing the massacre and purge of the Kashmiri Pandits and who, after five years of the abrogation of Articles 370 and 35A, got elected again in 2024 by the decision of the Supreme Court, and are ruling at a time when Pakistani terrorists massacred tourists in Pahalgam, with their presence being known to and accommodated by local shopkeepers and pony operators.

A vital course correction for India's security by New Delhi, albeit very right-wing sounding, should be:

- (a) reverting J&K to long-term President's Rule;
- (b) ensuring long-term, organised, and effective de-radicalisation;
- (c) increasing permanent Army presence in the Kashmir Valley and hinterland, with many more cantonments; and
- (d) ensuring that elections are held in J&K only when there are sufficient Kashmiri Pandit and/or Dogra candidates.

The Pioneer SINCE 1865

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Justice delayed leaves truth unanswered still



ASHA IYER KUMAR

2ND OPINION THE PIONEER

Justice is an elusive and often ambiguous idea. It does not always arrive where one expects it to, nor does it consistently side with those who have been grievously wronged. At times, it appears to favour individuals widely perceived as guilty in the court of public opinion, yet declared "not guilty" within the strict confines of the law.

This uneasy tension between moral certainty and legal outcome came sharply into focus in Kerala this week, when a prominent actor was acquitted of criminal conspiracy in the 2017 abduction and rape case involving another actor. The verdict triggered an outpouring of anger across social media and public forums in the state. Many viewed the acquittal as a stain on the country's judicial system, a moment that seemed to reaffirm public cynicism about

the ability of institutions to deliver justice in cases involving wealth, influence, and power. Accusations flew thick and fast — some openly asserting that money and clout had tilted the scales, quietly seeping into the crevices of a system meant to safeguard truth and fairness. Enough rage has been vented over what many see as the irony of the judgment, and it will likely remain one of the most telling examples of how a high-profile case can unravel over time. For eight long years, the matter lingered in court.

While it is true that truth, in law, must be established through evidence alone — and, viewed strictly through that prism, the acquittal followed established legal principles — the larger question cannot be ignored. When justice is delayed for nearly a decade, it ceases to be justice in any meaningful sense. In such cases, delay itself becomes a denial of the victim's fundamental right.

Memories fade, narratives shift, and pressure — subtle or otherwise — begins to reshape testimony. In this case, several witnesses who once provided critical statements later turned hostile. Of the 261 witnesses examined, 28 reversed their earlier accounts. How much truth was lost in that erosion is impossible to measure, but its impact on the outcome is undeniable. Such reversals are not uncommon in trials involving influential accused persons, and they point to a systemic vulnerability that the justice system has

yet to adequately address. While there may be no legal proof establishing intimidation or directly implicating the accused as a conspirator, the manner in which the crime was executed and subsequently handled makes it difficult to accept that it was a random act. The precision of the crime and the subsequent disintegration of the prosecution's case suggest manipulation so thorough that it left the state with little to sustain a conviction.

For the public — largely excluded from the complexities of legal procedure and the unseen forces that can shape a trial — the only option is reluctant acceptance of the verdict. There is some consolation in knowing that higher courts remain open should the survivor choose to pursue the matter further, with the hope that proceedings there may be swifter and more resolute. Yet a deep unease lingers. When crimes appear to be softened by power and privilege, it breeds fear and insecurity. It sends a chilling message that truth can be weakened by neglect, delay, or influence, and that the law may not always protect the vulnerable. The anger provoked by the Emakulam court's verdict may eventually fade, but the questions it raises will endure. At the heart of this legal and moral dilemma stands a woman whose struggle for justice and dignity remains painfully unresolved.

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

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An artist performing at the Divya Kala Mela on Kartavya Path, near India Gate, New Delhi. PHOTO: PANKAJ KUMAR

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FOREIGN CAMPUSES EXPOSE NEGLECT OF INDIA'S PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES

The entry of foreign universities into India marks a significant shift in the country's higher education landscape, but it also exposes a worrying lack of confidence in public, government run institutions.

While foreign campuses may reduce foreign exchange outflow and offer international exposure, their high fees, absence of reservation policies, and limited geographical reach will largely benefit a privileged minority. More fundamentally, the policy raises an uncomfortable question: is India's education system truly incapable of reform, or has it simply suffered from prolonged neglect? Public universities, despite chronic underfunding, faculty shortages and infrastructure constraints, continue to educate the overwhelming majority of

students and remain vital spaces for social mobility, inclusion and diversity. They produce teachers, researchers, administrators and professionals who sustain the country's economic and democratic life.

Instead of importing exclusivity under the banner of globalisation, the government must prioritise strengthening domestic institutions. Meaningful reform requires sustained public investment, academic autonomy, transparent governance and respect for constitutional values such as equity and access. Without this, foreign universities will remain islands of privilege, while the foundational system that serves millions continues to erode, undermining education as a public good.

KYAMUDIN ANSARI | MUMBAI

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

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Parliamentary praise for Ladakh institute

The Himalayan Institute of Alternatives, HIAL, founded by Ladakh educator and innovator Sonam Wangchuk, has received strong praise from a Parliamentary panel, which described its work as exemplary and urged the University Grants Commission to grant long pending recognition. In its report, the Standing Committee on Education, Women, Youth and Sports, chaired by Congress Member of Parliament Digvijaya Singh, expressed concern that HIAL's application for recognition has remained unresolved for years despite the institute's growing academic stature and international acclaim. The committee said it was impressed by HIAL's distinctive academic ecosystem, which blends education, research and entrepreneurship while remaining rooted in the region's socio cultural and ecological realities. It highlighted the institute's emphasis on experiential and project based learning, noting that HIAL reflects the spirit of the National Education Policy 2020.

The panel noted HIAL's impact on local communities and its global recognition through initiatives such as ice stupas and sustained community engagement. Despite administrative challenges, the report presents HIAL as a beacon of educational innovation deserving recognition and wider national adoption.

BHAGWAN THADANI | MUMBAI

Messi event signals administrative failure

The chaotic collapse of Lionel Messi's Kolkata appearance is a sobering reminder that celebrity spectacle without professional planning can quickly turn into a public hazard. Tens of thousands of fans paid exorbitant prices in good faith, only to be denied even a fleeting and dignified glimpse of the footballer they idolise. What followed, vandalism, pitch invasion and panic, was not spontaneous behaviour but the predictable outcome of gross mismanagement.

Events of such scale demand meticulous crowd control, transparent communication and realistic expectations. Instead, Messi's brief appearance was overwhelmed by VIPs and selfie seekers, while paying spectators were left confused and frustrated. The abrupt withdrawal of players without explanation deepened the sense of betrayal. That even experienced administrators and security forces were overwhelmed speaks volumes about the organisers' lack of preparedness. Damage to a stadium refurbished with public funds and risks to lives make this more than an entertainment fiasco. Accountability must be fixed, refunds ensured and criminal negligence examined. India's sporting ambitions will ring hollow unless professionalism, transparency and respect for fans are strictly enforced.

SANJAY CHOPRA | MOHALI

Centralisation threatens higher education

The Cabinet's approval of the Viksit Bharat Shiksha Adhikshan Bill is being presented as reform, yet it reveals a troubling obsession with centralisation in higher education governance. Replacing the University Grants Commission, AICTE and NCTE with a single regulator ignores India's deeper crisis of chronic underfunding, faculty shortages, rural exclusion and shrinking academic freedom. Separating funding from regulation while retaining ministerial control invites political interference and weakens university autonomy.

Centralised uniform standards will disproportionately harm small and rural institutions, pushing many towards closure or privatisation. Genuine reform requires trust in universities, sustained public investment and transparent, accountable governance. India's higher education system needs empowerment, not another top down, one size fits all experiment that rewards administrative control over quality, equity and intellectual freedom. Students and teachers deserve meaningful investment, institutional autonomy and academic accountability, rather than cosmetic restructuring and symbolic renaming of regulatory bodies that fail to address foundational structural problems affecting access, excellence and inclusion nationwide.

VIJAYKUMAR H K | RAICHR



Remembering Chandan Mitra: Mentor, visionary, and friend

In an industry often marred by sensationalism, Chandan championed balanced reporting, reminding us that journalism's true power lies in informing, not inflaming. Beyond his professional acumen, he was a multifaceted personality – a politician, historian and cultural enthusiast

FIRST Column



PROF (DR) K G SURESH

As I sit down to pen this tribute (my first column after his demise) on the occasion of Chandan Mitra's birth anniversary, my thoughts drift back to the man who shaped not just Indian journalism but also impacted the lives of countless journalists like me. Born on December 12, 1955, Chandan would have turned 70 this year, a milestone that feels both poignant and unreal in his absence. He left us on September 1, 2021, at the age of 66, but his legacy endures like the enduring ink of a well-crafted editorial.

My association with Chandan Da was both as a columnist with *The Pioneer*, where he served as the Editor and Managing Director for many years and as General Secretary of the Indian Media Centre (IMC), an organisation focused on media training and skill upgradation, led by him as Chairman. There, we collaborated on initiatives aimed at strengthening grassroots journalism, a cause close to both our hearts.

Chandan's journey into journalism was nothing short of illustrious, marked by academic excellence and a relentless pursuit of truth. A product of Kolkata's La Martiniere School, he went on to graduate from St Stephen's College, Delhi University, before earning a Master's and a DPhil from Oxford University. His scholarly background infused his journalism with depth and rigor, setting him apart in an era when reporting often prioritized speed over substance.

Starting his career at *The Statesman* in Kolkata, Chandan quickly rose through the ranks, moving to *The Times of India* in Delhi and then to the *Hindustan Times*, where he served as Executive Editor. But it was at *The Pioneer*, which he joined in 1993 and eventually led as editor and managing director, that he truly left his mark. Under his stewardship, *The Pioneer* transformed from a regional newspaper into a national voice known for its bold editorials, investigative reporting, and commitment to ethical journalism.

As a senior journalist with experience in broadcast and print media, I had contributed to various outlets, but writing for *The Pioneer* under Chandan's guidance was a defining phase. He had a knack for spotting potential in young and mid-career journalists, encour-



DR. CHANDAN MITRA

(12 DEC 1954-01 SEPT 2021)

ON THIS DAY, I RAISE A SILENT TOAST TO MY FRIEND AND MENTOR. MAY HIS VISION FOR A VIBRANT, ETHICAL, AND INCLUSIVE MEDIA CONTINUE TO GUIDE US. REST IN PEACE, CHANDAN — YOU ARE MISSED, BUT NEVER FORGOTTEN

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aging us to push boundaries while maintaining journalistic integrity. I remember submitting columns on socio-political issues, and Chandan would often call me personally to discuss nuances — sometimes challenging my views, other times refining them with his sharp insights. His feedback was never condescending; it was always aimed at elevating the discourse.

In an industry often marred by sensationalism, Chandan championed balanced reporting, reminding us that journalism's true power lies in informing, not inflaming. Our collaboration extended beyond *The Pioneer* to the Indian Media Centre initiatives, particularly through events and programs at IIMC, where I later served as Director General. IIMC, with its focus on training and skill upgradation for aspiring journalists, especially from grassroots levels, aligned perfectly with Chandan's vision for a more inclusive media ecosystem.

