

J&K CM,
LG offices
lock horns
over CCE
age relief

Customs
simplification
next big
reform:
FM

Miniature
model of
Gandhi
statue set for
UK auction

ISSF WC
Final:
Suruchi
wins gold,
Sainyam silver

AGENDA

Putin
Dials
Delhi

PIONEER IN SHORT

PARIKSHA PE CHARCHA TO BE HELD IN JANUARY

The ninth edition of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's annual *Pariksha Pe Charcha* will be held in January 2026, the registrations to which are open till January 11, according to Ministry of Education officials. "Pariksha Pe Charcha is back with its ninth edition. Students, parents and teachers from India and abroad will engage with the Prime Minister to discuss exam stress and also celebrate examinations as an utsav (festival), as an integral part of life," said a senior official. For the selection of participants, an online competition with multiple-choice questions is being organised on the MyGov portal from December 1 to January 11. Students from Classes 6 to 12, teachers and parents can take part in the competition.

DRONE ATTACK KILLS 50 IN SUDAN

A drone attack by the Sudanese paramilitary forces hit a kindergarten in south-central Sudan, killing 50 people, including 33 children, a doctors' group said. Paramedics on the scene in the town of Kalogi in South Kordofan state were targeted in "a second unexpected attack," Sudan Doctors' Network said in a statement late Friday. Emergency Lawyers, a rights group tracking violence against civilians in Sudan, reported in a statement Saturday the second strike on paramedics treating survivors in Kalogi and said "a third civilian site near the previous two" was also attacked.

FULL REPORT ON P9

INCOME BOOST FOR DAIRY FARMERS

Union Home and Cooperation Minister Amit Shah on Saturday expressed confidence that the implementation of the circular economy model across the country will increase dairy farmers' income by 20 per cent in the next five years. Shah was addressing cattle rearers associated with Banas Dairy at an event held at Sanadar village in Gujarat's Vav-Tharad district to mark the inauguration of the dairy's bio-CNG and fertiliser plant and ground-breaking of its milk powder plant. He praised Banas Dairy's management for successfully developing a model for a circular economy in the dairy sector, which includes generating extra income for farmers through various means, such as converting cattle dung into biogas and bio-fertiliser. Shah informed the audience that he had brought several members of Parliament to Banaskantha to understand the circular economy model of Banas Dairy.

FULL REPORT ON P7

FEELING REALLY FREE IN MIND: VIRAT

Indian batting mainstay Virat Kohli on Saturday said he is "feeling really free" mentally after producing another match-winning effort to help India clinch the three-match ODI series, in which he finished as the leading run-scorer with 302 runs. Kohli scored a rapid 45-ball 65 not out in the third ODI after hitting centuries in the first two games to extend his tally to a record 53, as India crushed South Africa by nine wickets to win the third ODI comprehensively. "Honestly, playing the way I have in the series is the most satisfying thing for me. I feel really free in my mind. I haven't played like this in 2-3 years," Kohli told the broadcaster after the match. "I know when I can bat like that in the middle, it helps the team a long way. Makes me confident, any situation in the middle, I can handle that and bring it in favour of the team," he added. Kohli said self-doubt is inevitable for a batter, irrespective of experience, but felt it helps in overall improvement.

FULL REPORT ON P11

Centre slams brakes on soaring airfares amid chaos

RAJESH KUMAR ■ New Delhi

With widespread flight disruptions pushing up ticket prices on several domestic routes, the Centre on Saturday capped airfares in the range of ₹7,500 to ₹18,000, depending on the distance, amid soaring air ticket prices due to the IndiGo flight disruptions.

Invoking its regulatory powers to ensure fair and reasonable fares across all affected routes, the Ministry of Civil Aviation (MoCA) issued a fare-cap order and directed all airlines to strictly adhere to it.

As the IndiGo mess and chaos across the airports entered its fifth consecutive day on Saturday, leaving thousands of flyers high and dry, the ministry also directed the airline to complete the ticket refund process for the cancelled flights by Sunday evening, as well as ensure baggage separated from the travellers is delivered in the next two days.

The refund process for all cancelled or disrupted flights must be completed by 8 pm on Sunday, the ministry said in a statement. On Saturday, more than 800 flights were cancelled at various airports.

Under the limits, for a flight flying up to 500 kilometres, the



Passengers standing in a queue at an IndiGo airlines counter at Terminal 1 (T1) of the Indira Gandhi International Airport in New Delhi

fares are capped at ₹7,500, and for 500-1,000 kilometres, the ticket price cap is ₹12,000. For flights operating 1,000-1,500 kilometres, the fares are limited at ₹15,000 and for flights above 1,500 kilometres, the cap is ₹18,000. These limits apply uniformly across all airlines and booking platforms. The ministry clarified that these limits exclude applicable UDF, PSF and taxes, and will not apply to Business Class or RCS-UDAN flights.

The cap means that for a Delhi-Mumbai flight, which is covered in a distance of over 1,300 kilometres, the fare for at least the economy class is capped at ₹18,000.

The ministry's move comes at a time when passengers across the country have been reporting skyrocketing last-minute fares, in some cases crossing ₹25,000 and up to ₹80,000 on popular metro routes. With the holiday and

wedding travel season ramping up, officials said stabilising the market had become an urgent necessity.

The last time the government-imposed fare caps was in May 2020, when a limited number of flights were allowed to resume following a two-month ban during lockdown measures. The caps were different price slabs based on flight distance.

CONTINUED ON >> P4

Indigo's fiasco under PMO scanner!

MoCA issues show-cause to IndiGo CEO, seeking response in 24 hours

RAJESH KUMAR ■ New Delhi

The airliner IndiGo's chaotic handling of the situation at airports across the country during Russian President Vladimir Putin's visit to India has reportedly not gone down well with the Prime Minister's Office (PMO). Sources said Prime Minister Narendra Modi was briefed on the IndiGo crisis, and thereafter, the PMO swung into action, which got in direct touch with the country's largest air carrier CEO Pieter Elbers.

The Ministry of Civil Aviation (MoCA) also summoned senior IndiGo officials for a meeting, indicating the seriousness of the situation. Sources said there is a demand to seek the removal of IndiGo's CEO Pieter Elbers, after the airline's chaotic handling of the new rules for pilots' rest hours led to mass cancellations and stranded

84 SPECIAL TRAINS ANNOUNCED TO EASE TRAVEL

New Delhi: The Railways announced 84 special trains across all zones for Saturday to help people facing travel disruptions due to the mass flight cancellations by IndiGo. In a coordinated move by the Railway Ministry, the trains, which are to make 104 trips, were arranged in the shortest possible time after analysis of train traffic situations in major cities such as New Delhi, Mumbai, Chennai, Bengaluru, Patna, and Howrah, among others. "The number of special trains and their trips might increase further depending on the traffic scenario. All zones have been asked to

make use of all available resources, including rolling stock as well as manpower, to safely operate these trains for the convenience of lakhs of passengers stranded at different parts of the country due to flight cancellations," said Dilip Kumar, Executive Director, Information & Publicity, Railway Board. Officials said efforts are being made to make people aware of the trains, and some divisions have even disseminated information at nearby airports to help passengers. All zones have issued notifications regarding special trains along with their schedules.

tens of thousands of passengers across the country. A heavy financial penalty is also being weighed on the budget carrier that commands nearly two-thirds of the domestic market share, sources added. IndiGo cancelled over 1600 flights on Saturday, which was 600 more than a day earlier. The airline's on-time performance from six metro airports

plunged to 3.7 per cent on Friday, as per the civil aviation ministry website.

With the carrier's mass cancellations triggering nationwide chaos, officials are also considering reducing the number of flights that IndiGo is allowed to operate, sources said, signalling the toughest action yet against airline.

CONTINUED ON >> P4

PM sets 10-year deadline to end 'Slave Mentality'

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Saturday urged people to completely rid the country of the slave mentality in the next 10 years, asserting that every sector today is shedding the colonial mindset and aiming for new achievements with pride. He also said the term Hindu rate of growth was used when India was struggling for 2-3 per cent growth.

"The policy of Macaulay, which sowed the seeds of mental slavery in India, will complete 200 years in 2035. This means there are 10

years left. Therefore, in these very 10 years, we all must come together to free our country from the slave mentality," he said.

"Linking the growth of the country with the faith of its people, with their identity... This was the symbol of the mindset of colonialism," he said, addressing the Hindustan Times Leadership Summit. An attempt was made to prove that the reason for India's slow growth was Hindu culture, Modi said. "Today's intellectuals who keep searching for communalism in all things did not see communalism in the use of the term Hindu rate of growth. This

term was made part of books and research papers during their time," he said.

Asserting that India is a model of high growth and low inflation, he said the country's 8.2 per cent growth in the second quarter of this fiscal year shows that it is becoming the growth driver of the global economy.

Modi said that at a time when the world is full of uncertainties, India is seen in a different league. The changes happening in India are not just about possibilities but are a saga of changing thinking and direction, he said.

CONTINUED ON >> P4



Prime Minister Narendra Modi speaking during an event in New Delhi

ED files chargesheet against Reliance Power, 10 others

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

The Enforcement Directorate (ED) on Saturday said it has filed a chargesheet against businessman Anil Ambani's group company, Reliance Power Ltd and 10 others in a money laundering case linked to the issuance of an alleged fake bank guarantee of ₹68 crore for securing a tender.

The other accused named in the prosecution complaint includes former Reliance Power CFO Ashok Kumar Pal, Reliance NU BESS Ltd and Rosa Power Supply Company Ltd (subsidiaries of Reliance Power), an Odisha-based "shell" company Biswal Tradelink Private Limited, its MD Patha Sarathi Biswal, Biothane Chemicals Pvt Ltd and trade financing consultant Amar Nath Dutta. Some other accused include Ravinder Pal Singh Chadha, Manoj Bhaiyasaheb Pongde and Punit Narendra Garg, as per the agency.

CONTINUED ON >> P4

The chargesheet has been filed under the provisions of the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA) at the Patiala House court in Delhi on Friday, as per officials. The case pertains to a bank guarantee of ₹68.2 crore submitted to secure a tender from the Solar Energy Corporation of India Limited (SECI) on behalf of Reliance NU BESS Limited, a subsidiary of Reliance Power, a listed company. The company (Reliance NU BESS) was formerly known as Maharashtra Energy Generation Limited.

Probe found, as per the agency, that Reliance Group officials were well aware that this was a "fake" bank guarantee. "Fraudulent" endorsements were being submitted to SECI from a "spoofed" email ID of SBI, and when SECI detected the fraud, Reliance Group arranged a genuine Bank Guarantee from IDBI Bank within a day of intimidation of the fraud by SECI.

India, US seek measures by UN against LeT, JeM

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

India and the US have sought additional punitive measures like asset freeze and arms embargo by the UN against Pakistan-based terror outfits Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) and Jaish-e-Mohammad (JeM), their proxy groups and backers.

The two sides also called for additional designations of ISIS and Al-Qaeda affiliates. These terror groups were designated by the UN, and they have already been facing various punitive actions

under the global body's sanctions regime.

India and the US deliberated on boosting cooperation to combat terrorism at a meeting of their Joint Working Group (JWG) on counterterrorism, as well as during deliberations at the 'designations dialogue', held on December 3 in New Delhi. In the talks, the Indian side thanked the US State Department for designating The Resistance Front (TRF), a proxy of LeT, as both a Foreign Terrorist Organisation (FTO) and a Specially Designated Global Terrorist (SDGT).

INDIA AND THE US DELIBERATED ON BOOSTING COOPERATION TO COMBAT TERRORISM

The TRF had taken responsibility for the Pahalgam terror attack.

The two sides emphasised that confronting terrorism requires concerted action in a sustained and comprehensive manner, according to a joint statement released on Saturday. Against this backdrop, the two sides renewed

their commitment to strengthening multilateral cooperation in the field of countering terrorism, including in the UN, Quad and the Financial Action Task Force (FATF).

"The two sides called for additional designations of ISIS and Al-Qaeda affiliates, and LeT and JeM and their proxy groups, supporters, sponsors, financiers and backers, under the UN 1267 sanctions regime, ensuring their members face a global asset freeze, travel ban and arms embargo," the statement said. It said the meet-

ings underscored the importance of bilateral cooperation in countering terrorism, reflecting the "spirit and breadth" of the India-US Comprehensive Global Strategic Partnership.

"Both sides unequivocally condemned terrorism in all its forms and manifestations, including cross-border terrorism. They expressed concern over the increasing use of unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs), drones, and AI for terrorist purposes," the statement added.

CONTINUED ON >> P4

Open defecation contaminates Ganga in Haridwar, despite Namami Gange works

ARUN KASHYAP ■ Haridwar

Despite crores of rupees being spent on cleaning the Ganga under the Namami Gange programme, open defecation by slum dwellers along the banks of the holy river in various parts of Haridwar continues to contaminate the river. Lakhs of pilgrims from across the nation and abroad visit Haridwar for a holy dip in the Ganga, but the river continues to be contaminated due to open defecation.

The Namami Gange mission was launched to ensure the purity of the Ganga, and about Rs 45,000 crore have been spent on it so far. Works under the project

have brought about some improvement, but blatant gaps like open defecation along the banks of the Ganga in Haridwar still remain. The open defecation also contradicts the claims of the Uttarakhand Government.

In 2017, the State Government had claimed that Uttarakhand was Open Defecation Free (ODF). Before this announcement was made, a considerable number of toilets were constructed under Namami Gange to prevent contamination along the Ganga. However, this correspondent visited various areas in Haridwar, including Chandighat, Laljiwala, Bairagi Camp and Bajriwala, among others, where residents of



The Pioneer Campaign

A fact check on Ganga – a holy river that originates in the Dev Bhumi but flows with a sordid tale of human neglect – flushing human waste and washing down multi-crore funding efforts by the Centre and State. Today, *The Pioneer* starts a campaign to wake up the authorities, stakeholders, and last but not least, the citizens, the most important link in the chain.

slums defecate in the open daily. There is a major shortage of toilets in these settlements, forcing the residents to

defecate in the open. The situation is the worst in the Chandighat settlement. About 6,000 people reside in this area along the Nildhara bank, but there is not a single proper toilet in the area. With no other option, the majority of the residents of this slum defecate in the open near the Namami Gange Ghat, causing contamination of the Ganga and the city. The slum dwellers state that they have no toilets and hence defecate in the open, as they have no other option.

Sheela, who lives in a shanty in the Chandighat area, said that they have no toilet and that her family defecate in the open.

CONTINUED ON >> P4

Canopies, boundary walls to protect Ambedkar’s statues

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Lucknow

Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, on Saturday, announced that boundary walls and protective canopies will soon be constructed around statues of Dr Ambedkar across the state to ensure their safety.

He pointed out that many such statues have been subjected to vandalism by miscreants.

“To prevent such incidents, the Uttar Pradesh government has decided to build protective boundary walls and install canopies over all statues of Babasaheb. His legacy must be preserved with dignity,” he said.

Speaking at a programme organised by the Babasaheb Dr Bhimrao Ambedkar Mahasabha Trust on the occasion of Babasaheb Mahaparinirvan Diwas, the chief minister said that the state government was committed to protecting the legacy of Babasaheb and implementing his vision of justice, equality and fraternity.

In a major welfare-oriented announcement, the chief minister said that the government would ensure a guaranteed minimum honorarium for Class IV employees, contractual workers and sanitation workers within the next one to two months.

Chief Minister Yogi said that these workers — who play an essential role in



running civic and government services — deserve fair and dignified compensation.

“We have already set up a dedicated corporation. In the next month or two, the government will ensure the minimum honorarium payments to all Class IV, contractual and sanitation workers,” he said.

He added that the ongoing Zero Poverty Mission is being

accelerated to ensure that no family in the state remains deprived of government benefits.

Identification of poor families from Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and the Most Backward Classes is nearly complete. Many families have already received ration cards, pension cards, or other welfare benefits. Those still without housing

or Ayushman health coverage will be provided homes and health insurance worth Rs 5 lakh.

“No poor or deprived person in Uttar Pradesh will be left out,” the chief minister emphasised.

Chief Minister Yogi strongly criticised political parties which, he said, had historically pursued appeasement for vote-bank politics.

Calling it detrimental to national unity and an insult to Babasaheb’s ideals, he recalled an incident involving a prominent Congress leader who refused to sing Vande Mataram in 1923.

“Babasaheb warned the nation long ago about such tendencies. He had said that anyone who enjoys the privileges of India but does not consider its land sacred cannot genuinely work in the interest of this country,” the chief minister said and added that parties driven by appeasement are not only harming India but also disrespecting Dr Ambedkar by trying to keep people deprived of their basic rights.

Calling Mahaparinirvan Diwas a day of deep inspiration, Chief Minister Yogi paid tribute to Dr Ambedkar’s life and legacy.

He said Babasaheb rose from the grassroots, overcoming immense social discrimination and traditional inequalities to open pathways of dignity and empowerment for Dalits, the deprived and the most backward communities.

AKY targets BJP again

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Lucknow

Samajwadi Party Chief Akhilesh Yadav joined the chorus of Opposition leaders targeting the BJP and its allies. In a post on X, the SP leader alleged that the opponents of democracy are the ones who want to bring in a one-man rule.

“The nation’s slogan should be ‘Jai Jawan, Jai Kisaan, Jai Samvidhaan’. There should be no for or against when it comes to the Constitution. Everyone should be on one side, with one voice. The Constitution is not just a book; it is also the foundation. The most tragic thing for a democracy is that there is debate in Parliament about saving the Constitution, when the discussion should be about moving the country forward

according to the Constitution. The crisis in the Constitution is actually a shadow of a crisis over democracy. Those who want to weaken the Constitution want to weaken democracy, and the opponents of democracy are the ones who want to bring in a one-man rule,” the SP leader posted.

Akhilesh Yadav said that the country should run according to the Constitution and not on personal whims.

“The Constitution grants rights, and those who want to crush rights try to deny the Constitution. I have said this many times, and I’m saying it again today, the Constitution itself is the sanjeevani (life-giving herb). It holds the power to make the country good and to keep it good. The Constitution is the karma grantha (scripture

of action) of democracy. That’s why, for us, the Constitution is the karma grantha. The country should run on the Constitution, not on personal whims,” he said.

Akhilesh further claimed that the Constitution was the guide for the Pichda-Dalit-Alpsankhyak alliance that his party claims to champion.

“The Constitution is the guiding beacon of PDA. Because it is the Constitution that ensures the dignity and honour of the individual. It is what saves PDA society from exploitation and oppresion and metes out punishment to the exploiters,” he said.

Taking a dig at the Centre and the BJP, the SP leader further said that justice would survive only if everyone gets equal opportunities.

MC inspects STP at Loniapurwa

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Lucknow

Municipal Commissioner Gaurav Kumar made a detailed inspection of the 50 MLD sewage treatment plant at Loniapurwa, being set up under the Namami Gange project.

During the inspection, it was revealed that the 1600 mm diameter inlet pipeline and the associated chamber, installed by Uttar Pradesh Jal Nigam (Urban) have been facing serious leakage issues for a long time.

Due to this, STP operations have been completely shut down since June 19, 2025, affecting not only the progress of the project but also adversely impacting the sewage management system of the area.

The municipal commissioner was also informed that to resolve the leakage issue, the project manager of UP Jal Nigam (Rural) and the chief engineer (Ganga) had repeatedly informed the department concerned but despite several letters sent from July 2025 till now, repair work had not been initiated, resulting in the situation remaining unchanged.

Considering the critical importance of the project, this delay was termed a matter of serious concern.

During the inspection, the municipal commissioner carried out a physical examination of the site and assessed the severity of the leakage in the pipeline and chamber.

He instructed the Jal Kal general manager, and the agency associated with the project, M/s Suez India Pvt Ltd, to immediately begin the repair work.

Mayawati questions delay in ‘achche din’ for Bahujans

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Lucknow

Bahujan Samaj Party chief Mayawati paid floral tributes to Dr BR Ambedkar on Parinirvan Diwas. While honouring the Dr Ambedkar, she sharply questioned why the ‘Achche Din’ (better days) envisioned for crores of Bahujans had still not arrived.

“Why have the historically oppressed still not seen better days?” Mayawati asked. She said that despite Ambedkar’s lifelong struggle and the constitutional safeguards ensured for Dalits, tribals, OBCs, and other marginalised communities, their lives have not seen meaningful or sustained improvement.

She emphasised that on national occasions such as Independence Day, Republic Day, Ambedkar Jayanti and today’s Parinirvana Diwas, one question repeatedly surfaces:

According to Mayawati, as the only “Ambedkarite national party,” the BSP remains concerned that genuine development for the oppressed majority continues to be ignored under caste-driven political rule. She alleged that



opposing parties employ “all kinds of tactics and conspiracies” to prevent Bahujans from emerging as a ruling class — something Dr. Ambedkar believed was essential for real social transformation.

Urging the community to recognise the power of their vote, she appealed to people to actively participate in the ongoing Special Summary Revision (SSR) of electoral rolls being conducted by the Election Commission.

Following party tradition, large numbers of Ambedkar followers and BSP workers gathered at key monuments.

In Lucknow, thousands offered tributes at the grand “Dr. Bhimrao Ambedkar Samajik Parivartan Sthal,” built during the BSP government.

Mayawati noted that heavy security arrangements during such public events often cause major inconvenience to followers travelling from distant regions. To avoid repeated hardship to the public, she said she now prefers paying tributes from her residence or the party office instead of visiting the monuments in person.

Referring to recent discussions on the sharp depreciation of the rupee, Mayawati said the issue is not merely economic but also has significant political and national implications. She urged the government to treat the matter with urgency and take concrete corrective measures.

Mayawati called upon society and governments to sincerely follow Dr Ambedkar’s humanitarian, constitutional and democratic principles. In today’s challenging times, she said, correctly understanding Ambedkar and following the path he laid out is the greatest need of the hour.

CM lauds role of Home Guards

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Lucknow

Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath said the role of home guards was not merely voluntary but a cornerstone of society’s trust and the government’s strength.

Addressing a gathering on the 63rd Foundation Day celebrations of the Uttar Pradesh Home Guards, the Chief Minister saluted the dedication of homeguards and emphasised that their discipline, loyalty, and sacrifice were vital in keeping society safe and secure. “You are not just volunteers of a force, but the trust of society and the strength of the state government,” he said.

Congratulating all soldiers and officers on the occasion, the Chief Minister said that the Foundation Day of the Home Guards is not just an event but a symbol of discipline, dedication, and service. The parade performed by the energetic soldiers reflected the capability, high discipline, and continuous hard work of the department.

He praised the ceremonial uniforms, the decoration of the premises, and the greenery, describing them as inspiring and captivating. “Such discipline and presentation should serve as a model for any organisation or force,” he noted.



He recalled Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s call during the Amrit Mahotsav of Independence, urging respect for every person in uniform. “This respect will only be realised when we demonstrate our commitment through discipline, reverence, and service,” he said.

Tracing the history of the force, Chief Minister Yogi

Adityanath reminded the audience that the Uttar Pradesh Home Guards was established on December 6, 1963, and since then has served as a protective shield for the state police.

He expressed pride that in recent years, Home Guard soldiers have received long-overdue recognition. In 2024, three soldiers were awarded the President’s Medal for

Distinguished Service, 11 for Meritorious Service, and three more in 2025. Additionally, 38 commendation discs were awarded by the Government of India. “Previously, Home Guard soldiers were neglected, but today they are being honoured by the President and the Home Ministry,” he said.

The Chief Minister emphasised that the Home Guards are no longer merely an auxiliary force. They now contribute significantly to law and order, traffic management, Dial 112 services, election duties, prison security, disaster control, and public building security.

Their presence is crucial at major events such as the Maha Kumbh Mela and in ensuring the successful conduct of examinations. He highlighted that over 4,000 youth have been trained as Disaster Mitras in collaboration with the Disaster Management Department, strengthening the state’s disaster response capacity.

The Chief Minister paid heartfelt tribute to the Home Guards’ service during the COVID-19 pandemic. When workers and labourers from Uttar Pradesh were stranded in other states, Home Guard soldiers accompanied every transport vehicle to ensure safe return, often risking their own lives.

Dayashankar calls for effective steps to deal with climate change

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Lucknow

Uttar Pradesh Transport Minister Dayashankar Singh has called for effective steps to deal with climate change and improve the environment.

Inaugurating the seventh International Conference on Environment and Society (ICES 2025) at Khwaja Moynuddin Chishti Language University on Saturday, the minister said that climate change had intensified challenges in urban areas, therefore effective steps must be taken for environmental improvement.

He said that industrialisation over the past 200 years had caused maximum damage to the environment. He said small actions could bring about major changes, so initiatives must

begin immediately.

He added that diesel buses cause significant environmental harm, which is why the UP Transport Department has decided to increase the number of electric buses.

“The improvement in Lucknow’s air quality is due in part to the growing fleet of electric buses. Earlier, electric buses operated only in 15 cities of the state; their number has now increased to 43, and soon these buses will be introduced in all districts,” he said.

On this occasion, Vice-Chancellor Prof Ajay Taneja said that global consensus on environmental issues was essential. Public Service Commission member AK Verma said that issues like the environment required global thinking.

“Policies must be framed

at the national level, work must be carried out at the local level, and awareness must be spread at the individual level,” he said.

President of Global Environment and Association MD Gupta said that environmental protection was directly linked to the survival of humanity.

At the conference, the transport minister was conferred with an honorary degree by an American university.

Prof Vinay P Aneja from the Department of Marine, Earth and Atmospheric Sciences at North Carolina State University, Raleigh (USA), said that only 30 per cent of the fertiliser used in agriculture actually reached the plants, while the remaining 70 per cent was wasted. This, he said, caused environmental damage.

Asstt teacher exams pass-off peacefully

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Lucknow

The Assistant Teacher (Trained Graduate) examination passed off peacefully on Saturday. Giving this information, ADM Jyoti Gautam said that the total registered candidates for the two sessions held in the morning and evening were 31,776. She said that the attendance in the morning session was 53.88 per cent and 62.84 per cent for the second session. There were 34 centres in the Lucknow district for the morning session and 35 centres for the evening session. The examinations will also be held on Sunday, December 21 and in January. The Uttar Pradesh Public Service Commission is conducting the Assistant Teacher (Trained Graduate) recruitment examination. Through this examination, eligible candidates will be selected for a total of 7,466 posts across 15 subjects.

Babri mosque demolition anniversary passes off peacefully

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ Ayodhya

Ayodhya remained under an extensive security blanket on the 33rd anniversary of the demolition of the Babri Masjid on Saturday, with no organised political or religious mobilisations — a sharp contrast to earlier years when rival groups marked the day with symbolic demonstrations.

