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Kohli rises to No 2 in ICC ODI rankings



PIONEER IN

SHORT

US VISA WINTER SETS IN FOR INDIA

The processing of H-1B visas for thousands of Indians has slowed sharply after the US imposed stricter social-media screening requirements, pushing many interview appointments into 2026 and creating uncertainty for professionals and families. The US Embassy in India has warned that previously confirmed dates may no longer be valid and that applicants who received rescheduled notices must appear only on their new dates or risk being denied entry. Interviews originally slated for December have been moved to March, with immigration attorneys confirming that a "significant number" of appointments were cancelled to accommodate expanded vetting. From December 15, H-1B and H-4 applicants must keep all social-media accounts public for examination under a broader national-security review previously applied to students. The changes come amid a wider tightening of skilled-worker immigration, including a new \$100,000 H-1B fee and recent pauses on other immigration categories. Recruitment experts warn the delays could disrupt project timelines and travel plans for thousands of Indian professionals.

DEEPAK KUMAR JHA
■ New Delhi

Home Minister Amit Shah and Leader of Opposition Rahul Gandhi engaged in a fierce war of words in the Lok Sabha on Wednesday, when Shah took the floor to respond to the allegations and criticisms levelled by the Congress and its INDIA bloc alliance partners against the Election Commission's electoral reforms process.

While the debate was on Rahul Gandhi challenged Amit Shah to an open debate to which the latter responded "I will decide." As the HM countered the opposition's allegations of 'vote chori' and referred to Rahul Gandhi's charge of "multiple voters at one Haryana house," the Congress leader stood up, interrupting the speech.

"My question yesterday was that for the first time in history, full immunity was given to the election commissioner. I wanted to know the reasoning behind this decision. Secondly, about Haryana, the HM took one example of fake voters, but there are 19 lakh fake voters,"



Union Home Minister Amit Shah speaking in the Lok Sabha on Wednesday

Rahul said. "You tell us ... actually, let us have a debate on my Press conference, very good idea, let us go, let us have a debate. Amit Shah ji, I challenge you, I challenge you to have a debate," Rahul said amidst uproarious scene in the House as the Parliamentarians of treasury and opposition benches were on their toes to back their topmost leader claims and statements.

A rattled Home Minister

took swipe at Rahul Gandhi and gave point-by-point rebuttal on 'vote chori' charge. Shah said he has been elected as an MLA or MP for the last 30 years and have long experience of the procedures and then responded to Rahul saying "Parliament will not proceed according to your wishes. I will decide the sequence of my speech. The Parliament will not work like this."

"Speaker sir, he (Rahul

Gandhi) should have some patience to listen to my answer. I will reply to each and everything. But he will not decide the sequence of my speech, I will decide it," Shah said to which Rahul once again retorted terming it a completely defensive response, a scared response.

"I can see worry lines on your face. Do not worry, I will not be provoked by them. I will continue with my reply," Shah said.

IndiGo pulls DGCA into cockpit

RAJESH KUMAR ■ New Delhi

The aviation regulator has constituted an oversight team to monitor IndiGo's daily operations. The team of eight experts comprises of senior Government official and flight operations inspectors. While four members of the team will be stationed at the carrier's corporate office in Gurugram, remaining will inspect operations at 11 airports across the country. The team will submit daily reports to the regulator at 6pm every day.

The Directorate of Civil Aviation (DGCA) has also summoned on Thursday the airline CEO, Pieter Elbers and sought a report on recent disruptions. The moves by the regulator come a day after the Prime Minister's Office reviewed chaos at airports.

Officials deputed to the airline's corporate office will review daily operational details such as total fleet, network, number of pilots, crew availability, standby crew strength, split duties, training status and unplanned leave taken by



Aviation minister Ram Mohan Naidu Kinjarap with IndiGo's CEO Pieter Elbers during a meeting regarding company's flight disruptions

crew. They will also track domestic and international cancellation status, refunds, on-time performance, compensation provided to passengers under Civil Aviation Requirements (CAR) and baggage return timelines.

Meanwhile, the remaining officers have been ordered to visit designated airports within two to three days and submit a comprehensive report to the DGCA within 24 hours of completing their inspections. The airports include Nagpur, Jaipur, Bhopal, Surat, Tirupati, Vijayawada, Shirdi, Cochin, Lucknow, Amritsar and Dehradun.

INDIGO CHIEF APOLOGISES

New Delhi: IndiGo Board Chairman and Non-Executive Director Vikram Singh Mehta on Wednesday publicly apologised for last week's large-scale flight disruptions, acknowledging that the airline failed to meet customer expectations and pledging corrective measures. In a video message, Mehta rejected claims that IndiGo engineered the crisis or compromised safety, emphasising that the airline adhered to updated Pilot Fatigue Rules (FDTL).

The Bystander



NETANYAHU CALLS PM MODI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Wednesday spoke with his Israeli counterpart Benjamin Netanyahu and discussed ways to further strengthen the strategic partnership between the two nations. Netanyahu called Modi and shared views on the situation in West Asia. "PM Modi reaffirmed India's support for efforts towards a just and durable peace in the region, including early implementation of the Gaza Peace Plan," a statement from the PMO said. It said both leaders expressed satisfaction at the continued momentum in India-Israel Strategic Partnership and reaffirmed their commitment to further strengthening these ties for mutual benefit. "The two leaders condemned terrorism in all its forms and manifestations," the statement said.

INDIA WINS BRONZE IN JR HOCKEY WC

Chennai: India produced a stunning fightback to overturn a two-goal deficit and defeat Argentina 4-2, securing the bronze medal in the FIH Men's Junior World Cup on Wednesday. After falling behind to early goals from Nicolas Rodriguez (3rd minute) and Santiago Fernandez (44th), India mounted a dramatic late resurgence. Ankit Pal (49th), Manmeet Singh (52nd), Sharda Nand Tiwari (57th), and Anmol Ekka (58th) scored from penalty corners and a penalty stroke, completing the turnaround. Argentina dominated the first half, controlling possession and testing Indian goalkeeper Princeped Singh with multiple penalty corners, but India held firm. The win marks India's return to the podium after finishing fourth in the previous two editions (2021, 2023) and recalls their 2016 title triumph in Lucknow. The young Indian side displayed resilience and precision in the final quarter.