He was a frequent panelist and guest at IIMC events, sharing his experiences on topics ranging from the evolution of Indian language journalism to the challenges of digital media. One memorable occasion was a panel discussion on journalism ethics, where Chandan delved into how media could empower rural and underserved communities. He emphasized the need for skill-building programs that went beyond urban elites, advocating for training modules that

equipped journalists from small towns with tools for investigative reporting and multimedia storytelling. Often me and IIMC Founder and veteran journalist late Shyam Khosla would admire the manner in which Chandan, unlike people of his stature and with hectic work schedules, would spend days together at our meetings in Chandigarh and other cities discussing how to empower content wise and technologically the journalists working in small towns and districts.

Chandan's commitment to grassroots journalism was not mere rhetoric; it was action-oriented. At *The Pioneer*, he initiated coverage of underreported stories from India's hinterlands, giving voice to issues like rural development, tribal rights, and local governance. This approach resonated with the ethos of IIMC's training programs, which aim to bridge the gap between metropolitan media and regional realities.

He was also a passionate advocate for the soft power of Indian cinema, and was amongst the first to dedicate space in any mainstream newspaper to discussions linked to the industry. During our joint sessions, we discussed strategies to integrate digital literacy into journalism curricula, recognizing that the rise of social media demanded new skills for fact-checking and ethical online reporting. Chandan often shared anecdotes from his early days, illustrating how grassroots stories could influence

national policy. He wholeheartedly supported our demand for a National Register for Working Journalists, expanding the scope of Press Council of India to a wider Media Council of India and giving the ombudsman more teeth to enforce its mandate and fixing a minimum qualification for scribes. Later, as Vice Chancellor of Makhnall Chaturvedi National University of Journalism and Communication, Bhopal, I tried to take forward Chandan's dream by facilitating meetings between a high level delegation of Press Council of India led by Prof J S Rajput with local journalists and media educators for determining a minimum qualification for journalists in the backdrop of untrained and so called Citizen Journalists peddling fake news, misinformation and disinformation and thereby causing incalculable damage to the credibility of mainstream media.

Beyond his professional acumen, Chandan was a multifaceted personality—a politician, historian, and cultural enthusiast. Nominated to the Rajya Sabha twice by the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in 2003 and 2010, he later joined the Trinamool Congress (TMC) in 2018. His political journey reflected his ideological flexibility and deep understanding of India's diverse socio-political fabric. As a parliamentarian, he contributed to debates on media freedom, education, and cultural heritage, often drawing from his journalistic roots. I recall him speaking passionately about preserving India's linguistic diversity in journalism, a theme that echoed in our IIMC collaborations. He was very supportive when I introduced Marathi, Malayalam, Urdu and Sanskrit courses at the Institute.

On a personal level, Chandan was warm, witty, and incredibly generous with his time. Despite his busy schedule, he mentored many, including me, during transitional phases in our careers. When I moved from active journalism to media education, Chandan was one of the first to encourage me, saying, "Suresh, teaching the next generation is the ultimate form of journalism — it's about passing the torch." His words stuck with me as I took on roles at IIMC and later at institutions like IIMC and Apeejay Institute of Mass Communication. He believed that journalism wasn't just a profession but a public service, and his life exemplified that. Chandan's impact on Indian media is immeasurable. He revived *The Pioneer* during turbulent times, expanding its

reach and introducing innovative formats that blended print with emerging digital trends. His editorials were incisive, often critiquing power structures while advocating for democratic values. In fact, I vividly remember him telling me that financially managing a newspaper was a huge challenge and he was never interested in becoming a proprietor "but circumstances, the prospects of my journalist and non-journalist colleagues losing their jobs, prompted me to take up this challenge."

In politics, he bridged the gap between media and governance, using his platform to highlight issues like press freedom and cultural preservation. Tributes poured in after his passing, from Prime Minister Narendra Modi to fellow journalists, underscoring his role in nurturing young talent. The Rajya Sabha even paid homage to him in November 2021, recognizing his contributions as a former MP and Editor.

In the context of grassroots journalism, Chandan's work at *The Pioneer* and his engagements with training bodies like IMC were pioneering. He supported programs that trained journalists in regional languages, ensuring that stories from India's villages reached national audiences. Today, as media faces challenges from misinformation and digital disruption, his emphasis on skill upgradation feels more relevant than ever. I often reflect on our discussions about integrating technology into journalism education — ideas that have influenced modern curricula at institutions across India. As we mark this anniversary, I am reminded of Chandan's enduring spirit. He was a man of many seasons: journalist, politician, scholar, and above all, a humanist.

His death snapped long-standing friendships, as noted by colleagues like Swapan Dasgupta, who remembered their bond dating back to 1966. For me, Chandan was a guiding light in a profession that demands both courage and compassion. His initiatives at the Indian Media Centre — through panels, workshops, and advocacy — helped democratize journalism. In closing, Chandan Mitra's legacy is not confined to headlines or parliamentary records; it lives in the journalists he inspired, the stories he amplified, and the institutions he strengthened. On this day, I raise a silent toast to my friend and mentor. May his vision for a vibrant, ethical, and inclusive media continue to guide us. Rest in peace, Chandan — you are missed, but never forgotten.

India's missing digital infrastructure: Why a tech Superpower still imports Computer



KRISHNA V GIRI



PAYAL SETH

India generates close to one-fifth of the world's digital data yet hosts barely 2-3 per cent of global data-centre capacity. The result is stark: a country that creates the digital exhaust of 1.4 billion people depends heavily on infrastructure physically located elsewhere. Our firms, start-ups and even public systems increasingly rely on computing outside India's borders.

The global comparison is sobering (see Figure 1). Switzerland, with under ten million people, operates over a hundred data centres, while India, with 1.4 billion, has only around 150. That is roughly a hundred-fold gap on a per-capita basis. The paradox is that India, the world's software factory, is still a compute importer.

Our domestic capacity today is about 1.2 gigawatts (GW) and is projected to rise to 2 GW by 2026 and 9 GW by 2032. These are healthy growth numbers, yet they remain modest relative to our digital footprint, and as AI workloads surge, the deficit will deepen unless compute is treated as national infrastructure.

The Job Question and the Real Economic Multiplier

It is easy to dismiss data centres as "job-poor". Indeed, a typical 100 MW facility might sustain only around 50 long-term operational jobs and approximately 500 construction roles during its build phase. But this narrow view ignores the broader ecosystem they anchor: power infrastructure, fibre connectivity, cooling systems, server manufacturing and high-skilled services. The surrounding economic activity is expected to exceed ₹50,000 crore by FY 2027. For instance, in Andhra Pradesh, a ₹4,500-crore facility (by Adani Group and Google) is projected to create over 16,000 direct and indirect jobs, and a broader renewables-plus-data-centre cluster could add over 70,000 indirect jobs.

If India reaches 9 GW by 2032, even conservative multipliers imply tens of thousands of direct construction jobs, several thousand high-skill permanent roles and many times that number in the wider ecosystem spanning equipment, power, cooling, connectivity and services. That is not labour-intensive in the way textiles are, but it is deeply consequential for state economies looking to anchor clusters of high-wage activity.

How India Built the Wrong Architecture

India entered the data-centre era early but built the wrong model. Beginning in 2006, government funding created State Data Centres (SDCs) with a ₹1,623-crore outlay to host e-governance workloads. They replaced scattered server rooms but were designed for kilowatt-scale loads — not the tens of megawatts modern workloads need. Managed as government IT assets rather than industrial platforms, they remain closed to private demand. India essentially built small server rooms and mistook them for a compute strategy.

The Policy Flip-Flop That Followed

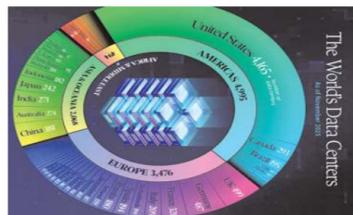
Regulatory shifts deepened investor uncertainty. The 2018 Srikrishna Committee recommended storing a copy of all personal data in India and designating some as "critical", to be stored exclusively onshore. This signalled a strong localisation push and could have guaranteed domestic demand. But the 2023 law took the opposite approach: most cross-border transfers are allowed unless countries are blacklisted. Investors, expecting guaranteed local demand, faced years of ambiguity followed by a diluted regime. The result was predictable: hesitation and slow capacity growth.

A Compute Hub Emerges on the East Coast

Against this backdrop, Visakhapatnam (Vizag) demonstrates what a coherent ecosystem can achieve. A planned US\$15-billion investment, including a subsea cable landing and gigawatt-scale compute capacity, aims to position Vizag as a regional gateway. Andhra Pradesh targets 6 GW in five years, with 1.6 GW already committed. The vision includes Google's largest India data centre and major renewable-energy integration. Andhra Pradesh's IT Minister has separately articulated a vision of Visakhapatnam as "India's Data City". While many states—Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Uttar Pradesh and Telangana—have data-centre policies offering tariff waivers and land subsidies, the absence of a national framework risks a race to the bottom. States compete on incentives but lack coordination on grid integration, cooling standards, renewable-energy tie-ups and geographic distribution.

A Coherent National Strategy

India's compute transition will not happen by accident. It requires three deliberate shifts. First, treat data centres as core national infrastructure: link incentives to efficiency, water use and renewable PPAs. Second, adopt a national spatial strategy: coast to inland, cable-landing hubs to high-voltage corridors. Third, shift the state from operator to enabler: provide land, trunk infrastructure and



clearances; let private capital build and run to global standards.

The Energy Constraint: Why Green Is Not Optional

Finally, no credible data-centre strategy can ignore energy. One expects data centres to consume nearly 30 per cent of national electricity in a decade. India's share today is modest, around 0.8 per cent of total electricity demand, rising to 2.6 per cent by 2030. But the grid is weaker and reliability uneven. One megawatt of IT load requires roughly 1.2-1.5 megawatts of grid power, depending on efficiency.

Without pairing new capacity with dedicated renewable generation, the sector risks public backlash in a country where many households still face outages. The only durable solution is to structurally couple new data-centre capacity with new renewable-energy projects. For instance, Madhya Pradesh's agreement with Submer Technologies is to develop up to 1 GW of energy-efficient, immersion-cooled, AI-ready data centres with up to 45 per cent energy savings and 90% water conservation relative to conventional designs. Another good example of the model India needs is Greenko's 1,680 MW pumped-storage hydropower project at Pinnapuram in Andhra Pradesh, one of the largest of its kind globally. By pairing long-duration storage with solar and wind, it functions as a round-the-clock clean-energy backbone.

The Stakes

The next decade will be defined not by who writes the algorithms, but by who owns the infrastructure that runs them. If India remains a talent exporter but a compute importer, it will capture only a fragment of the value the AI era creates. We already generate the data. We already have the developers. What we lack is the infrastructure, the strategy and the execution strength to convert that into sovereign compute power.

Krishna V Giri, Distinguished Fellow & Special Advisor to the Chairperson and Payal Seth, Fellow. Both are at Pahlé India Foundation

The high-technology turn in India-Russia relations



PRIYA GUPTA

President Vladimir Putin's 4-5 December visit to India has often been interpreted through conventional lenses such as energy supplies, defence transactions and routine diplomatic signalling. Putin described India as "a unique civilisation and a trusted partner," a sentiment that framed the tone of his visit and underscored why technological cooperation now sits at the centre of the relationship. "India has shown remarkable stability and responsible leadership," he observed in the interview.

India's emergence as the world's fifth-largest economy, with credible projections of becoming the third largest by 2027, forms the backdrop to this renewed engagement. A median age of twenty-eight strengthens India's long-term capacity in digital innovation, advanced computing and scientific research. Bilateral trade with Russia has now crossed sixty-five billion dollars. A large part of this increase came from the shift in energy sourcing, with Russian crude rising from one per cent of India's imports in 2021 to more than thirty-five per cent today. This shift generated savings estimated to be between five and six billion dollars in the last financial year.