Security personnel were on high alert and carried out checking drives across the holy town, espe-

cially around the newly constructed Ram temple, railway station, bus stands and major roads, and other sensitive areas in Uttar Pradesh, including Varanasi and Mathura, with mosque-temple disputes, stopping vehicles at multiple checkpoints, verifying IDs and strengthening vigil.

“December 6 is always a sensitive date for Ayodhya. This year, we are ensuring no breach of peace or security,” said Superintendent of Police (City) Chakrapani Tripathi.

He said that strict directives had

been issued prohibiting public gatherings or rallies, while hotels had been asked to maintain detailed visitors’ records. Bomb squads and dog squads also carried out checks at railway station parking areas along with Railway Protection Force (RPF) and Government Railway Police (GRP) personnel, he said.

Unlike previous years, there were no organised political or religious mobilisations. Local activists and residents said it reflects both the administrative curbs imposed after

the Supreme Court’s 2019 verdict and the passing away of the once-key leaders from both sides of the dispute.

“The government has banned observing ‘Black Day’ or ‘Victory Day’ (Shaurya Diwas) after the final verdict,” said Indu Bhushan Pandey, a social activist in Ayodhya.

The BJP posted messages on its X handles paying tributes to those associated with the Ram Temple movement on ‘Shaurya Diwas’ — observed by Hindu outfits to mark the demolition in 1992.

“Jai Shri Ram, On Shaurya Diwas, a hundred salutations to the Sanatanis, by offering their lives in the Shri Ram Mandir movement, paved the way for the cultural renaissance of the nation,” a post on the official handle of the BJP’s Uttar Pradesh unit said.

Many prominent figures associated with the Ram Janmabhoomi movement, including Ashok Singhal, Kalyan Singh, Bal Thackeray and Mahant Avidyanath, have either passed away or faded from public life.



लखनऊ विकास प्राधिकरण
(ISO 14001:2004, ISO 9001:2008 प्रमाणित संस्था)
प्राधिकरण भवन, विपिन खण्ड, गौमती नगर, लखनऊ (उ.प्र.)
टोल फ्री : 1800 1800 5000, वेबसाइट: 'http://www.ldaonline.co.in'

सार्वजनिक सूचना
श्रीमती उर्मिला चौहान पत्नी- श्री मकरंद चौहान द्वारा लखनऊ विकास प्राधिकरण की विकसित योजना खरिम खण्ड, शारदा नगर योजना के मूखण्ड संख्या-2/151 पर ऑनलाईन-LDA/BP/25-26/1464 के माध्यम से मिश्रित भू-उपयोग के अन्तर्गत व्यवसायिक, कार्यालय एवं आवासीय स्वीकृति करने का अनुरोध किया गया है। परन्तुमन्त्र खल का भू-उपयोग प्राधिकरण द्वारा विकसित योजना के ले-आउट में 'आवासीय' है। वर्तमान में प्रमाणी उत्तर प्रदेश विकास प्राधिकरण भवन निर्माण एवं विकास उपविधि तथा आदर्श जोड़िन रेगुलेशन-2025 के अध्याय-8 के प्रस्तर-8.1.2 च (1) के अनुसार आवासीय भू-उपयोग में 24.00 मीटर चौड़े मार्ग पर मिश्रित उपयोग अनुमत्य है।
अतः प्रस्तर-8.1.3 के नोट-4 के अनुसार अनुमोदित ले-आउट में निम्नित आवासीय भू-उपयोग में मिश्रित उपयोग अनुमत्य किये जाने हेतु जन सामान्य से आपत्ति/सुझाव आमंत्रित किये जाने का प्रावधान है। तदक्रम में जन सामान्य से आपत्ति/सुझाव आमंत्रित किये जाते हैं।
आपत्ति/सुझाव मुख्य नगर नियोजन, उपविभाग, उपविभाग के कार्यालय में लिखित रूप में दो प्रतियों में सूचना प्रकाशन की तिथि से 15 दिन के अन्दर प्रस्तुत किये जा सकते हैं। निम्न अवधि में प्राप्त आपत्ति/सुझाव पर से विचार किया जायेगा।
अपर सचिव

Theft case solved, four held

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Lucknow

The Alambagh police arrested four miscreants for committing theft at a house, ten hours after the incident was reported on Saturday.

Those arrested have been identified as Amit and Akash, both of Manak Nagar, Yash Chauhan of Krishna Nagar and Shubham of Para police station area. The police recovered Rs 29,559, a DVR and a mobile phone from the accused.

As per reports, the thieves had burgled a shop named Satyam Store at Talkatora Road in the area in the wee hours on Friday. The incident came to light around evening when the shop owner reached the shop on information from his neighbours, and the police were

called.

The cops collected footage of CCTVs installed in the area, and the images of the thieves were captured in it. The police succeeded in identifying the miscreants with the help of their informers and nabbed them around 4 am on Saturday. The accused confessed to their crime.

A police spokesman said the police recovered the cash, DVR and mobile phone stolen from the shop. "The thieves are being interrogated further to get detailed information about their network and their criminal past," the police spokesman said.

In another success, the Madaion police, on Friday night, arrested a robber who had looted a gold earring from a 40-year-old woman in

the area on November 29. The 24-year-old accused has been identified as Virendra of Malihabad, and he is a labourer.

He confessed to his crime and said he ran short of money as he was not getting much work these days, and so he took to the crime of snatching gold chains or earrings from women. Police said they had recovered the looted ornaments, and the victim woman had identified the recovered ornaments.

Meanwhile, the Hasanganj police arrested two miscreants who had committed theft at a liquor shop in the area some time back, on Saturday.

Those arrested have been identified as Akash Pandey,

aka Suraj and Shuhail Khan, both of the Bazaarkhala police station area. The police recovered 22 beer bottles, Rs 11,500 in cash, a mobile phone and a motorcycle, which they used in fleeing from the scene after committing the crime.

The police said both Akash and Suhail had a long history of crime of committing theft in the Hasanganj, Hazratganj, Alignaj and Baskhi Ka Talab.

A police spokesman said their arrest came in a case lodged on the complaint of one Chandni Jaiswal on November 13. "The accused had burgled her shop and decamped with cash and liquor, and beer bottles. The accused sold some of the stolen goods to customers at a lower price," the spokesman said.

Woman accuses 3 youths of assault, threats

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Lucknow

A woman accused three youths of thrashing her and her son in Banthra and making threats to kill her on Saturday. The accused named in the case have been identified as Mansih, Ashish and Umesh, all of Mawai Padiayana in the area.

In her complaint, the woman identified as Guddi Devi said she attended a marriage function at the house of Manish, and the next day she, along with her son, went to Manish's house to give a gift. She said during this, they picked a verbal argument with her, and her son, Subhash, intervened. It was alleged that Subhash was beaten by Manish, Umesh and Ashish. "I intervened to save my son, and

they attacked me also and abused me," she alleged.

Police registered a case and started an investigation into the case. The police said both sides had some misunderstanding, which resulted in an assault on the woman and her son.

ARRESTED

A man was arrested on the charges of sexually exploiting a girl from Unnao on Saturday by a team of Gomti Nagar police. The accused, identified as Ranjeet Pal of Sitapur, had met the girl through a common acquaintance during his stay in Gomti Nagar. It was alleged that the accused started dating the girl whom he promised to marry later. He later developed physical relations with her despite opposition from her. "He

promised he would marry, and his family agreed to the same, and his business was fully established. I fell for his words, and he sexually exploited me," the victim has alleged in her complaint given to the Gomti Nagar police on November 29, 2025.

The accused confessed to his crime and said he never had a plan to marry the girl and had just exploited the situation. The police said they police were finding the crime history of the accused.

SPEEDING TRUCK HITS CAR

A speeding truck collided with a car in front of a petrol pump on Mohanlalganj highway on Saturday afternoon. The impact of the collision was so severe that the car lost control, overturned and skidded across

the road.

Fortunately, all occupants of the car narrowly escaped without injuries.

The accident led to a traffic jam on the busy stretch. Police reached the spot and started managing traffic to prevent further congestion.

Due to the overturned car, the highway could not be completely cleared, so police sought assistance from the National Highway authorities and called for a crane to lift the car and clear the road. After nearly half an hour, the car was removed from the highway, allowing traffic to resume smoothly.

According to officials, police have launched a search for the truck driver, who fled the spot, and an investigation is underway to determine the cause of the accident.

Tamil guests visit Bharat Kala Bhavan

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Varanasi

The delegates from Kashi Tamil Sangamam (KTS) 4.0 undertook a cultural and educational tour of Bharat Kala Bhavan at Banaras Hindu University (BHU) here on Saturday. During this tour, they deeply appreciated the rich heritage of South Indian art and culture, particularly the renowned Chola bronzes, the magnificent Nataraja statue, and the exquisite crafts tradition of South India.

The delegates further visited the Malaviya Gallery, where they studied rare records, paintings and artifacts related to the life, work, and national contributions of Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya. This gallery introduced them to the founding, spirit, and visionary work of BHU. The delegates also visited the ongoing special exhibition, 'Ganga-Kaveri Sampravah', which showcases the cultural, spiritual and artistic links between the two great rivers, the Ganga and the Kaveri, and they viewed them with great interest and appreciation. They also explored the rich textile and weaving traditions of Kashi and Tamil Nadu.

The beautiful sculpture of Gandaberunda in a Banarasi sari brought to life the shared artistic heritage of North and South India.

Upon completion of the tour, lunch was arranged for all the guests at the Annakshetra, run by the temple. The 'prasad' served at the Annakshetra gave everyone a deep experience of Kashi's tradition of service and hospitality.

The visit and tour of the third group of KTS has further strengthened the cultural, spiritual, and historical ties between the two communities.

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Varanasi

The arrival of groups from South India for Kashi Tamil Sangamam (KTS) 4.0 continues. The third group from Tamil Nadu, mainly consisting of Tamil writers, arrived at Banaras railway station by a special train on Saturday.

The group was given a grand welcome at the railway station in the tradi-

receiving the traditional welcome at the station. Many of them expressed the unforgettable warmth and spiritual atmosphere in Kashi.

The sound of the drum filled the entire complex with Shiva, clearly demonstrating the cultural unity between Kashi and Tamil Nadu.

Later, the Tamil guests reached Kashi Vishwanath Temple where the temple



tional manner with beats of drum, showers of flowers, and chants of 'Har Har Mahadev' and 'Vanakkam Kashi'.

Uttar Pradesh's cabinet minister Anil Rajbhar and administrative and railway officials were present during the welcome. They briefed the group on Kashi's cultural affinity and the historical Tamil-Kashi ties.

The Tamil group members were very enthusiastic upon

officials welcomed them with the beat of drum and a shower of flowers.

Following the welcome, the temple administration provided the members with a detailed tour of the grand corridors of the Shri Kashi Vishwanath Dham. During the tour, everyone learned about the Dham's historical form, architecture, newly-constructed facilities and the ever-growing stream of devotees.

The Tamil group unanimously declared, "Today will be remembered as an important symbol of the confluence of Kashi and Tamil traditions."

The group was elated with the chants of 'Har Har Mahadev'.

Organised by the Union Education Ministry, this event is embodying Prime Minister Narendra Modi's vision of 'Ek Bharat Shreshtha Bharat'.

Two girls injured in wolf attacks

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ Bahraich

Two minor girls were injured in separate incidents of wolf attacks in the Bahraich district, forest department officials said on Saturday.

In the first incident on Friday, Anushka Nishad (5), daughter of Baliram from Mallahanpurwa village, was sleeping alone inside her house when a wolf entered and tried to carry her away,

they said. Hearing her screams, family members and villagers rushed to the spot. The wolf left the child, hearing the commotion, and ran towards the fields. The girl sustained minor injuries from the animal's teeth, the officials said.

Divisional Forest Officer Ram Singh Yadav described the attack as deliberate and cleverly planned, as it occurred precisely when Anushka's mother went out

for a few moments.

On the same day, Nancy (4), daughter of Kamlesh Yadav, was playing outside her house in Baburi Tola village when a wolf suddenly attacked and dragged her away. Villagers raised an alarm, and the wolf released the child and ran towards the sugarcane fields. The injured child was sent to the Kaiserganj Community Health Centre for treatment.

Divisional Forest Officer

Ram Singh Yadav told reporters that both attacks involved wolves, adding that the entire area is plagued by the animal's activity. Since September 9, such attacks in the Bahraich district have claimed 10 lives, including eight children and an elderly couple, and injured dozens of people, the officials said.

District Magistrate Akshay Tripathi met the families of the victims on Friday and consoled them.

Centre slams brakes on soaring airfares amid...

Thousands of passengers who had IndiGo's tickets for travel now started cancelling flights and buying on other airlines like Air India, AI Express, Akasa and SpiceJet at sky-high fares.

An analysis of fares on airlines' websites on Friday showed that a one-way one-stop economy-class SpiceJet Kolkata-Mumbai flight ticket for December 6 costs up to ₹90,000, and a similar ticket of Air India for Mumbai-Bhubaneswar costs up to ₹84,485. The prices from Delhi to Mumbai shot up to ₹80,000. Tickets that normally cost ₹5,000-₹8,000 suddenly shot up to ₹30,000-₹82,000, leaving passengers shocked and stranded.

In order no 01/2025, the ministry said the disruptions had led to severe capacity constraints and "unreasonable surge" in fares on multiple sectors, prompting intervention in the public interest. The government has now imposed temporary maximum fare limits for all scheduled domestic flights. In an official statement, the ministry said, "The objective of this directive is to maintain pricing discipline in the market, prevent any exploitation of passengers in distress, and ensure that citizens who urgently need to travel, including senior citizens, students, and patients, are not subjected to financial hardship during this period."

The order further mandates that the fare caps apply uniformly across all booking platforms, whether tickets are purchased through airline websites or online travel agents. Airlines have also been instructed to ensure consistent availability of tickets across fare buckets and to consider adding capacity on routes witnessing unusually high demand.

The fare restrictions will remain in force until prices stabilise or until the Government issues a further review. The objective of this directive is to maintain pricing discipline in the market, prevent any exploitation of passengers in distress, and ensure that citizens who urgently need to travel - including senior citizens, students, and patients - are not subjected to financial hardship during this period."

The ministry added that it would "continue to closely monitor fare levels through real-time data and active coordination with airlines and online travel platforms. Any deviation from the prescribed norms will attract immediate corrective action in the larger public interest."

In a statement, the ministry also directed the airline to complete the ticket refund process for the cancelled flights by Sunday evening, as well as ensure baggage separated from the travellers is delivered in the next two days. The refund process for all cancelled or disrupted flights must be completed by 8 pm on Sunday, the ministry said in a statement. "Airlines have also been instructed not to levy any rescheduling charges for passengers whose travel plans were affected by cancellations," it said.

The current crisis was primarily caused by a shortage of pilots that was not anticipated due to planning deficiencies, and the authorities are keeping a close watch on the situation.

Scenes of absolute chaos have unfolded at airports across the country as IndiGo's domestic fliers expressed frustration with their flights being delayed or cancelled.

ED files chargesheet against Reliance Power...

"However, SECI refused to accept the fresh Bank Guarantee as it was submitted after the due date. "Since Reliance NU BESS Limited had emerged as the L-2 bidder, to save the tender, Reliance Group officials even tried to arrange a fresh endorsement of the fake foreign Bank Guarantee from an SBI branch in Kolkata," the ED alleged.

The Reliance Group had earlier said Anil Ambani was "not on the Board of Reliance Power Limited for more than 3.5 years and is not concerned with this matter in any manner". It claimed to have been a "victim of fraud, forgery and cheating conspiracy" in this case adding that it had made due disclosures in this context to the stock exchange on November 7, 2024.

The ED added that Reliance Group officials signed a "dummy" agreement and also obtained the "Certificate of Enlistment" of Reliance NU BESS Limited from Kolkata Municipal Corporation by submitting "bogus" address documents, it said. However, when they again failed to get the fresh endorsement done, to shift the entire blame onto the intermediary, they filed a complaint against Biswal Tradelink Private Limited and its MD, Partha Sarathi Biswal.

Biswal was arrested by the ED in this case, apart from ex-Reliance Power CFO Ashok Kumar Pal and Dutta. They are currently lodged in jail under judicial custody. The money laundering case stems from a November 2024 FIR

FROM PAGE - 1

of Delhi Police's Economic Offences Wing (EOW). It was alleged that Bhubaneswar-based shell entity Biswal Tradelink was engaged in issuing "fake" bank guarantees against commission. Reliance Power Limited submitted this bid for a tender issued by SECI for setting up 1000 MW/2000 MWh standalone BESS projects under tariff-based competitive bidding.

The investigation has "established" the "connivance" and "mala fide" intentions of the Reliance Group in securing the SECI tender by submitting fake Bank Guarantees purportedly issued by foreign banks and their forged endorsements in the name of SBI, the ED said. The agency also stated in the chargesheet that it has attached assets worth ₹5.15 crore as part of this probe. The agency added that Reliance Power, with a mala fide intent, hired the services of Biswal Tradelink to arrange a fake Bank Guarantee from FirstRand Bank, Manila, Philippines, which is a "non-existent" branch, and from ACE Investment Bank Limited, Malaysia.

"Endorsements of the fake Bank Guarantees were done by using a spoofed email ID of SBI and forged endorsement letters purportedly issued by SBI. "A fraudulent domain, s-bi.Co.In (a look-alike of genuine address sbi.Co.In), was used for the said purpose," it said. Describing the role of other accused, the ED said Reliance Power routed funds of ₹6.33 crore from its other subsidiary, Rosa Power Supply Company Ltd to Biswal Tradelink under the guise of bogus transportation services, in order to meet the required funding for arranging the fake Bank Guarantee.

A "fake" work order and "fake" invoices were executed by the officials of Reliance Group in collusion with accomplice Biswal. "After the arrangement of the fraudulent Bank Guarantee by Biswal Tradelink, Reliance Power also paid a hefty fee of ₹5.40 crore to the said shell entity to depict the entire arrangement as a genuine commercial transaction," the ED claimed.

BSES spokesperson, in a statement, said it is learnt from the Press release dated December 06, 2025, issued by ED that a Supplementary Prosecution Complaint has been filed against Reliance Power Limited, its subsidiaries, Reliance NU BESS Limited, Rosa Power Supply Company Limited, Manoj Bhaiyasaheb Pongde, apart from other third parties in the matter related to SECI Bank guarantee.

"Vide earlier disclosures dated November 7, 2024 and November 14, 2024 we had informed that the Company, Reliance NU BESS Limited had lodged a criminal complaint in above matter against the third parties who had arranged the said bank guarantee with Economic Offence Wing of Delhi Police on October 16, 2024, on basis of which First Information Report (FIR) has been registered on November 11, 2024 against the said third parties. It is reiterated that the Company, Reliance Power Limited, its subsidiaries and its employees acted bona fide and are victims of a fraud, forgery, cheating and conspiracy committed by the third parties," the statement read.

"ED allegations have not yet passed through judicial scrutiny, and the Company has not been held guilty of any wrongdoing. As per law settled by the Supreme Court, the company will get an opportunity to put across its case and facts before the court, even before cognisance, so filing of this complaint does not affect the affairs of the company in any manner," said the BSES statement.

PM sets 10-year deadline to end 'Slave Mentality...

"We are standing at a juncture where one fourth of the 21st century has passed. The world has seen many ups and downs: financial crisis, global pandemic, technological disruptions, world falling apart. We are seeing wars; these situations, in one way or another other are challenging the world," Modi said.

The world is full of uncertainties, but India is being seen in a different league altogether, he said. "India is full of self-confidence. When there is talk of a slowdown, India writes the story of growth. When there is a trust deficit in the world, India is becoming a pillar of trust; when the world is moving towards fragmentation, India is becoming a bridge builder," Modi said.

Pointing out Q2 GDP figures being more than 8 per cent, he said it is the symbol of our pace. "This is not just a number but is a strong macroeconomic signal. It is a message that India is becoming the growth driver of the global economy," Modi said.

Global growth is around 3 per cent while G7 economies are growing at an average of about 1.5 per cent, he pointed out. "At such a time, India is a model of high growth and low inflation," Modi said.

There was a time when people, especially economists in our country, used to express concern over high inflation, but the same people now talk of inflation being low, he said in his address. India's achievements are not ordinary; it is not about numbers but about fundamental change brought about in the last decade, Modi asserted.

Open defecation contaminates Ganga...

Another local said that she has been living in a hut near the Ganga since 1992 and that they use a public toilet when they have enough money to afford the facility.

Haridwar district magistrate Mayur Dixit said that most of these places are illegal settlements. These are encroachments on government land, and due to this, it is not possible to construct toilets in such locations. Any construction is illegal in a place where Government land has been encroached upon, he said.

The DM told The Pioneer the public toilets built near such places can be used by the residents, adding that the authorities are raising awareness among the locals to use such public facilities.

Indigo's fiasco under PMO scanner!

As many flights were cancelled or delayed, confusion continued at major airports as frustrated passengers waited for updates and also tried to locate their luggage.

Many took to social media to express their anger as airfares rose sharply on several routes. After days of chaos triggered by the disruption of flight operations, IndiGo has shared a big update.

The airline has reestablished 95 per cent of its network connectivity in terms of destinations.

The carrier operated to 135 out of the 138 destinations on Saturday and is on course to operate over 1,500 flights by the end of the day, IndiGo said in a statement.

Apologising again, the airline said, "While we understand that we have a long way to go, we are committed to building back the trust of our customers."

"The number of cancellations on Saturday dropped below 850 flights, much lower compared to Friday. We are continuing to work towards reducing this number progressively over the next few days," IndiGo said in a statement. For refund assistance, the airline said, customers can visit its website or contact customer support.

The airline's teams are focused on stabilising schedules, reducing delays, and supporting customers through this period, it said, adding, "We are also working closely with all airports and partners to ensure timely updates are provided to customers at terminals, on our website, and via direct notifications."

The airline, which has been granted major relaxations by the DGCA in the second phase of the new flight duty and rest period norms for pilots, after it told the aviation safety regulator that it was facing significant transitional challenges in roster planning and crew availability under Phase-2 FDTL requirements, also said it is working "determinedly" to bring its operations back on track across the network.

According to a survey, as many as 87 per cent of respondents of a survey conducted on IndiGo passengers said they wanted the service deficiency of the airline to be put under the Class Action provision of the CP Act 2019. A class action provision is a legal mechanism that allows a group of people with a common grievance to collectively sue a company for acts like mismanagement or fraud. The survey asked fliers, "Should the CCPA take up the service deficiency of IndiGo under the Class Action provision of the Consumer Protection Act 2019?"

Out of 32,547 who responded to the question, 87 per cent stated "yes, absolutely"; 3 per cent stated "no, not needed" and 10 per cent did not give a clear answer, it said.

"To sum up, 87 per cent of airline passengers surveyed want CCPA to take up the service deficiency of IndiGo under the Class Action provision of the Consumer Protection Act 2019," it said.

India, US seek measures by UN against LeT, JeM

It said the two sides strongly condemned the terrorist attack in Pahalgam and the recent heinous terror incident near the Red Fort, while stressing that those responsible for terrorism should be held accountable.

"The two sides reviewed a wide range of traditional and emerging threats and challenges such as terrorist recruitment, abuse of technology for terrorist purposes, and financing of terrorism." "Both sides discussed ways to strengthen cooperation against challenges, including through training, cyber security, exchange of best practices and information sharing through continued bilateral and multilateral efforts," the statement noted.

India and the US also discussed strengthening law enforcement and judicial cooperation, including through information sharing and cooperation on mutual legal assistance requests.

Vinod Bahade, Joint Secretary (counter terrorism) in the Ministry of External Affairs, and Monica Jacobsen, Senior Bureau Official in the Bureau of Counterterrorism in the US Department of State, led their respective delegations at the meetings.

Himachal Pradesh to induct women into fire services



CM Sukhvinder Singh Sukhu announced that women would now be inducted into the fire services, saying the Himachal Pradesh Government is prioritising women empowerment. Presiding over a ceremony marking the 63rd Raising Day of Himachal Pradesh Home Guards and Civil Defence on Saturday.

Shashi Tharoor calls Putin banquet ‘warm and engaging’

Senior Congress leader Shashi Tharoor, who on Friday attended a banquet for Russian President Vladimir Putin at the Rashtrapati Bhawan, on Saturday described the atmosphere there as “warm” and “engaging”, and said he enjoyed his conversations with many of the attendees. Tharoor’s remarks came a day after President Droupadi Murmu hosted a banquet for the visiting Russian president at the Rashtrapati Bhavan.



CM Khandu lauds global meet on Dalai Lama’s legacy



Arunachal Pradesh CM Pema Khandu on Saturday lauded the successful conclusion of the four-day international conference on “cultural and historical significance of Tibetan spiritual leader, the Sixth Dalai Lama, Gyalwa Tsangyang Gyatso”, saying the event brought together scholars from across the world to reflect on a spiritual legacy that transcends borders and faiths.

CJI launches skill and polytechnic courses in jails

Skill development centres, polytechnic diploma courses and ITI-level vocational programmes were launched for inmates inside various jails in Haryana on Saturday. Chief Justice of India Surya Kant inaugurated these initiatives from the district prison Bhondsi in Gurugram under the project ‘Empowering Lives Behind Bars, Real Change: The New Paradigm of Correctional Justice’.



‘Historic blunders’ on J&K, China part of Nehru’s legacy: BJP hits back at Sonia

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

The Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP) on Saturday alleged that “historical blunders” like “allowing” Pakistan and China to occupy Indian territory and giving special status to Jammu and Kashmir are Jawaharlal Nehru’s legacy, as it hit out at Congress leader Sonia Gandhi over her accusation that the ruling dispensation’s main objective is to vilify him.

Hitting back at the Congress parliamentary party chairperson over her allegations that the ruling BJP’s goal is not just to “erase” the legacy of the country’s first prime minister but to “destroy” its social and political foundations, BJP national spokesperson Gaurav Bhatia said the word destruction that Sonia Gandhi used in her accusation is “synonymous with” her son Rahul Gandhi.

“If there is any ‘Bhasmasur’ in Indian politics today, he is Rahul Gandhi. He destroyed the parties of Sharad Pawar and Uddhav Thackeray in Maharashtra, then Arvind Kejriwal by forging an alliance with his party during the Lok Sabha polls in Delhi,” Bhatia charged.