Drug abuse, smartphone addiction biggest threat to youth, warns CM Yogi

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Gorakhpur

Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, on Wednesday, warned that the two biggest threats facing today's youth are drug abuse and smartphone addiction, urging them to stay away from both to safeguard their own future and that of the nation.

Addressing the grand finale of the 93rd Founder's Week of Maharana Pratap Shiksha Parishad (MPSP) at Mahayogi Gorakhnath University, he said that a young person trapped in addiction cannot fulfil responsibilities towards family, society, or the country.

"The two biggest threats facing today's youth are drug abuse and smartphone addiction. They should stay away from both to safeguard their own future and that of the nation," he said.

Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath welcomed



Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath and Uttarakhand Governor Lt Gen (Retd) Gurmit Singh felicitating students at a function in Gorakhpur on Wednesday

Uttarakhand Governor Lt Gen (Retd) Gurmit Singh as the chief guest on the occasion. The chief minister cautioned students that drug mafia are aggressively targeting the young generation. "You must stay alert. Academic institutions must also remain vigilant," he said, adding that the youth must prepare for a new battle

against addiction because "the enemy wants to infiltrate in one form or another — don't give them the opportunity." He advised students to gradually reduce screen time, saying sudden changes are difficult. "Use your phone only when necessary, that too for half an hour or an hour," he said. Excessive smartphone use, he warned,

damages eyesight, dulls the brain, weakens intellect and physical abilities.

Calling upon students to gear up for emerging challenges, the chief minister said the world had already stepped into a new era of artificial intelligence, Internet of Things, drones and robotics.

Technology, he said, would not reduce jobs but create new opportunities and youth must be mentally and physically prepared for this shift.

Motivating students, he said, success comes to those who remain patient and persistent. "Defeat happens only when our outlook turns negative," he said.

He stressed the importance of healthy competition and teamwork, reminding students that shortcuts never lead to lasting success. As technology simplifies life, it also brings new challenges, and academic institutions must prepare accordingly, he added.

Deepavali joins UNESCO heritage list

RAJESH KUMAR ■ New Delhi

In a landmark recognition, Deepavali, the festival of lights, has been added to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity, joining the ranks of Yoga and Durga Puja. The festival is a new inscription on the list, alongside cultural symbols from many other countries, like Ghana, Georgia, Congo, Ethiopia and Egypt, among others.

India had sent the Deepavali nomination dossier to UNESCO in 2023 for the 2024-25 cycle. Apart from Deepavali in India, traditional saree weaving art of Tangail also secured a place in the list.

"New inscription on the #IntangibleHeritage List: Deepavali, #India. Congratulations!," UNESCO said in a tweet on Wednesday. India is hosting a session of the Intergovernmental Committee for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH). Chants of 'Jai Hind', 'Vande Mataram' and 'Bharat Mata ki Jai' rent the air as UNESCO announced that the celebrated festival has been added to the prestigious list after a discussion by its committee. Artistes dressed in different traditional attire performed in front of the main stage while images of the Deepavali festival played on the big screen.

Deepavali or Diwali is the most widely cel-



Dev Deepawali in Varanasi

ISTOCK

ebrated Hindu festival in India. The decision to have the festival on the cultural heritage list was reportedly taken during a key meeting of UNESCO being hosted at the Red Fort in Delhi. This marks the first time India has hosted the prestigious UNESCO panel, which is tasked with evaluating cultural practices, traditions, and expressions from around the world for international recognition and protection.

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

The Pioneer campaign spurs Ganga action

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Haridwar

Taking cognisance of the issues raised by *The Pioneer* in its campaign on the condition of the river Ganga and Namami Gange project works in Haridwar, the Uttarakhand authorities have taken prompt action. Instructions have been issued to all the districts to take necessary steps to address the shortcomings and fill any gaps found.

The State Mission For Clean Ganga, Namami Gange Uttarakhand programme director Vishal Mishra informed that instructions have been issued by the State administration to all the district magistrates to submit a time-bound action plan within one month. Steps must be taken to fill any gaps like the need for building more Sewage Treatment Plants (STPs) in any place. Further, all the district magistrates have been asked to put up necessary proposals through the District Ganga Committees (DGCs) and any problems



Ganga Aarti being performed on the ghats of Ganga in Haridwar

WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

being faced in the implementation of projects will also be taken up in the DGCs.

Meanwhile, taking a serious note of the issues raised by *The Pioneer*, the Haridwar district magistrate Mayur Dixit has sought a report from Uttarakhand Peyjal Nigam's project manager Meenakshi Mittal and Uttarakhand Jal

The Pioneer

Campaign

Sansthan Maintenance branch (Ganga) executive engineer Harish Bansal seeking an explanation for the STPs overflowing in Haridwar. Reports on open defecation

by residents of illegal shanties on the banks of the Ganga, overflowing STPs, neglected ghats in dilapidated conditions and abandoned solid waste management work in some Ganga Grams resulting in garbage dumping near the holy river were the issues raised by *The Pioneer* in its campaign.

Woman leading gang of drug smugglers held by STF

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Lucknow

The Special Task Force, Uttar Pradesh (Lucknow Unit) arrested the woman leader of the gang involved in smuggling of illegal drugs on Wednesday.

The accused was identified as Nasreen Bano alias Badam of Madeyganj in Lucknow. She was arrested from Faridipur village in Thakurganj police station area.

As per reports, the UPSTF

was directed to gather intelligence and take action against the miscreants involved in drug peddling. In accordance with these instructions, intelligence gathering operations were being conducted under the supervision of Additional Superintendent of Police, STF, Lucknow, Dinesh Kumar Singh.

On Wednesday, the team received information that accused Nasreen Bano, on whose name a reward of Rs. 50,000 was declared from

Kotwali Dehat police station, Bahraich, was present in village Faridipur in Thakurganj.

On this information, the STF team reached the said place along with women police from the local police station and arrested Nasreen Bano.

Upon interrogation, the arrested accused revealed that she ran a drug trafficking gang that smuggles illegal drugs (brown sugar) into Lucknow and surrounding districts of Bahraich. She had

been operating for the past six years.

She sourced crude oil from Manipur and prepared brown sugar from it, which she then supplied through gang members.