Defence cooperation remains substantial. Russia continues to supply a significant share of India's military equipment, and a large proportion of India's defence platforms still depend on Russian technical ecosystems. The digital economy is projected to reach one trillion dollars by 2030. India has become the third-largest hub of global AI talent. Unlike earlier engagements that were centred on defence procurement and hydrocarbons, this visit placed technology at the forefront of bilateral priorities.

From Buyer and Seller to Joint Innovators

As he put it in the interview, Russia does not "simply sell weapons to India; we share technologies," a remark that reveals how Moscow now views India as a long-term co-developer rather than a downstream recipient.

Putin's interview reflects an important shift in Russia's approach to India. He stated that Russia seeks to share technology with India rather than remain a supplier of equipment. The principle of joint development is now extending beyond defence into artificial intelligence, quantum technologies, space systems, nuclear research and advanced materials. These sectors jointly form a coherent Indo-Russian technology corridor. It

represents a move from a transactional relationship to one grounded in shared knowledge creation and scientific confidence. For India, this aligns closely with the pursuit of technological sovereignty and long-term strategic autonomy.

Artificial Intelligence and the New East-Eurasian Axis

Artificial intelligence is one of the clearest areas where the benefits of collaboration are visible. India contributes nearly sixteen per cent of global AI talent and hosts more than nine hundred AI-based start-ups. Its digital public infrastructure, which includes Aadhaar, UPI and DigLocker, provides a fertile environment for designing and deploying large-scale AI systems. Russia adds strengths derived from several decades of scientific investment. When combined, these capacities give the partnership the ability to build independent AI architectures without relying on Western technological ecosystems.

Quantum Technologies as a Transformative Frontier

Quantum science is another domain in which cooperation could deliver long-term advantages. India's National Quantum Mission, supported by significant public investment, aims to build national capacity in quantum communication, quantum computing and advanced materials. Russia already possesses strong foundations in quantum physics and superconducting materials. Joint projects could include Quantum Key Distribution satellites, secure post-quantum communication protocols, shared quantum laboratories and hardware accelerators for high-performance computing.

Space Cooperation for Renewed Strategic Depth

India and Russia have a long history of collaboration in space. The recent visit opens the possibility of a much more expansive programme. Potential areas of cooperation include joint lunar exploration building upon India's Chandrayaan missions, propulsion systems for deep-space mobility and a coordinated navigation architecture through NavIC and GLONASS. This functions as a form of national infrastructure that influences communication, logistics, defence readiness and economic planning.

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

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FROM THE WORLD

PAKISTAN

Army kills three TTP terrorists

Three terrorists associated with the banned terror outfit Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan were killed in an intelligence-based operation in northwest Pakistan's restive Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, police said on Sunday. The operation was conducted in the area close to the Pak-Afghan border in Bajaur district after the reported presence of the terrorists. The terrorists were involved in various subversive activities like attacks on security forces, police, and IED blasts. The security forces seized a huge cache of arms and ammunition from the possession of the terrorists after the operation. The police cordoned off the area and launched a search operation. Pakistan continues to reel under terrorism with a surge of 25 per cent terror incidents in 2025.

SOUTH AFRICA

Indian killed in temple collapse

A 52-year-old Indian-origin man is among four people killed after a four-storey Hindu temple under construction collapsed in South Africa's KwaZulu-Natal province, officials have said. The New Ahoibam Temple of Protection, situated on a steep hill in Redcliffe in north of eThekweni, was being expanded when a section of the building gave way on Friday while workers were on site. The exact number of workers and temple officials believed to be trapped beneath tonnes of rubble is unknown. While two people, a construction worker and a devotee, were confirmed dead on Friday, the death toll rose to four on Saturday after rescue teams recovered more bodies. Of the four deceased, one has been identified as Vicky Jairaj Panday, an executive member of the temple trust and manager of the construction project.

US envoys arrive in Berlin for Ukraine peace talks

ASSOCIATED PRESS

Berlin

US envoys arrived in Berlin on Sunday morning for another round of talks intended to secure a deal to end the war in Ukraine.

US President Donald Trump's special envoy Steve Witkoff and Trump's son-in-law Jared Kushner were spotted in downtown Berlin by a photographer for the German news agency dpa.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said that Ukrainian, US and European officials will hold a series of meetings in Berlin in the coming days.

"Most importantly, I will be meeting with envoys of President Trump, and there will also be meetings with our European partners, with many leaders, concerning the foundation of peace — a political agreement to end the war," Zelenskyy said in an address to the nation late Saturday.

Washington has tried for months to navigate the demands of each side as Trump presses for a swift end to Russia's war and grows increasingly exasperated by delays. The search for possible compromises has run into major obstacles, including control of Ukraine's eastern Donetsk region, which is mostly occupied by Russian forces, and security guarantees for Ukraine.

"The chance is considerable at



this moment, and it matters for our every city, for our every Ukrainian community," Zelenskyy said. "We are working to ensure that peace for Ukraine is dignified, and to secure a guarantee — a guarantee, above all — that Russia will not return to Ukraine for a third invasion." Russian President Vladimir Putin has demanded that Ukraine

withdraw its forces from the part of the Donetsk region still under its control and abandon its bid to join NATO, among the key conditions for peace — demands Kyiv has rejected.

Putin's foreign affairs adviser Yuri Ushakov told the business daily Kommersant that Russian police and national guard troops

would stay in parts of eastern Ukraine's Donbas even if they become a demilitarised zone under a prospective peace plan — a demand likely to be rejected by Ukraine as US-led negotiations drag on.

Ushakov warned that a search for compromise could take a long time, noting that the US proposals

that took into account Russian demands had been "worsened" by alterations proposed by Ukraine and its European allies. "We don't know what changes they are making, but clearly they aren't for the better," Ushakov said, adding: "We will strongly insist on our considerations."

German Chancellor Friedrich Merz, who has spearheaded European efforts to support Ukraine alongside French President Emmanuel Macron and UK Prime Minister Keir Starmer, said Saturday that "the decades of the Pax Americana are largely over for us in Europe and for us in Germany as well."

He warned that Putin's aim is "a fundamental change to the borders in Europe, the restoration of the old Soviet Union within its borders." "If Ukraine falls, he won't stop," Merz warned on Saturday during a party conference in Munich. Putin has denied plans to restore the Soviet Union or attack any European allies.

As peace efforts continued, Russia and Ukraine exchanged another round of aerial attacks.

Ukraine's air force said overnight that Russia launched ballistic missiles and 138 attack drones at Ukraine. In its daily report, the air force said 110 had been intercepted or downed, but missile and drone hits were recorded at six locations. Zelenskyy said Sunday

that hundreds of thousands of families were still without power in the south, east and north-east regions and work was continuing to restore electricity, heat and water to multiple regions following a large-scale attack the previous night. The Ukrainian president said that in the past week, Russia had launched over 1,500 strike drones, nearly 900 guided aerial bombs and 46 missiles of various types at Ukraine.

"Ukraine needs peace on decent terms, and we are ready to work as constructively as possible. These days will be filled with diplomacy. It's very important that it brings results," Zelenskyy said.

Russia's Defence Ministry said that air defences downed 235 Ukrainian drones late Saturday and early Sunday. In the Belgorod region, a drone injured a man and set his house ablaze in the village of Yasnye Zori, regional governor Vyacheslav Gladkov said.

Ukrainian drones struck an oil depot in Uryupinsk in the Volgograd region, triggering a fire, according to the regional governor, Andrei Bocharov.

In the Krasnodar region, the Ukrainian drones attacked the town of Afipsky, where an oil refinery is located. The authorities said that explosions shattered windows in residential buildings, but didn't report any damage to the refinery.

Cambodian rocket fire caused its first civilian death, says Thailand

ASSOCIATED PRESS

Kantharalak (Thailand)

Thailand's Government said a rocket attack from Cambodia on Sunday killed a 63-year-old villager, its first civilian death reported as a direct result of combat over the past week along the border of the two Southeast Asian nations.

Both countries confirmed that large-scale fighting, which was set off by a skirmish on December 7 that wounded two Thai soldiers, continued Sunday. The two sides are battling over long-standing competing claims to patches of frontier land, some of which contain centuries-old temple ruins.

More than two dozen people on both sides of the border have officially been reported killed in the past week's fighting, while more than half a million have been displaced.

Reporters from The Associated Press arrived at the scene of Sunday's rocket impact in Sisaket province's Kantharalak District about 10



A village security volunteer splashing water to control a fire at a house after what a Thai soldier said was a Cambodian artillery strike in the area in Sisaket province, Thailand

minutes after it hit. They witnessed the body of a man totally wrapped in bandages being put on a stretcher that was taken to an ambulance.

A house a couple of hundred metres away was in flames, with village volunteers attempting to put out the fire with buckets of water. A piece of shrapnel believed to be from the same

rocket was embedded nearby in the road.

The victim, identified as Don Patchapan, was killed in the heart of a residential area near a school, according to a Thai Army statement.

Thai Government spokesperson Siripong Angkasakulkiat condemned Cambodia for deliberately firing into civilian areas,

saying that such an action was "cruel and inhumane".

Cambodia has deployed truck-mounted BM-21 rocket launchers with a range of 30-40 km. Each can fire up to 40 rockets at a time but cannot be precisely targeted. They have landed largely in areas from where most people have already been evacuated. Thai authorities say

Cambodia has launched thousands of the rockets on virtually a daily basis.

Thailand, meanwhile, has been carrying out airstrikes with its fighter planes, with Cambodia saying the bombing continued on Sunday. Both sides have employed drones for surveillance and delivering bombs.

The Thai military has acknowledged 15 of its troops have died during the fighting, and estimated Sunday that there have been at least 221 fatalities among Cambodian soldiers.

Cambodia denounced the Thai count of its dead as disinformation but has not yet acknowledged any military casualties. It has said at least 11 civilians have been killed and more than six dozen wounded.

Cambodia Prime Minister Hun Manet delivered a morale-boosting message to his countrymen on Sunday, writing on social media that he is proud to see this nation's strength "in this situation where our country is

facing difficulties due to aggression from neighbouring countries".

The new fighting derailed a ceasefire promoted by US President Donald Trump that ended five days of earlier combat in July. It had been brokered by Malaysia and pushed through by pressure from Trump, who threatened to withhold trade privileges unless Thailand and Cambodia agreed.

It was formalised in more detail in October at a regional meeting in Malaysia that Trump attended.

Trump announced this past Friday that the two countries had agreed at his urging to renew the ceasefire, but Thai Prime Minister Anutin Charnvirakul denied making any commitment and Cambodia announced it was continuing to fight in what it said is self-defense.

A Thai Navy warship in the Gulf of Thailand joined the fighting on Saturday morning, trading fire with guns based in Cambodia's southwestern province of Koh Kong.

UK hikes security near Jewish sites after attack in Australia

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

London

British Prime Minister Keir Starmer condemned the terrorist attack at Bondi Beach in Sydney, Australia, as he confirmed increased vigilance around Jewish sites across the country on Sunday.

The attack in Sydney was earlier described by Australian authorities as a terrorist attack targeted at members of the Jewish community celebrating the holy festival of Hanukkah, or Chanukah, at the time of the shooting. The Metropolitan Police in London issued a statement in solidarity soon after, reiterating plans to bolster security around synagogues. "The news that the Bondi beach attack was an antisemitic terrorist attack against Jewish families at a Chanukah event is sickening," said Starmer.