“After destroying Tejashwi Yadav recently in Bihar (polls), he is now heading for Uttar Pradesh to destroy Akhilesh Yadav in the state,” he said. Bhasmasur is a demon in Hindu epics known for a boon he received from Lord Shiva that allowed him to turn anyone into ashes (bhasma) by touching their head. However, this power ultimately led to his destruction.

Sonia Gandhi had on Friday alleged that a systematic attempt is being made to denigrate, distort, demean and defame Nehru, which was not acceptable.

Addressing an event to launch the Nehru Centre

India at Jawahar Bhawan, she said that the project to vilify Nehru is the main objective of the ruling dispensation.

She said the sole objective of this is to not only diminish Nehru as a personality but also his universally recognised role in India’s independence struggle and to demolish his legacy in a crude and self-serving attempt to rewrite history.

Reacting sharply to her charge, Bhatia asked, “What is Nehru’s legacy?”

“Nehru’s legacy includes inclusion of Article 370 in the Constitution, turning down an offer to become UN Security Council member for China and allowing both Pakistan and China to capture Indian territory,” the BJP spokesperson alleged, and demanded a response from Sonia Gandhi.

Bhata said that the country has been paying for the ‘historic builders’ made by Nehru.

However, the country is “so strong today” under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and is “making amends” to those “blunders” made by Nehru, he said, citing the abrogation of Article 370 of the Constitution in 2019, which revoked the special status given to Jammu and Kashmir.

The BJP spokesperson also flayed Rahul Gandhi over his allegation that the Government tells visiting foreign dignitaries not to meet him, accusing the Leader of Opposition (LoP) in the Lok Sabha of playing “politics of lies”.

Bhatia showed pictures of Gandhi’s meeting with former Bangladesh prime minister Sheikh Hasina last year and his meeting with Prime Minister of Mauritius Navinchandra Ramgoolam and Prime Minister of New Zealand Christopher Luxon this year, and accused the Congress leader of repeated-

ly playing the victim card and indulging in drama.

Gandhi on Thursday alleged that the Government tells visiting foreign dignitaries not to meet the Leader of the Opposition due to its “insecurity”.

He said it is a tradition that visiting foreign dignitaries meet the LoP, but Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the Ministry of External Affairs were not following this norm. Gandhi’s remarks came hours ahead of Russian President Vladimir Putin’s two-day visit to India.

Hitting back, Bhatia said, “Global diplomacy runs on credibility and not on the sense of entitlement.”

“It is a misfortune of our country that he has become an LoP. He doesn’t even know how to make responsible statements, keeping in mind the occasion. He has been a major source of embarrassment for our country,” the BJP spokesperson charged.

Zubeen death probe nears completion, chargesheet to be filed on December 12

TONY DAS ■ Guwahati

Investigation into the death of Assam’s cultural icon Zubeen Garg is almost complete, and the chargesheet will be filed on December 12, a senior police officer said on Saturday. Special Director General of Police of Criminal Investigation Department (CID), Munna Prasad Gupta, while addressing a press conference here, said, “The investigation is almost complete. The details will be given in the charge sheet.”

Gupta, who is leading the Special Investigation Team (SIT) probing Garg’s death, said seven arrests have been made so far and over 300 witnesses examined. He said the chargesheet will be filed in CID case number 18/2025, of the original case registered after nearly 60 FIRs were filed across the state following Garg’s death. He died while swimming in the sea in Singapore on September 19.

Investigation into the second case (CID case number 19/2025), pertain-



ing to property-related and other activities, is underway, he added.

Gupta refused to share further details, adding that more will be known once the chargesheet is submitted. On November 26, the chief minister said in the assembly that Garg’s death while swimming in the sea in Singapore is a case of “plain and simple murder”.

He was in the Southeast Asian nation to participate in the North East India Festival (NEIF) 2025. NEIF chief organiser Shyamkanu Mahanta, the singer’s manager Siddharth Sharma, and his two band members, Shekhar

Iyoti Goswami and Amrit Prabha Mahanta, his cousin and Assam Police DSP Sandipan Garg, and his two PSOs, Nandeswar Bora and Prabin Baishya, have been arrested in the case.

Singapore Police Force (SPF) is also carrying out an independent investigation into the incident of Garg’s alleged drowning at sea. In a statement on October 17, the SPF said that the preliminary investigations have not indicated any foul play in Garg’s death and investigations may take up to another three months, after which the findings will be submitted to the State Coroner for further proceedings.

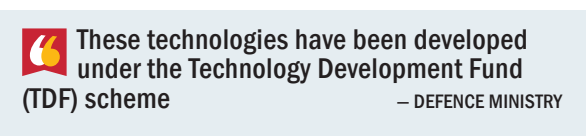
DRDO hands over seven new technologies to armed forces

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

From a long-life seawater battery system for sustained underwater sensing and surveillance applications to a waterjet propulsion system for fast interceptor craft, the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) has handed over seven technologies to the armed forces, the Government said.

These technologies have been developed under the Technology Development Fund (TDF) scheme, the defence ministry said on Friday. “DRDO has handed over seven technologies developed under the TDF scheme to the three Services,” it said in a statement.

“The technologies are — an indigenous high-voltage power supply for airborne self-protection jammers, a tide-efficient gangway for naval jetties, advanced very low frequency-high frequency switching matrix systems, VLF loop aerials for underwater platforms,



indigenous waterjet propulsion system for fast interceptor craft, a novel process for recovery of lithium precursors from used lithium-ion batteries and a long-life seawater battery system for sustained underwater sensing and surveillance applications,” the ministry said.

Each of these technologies or products has been designed, developed and “extensively tested” by the Indian industry with close collaboration and guidance of DRDO’s domain experts and the tri-services, “reinforcing the scheme’s focus on import substitution and critical technology development”, it said.

The technologies were handed over during the meeting of the Empowered Committee of DRDO held at DRDO Bhawan here on December 2 under the

chairmanship of Secretary, Department of Defence R&D and Chairman of DRDO, Samir V Kamat.

Senior representatives from the armed forces, Department of Defence Production and the DRDO also attended the meeting.

The Committee undertook detailed discussions on a wide spectrum of project proposals and approved 12 new projects spanning across strategic, aerospace, naval and electronic warfare technologies, the ministry said.

“These approvals underscore the continued focus on building domestic capability and reducing dependency on foreign technologies in critical and emerging technology areas,” it said.

The Committee discussed the approval approach for various categories of projects under

the TDF and emphasised the need for expediting the end-to-end processing of the scheme’s projects to ensure timeliness and alignment with evolving strategic and technological requirements of the Services.

The Committee also deliberated upon the roadmap of successfully developed technologies and the ways which the subsequent acquisition process needs to be streamlined and executed seamlessly.

It recommended important policy alignment and enabling mechanisms to ensure faster induction and operational deployment of the developed technologies, the ministry said.

Addressing the participants, the chairman of the DRDO reaffirmed the Government’s commitment to strengthening indigenous defence innovation under the vision of ‘Aatmanirbhar Bharat’ through faster execution of the TDF scheme.

New US strategy soft on Pakistan, hits Modi Govt: Congress

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

In a swipe at the Modi Government over the new US National Security Strategy, the Congress on Saturday said it marks a notable shift in the American approach to Pakistan, and avoids the explicit criticism that defined the 2017 Trump-era strategy document, which openly accused Pakistan of supporting militants targeting US partners.

The opposition party also pointed out that the document reiterates US President Donald Trump’s claim that he settled the “raging conflict” between India and Pakistan. Congress general secretary in-charge communications, Jairam Ramesh, said the 33-page National Security Strategy has just been released by the White House.

“In his introduction to the document, President Trump reiterates his claim that he ‘settled the raging conflict between India and Pakistan’.

The same claim is repeated on Page 8,” Ramesh said.

Strategy also marks a notable shift in the US approach to Pakistan, he claimed. “It avoids the explicit criticism that defined the 2017 Trump-era strategy document, which openly accused Pakistan of supporting militants targeting US partners, demanded stronger counterterrorism action, and pressed Islamabad to demonstrate responsible management of its nuclear arsenal. The new strategy omits any such references,” Ramesh said.

“Kya se kya ho gaya, bewafa teri dosti mein,” he added in Hindi, taking a swipe at Prime Minister Narendra Modi with a play on the hit number with similar lyrics from the Dev Anand-starrer film ‘Guide’ (1965).

The Congress general secretary also shared screenshots of the document where reference is made to Trump’s claims on stopping the India-Pakistan conflict in May. Ramesh also shared the White House website link to the document.

The National Security Strategy released by the Trump administration late

CONGRESS MOCKED MODI OVER TRUMP’S CLAIM OF BROKERING INDIA-PAKISTAN PEACE, SAYING THE MODI-TRUMP HUGLOMACY IS IN DEEP FREEZE

Thursday stressed on strong cooperation with India to address the security challenge in the South China Sea. The Trump administration has said that the US must continue to improve commercial and other relations with India to encourage New Delhi to contribute to Indo-Pacific security, including through continued cooperation within the Quad grouping.

The document also mentions the eight wars that Trump claims he has resolved, including the May conflict between India and Pakistan. “President Trump has cemented his legacy as The President of Peace. In addition to the remarkable success achieved during his first term with the historic Abraham Accords, President

Trump has leveraged his deal-making ability to secure unprecedented peace in eight conflicts throughout the world over the course of just eight months of his second term.

“He negotiated peace between Cambodia and Thailand, Kosovo and Serbia, the DRC and Rwanda, Pakistan and India, Israel and Iran, Egypt and Ethiopia, Armenia and Azerbaijan and ended the war in Gaza with all living hostages returned to their families,” the document said.

Earlier this week, the Congress took a swipe at Modi over Trump’s repeated claims that he brokered peace between India and Pakistan, saying “no wonder the Modi-Trump huglomacy is in deep freeze”.

Trump has repeatedly claimed that within the first eight-nine months of his second term in the White House, he resolved conflicts between India and Pakistan, Thailand and Cambodia, Armenia and Azerbaijan, Kosovo and Serbia, Israel and Iran, Egypt and Ethiopia and Rwanda and Congo.

TN CM sends relief ship with rice to cyclone-hit Sri Lanka

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ Chennai

Tamil Nadu Chief Minister MK Stalin on Saturday flagged off a ship laden with relief material, including 300 MT rice, to Cyclone ‘Ditwah’-ravaged Sri Lanka.

About 300 MT sugar, 300 MT lentils, 25 MT milk powder, medicines, blankets, dhotis, sarees and towels were among the relief materials that were dispatched on Saturday from the Chennai port on behalf of the state Government.

The goods were totally valued at ₹1.19 crore, an official said, and added that a similar consignment with 150 MT rice, 150 MT sugar and other essentials were sent by a ship from Tuticorin port today.

The state Government had extended a similar gesture when the island nation faced a severe economic crisis in May 2022.

Sri Lanka faced historic flooding when Cyclone

Ditwah made a landfall on November 28.

According to the UN relief coordination office, OCHA, 9,98,918 people from all 25 districts were affected and 212 deaths were reported. Over 1.80 lakh people were sheltered in 1,094 relief camps.

The chief minister said the state sent 950 MT of relief material to Lanka as a symbolic gesture to say “we are with you during the difficult times.”

Quoting a couplet from the Tamil masterpiece ‘Thirukkural’ authored by savant Thiruvalluvar on the recognition of one’s duty even in adverse conditions, he said in a post on the social media platform ‘X’ that the relief material was being sent to Sri Lanka which was facing hardship.

The couplet no. 218, quoted by Stalin, says those who deeply know duty do not neglect giving even in their own unprosperous season.

CPI(M), LDF never linked with Jamaat-e-Islami: Kerala CM

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ Thrissur (Kerala)

Kerala Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan on Saturday claimed that neither the CPI(M) nor the LDF has ever had any association with the Jamaat-e-Islami, rejecting opposition UDF allegations that the Left party and the Muslim outfit were political partners for decades.

Vijayan said that the Left Front never had the “misfortune” of seeking votes from the Jamaat-e-Islami and never gave the Muslim outfit a “good certificate”.

“But there are some people now who are desperately trying to give a good certificate to the Jamaat-e-Islami,” the chief minister said at a press conference here. He alleged that it is the Jamaat-e-Islami which shapes the political agenda of the Congress and also contributes to UDF poll campaigns.

The remarks came in response to a statement by Indian Union Muslim League (IUML) national general secretary P K Kunhalikutty, who

claimed that the CPI(M) and Jamaat-e-Islami have been linked for decades in a relationship that “cannot be severed easily.”

IUML is a key constituent of the Congress-led UDF opposition. Hitting back, Vijayan said the UDF and Jamaat-e-Islami leaders “will say anything,” and their claims of CPI(M) links with the Muslim outfit are baseless.

Supporting his claim, the CM noted that the Jamaat-e-Islami began voting in elections only from 1987, a time when the Left was not in power in Kerala.

He said that in 1987, the Jamaat-e-Islami had explicitly refused to vote for Marxist or fascist groups, making it clear they voted for the Congress.

In 1992, the Congress Government at the Centre classified the Jamaat-e-Islami as a prohibited group, preventing it from supporting the party in 1996, he added.

“In subsequent years, the Jamaat-e-Islami adopted a candidate-based voting stance and sometimes contested elections themselves.

During the VS Achuthanandan Government (2006-2011), the outfit’s youth wing Solidarity, actively worked against the Left Front,” Vijayan said.

“So, we never had the misfortune of chasing their votes. We have also never given them a good certificate. But now, some are desperately trying to do so,” he added.

Later in the day, in response to Vijayan’s claims, Leader of Opposition in the Assembly, VD Satheesan, contended that the Jamaat-e-Islami has been supporting the Left front since 1977, when the Muslim outfit entered politics.

“Since then, till 2019, they have been voting for the CPI(M) and LDF,” he said at a press meet in Malappuram.

Satheesan also showed a purported photograph of Vijayan meeting an Amir of the Jamaat-e-Islami and claimed that many CPI(M) leaders across India were seen in close contact with members of the Welfare Party of India, the Muslim outfit’s political wing.



President Droupadi Murmu, VP CP Radhakrishnan, PM Narendra Modi, Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla and Union Minister Kiren Rijiju paying tribute to Babasaheb Ambedkar on his 69th death anniversary at the Parliament House complex in New Delhi

■ States Focus ■



CM NITISH LAUNCHES JD(U)'S MEMBERSHIP DRIVE IN BIHAR

Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar on Saturday inaugurated the membership drive of the JD(U), the party headed by him, for the period between 2025 and 2028. The drive began with Kumar assuming the membership of the party, followed by JD(U) national working president Sanjay Jha, senior leader Bashishtha Narain Singh and State unit president Umesh Kushwaha, among others. "It was only natural that our national president Nitish Kumar first assumed the membership. This time around, we have set a target of 1 crore, which is higher than the target of the previous membership drive," Jha told reporters.



JAGANNATH TEMPLE OWNS OVER 60,000 ACRES IN ODISHA

Shree Jagannath Temple in Puri owns over 60,426 acres of land in Odisha, and nearly 400 acres in six other States, Law minister Prithiviraj Harichandan said in the Assembly on Saturday. Harichandan said this while replying to a written question of BJD MLA Sudarshan Haripal in the Assembly. The 12th century shrine in Puri is governed by the Law department as per the Shree Jagannath Temple Act, 1956. While 60,426.943 acres of land in the name of Lord Jagannath are located across 24 districts of Odisha, another 395.252 acres of temple land were traced in six States – West Bengal (322.930 acres), Maharashtra (28.21 acres), Madhya Pradesh (25.11 acres), Andhra Pradesh (17.02 acres), Chhattisgarh (1.7 acres) and Bihar (0.27 acres).

J&K CM, LG offices lock horns over CCE age relief

MOHIT KANDHARI ■ Jammu

Despite maintaining a cordial working relationship, a fresh round of 'war of words' has broken out on social media between the office of Jammu and Kashmir Chief Minister Omar Abdullah and the Lieutenant Governor (LG) Manoj Sinha over the issue of age relaxation to the aspirants of the Jammu and Kashmir Combined Competitive (Preliminary) Examination-2025 (CCE).

The day-long confrontation between the two sides prompted Chief Minister Omar Abdullah to write a letter to the Chairman of the Jammu and Kashmir Public Service Commission, seeking postponement of the exam, which is scheduled to be held on December 7.

Chief Minister Omar Abdullah, in a letter to Arun Kumar Choudhary, Chairman JKPSK Saturday said: "I am writing in the context of the extraordinary situation presently confronting the aspirants of the Jammu and Kashmir Combined Competitive (Preliminary)



Examination-2025, scheduled to be conducted by the Jammu and Kashmir Public Service Commission. The ongoing disruption in the air services has caused widespread travel chaos across the region. This is further compounded by the prevailing uncertainty arising due to the delay in the proposal regarding age relaxation — an enabling provision that has been extended multiple times in the past. Together, these factors have placed unprecedented mental and logistical stress on the competing candidates.



In view of the above, and keeping in mind the principles of fairness, equity and equal opportunity for all aspirants, I would urge the Commission to take cognizance of the prevailing circumstances and consider postponement of the forthcoming examination by a reasonable duration, purely in the interest of the candidates. I am confident that the Commission as always, will take a compassionate and balanced view of the matter in the larger public interest". Earlier in the day, the Office

of the Lieutenant Governor (Lok Bhavan) said that several social media posts circulating about the JKPSK Prelims examination were "misleading," asserting that the age-relaxation file sent by the Government was promptly returned the same day with a key query, but no response has been received since.

In a post on X, the Office of LG Jammu and Kashmir, said: "Social media posts with regard to JKPSK exam are misleading. Lok Bhavan had received the file on 2nd December, 2025, which was categorically related to age relaxation only. The file was returned the same day, 2nd December, 2025, with a query whether it is logistically possible to conduct the exam on 7th December, by incorporating modifications in eligibility criteria at such a belated stage. Despite a lapse of 4 days, Lok Bhavan did not receive any response. I fully sympathise with young aspirants.

The advertisement notice for the examination was published by the Jammu and Kashmir Public Service

Commission on 22/08/2025. The exam was notified to be conducted on 07/12/2025 through a notice on 06/11/2025".

Reacting to the ongoing tussle, the Peoples Democratic Party Chief Mehbooba Mufti, in a post on X, said, "Aspirants of the JKPSC CCE are caught in a tussle between the LG and the CM. In this cold, they are out on the streets asking for nothing more than basic fairness -age relaxation and a reasonable exam schedule. I urge @OfficeOfLGandK and @OmarAbdullah to step in and resolve this issue without any further delay".

The ruling National Conference accused the BJP-PDP alliance Government for reducing the age limit during their tenure in power.

"Which Government permanently reduced the age limit for all students of Jammu and Kashmir to apply for Government services? It was the PDP-BJP Government in 2018, said a post of the JKNC handle on X (earlier Twitter). Hitting back, PDP wrote back on X, "Excuses and finger-

pointing at a Government that ceased to exist seven years ago cannot wash away the responsibility you carry today. NC sought votes in the name of resolving people's issues, sort this out".

People's Conference Chairman Sajad Lone in a post on X said, "The JKAS age relaxation issue is turning out to be yet another classical case of passing the buck at the cost of young aspirants. First CM posted, suggesting that he had no role in the scuttling of the age relaxation file. And now the LG has suggested that they had sent the file back on the 2nd of December.

For heaven's sake, can the CM put something in writing? The CMs office cannot be run through TV bytes. What stops him from issuing written orders? Let them defy written orders. If the other side is falsifying facts. Let us call their bluff. Every single day we have a moaning CM complaining about his file being turned down. Yet nothing in the form of written communication".

Female Greylag Goose tagged for migration study

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Patna



In a bid to track and study its migratory movements, the Bird Ringing and Monitoring Station (BRMS) in Bihar's Bhagalpur district has tagged a female Greylag Goose, which breeds across northern Europe, Central Asia and South Asia, with a solar-powered GPS-GSM transmitter.

GPS tracking will help map its migration route, timing, stopover patterns and habitat use — critical information for wetland conservation across Bihar, a senior officer said. The tagged bird has been named 'Sonbarsa', after the village in Bhagalpur district where it

was recently captured.

Officials said the name reflects the area's identity, with Sonbarsa signifying a fertile, gold-toned landscape shaped by riverine soils, symbolising abundance and harmony with nature.

"BRMS, Bhagalpur, a joint venture of the State Government's Department of Environment, Forest and

Climate Change and the Bombay Natural History Society (BNHS), tagged a female Greylag Goose on Friday at the Ghatara wetland near Sonbarsa village with a solar-powered GPS-GSM transmitter to study its migratory movements.

"This is the first-ever GPS tagging of a bird in Bhagalpur district, marking a significant milestone in Bihar's migratory bird research," Principal Chief Conservator of Forests (PCCF), Prabhat Kumar Gupta, said on Saturday.

Greylag Goose, which travels thousands of kilometres along the Central Asian Flyway, uses wetlands like Ghatara as stopover or wintering sites.

He said this tagging marks a major step toward advancing scientific understanding and safeguarding migratory birds that depend on the State's wetlands.

This effort follows the GPS-GSM tagging of two Bar-headed Geese in Jamui district in February this year, strengthening Bihar's contribution to waterbird monitoring under the Central Asian Flyway.

Earlier, BRMS, Bhagalpur had documented a juvenile Greater Flamingo in the Ganga near Sultanganj on December 8, 2024. It marked the first documented appearance of the species in the Bhagalpur district, the PCCF said.

Ayodhya under heavy security on Babri demolition anniversary

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Lucknow/Ayodhya

Ayodhya remained under an extensive security blanket on the 33rd anniversary of the demolition of the Babri mosque organised political or religious mobilisations — a sharp contrast to earlier years when rival groups marked the day with symbolic demonstrations.

Security personnel were on high alert and carried out checking drives across the holy town, especially around the newly constructed Ram temple, railway station, bus stands and major roads, and other sensitive areas in Uttar Pradesh, including Varanasi and Mathura, with mosque-temple disputes, stopping vehicles at multiple checkpoints, verifying IDs and strengthening vigil.

"December 6 is

always a sensitive date for Ayodhya. This year, we are ensuring no breach of peace or security," said Superintendent of Police (City) Chakrapani Tripathi.

He said that strict directives had been issued prohibiting public gatherings or rallies, while hotels had been asked to maintain detailed visitors' records. Bomb squads and dog squads also carried out checks at railway station parking areas along with Railway Protection Force (RPF) and Government Railway Police (GRP) personnel, he said.

Unlike previous years, there were no organised political or religious mobilisations. Local activists and residents said it reflects both the administrative curbs imposed after the Supreme Court's 2019 verdict and the passing away of the once-key



Security personnel stand guard near Beldanga Railway station in Murshidabad on Saturday

PTI

leaders from both sides of the dispute. "The Government has banned observing 'Black Day' or 'Victory Day' (Shaurya Diwas) after the final verdict," said Indu Bhushan Pandey, a social activist in Ayodhya.

The BJP posted messages on its X handles paying tributes to those associated with

the Ram Temple movement on "Shaurya Diwas" — observed by Hindu outfits to mark the demolition in 1992.

"Jai Shri Ram, On Shaurya Diwas, a hundred salutations to the Sanatanis who, by offering their lives in the Shri Ram Mandir movement, paved the way for the cultural renaiss-

sance of the nation," a post on the official handle of the BJP's Uttar Pradesh unit said.

Many prominent figures associated with the Ram Janmabhoomi movement, including Ashok Singhal, Kalyan Singh, Bal Thackeray and Mahant Avaidyanath, have either passed away or faded from public life. Leaders from the Babri mosque Action Committee, such as Zafaryab Jilani, Syed Shahabuddin, Abdullah Bukhari and Sultan Salahuddin Owaisi, are also no longer alive.

Even the main litigants, including Hashim Ansari and Triloki Nath Pandey, in whose name the court decree for the Ram temple was issued, have passed away.

Meanwhile, the five-acre plot allotted by the Supreme Court to the Sunni Central Waqf Board for building a mosque remains barren.

The Ayodhya Development Authority had rejected the initial plan submitted for the proposed mosque, and no revised map has since been filed.

The new mosque project rollout at Dhannipur, around 25 km from the holy city, could begin around April 2026, the head of the trust tasked with the project said.

"If all fits in place, and of course, subject to the Ayodhya Development Authority's (ADA) approval of the revised layout plan of the mosque that we hope to submit by December-end, a tentative timeline of the mosque project rollout could be around April 2026," Zufar Faruqi, chairman of the Indo-Islamic Cultural Foundation (IICF), which will undertake the construction of the mosque-complex project, said.

Rajasthan 1st State to digitise 100% of voter rolls under SIR

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Jaipur

Rajasthan on Saturday completed 100 per cent digitisation of its electoral roll under the Special Intensive Revision (SIR), becoming the first State in the country to do so, Chief Electoral Officer Navin Mahajan said.

He said that coordinated effort and meticulous execution by BLOs, assistant staff, supervisors, district election

officers and other staff engaged in the exercise were behind this success.

"Rajasthan now also leads the country in voter mapping, with more than 97 per cent of the mapping work completed. As a result, only 3 per cent of voters will need to furnish documents during the claims-objections phase," he said.

On average, he said, only about 30 voters per booth will be required to submit documents.

He said high-quality mapping has made the SIR process simpler, more transparent and greatly reduced repeated verification for voters.

Mahajan said that the dedication of field staff, especially BLOs and panchayat-level employees, was central to this achievement.

He said the success reflects not just statistical progress but the collective spirit that enabled the State to set a new benchmark.

The chief electoral officer said that the draft electoral roll will be published on December 16, adding that claims and objections can be filed from December 16 to January 15, 2026.

Hearings, verification and decisions on claims and objections will be conducted from December 16 to February 7, 2026. The final electoral roll will be published on February 14, 2026, the officer said.

don't know about it. The AICC has nominated a five-member committee under Girish Chodankar. What you say is astonishing. We are with the DMK."

When the reporter persisted, the Congress leader said, "I really don't know what to say. There was no coverage in the media to say the meeting took place. I can't react to speculation." He exuded the hope that the DMK would not underestimate the strength of Congress and that it would allot them a modest number of seats this time.



this time.

Responding to a question on the reported meeting between Chakravarty and Vijay, who heads the Tamilaga Vетtri Kahagam, Selvaperunthagai replied, "I

stressed. The panel had called on Stalin, the leader of the Secular Progressive Alliance, on December 4 and informally commenced the process of discussing seat-sharing.

Selvaperunthagai, Congress Legislature Party leader Rajesh Kumar, and AICC secretaries Suraj MN Hegde and Nivedith Alva were the other members of the committee led by Chodankar.