On October 17 last a member of her gang was arrested by the Special Task Force in Bahraich district with 3,440 kg of illegal drugs (brown sugar).

The accused Nasreen Bano's name also surfaced in this case and a reward of Rs 50,000 was announced.

Bijnor police probing dowry case

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Lucknow

The Bijnor police have initiated an investigation into a complaint filed by a local woman against her in-laws, accusing them of dowry harassment, assault and attempted murder.

The case was registered following a directive from the chief minister's office after the woman failed to get a response from local helplines.

The victim, Shilpi, a resident of Bhakti Kheda, married Santram alias Sant Kumar, who lives in Garhi Mohalla, Bijnor, in 2023. The complainant alleged that just a few days after the marriage,

her husband, mother-in-law, father-in-law, brother-in-law, and sister-in-law started taunting and assaulting her over dowry demands.

Shilpi alleged that on the evening of June 16, 2025, her husband and several in-laws arrived at her parental home in an inebriated state and assaulted her.

She also alleged that her husband grabbed her hair, threw her to the ground, held a knife to her throat, and threatened to kill her.

The accused fled the scene when neighbours heard the commotion and intervened, but not before allegedly threatening to kill her entire family.

The victim stated that earlier, on June 1, her in-laws had assaulted her and attempted to harm her one-year-old child.

She alleged that her husband and in-laws confiscated her jewellery and clothes and threw her out of the house, forcing her to live with her parents.

She claimed that despite her parents spending Rs 15 lakh on the wedding, her in-laws were now demanding a car and Rs 5 lakh in cash.

The victim stated that when her attempts to seek police help through helplines 1090 and 112 were unsuccessful, she filed a complaint at the chief minister's office.

UP CEO seeks more time to complete SIR

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Lucknow

Uttar Pradesh's chief electoral officer has requested the Election Commission of India to extend the date of completing the special intensive revision (SIR) of the electoral rolls by two weeks, till December 25.

The SIR process was earlier scheduled to end on December 4 and was extended by one week till December 11.

UP's Chief Electoral Officer Navdeep Rinwa said here on Wednesday that a request had been made to the ECI for extending the date of completing the SIR process.

He said the extension of the deadline would help in re-verification of the voters who were dead, had shifted and were not traceable.

He said so far, the digitisation of 99.24 per cent enumeration forms had been completed.

He said of the 99.24 per cent enumeration forms, as many as 18.85 per cent or 2.91 crore voters had been identified as untraceable, dead, permanently shifted and dual voters. This includes 8.22 per cent or 1.27 crore voters who have permanently shifted from the address given in the voters list.

The Pioneer CLASSIFIEDS

NOTICE

It is hereby inform to the genral Public that I have chenged my Name from. Pawan Kumar Saraswat to PAVAN Kumar Saraswat which is also mentioned in the Aadhar Card. In future I should Pavan Kumar Saraswat S/o Late Radhe Shyam Saraswat 6 village bolla Kiratpur Nimana Aligarh U.P. 202140

NOTICE

In all the educational records of my daughter, her name is recorded as Dhanvi Yadav, D/o Umesh Chandra, but in the Aadhaar card, Shreya Yadav has been entered, which is incorrect. My daughter's correct name is Dhanvi Yadav. Umesh Chandra S/o Late Baijnath Yadav, Resident of Mohalla Kanoongoyan, City & District Kannauj.

NOTICE

With due request, I seek correction in my daughter Aisha Afridi's academic records. She passed High School in 2023 and Intermediate in 2025 from your esteemed institution. In both marksheets, her Mother's Name is printed incorrectly as Leebna Khan instead of the correct spelling Lubna Khan, kindly rectify this early.

NOTICE

I am Arjun Prasad Gupta, Army Subedar, Service Number JC-735065Y. My wife's name is incorrectly recorded as Priya in my Army service record; the correct name is Priya Gupta, and this is the name recorded in all other documents. This is the truth and the correct information. My address is House No. 813/595, Hariharpur Neelmatha, Lucknow, Pin Code 226002.

NOTICE

Important Notice

It is to inform the general public that the original document related to Flat No. 20/D-416/08, 6th Floor, 'Govardhan Enclave 2 BHK, Type B, built up area of flat 72.02 sq.mtr, super area 101.87 sq.mtr located Sector-20, Vindavan Yojna-4, Lucknow, dated 22.10.2022, serial number 39733, bearing signatures of witnesses and photographs affixed on page no. 6 schedule-B, has been lost by the present owners Rajesh Gupta and Harshit Gupta, for which FIR dated 09.12.2025 has been reported on LAR No.20/2500003628990. If any person or financial institution has any objection regarding the original document related to the above property, dated 22.10.2022, serial number 39733, then they may contact the address and phone number given below. Any claimant may submit his or her claim regarding the above property within 15 days. If no claim is filed within 15 days, the property will be deemed to be purged. By Kunwar Rajeshwar, Advocate, SBI (4491), Home Loan Center-2, Gomti Nagar, Lucknow, Mobile No. 9415418880, 9580280435.

NOTICE

It is to declare that my correct name is VAISHNAVI GUPTA (ICSE UID 6596005) my father correct name is ASHISH KUMAR GUPTA correct date of birth is 17/10/2001

NOTICE

I have changed my name from SHAHID KHAN to MOHAMMAD SHAHID for all future purposes. Mohammad Shahid S/o Mohammad Hai R/o 105/135, Saeedabad Chamanganj Kanpur

NOTICE

My plot number 4E/101/08 Awas vikas hanspuram naubasta really misplaced it's original passion letter dated 12/12/10. Whose used will invalid. Shashi Kant Singh S/o Shiv Ram Singh 116/656, Rawatpur Gaon Kanpur Nagar- 208019

NOTICE

My name is Sadhna Singh, my name has been wrongly mentioned as Sadhna in my son's Abhinav Singh school documents. My correct name is mentioned in my Aadhar card as Sadhna Singh which is real and accurate. Sadhna Singh wife Ashok Kumar Singh, Tedhi puliya Alambagh Lucknow.