"My thoughts are with the victims and their families. The United Kingdom will always stand with Australia and the Jewish community. We are actively working with the Community Security Trust (CST) on the policing of Chanukah events," he said.

New South Wales Premier Chris Minns said two individuals fired on a "crowded group of families" at the park in a "cowardly act of terrifying violence". At least 11 fatalities and 29 injuries have been reported from the site of the attack, categorised by Australian officials as a "terrorist incident".

"While the details of the incident continue to emerge, the Australian authorities have now confirmed that the target was a Hanukkah gathering taking place on Bondi Beach," the Met Police said in a statement. We were already working closely with partners, including the Community Security Trust, to provide an increased presence around synagogues and other community venues at this important time.

Jaishankar meets European, UK, Egyptian counterparts in UAE

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Dubai

External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar has met with his counterparts from Europe, the UK and Egypt on the sidelines of a high-level international summit in the United Arab Emirates (UAE), where leaders and policymakers gathered to discuss key geopolitical and security challenges.

In a social media post on Saturday, Jaishankar said "it was great to be" with Luxembourg's Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Xavier Bettel, Poland's Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Radoslaw Sikorski, and Latvia's Foreign Minister Baiba Braze. The minister was in the UAE capital Abu Dhabi to attend the three-day Sir Bani Yas Forum 2025, which



External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar with Belgium Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Maxime Prevot in Dubai

concluded on Sunday.

Jaishankar also met UK Deputy Prime Minister David Lammy on the sidelines of the summit. "Good to see UK DPM @DavidLammy on the sidelines of Sir Bani Yas Forum 2025," he said in another social media post.

In another meeting, the

External Affairs Minister said it was "nice to catch up" with Egypt's Foreign Minister Dr Badr Abdelatty.

Sir Bani Yas Forum is an annual platform that brings together global leaders, ministers and experts to deliberate on regional and international issues.

Anti-immigrant rhetoric across Europe

ASSOCIATED PRESS

London

In the past year, tens of thousands hostile to immigrants marched through London chanting "send them home!" A British lawmaker complained of seeing too many non-white faces on TV. And senior politicians advocated the deportation of longtime UK residents born abroad.

The overt demonisation of immigrants and those with immigrant roots is intensifying in the UK — and across Europe — as migration shoots up the political agenda and right-wing parties gain popularity.

In several European countries, political parties that favour mass deportations and depict immigration as a threat to national identity come at or near the top of opinion polls: Reform UK, the Alliance for Germany and France's National Rally.

IMMIGRATION HAS RISEN DRAMATICALLY OVER THE PAST DECADE IN SOME EUROPEAN COUNTRIES

President Donald Trump, who recently called Somali immigrants in the US "garbage" and whose national security strategy depicts European countries as threatened by immigration, appears to be endorsing and emboldening Europe's coarse, anti-immigrant sentiments. Amid the rising tensions, Europe's mainstream parties are taking a harder line on migration and at times using divisive language about race.

"What were once dismissed as being at the far extreme end of far-right politics has now become a central part of the political debate," said Kieran Connell,

a lecturer in British history at Queen's University Belfast.

Immigration has risen dramatically over the past decade in some European countries, driven in part by millions of asylum-seekers who have come to Europe fleeing conflicts in Africa, the Middle East and Ukraine.

Asylum-seekers account for a small percentage of total immigration, however, and experts say antipathy toward diversity and migration stems from a mix of factors.

Economic stagnation in the years since the 2008 global financial crisis, the rise of charismatic nationalist politicians and the polarizing influence of social media all play a role, experts say. In Britain, there is "a frightening increase in the sense of national division and decline" and that tends to push people toward political extremes, said Bobby Duffy, director of the Policy Unit at

King's College London. It took root after the financial crisis, was reinforced by Britain's debate about Brexit and deepened during the COVID-19 pandemic, Duffy said. Social media has exacerbated the mood, notably on X, whose algorithm promotes divisive content and whose owner, Elon Musk, approvingly retweets far-right posts.

Across Europe, ethnonationalism has been promoted by right-wing parties such as Alliance for Germany, France's National Rally and the Fidesz party of Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán.

Now it appears to have the stamp of approval from the Trump administration, whose new national security strategy depicts Europe as a collection of countries facing "economic decline" and "civilisational erasure" because of immigration and loss of national identities.



Three children killed as drone crashes in Pakistan

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Peshawar

At least three children were killed and another sustained injuries when a quadcopter drone crashed into a residential area in northwest Pakistan, police said. According to initial reports, the incident occurred in the Mumand Khel area, in Bannu district, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, where the drone fell into a populated neighbourhood late Saturday, causing casualties among children. Following the incident, residents immediately launched rescue efforts and shifted the injured child and the bodies of the deceased to a nearby hospital. Rescue and security personnel also rushed to the scene soon after the incident. Hospital authorities confirmed that the injured child is out of danger, while the bodies of the three children have been placed in the hospital morgue.



Bangladesh foreign ministry summons Indian envoy

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Dhaka

Bangladesh's Foreign Ministry on Sunday summoned Indian High Commissioner Pranay Verma to express its "serious concern" over the "incendiary statements" made by deposed prime minister Sheikh Hasina. Hasina fled to India in August last year. She was sentenced to death by a special tribunal last month after being convicted on charges of crimes against humanity. Bangladesh has been demanding her extradition. "The Ministry of Foreign Affairs summoned the Indian High Commissioner today to convey the Government of Bangladesh's serious concern to the Government of India for allowing fugitive Hasina to continue to make incendiary statements calling upon her supporters to engage in terrorist activities in Bangladesh, aiming to thwart the upcoming parliamentary elections," a foreign office statement said.



PIOTECH

SBI aims to double YONO app users to 20 crore



State Bank of India Chairman CS Setty has said that the bank is targeting to double its YONO app user base to 20 crore over the next two years with the launch of a new version on Monday. YONO 2.0 is a significant upgrade, offering a better experience for customers and a robust digital platform for the bank, and full fledged features will be rolled out over 6-8 months, he told PTI in an interview. "From a bank perspective, YONO 2.0 is a key anchor of digitalisation, with a common code for internet banking and mobile banking.

This allows for seamless integration across channels, enabling SBI to launch new products and processes quickly. The bank aims to leverage YONO 2.0 to enhance its digital presence and customer engagement," he said. For example, he said, YONO 2.0 developed a common core for customer journeys, which will ensure a seamless experience across internet banking, mobile banking and branch channels for account opening or any other transaction. (PTI)

Ola electric commences hyperdelivery for its 4,680 Bharat cell powered vehicles



Ola Electric on Sunday said it has commenced same-day registration and delivery of its 4,680 Bharat Cell powered vehicles in Bangalore. This offering is a part of the company's umbrella Hyperservice initiative to deliver a transparent, convenient and customer-first service experience, the Bengaluru-based firm said in a statement. Under Hyperdelivery initiative, customers can now complete their purchase online or at an Ola Electric Store and ride home on their fully registered vehicles on the same day, it added. Earlier this year, the company announced that it has moved its vehicle registration process completely in-house.

"Hyperdelivery adds another layer of ease and convenience for customers who want to purchase our vehicles. When we introduced it earlier this year, we completely changed the way Indians bought their vehicles," a company spokesperson stated. Under its customer-first experience under Hyperservice, the company recently announced the nationwide rollout of its in-app service appointment feature enabling customers across India to seamlessly schedule service for their vehicles. Furthermore, the company also announced the scale up of Hyperservice into an open platform that redefines EV servicing in India. (PTI)

Rubrik drives trusted AI adoption with amazon bedrock



Rubrik (NYSE: RBRK), the Security and AI Operations company, has announced availability of Rubrik Agent Cloud for Amazon Bedrock AgentCore. The new integration will allow Amazon Bedrock AgentCore customers to easily enable monitoring, governance, and remediation for agents across multi-cloud resources and infrastructure. Rubrik Agent Cloud is designed to monitor and audit agentic actions, enforce real-time guardrails for agentic actions and finally, undo agent mistakes. Built on the Rubrik Platform that uniquely combines data, identity and application contexts, Rubrik Agent Cloud will provide customers with security, accuracy and efficiency as they transform with AI. "Amazon Bedrock AgentCore gives developers the flexibility to build and deploy intelligent agents using their choice of AI model or framework," said Devvret Rishi, General Manager of AI at Rubrik. "With Rubrik Agent Cloud, organisations will have a single plane of glass for the complete AI agent lifecycle, one that enables customers to see every agent in action, enforce policies in real-time, and instantly rewind mistakes before they become catastrophic errors." Today's agents help increase productivity, however if not properly governed, they are also capable of taking real-world, destructive actions on behalf of users, often without centralised oversight.

In fact, research shows that 72 per cent of leaders have reported an increase in cyber risks, nearly half (47 per cent) of which are linked to the growing capabilities of generative AI-driven attacks. Now more than ever, organisations urgently need a control layer within their cyber strategies. With Rubrik Agent Cloud, Amazon Bedrock AgentCore helps security and IT teams automate complex tasks while keeping pace with a new, rapidly expanding attack surface.

The India paradox: AI anxiety rises even as energy jobs surge

Why the world's electricity boom shows India's problem isn't job loss — but the race to train enough workers



NISHANT SAHDEV

Niels Bohr, the Nobel laureate in Physics and father of the atomic model, once remarked, "Prediction is very difficult, especially if it's about the future." Few lines capture our era better. Artificial intelligence has become a global amplifier of hopes and anxieties, yet the loudest anxiety — that AI will take away jobs — continues to grow despite evidence pointing in the opposite direction. The fear is simple, dramatic, easy to repeat.

India sits at the centre of this contradiction. Public debate warns of AI-driven unemployment, but India's energy economy — especially electricity — has been adding jobs at one of the fastest rates in the world. The new World Energy Employment 2025 report by the International Energy Agency (IEA) paints a picture sharply at odds with popular fears.

The global energy workforce has expanded to 76 million people, growing 2.2 per cent in 2024 — almost twice the rate of global employment. Since 2019, more than 5 million energy jobs have been created, even as AI adoption has accelerated. Electricity is now the single largest employer in the global energy system, outpacing oil, gas and coal. And India is among the countries seeing the steepest rise. AI anxiety is rising, but so is the demand for skilled work. Something in our narrative is wrong.

India's reality check: The world is hiring, not replacing

The belief that AI will steal jobs persists because it offers a tidy storyline: machines advance, humans exit. But the electricity sector — arguably the backbone of the modern world — offers a counterexample too large to ignore. Since 2019, electricity has become the fastest-growing source of energy employment. Solar alone employs more people than any energy technology in history.

Transmission lines, grid expansion, battery installations, nuclear maintenance and renewable manufacturing have created millions of jobs across emerging and advanced economies. For India, this shift is happening at accelerated speed.



India recorded nearly 6 per cent growth in energy employment in 2024 — among the highest globally — driven by rapid renewable additions, urbanisation and rising electricity consumption. Solar parks in Rajasthan and Gujarat, new transmission corridors across central India, the spread of EV charging networks and the rise of battery gigafactories are all labour-intensive undertakings.

And none of these jobs can be automated away. Automating a call centre is one thing; automating the installation of a 400-kilovolt transmission line is quite another.

No robot climbs a 60-metre tower in monsoon winds. No algorithm swaps a failed transformer at midnight. No predictive model walks into a solar field under 45°C heat to realign panel arrays.