The Congress, which won 18 out of 25 seats it contested in alliance with the DMK in the 2021 Assembly election, is aiming to contest more seats

TNCC chief denies reports of Praveen, Vijay meeting

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Chennai

TNCC chief K Selvaperunthagai on Saturday denied any knowledge about Congress functionary Praveen Chakravarty's meeting with actor-politician Vijay on alliance and said this claim appeared illogical.

The Congress high command had already constituted a five-member committee under Girish Chodankar (AICC TN incharge) to hold discussions with DMK president and Chief Minister MK Stalin on seat-sharing, he

Adhikari slams Mamata after Kabir lays down foundation stone of Babri mosque

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ Kolkata

Bengal Opposition Leader Suvenud Adhikari on Saturday slammed Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee for allowing "communal elements" like former Trinamool Congress MLA — Humayun Kabir to thrive in the State by providing them political patronage.

Adhikari's Statement came soon after Kabir — who was on Thursday suspended from his party — laid the foundation stone of a proposed Babri Mosque at Beldanga in Murshidabad district bordering Bangladesh.

"It is a very dangerous step we have no problem if anyone constructs a mosque or a temple or a church anywhere but where the name of Babar is being used it becomes really dangerous because everyone knows that Pathans and Mughals invaded India, tortured the Hindus and converted thousands of them, looted their wealth and women, we have problem not with the mosque but with the name he was not Indian. He was a



Former TMC MLA Humayun Kabir (left) waves to the gathering, he laid the foundation stone for a mosque, modelled on Ayodhya's Babri Masjid in West Bengal's Murshidabad district on Saturday

PTI

rapist and a robber. His name was invoked without any permission," Adhikari said blaming the Chief Minister for making what Kabir had become today.

Adhikari was taking part in a rally on the occasion of "Saurya Diwas" that started in front of Swami Vivekananda's residence and marched a few kms till Shyambazar crossing in North Kolkata.

Wondering why the Chief

Minister would not take action against Kabir when he during the last general elections threatened to cut and throw the 30 per cent population (Hindus) of Murshidabad in River Bhagirathi (Ganges), Adhikari said, "Mamata Banerjee provided police protection to men like Humayun Kabir where as one has to approach the court to celebrate Saraswati Puja, a few days ago, the police transported Goddess Kali in a prison

van, instead of taking action against a section of the population who were disturbing the Puja today's development will not bring any peace."

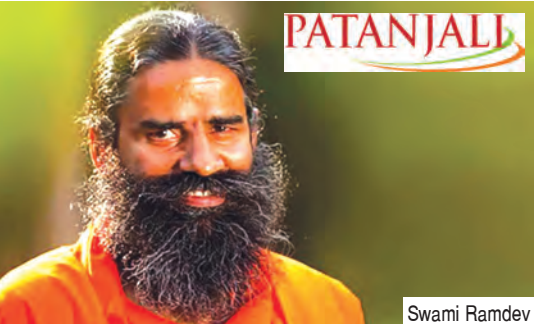
However, Kabir who managed to draw many thousand people to witness the foundation stone laying ceremony said that he was not doing anything unconstitutional by setting up a mosque.

"I am not doing anything unconstitutional. Anyone can build a temple, church I will build a mosque It is not written anywhere that I cannot build the Babri mosque if a Ram Temple can be built at Sagardighi why cannot a Barbri Mosque be build here." A Hindu religious organisation has been building a replica of Ayodhya Ram Temple at Sagardighi which is also in Murshidabad district.

Meanwhile, even as the Trinamool Congress on Saturday observed a Sanhati Diwas (Solidarity Day) the Chief Minister took to the social media saying her struggle to contain communal hatred would continue.

PROSPECT

Patanjali Group signs MoU to enter Russia with its Ayurveda products



Yoga Guru Baba Ramdev-led Patanjali Group on Saturday signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the Russian Government that will facilitate its entry into the country. The MoU aims to promote health and wellness, health tourism, exchange of skilled human resources and research-related initiatives, as per a statement. The MoU was signed here by Ramdev on behalf of the Patanjali Group and Sergey Cheremin, Chairman of the Indo-Russia Business Council and Minister of Commerce of Russia.

The Patanjali Group, founded by Baba Ramdev and Acharya Balkrishna, is an Indian conglomerate known for its Ayurvedic and FMCG products, encompassing Patanjali Ayurved and Patanjali Foods (formerly Ruchi Soya). Ramdev, addressing the programme, said people in Russia appreciate and actively practice yoga, Ayurveda, and naturopathy. He further said "our foremost goal is to take this wellness science of the sages to nearly 200 countries across the world, with Russia serving as the entry point".

"The first major objective of this MoU is to expand Patanjali's wellness services in Russia. The second objective is to share India's spiritual knowledge, culture, yoga, Ayurveda and invaluable heritage with Russia.

For this purpose, India's cultural and sage traditions will be taken to Russia," he said. Additionally, under this MoU, leading Indian brands will be promoted in Russia and Russian brands in India. While Sergey Cheremin said they will strengthen their partnership with Patanjali. By adopting Patanjali's yoga, Ayurveda and naturopathy, they aim to transform the lifestyle of the people of Russia and make them healthier and disease-free, he said.

Install rooftop solar panels on all Govt buildings: Haryana CM to officials



Haryana Chief Minister Nayab Singh Saini on Saturday directed that all Government buildings like schools, colleges, hospitals, offices, etc, be equipped with rooftop solar systems to accelerate the State's transition towards clean and green energy. He was chairing a high-level review meeting on the budget announcements of the power sector at the civil secretariat here, according to an official statement. uring the meeting, Saini reviewed the progress of the PM Suryaghar: *Muft Bijli Yojana* and instructed officials to expedite rooftop solar installations across households in the State. He also examined the month-wise achievements under the scheme and emphasised strict monitoring and accountability.

In addition, the CM directed the creation of solar parks across the State to harness Haryana's renewable energy potential. He also ordered immediate removal of old and defunct electricity poles from major State roads and highways to enhance public safety and improve road aesthetics. Chairman, Haryana Power Generation Corporation Ltd (HPGCL), Shyamal Misra said 42,486 rooftop solar installations have been completed in the State as of November 20, 2025. A target has been set to install 2,22,000 rooftop solar systems in the state by March 31, 2027. He said power distribution companies have also formulated a new scheme, 'Saur Urja Protsahan Yojana' and it has been submitted to the State Government for approval.

Assam CM launches seed capital cheque distribution for women of Hailakandi and Dholai

TONY DAS
■ Guwahati

Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Saturday launched the distribution of seed capital cheques under the *Mukhyamantri Mahila Udyamita Abhiyan* for women beneficiaries across Hailakandi and Dholai Legislative Assembly Constituencies (LACs) in the Barak Valley.

A total of 17,774 beneficiaries from Hailakandi LAC and 20,045 from Dholai LAC each received cheques of ₹10,000 under the initiative, aimed at ensuring sustainable economic empowerment for women in Assam.

Speaking at the Hailakandi distribution event, the Chief Minister noted that cheque distribution has already been completed in 50 constituencies in the past two months, benefiting 12 lakh women across the State.

He highlighted Prime Minister Narendra Modi's vision to transform three crore women into "*Lakhpati Didis*," stating the State Government aims to transform 40 lakh women associated with Self-Help Groups (SHGs) into "*Lakhpati Baideus*" (elder sisters).

CM Sarma urged beneficiaries to make the best use of the initial ₹10,000 seed fund, explaining that depositing it in their SHGs could create a working capital of ₹1 lakh for enterprises or business expansion.

Following a six-month assessment of fund utilisation, beneficiaries will be eligible for subsequent support of ₹25,000 and ₹50,000. Eligibility for these subsequent benefits is restricted to beneficiaries with up to three children. The CM also announced that under Orunodoi 3.0, two to three thousand new beneficiaries will be included from Hailakandi LAC. Further-more, from January 1, ration card holders will be able to purchase dal, salt and sugar at Rs. 100 per kg, a reduction from the existing ₹117.

On development, CM Sarma announced the installation of an MRI machine at Hailakandi Civil Hospital and directed the District Commissioner to identify land for a medical college.

Earlier, the Chief Minister laid the foundation stone for the statue of Bharat Kesari Dr Syama Prasad Mukherjee on Puranibazar Road, Hailakandi.



CM Himanta Biswa Sarma is distributing seed capital cheque to women beneficiary during the Mukhyamantri Mahila Udyamita Abhiyan programme in Hailakandi on Saturday

Pioneer photo

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

Ahead of Budget 2026, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Saturday said the simplification of customs would be the next big reform agenda for the Government. During the current financial year, the Government undertook reforms such as rate rationalisation and simplification of the income tax and Goods and Services Tax (GST) in a bid to boost consumption by providing more cash in the hands of the common man.

"We need a complete overhaul of customs... We need to have customs simplified for people to feel that it is not cumbersome to comply... Need to make it more transparent," Sitharaman said while speaking at the HT Leadership Summit here.

There is a need to bring the virtues of income tax to the customs side in terms of transparency, she said, adding that the proposed reforms will be comprehensive and entail customs duty rate rationalisation. The announcements to this effect can be made in the upcoming Budget, likely to be presented on February 1. "We have brought down



Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman

customs duty over the last two years steadily. But in those few items where our rates are considered to be over the optimal level, we have to bring them down as well. Customs is my next big cleaning-up

assignment," she said. In this year's Budget, among other measures announced, the Government proposed eliminating seven additional customs tariff rates on industrial goods, following

the removal of seven tariffs in 2023-24 (announced in the previous budget speech on July 23, 2024). This reduces the total number of tariff slabs to eight, including a zero rate. On the depreciating rupee

against the dollar, Sitharaman said, it will find its natural level.

The rupee has depreciated about 5 per cent against the US dollar during the calendar year 2025.

The rupee breached the 90-a-dollar level for the first time to settle at a fresh all-time low of 90.21 (provisional) on Wednesday, down 25 paise from its previous close, amid sustained foreign fund outflows and higher crude oil prices.

Sitharaman exuded confidence that the GDP growth would be 7 per cent or above during the current financial year.

The Indian economy grew by a higher-than-expected 8.2 per cent — a six-quarter high — as increased factory production in anticipation of a consumption boost from the GST rate cut helped offset deceleration in farm output.

The growth in the second quarter, compared with 7.8 per cent in the preceding three months and 5.6 per cent in the year-ago period, was aided by a strong showing from the services sector, which clocked double-digit growth.

For the first half ended in September, India clocked a growth rate of 8 per cent.

Circular economy to boost dairy farmers' income by 20% in 5 years: Amit Shah



Union Minister for Home Affairs and Cooperation, Amit Shah inaugurates the newly constructed Bio-CNG and Fertiliser Plant by Banas Dairy

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Ahmedabad

Union Home and Cooperation Minister Amit Shah on Saturday expressed confidence that implementation of the circular economy model across the country will increase dairy farmers' income by 20 per cent in the next five years. Shah was addressing cattle rearers associated with Banas Dairy at an event held at Sanadar village in Gujarat's Vav-Tharad district to mark the inauguration of the dairy's bio-CNG and fertiliser plant and ground-breaking of its milk powder plant.

He praised Banas Dairy's management for successfully developing a model for a circular economy in the dairy sector, which includes generating extra income for farmers through various means, such as converting cattle dung into biogas and

bio-fertiliser. Shah informed the audience that he has brought several members of Parliament to Banaskantha to understand the circular economy model of Banas Dairy.

"So far, our cooperative dairies have received huge success in procuring milk from farmers and giving back the income generated from selling milk products. Now, the time has come to focus on the circular economy. You will get your share from the income generated by the dairy by selling biogas and fertiliser produced from cattle dung procured from farmers," he said. A concrete plan for the implementation of this circular economy model across the country will emerge from the meeting of MPs in Banaskantha in the evening, the minister said.

Shah also informed the gathering that chairpersons and managing directors of all

the major cooperative dairies will visit Banas Dairy in January 2026 to understand more about the initiatives taken by the dairy, considered Asia's largest dairy with a turnover of ₹24,000 crore.

"Apart from the usual milk products like paneer and curd, there are many products that are in demand across the globe, but they are not produced in India. If we focus on those products, dairy farmers can earn extra income," he said.

Shah said Prime Minister Narendra Modi has created a system wherein dairies will get the required finance and technology to adopt this circular economy model, which also includes leather production from the hide harvested from the cattle that died naturally. "Our Government has created three cooperatives for the agriculture sector and three for the dairy sector. I want to

assure you that the circular economy will increase dairy farmers' income by 20 per cent in the next five years," he said. Shah said his ministry and the Centre have done detailed planning for implementing the circular economy model in the dairy sector. He expressed confidence that targets set by PM Modi under the 'White Revolution 2.0' initiative will be achieved through collective efforts.

On the occasion, Shah praised women dairy farmers for their contribution and efforts in strengthening the sector in this arid region of Gujarat. "Women dairy farmers of this region sent a message to NGOs around the world that advocate for women's empowerment. Without any agitation, you worked hard to create a system where your earnings are deposited directly into your bank account," he noted.

Need stronger arbitral institutions for infrastructure sector: Justice Rajesh Bindal

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

Supreme Court judge Justice Rajesh Bindal has underlined the need for strong arbitral institutions, stating that the country's booming infrastructure sector requires expert involvement and problem-solving approaches to prevent disputes from stalling projects.

The Supreme court judge was speaking at the 5th Biennial International Conference on Construction Law and Arbitration organised by the Society of Construction Law here on Friday evening, in collaboration with Khaitan and Co, Larsen and Toubro, JSA Advocates and Solicitors, among others. Justice Bindal said construction law is a highly specialised field.



Justice Rajesh Bindal

He said the rapid growth of India's infrastructure, including power, roads, metro, ports and dams, has naturally increased disputes.

"Activity is increasing, so percentage of disputes will go up — some genuine, some creative.

We should solve them at each stage, instead of taking the entire dispute to the end and stalling the project," Justice Bindal said.

He endorsed institutional arbitration in construction disputes, to combat its current issues of inflated costs and delayed proceedings by ensuring the availability of technical experts, proper record-keeping, and structured case management.

He also stressed contract drafting as a key area for reducing disputes.

"The best form of agreement is where all relevant laws and terms are incorporated in a single document, avoiding overlaps and patho-

logical clauses," he said.

Justice Bindal warned about challenges posed by Artificial Intelligence (AI) in arbitration and litigation, including fabricated evidence, non-existent judgments, and confidentiality risks on open AI platforms.

Speaking at the event, Attorney General R Venkataramani called for dedicated legislation for the construction sector, underlining its current fragmented nature.

He urged law schools to play a larger role in shaping the future of construction law and regulatory frameworks.

Delhi High Court judge Justice Tejas Karia highlighted the rapid evolution and complexity of India's infrastructure sector and emphasised the need for specialised dispute resolution frameworks.

"The future of construction disputes is clear. It will be faster, more data-driven and supported by technology. It will be less adversarial and more collaborative and rely on early resolution structures and enforcement.

If we build a dispute resolution system that is clear, predictable, economically enabled and globally trusted, we can position India as a hub for infrastructure arbitration," he said.

MP Manoj Tiwari flags off FICCI-CASCADE anti-smuggling auto rally

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

FICCI-CASCADE (Committee Against Smuggling and Counterfeiting Destroying the Economy), on Saturday organised the third edition of its Annual Auto Rally. The event was flagged off by Lok Sabha Member of Parliament Manoj Tiwari. The aim of the rally was to raise large scale awareness on the impact of smuggled and counterfeit goods on India's economy, public health and national security.

On the occasion Tiwari made a passionate appeal during the flag-off ceremony and urged citizens to act as informed consumers and join the nation's collective crusade against smuggling, which continues to drain Government revenue and undermine legitimate industry.

"Smuggling is not just an economic offence, it is a silent threat that fuels criminal networks and even terrorism. A bomb blast shocks the nation in a single moment, but the funding for such acts often begins quietly through the sale of smuggled and illegal goods. Many citizens do not realise that when



Manoj Tiwari, Member of Parliament and Anil Rajput, Chairman, FICCI CASCADE, flagging off the Anti-Smuggling Auto Rally in Delhi, with over 300 auto-rickshaws participating to raise awareness on the rising threat of smuggling and counterfeiting

Pioneer photo

they buy products without a bill or choose cheaper, smuggled items, they unintentionally strengthen the very forces that work against India's safety and stability.

Today, I appeal to every Indian: let us take a clear and conscious pledge that we will never purchase goods that come through illegal channels.

Even if it costs a little more, let us always choose rightful, tax-paid, bill-certified products.

This is not only about supporting honest businesses — it is about protecting our nation, safeguarding our people, and weakening the networks that misuse our hard-earned money against us," he said.

FROM THE WORLD

USA

Woman charged with smuggling

A 42-year-old woman has been charged for her role in an international smuggling conspiracy under which individuals primarily from India were brought illegally to the US across the border from Canada. Stacey Taylor of Plattsburgh, New York, appeared for an arraignment this week after a federal grand jury in Albany returned an indictment in October charging her for her role in the smuggling conspiracy, according to an official statement on Friday. Court records show that US Border Patrol agents interdicted Taylor's vehicle near Churubusco, New York, near the Quebec border in the early morning hours in January, and found four foreign nationals inside her vehicle. The four men - three Indian nationals and one Canadian national - had crossed the US-Canadian border illegally, without inspection.

PAKISTAN

Nine terrorists gunned down

Security forces have gunned down nine terrorists belonging to the banned Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) in two separate intelligence-based operations in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province in northwest Pakistan, military's media wing said on Saturday. The operations were conducted in Khyber, Tank and Lakki Marwat districts of the province on Friday, the Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR), the media wing of the Pakistan Army said in a statement. An intelligence-based operation was conducted in Tank on the reported presence of terrorists. After an intense fire exchange, seven terrorists were killed, the ISPR statement said. In a separate IBO conducted in Lakki Marwat, "two more khawarij were effectively neutralised by security forces."

India boosts Sri Lanka recovery efforts

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ Colombo

A top Indian diplomat on Saturday briefed Sri Lankan corporate leaders about New Delhi's "response and continued commitment" to the cyclone-hit island nation in its resurgence from the disaster that has claimed over 600 lives so far.

Indian High Commissioner Santosh Jha met Sri Lankan corporate leaders associated with the 'Rebuilding Sri Lanka Fund' as the island nation is grappling with widespread flooding, landslides and severe infrastructure collapse following Cyclone Ditwah.

Till Saturday noon, as many as 611 people had died because of the disaster, which also left several districts isolated and acutely strained the country's disaster-response capacity.

During his meeting with the corporate leaders, Jha discussed the "way ahead for rehabilitation and recovery", the Indian High Commission said in an X post.

He also briefed them on the elements of "India's response and continued commitment to stand by Sri Lanka in its resurgence from this crisis," it added.

India was the first country to respond to Sri Lanka's international appeal for assistance under its Operation Sagar Bandhu.

Its humanitarian assistance has continued across land and air, focusing on both emergency response and sustained medical care, the Indian mission here said in a press release. Since the launch of Operation Sagar Bandhu on November 28,



High Commissioner Santosh Jha during a meeting with Sri Lanka's corporate leaders associated with Rebuilding Sri Lanka Fund

PTI

India has provided more than 58 tonnes of relief material including dry rations, tents, tarpaulins, hygiene kits, water purification kits and around 4.5 tonnes of medicines and surgical equipment.

Another 50 tonnes of equipment including generators, inflatable rescue boats, and Outboard Motors have been provided, and 130 tonnes of Bailey Bridge units have been airlifted along with 31 engineers to restore critical connectivity.

The Indian Engineer Corps is conducting surveys and reconnaissance for the construction of Bailey Bridges on vital road routes to restore connectivity in flood-hit

areas. On Saturday, a ship laden with 950 tonnes of essential goods including 300 MT rice was dispatched by Tamil Nadu Chief Minister MK Stalin.

It is carrying clothes and food to be distributed among those affected by the cyclone following a request made by the Sri Lankan Deputy High Commission in Chennai, according to the Sri Lankan Foreign Ministry.

"India was the first country to respond. India sent helicopters and rescue teams. They sent food and medicine very quickly," Foreign Minister Vijitha Herath said, calling the response received from the international community to Sri Lanka's appeal

"overwhelming". Under Operation Sagar Bandhu, two columns of the National Disaster Response Force (NDRF), comprising 80 experts and K9 units with specially trained dogs, conducted rescue and relief operations, evacuating around 150 stranded persons. A full-fledged field hospital with 78 medical personnel from India is now providing life-saving care in Mahiyanganaya near Kandy.

It was airlifted by the Indian Air Force on Wednesday. In its first 24 hours, the facility provided much-needed medical care to around 400 patients affected by the cyclone, conducted 55 minor procedures and

an operation, the High Commission said in an X post. Commander of the Sri Lanka Army Lieutenant General Lasantha Rodrigo reviewed the field hospital and thanked the Indian Government for its swift response and for ensuring that critical medical care reaches those in need.

Medical centres have also been set up using the BHISHM (Bharat Health Initiative for Sahyog Hita and Maitri) Arogya Maitri cubes in the badly hit Ja-Ela and Negombo. "India's medical teams continue to stand beside Sri Lanka, ensuring that timely care reaches those in need," the X post said.

Major terror bid foiled in Pak, 24 terrorists arrested

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ Lahore

Law enforcement agencies have foiled a major terror plot in Pakistan's Punjab province and arrested 24 terrorists, most of whom belong to the banned Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), police said on Saturday.

The terrorists were arrested during operations in different areas of the province this week, the Counter-Terrorism Department (CTD) of Punjab said in a statement.

It said the CTD Punjab conducted 364 intelligence-based operations in different districts, in which 24 terrorists were arrested along with weapons, explosives and other prohibited materials. Eleven of those arrested belong to the outlawed TTP. Around 5 kg of explosives, 24 detona-



tors and four bombs were recovered from those arrested.

The CTD said that the terrorists had planned to target important buildings in different cities. As many as 24 cases have been registered against the arrested terrorists and further investigation is being carried out against them, it said. Since there has been a rise in terror incidents in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, Punjab has been put on high alert.

Following last month's suicide attack in Islamabad that claimed 12 lives, Punjab police have been put on high alert with instructions to heighten arrangements for the security, especially of judges, courts and bars across the province.

The police officers were instructed to ensure daily and weekly inspections of the security arrangements.

Miniature model of Gandhi statue set for UK auction

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ London

A miniature model of an iconic sculpture of Mahatma Gandhi from a central London square is set to go under the hammer at an auction in England next week, with a guide price estimate between 6,000 and 8,000 pounds.

The 27-cm tall bronze maquette is said to be the earliest complete vision of the statue by Polish sculptor Freda Brilliant that has been installed at Tavistock Square in London's Bloomsbury since 1968. In September, its plinth was targeted with "racially aggravated" graffiti and had a spruce up in time for Gandhi Jayanti on October 2.

"Freda Brilliant first conceived of the idea of a sculpture of Mahatma Gandhi in 1949, but it was not until the early 1960s that she was commissioned to make the memorial in Tavistock Square,



London," Woolley & Wallis auction house from Wiltshire said in a statement.

"She initially explored three poses, one of Gandhi standing, one of him walking, and the final one offered here, sitting cross-legged, a pose she described as 'traditional and intimate, suited to the small but beautiful [Tavistock] square'," it stated. Once the

sculptor had settled on the pose, she created a customary metal miniature. It is the first of two of these maquettes that is being offered at auction next Thursday. A second maquette sold back in June 2019 for 65,000 pounds to a private collector. "Given Freda's growing reputation and the fierce bidding we've seen for her Gandhi works in the past,

the emergence of this first maquette from a private London collection is significant," said Victor Fauvelle, Woolley & Wallis specialist.

"It offers collectors an exceptional chance to secure the piece that set one of Freda's most internationally recognised monuments and sculptures in motion," he said. The bronze sculpture, created with the backing of India League, was unveiled at the square as a nod to Mahatma Gandhi's days as a law student at the nearby University College London.

The sculpture depicts Gandhi in a classic meditative pose, with the inscription on the plinth saying: "Mahatma Gandhi, 1869-1948." Gandhi Jayanti, designated as International Day of Non-Violence by the United Nations, is commemorated with floral tributes and Gandhiji's favourite bhajans at the monument in London annually on October 2.

Israeli defence firm says it plans to supply first batch of LMGs to India early next year

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ Jerusalem

A leading Israeli defence firm has said it intends to supply the first batch of 40,000 light machine guns (LMGs) to India starting early next year, while it is in the final stages of signing a contract to supply nearly 1,70,000 new-age carbines.

Shuki Schwartz, CEO of Israel Weapon Industries (IWI), also said that his firm is currently collaborating with various agencies within India's Ministry of Home Affairs to market their products, including pistols, rifles, and machine guns.

"We're now involved in three significant programmes. First is the contract for 40,000 light machine guns, which was signed last year. We have completed all tests, trials, and

FINAL STAGES OF SIGNING A CONTRACT TO SUPPLY NEARLY 1,70,000 NEW-AGE CARBINES

Government checks, and we have received the license for production. We intend to supply the first batch at the beginning of the year," Schwartz told.

LMGs supply is for five years. We can do it faster, but the first supply will be at the beginning of the year," he said when asked about the timeline of the supply.

Schwartz said the second programme involves the CQB (Close Quarters Battle) carbines tender, where the firm was the second bidder. Bharat Forge is the primary bidder. "We intend to supply

40 per cent of the contract. We are in the stage of pre-signing of the contract, and I believe it will be finalised by the end of this year or the beginning of next year," he said. Sixty per cent of the CQB carbines supply will be sourced from Bharat Forge, while the remaining 40 per cent (170,000 units) will be delivered by PLR Systems, a subsidiary of the Adani Group. On Arbel technology, the first computerised weapon system that uses a complex algorithm to determine when a soldier is on target and quickly strikes with high precision, Schwartz said that they are in the early stages of talks with India about integrating this technology into the country.

"We are in the initial stages of discussions with different agencies to adopt the Arbel systems. Once they

take it, we will supply it through co-production in Israel and India," he said.

He added that PLR Systems will handle the co-production locally in India. "We are also collaborating with the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) and various agencies within MHA to sell our complete range of products, which includes pistols, rifles, and light machine guns. Our dealings involve smaller quantities across many contracts, and we have been working in this area for several years," he said. When asked about annual supply numbers, he mentioned it could be "tens of thousands of weapons a year."

He acknowledged that while the two major contracts will last for a few years, there is a demand for quicker delivery due to the current situation.