NOTICE

My correct name is Shivanshi Singh D/o Dharendra Singh R/o-465 KDA Colony Daheli Sujanpur Kanpur Nagar UP- which is education, Aadhar card, Pan card, Pan card. Bank passbook, passport Records by mistake LIC policy no-231266628 my name is mentioned as Manu Singh which is my household name In future I will be known Shivanshi Singh I have completed all legal formalities regarding the above by me

NOTICE

My correct name is Suman W/o Late Anil Kumar Kureel R/o-6 Block Kacchi Basti Govind Nagar Kanpur Nagar UP- Which is Aadhar card.Bank passbook, up jiladhikari jach aakhya Records by mistake LIC policy no-238195888 my name is mentioned as Babli which is my household name In future I will be known as Suman I have completed all legal formalities regarding the above by me

NOTICE

I, Khadija Sharif, W/o Mohd. Faizan Aslam, R/o 12/228, Gwaltoli, Kanpur. I have changed my name from Khadija Ahmad to Khadija Sharif and wish to be known and recognized by this name in future.

NOTICE

I SINDU, is Mother of Name, THORAVE SHASHIKANT PRALHAD, presently residing at Vill- Rajirja shankar wadi, Po- Rajache Kurla Teh - Khatav, Dist- Satara, State- Maharashtra, Pin - 415512, have changed my name from SINDU to THORAVE SINDHUTAI PRALHAD, and Date of birth from 01/01/1954 to 24/12/1944, vide affidavit no IN-UP89555136410017X, dated 10/12/25, before notary Jhansi.

NOTICE

My daughter's correct name is Shubhika Yadav D/o Late Ram Naresh Yadav R/o- k.k house kishani road adarsh nagar Bidhnu Auraiya which is mentioned, Education,birth certificate Records by mistake- Aadhar card no.84481149765 my daughter's name is mentioned as pratima yadav which is my household name if future i will be known Shubhika Yadav I have completed all legal formalities regarding the above by me.

NOTICE

My correct name is Vaishnavi Gupta D/o Raj Kumar Gupta R/o- C-105/718 Anand Bagh Kanpur UP- Which is education, Aadhar card, Pan card.Bank passbook, Records by mistake LIC policy no-234246594 my name is mentioned as Km Shivani which is my household name In future I will be known Vaishnavi Gupta I have completed all legal formalities regarding the above by me

NOTICE

I, Anushree Dubey, wife of late Rajesh Dubey, age approximately 38 years, Plot No. 16, Bharatipuram Colony, Uttardhona, Tiwariganj, Faizabad Road, Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh, date of birth 18.09.1987. I was married to late Rajesh Dubey on 07.02.2011 in Lucknow. After marriage, my name has been changed to Anushree Dubey, Anushree Sharma and Anushree Dubey are the same person. In future, I should be known and identified by this name in all government and semi-government records.

CLASSIFIEDS

NOTICE

It is hereby informed that I have changed my name from NISAR AHMED to NISAR AHMAD ANSARI S/o Waris Ali Ansari R/o 101/40, Colonelganj Kanpur Nagar for all future purposes.

NOTICE

NOTICE

I have changed my name from VIDUSHI CHANDRA to VIDUSHI GUPTA for all future purposes. Vidushi Gupta W/o Vipul Chandra R/o 112/364-B Swaroop Nagar Kanpur Nagar

NOTICE

I have lost my original Lease deed dt. 26.05.1956 Sr.No. 2713 of H.No. 128/182 E-Block Kidwai Nagar Kanpur Nagar. Its use will be illegal. Vishnu Bhargav S/o Late Rajkumar Bhargav R/o 128/182 E-Block, Kidwai Nagar, Kaupur Nagar

NOTICE

We, Suman Devi Halwai and Rakesh Babu Gupta, declare that we have lost our Original Allotment Letter of my House No. 11, Block -K-1, Scheme MIG Barra KUDP situated at Mohalla Barra, Kanpur Nagar. If anyone tries to use if for any cause it will be considered illegal and void

NOTICE

द्विनांक 12-12-2025 अपराह्न 2.00 बजे कार्यालय महानिरीक्षक निबन्धन, उम्रगो शिविर लखनऊ, विश्वास काम्पलेक्स, विश्वास खण्ड-3, गोमतीनगर, लखनऊ में निम्नोप्यक्त वाहनों- यू०पी० 70-ए.जी.-0996 एवं यू०पी० 70-ए.जी.-0997 (एम्बेस्डर कारों) की नीलामी, सिक्कोरिटी रु० 5,000/- नगद प्रति वाहन, जी. एस.टी. पंजीकरण, आधार, चैनकार्ड के साथ जमा होगी। आई. पी. सिंह एण्ड सन्स

AUCTION NOTICE

5 killed as SUV rams into car on E-way

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Lucknow

Five persons were killed and four others were injured when a SUV rrammed into a stationary hatchback on the Purvanchal Expressway in Haidergarh area of Barabanki on Wednesday.

Police said both vehicles caught fire shortly after the collision.

There were six people in the hatchback when the SUV crashed into it. Five of them died on the spot. The sixth, identified as Zeeshan, and three occupants of the SUV suffered injuries, police said.

According to Superintendent of Police Arpit Vijayvargiya, preliminary investigation suggests that a couple and their two children, travelling in a hatchback, had stopped their vehicle to drink water when the SUV rrammed into it.

The four injured were taken to the Haidergarh community health centre. Two of them are said to be in serious condition, the SP added.

The deceased were identified as Gulishtha (49), Samreen (22), Ilma Khan (12), Ishma Khan (6) and Jian (10).

Meanwhile, a 33-year-old man was killed on the spot after being hit by an unidentified vehicle in Chandauli on Wednesday, police said.

The incident occurred at around 1 pm near the Navin Mandi in the Chandauli Sadar Kotwali police station area.

Station House Officer Sanjay Singh said the deceased was identified as Puiyakamal of Goswari village in Ilia police station area. He was staying at his sister's house in Narsinghpur village, which also falls under the Sadar Kotwali jurisdiction.

STUDENT ATTACKED OVER RIVALRY

A class IX student of a government school in RD50 under Manak Nagar police station area was allegedly attacked by his classmates on Tuesday due to rivalry. The police registered a case on Wednesday after the

student's parents lodged a complaint.