Electricity systems are physical and improvisational. They demand judgement under uncertainty, risk-taking and hands-on skill. AI can guide decisions, but it cannot hold a spanner or secure a safety harness. This is why electricity-related employment has grown in nearly every region and why mass AI-driven unemployment does not match the empirical record.

AI is modifying work, not removing it

Across the electricity sector, a clear pattern emerges: AI multiplies human work by making systems larger, safer and more efficient.

Sensors in power plants, turbines and substations generate continuous data. AI analyses this data to predict failures, but prediction is not repair. Humans still diagnose issues, replace components and restore service. AI simply makes their work timelier and more effective. AI-enhanced grid



analytics forecast demand spikes, detect faults and improve load management. But crews still rebalance flows, upgrade infrastructure and respond on the ground. AI speeds up permitting and compliance as well, helping projects break ground sooner — leading not to fewer jobs but to more physical work being done faster.

Training is changing too. Virtual reality tools now prepare linemen, nuclear operators and maintenance crews for hazardous tasks. Learning becomes faster and safer, but real work still happens in the field.

The economic truth is straightforward: when efficiency rises, sectors expand. And when sectors expand, demand for human labour increases. Predictive tools reduce breakdowns, so companies deploy more infrastructure and need more tech-

nicians. Better grids enable more renewable integration, creating manufacturing and installation jobs.

Faster permits accelerate project timelines, requiring more workers in shorter cycles.

The IEA dataset shows no evidence that AI has reduced electricity-sector jobs. What it does show is a global labour shortage: too few electricians, too few solar installers, too few grid technicians and too few engineers who understand both electrical systems and data analytics.

India's crucial choice: Fix the skill mismatch or fall behind

India's energy transition is among the most ambitious in the world. With over 500 GW of installed power capacity — more than half from non-fossil sources — the country is expanding at historic speed. Every new gigawatt requires design teams, manufacturing workers, construction crews, inspectors and engineers. India's challenge is not a shortage of work, but a shortage of workers trained to do it.

The IEA report is blunt: India's grid is becoming more digital, yet the workforce is not scaling at the same pace. Predictive maintenance tools require technicians who can interpret diagnostic dashboards. AI-assisted control rooms need engineers fluent in circuits and code. Solar and wind additions require installation teams skilled

in safety standards, electrical systems and digital monitoring. This skill mismatch threatens to slow down the very transition powering India's growth.

Coal-dependent regions highlight both risk and opportunity. As India shifts toward cleaner energy, technicians, machinists, fitters and operators can move into new roles — if supported with structured reskilling. This demands new curricula, regional training hubs and stronger vocational systems.

AI will not replace India's workers. But it will replace India's untrained workers. The future belongs to technicians who can read both wiring diagrams and data dashboards, to engineers who understand turbines and algorithms and to operators who manage electrical parameters alongside predictive models.

Seizing this future requires transforming ITIs and polytechnics into hybrid digital-energy institutes, creating national certifications for solar, storage, grid and EV roles, embedding AI tools in vocational programs, building training hubs in coal-transition districts and elevating energy apprenticeships to mainstream aspiration.

A final reckoning: The myth and the moment

AI has been cast as the thief at the door. But the electricity sector — one of the most physical and rapidly expanding industries in the world — shows a different truth. AI is not shrinking work; AI is expanding the universe of what humans can build.

Energy transitions are labour-intensive. Infrastructure is labour-intensive. India's growth story is labour-intensive. The only scarce resource is skill.

Countries that embrace AI as a force multiplier — not a job destroyer — will build faster and grow stronger. Those that cling to fear will misread the era entirely.

India stands at a decisive moment. The myth of job-stealing AI has had a long run. The evidence is louder now: work is not vanishing; work is evolving. And nations that prepare their workers for this evolution will shape the next century.

Author is a theoretical physicist at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and the author of the forthcoming book Last Equation Before Silence

New technologies chugs Indian railways



SHITANSHU SHEKHAR SHUKLA

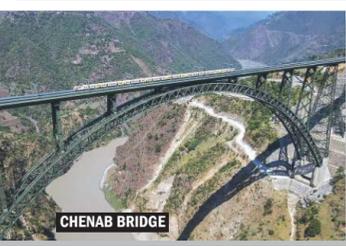
The Indian Railways is in a reset mode, for a change. The train has chugged up the hill in Kashmir and Mizoram. The sight of a rail winding through the mountains and the terrains overwhelmed the residents in Kashmir and Mizoram (Bairabi-Sairang railway line) held back in growing alienation by history and geography for ages. Their inclusion into ever expanding ambit of Indian transport is a step stone to prosperity. The promise of the incredible North East or even Kashmir had long been buried deep into status quo.

The three capitals of the Northeast, Guwahati, Agartala and Itanagar, are already connected to the national rail network. The Shokhuvi-Molvom section in Nagaland was completed in March 2025, with further sections to Kohima (Zubza) under construction and expected to open by 2026-2029. The Murkongselek — Sille stretch in Arunachal Pradesh is to open in a couple of months, if not earlier, with the Sille-Pasighat section following in February 2026.

Assam saw new Amrit Bharat trains and new railway links approved, boosting connectivity and economic prospects. The Indian Railways has also illuminated several areas of darkness like Palamu, Jharkhand, the only state in the country where the operation of Rajdhani Express was limited and irregular.

Connecting Kashmir to Kanyakumari, completion of Udhampur-Srinagar-Baramulla Rail Link (USBRL) included the construction of the Chenab Bridge, the world's highest railway bridge, and the Anji Bridge, India's first rail cable bridge. The New Pamban Bridge, India's first vertical lift sea bridge, replaced the 105-year-old Pamban Bridge. The inauguration left many gasping with awe and admiration across the world, given the audacity of the magnitude defying the geography and the technology. The inspiration is drawn from the leadership up the order.

Union Minister of Railways, Ashwini Vaishnaw is often sitting with the driver running down a test drive fraught with the risks of an inaugural drive. The Minister is neither bound by a rule nor required by a custom to tread an un-trodden path. Needless to say, the message is quietly communicat-



ed to keep moving without fear. Even in the aftermath of the railway accidents, the Minister himself remains present at the site of the accident like a common passenger or victim, sitting on the tracks or on the culvert even at night to inspect. Of course, the criticisms keep flying thick and fast. The opposition and the doomsayers are always far removed, and for a purpose as well. The distance lends enchantment too.

But if it was so easy, why could the previous ministers worthy of salt not set such an example? After all, it is neither an obligation under any rule nor a requirement. However, a new start is not a hostage to the past for a person possessed with a mission. The relief and distribution work in the aftermath of an accident is best completed in an overdrive. Minister's presence ensures the precious time is not lost to save a victim from the clutches of red tape always ready with salt to injury of the victims already reeling under the misfortune. Even small act of gratitude is beautiful, leave alone the huge leaps. Playing Chhath songs and music on loudspeakers at

stations and in the trains ferrying the devout passengers in Bihar was another unforgettable pleasant surprise to all the passengers that has never happened before and may never happen in the future. But resonating so small but inner chords deep in the hearts of passengers is a memory that will be cherished for the rest of their lives. Railways also successfully made up for the previous mismanagements with a heart and compassion.

Treating our passengers as a part of its own, this compassion for their well-being adds a touch of sweetness to help overcome the obvious discomforts of a difficult journey, the horrific crowds and the stretched system during Chhath. This is a reflection of the fundamental change taking place within Indian Railways.

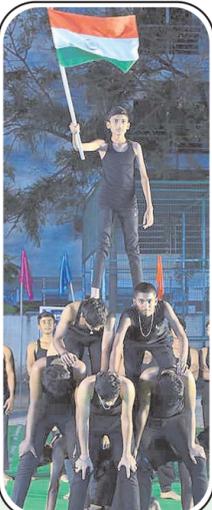
That's not to say everything is perfect and there's nothing left for an improvement. There's still a lot to correct. But the wheels are turning, the engine is roaring strong, and most importantly, the priorities are clear and right. The statistics below bear a testimony to the wheels of the Railways chugging into

unchartered territories. Renewable energy capacity reached 2,014 MW, with 375 MW solar and 103 MW wind energy commissioned in 2024-25. Production milestones included 700 locomotives by CLW and 477 by BLW, setting new annual records. Coach production also saw a 9 per cent growth, with 7,134 coaches manufactured. Track renewal reached 6,450 km, turnout renewals 8,550, and 6,200 km of rails were renewed, with speed upgrades on 2,000 km to 130 kmph and 7,200 km to 110 kmph. Freight loading reached 1,473 million tonnes (MT), showing a 3.86 per cent growth, supported by Dedicated Freight Corridors (DFCs) which facilitated over 72,000 train runs. Average speed of goods trains improved by 18.1 per cent, from 13.40 to 15.82 kmph and mail/express punctuality stood at 93.78 per cent for the year. A record 136 Vande Bharat trains were introduced, with the launch of the first Namoo Bharat Rapid Rail. Vande Bharat now operates on over 40 routes nationwide. The Amrit Bharat Station Scheme saw work start on 1,198 stations out of 1,337 targeted, modernising station infrastructure. Over 10,000 locomotives were equipped with Kavach, the indigenous train protection system, enhancing safety. Indian Railways electrified a record 2,188 km of railway lines,

averaging 14.5 km per day, surpassing previous years and advancing the goal of 100 per cent electrification. The Amrit Bharat Station redevelopment scheme is modernising stations across the country, improving amenities and accessibility. Indian Railways has prioritised digital transformation, renewable energy adoption, and eco-friendly practices to ensure a sustainable future. These developments collectively demonstrate a clear upward trend in Indian Railways' operational efficiency, safety and passenger experience over the last five years. Over 23,000 track kilometers have been upgraded to support speeds up to 130 kmph, and 54,337 km upgraded for 110 kmph, enhancing both passenger and freight transit efficiency. Electrification of broad-gauge tracks has advanced rapidly, with 6,577 route kilometers electrified in 2023 alone. Modernisation efforts include the introduction of LHB coaches, onboard Wi-Fi at over 9,000 stations, smart ticketing and enhanced safety technologies.

Author is a senior journalist and political communications expert





SPS High School, Kompally, celebrated its Silver Jubilee at Annual Day "SANKALP 2025", transforming the campus into a vibrant arena of sportsmanship, discipline, and youthful enthusiasm. The event highlighted the institution's commitment to fostering holistic development among students. The celebrations began with an impressive march-past by the four houses, followed by the ceremonial lighting of the lamp. The SPS High School headed by Dr. Sailesh Sampathy (Vice President & Dy. Chief Executive), Deepika (Associate Vice President), and Y. Sarada (Head Mistress) graced the occasion. They addressed the gathering and applauded the school's dedication to nurturing young minds.



AIS Clinic new Homeopathy Clinic inauguration by Justice B. Sudershan Reddy, Retired Chief Justice, Jayesh Ranjan, IAS, Special Chief Secretary to the Government of Telangana and CEO of the Industries & Investment Cell, SPEED and YAT & C (Sports) Department, at Road No. 12, Banjara Hills, Hyderabad, strengthening its commitment to holistic, patient-focused healthcare rooted in time-tested medical systems. Homeopathy is a recognised system of medicine in India, practised for over two centuries, and is based on the principle of stimulating the body's natural healing response through individualized treatment.