Gaza ceasefire at critical moment: Qatar



Palestinian Ahmed Abu Amra riding his motorcycle and shows off his skills on a sandy hill in the Al-Zahra area, central Gaza Strip

AP

ASSOCIATED PRESS
■ Doha

Qatar's Prime Minister on Saturday said the Gaza ceasefire has reached a "critical moment" as its first phase winds down, with the remains of just one Israeli hostage still held by militants. Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al Thani told an international conference in the Qatari capital that international mediators, led by the US, are working "to force the way forward" to the second phase to cement the deal.

"What we have just done is a pause," he told the Doha Forum. "We cannot consider it yet a ceasefire."

"A ceasefire cannot be completed unless there is a full withdrawal of Israeli forces, there is stability back in Gaza, people can go in and out, which is not the case today," he said.

While the ceasefire halted the heavy fighting of the two-year war, Gaza health officials say that over 360 Palestinians have been killed by Israeli fire since the truce took effect in October. In new violence, two Palestinians were killed in an Israeli airstrike northwest of Gaza City, Shifa Hospital said.

Israel's army said it wasn't aware of an airstrike in that location. However, it said that Israeli soldiers on Saturday killed three militants who crossed the "yellow line" into Israeli-controlled northern part of Gaza and "posed an immediate threat." Since the ceasefire, the Israeli army says it has carried out a number of attacks on Palestinians crossing the ceasefire lines.

The first phase of US President Donald Trump's 20-point peace plan took effect

October 10. The fighting stopped and dozens of hostages held in Gaza were exchanged for hundreds of Palestinians held in Israeli prison. Israel sent a delegation last week to Egypt for talks on returning the remains of the last hostage.

The next phase, which includes the deployment of an international security force in Gaza, formation of a new technocratic Government for the territory, disarmament of Hamas and an eventual withdrawal of Israeli forces from Gaza, has not yet begun. Arab and Western officials told The Associated Press on Friday that an international body overseeing the ceasefire, to be led by Trump himself, is expected to be appointed by the end of the year. In the long term, the plan also calls for a possible "pathway" to Palestinian independence.

Sheikh Mohammed said that even the upcoming phase should be "temporary" and that peace in the region could only take place with the eventual establishment of a Palestinian State — something that is opposed by Israel's hard-line Government.

"If we are just resolving what happened in Gaza, the catastrophe that happened in the last two years, it's not enough," he said. "There is a root for this conflict. And this conflict is not only about Gaza." He added: "It's about Gaza. It's about the West Bank. It's about the rights of the Palestinians for their state. We are hoping that we can work together with the US administration to achieve this vision at the end of the day." Turkey's Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan said there is a "big question" over the formation of an international security force for Gaza.



Indian student dies from injuries in US house fire

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ New York

A 24-year-old Indian student in the US has died after suffering severe injuries in a house fire, according to the Indian mission. Sahaja Reddy Udamala was pursuing a Master's degree in Albany, New York. The Consulate General of India in New York said in a post on X on Friday (local time) that it is "deeply saddened by the untimely demise" of Udamala, who lost her life in the house fire incident in Albany. "Our thoughts and heartfelt condolences to her family during this difficult time," the Consulate said, adding that it is in touch with Udamala's family and is extending all possible assistance. The Albany Police Department said in a statement that its personnel and the Albany Fire Department responded to the house fire on the morning of December 4.



Bolsonaro's son says he will run for presidency of Brazil

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ Sao Paulo

Brazilian Senator Flávio Bolsonaro, the eldest son of former President Jair Bolsonaro, said on Friday that his father decided he should represent their political group and run for president in 2026. Bolsonaro was arrested last month and began serving a 27-year prison sentence after being convicted of attempting a coup. The far right leader has already been barred from running for office until 2030 as part of a separate process against him. "It is with great responsibility that I confirm the decision of Brazil's greatest political and moral leader, Jair Messias Bolsonaro, to entrust me with the mission of continuing our national project," Flávio Bolsonaro wrote on X. The office of Sen. Bolsonaro confirmed that he will challenge President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, who is running for a fourth nonconsecutive term.

Sudanese paramilitary drone attack kills 50

ASSOCIATED PRESS
■ Cairo

A drone attack by the Sudanese paramilitary forces hit a kindergarten in south-central Sudan, killing 50 people, including 33 children, a doctors' group said. Paramedics on the scene in the town of Kalogi in South Kordofan state were targeted in "a second unexpected attack," Sudan Doctors' Network said in a statement late Friday. Emergency Lawyers, a rights group tracking violence against civilians in Sudan reported in a statement Saturday the second strike on paramedics treating survivors in Kalogi and said "a third civilian site near the previous two" was also attacked. The group condemned the attack, blaming the paramilitary group, the Rapid



Support Forces, or RSF, for the strikes, calling them "a flagrant violation of international humanitarian law, including the protection of civilians, especially children, and vital civilian infrastruc-

ture." The death toll is expected to be higher, but communication blackouts in the area have made it difficult to report casualties. Thursday's attack is the latest in the fighting

between the RSF, and the Sudanese military, who have been at war for over two years. It is now concentrating in the oil-rich Kordofan states."Killing children in their school is a horrific vio-

lation of children's rights," said UNICEF Representative for Sudan Sheldon Yett in a statement Friday. "Children should never pay the price of conflict," said Yett. He said UNICEF urges all parties "to stop these attacks immediately and allow safe, unhindered access for humanitarian assistance to reach those in desperate need." Hundreds of civilians were killed throughout the Kordofan states in the last few weeks as intensified fighting shifted from Darfur after the RSF took over the besieged city of el-Fasher. Sudanese military aerial strikes on Sunday killed at least 48 people, mostly civilians, in Kauda, South Kordofan. UN Human Rights Chief Volker Türk warned that Kordofan could face new atrocities like those in el-Fasher. Separately, the RSF con-

demned in a statement Friday a drone strike on the Chad-Sudan border, accusing the Sudanese military of being behind it and posted a video showing billowing black smoke. This couldn't be independently verified and it is unclear whether there were casualties in this strike. There was no immediate comment from the Sudanese military. RSF's violent takeover of el-Fasher was marked with executions of civilians, rapes and sexual assaults, and other atrocities. Thousands escaped and thousands more are feared killed or trapped in the city. The RSF and the Sudanese military have been fighting for power over Sudan since 2023. More than 40,000 people were killed in the war, according to the World Health Organization, and 12 million displaced.

Doctors postpone ex-PM Zia's travel abroad for treatment



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ Dhaka

The medical board treating critically ill Bangladesh's former minister Khaleda Zia on Saturday postponed her planned travel to London for an indefinite period, her personal physician said. The three-time premier Zia was scheduled to depart for London on Sunday after her plan to leave on Friday was postponed as an air ambulance offered by Qatar could not reach Dhaka due to technical issues. Media reports suggested Doha later rented an alternative aircraft from Germany. "The medical board thinks it is not appropriate for her to travel abroad at this moment," Dr AZM Zahid Hossain her personal physi-

cian and also a member of the party's policy-making standing committee, told reporters. He added that doctors continued their "highest-level efforts" to arrange Zia's treatment abroad, while a medical ambulance was fully ready to fly her abroad whenever the situation suits her travel. "Allah has cured her from even more serious conditions in the past. The medical board is confident that Begum Khaleda Zia will overcome her current physical complications," he said. BNP Secretary General Mirza Fakhru Islam Alamgir on Friday had said if everything went well, the air ambulance provided by Emir of Qatar Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani would arrive on Saturday to fly her to London on Sunday.

11 killed in mass shooting at South African bar

ASSOCIATED PRESS
■ Cape town

A mass shooting carried out on Saturday by multiple suspects in an unlicensed bar near the South African capital left at least 11 people dead, police said. The victims included three children aged 3, 12 and 16. Another 14 people were wounded and taken to the hospital, according to a statement from the South African Police Services. Police didn't give details on the ages of those who were injured or their conditions. The shooting happened at a bar inside a hostel in the Saulsville township west of the administrative capital of Pretoria in the early hours of Saturday. Ten of the victims died at the scene and the 11th died at the hospital, police said. The children killed were a 3-year-old boy, a 12-year-old boy and a 16-year-old girl. Police said they were searching for three male suspects. "We are told that at least three unknown gunmen entered this hostel where a group of people were drinking and they started randomly shooting," police spokesperson Brig Athlenda Mathe told national broadcaster SABC. She said the motive for the killings was not clear. The shootings happened at around 4.15 am, she said, but police



were only alerted at 6 am South Africa has one of the highest homicide rates in the world and recorded more than 26,000 homicides in 2024 — an average of more than 70 a day. Firearms are by far the leading cause of death in homicides. The country of 62 million people has relatively strict gun ownership laws, but many killings are committed with illegal guns, authorities say. There have been several mass shootings at bars — sometimes called shebeens or taverns

in South Africa — in recent years, including one that killed 16 people in the Johannesburg township of Soweto in 2022. On the same day, four people were killed in a mass shooting at a bar in another province. Mathe said that mass shootings at unlicensed bars were becoming a serious problem and police had shut down more than 11,000 illegal taverns between April and September this year and arrested more than 18,000 people for involvement in

illegal liquor sales. Recent mass killings in South Africa have not been confined to bars, however. Police said 18 people were killed, 15 of them women, in mass shootings minutes apart at two houses on the same road in a rural part of Eastern Cape province in September last year. Seven men were arrested for those shootings and face multiple charges of murder, while police recovered three AK-style assault rifles they believe were used in the shootings.

12 arrests in Minneapolis as part of immigration operation

ASSOCIATED PRESS
■ Minneapolis

Federal agents have arrested a dozen people in Minneapolis since launching an enforcement operation this week primarily focused on Somali immigrants living unlawfully in the US, but fewer than half of those detained are Somali. US Immigration and Customs Enforcement said Thursday that agents had arrested 12 people. Of those, six are Mexican nationals, five are from Somalia and one is from El Salvador. Minneapolis-St Paul, which has the nation's largest Somali community, is the latest area targeted by the Trump administration for mass deportations, following operations in Chicago, Los Angeles and Charlotte, North Carolina.

CRACKDOWN SPARKS CRITICISM; OFFICIALS DENOUNCE RHETORIC, VOW SOMALI COMMUNITY PROTECTION

This week, immigration authorities have also arrived in New Orleans, where officials said they intend to arrest up to 5,000 people. A statement from DHS Assistant Secretary Tricia McLaughlin called the 12 people federal agents arrested some of the "worst of the worst criminal illegal aliens". Eight of them had been charged or convicted of crimes, including assault, fraud, domestic violence and driving under the influence, according to ICE. President Donald Trump

recently targeted Somali immigrants in public remarks, calling them "garbage" and saying "they contribute nothing". He also blamed Democratic Governor Tim Walz for allowing alleged fraud in government programs to happen on his watch, which a conservative publication claimed was funneling money to a Somali militant group. The crackdown has drawn intense criticism from local and state officials who have denounced Trump's rhetoric and pledged to protect the Somali community. Minneapolis Mayor Jacob Frey said city police would not participate in federal immigration enforcement. DHS' McLaughlin accused Frey and Walz of not enforcing immigration laws and endangering citizens.

Russia unleashes a massive drone, missile attack on Ukraine

ASSOCIATED PRESS
■ Kyiv

Russia unleashed a major missile and drone barrage on Ukraine overnight into Saturday, after US and Ukrainian officials said they'll meet on Saturday for a third day of talks aimed at ending the nearly four-year war. Following talks that made progress on a security framework for postwar Ukraine, the two sides also offered the sober assessment that any "real progress toward any agreement" ultimately will depend "on Russia's readiness to show serious commitment to long-term peace." The statement from US special envoy Steve Witkoff, Trump's son-in-law Jared Kushner as well as Ukrainian negotiators Rustem Umerov and Andriy Hnatov came after they met for a second day in Florida on Friday. They offered only broad brushstrokes about the



progress they say has been made as Trump pushes Kyiv and Moscow to agree to a US-mediated proposal to end the war. Russia used 653 drones and 51 missiles in the wide-reaching overnight attack on Ukraine, which triggered air raid alerts across the country and came as Ukraine marked Armed Forces Day, the country's air

force said Saturday morning. Ukrainian forces shot down and neutralized 585 drones and 30 missiles, the air force said, adding that 29 locations were struck. At least eight people were wounded in the attacks, Ukrainian Minister of Internal Affairs Ihor Klymenko said. Among these, at least

three people were wounded in the Kyiv region, according to local officials. Drone sightings were reported as far west as Ukraine's Lviv region. Russia carried out a "massive missile-drone attack" on power stations and other energy infrastructure in several Ukrainian regions, Ukraine's national energy operator, Ukrenergo,

wrote on Telegram. Ukraine's Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant temporarily lost all off-site power overnight, the International Atomic Energy Agency said Saturday, citing its Director General Rafael Mariano Grossi. The plant is in an area under Russian control since early in Moscow's invasion of Ukraine and is not in service, but it needs reliable power to cool its six shut-down reactors and spent fuel, to avoid any catastrophic nuclear incidents. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said that energy facilities were the main targets of the attacks, also noting that a drone strike had "burned down" the train station in the city of Fastiv, located in the Kyiv region. Russia's Ministry of Defence said its air defences had shot down 116 Ukrainian drones over Russian territory overnight into Saturday.

Protesters held for smearing custard on King Charles jewels



ASSOCIATED PRESS ■ London

Four protesters were arrested on Saturday after splattering food on the case of a priceless diamond-encrusted crown at the Tower of London. The Crown Jewels display was closed after members of a group called Take Back Power smeared apple crumble and poured yellow custard — two staples on British dessert menus — on the display case containing the Imperial State Crown worn by King Charles III during his coronation in 2023 and during his speech to open Parliament in 2024. The Metropolitan Police said the protesters were arrested on suspicion of criminal damage. The group that advocates for a permanent citizens' assembly and wants to tax extreme wealth said two of its members

had thrown the food and two others were also arrested and taken into "custard-y." The act of civil disobedience is one of many that has targeted prized treasures and artworks to draw attention to a political cause. Petroleum protesters were imprisoned last year for tossing a can of tomato soup on glass protecting Van Gogh's "Sunflowers" at London's National Gallery. Video of the stunt at the Tower of London, once a royal palace also known as the prison where Anne Boleyn, Thomas More and others were executed, showed two protesters attacking the case as other visitors stepped back in shock. After an employee intervened and radioed for help, the two demonstrators unfurled a sign saying, "Democracy has crumbled."

KPK Govt approves closure of related to May 23 incidents



ASSOCIATED PRESS
■ Peshawar

Khyber Pakhtunkhwa provincial (KPK) Government has approved the closure of all "politically motivated" cases registered in connection with the May 2023 violent incidents that erupted following the arrest of former Pakistan prime minister Imran Khan. The decision in connection with the cases registered on May 9 and 10, 2023 was taken during the provincial Government's cabinet meeting held under the chairmanship of Chief

Minister Sohail Afridi late on Friday. "The cabinet termed the cases filed on May 9 and 10 as politically motivated and lacking evidence, and therefore granted approval for their withdrawal," Special Assistant to the Chief Minister on Information, Shafi Jan, said. On May 9, 2023, workers belonging to Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party vandalised a dozen military installations, including the Jinnah House (Lahore Corps Commander House), Mianwali Airbase and the ISI building in Faisalabad, some 130 kms from Lahore.



Mexico freezes Miss Universe co-owner's bank accounts

ASSOCIATED PRESS ■ Mexico City

Mexico's anti-money laundering office has frozen the bank accounts of the Mexican co-owner of Miss Universe as part of an investigation into drugs, fuel and arms trafficking, an official said. The country's Financial Intelligence Unit, which oversees the fight against money laundering, froze Mexican businessman Raúl Rocha Cantú's bank accounts in Mexico, a federal official told The Associated Press on condition of anonymity because he was not authorized to comment on the investigation. The action against Rocha Cantú adds to mounting controversies for the Miss Universe organization. Last week, a court in Thailand issued an arrest warrant for the Thai co-owner of the Miss Universe Organization in connection with a fraud case and this year's competition.



US to expand travel ban to more than 30 countries

ASSOCIATED PRESS ■ Washington

The Trump administration will be expanding its ban on travel for citizens of certain countries to more than 30, Homeland Security Secretary Kristi Noem said, in the latest restriction to come since a man from Afghanistan was accused of shooting two National Guard members. The expansion would build on a travel ban already announced in June by the Republican administration, which barred travel to the U.S. for citizens from 12 countries and restricted access to the U.S. for people from seven others. In a social media post earlier this week, Noem had suggested more countries would be included. Noem, who spoke late Thursday in an interview with Fox News Channel host Laura Ingraham, would not provide further details, saying President Donald Trump was considering which countries would be included.

BRIEFLY

LILLE BEATS MARSEILLE IN LIGUE 1



Lille gave Marseille its first Ligue 1 loss in six weeks after Ethan Mbappé’s goal for a 1-0 win. Fourth-placed Lille tied third-placed Marseille on points in the table. Marseille was unbeaten in six league games but it went behind in the 10th minute thanks to some hesitant defending. A mix-up between goalkeeper and the defense allowed Mbappé to steal in and poke in Nabil Bentaleb’s long pass. Lille’s third straight win boosted its fine home record to 16 wins and only two defeats in its last 23 Ligue 1 matches. The defeat was Marseille’s first in the league since Oct. 25 against Lens. Marseille struggled on a chilly night in Lille and did not shoot on target until the 76th. Brest notched a third successive win after beating Monaco 1-0. Kamory Doumbia headed the only goal after 28 minutes.Brest’s Ludovic Ajorke was sent off on the hour mark for a bad tackle on Lamine Camara but the team held on and rose to ninth place.

GILL CLEARED TO PLAY FIRST T20I AGAINST SOUTH AFRICA



India’s T20I vice-captain Shubman Gill has been cleared by the Sports Science team of the BCCI’s Centre of Excellence (CoE) to play the opening T20I against South Africa after successfully completing his rehabilitation from a neck injury sustained during the Kolkata Test. Gill was selected in the squad subject to fitness and had to undergo all rehabilitation and skill-training protocols required for Return To Play (RTP). “Shubman Gill has successfully completed his rehabilitation at CoE and has met the requisite criteria to be declared fit for all formats of the game,” a communication from the CoE has gone to the team management’s Sports Science and Medicine (SSM) team, comprising physio Kamlesh Jain, strength and conditioning coach Adrian Le Roux and sports doctor Dr Charles.

IPBL: Hyderabad Royals stun Chennai Super Warriors

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi

Hyderabad Royals staged a comeback from 0-2 down to topple Chennai Super Warriors 4-2 in Qualifier 1, sealing their spot in the final of the Indian Pickleball League (IPBL) on Saturday.

A resurgent Mumbai Smashers then defeated Lucknow Leopards in the Eliminator with an identical score to advance to Qualifier 2. A three-way tie for fourth meant a Play-In preceded the knockouts, with the Global Pickleball Federation President Javier Regalado in attendance.

With Grand Rallies played to 25, Mumbai Smashers edged Capital Warriors Gurgaon 25-24 in the opener, then backed it up with a composed 25-22 win over Bengaluru Blasters to secure fourth place and seal their spot in the playoffs.

In the final placement rally, Bengaluru defeated Gurgaon 25-21 to finish fifth.



In the Qualifier, first-placed Chennai Super Warriors faced the second-ranked Hyderabad Royals for a direct ticket to the final. Mitch Hargreaves gave Chennai the perfect launch, winning the men’s singles 15-11 before teaming with Harsh Mehta to repeat the scoreline in the men’s doubles for a 2-0 lead. The women’s singles brought the headline show-down – unbeaten Roos van Reek versus Megan Fudge.

Fudge came out firing, dominating the kitchen line to lead 7-3, but van Reek clawed back to 7-7. But Fudge closed

ISSF WC Final: Suruchi wins gold, Sainyam silver

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Doha

Talented shooter Suruchi Singh came up with yet another commanding performance to clinch the women’s 10m air pistol gold, while compatriot Sainyam took the silver as India made a big splash on the opening day of the season-ending ISSF World Cup Final on Saturday.

After a disappointing outing by the 10m rifle exponents earlier during the day, Suruchi lit up the day by firing a superb 245.1 in the final on her way to the top podium finish, while former junior world champion Sainyam made it a gold-silver finish for the country with a score of 243.3. Double Olympic bronze-medallist Manu Bhaker, who also made it to the final, finished fifth tallying 179.2.

Suruchi, who was ranked number 1 in the world in September-October following four back-to-back World Cup gold medals earlier this year, was in great form as she finished the qualification round in the elite 12-shooter field in second place with an aggregate of 586.

Bhaker (578) came in sixth, while Sainyam (573), the 2023 junior world champion, barely managed to make the final after finishing eighth in qualification.

However, the final saw the 21-year-old Sainyam in a different zone altogether as she led the field for a major part of the final before conceding the top spot to Suruchi after shooting four below-average scores of 9.5 each in the elimination round.

Suruchi, the daughter of a Havildar hailing from Jhajar — the same district as Bhaker — earned Euro 5,000 for her effort, while Sainyam received a pay cheque of Euro 4,000.

India’s former world champion Rudrankksh Patil and Paris Olympic finalist Arjun Babuta missed out on medals in men’s 10m air rifle, finishing fourth and sixth respectively. Elavenil Valarivan also came up short in women’s 10m air rifle, finishing ninth in the qualification round, failing to make the eight-shooter final.

Rudrankksh, the 2022 world champion who has shown good form this season by clinching the World Cup gold



in Buenos Aires, came into the star-studded final after finishing fourth in the qualification round with a score of 631.9.

Babuta entered the eight-shooter final after finishing third 633.3 even as double Olympic gold medallist at the Paris Olympics, China’s Sheng Lihao led the field tallying 637.7, while former world champion Victor Lindgren of Sweden was second with a score of 633.5.

The top-class final saw Rudrankksh shoot just one below-par score of 9.8 in his second shot of the first series, which made the difference in the end as the Indian tallied

209.9. Lindgren took the gold and Euro 5,000 in prize cheque with a score of 253.0, while Lihao bagged the silver (252.6) and Euro 4,000 in prize money.

Another stalwart, Hungary’s Istvan Peni won the bronze.

Elavenil, fresh from her World Championships bronze medal in Cairo, could not make the eight-shooter final as she finished ninth in qualification with a score of 630.

World Championships bronze medallist in trap, Zorawar Sandhu was placed ninth among 12 shooters after he notched up 70/75 on day one of competition.

RUDRANKKSH, BABUTA, ELAVENIL DISAPPOINT IN SHOOTING WORLD CUP FINAL

Doha: India’s former world champion Rudrankksh Patil and Paris Olympic finalist Arjun Babuta missed out on medals in men’s 10m air rifle, finishing fourth and sixth respectively in the season-ending ISSF World Cup Final here on Saturday.

Elavenil Valarivan also came up short in women’s 10m air rifle, finishing ninth in the qualification round, failing to make the eight-shooter final. Rudrankksh, the 2022 world champion who has shown good form this season by clinching the World Cup gold in Buenos Aires, came into the star-studded final after finishing fourth in the qualification round with a score of 631.9.

Babuta entered the eight-shooter final after finishing third 633.3 even as double Olympic gold medallist at the Paris Olympics, China’s Sheng Lihao led the field tallying 637.7, while former world champion Victor Lindgren of Sweden was second with a score of 633.5. The top-class final saw Rudrankksh shoot just

one below-par score of 9.8 in his second shot of the first series, which made the difference in the end as the Indian tallied 209.9.

Lindgren took the gold and Euro 5,000 in prize cheque with a score of 253.0, while Lihao bagged the silver (252.6) and Euro 4,000 in prize money.

Another stalwart, Hungary’s Istvan Peni won the bronze. Elavenil, fresh from her World Championships bronze medal in Cairo, could not make the eight-shooter final as she finished ninth in qualification with a score of 630. World Championships bronze medallist in trap, Zorawar Sandhu was placed ninth among 12 shooters after he notched up 70/75 on day one of competition. He shot 23, 24 and 23 in the three round of 25 each, and will return to the range on Sunday for two more rounds before the six finalists can be spotted. The veteran marksman is the sole entry from India in the shotgun competition.

India need to lift its game to prevail over Germany in FIH Junior WC semifinals

SAUMJYOTI S CHOUDHURY

Chennai

Eyeing to reclaim the crown after nine years, the Indian men’s hockey team will have to raise its game by leaps and bounds if it hopes to get past seven-time champions and title holders Germany in the semifinal of the FIH Junior World Cup on Sunday.

Two-time champions India last won the title way back in 2016 in Lucknow.

The Indians had a relatively easy pool outing, scoring 29 goals and conceding none against lowly sides like Chile, Oman and Switzerland to breeze into the quarterfinals.

But the PR Sreejesh-coached side faced their first real test against Belgium in the quarterfinals. India had to dig deep into their reservoir to eke out a 4-3 shoot-out win against Belgium after both the sides were locked 2-2 at the end of regulation time.

It took a superlative effort from goalkeeper Prinedeep Singh to keep India in the hunt. Prinedeep not only made some fantastic saves in the regulation 60 minutes but also effected two brilliant saves in the shoot-out to take India forward.

India’s defence was hardly tested in the pool stages, but against Belgium got a taste of what is awaiting for them in the knockout stages of the tournament against quality opponents.

Sreejesh was not at all happy with the team’s performance against Belgium despite the win and asked his players to keep their “feet on the ground”.

“I sweetly made them understand that it was not the final. To keep your feet on the ground is most important and we need to focus on the next match,” Sreejesh said after the Belgium match.

He listed the areas which



India need to improve going ahead if they desire to reclaim the title.

“We expect the same (performance) from Germany too in the next match. So we have to raise our level according to the occasion. What we need to do is score and that’s the most important thing,” he said.

“Another important thing is to focus on the mistakes you have committed. What is easy

is to keep in your mind what good things you have done in the match but what is important is to learn from the mistakes we have committed inside opponent’s D and how to get more outcome.”

The Indian forwards, who shone bright in the pool stages against weaker opponents, fell flat against Belgium despite creating numerous scoring chances. And come Sunday,

Argentina will open their World Cup defence against Algeria

ASSOCIATED PRESS

Washington

All around the globe, eyes focused on the stage where World Cup paths were sorted, nations’ names chosen one by one in a draw that determined Argentina and Lionel Messi will start their title defence against Algeria.

Twenty-seven months after qualifying began, teams from five-time champion Brazil to newcomers Cape Verde, Curaçao, Jordan and Uzbekistan learned their group-stage opponents in the expanded 48-nation, 104-game tournament that starts June 11 in the United States, Canada and Mexico.

“Exciting for the island, for the people there. They’re so proud,” said Dick Advocaat, the 78-year-old Dutchman leading Curaçao, a Caribbean country with a population of 150,000, into an opener against four-time champion Germany.