As per reports, the victim student was returning home after school around 2.30 pm on Tuesday. It was alleged that a student of his class and six other unidentified students attacked him with sticks a few metres away from the school. The passers-by intervened after they spotted the victim being kicked and punched by a group of youths and they chased the attackers away. The passers-by later contacted the family of the victim and the parents lodged a complaint with the police. The police are investigating the case.

The parents of the students are apprehensive that their child might be attacked by the rival student, who lives in a locality close to the school.

AUTO DRIVER THRASHED

An auto driver was attacked by his rivals in Krishna Nagar police station area. The incident took place

on December 6 but came to light on Wednesday.

The victim, Shani Kashyap of Badali Khara in Krishna Nagar, said he was going to drop a passenger to Rajajipuram from Krishna Nagar. According to Shani, when he was crossing the LDA turn at the Kanpur road, a white car stopped ahead of his auto and two youths got out of it. It was alleged that one of the accused introduced himself as an advocate and called some persons and two youths reached the spot on a motorcycle. The group thrashed Shani unprovoked and threatened him with dire consequences for reporting the matter to the police. The victim said the commuters intervened in the matter and the accused fled the scene.

The injured auto driver was later admitted to Lok Bandhu Hospital. He reported the matter after he was discharged. Police are investigating the case and trying to identify the accused with the help CCTV footage from the area.

Stall at Namo Ghat draws handicraft lovers

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Varanasi

At the ongoing exhibition at Namo Ghat during Kashi Tamil Sangam (KTS) 4.0, the 'Thanjavur Thalaivatti Bommai' (stall number 28) has become a special attraction for traditional handicraft lovers. The stall's operator, Hari Prasanth Boopathy, who hails from Thanjavur (Tamil Nadu), is visiting Varanasi for the first time and brings with him rich cultural heritage of South India.



The traditional craft of Thalaivatti Bommai (moving dolls) is being preserved and promoted by the sixth generation of his family. This art has been passed down through generations and has now gained international recognition. Boopathy exports these dolls to several countries, including the United States and Canada.

These traditional dolls are inspired by the architectural style of the Brihadeeswara Temple in Thanjavur and are considered disaster-proof. These dolls are primarily based on king and queen figures, vividly depicting South Indian culture and royal traditions.

Boopathy is not only a leader in the business but also plays an active role in promoting the art. He provides training through workshops in schools and colleges and also operates a government-recognised training center under the Central Government's Handicraft Training Platform. His entire business is based on a B2B model and he is considered one of the leading entrepreneurs in this art form in Thanjavur.

The visitors and tourists visiting his stall during Kashi Tamil Sangamam 4.0 were extremely excited about

these dolls and a large number of people were drawn to this unique art form. Boopathy expressed his gratitude to Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the Union Ministry of Education for organising this KTS event. He said that through this platform, he had the opportunity to visit Varanasi for the first time, see and understand the arts from different parts of the country and bring his traditional art to those who were previously unfamiliar with this craft. He shared that his father has received several state-level awards and his Thalaivatti Bommai dolls have been presented to several MLAs and Chief Ministers. "KTS 4.0 is becoming a powerful medium to connect the cultural heritage of North and South India by providing a national platform to such traditional artisans," he added.

Hydrogen fuel cell vessel to be flagged off today

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Varanasi

Varanasi is set to mark a major milestone in India's transition toward sustainable inland water transport as Union Minister of Ports, Shipping and Waterways Sarbananda Sonowal will flag off the commercial operations of the country's first indigenous hydrogen fuel cell vessel at Namo Ghat on December 11.

The ceremony will be attended by senior leaders from the Uttar Pradesh government, including Transport Minister Dayashankar Singh, and Minister of State (Independent Charge) for Ayush, Food Security and Drug Administration Dr

Daya Shankar Mishra 'Dayalu', alongside members of the Legislative Assembly and Mayor Ashok Kumar Tiwari.

The initiative is part of the ongoing modernisation of India's inland waterways under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who has prioritised cleaner transport, improved connectivity and enhanced public convenience. Over recent years, the Government of India and the Inland Waterways Authority of India (IWAI) have expanded navigation channels, introduced modern terminals and operationalised new passenger and cargo routes to strengthen water-based communication and reduce

logistics costs.

Speaking ahead of the launch, Sonowal said the development highlights the transformational approach of PM Modi, who has reshaped India's infrastructure with people-first modernisation.

"PM Modi has been the change-maker who transformed India's development landscape with modern infrastructure that enhances public welfare and convenience. PM Modi's vision for a clean, efficient and future-oriented waterways network is turning rivers into engines of growth and mobility. The launch of India's first hydrogen fuel cell vessel in Varanasi demonstrates our resolve to adopt cutting-edge, eco-

friendly technology that will define the next era of green transport.

This pioneering step reflects our commitment to a future where sustainable innovation drives progress, strengthens economic potential and improves the daily lives of people.

PARADIP PORT AUTHORITY
e-TENDER CALL NOTICE
No. EM/PED-35/2025
No:EM/PED/TECH-26/2025/967 Date: 02.12.2025
Name of the work: Design, supply and installation of LED flood lights as replacement of HPSV fittings on high mast towers at Paradip Port prohibited area. Estimated cost: **Rs.1,71,23,700/-**
Last date & time of submission of bid: **dt.07/01/2026 up to 18:00**
Hrs. Refer our website for details <https://eprocure.gov.in/eprocure/app>.
Sd/- Executive Engineer (Elect.), PED-III
PPA/PR/57/2025-26 dtd.05.12.2025

IDFC FIRST Bank Limited
(erstwhile Capital First Limited, amalgamated with IDFC Bank Limited and presently known as IDFC FIRST Bank Limited)
CIN : L65110TN2014PLC097792
Registered Office: - KRM Towers, 8th Floor, Harrington Road, Chetpet, Chennai- 600031.
Tel : +91 44 4564 4000 | Fax: +91 44 4564 4022

Notice under Section 13 (2) of the Securitization and Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002
The following borrowers and co-borrowers availed the below mentioned secured loans from **IDFC FIRST Bank Limited (erstwhile Capital First Limited, amalgamated with IDFC Bank Limited and presently known as IDFC FIRST Bank Limited)** The loans of the below-mentioned borrowers and co- borrowers have been secured by the mortgage of their respective properties. As they have failed to adhere to the terms and conditions of the respective loan agreements and had become irregular, their loan were classified as NPA as per the RBI guidelines. Amounts due by them to **IDFC FIRST Bank Limited (erstwhile Capital First Limited, amalgamated with IDFC Bank Limited and presently known as IDFC FIRST Bank Limited)** are mentioned as per respective notices issued more particularly described in the following table and further interest on the said amounts shall also be applicable and the same will be charged as per contractual rate with effect from their respective dates.