The inaugural season of the Hyderabad Pickleball League (HPL) came to a spectacular end as Credicon Mavericks were crowned as champions following a gripping finale against All Stars at The League, Financial District. The championship match delivered edge-of-the-seat action, entering a decisive tie-

breaker seventh set where the Mavericks sealed a dramatic 4-3 victory, etching their name as the first-ever title winners in HPL history. Success of the Yashwanth Biyyala, Co Founder Centre Court Sport & Entertainment and the Hyderabad Pickleball League said, the Hyderabad Pickleball League Season 1 has set a strong benchmark for the future of pickleball in the city and beyond.



India's leading education group, Podar Education Network, has announced the launch of its newest Podar Prep centre in Kokapet, Hyderabad. The new centre brings a refreshed approach to early childhood education, inspired by NEP 2020 and complemented by insights from EYFS (UK) and EYLF (Australia), led by renowned early childhood expert Dr. Swati Popat Vats, President of Podar Education Network and the Early Childhood Association. Dr. Vats provided easy, actionable strategies to help families set healthy screen boundaries. Podar Prep is the premium preschool brand of the Podar Education Network, a trusted name with over 95 years of educational excellence.



Srinivasarao, Alok Pandey, Ajit Sabnis and Nagarajani

The Sri Aurobindo Society, Telangana State Centre, organised its one-day annual Telugu States Conference at The Plaza, Begumpet, Hyderabad, to create wider awareness on the relevance of spirituality in today's rapidly changing world. The conference draws inspiration from the vision of Sri Aurobindo and The Mother, who envisioned spirituality as a lived reality rather than a belief system. Addressing the Media, Dr. Alok Pandey (fondly known as Alok Dal), MD Psychiatry, said, "Spirituality has to be the foundation of our living. It is the only fool-proof guidance for navigating life. The event offered a meaningful opportunity for the public to connect with the Sri Aurobindo Society's work and to explore spirituality as the basis for a harmonious, purposeful, and fulfilled life.



Srivalli and Harshita



Excellencia Schools & Junior Colleges, in association with The Quantum International School, is organizing Education Conclave 2025 with the theme "Building Skills for Tomorrow's World". Dr. Jaya Prakash Narayan, Former IAS, D. Chakrapani, IAS (Retd.), Dr. Raghavendra Hunasgi, Global CEO and technologist, Thirumala Arohi Mamunooru, Chief Learning Officer, Prof. Satya Kiran Sastry, International leadership coach, are seen.



Pallavi International School, Gandipet Celebrates Annual Day with the Theme the Foundation Years and Primary Years (PY) with great enthusiasm and cultural splendor at the Gandipet school campus. Pallavi Group of Institutions, Dr. T. Sudha, Executive Director of DPS & Pallavi Group of Schools, and Hema Madhubushi, Principal, Pallavi International School, Gandipet. The Chief Guest for the FY session Uma Devi G., Janardhan Reddy, IAS,



Swastik Gupta Student of IHMH, dressed as Santa Claus & Ms. Srija Paul Student of IHMH dressed as Angel, Sanjay Thakur, Principal, IHMH, Chef Ramesh Yadav, Executive Chef, Hotel Abode, Rajesh, Lecturer, IHMH, Dristi, Asst. College Manager, IHMH, at the Christmas lunch Celebration hosted by Institute of Hotel Management Hyderabad (IHMH), at its campus in DD Colony.

FUN

ARCHIE



CALVIN AND HOBBS



GARFIELD



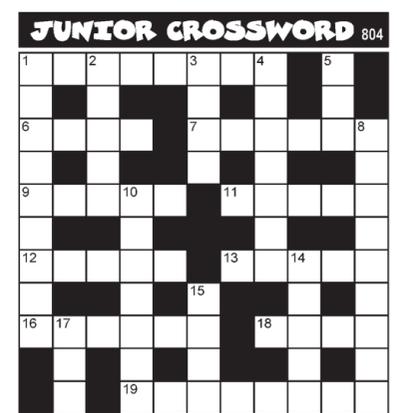
REALITY CHECK



SPEED BUMP



CROSSWORD



NANCY



SUDOKU

7	3	1		8				
		4						
9	6	2		8				
	7	9						1
		5	3	1	2			
3					6	9		
			2			4	3	5
				6				
	3			5		8		9

Yesterday's solution

1	2	6	8	4	7	9	3	5
7	4	5	2	3	9	8	1	6
3	9	8	6	5	1	7	4	2
6	3	4	5	1	8	2	9	7
8	1	7	9	2	6	4	5	3
2	5	9	3	7	4	6	8	1
9	7	1	4	6	3	5	2	8
5	8	3	7	9	2	1	6	4
4	6	2	1	8	5	3	7	9

ACROSS

- Illnesses
- A tool you eat with
- The most destructive type of exploding bomb
- The River Nile flows through this country
- Not as many
- Sooner than expected
- The opposite of fresh
- A keyboard worker
- A clenched hand
- Someone who grows plants
- Glide over snow with long things on your feet
- A worker in wood
- Tugging
- A visitor from another planet
- Mix up with a spoon
- A word of agreement

SOLUTION 803

K	J	S	F	R
I	N	C	O	M
B	I	O	R	M
E	A	T	E	N
H	X	P	C	I
E	L	E	C	T
A	E	Y	U	D
D	O	L	L	A
I	A	A	L	I
N	E	W	S	P
G	S	S	L	

DOWN

- Not the same
- An apology word
- The mark of an old injury
- Opposite of quickest

GINGER MEGGS



DIFFICULTY RATING: ★★☆☆☆



A leading business newspaper did an interesting calculation. It stated that foreign institutional investors sold equities worth more than ₹2.23 lakh crore in the secondary market in this calendar year (January 1-December 14). This worked out to a net selling of ₹900 crore a day based on the number of days the stock exchanges were open. In other words, it translated into sales of just over ₹150 crore an hour based on the number of hours they were open. Such a pace, added the newspaper, had never been witnessed before, ever since foreign investors were allowed to directly invest in Indian equities. There were days, weeks, and months when hectic selling took place. But it was never so sustained, regular, consistent, and continuous over nearly 12 months. During this year, there were moments, and short periods of net inflows. The overall trend was outwards.

However, the broader indices remained relatively stable despite periods of high volatility, and regular uncertainties. The net outflows by the foreigners were more than matched by the domestic inflows, especially by retail investors largely through mutual funds, which invariably invested in the secondary market. The small investors pumped in huge sums in IPOs (Initial Public Offerings) through the year, and especially in the past 2-3 months. Listing gains in the IPOs were common, and some shares were listed 50-60 per cent higher than the offer prices. For example, while foreigners sold ₹16,000 crore worth of equities in this month, the domestic investors bought shares worth ₹40,000 crore, or two-and-a-half times the former figure. Experts contend that domestic inflows have consistently been ₹30,000 crore a month for the past three months. One of them dubs the pattern as foreigners versus domestic "tug of war."

What does this mean? Are the foreigners smarter, or know something about the Indian equities that the local investors do not? Or is it that the domestic investors have more faith and trust in equities? As far as the foreigners are concerned, they are driven by three factors. One, they regularly book profits, and invariably have target sale prices in mind. The moment they achieve it, they vamoose. While the larger institutions invest for a longer period, others like hedge funds, which are more driven by quarterly returns, buy-and-dump regularly. When the sale decisions of the two converge, there is madness in the markets, and the herd mentality takes over. Two, the foreigners are dictated by safety. Whenever they see threats, or feel that the safer US market offers decent returns, money flies away from the emerging markets like India. Three, the foreigners take macro and fundamental data seriously. Any instability, and they are gone, even if they return quite fast, and within weeks or months.

In the case of the Indian retail investors, they are generally the last ones to join the equity party. They wait until stock prices are already high, and then jump in because either they see their friends, relatives, and neighbours making money, or they are gripped by FOMO, and do not wish to lose out on the opportunities. Although many of them burnt their hands, and legs, during the pandemic bust, the Indian indices have gone up by more than three times since then. Thus, the small investors have seen massive returns accrue to those who stayed invested, and had the patience. Now that the stocks are rising across the large-caps, midcaps, and small-caps spectrum, the retail investors feel that the party will go on. During the past few years, they have come to believe that mutual funds are the safest, and the least risky instruments, which offer substantial returns on the upside. They have thronged to the markets like never before.

One needs to examine two more factors that are likely to play out in the future. The first is that the foreigners will return, as they have in the past, as soon as there is good news on the Indian economic horizon. This can be in the form of the India-US trade deal that may be inked within weeks or a few months. It will ensure that the current 50 per cent tariffs will come down, even as India will need to open its market for American imports. This will change the growth trajectory immediately, and positively impact the trade deficit. It will aid private investments even as the Government feels compelled to ease public investments to manage the fiscal deficit. External factors like an end to the Russia-Ukraine war, and the easing of the western sanctions on Russia will help India, which is being forced to limit crude oil imports from Russia. Oil prices are likely to come down.

On the domestic investors' front, there are a few under-the-radar changes. Despite the overall inflows, the retail investors have begun to sell in the secondary market, and invest in IPOs, where they see better returns. This means that the mindset may change in 2026, and there may be less inflows through mutual funds in percentage terms, even if the overall inflows remain positive. If the stock indices go up, or if the prices of certain stocks go up, even the domestic investors, who possibly entered late, will begin to book profits. This will put pressure on overall inflows. One will need to watch these two sub-trends to determine whether they converge or diverge.

Open graveyards in open skies

Over the past few decades, most successful airlines crashed

There are probably tens of thousands of furious flyers, who want the CEO of IndiGo Airline, Peiter Elbers, to go. There may be a few hundred, who desire that he is arrested for the way the airline treated thousands of passengers over the past two weeks, as thousands of flights were either delayed or cancelled. But even the worst critics of IndiGo will not like Elbers to suffer the fate of another CEO of a past, and similarly successful, private airline.

Three decades ago, to be precise, in 1995, Thakiyuddin Abdul Wahid left for his office in the western suburbs of Mumbai. He had received several threats from the city's underworld, even as the leadership of the most dreaded gang had shifted lock, stock, and barrel to the United Arab Emirates. But Wahid, who had launched the East-West Airlines, which was the country's first private sector airline, and doing reasonably well, seemed unfazed. He should have heeded to the warnings, as on his way to the office, he was shot dead.

The police stated that the shooters possibly belonged to one of the gangs that operated in the city. With the brutal and public killing came the hastened end of East-West Airlines which, like Wahid, died an unsung death. Started in 1993, the airline was history by 1996. Interestingly, in 1993, Naresh Goyal promoted Jet Airways, which later emerged as the most successful airline in India. More than two decades later, Jet crashed, was declared bankrupt, and sold off to a new buyer as part of the insolvency exercise.

Goyal, who worked for years in the travel agency business, started his career in East-West. Back in the early 1990s, Jet and East-West were rivals. With the demise of the latter, Jet became an even stronger player in the domestic market. There is more of history, when one talks about the travails and troubles of the Indian aviation

industry, and its private and state-owned players. These remind us of the situation that IndiGo finds itself in today.

In 1995, the Tata Group tied up with Singapore Airlines, one of the best-known, and arguably one of the best airlines in the world, to launch a domestic airline to ply on both local and international routes. Incidentally, the Tata Group was the promoter of India's national carrier, Air India, which was later taken over by the Government, merged with the state-owned Indian Airlines, and then privatised and sold to the same group. There were speculations and allegations, though unproven, that Jet was responsible for the non-take-off of the Tata-Singapore Airlines venture.