On a day that began with snow falling on the nation’s capital, the ceremony at the Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts included U.S.



Inter Miami forward Lionel Messi, centre, does drills during a training session for Saturday’s MLS Cup soccer match against the Vancouver Whitecaps

AP/PTI

President Donald Trump receiving a newly created peace prize awarded by FIFA, soccer’s governing body. Trump, Mexican President Claudia Sheinbaum and Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney picked up plastic spheres containing their own nations’ names from bowls — Sheinbaum drew more applause from those gathered in the hall than Trump.

FIFA’s lead-in show, featuring music and stars from sports and entertainment,

was almost as long as a 90-minute soccer match, with the actual draw starting nearly 1 1/2 hours into the proceedings. Tom Brady, Shaquille O’Neal, Aaron Judge and Wayne Gretzky took part. New Zealand was the last orb picked.

“Just watching Americans on stage and the president giving speeches and performances, it made it feel like an American event already,” said U.S. Midfielder Tyler Adams, who watched from England,

where he plays for Premier League club Bournemouth. “And I think we know the expectation of what it’s going to be like when we go there and there’s going to be half-time shows and there’s going to be celebrities and the big draw of what America brings to sports.”

Three-time champion Argentina opens on June 16 at either Kansas City, Missouri, or Santa Clara, California. Specific sites for all group stage games and kickoff times were to be announced Saturday. The Albiceleste then face Austria and Jordan in Group J. Argentina surprisingly lost its 2022 opener to Saudi Arabia before going on to win the final over France on penalty kicks.

Messi, who turns 39 during the tournament, hasn’t committed yet to playing but it would be shocking if he decided against appearing in a record sixth World Cup. “We are just awaiting for him to decide,” coach Lionel Scaloni said. “In principle, everything is going well.”

The U.S., which reached the semifinals at the inaugu-

ral World Cup in 1930 and the quarterfinals in 2002, starts Group D against Paraguay on June 12 in Inglewood, California. The Americans play Australia six days later at Seattle, then face Turkey, Romania, Slovakia or Kosovo — one will emerge next year from playoffs — on June 25 back at SoFi Stadium.

Mexico hosts the tournament opener at Azteca Stadium in Mexico City on June 11 against South Africa in Group A, a rematch of the 1-1 draw at the 2010 opener in Johannesburg. El Tri then meets South Korea and closes the first round against the Czech Republic, Ireland, Denmark or North Macedonia. Forty-two of the teams have been determined; 22 are competing in playoffs for six berths that will be decided March 31.

Winners and second-place nations from the 12 groups advance to the new round of 32 along with the top eight third-place teams. All games from the quarterfinals on will be in the U.S., culminating in the July 19 final at East Rutherford, New Jersey.

Hamilton crashes in final practice for F1 title-deciding Abu Dhabi GP ahead of qualifying

ASSOCIATED PRESS

Abu Dhabi

Seven-time Formula 1 champion Lewis Hamilton crashed in the final practice of the season-ending Abu Dhabi Grand Prix ahead of qualifying later Saturday.

The thrilling three-way title battle will be decided on Sunday at the Yas Marina Circuit. McLaren driver Lando Norris is 12 points ahead of Red Bull’s Verstappen and 16 ahead of McLaren teammate Oscar Piastri.

Verstappen is aiming for his fifth straight F1 title — Norris and Piastri are chasing their first. All three drivers have won seven races.

Mercedes driver George

Russell led third practice ahead of Norris and Verstappen, with Piastri fifth.

Hamilton lost the rear of the Ferrari coming out of Turn 9 and spun full circle before sliding into the barriers, bringing out the red flag. He stepped out of the car and picked up some of the debris himself.

Hamilton owns F1 records for most wins (104) and pole positions (104) but called his own performance “terrible” this season.

The 40-year-old Briton won a sprint race in China in March, but nothing else this season. He has not even been on the podium in a main race this campaign.

Norris had a scare during

third practice when he narrowly avoided running into the back of Yuki Tsunoda’s Red Bull, swerving around him just in time.

Toward the end of practice, Mercedes driver Kimi Antonelli lurched into the side of Tsunoda’s Red Bull in the pit lane as Tsunoda was driving past him.

Norris showed good pace to lead Friday’s first two practice sessions ahead of Verstappen.

Title showdown

Taking the pole is crucial in Abu Dhabi, where overtaking is hard on the 58-lap circuit.

Every driver starting on pole has won the race since 2015. The last not to do so was Nico Rosberg a year earlier, when he was beaten



by his then-Mercedes teammate Hamilton.

Norris will win the title if he’s on the podium in Abu Dhabi. Even if Verstappen wins, the Dutchman needs Norris to be fourth or lower. If Piastri wins, he requires Norris to finish outside the top five.

McLaren rues errors

Norris had the chance to wrap up the title at last week’s Qatar Grand Prix but a botched strategy call by McLaren handed Verstappen the win, boosting his chances of a fifth straight title to equal Michael Schumacher’s feat with Ferrari from 2000-04.

Verstappen’s victory in Qatar was his 70th overall. His title chances were suddenly improved after Norris and

Piastri were disqualified in Las Vegas. Tense title race After winning the Dutch GP on Aug. 31 for his seventh victory, Piastri led by Norris by 34 points and was 104 ahead of Verstappen, who had won just two races.

Piastri, who is looking to become the first Australian champion in 45 years, hasn’t won in eight races since his Zandvoort win.

When Norris won the Brazil GP sprint race in early November, he moved 39 ahead of Verstappen with four races to go.

Verstappen also qualified in 16th for the main race in Sao Paulo and said he could “forget about” winning the title at that point.

Jaiswal’s ton powers India to series win over South Africa

G UNNIKRISHNAN
■ Visakhapatnam

Yashasvi Jaiswal reeled off an unbeaten maiden ODI hundred, carrying India to a nine-wicket victory in the third and final one-day and a 2-1 series win against South Africa on Saturday.

It was always a case of the margin of victory once Jaiswal (116 not out, 121 balls) and his senior opening partner Rohit Sharma (75, 73 balls) stitched 155 runs in 25.5 overs, and it turned precisely so as India finished with 271 for one in 39.5 overs, chasing 271.

Virat Kohli contributed a classy 65 not out off 45 deliveries. Quinton de Kock made a refined 106 off 89 balls, his 23rd ton in ODIs, but it remained a shiny footnote as Indian batters dictated the course with authority.

Jaiswal was not comfortable initially in his innings but the assured presence of Rohit

at the other end was a massive blessing for him.

Rohit guided the under-study, who was playing only his fourth ODI, through some early turbulent phases, and also did the bulk of the scoring. The 38-year-old reached his fifty in 54 balls, tranquil by his standards but those patented, magical swivel pull shots, three of them sailed for sixes, lent the innings a touch of aggression.

It enabled Jaiswal to collect runs unhurriedly, and walked to fifty in 75 balls. But once he reached his fifty, the left-hander grew in confidence and opened a lot more, unbuckling some of those drives and cuts that he carefully avoided in the early phase of his innings.

Rohit, who became the fourth Indian batter to reach 20000 international runs during his knock after Sachin Tendulkar, Rahul Dravid and Kohli, looked set for another

hundred. But an ill-timed sweep off left-arm spinner Keshav Maharaj cut short his stay. But that didn't deter Jaiswal, who, accompanied by Kohli, kept India's innings moving.

The 23-year-old reached the coveted three-figure mark in 111 balls with a single off pacer Corbin Bosch and immediately tore his helmet away to slip into an energetic celebration—a combination of sprint, jump, roar and punch in the air.

Jaiswal and a typically assertive Kohli added 156 runs for the second wicket as India calmly went past the target to whip some frenzy among a nearly 27000-strong crowd.

Earlier, a largely disciplined bowling effort also played its part in keeping South Africa to a manageable total, an effort led by pacer Prasidh Krishna (4/66) and Kuldeep Yadav (4/41). After Arshdeep



India's Yashasvi Jaiswal celebrating his century during the third ODI cricket match of a series between India and South Africa, at ACA-VDCA Cricket Stadium in Visakhapatnam, Andhra Pradesh

Singh sent back Ryan Rickelton early, De Kock (106, 89 balls, 8x4, 6x4) struck his seventh century against India and put on 113 runs off 124 balls with skipper Temba Bavuma (48, 67 balls) as the visitors moved to a healthy position.

De Kock was severe on Prasidh (4/66), who erred on length continuously in his first spell (2-0-27-0). The left-hander biffed the pacer for 6, 6, 4 in his second over to milk 18 runs. The 32-year-old quickly pounced on anything that was short, and pacers Prasidh and Harshit Rana offered him plenty of feed on his pet areas.

De Kock moved to fifty in 42 balls, and never let the tempo down reaching his hundred in 79 balls.

India found temporary relief when Ravindra Jadeja induced a false slash from Bavuma (48, 67 balls) to get caught by Kohli at point.

TALKS ABOUT SPLIT COACHING
SURPRISING, SAYS GAUTAM GAMBHIR

Visakhapatnam: India head coach Gautam Gambhir on Saturday came down heavily on theories doing the rounds on social media about split coaching, terming them “surprising” and asked those opinion-makers to stay “in their domain.”

After India's recent 0-2 Test series defeat against South Africa, some influential cricketing names, including an IPL team owner, asked the BCCI to consider appointing separate coaches for red-ball and white ball formats.

“Look, there were a lot of talks because the results didn't go in our favour (in Test series). But the most surprising thing is that not once did any media or journalist write that our first Test match (in Kolkata)

was played without the captain (Shubman Gill), who didn't bat in both innings (because of a neck injury),” Gambhir said during the post-match press meet after India clinched the ODI series against SA 2-1.

Gambhir said such opinion makers should refrain from making remarks that have no direct connection with on-field cricketing matters.

“Some people also said things that have nothing to do with cricket. An IPL team owner (Parth Jindal of Delhi Capitals on X) also wrote about split coaching.

“So this is surprising. It's very important for people to stay in their domain. Because if we don't go into someone's domain, then they also don't have the right to come into our domain,” Gambhir added.

Feeling really free in mind: Virat after match-winning effort

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ Visakhapatnam

Indian batting mainstay Virat Kohli on Saturday said he is “feeling really free” mentally after producing another match-winning effort to help India clinch the three-match ODI series, in which he finished as the leading run-scorer with 302 runs.

Kohli scored a rapid 45-ball 65 not out in the third ODI after hitting centuries in the first two games to extend his tally to a record 53, as India crushed South Africa by nine wickets to win the third ODI comprehensively.

“Honestly, playing the way I have in the series is the most satisfying thing for me. I feel really free in my mind. I haven't played like this in 2-3 years,” Kohli told the broadcaster after the match.

“I know when I can bat like that in the middle, it helps the team a long way. Makes me confident, any situation in the middle, I can handle that and bring it in favour of the team,” he added.

Kohli said self-doubt is inevitable for a batter, irrespective of experience, but felt it helps in overall improvement.

“When you play for that long — 15-16 years — you do



India's Virat Kohli playing a shot during the third ODI cricket match of a series between India and South Africa, at ACA-VDCA Cricket Stadium in Visakhapatnam, Andhra Pradesh

doubt yourself. Especially as a batter when one mistake can get you out. It's a whole journey of getting better and getting better as a person along the

way. It improves you as a person and it improves temperament as well,” he said.

“I'm just glad that I'm still able to contribute to the team. When I play freely, I

know I can hit sixes. There's always levels you can always unlock,” he added.

Adjudged the player of the series, Kohli, who topped the batting charts with 302 runs at an average of 151 with two tons and a fifty, said the hundred at Ranchi was the most special knock among the three.

“The first one at Ranchi, because I hadn't played a game since Australia. Just how your energy is on the day, Ranchi is very special for me and I'm very grateful as to how these three games have gone,” he said.

India captain KL Rahul said it was important for bowlers to get a break from bowling in wet outfield after dew factor influenced the play in first two matches.

“We got tough conditions in the first two games. So, it was good to give the bowlers a break in a wet outfield. (The surface) was still a really good wicket, what we were able to do was pick up wickets in bunches,” he said after India bowled out South Africa for 270.

India's win was set up by Prasidh Krishna (4/66) and Kuldeep Yadav (4/41) in the first half of the game.

“We were able to squeeze in the middle. Prasidh picked up those two or three wickets in a spell which was

really crucial and then Kuldeep coming in, picking two wickets in an over. In ODI cricket, that's how you try and contain teams,” he said.

South Africa captain Temba Bavuma said his side “gifted” wickets to India as they slipped from 168 for two to 270 all-out.

“We would have wanted to make it a lot more exciting today. From a batting point of view, we didn't have enough runs. It tends to get easier under lights. Probably should have been smarter as we gifted wickets,” he said.

“The Indian team showed their quality - kudos to them. We could have been a lot more smarter, if you look the first two ODIs, we did that. Probably today, the conditions were different. You never want to get bowled out in a 50-over game.”

Bavuma, however, was happy to see that South Africa was able to put pressure on the Indian spinners in the ODI series.

“We have definitely grown, we speak a lot about how we want to play,” he said.

“India have quality spinners and it's never easy to put them under pressure. For large parts of the series we did that. I think if there were 10 boxes, we ticked 6 or 7 of them.”

Starc torments England with bat and ball in second Ashes test

ASSOCIATED PRESS
■ Brisbane (Australia)

Mitchell Starc has been menacing England with the ball in this Ashes series. Now he's doing damage with the bat, too. At stumps on Day 3 of the second test, England was teetering on 134-6 in its second innings and still needed to score 43 runs to make Australia bat again.

Starc was voted player of the match for his 10-wicket haul in Australia's thumping eight-wicket win in the series opener at Perth last month.

Now he's in line for another award in the day-night test in Brisbane. After taking six wickets in England's first innings of 334 on Days 1 and 2, Starc scored an innings-high 77 as Australia responded with 511 on Saturday afternoon and then took two wickets in the night session.

England's hopes now rest on skipper Ben Stokes, who will resume Sunday on 4.

Starc's day outThe 35-year-old Starc made England's bowlers toil all afternoon in sunny, subtropical conditions at the Gabba as he led Australia to a 177-run first-innings lead.

With the lights on and the pink ball starting to move



Australia's Mitchell Starc appeals successfully for the wicket of England's Joe Root, left, during the second Ashes cricket test match between Australia and England in Brisbane

around on the third night of the match, Starc took the crucial wicket of top-ranked Joe Root (15) to have England reeling at 123-5, still 54 runs in arrears.

He added the wicket of Jamie Smith in his next over as England slipped to 128-6.

Scott Boland and Michael Neser combined to take the first four wickets for Australia after Starc, for the first time in the series, didn't take a wicket in the first over of the innings.

Boland removed Ben Duckett (15) and Harry Brook (15) and Neser took two sharp

return catches to dismiss Ollie Pope (26) and Zak Crawley (44).

Neser later credited Starc with being the greatest left-arm bowler of all time.

“He's a special player,” Neser said. “He doesn't like to admit it, but he is the GOAT — the greatest lefty of all time.”

“He does it with the ball, the bat, and to be next to him, witnessing what he does, is just amazing.”

Starc and the bowling attack will be aiming for four quick wickets Sunday to give Australia a 2-0 lead in the five-match series.



Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma felicitated Simu Das, whose outstanding performance helped India win the Women's Blind T20 World Cup 2025 and presented her a ₹10 lakh cheque as a token of support for her sporting career

Goa beat Jammu & Kashmir in Syed Mushtaq Ali T20 Trophy

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ Kolkata

Skipper Suyash Prabhudessai led from the front with an unbeaten 28-ball 51 as Goa handed a seven-wicket defeat to Jammu and Kashmir in their Syed Mushtaq Ali T20 Trophy's Group B clash on Saturday.

Goa were also bolstered by a fine 44-ball 59 with eight fours and a six by Kashyap Bakhale in the chase as they responded with 167 for three in 19 overs after keeping Jammu and Kashmir to 161 for six earlier.

Goa used as many as six bowling options and it was Shubham Tari who was the pick among them, returning 4-0-30-3, while Deepak Gaonkar and Vikash Singh claimed one wicket apiece.

At the iconic Eden Gardens here, J&K batters Yawer Hasan (48) and skipper Shubham Khajuria (45) made



key contributions, while Abdul Samad provided a late surge with a nine-ball 22 which included two fours and as many sixes.

J&K pacer Auqib Nabi and Sunil Kumar bowled identical spells of 1/31 but could not avert a defeat for their side.

At the Jadavpur University Ground, Bihar suffered a crushing seven-wicket defeat to Hyderabad who won a low scoring match with more than eight overs to

spare. Teenage batting sensation Vaibhav Sooryavanshi fell for a run-a-ball 11 as Bihar could not find any momentum with the bat. Piyush Singh scored 34 with the fours and Bipin Saurabh hit three late sixes to make 31 not out, as they crawled to 132 for eight. In reply, Tanmay Agarwal cracked 11 fours and a six to make 67 not out off 42 balls as Hyderabad responded with 134 for three in 12.5 overs.

JHARKHAND BEAT TN BY 28 RUNS; SAURASHTRA EKE OUT ONE-RUN WIN OVER KARNATAKA

Ahmedabad: Strong fifties from Kumar Kushagra and Virat Singh were complemented by a disciplined bowling effort as Jharkhand defeated Tamil Nadu by 28 runs in their Elite Group D match of the Syed Mushtaq Ali Trophy on Saturday. Asked to bat, Jharkhand made a woeful start and slipped to 29 for 2 in the fifth over before Kushagra (84 off 48 balls) and Virat (72 off 39 balls) stitched together a 120-run stand to take the innings close to the 150 mark in the 15th over. Virat and Anukul Roy then provided the late acceleration to propel Jharkhand to a strong 207 for 3. Kushagra struck five fours and as many sixes, while Virat's innings was laced with 10 boundaries and two sixes.

In reply, Tamil Nadu

stayed in contention in the first half of the chase, with Sai Sudharsan (64 off 42 balls) anchoring the effort as they reached 124 for 2 in the 14th over.

However, Sudharsan's run-out in the same over triggered a collapse, and Tamil Nadu failed to recover, finishing at 179 for 7. Sushant Mishra (2 for 51) and Bal Krishna (2 for 29) picked up two wickets apiece. Saurashtra edge out Karnataka by one run.

In another match, Saurashtra registered their narrowest T20 victory in terms of runs, edging Karnataka by one run.

Batting first, Saurashtra rode on collective contributions, with Vishvaraj Jadeja (40) and Siddhant Rana (42) leading the way as they posted 178 for 8.

Puducherry stun Bengal by 81 runs

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ Hyderabad

Spinners Jayant Yadav and Sidak Singh outshone out-of-favour India pacer Mohammed Shami with four and three wickets respectively as Puducherry stunned Bengal by 81 runs in a Group C match of the Syed Mushtaq Ali Trophy on Saturday.

Electing to field first, Bengal restricted Puducherry to 177 for 5 with veteran Shami taking three wickets for 34 runs from his four overs. He was well supported by off-spinner Wriddick Chatterjee (2/53) while pacer Akash Deep went wicketless.

For Puducherry, captain Aman Khan top-scored with a strokeful 40-ball 74, studded with five fours and seven sixes, while Jashwanth Shreeram contributed 45.

Chasing 178 for a win, Bengal were bowled out for 96 in just 13.5 overs, with off-

spinner Jayant taking four wickets for 28 runs from his four overs, while left-arm spinner Sidak returned with stunning figures of 3 for 9 from his three overs.

Adil Ayub Tunda and Aman got one wicket each.

For Bengal, Karan Lal top-scored with 40 off 23 balls while his opening partner Abhishek Porel and captain Abhimanyu Easwaran made 11 and 12 respectively. All other Bengal batters could not reach double digit figures.

Abhishek shines again with a half century

World No 1 T20 batter Abhishek Sharma shone yet again in Punjab's 73-run thrashing of Services.

Opening with Prabhsimran Singh after Punjab were asked to bat, Abhishek smashed 62 off 34 balls with the help of eight fours and three sixes to guide his side to 233 for 6 in 20 overs.

Against Puducherry on

Thursday, Abhishek had smashed a nine-ball-34 and then taken 3 for 23 with his left-arm spin in Punjab's 54-run win.

Prabhsimran made 50 off 28 balls while Naman Dhir contributed 54 off just 22 deliveries at No 4 as Punjab made merry in their innings.

Punjab bowlers then complemented their batting colleagues' top show, shooting Services out for 160 in 19.4 overs.

Just like in the previous match, Abhishek took two wickets for eight runs from his two overs. Sanvir Singh and Harpreet Brar also got two wickets apiece to derail the Services run chase.

In another Day/Night match, Haryana won by eight runs against Baroda who were without Hardik Pandya.

Opting to field first, Baroda restricted Haryana to 174 for 7 with Atit Sheth taking two wickets for 48 runs.



Shaadi Season Shenanigans

Invitations pile up, playlists change, and suddenly the perfect outfit becomes non-negotiable, says SAKSHI PRIYA

Wedding season is back — love is in the air and every street feels like it's playing its own wedding band. It's the moment when everyone begins searching for the look, the feeling, the "it dress" that captures who they are. Brides linger over fabric swatches, grooms surprise themselves by caring about pocket details, and families hope for outfits that feel unforgettable. Within this celebratory mood, designers are interpreting weddings in ways that feel personal rather than performative. Taraasa by Frontier Raas presents Destination Bridal 2025 — Past, Present, Forever as a thoughtful narrative rooted in emotion. Creative Director Gaurang Batra observes that today's bride seeks connection — she chooses outfits that reflect her voice and values rather than rules. The collection moves from heritage ivories and soft shimmers to a classic red

lehenga. Handwoven and light, it is created for brides who want their "this is my moment" outfit to feel effortless and meaningful, whether the celebration takes place in a palace, by the sea, or at home. In contrast, Qbik offers a strikingly different expression of the season with Disco Discord. Co-founders Vrinda Sachdev and Gurinder Singh design for couples who want their wedding presence to feel individual. Satin finds contrast in CNC-cut metal, crafted into sculptural details across sarees, blouses, tuxedos, and gilets. Sachdev sees this balance as a reflection of modern weddings-emotional yet confident-while Singh highlights the quiet strength metal brings to both menswear and womenswear. A satin saree with an underwired, metal-detailed blouse becomes a favourite for brides, while sharply tailored tuxedos with sculptural buttons stand out for grooms. Together, these visions crown a new chapter in wedding style, where love reigns, as tradition and modernity unite gracefully.

Vrinda Sachdev and Gurinder Singh
Qbik: DISCO DISCORD

TWO DESIGNERS DEFINE DARING, REWRITING WEDDING STYLE WITH CONFIDENCE

Gaurang Batra
Frontier Raas: Taraasa

Your plus-one for every wedding



TEAM VIVA

Weddings slow us down in unexpected ways. Between rituals, conversations, and moments of waiting, your bag ends up sharing more of the day than you realise — resting on your lap, tucked beside you, moving from space to space. The Leather Garden's Saaya comes from observing scenes like these. Its design language takes cues from Indian architecture, where arches and jharokhas filter sunlight into shifting patterns. Those fleeting shadows became the starting point for the collection, influencing the shapes, textures, and fine detailing of each bag. The process behind Saaya was careful and hands-on. It started with two colour stories — lighter tones balanced with deeper shades — chosen with wedding settings in mind. Then came material trials, leather experiments, and dozens of small embroidery samples, tested, rejected, and refined. Craft practices from different parts of India informed the surface work in subtle ways. Conceived by founder Neeharika, the collection is made to be lived with — carried, kept, and returned to across many milestones.



The Christmas markets you have to hit!

THE SORBET SOIRÉE CHRISTMAS MARKET
A festive mix of shopping, food, live music, workshops, art zones, a kids' wonderland and a pet-friendly area. Over 80 stalls and thousands expected.
Where: Sunder Nursery, Nizamuddin
When: 19-20 December
Time: 10am-9pm
Entry: Free (Nursery entry ₹50 adults / ₹25 kids)



CHRISTMAS EARTH MELA 2025
Delhi's sustainable festive carnival with 120+ mindful Indian brands, global food, live music, a bar, kids' zone, fun corners, massages, and quirky experiences.
Where: Italian Embassy
When: 13-14 December
Time: From 11am onwards (last entry 7pm)
Entry: ₹200 onwards (book online)



GERMAN CHRISTMAS MARKET 2025
A two-day Indo-German festive fair featuring German food, curated gifts, crafts, live music, and family-friendly activities.
Where: PSOI Lawns, Vinay Marg, Chanakypuri
When: 13-14 December 2025
Time: 11am-8pm
Entry: ₹600 (Free for children under 12)



Gulzar-e-Shayari: Yaadein aur Guftagu ek saath



PHOTO: PANKAJ KUMAR

SAKSHI PRIYA

"Lafzon ne chiraag jalaye, shaam ne tehzeeb ka libaas pehna, Yamuna ke kinaare, shehar thoda ruk kar khud ko sunne laga."
Baansera Park set the tone for the opening day of Jashn-e-Rekhta's tenth edition, where Urdu quietly held the evening together. Along the riverfront, people moved between stages, book stalls and small baithaks, guided by guftagu, kalaam and likhi hui zubaan. In one corner, a purani nazm found its way

back into memory; in another, a khamosh qiraat continued in its own quiet way. Urdu felt familiar in the space, already known. The lamp-lighting ceremony marked a decade of the festival, shaped by founder Sanjiv Saraf's sustained vision. It served as a reminder that Jashn-e-Rekhta has grown into a space where Urdu continues to find new listeners while staying rooted in tradition. At Mehfil-Khana, the evening found one of its strongest anchors. Mehakti Khushbu ka

Safar: Gulzar ke Saath brought the audience together for careful listening. Framed as a conversation, it allowed Divya Dutta to engage Gulzar with restraint and sensitivity, drawing him into thoughts on memory, writing and the inner life of words. Listening to Gulzar was a reminder of why his voice continues to matter year after year. His reflections carried precision and honesty, shaped by lived experience and close observation. When he spoke about writing, it stayed measured and grounded, returning often to the ordinary-silences at home, passing expressions, moments that stay longer than expected. Divya Dutta guided the exchange with care, allowing his words to find their place with the audience. Later, the same space shifted mood with Rang-e-Mausiqi, as Sukhwinder Singh took the stage. His voice filled the grounds with familiarity and force, drawing people closer through lyric and sound, closing the evening with a balance of poetry and music. Beyond the stages, food,



RANG-E-MAUSIQI
Sukhwinder Singh's performance filled the evening with power and familiarity, turning poetry into song and drawing the audience together through voice, energy and shared feeling.



books and calligraphy converged, as audiences moved between taste, text and thought, shaping an evening where culture was absorbed as much as it was performed. With the final day of Jashn-e-Rekhta now underway, one question remains: how often does a city listen so closely to Urdu — its kahaniyaan, its shayari, its khamoshiyan and carry those notes back into everyday life? Perhaps the true measure of the festival lies not on the stage, but in the words people carry home.