Sr No.	Loan Account No.	Type of Loan	Section 13 (2) Notice Date	Outstanding amount as per Section 13 (2) Notice
1	133885965 & 166810646	HOME LOAN	26.11.2025	6,91,397.92/-

NAME OF BORROWERS AND CO-BORROWERS : 1. PREETPAL SINGH 2. PHOOL MATI DEVI

PROPERTY ADDRESS : ALL THAT PIECE AND PARCEL OF PLOT AREA 121.30 SQ. MT. SITUATED AT GATA NO. 2095 MIN. VILLAGE: SHEKHDAHEER, PARGANA: FAKHARPUR, TEHSIL AND DISTRICT: BAHRACH, UTTAR PRADESH-271801 EAST: REST LANE OF MUKIR, WEST: PLOT OF ANNU SONI, NORTH: KHET OF RAMESH ETC., SOUTH: RASTA 14' WIDE

You are hereby called upon to pay the amounts to **IDFC FIRST Bank Limited (erstwhile Capital First Limited, amalgamated with IDFC Bank Limited and presently known as IDFC FIRST Bank Limited)** as per the details shown in the above table with contracted rate of interest thereupon from their respective dates and other costs, charges etc. within 60 days from the date of this publication, failing which the undersigned shall be constrained to initiate proceedings, under Section 13 (4) and section 14 of the SARFAESI Act, against the mortgaged properties mentioned hereinabove to realize the amount due to **IDFC FIRST Bank Limited (erstwhile Capital First Limited, amalgamated with IDFC Bank Limited and presently known as IDFC FIRST Bank Limited)**. Further you are prohibited under Section 13 (13) of the said Act from transferring the said secured assets either by way of sale/lease or otherwise.
Sd/- Authorized Officer
Date : 11.12.2025 IDFC FIRST Bank Limited (erstwhile Capital First Limited, amalgamated with IDFC FIRST Bank Limited and presently known as IDFC FIRST Bank Limited)
Place : BAHRACH

Former IPS officer held in industrial plot allotment fraud case

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Lucknow

Former IPS officer Amitabh Thakur was arrested on Wednesday in connection with an alleged case of fraud in allotment of industrial land in his wife's name in Deoria district in 1999.

He was arrested in the early hours from the Maholi border in Sitapur district after being taken into custody by police in Shahjahanpur while he was travelling by train from Lucknow to Delhi, police said.

He was later remanded to 14 days' judicial custody by a Deoria court.

DCP (West) Vishwajeet Srivastava said while posted as superintendent of police in Deoria in the year 1999, Thakur allegedly misused his influence and got industrial plot number B2 of District Industries Centre, Deoria allotted in the name of his wife, Nutan Thakur, by using forged documents and false identities and later sold it for alleged monetary gains.

The DCP (West) said a complaint in this regard was lodged by Sanjay Sharma, a resident of Rajajipuram in Talkatora police station limits of Lucknow.

According to the DCP (West), Sharma alleged that for this allotment, Nutan Thakur used a false name (Nutan Devi), a false husband's name (Abhijat Thakur/Abitap Thakur), and a



false address (village Khaira, Sitamarhi, Bihar) instead of her and her husband's real names and addresses to obtain the allotment, while Amitabh Thakur allegedly extended protection and assistance by misusing his official position.

In the process, she prepared forged documents including application forms, affidavits, treasury challan transfer deeds, etc. and misled the government departments.

He said on the basis of the complaint, a case crime number 183/25 under sections 419, 420, 467, 468, 471, 34, 120B of the Indian Penal Code was registered at Talkatora police station on September 12, 2025.

For a fair and transparent investigation into the case, a special investigation team (SIT) was constituted by the DCP West. During the probe, documentary evidence was collected from Deoria district, verification of the

alleged false names and addresses was carried out in Bihar, and statements of witnesses were recorded.

On the basis of the evidence gathered, Thakur was arrested at around 3:45 am on Wednesday from the Maholi border in Sitapur district.

Senior officials said Thakur was detained by the Shahjahanpur police in the intervening night of Tuesday and Wednesday after the Lucknow Police alerted them that he was travelling to Delhi by train.

Shahjahanpur Superintendent of Police Rajesh Dwivedi said the local police intercepted the Lucknow-Delhi AC Superfast Express around 2 am and handed Thakur over to the Lucknow police as he was required to be produced before a Deoria court.

Later in the day, Thakur was produced before Chief Judicial Magistrate Manju Kumari in Deoria, who sent him to 14 days' judicial custody.

District government counsel (criminal) Rajesh Mishra said a separate case in the matter was also registered at Deoria Sadar Kotwali under similar sections. He added that the complainant had earlier even written to the President of India seeking action. The police said elaborate security arrangements were made in the court campus during Thakur's pro-

duction, including barricading at the main gate.

While being taken to court, Thakur told reporters that he feared for his life and would seek protection from the court.

He argued his case himself during the hearing without engaging a lawyer and sought several security-related directions, including access to spectacles, pen and paper in jail, and assurance of personal security, officials said.

Earlier, Nutan Thakur had alleged that her husband was abducted from a train while travelling to Delhi.

She told newsmen that her husband was on a train heading to Delhi and when it reached Shahjahanpur, some people entered the coach and took him away around 1:50 am on Tuesday night.

Nutan Thakur said she lodged a complaint with the Railway Protection Force (RPF) and attempted to call Shahjahanpur's superintendent of police but received no immediate response.

She confirmed that at 9:40 am on Wednesday, the SHO of Talkatora police station in Lucknow called her to inform her that her husband was being taken to Deoria.

She claimed that the police have secured the suspension of Amitabh Thakur's X (formerly Twitter) account and her own X account had also been suspended.

CM Adityanath hails inclusion of Deepavali in Unesco heritage list

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Lucknow

Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath hailed the inclusion of Deepavali in UNESCO's Intangible Cultural Heritage list as a moment of immense pride.