So successful was the lobbying by Jet in preventing the entry that there was a time when the then chairman of Tata Group, the late Ratan Tata angrily spoke about vested interests that were damaging the Indian aviation sector by blocking worthwhile investments from gold-plated firms like Singapore Airlines. In any case, the Tatas had to wait for more than two decades before it could enter the Indian airwaves with its proposed venture with Singapore Airlines. Vistara was launched in 2016, and the Tatas later took over Air India.

There are several other examples of major engine failures in the aviation sector. Most of us may not remember a relatively-unknown NEPC Airlines, which belonged to NEPC Group that specialised in non-renewable energy. The background of the promoters, and the source of the finances were questionable, and the airline died a quiet death a few years after it launched the operations. Around the same time, there was the famous or notorious Subrata Roy of the Sahara Group, who decided to jump into the cockpit.

Sahara Airways, in retrospect, seemed more like a pomp-and-show business aimed to satisfy the late Roy, rather than a serious effort.

As the passenger and freight market grew, Captain Gopinath launched Air Deccan, possibly the first low-cost airline in the country. Since the launch in 2003, it proved to be a major success as it offered flight tickets at amazingly affordable prices. IndiGo entered the fray as another low-cost operation in 2006. There were two promoters. Rahul Bhatia was associated with the travel agency business, and Rakesh Gangwal, who lived in the US, was a known expert in the aviation sector. Of course, not to be outdone, the flamboyant Vijay Mallya launched Kingfisher Airline.

Giving this short, and summarised history of private aviation in India is not to recap past events. It is to pinpoint a major highlight, trend, and pattern. In most cases, possibly in every case, the most successful private player at any given point in time, or the upcoming ones that dreamed of flying high, either crashed, or were sold off. We know about Jet and East-West, as well as NEPC. Jet took over Sahara, and Kingfisher gobbled Air Deccan. Later, Kingfisher went out of business, and took down Mallya, and his spirits with it.

IndiGo may survive the current problems, and controversies, but its credibility has taken a huge hit. Till date, Captain Gopinath accuses that the promoters of IndiGo sabotaged Air Deccan by mishandling the latter's backend Internet-based operations. When Kingfisher hit air pockets, it died a messy death in 2012 with thousands of non-refunded canceled tickets, hundreds of employees who found themselves out of jobs, and without salaries for months. Mallya left India in 2016, and remains a fugitive in the UK.

Questions were repeatedly raised about the finances behind many successful airlines. East-West's Wahid was believed, rightly or wrongly, to have links with the underworld. Jet's money initially came through the Isle of Man, which is known for banking secrecy laws. Mallya was accused of siphoning off banks' money from his ventures. Jet's Goyal, once celebrated as the hero of Indian aviation, was arrested by the Enforcement Directorate for money laundering, and possible bank fraud at an old age. It was a sight to watch the pitiable condition of Goyal pleading for bail.

Months before the IndiGo debacle, Gangwal, the co-founder who fought with his previous partner, and exited the airline, sold a huge portion of his and family's existing stake. Although this is in the realm of speculation, one can question whether Gangwal knew what was about to happen. To be fair, he had charged that the airline was being mismanaged, and could go down under any time. This was the reason for his tussle with Bhatia. But finances, arrogance, overconfidence, and hubris are only some of the factors why private and state-owned players fail to remain in the air for too long.

The author has worked for leading media houses, authored two books, and is now Executive Director, C Voter Foundation

OUR TAKE



Sutanu Guru Author, Journalist and Academician



A Contrarian Investor

57 months of equity inflows

Since 2021, investors thronged to invest in equity mutual funds

At the end of November 2025, the mutual funds industry's asset under management (AUM) crossed ₹80 lakh crore. This marked positive inflows into equity mutual funds for 57 months since March 2021, when the monthly inflow was just over ₹9,000 crore, and the AUM stood at just over ₹30 lakh crore. However, trends indicate that investors across equity, hybrid, and alternative mutual funds categories have continued to show strong confidence in professionally-managed portfolios, which reflect both the market performances, and rising retail participation.

Today, small investors are increasingly integrating mutual funds into their long-term financial plans, favoring goal-oriented, transparent, and disciplined portfolios. The mutual fund ecosystem continues to flourish through diversified strategies, and customised solutions, cementing its role as a cornerstone of sustainable and long-term wealth creation. "AMFI's (Association for Mutual Funds in India) data for November shows strong... flows once again, and that strength is clearly feeding into equity market sentiment. This comes after almost a year of mostly sideways and dull markets."

Between 2021 (in fact, since the middle of the pandemic year, 2020), and late-2024, the Indian equities, and equity indices have zoomed. They reached all-time highs in September 2024, after which navigating shares has become tough. As foreigners began to withdraw money, and turn net sellers in this calendar year, the indices and stocks became volatile, and the growth faltered. But the encouraging, and possibly surprising, part is that the inflows through SIPs (Systematic Investment Plans) by domestic retail investors continue to grow, and are now just shy of Rs 30,000 crore every month," says Santosh Joseph, CEO, Germinate Investor Services.

In November 2025, according to AMFI's data, mutual funds recorded net equity inflows of nearly ₹30,000 crore, which pushed the AUM to more than ₹80 lakh crore, with robust growth across large-cap, mid-cap, and small-cap funds. According to Sanjay Agarwal, Senior Director, CareEdge Ratings, despite the macroeconomic uncertainties, equity inflows remained positive for more than four-and-a-half years, witnessing massive net inflows in November 2025. More importantly, the equity categories registered inflows for the month, apart from the dividend yield funds, and ELSS funds.

A few interesting shifts are happening within the categories. Thematic funds, which dominated for most of 2024, began to cool off in the second half of 2024-25.



"Sectoral/Thematic gross sales softened only because October was boosted by NFO-driven one-offs. The overall trend for November reflects a stabilising risk appetite, and stronger, broad-based net inflows across core equity categories," says Akhil Chaturvedi, Executive Director and Chief Business Officer, Motilal Oswal Asset Management Company.

"Flexi-cap funds, which were less favoured earlier, are seeing renewed traction as investors rotate back into broader, more flexible equity strategies. Another steady trend is the rise in gold and silver funds, which are seeing consistent monthly inflows. The ETF and FoF structures there are clearly finding more acceptance," explains Joseph. Over the past three months, between September and November 2025, the overall AUM rose from ₹78-79 lakh crore to nearly ₹81 lakh crore. Most of the incremental money and inflows came into equity, hybrid, and passive strategies, even as the inflows in debt funds turned choppy, and diverged from month to month.

"What stands out is that the small cap, sector/thematic, and flexi-cap funds continue to see rising folios alongside healthy NFO mobilisation in small cap, thematic, multi-asset, and passive offerings, signalling that retail investors are steadily embracing more diversified, higher beta, and solution-oriented mutual fund

portfolios to play the India's growth story," says Robin Arya, Small-case Manager, Founder & CEO, Goalfi. During November 2025, 24 open-ended NFOs were floated, with sectoral/thematic funds accounting for 63 per cent of the share. Two dozen schemes were launched during the month, raising a total of ₹3,126 crore.

Gold ETFs continue to witness healthy investor interest in November 2025, recording net inflows of ₹3,741 crore, extending their streak of positive flows for the seventh consecutive month. "Although moderating from the unusually strong surge seen in September and October (this year), the latest figure still reflects sustained demand for gold-backed products in a market environment marked by elevated macro uncertainty and intermittent risk-off sentiment," says Nehal Meshram, Senior Analyst, Morningstar Investment Research India. After a sustained surge, global gold prices softened slightly during the month as the US dollar strengthened. Despite this trend, the domestic investors maintained their allocations to gold ETFs, underscoring their growing role as a strategic asset for wealth preservation, hedge effectiveness, and portfolio diversification.

Debt mutual fund categories witnessed outflows, barring the ultra-short duration funds,

low duration funds, money market funds, short duration funds, corporate bond funds, and floater funds. "There was a marginal net outflow in the debt category overall, but the AUM of the category remained steady at ₹19.36 lakh crore for the month of November 2025, owing to MTM gains," says Agarwal. India's passive investing landscape continues to be strong, with AUM for passive funds increasing from ₹13.72 lakh crore in November 2025. This reflects momentum, and a broader behavioural shift that has seen passive assets grow more than eight times since March 2020.

"The surge is driven by the structural evolution of the Indian markets. Greater financial penetration, and widespread real-time access to information have enhanced market efficiency, encouraging investors to embrace transparent, low-cost products that deliver index-linked outcomes. Supported by the seamless digital access, and a progressive regulatory environment, passive investing is rapidly emerging as a preferred choice in India's asset management ecosystem," says Hemen Bhatia, Executive Director & CEO, Angel One. The investors have become smarter and sharper.

Overall, even though 2025 was a difficult year, and the markets slowed down for most of the past 11 months, mutual funds remained the preferred investment option. "Investors are staying committed through SIPs, equity flows remain healthy despite volatility, and interest in gold and silver continues to climb. The resilience in flows is the strongest signal that the retail participation, and long-term investing habits are only getting stronger," says Joseph. This is contrary to the behaviour of the foreign investors, who remained net sellers during the year. It seems like a war is on between the two sections.

As the accompanying article (Sidebar) on this page highlights, the divergence in the investing mindset can be explained through several factors. In the future, foreigners may emerge as net buyers, and domestic retail investors may turn part-sellers to book profits. Thus, 2026 will be an interesting year for Indian equities, even as some brokerage houses predict the beginning of another bull run. However, the battles between foreigners and Indians may decide the outcomes.

BRIEFLY

REAL SOCIEDAD FIRES COACH SERGIO FRANCISCO



Real Sociedad fired coach Sergio Francisco on Sunday, two days after the club's third straight loss in the Spanish league. Sociedad lost 2-1 to struggling Girona on Friday in a home match it led through 75 minutes. It had also lost at Alaves and against Villarreal in its league games. Girona hadn't won in four consecutive matches in all competitions, being eliminated by third-division club Ourense in the second round of the Copa del Rey earlier this month. Francisco leaves Sociedad in 15th place with 16 points from 16 matches, one point clear of the relegation zone. The 46-year-old Francisco had taken over the helm from long-time Sociedad coach Imanol Alguacil in April. Sociedad has yet to announce Francisco's replacement. Its next match is at Eldense in the Copa del Rey on Tuesday.

TEENAGER BARTESAGHI SCORES TWICE BUT MILAN HELD TO DRAW



Teenage defender Davide Bartesaghi scored his first senior goals but couldn't prevent AC Milan from being held to a 2-2 draw at home to Sassuolo in Serie A on Sunday. The result left Milan just a point ahead of Napoli, which was playing at Udinese later. Inter Milan can also move above its city rival if it wins at Genoa later. Sassuolo had only won one of its past three matches but it took the lead at San Siro in the 13th minute. The visitors won the ball back from a Milan defensive throw-in and Andrea Pinamonti laid it off for the onrushing Ismaël Koné, who forced his way into the area before lifting it over Mike Maignan.

Odisha Masters: Unnati Hooda, Kiran George clinch singles titles

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ Cuttack

Top seed Unnati Hooda and Kiran George delivered commanding performances to clinch the women's and men's singles titles respectively in the Odisha Masters Super 100 tournament on Sunday.

Hooda was a picture of composure as she defeated compatriot Isharani Baruah 21-17, 21-10 in just over half an hour.

The 18-year-old controlled the rallies from the outset, denying Baruah the momentum that had powered her impressive run in the BWF World Tour event.

Despite the loss, Baruah capped a memorable week with a well-earned silver medal after a series of standout performances at the Jawaharlal Nehru Stadium.