FOR SUGGESTIONS, FEEDBACK OR ADDITIONAL INFORMATION, PLEASE WRITE TO US AT FEATURES@DAILYPIONEER.COM

Although every possible care and caution has been taken to avoid errors or omissions, this publication is being sold on the condition and understanding that information given in this publication is merely for reference and must not be taken as having authority of or binding in any way on the writers, editors, publishers, and printers and sellers who do not owe any responsibility for any damage or loss to any person, a purchaser of this publication or not for the result of any action taken on the basis of this work. All disputes are subject to the exclusive jurisdiction of competent court and forums in Lucknow only. Readers are advised and requested to verify and seek appropriate advice to satisfy themselves about the veracity of any kind of advertisement before responding to any contents published in this newspaper. The printer, publisher, editor and any employee of the Pioneer Group's will not be held responsible for any kind of claim made by the advertisers of the products & services and shall not be made responsible for any kind of loss, consequences and further product-related damages on such advertisements.

Printed and Published by Kushan Mitra for and on behalf of CMYK Printech Ltd., 4th Floor, Sahara Shopping Centre, Faizabad Road, Lucknow-226016 and Printed at The Indian Express Pvt Ltd., C-26 Amsai Industrial Area, Nadarganj, Lucknow. Executive Editor Deepak Kumar Jha, Resident Editor Vijay Prakash Singh. RNI No. 2016/57. Lucknow Telephones: EPABX: 4036600 Fax: 2345582. Allahabad Office: (0532) 2420818, 2421018, 3290460. Kanpur Office: (0512) 2304006, 2304416. Varanasi Office: (0542) 2414294, 2414295. Delhi Office: 100K, Milap Bhawan, 8/A, Bahadur Shah Zafar Marg, New Delhi-110 002. Phone: 011-40110455. Corporate Office:- 201-205, 2nd Floor, Pratap Bhawan 5, B.S.Z. Marg, New Delhi-110002 Phone: 011-46033729, 011-69342500.

The Pioneer AGENDA

It is better to be violent, if there is violence in our hearts, than to put on the cloak of nonviolence to cover impotence.
— Mahatma Gandhi



Putin Dials Delhi

New Delhi's red-carpet welcome to the Russian President, despite pressure from Western powers, shows that the two countries assert their autonomy and commitment to independent foreign-policy choices



Indo-Russia: Cementing strategic ties

Russian President Vladimir Putin's state visit to India on December 4-5 for the 23rd India-Russia Annual Summit marked a significant diplomatic moment, demonstrating the resilience of one of the world's most enduring strategic partnerships. The visit, Putin's first to India since the Ukraine conflict began in 2022, was laden with symbolism, from Prime Minister Narendra Modi's personal reception at the airport to the ceremonial guard of honour at Rashtrapati Bhavan.

The optics were deliberate and unmistakable. At a time when Western nations have sought to isolate Russia diplomatically, India's warm embrace sent a clear message about the independent trajectory of its foreign policy. The traditional Modi hug at the airport, extended only to very select visiting dignitaries, underscored the personal rapport between the two leaders and India's commitment to its time-tested partnership with Moscow.

Beyond Ceremony: Practical Priorities

While the pomp and pageantry captured headlines, the substance of the visit revealed a relationship recalibrating itself for contemporary challenges. Trade and economic cooperation emerged as the central theme, reflecting both nations' pressing economic needs. Russia, reeling under Western sanctions, and India, facing 50 per cent tariffs from Washington, see in each other vital alternative markets.

The leaders endorsed the Programme for the Development of Strategic Areas of India-Russia Economic Cooperation till 2030, setting an ambitious bilateral trade target of \$100 billion by the decade's end. This represents a significant



VIKAS SWARUP
Ambassador

leap from the current \$68.7 billion, though much of the recent growth stems from India's purchases of discounted Russian oil, a factor now under American scrutiny. The joint statement emphasised developing bilateral settlement systems using national currencies, a strategic move to insulate trade from dollar-dependent mechanisms. Both nations agreed to enhance interoperability of national payment systems and explore central bank digital currency platforms. This financial architecture aims to ensure "uninterrupted maintenance of bilateral trade" despite external pressures.

The Energy Equation

The elephant in the room was oil. India's purchase of Russian crude has surged since 2022, providing crucial revenue to Moscow's sanctions-hit economy while offering Delhi energy security at competitive prices. Putin emphasised Russia's readiness to ensure "uninterrupted oil supplies" to India, but conspicuously, no specific agreements were announced.

This silence is telling. India faces mounting pressure from the Trump administration to curtail Russian oil imports, while its energy security imperatives pull in the opposite direction. The absence of concrete commitments suggests Delhi is keeping its options open, attempting the delicate balancing act of maintaining strategic autonomy while managing great power pressures.

Defence: The Unspoken Dimension

Equally notable was what wasn't announced. Despite speculation about

major defence acquisitions—including the advanced Su-57 fifth-generation fighter aircraft and additional S-400 air defence systems—no blockbuster defence deal materialised.

This reflects India's careful calibration between its defence relationship with Russia, which supplies approximately 60 per cent of its military equipment, and its growing strategic ties with the United States.

The joint statement emphasised reorienting military-technical cooperation toward "joint research and development, co-development and co-production" under the Make-in-India initiative. Both nations agreed to encourage joint manufacturing of spare parts and components for Russian-origin equipment, with potential exports to friendly third countries.

However, Russia's capacity to deliver on existing orders remains questionable, with its defence industrial base stretched by the Ukraine conflict. The delayed delivery of remaining S-400 units serves as a reminder of these constraints.

Expanding Horizons

Beyond traditional pillars, the visit yielded progress in emerging areas. Both nations are committed to regular consultations on Arctic-related issues and cooperation on the Northern Sea Route, with India training seafarers for polar water operations. The opening of Indian consulates in Yekaterinburg and Kazan signals intent to deepen regional connections beyond traditional centres.

CONTINUED ON >> P14

The most reliable partnership in the world

As an Indian-born Russian citizen who has made Russia his home for decades and now serves as a two-time elected legislator in the Kursk State under President Vladimir Putin's United Russia Party, I occupy a rare vantage point. I am rooted in Indian heritage yet deeply committed to the Russian state and people. This dual identity allows me to see the India-Russia partnership not only through the lens of geopolitics and diplomacy but also through civilisational continuity, cultural warmth, and human connection.

President Putin's visit to India is a vivid reminder that the relationship between our two nations does not depend on fluctuating global winds. It is grounded in trust accumulated over decades and reinforced by genuine goodwill between the leaders guiding both countries today.

Despite global turbulence, shifting alliances, and emerging rivalries, the deep mutual respect between India and Russia remains one of the least disrupted relationships in modern international affairs.

One of the most compelling aspects of our bilateral relationship today is the personal chemistry between President Vladimir Putin and Prime Minister Narendra Modi. Personal diplomacy is often underestimated by those who



ABHAY KUMAR SINGH
Legislator, Kursk State, United Russia Party, Russia

view the world only through structural or strategic frameworks. But anyone who has witnessed these leaders together knows that personal warmth and trust can accelerate cooperation in ways that formal channels alone cannot.

I recall the recent Shanghai Cooperation Organisation summit in China, where both leaders travelled in the same car — an unusual gesture in diplomatic practice. Before that, Prime Minister Modi broke strict protocol by personally receiving President Putin at the airport, accompanying him to the red carpet. These are not mere symbolic acts. They reflect instinctive comfort and mutual respect cultivated over years. Their relationship predates their rise to the highest offices and is built on familiarity, clear communication, and confidence in each other's intentions. Such gestures cannot be choreographed or fabricated.

They demonstrate genuine rapport between two leaders who understand their historical responsibility. This personal trust has tangible policy consequences: negotiations move faster, uncertainties shrink, and long-term projects gain continuity. In a time of global uncertainty, such a relationship is not just beneficial — it is essential.

A crucial aspect of our cooperation is defence. One example is the Su-57 fighter jet, which offers India a strategic advantage. The Su-57 is not only technologically advanced but also far more cost-effective than Western alternatives such as the French Rafale. For the price of one Rafale, India can acquire two Su-57s, significantly strengthening its defence capabilities.

Moreover, the deal with Russia includes licenses for 'local manufacturing, operation, and production in India', supporting domestic defence production and self-reliance. Such agreements highlight how the India-Russia partnership goes beyond diplomacy into tangible national security benefits.

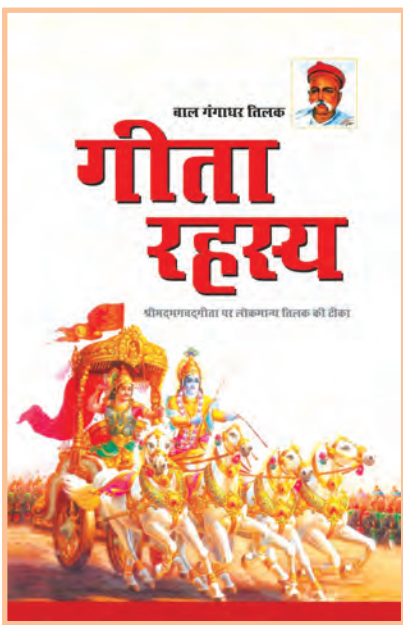
What makes the India-Russia relationship exceptional is that it is not dependent on any single pair of leaders. Our shared history stretches back nearly eight decades in its modern form, and even further in cultural and civilisational terms. India and Russia have never been adversaries—never fought a war, never clashed over territory or ideology, never confronted each other even indirectly. This absence of conflict is rare in international affairs. Many nations today struggle with difficult pasts: colonial legacies, border disputes, ideological confrontations. India and Russia, however, have maintained goodwill consistently, across generations and governments.

This friendship is enriched by historical stories that may be lesser-known but are deeply telling. During the Soviet period, one of the world's most closed political environments — Stalin's daughter, Svetlana, was allowed to travel to India and live there. Such permission was nearly impossible to obtain at the time. Her visit was not just a personal journey; it symbolised the trust and respect the USSR extended toward India.

CONTINUED ON >> P14



“A PEOPLE WITHOUT THE KNOWLEDGE
OF THEIR PAST HISTORY, ORIGIN
AND CULTURE IS LIKE A TREE
WITHOUT ROOTS”
— MARCUS GARVEY



Global significance of the

Gita

The Bhagavad Gita was inscribed on UNESCO's *Memory of the World Register* in April this year. This recognition highlights its global significance. The Gita has been translated into all major languages of the world. The largest number of commentaries in various languages across the world have been written on the Gita itself.

The British scholar Charles Wilkins translated the Gita into English in 1785 as *Bhagvat Geeta, or Dialogues of Krishna and Arjun*. In 1787, AJ Parraud translated the Gita into French. In 1823, August Schlegel translated the Gita into German, and the German poet Friedrich Schlegel wrote a commentary on it. The distinguished British poet and journalist Edwin Arnold published a poetic English translation of the Gita in 1885, titled *The Song Celestial: A Poetic Version of the Bhagavad Gita*.

The American writer and philosopher RW Emerson wrote a famous poem centred on the Gita, called *Brahma*, in the nineteenth century. In the same century, the American poet and philosopher Henry David Thoreau, while commenting on the Gita, wrote that, compared to the Gita, world literature stands at a lower level. The American scholar Thomas J Hopkins, in his commentary on the Gita, praised its greatness. The English writer and philosopher Aldous Huxley, while writing the preface to *Bhagavad Gita: The Song of God*, translated by Swami Prabhavananda and Christopher Isherwood in



KRIPASHANKAR CHAUBEY
Professor at Mahatma Gandhi
Antarashtriy Hindi
Vishwavidyalaya, Wardha

1944, described it as a great work. The list of the world's scholars who have studied the Gita is very long.

In India, in the ninth century, Shankaracharya (788-820), while writing a commentary on the Gita, derived the principle of renunciation (sannyasa) from it. In the eleventh century, Ramanujacharya drew the element of devotion (bhakti) from the Gita and explained that knowledge is attained through devotion. In the thirteenth century, Saint Gyaneshwar composed the Gyaneshwari. In the sixteenth century, Eknath, and in the seventeenth century, Ramdas wrote commentaries on the Gita.

In the modern era, Rishi Arvind Ghosh presented his commentary by writing the book *Essays on the Gita*. The book *The Bhagavad Gita as Viewed by Swami Vivekananda* reveals how deeply Vivekananda was influenced by the Gita. The great Tamil poet and journalist Subramanya Bharati published a Tamil translation of the Gita. India's former President Sarvapalli Radhakrishnan translated the Bhagavad Gita into English and wrote a commentary on it, stating that it is less a philosophical treatise and more a religious scripture. Bal Gangadhar Tilak, through his book *Gita Rahasya*,

extracted the principle of Karma Yoga from the Gita. He wrote this book to provide a spiritual foundation for the Indian freedom struggle. Mahatma Gandhi wrote the book *Gita Ki Mahima* and called the Gita his mother. Vinoba Bhave translated every stanza of the Gita from Sanskrit into Marathi, in equal measure, as per the wish of his mother, Rukmini Devi. This work was named *Gitai* by Vinoba, which means Mother Gita. Kamalnayan Bajaj envisioned the construction of a memorial on Gitai. Thus, the conceptualisation of Gitai Mandir was the result of Kamalnayanji's thinking.

The Bhoomipuujan of this temple was performed by Vinobaji on November 4, 1964. It is worth mentioning that the occasion was graced by the presence of all three Bhave brothers, namely Vinobaji, Balkobaji and Shivaji. On November 4, 1969, the foundation stone of Gitai Mandir was laid by Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan (Badshah Khan). Gitai Mandir was constructed on land covering 0.92 acres in Wardha, Maharashtra. Marathi shlokas of the Gitai, written by Vinobaji, were engraved on the rock slabs of this temple. This is the first project in India in which a complete Marathi scripture, Gitai, is engraved on rock slabs.

For inscribing 700 shlokas of 18 chapters of *Gitai*, 18 types of rock slabs were used. These rock slabs were brought from all four corners of the country, namely Chunar (Eastern Uttar Pradesh), Kolhapur (Maharashtra), Karoli (Madhya Pradesh), Bundi (Rajasthan) and Kuppam (Andhra Pradesh). Granite slabs were also brought from several places in Karnataka, Tamil Nadu and other areas. The parallel walkway was constructed using stones from Wardha, Tadoba and Saoner. Thus, the stones used in the construction of the Gitai Mandir firmly represent the unity of the nation.

The selection of rock slabs was based on the advice of specialists and proven experiments. They are least affected by possible weathering action, ensuring their durability in the future. While fixing the shape of the rocks, due consideration was given to the effects of rain, wind and sun. Each rock slab is 9 feet high, 2 feet wide and 1 foot thick, embedded 2 feet below ground level in concrete. The rocks have been kept naturally rough, symbolising the simplicity of the Sarvodaya programme and presenting a rural

appearance.

One *Gitai* shloka is inscribed on each rock slab. These inscriptions are placed between 5 and 6 feet from the ground level, making them suitable for reading without obstructing movement. The size of the letters is large enough to be read easily from a distance of 8-10 feet. Care has been taken to maintain uniformity in the shape and size of all letters.

The temple encircled by these rock slabs has no traditional roof, floor or walls. There is a gap of 3 inches between consecutive rock slabs, allowing air and light to flow naturally. The shadows of the rock slabs change with the movement of the sun's rays. In this way, the five elements-sky, sun, air, water and earth—are present in the temple, symbolising humanity's natural connection with them. The rock slabs stand in a continuous row without interruption.

To enter the temple, steps are arranged in a tunnel-like form. Once inside, a visitor may move towards the left along a circular path to complete the circumambulation while reading the Gitai shlokas engraved on the slabs. Built of exposed concrete, the main entrance of the Mandir is unique in shape and size and is also a remark-

able example of architecture (Vastukala). At the entrance stands a pillar in the shape of a Swastik, bearing Vinobaji's words engraved in his own handwriting, expressing his emotional bond with Gitai. It reads:

“Gitai is my mother; I am her child. Whenever I fall down and cry, she lifts me up in her lap.” Vinobaji's messages to the world-Truth, Love and Compassion—are also engraved on the same pillar, along with the essence of the Gita in one word, Samyayog. The Gitai Mandir is not a traditional place of worship but a space for contemplation and meditation. The atmosphere of the temple is peaceful.

The Gitai Mandir reminds us of the wisdom of the Gita for living a meaningful and righteous life. The 700 shlokas of the 18 chapters of Gitai, inscribed on 18 types of rock slabs, offer philosophical, spiritual and practical guidance for navigating life's challenges and attaining spiritual liberation. The Gitai Mandir emphasises the importance of performing one's duty (dharma), acting selflessly, and remaining calm in both success and failure.



FROM AGENDA COVER

Indo-Russia: Cementing strategic ties

In a move to boost cultural and economic exchanges, Modi announced that India will launch a free 30-day e-tourist visa and a 30-day group tourist visa for Russian citizens.

In civil nuclear cooperation, both sides welcomed progress on the Kudankulam Nuclear Power Plant, with fuel shipments arriving for Unit 3. They agreed to accelerate discussions on Russian-designed reactors and localisation of nuclear equipment manufacturing, aligned with India's goal of 100 GW nuclear capacity by 2047.

Critical minerals emerged as a new frontier, with both nations expressing interest in cooperation on exploration, processing and recycling technologies, crucial for advanced manufacturing and emerging technologies.

Multilateral Convergence

The leaders emphasised strengthening cooperation within BRICS, SCO and G20, with Russia pledging full support for India's upcoming BRICS Chairship in 2026. They advocated for UN Security Council reform, with Russia reiterating support for India's permanent membership in an expanded council.

On counter-terrorism, both nations condemned terrorist attacks in their territories and

called for concerted action against UN-listed terrorist groups, emphasising the need to combat terrorism “without hidden agendas and double standards.”

Notably absent from the joint statement was any direct reference to the Ukraine conflict, though the leaders emphasised their commitment to “global peace and stability in a multipolar world” and stressed that their relationship should be “ensured upon the basis of equal and indivisible security.” This carefully calibrated language reflects India's consistent position of calling for dialogue and diplomacy while refusing to condemn Russia explicitly.

The Geopolitical Tightrope

Putin's visit illuminated India's evolving foreign policy doctrine. Delhi is no longer boxed in by old Cold War binaries and is instead practising a confident, multi-aligned approach rooted in strategic autonomy. The message was clear: India engages Moscow on terms shaped by its own interests, not by external criticism.

As Prime Minister Modi noted, addressing tariff and non-tariff barriers, ensuring smooth payment mechanisms, and regular business interaction are key to achieving the revised trade target. Whether India can simultaneously maintain its Russian partnership while securing trade deals with Washington remains the defining question. The “informal dinner” between Modi and Putin,

described by Russian officials as addressing “the most urgent, most sensitive and most important issues,” likely involved frank discussions on these very dilemmas.

The 23rd India-Russia Annual Summit reaffirmed a partnership anchored in mutual respect and converging interests, even as both nations navigate an increasingly complex global landscape. The relationship's resilience lies not in ignoring differences but in pragmatically managing them while advancing shared objectives.

Vikas Swarup is a retired Indian Foreign Service officer, he was the High Commissioner of India to Canada and the official spokesperson for the Ministry of External Affairs

The most reliable partnership in the world

Even earlier, philosophical exchanges between Mahatma Gandhi and Leo Tolstoy created intellectual bridges linking two great moral traditions. Russian painter Nicholas Roerich, who lived in the Himalayas, left a vast artistic legacy that continues to connect our nations. These examples show that India-Russia ties are rooted as much in civilisational exchange as in statecraft.

In the present day, one of the most significant people-to-people bridges between our nations is education. Nearly one lakh Indian students study in Russian universities, especially in med-

icine, engineering, and technical fields. This trend spans three generations. Families trust Russian education because graduates return well-trained, well-prepared, and often capable of clearing Indian qualifying examinations with confidence. As Russian policymakers, we are committed to making this experience even more supportive. Indian students enrich Russian cities culturally, while the knowledge they acquire strengthens India's workforce.

Cultural diplomacy is another powerful pillar of this relationship, with Bollywood playing a key role. Indian cinema once enjoyed immense popularity in Russia. Raj Kapoor's films, in particular, created a wave of affection that still resonates among older generations. The songs, storytelling, and emotion deeply connected with Russian audiences. Later, Amitabh Bachchan and Mithun Chakraborty carried this legacy forward.

In recent decades, however, Bollywood has shifted its focus elsewhere, and younger Russian audiences have gravitated toward Hollywood. But this need not be permanent. Russia remains visually stunning, with its snowfall, white nights, and the unmatched beauty of Saint Petersburg. These cinematic treasures are waiting to be rediscovered. With the Russian government actively promoting cultural engagement with India, the moment is ripe for Bollywood's return. Such collaboration would strengthen cultural understanding and revive the emotional connection

that once defined our soft diplomacy.

At the strategic level, India and Russia continue to cooperate in defence, energy, nuclear technology, trade, and increasingly in sectors such as digital technology, pharmaceuticals, and manufacturing. What sets this partnership apart is its consistency. It does not fluctuate with elections, leadership changes, or international pressure. It evolves steadily because it is underpinned by mutual respect. As the global order becomes more complex, the India-Russia partnership is poised to play a stabilising role. Both countries have the capacity—and, more importantly, the desire—to build a world where cooperation outweighs confrontation.

As someone who carries both Indian heritage and Russian citizenship with pride, I believe deeply in the potential of this partnership. It is not just strategic or economic. It is emotional, historical, and human. It is a bond between civilisations, strengthened by people and guided by leaders who understand its importance.

The future of India-Russia relations, in my view, is bright—not because of treaties or agreements alone, but because of the trust that lives in the hearts of our peoples. That trust is our greatest asset—and the world would do well to pay attention to it.

Abhay Kumar Singh is Indian-born Russian Citizen and Two-time Legislator, Kursk State, United Russia Party (Putin Party)

“FOOD IS THE MOST PRIMITIVE
FORM OF COMFORT”
— SHEILA GRAHAM

Manipur: Timeless beauty and a cuisine rooted in nature



ANIL
RAJPUT

Manipur, one of the Seven Sister States of North-East India, is often called The Jeweled Land. The name derives from the Sanskrit word mani (jewel) and pur (land or city) because of the region's natural beauty, culture and dance traditions. Its landscape is marked by serene valleys and gentle hills and surrounded by majestic mountain ranges that encompass it. The state shares a long boundary with Myanmar and shares borders with Nagaland, Mizoram and Assam facilitating an active interaction in the eastern Himalayas. Imphal, the capital of Manipur is located in a valley at an elevation of nearly 2,600 feet above sea level, which influences its agreeable weather throughout the year. The Loktak Lake, located in the Bishnupur district, has the distinction of being the largest fresh-water lake in the north-east, and is famous for its floating biomass known as phumdis, besides being the world's only floating national park. This geography of rich water bodies, cool hills and plentiful vegetation, shaped the habitation patterns and agricultural practices of Manipur's people, defining not only their identity but their cuisine, rituals and relationship with nature.

Human settlement in Manipur began in the fertile Imphal Valley, where early clans and proto-Meitei groups set up small farming communities along the rivers. Over time, these villages grew into organized chiefdoms and eventually formed the base of the Meitei kingdom that took shape in the first century CE. As the valley communities developed, Tibeto-Burman groups migrated into both the Imphal Valley and the surrounding hills. Each brought its own language and rituals, adding to the region's growing mix of cultures. Kangla Fort, on the banks of the Imphal River, became the seat of the Meitei kings and served for centuries as the center of political authority, ritual life, and administration. It played a key role in holding the various clans together. Meanwhile, hill communities such as the Tangkhul, Mao, Maram, Thadou, Hmar, Paite, Zou, Kuki, and others kept their distinct identities while staying closely connected to the valley. Trade in salt, forest products, woven textiles, bamboo goods, and dried meats helped maintain these ties and supported a long history of interaction and mutual dependence.

The Anglo-Manipur conflict of 1891 marked a turning point, bringing the region under British influence and new administrative systems besides exposure to the world outside its hills and valleys. Yet the cultural depth of the Manipuri people remained resilient despite the changes and its deeply rooted traditions endured. Manipur's strategic location also provided an ideal gateway for trade and cultural exchanges with Southeast Asia and they enriched each other with their trade, culture and cuisines. This region continues to be an important element in India's Look East policy that seeks closer and mutually beneficial ties with the rest of East Asia.

Religion in Manipur revolved, like in neighboring states, around animism (forces of nature), ancestor reverence and local cosmologies. Early Meitei spiritual life was centred on Sanamahi worship that was believed to ensure protection, prosperity and the well-being of the family. Leimarel Sidabi, considered the Mother Earth figure, and other deities representing forests,



lakes and skies formed a spiritual constellation that guided moral conduct, agricultural cycles and community life. Lai Haraoba, an ancient and popular Meitei festival honours the Umang Lai, the ancestral forest deities of Manipur, through rituals, songs, and dance sequences performed by priestesses. It brings together different clans in worship and serves as one of the oldest unifying traditions of Meitei civilization.

The spread of Vaishnavism in the eighteenth century during the reign of King Pamheiba (Garib Niwaz) introduced another set of transformations in the valley. Hymns, devotional poetry and the Ras Leela dance form gave Manipur's society the depth of the bhakti tradition that blended seamlessly with earlier beliefs. The emergence of this new devotional identity did not erase the earlier beliefs but created a harmony of philosophies where rituals for ancestors, forest spirits and Vaishnava beliefs coexist even today.

Cuisine in Manipur, one of the most intricate food cultures of the region, is mostly inspired by its geography and reflects its religious and social traditions. Much like the varied tribal cuisines of the north-east, Manipuri cuisine cannot be generalized because it is created on a foundation of ecological diversity, traditional methods of cooking and nuances of subtle flavours. An abundance of local produce provides diverse ingredients that are native to the region's ecology. Fresh herbs, seasonal greens, fermented ingredients, and fresh water fish form the basis of everyday meals, while techniques such as steaming, slow-cooking, and light seasoning bring out natural flavours rather than being overpowering. Manipuri food reflects a long tradition of using what the land and waters provide and is prepared in ways that preserve both nutrition and taste.