He said this global recognition honours a festival that symbolises the triumph of light over darkness and the spirit of new beginnings.

The achievement, he noted, further reinforces India's cultural strength and the universal relevance of its traditions.

Sharing his views on his 'X' handle, the chief minister emphasised the special significance of this recognition for Uttar Pradesh.

He wrote, "The inscription of



Deepavali on UNESCO's Intangible Cultural Heritage List is a proud recognition of a festival that celebrates light over darkness and new beginnings.

"For Uttar Pradesh, this honour is especially meaningful. Ayodhya, the sacred land of Prabhu Shri Ram, is

where Deepavali was first celebrated. "This global acknowledgement reflects India's growing cultural stature under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

"May Ayodhya's eternal light continue to guide humanity towards truth and harmony."

Chief Minister Yogi added that the growing acceptance of India's festivals and traditions by the global community is a highly encouraging development. Expressing optimism, he said, "The eternal light of Ayodhya will continue to inspire humanity to walk the path of truth and harmony."

For him, Diwali is not merely a festival but a way of life that guides society towards unity and shared values.

CM assures effective redressal of people's grievances

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Gorakhpur

Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, on Wednesday, assured people that every grievance raised with the government would be resolved in a time-bound and effective manner.

Interacting with visitors during a Janata Darshan at the Mahant Digvijaynath Smriti Bhavan auditorium in the Gorakhnath temple, the chief minister heard the grievances of around 200 people. After a night's halt on the temple premises, the chief minister directed the officials present at the venue to deal with each person's

issue sensitively and ensure timely disposal of all cases.

A large number of women attended the programme.

The chief minister asked the officials to take strict legal action in land-grabbing cases.

When a woman complained that her house had been set on fire, Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath ordered immediate action against the accused.

Several people also sought financial assistance for the treatment of serious ailments. Assuring full support, the chief minister said lack of funds would not hinder medical care, and instructed the officials to expedite hos-



Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath speaks to a youth about the facilities during a surprise estimation of a Plan Baser in Gorakhpur on Wednesday night.

pital estimates and send them to the government so that adequate help could be provided from the Minister's Relief Fund, an official statement stated.

Electric double-decker bus to take tourists sight-seeing in city

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Lucknow

Uttar Pradesh Tourism and Culture Minister Jaiveer Singh on Wednesday instructed the department officials to expedite the work plan for the financial year 2025-26 and complete all required formalities at the earliest.

The minister was reviewing the activities of the Tourism and Culture Department during a meeting held at the Tourism Bhavan auditorium in Gomti Nagar.

He stated that an electric double-decker bus will be operated from the 1090 Crossing to facilitate sight-seeing tours for tourists and devotees visiting the state capital. The bus will have trained guides who will brief

passengers on the history, background, traditions and heritage of the city's historic and ancient religious sites. Decisions regarding the bus route and fare will be taken after further discussion. The launch of the double-decker bus is proposed for December 25, the birth anniversary of Bharat Ratna and former Prime Minister late Atal Bihari Vajpayee.

He directed officials to ensure the completion of all pending works under the ongoing development projects.

He emphasised the need to strengthen tourism infrastructure across various development authorities. The minister reiterated that financial discipline, timely execution and quality standards should be strictly fol-

lowed in every construction project.

During the review, Jaiveer Singh instructed that boards be installed at all locations where tourism and culture projects are underway. These boards must include the project name, estimated cost, expected completion date and mobile numbers of the executive and assistant engineers. He added that visitors should also be able to learn about the background, significance and historical importance of the site through the information displayed. The boards should also mention name and contact number of the implementing agency.

He reiterated that there should be no compromise on quality in any construction work. If substandard materi-

als are found, strict action will be taken against the contractor and the executing agency, he added.

The minister reviewed the progress of construction works under the Directorate of Culture and the Uttar Pradesh Museum Directorate. He directed the completion of the ongoing Ramleela boundary wall projects in Hardoi, Etah, Aligarh, Pilibhit, Firozabad, Mainpuri and Amroha by December 31. He instructed that toilet complexes be constructed for visitors at large Ramleela grounds. He added that the boundary walls of Ramleela venues across the state should have uniformity, with designs reflecting elements of Sanatan tradition. This standard will be implemented at all Ramleela sites in the

state.

The minister also reviewed the progress of new museums being developed under the Uttar Pradesh Museum Directorate.

Jaiveer Singh examined the compliance status of decisions taken in previous meetings, the estimates and administrative and financial approvals for sanctioned projects, status of projects yet to begin and matters pending with the Government of India. Principal Secretary Tourism and Culture Amrit Abhijat, Director General Tourism Rajesh Kumar, Managing Director of Tourism Development Corporation Ashish Kumar, Special Secretary (Culture) Sanjay Kumar Singh and others were present in the meeting.

Winter session of UP Assembly from Dec 19

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Lucknow

The winter session of the Uttar Pradesh assembly will commence here from December 19. The session is likely to have four sittings and is likely to conclude on December 24.

The state government is likely to present the first supplementary budget for 2025-26. The state cabinet by circulation on Tuesday decided to convene the winter session of the assembly.

The state Finance Department has begun preparations to present the first supplementary budget during the winter session, those aware of the development said. The state government is also likely to carry out legislative business and table ordinances that may have been promulgated after the monsoon session.

Presently the ministers and legislators are busy with the ongoing Special Intensive Revision of electoral rolls in all 403 constituencies of the state assembly. Discussions on the SIR issue may also be held during the winter session.

COURT NOTICE
CITATION (BY ADVERTISEMENT)
(Chapter XXX, Rule-21)
IN THE HIGH COURT OF
JUDICATURE AT ALLAHABAD
ORIGINAL JURISDICTION
TESTAMENTARY AND
INTESTATE JURISDICTION
TESTAMENTARY CASE NO. 41 OF 2025
IN THE MATTER OF THE GOODS OF

Late Gareeb Das Yadav S/o
Late Jokhai Ram Yadav R/o 119/112
Dharam Veer Gal Sulem Sarai,
Allahabad 211011..... Deceased.
Smt. Nita Yadav W/o Late Gareeb Das
Yadav..... Petitioner.