The men's singles final witnessed a gripping contest with second seed George prevailing over Indonesia's Muhammad Yusuf 21-14, 13-21, 21-16 in a hard-fought battle



that lasted 65 minutes.

George took the opening game before Yusuf fought back to level the match. Showing resilience and tactical clarity, George closed out the decider to secure the title. Indonesia enjoyed success in the mixed

doubles, where Marwan Faza and Aisyah Pranata defeated compatriots Dejan Ferdinansyah and Bernadine Wardana 21-15, 21-10.

In women's doubles, Bulgaria's top seeds Gabriela and Stefani Stoeva overcame

Malaysia's Ong Xin Yee and Carmen Ting 21-19, 21-14.

The men's doubles crown went to Indonesia's Ali Faathir Rayhan and Devin Artha Wahyudi, who rallied past Malaysia's Khang Khai Xing and Aaron Tai 15-21, 21-12, 21-16.

Coughlin, Novak lead mixed-team Golf event



ASSOCIATED PRESS
■ Naples (US)

Lauren Coughlin holed a bunker shot for eagle on the par-5 17th hole, and she and Andrew Novak teamed for a stout 4-under 68 in foursomes to build a one-shot lead going into the final round of the Grant Thornton Invitational. It's another chance for Novak to pick up a team title this year. He partnered with Ben Griffin to win the Zurich Classic of New Orleans. The Grant Thornton is the only mixed-team event.

They were at 19-under 125 and leading by one shot over Charley Hull and Michael Brennan, who were poised to share the lead until a three-

putt bogey on the final hole when Hull lipped out from just outside 3 feet. They shot 71. Lexi Thompson and Wyndham Clark were two shots behind after finishing with eight straight pars for a 72. The final round is modified fourballs. Each player tees off, then they switch golf balls and stick with that ball the rest of the way, with the low score counting.

It should lead to lower scoring, although the Canadian duo of Brooke Henderson and Corey Conners did their part in the more difficult foursomes. They managed seven birdies and briefly shared the lead until a bogey on the 18th for a 67.

Having Messi is a golden moment for Mumbai and India: Tendulkar

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ Mumbai

Cricket legend Sachin Tendulkar on Sunday termed Argentine football superstar Lionel Messi's visit to Mumbai as a golden moment for the city and the country.

Tendulkar compared the 2011 Cricket World Cup triumph at the same ground with the visit of Messi, along with his Inter Miami team-mates Luis Suarez and Rodrigo de Paul.

"I have spent some incredible moments here. As we call it, Mumbai is a city of dreams. And a number of dreams have seen the finish line here on this very venue. And without your support, we would never have seen those golden moments on this ground in 2011,"

Tendulkar said referring to India's ODI World Cup triumph in which he played a major role.

"And today, having all three of them here is indeed a golden moment for Mumbai, Mumbaiers and India. The way you have received all three greats of the game has truly been remarkable."

Talking about Messi, he said, "When it comes to Leo, if I have to speak about his game, it wouldn't be the right platform. And you know, what does one talk about him? He has achieved everything. We really admire his dedication, determination, commitment."

"And above all, his humility, the person that he is. And on behalf of Mumbaiers and Indians, I would like to wish him and



his family the very best of health and happiness to all of you. Thank you once again for being here and

encouraging youngsters."

Tendulkar also hoped that "India also reaches the height that we all aspire to

(in football)."

Tendulkar presented a No.10 jersey signed by him to Messi. The Argentine

World Cup-winning captain reciprocated with a football.

Messi arrived in Mumbai around noon under "World Cup level" security measures, marking the second day of his four-city 'GOAT India Tour 2025'.

He will wind up his visit on Monday in New Delhi where he will meet Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

Messi had arrived in India in the wee hours of Saturday, but the opening leg of the tour in Kolkata quickly descended into chaos later in the day due to poor crowd management and security lapses.

However, his evening programme in the Hyderabad leg stood in stark contrast to the mayhem in Kolkata, proceeding smoothly and concluding on a positive note.

Young players shine as PSG beats Metz

ASSOCIATED PRESS
■ Paris

Defending champion Paris Saint-Germain returned to the top of Ligue 1 with a 3-2 win at last-place Metz that highlighted the strength of its flourishing youth academy.

Teenage forward Ibrahim Mbaye, who in September was taking a high school diploma exam, set up two goals. After coming through the PSG academy he made his Ligue 1 debut at the age of 16 years, 6 months, 23 days last season, making him the youngest PSG player to start a league game.

After Portugal striker Gonçalo Ramos put PSG ahead in the 31st minute, Mbaye set up 18-year-old Quentin Njantou — another player who came through PSG's academy — with a cross from the left to make it 2-0 in 39th.

It was Njantou's first goal for the club.



"Is this a big moment for me? Yes, absolutely. It's my first goal. I'm very happy to have scored it," Njantou said. "I thank the coach for having faith in me today."

Metz midfielder Jerry Deminguet pulled one back just before halftime, before Mbaye's pass sent 20-year-old Désiré Doué sprinting through on a counterattack from deep to score PSG's third, midway through the

second half.

Georgia midfielder Georgiy Tsitaichvili scored with a brilliant curling strike from the left past goalkeeper Matvei Safonov to make it 3-2 in the 81st and give Metz hope.

But PSG held on to move two points ahead of surprise front-runner Lens, which can reclaim the lead if it beats struggling Nice at home on Sunday.

In Sunday's other games, third-place Marseille takes on Monaco and fourth-place Lille is at lowly Auxerre.

Brest defender Kenny Lala made two big mistakes during a 3-1 loss at fifth-place Rennes.

Lala was at fault for the first two Rennes goals after Brest had taken an early lead through striker Mama Baldé. Rennes replied with goals in quick succession from top scorer Estéban Lepaul and Jordan winger Mousa Al-Taamari.

On the first goal, the right back got the ball stuck in his feet and lost his balance, allowing Al-Taamari to break down the left and whip in a cross for Lepaul to slide the ball home in the 24th minute.

One minute later, Lala tried a first-time back pass on the halfway line and mistimed the waist-high ball completely, with Al-Taamari profiting to race clear and finish confidently.

Liverpool beat Brighton in Premier League

ASSOCIATED PRESS
■ Liverpool

The first stage of Mohamed Salah's rehabilitation at Liverpool is complete after the Egypt forward returned to the team for its 2-0 win over Brighton in the Premier League.

The question now as Salah heads off to the Africa Cup of Nations: Is there a future for him at Anfield when he comes back?

Salah, who let rip last weekend about his current frustrations at Liverpool, entered as a 26th-minute substitute to a big ovation and set up the second of Hugo Ekitike's goals as the defending champions jumped to sixth place and extended their unbeaten run to five games in all competitions.

"For me, there is no issue to resolve," Liverpool manager Arne Slot said of his star player's current situation

at the club.

Arsenal is attempting to take Liverpool's title and opened up a five-point lead by beating last-placed Wolverhampton 2-1 — but only thanks to two own-goals, the second of which came in stoppage time.

On a run of just one win in their previous three games, the leaders looked like dropping more points when Tolu Arokodare equalized for Wolves in the 90th minute, canceling out an own-goal by goalkeeper Sam Johnstone in the 70th.

Then Yerson Mosquera headed into his own net from Bukayo Saka's cross to gift Arsenal the win.

Also Saturday, Chelsea beat Everton 2-0 and was set on its way to victory by Cole Palmer's first goal in three months.

Salah held talks with Liverpool manager Arne Slot on Friday in an effort to overcome their issues and the



result was that Salah was recalled to the matchday squad for the Brighton game. He had been a substitute for the last three Premier League matches before being left at home for the midweek Champions League trip to Inter Milan as a punishment for his explosive comments to reporters last weekend.

"It was an easy decision to put him in the squad," Slot said. "I have said many times before what has been said

between us will stay between us." Liverpool's fans demonstrated they are willing to excuse Salah for his show of anger and gave him a rapturous welcome when he came on as a substitute for the injured Joe Gomez midway through the first half.

By then, Liverpool was leading 1-0 thanks to Ekitike's rising shot inside the first minute and Salah showed glimpses of his class, especially on the counterattack.

Raphinha scores 2 as Barcelona wins to add pressure on Real Madrid's Alonso

ASSOCIATED PRESS
■ Barcelona

Raphinha scored a brace as Barcelona beat Osasuna 2-0 to increase its La Liga lead and pile more pressure on beleaguered Real Madrid coach Xabi Alonso.

The Brazil forward broke the deadlock with a shot from the top of the area in the 70th minute at Camp Nou. He then put the result beyond doubt by scoring from close range with six minutes remaining.

A seventh league win in a row left the defending champions seven points clear of Real Madrid before its game at Alaves on Sunday. That is likely a must-win game for Alonso after the powerhouse has won just two of its last eight games across all com-

petitions. Madrid had led Barcelona by five points in the Spanish league after winning a clasico match in late October. But a huge dip in form with just one win in five rounds, including a humiliating 2-0 defeat to Celta Vigo at home last weekend, has left Madrid reeling.

Relishing the trouble of Barcelona's top rival, the Camp Nou crowd chanted "Stay Xabi! Stay Xabi!" in Spanish at one point during the Osasuna match.

Raphinha, however, stayed focused on his team.

"We need to focus on ourselves and if we do our job then we won't have to worry about anyone else," Raphinha said. "We are playing better than before and the more points, the better."



Raphinha was key to Barcelona winning La Liga and Copa del Rey last season, when Hansi Flick's side also reached the Champions League semifinals.

Barcelona struggled to replace his speed and incisiveness when Raphinha was sidelined with a leg injury for six weeks earlier this campaign. But he has returned as

strong as ever. He also assisted in a 3-1 victory over Alaves in late November and scored in a 3-1 win over Atletico Madrid earlier this month. Sixteenth-placed Osasuna

generated little in attack but its defense and goalkeeper Sergio Herrera frustrated Barcelona until Raphinha struck. Herrera saved a shot by Lamine Yamal while Marcus Rashford's goal-bound effort was blocked by a defender.

Raphinha's first goal came after Barcelona recovered the ball and Pedri González led a counterattack before laying off for him to score from distance. His second was easier: a tap-in after Osasuna defender Alejandro Catena redirected a cross from Jules Koundé to the far post where Raphinha was unmarked.

Antoine Griezmann scored the winner after coming off the bench to help fourth-placed Atletico beat Valencia 2-1 and stay nine points

behind Barcelona. Griezmann replaced Julián Álvarez with half an hour to go with Atletico leading after Koke Resurrección scored from a rebound in the 17th.

Lucas Beltrán pulled the visitors level in the 63rd with a shot from outside the area as the Argentine striker skirted past a defender and lashed a long strike just inside the post.

Griezmann restored the lead in the 74th at the Metropolitan Stadium when he used an exquisite control, hooking down a long ball with the tip of his boot, before he fired in the winner.

The 34-year-old Griezmann has taken a more limited role with Atletico this season, but he is still proving to be decisive. The former France star scored two goals as a

substitute in a 3-1 win over Levante last month and also netted after coming on in the second half against Sevilla and Real Madrid.

His winner against Valencia increased his record haul for Atletico to 204 career goals.

The loss for Valencia will increase the pressure on coach Carlos Corberán with the team in 17th place just on the edge of the relegation zone. Leandro Cabrera's header helped Espanyol beat Getafe 1-0 on the road and secure a fourth consecutive league win.

Espanyol is the surprise of the season approaching the winter break. The Barcelona-based team is in fifth place after 16 rounds, having barely avoided relegation on the final day of last season.