The cuisine of Manipur's valley regions is characterised by fresh, seasonal ingredients especially herbs, greens, and river fish and prepared with

minimal oil to preserve natural flavours. Light fermentation, gentle spicing, and simple cooking methods like boiling and steaming give the food an earthy taste and ensures nutritional value. Ngari, fermented fresh water fish that is sun-dried, forms the base of many local dishes and is known for its strong aroma and deep flavour. It is a key ingredient in popular dishes such as iromba and kangsoi and various chutneys, adding a punch to everyday meals. Iromba is made by combining boiled vegetables with mashed ngari and hara mirch (green chilli) with vegetables such as yongchak, seasonal beans, colocasia stems, and lai, a leafy green, that are stirred together into a delicious dish to be eaten with steamed rice. Iromba varies from one household to another, with some preferring it milder and others enhancing its sharpness with additional chillies. Another celebrated valley dish is singju, a spicy and crunchy salad of shredded vegetables, lotus stems, cabbage and herbs mixed with ngari. The use of roasted til (sesame) and a hint of lemon lends the salad its nutritious and nutty character.

A signature preparation of the Meitei culinary repertoire is chak hao, the famed black rice of Manipur, cooked during festivals and special occasions. It is often transformed into a sweet pudding with doodh (milk) and a touch of gur (jaggery), creating a rich and irresistible dessert. Another preferred dish is kangsoi, a boiled vegetable stew flavoured with adrak (ginger), hara mirch and a few herbs, cooked gently until the vegetables release their natural juices. This dish is an almost daily fare across the valley because of its lightness and nourishment, especially when the seasons are changing since it has properties that enhance immunity. Paaknam,



a savoury cake made of besan (gram flour), herbs, vegetables and sometimes fish, and wrapped in banana leaves and steamed, creates a fragrant dish served during festive periods. To top it all, Morok metpa, a fiery chutney made from roasted mirch (chilli), onions and herbs, along with ngari accompanies nearly every meal and reflects the local preference for heat balanced with freshness.

The valley also has a unique relationship with freshwater fish. Loktak Lake provides a wide variety that feature in dishes such as nga thongba, a fish stew prepared with adrak, pyaaz (onion), tomatoes, potatoes and herbs simmered slowly until the fish becomes tender. Nga atoiba, a fresh water fish stew, cooked with ingredients such as colocasia stems (paangkho), yong-chak, mustard leaves, chilli, turmeric, and sometimes herbs like maroi. Unlike spicier dishes, nga atoiba keeps the seasoning minimal to let the natural flavour of the fish stand out. The harmony between the natural sweetness of vegetables and the depth of ngari forms the heart of daily meals, creating a palette that is distinct, refined and deeply rooted in the land.

In the hill districts to the north, east, west, and south, tribal communities like the Tangkhul, Mao, Paite, Kuki, and Thadou have their own unique cuisines. These cuisines rely on forest produce, smoked meats, and traditional preservation methods. In the northern hills where the Tangkhuls live, the food is richer and often includes smoked or dried meats. Smoking happens carefully at home, allowing the meat to take in the aroma of firewood. This process creates flavors that fit well with the cool monsoon season. One beloved dish is hentak, made from a blend of sun-dried fish powder and a paste of edible Alocasia petioles, shaped into small balls and left to ferment. Hentak has a mildly pungent smell and is rich in protein. It is often used to add flavor to everyday meals, especially in stews, vegetable dishes, and chutneys. In the valley region, it is a household essential, valued for its long shelf life and the deep flavor it brings to home-style Manipuri cooking.

In the western hills, where the Mao Nagas live, the cuisine emphasises ginger, yam, fermented bamboo shoots and leafy vegetables. Smoked pork cooked with bastenga, fermented bamboo shoot, is a common delicacy symbolic of their reliance on preservation methods perfected over generations. The dish combines pork, bamboo shoot, mirch and adrak, simmered long enough to merge flavours yet still preserve the natural textures. Another traditional western hill dish is anishi made from fermented taro leaves cooked with pork. The slow cooking brings out an inten-

sity that pairs well with steamed rice and seasonal vegetables.

In the southern hills inhabited by Kuki and Paite groups, cuisine shifts toward heartier stews, dried meats and dishes cooked with a greater amount of pyaaz and tomatoes. Pork and chicken are central to many dishes, where meat is stewed with bamboo shoots, lai and seasonal herbs collected from nearby forests. One popular preparation is sai bhaji, where pork is simmered with beans, vegetables and adrak until it becomes tender and richly flavoured and is eaten during family gatherings or community feasts. The southern tribes also prepare dried fish broths that combine dried river fish with mirch and herbs to create warming meals suited to the cooler hill climate.

In the eastern districts bordering Myanmar, cross cultural influences emerge more prominently. Here, communities prepare rice noodles used in broth-based dishes enriched with vegetables, herbs and sometimes fish. The technique of boiling, steaming and using minimal spices reflects a shared culinary heritage shaped by both Manipuri and Southeast Asian practices. Seasonal greens feature in broths that are mild but nourishing, providing comfort during rainy months. Bamboo shoot curries, steamed fish seasoned with adrak and hara mirch, and boiled yam preparations are widespread across the eastern settlements, reinforcing a shared culinary identity that is both local and trans-regional.

As can be seen from the above recipes, fermentation holds deep significance in Manipuri gastronomy across both valley and hills. Ngari in the valley and hentak or bastenga in the hills reflect a deep understanding of natural preservation techniques. Rice also plays an essential role, not only as a staple but a cultural symbol. The valley's sticky rice, known as chak-hao (black aromatic rice) and other varieties in white, are staple in daily diets. Local beverages made through natural fermentation are also popular during rituals, reflecting the continuity of age-old practices linked to changing seasons.

Manipuri cuisine is being kept alive in contemporary times by the increasing numbers of cafes and restaurants that reinterpret traditional dishes while taking care to preserve their basic flavors. Indeed, this trend is welcome and calls for applause. Chefs are presenting classics like iromba, singju, chak-hao kheer, and ngari-based stews by reinventing them in lighter textures to suit the taste of modern times. Every care is undertaken to get farm-to-table sourcing that appeals to the health-conscious young. Ingredients hitherto confined to home kitchens-like hawaijar, wild herbs, black rice, and seasonal greens-now feature in curated menus and fusion dishes. Community-led food festivals and local entrepreneurs ensure authentic cooking ingredients and methods using family recipes remain central, allowing Manipuri food to evolve without losing its original character.

It is my belief that we have an obligation to protect these culinary traditions and keep them alive for future generations. The flavours of Manipur are not simply recipes but an expression of a people's tradition shaped by their land, their beliefs and their ancestral wisdom. They are the collective repository of the knowledge of generations who worked with forests, rivers, hills and fields, understanding nature and its importance for nourishment. Preserving this heritage is therefore an act of cultural responsibility that we must assume for ourselves. By valuing these traditions today, we affirm that the cuisine of Manipur will continue to nourish, teach and inspire the generations to come.

(The writer is Secretary, Cuisine India Society)

Naples comes calling with its Sourdough legacy



TEAM AGENDA

The aroma of rested sourdough and blistered tomatoes has finally found its way to Delhi. For a city that takes its food seriously, the arrival of Si Nonna's feels timely and assured. Celebrated across continents, it brings with it the legacy of Naples-five centuries of Neapolitan sourdough tradition and the distinction of being the world's largest AVPN-certified pizzeria network.

At Si Nonna's, the emphasis remains firmly on craft and discipline. Dough rests patiently for 24 hours, flour is thoughtfully sourced, cheese stays fresh, and every step-from fermentation to firing-follows methods shaped long before pizza became global currency. The result is flavour built on balance and restraint, confident without excess.

That philosophy runs through the menu. Pizza No. 2, topped with tomato sauce, buffalo mozzarella, basil and olive oil, achieves quiet harmony. Pizza No. 3 deepens the profile with garlic, olives, capers, basil and Fior di Latte, delivering layered flavour that remains

light on the palate. Other selections-numbers 6, 8 and beyond-continue this careful conversation between crust and topping, where nothing competes and everything belongs. Paired with a cup of strong hot coffee, the experience feels satisfying and complete.

Beyond pizzas, the menu reflects the comfort of a Neapolitan table. *Panuozzo sandwiches*, *Eggplant Parmigiana*, *fresh gelatos*, *kombuchas*, cooling beverages and a *classic Tiramisu* add depth and variety. Vegetarian, vegan and Jain-friendly options sit naturally alongside the rest, without implication or afterthought.

The space reinforces the experience. An open kitchen allows diners to watch dough being stretched, topped and eased into the oven. Guests — both children and adults — are invited to participate, crafting sourdough pizzas with aprons, chef hats and gentle guidance, creating a shared

family tradition rather than a staged performance.

Ayush Jatia, the force behind Si Nonna's, describes Delhi as a city "curious, energetic and deeply passionate about food" — a fitting stage for its presence. With GK2 as its home, Si Nonna's presents a revival of Neapolitan heritage, blending Italian kitchen traditions with Delhi's appreciation for authentic flavours.



Chronicles of Deccan delights



TEAM AGENDA

There are food festivals, and then there are culinary experiences that feel like stepping into someone's home, where the air is fragrant with slow-cooked spices and every bite carries memory. Hyderabad! Rasoi, hosted at Hyatt Place Gurgaon, firmly belonged to the latter. Across a week-long celebration, the hotel revived a culinary legacy rooted in warmth, patience and tradition, led by the quietly formidable Nizami Dilnaz Baig.

Hyderabad! cuisine reflects centuries of cultural dialogue — Nizami opulence shaped by Persian finesse, Mughlai richness, Turkish depth and Deccan earthiness. At this festival, those influences unfolded with rare authenticity. Dilnaz Baig, 74 and fiercely passionate, brought to Gurgaon the flavours of Hyderabad's home kitchens rather than theatrical interpretations. Her presence transformed the event into an intimate cultural exchange. Having travelled through Pakistan, Iran, Turkey, Thailand and Europe, Dilnaz absorbed global influences without losing sight of her culinary origins. Her cooking draws from memory and instinct, both shaped by generations of practice.



"Hyderabad! cuisine is about heritage," she explained. "Every dish carries a story from the royal kitchens of the Nizams, where spice, aroma and time work together."

The menu honoured that philosophy. *Khatti Dal* set a comforting tone, while *Hyderabad! Dum Biryani*, *Haleem*, *Mirchi ka Salan* and *Bagara Baingan* showcased depth, balance and restraint. *Pathar ka Gosht* and *Shikampuri Kebabs* impressed with simplicity and technique, while thoughtful vegetarian options ensured inclusivity.

Guests could choose a relaxed table d'hôte lunch or a generous buffet dinner. What stayed was a sense of belonging. As General Manager Neha Kapoor observed, this was food steeped in familiarity and tradition. For one memorable week, Hyderabad arrived — alive on every plate.

Why meditation is non-negotiable to your mental health

GURUDEV SRI SRI RAVI SHANKAR

See, in schools, teachers often tell children not to get angry or not to feel sad. But nobody teaches you how not to get angry or how to handle this restless mind or negative emotions. We teach dental hygiene to our children, but forget to teach them about mental hygiene. What is mental hygiene? Taking care of your mind is mental hygiene. Everybody likes to wear clean clothes; everybody takes a shower daily. In the same way, we need to learn how to keep our minds free from the impressions we gather in the course of daily life.

Mental hygiene is necessary, and you can maintain it through practices like meditation. Taking some time out every day to consciously relax the mind and repose in your Self is like pressing the delete button on all the unnecessary files on your computer. It lets you start afresh with a clear slate. We teach children to brush their teeth when they are very young, so their teeth remain healthy and their smiles intact. But a smile comes not only from healthy teeth, but from a pleasant state of the mind, which you get from meditation to begin with. And then where does it lead us? Is it limited only to hygiene or wellness of the mind? No, it leads us to another dimension deep within us, which is a field of all possibilities.

The Antidote to Stress

A primary mental health concern today is stress, which does not go away just by talking or advising alone. We need to learn some techniques and tools to get rid of stress and calm the mind. Meditation is for those who have a lot to do in the world. It helps those with responsibilities, deadlines, challenges, and pressure. It gives you inner stability. It makes you peaceful within and dynamic outside. The quality of your life depends on the quality of your mind. If the mind is not centred, external influences can easily disturb it. Meditation helps you achieve that centredness.

The formula for stress is too much to do, too little time, and no energy to do it. Now, you cannot reduce your workload, nor can you have more time; you are left with only one thing to do, which is to increase your energy level. And this is where meditation can be of immense help.

Meditation gives you deep rest, deeper than the deepest sleep. When the mind becomes calm and centred, it gains access to the enormous intelligence and energy that reside within us. Meditation is a way to take that deep rest, and yet remain alert and conscious.

People have a common misconception that meditation is about focusing the mind. No, meditation is effortless and fun. It is what your soul has been looking for. When the mind becomes calmer with practice, you make better decisions and create a positive, harmonious atmosphere around you. When the mind is disturbed, your perception is disturbed, and any decision you take from that place is one you end up regretting.

What Does Science Say About Meditation and Stress?

Today, there are more than enough scientific

A primary mental health concern today is stress, which does not go away just by talking or advising alone. We need to learn some techniques and tools to get rid of stress and calm the mind



studies on how meditation benefits both body and mind. Studies show that stress, anxiety, and negative feelings create lesions in the hippocampus of the brain. When these lesions are removed through deep conscious relaxation, you begin to feel better, fresher, and more alert. Meditation empowers you to be in the present moment — not worried about the future or brooding over the past.

Another study shows that the amygdala, the central part of the brain, starts shrinking when you begin meditating. When the amygdala is larger, you are more prone to nervousness and other emotional imbalances. Scientists also say that grey matter increases in the brain with meditation. Grey matter processes information and controls muscles, memory, and emotions.

Researchers at Harvard Medical School have found that under stress, the brain may shift from cognitive to survival mode, which can cause memory loss over time, as more energy goes into surviving than cognition.

Chronic stress can lead to atrophy of brain mass and a decrease in its weight. These structural changes impact how you respond to stress, cognition, and memory. Stress can lead to irritability, moodiness, anxiety, and depression. Meditation works at the root of this by calming the system and restoring balance. Through meditation and breathing techniques, we can cleanse the mind of negative emotions and address mental stress effectively.

Modern medicine also supports these spiritual practices in reducing stress hormones. Psychiatrists at the National Institute of Mental Health and Neurosciences have found that cor-

tisol levels — the stress hormone — are significantly lower among practitioners of Sudarshankriya, a powerful breathing technique and meditation practice. Research from Sweden shows that Sudarshankriya reduces stress and anxiety and increases optimism and well-being. It is as effective as standard drug therapy, free of side effects, and does not strain the wallet. You can also increase your energy levels by chanting, which is a path to meditation. These chants have existed in human consciousness for thousands of years. When you chant, the deepest level of consciousness begins vibrating, energising you while calming your mind at the same time. It is because of these practices — singing bhajans and chanting — that people in ancient times did not experience many instances of depression, despite living modest lives in India. People chanted often, so the subtle energy remained high.

Meditation and Sleep

The biggest casualty of a stressful lifestyle is the quality of sleep. Every night when you sleep, you wake up energised and rejuvenated because the mind, body, and breath come together into one rhythm, eliminating the stress of the day. But there is another way of resting that is far superior to natural sleep — meditation. In meditation, you relax consciously.

With conscious meditation, or conscious rest, and this state of restful alertness, you can remove stress from the body-mind system in a very short period of time. It brings clarity to the mind, makes your skin glow, and your heart glow as well.

Power of Intention

There are more than 400 benefits of meditation; over 100 have been proven and documented. Meditation enhances intuition, creativity, decision-making, work-life balance, and interpersonal relationships. It also boosts immunity. Beyond these benefits, it strengthens the power of intention.

When there is disturbance in the world, if you can remain calm and maintain equanimity, ideas arise in your mind about what to do. Peace becomes possible when the mind is serene. When we are disturbed, we are of little help to ourselves or to others. People seek altered states of consciousness through harmful means because they want relief, but the state they seek is already present in their breath. Sit and meditate for a few minutes, and you experience joy within. Millions have emerged from harmful habits, violence, and extreme stress through meditation.

Is Meditation for Everybody?

It is a natural human tendency to seek joy that does not diminish and love that does not distort or turn into negative emotions such as anger, hate, or jealousy. Wanting comfort is natural because you once experienced that unmatched state of comfort in your mother's womb. There, you had to do nothing. Food was supplied effortlessly, and you floated peacefully. That is meditation, and meditation is absolute comfort. Meditation is an art. Just as everyone has ten fingers and only needs to learn how to use them to create something melodious with



IN SANSKRIT, IT IS SAID, “MANANATRAYATEITI MANTRA.” A MANTRA PROTECTS THE MIND FROM REPETITIVE THOUGHTS AND WORRIES. MANTRA-BASED MEDITATION TECHNIQUES SUCH AS SAHAJ SAMADHI HELP FREE THE MIND FROM THIS CYCLE

an instrument, similarly, as long as you have a mind with which you can think, you can meditate. Often, people complain that it is difficult to focus the mind or relax, but meditation does not require renunciation or drastic lifestyle changes. You do not need to go to the Himalayas or practise extreme penance. To meditate, you simply need to know how to relax — like making an effort to catch a train, but once you are on it, you can rest. You can begin meditation with the help of a qualified instructor who uses a mantra — a specific sound. In Sanskrit, it is said, “Mananatrayatēti mantra.” A mantra protects the mind from repetitive thoughts and worries. Mantra-based meditation techniques such as Sahaj Samadhi help free the mind from this cycle.

To meditate effortlessly, I offer three principles. First, *Achah* — “I want nothing.” Put all desires aside temporarily. Second, *Aprayatna* — “I do nothing.” Meditation is not about effort, focus, or control. Just let go. Third, *Akinchan* — “I am nothing.” Drop all labels you associate with yourself. For those moments, simply be nobody.

In the very first sitting, you experience something beautiful. With regular practice, once or twice a day, a transformation begins within you — one that others around you will also begin to notice, recognising the calm and positive energy you carry. No, enjoy the ride for a while. Be on it! Never mind! But see that your goal, or what you set as a goal, is already there where you are. And knowing this brings you serenity, beyond any words or explanation.

Former colonies demand reparations: Britain owes a debt – moral & otherwise

GYANESHWAR DAYAL

A few years ago, when ShashiTharoor stood at Oxford and argued that Britain owed a moral debt to India and its former colonies, his words were treated as an eloquent aside rather than a rallying cry. He suggested that even a simple apology would signal remorse for centuries of plunder and subjugation. At the time, he was largely a solitary voice. That is no longer the case. What was once an academic argument has now consolidated into the largest global demand for reparations in recorded history?

In an extraordinary development, former colonies of the British Empire have jointly advanced claims amounting to an estimated \$180 trillion. This unprecedented figure transforms decades of moral debate into a concrete economic reckoning-one that directly challenges a powerful imperial legacy that continues to shape global inequalities.

Momentum has gathered across continents. In Yemen, Sana'a University recently held an intellectual seminar examining British colonial crimes in southern Yemen. Timed with Independence Day, the event formed part of the ongoing Academics Toward al-Quds series. University President Dr Mohammed al-Bukhaiti emphasised the institution's responsibility to preserve national memory and expose the lasting impact of colonial domination, particularly in an era shaped by contested narratives and information warfare. Dr Zaid al-Warith, Assistant Rector for Centres Affairs, reminded participants that such anniversaries are not ceremonial markers; they carry the weight of generations who resisted British rule with persistence and resolve. The seminar underscored the enduring relevance of colonial history to contemporary political and economic struggles.

The staggering global claim of \$180 trillion is a composite of demands emerging from nations across the Caribbean, Africa and Asia. It reflects decades of research, the maturation of reparatory discourse, and a coordinated diplomatic realignment. African



leaders, meeting in Algiers for their second major summit this year, advanced the movement into a decisive phase. Preliminary assessments from the African Union estimate damages inflicted by British colonial rule on the continent at \$100-120 trillion, while Nigeria has independently lodged a \$5 trillion claim.

The Caribbean Community (CARICOM) has also intensified its efforts. During a visit to London in mid-November, its leaders pressed Prime Minister Sir KeirStarmer directly, reiterating collective claims valued at \$24 trillion, including Barbados's assessment of \$4.9 trillion. Their arguments draw upon extensive documentation of long-term social and economic harm rooted in slavery and indenture.

India's position lends considerable weight to the global claim. A major Oxfam study published in 2024 estimated Britain's economic extraction from India at \$65 trillion-a figure now widely cited in international legal and academic circles. Scholars and legal experts in London note that while the scale of these demands is unprecedented, the depth and credibility of the underlying research give the claims a seriousness that international courts cannot easily dismiss. The documentary From Slaves

to Bond has further highlighted the difficulty of quantifying generational trauma, structural impoverishment and the enduring economic architecture of empire.

The debate arrives at a sensitive moment in British politics. A 2024 declaration signed by Sir KeirStarmer and 55 Commonwealth leaders acknowledged the need to address “reparatory justice” for the “abhorrent” transatlantic slave trade. Now, as Prime Minister, Starmer faces a formalised global demand that extends far beyond symbolic recognition. His government, however, continues to reject financial reparations, insisting that contemporary partnerships and development assistance remain the appropriate mechanisms for redress.

With \$180 trillion proposed as the starting point for negotiation, Britain is no longer confronted with abstract historical guilt, but with a detailed accounting of imperial extraction. The months ahead will determine whether this coordinated international push reshapes global frameworks of justice-or whether it stands as an unresolved reminder of a history the world is no longer prepared to ignore.

(The writer is a Senior Editor with The Pioneer)

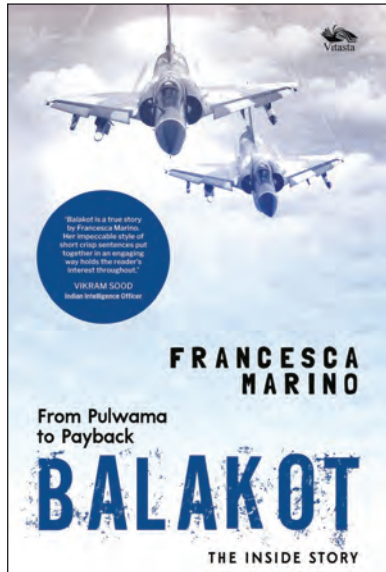
What really happened at Balakot: Unravelling Pakistan’s terror facade

REENA SINGH

More than six years after the Balakot air strikes, Italian journalist Francesca Marino brings readers a sharp, meticulously documented account of what really happened on the night of 26 February 2019. *Balakot: From Pulwama to Payback* cuts through political noise, propaganda, and deliberate misinformation to present one of the clearest factual narratives of the Indian Air Force's strike on a major Jaish-e-Mohammed (JeM) training camp deep inside Pakistan. The result is a book that is simple in its language but uncompromising in detail-a rare combination in reporting on the India-Pakistan conflict.

The core claim established in the book is unmistakable: the Indian strike hit its intended target, a functioning JeM training facility, killing between 150 and 170 terrorists, including trainers from outside Pakistan. Marino's evidence is neither speculative nor second-hand. She presents eyewitness testimony from a man who was at the camp that night — an account that describes the immediate chaos after the strike, the rapid arrival of Pakistani soldiers, and the urgent evacuation of bodies and injured militants to a nearby military hospital. According to this witness, the site was thereafter swiftly sanitised. Debris was removed overnight and dumped in a river; families of the dead were summoned and paid off and silenced with threats. It is rare to find such direct testimony from inside a terror camp, and Marino uses it appropriately.

Where Pakistan attempted to weave a narrative of “missed targets”, “fallen trees”, and “dead crows”, Marino demonstrates how that story was constructed for Western media consumption. Pakistan insisted that Indian aircraft intruded and then fled, dropping bombs in empty fields. Marino's book dismantles this narrative with satellite imagery, independent intelligence, and on-ground reports from her long-established network in Pakistan-built over thirty years of reporting on South Asia. Her work exposes how Pakistan's establishment produced a



Title: Balakot: From Pulwama to Payback
Author: Francesca Marino
MRP: ₹495
Publisher: Vitasta Publishing



REENA SINGH

coordinated cover-up to hide the scale of the damage, even going so far as to rebuild structures with the same rubble material to ensure that nothing looked new when the foreign press visited weeks later.

But *Balakot* is more than an investigation into one night's events. Marino places the strike against the long, grim history of Pakistan's terror machinery. She traces the origins of JeM, profiles its leadership and trainers in meticulous detail, and explains its links with Pakistan's shadowy power centres and the ISI. Through biographies, funding trails, and the mapping of multiple training camps, she shows how deeply the Pakistani state — not just its rogue elements — has been invested in terrorism. These sections sometimes read like intelligence dossiers, but they enrich the reader's understanding of the larger ecosystem in which Balakot occurred.

A key strength of the book lies in its laying out of how ordinary Pakistani cit-

izens — many of them migrants in Europe — are drawn into this system. Marino documents how money is channelled from overseas to keep the terror infrastructure running, and how networks of mosques and religious schools contribute to ideological recruitment. She also discusses the use of social media platforms by these terror outfits-Twitter, Facebook, and X — as tools of propaganda, radicalisation, and fund-raising. The book does not exaggerate these points; it presents them plainly, supported by sources and patterns that have been observed for years.

One of the most important sections in *Balakot* is Marino's exclusive interview with Air Chief Marshal Birender Singh Dhanoa, who was heading the Indian Air Force at the time of the strike. Dhanoa offers a clear, jargon-free explanation of the operation: the choice of bombs, the precision of the targeting, and the unique method of triggering explosives inside a cavity to maximise shrapnel and contain the blast radius. His account stands in stark contrast to the Pakistani narrative — it is measured, technical, and evidence-based. For readers trying to understand what exactly happened that night, this interview alone is worth the price of the book.

Some parts of the narrative read with the pace and tension of detective fiction-Marino pieces together movements, timelines, intelligence inputs, reactions, and cover-up operations with the skill of a storyteller. Other chapters, listing camps, biographies, and funding chains, are more sober and documentary in tone. Together, they form a comprehensive picture of the terror apparatus, the international media's frequent gullibility, and the geopolitical stakes that continue to define India-Pakistan relations.

Marino is a journalist who has taken risks that few foreign reporters have been willing to take in Pakistan. Her access to both official sources and ordinary locals, especially those wary of the Pakistani state, gives the book its depth. This combination of high-level interviews and grassroots testimony-allows her to connect dots across borders and institutions in a way that few journalists can.

For the complete book review please see our website www.dailypioneer.com