WHEREAS an application has been made by Smt. Nita Yadav W/o Late Gareeb Das Yadav R/o 119/112 Sulem Sarai Allahabad 211011, for the probate of the will (or Letters of Administration to the estate) of Late Gareeb Das Yadav deceased, who died at G.G.S. Memorial Hospital, Prayagraj on 14.11.2021 AND WHEREAS, the 04th day of February, 2026 has been fixed for hearing of the said application. THIS CITATION is issued calling upon all persons claiming to have any interest to come and see the proceedings if they think fit before the grant of probate (or Letters of Administration).

Given under my hand and the seal of the Court this 28th day of November, 2025.

Devednna Kumar
Advocate
Counsel for the Petitioner.
DEPUTY REGISTRAR
HIGH COURT, ALLAHABAD

her decision to divorce her husband and her subsequent relationship with Ajit. The artist family reportedly became aware of her relationship with Ajit and tried to persuade her to leave him, but she did not listen, allegedly due to pressure from Ajit.

In 2020, Ajit sent her to Lucknow, where he would frequently visit her. Following her divorce in 2023, the family completely severed ties with the artist. She neither visited home for festivals, nor did any family member visit her.

A colleague confirmed that she took on rent a room in Vikas Nagar in 2023 and began working at a salon in Indira Nagar.

During this time, Ajit spent less time in Bahraich and often stayed with her in Lucknow.



Police personnel conduct a vehicle-checking drive at Hazratganj intersection, in Lucknow on Wednesday PTI

Make-up artist, in a live-in relationship, end life

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Lucknow

A 24-year-old make-up artist, who worked at a salon in Hazartganj, was found dead late on Sunday night. She was hanging from the ceiling fan in her rented accommodation in Vikas Nagar Sector-1. Her live-in partner, Ajit, rushed her to the Trauma Centre, where doctors declared her dead on arrival.

The girl's father, a resident of Bahraich, said that he received a call from Ajit around 11 pm on Sunday informing him that she had hanged herself and he was taking her to the hospital. A short while later, the family was informed of her death, after which they immediately left for Lucknow.

He said his daughter had

made a final call to the family before her death but did not mention anything that suggested she was contemplating suicide.

The girl's father disclosed that Ajit works as a DJ and is already married with a wife and two children living in the village. He said that the girl was in a live-in relationship with Ajit, a fact the family was completely unaware of. However, the father said that Ajit claimed to have married her in a temple.

Ajit told the police that he had picked the girl up from the salon that night. After spending some time together, he stepped out to buy groceries. When he returned, he found the door locked from inside. He broke the door and found her hanging from the fan with a 'dupatta'.

Inspector Vikas Nagar Alok Singh stated that the cause of death will only be clear after the post-mortem examination report is received. An investigation into the matter is currently underway.

Further details revealed that the artist had married a man from Bahraich in 2019 and the couple had a daughter. During this time, she met Ajit, also from her village. Their acquaintance soon blossomed into a relationship, causing strain in her marriage.

The artist's relatives claimed that her husband would frequently beat and harass her. Despite multiple attempts to sort out the differences, the situation did not improve, leading her to decide to live with Ajit.

The family disapproved of

IN FOCUS



A large number of Ayyappa devotees gather at the Sabarimala Sannidhanam temple in Pathanamthitta, Kerala

PTI

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE

■ New Delhi

The CBI has filed a charge sheet against two Chinese nationals who were allegedly the masterminds of the HPZ Token Investment Fraud case in which over Rs 1000 crore were siphoned off through shell companies during Covid.

The CBI has alleged that Shigoo Technology Pvt. Ltd., owned and controlled by Chinese, allegedly cheated the public during the Covid lockdown using a fake mobile application titled “HPZ Tokens”, claiming that investments would be used for cryptocurrency mining and would yield very high returns. CBI’s investigation found that this was not an isolated incident but part of a large, well-coordinated cyber crime network operated by foreign nationals. This



syndicate was responsible for several cyber scams targeting Indian citizens in post Covid period using loan apps, fake investment apps and platforms offering bogus online job offers.

Wan Jun and Li Anming had come to India to set up the company and infrastruc-

ture following which they left the country and operated the company remotely from abroad, the officials said.

Both never joined the investigation and remained fugitives, they said.

The syndicate was the fountainhead of several scams though which gullible

citizens were cheated using a host of loan applications, fake investment apps and platform offering bogus online job offers. When the CBI took over investigation, it immediately cracked down on its local operations arresting six persons -- Dortse, Rajni Kohli, Sushanta Behra, Abhishek, Mohd Imdhad Husain and Rajat Jain.

The investigations revealed a massive intricate web of operation in which all the 27 involved accused were unmasked. The CBI filed charge sheet against 30 entity including the two Chinese nationals and 27 other individuals besides three companies.

“Wan Jun was the director of a company Jilian Consultants India Private Limited which was a subsidiary of a Chinese entity Jilian Consultants. Wan Jun with the help of one Dortse

successfully created several shell companies including Shigoo Technologies,” the CBI spokesperson said in a statement.

The agency dug deep into the shady operations of the company which showed that the shell companies set up under the Chinese umbrella Jilian Consultants became a conduit to collect and launder the proceeds of crime of major organized cyber frauds with over ₹1,000 crore moved within months through its accounts.

“These frauds were connected and controlled by a single organized criminal syndicate based overseas,” the spokesperson said.

The CBI probe also exposed an organised and sophisticated use of Payment Aggregators which were in nascent stages of operations in the India. The racket misused these aggregators

to launder the money “at a high speed from the accounts of one shell company to other” and also allowed them to partially disburse the money back to investors so as to gain their confidence.

“The payment aggregation systems had just taken off in India, and the payment aggregators were providing large collection and money disbursal services using technology to genuine companies. The technology had allowed the users to access large number of bank accounts simultaneously,” the spokesperson said.

Jilian Consultants also engaged professionals including company secretaries (CS) to create several shell companies which were converting the collected amounts into crypto before sending them out of the country.

BJP questions LoP Rahul Gandhi’s foreign trips

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE

■ New Delhi

BJP on Wednesday raised questions on Rahul Gandhi’s foreign trips and asked the Leader of Opposition (LoP) in the Lok Sabha about his “compulsion” to often embark on “secret travels” abroad. Alleging that the itinerary of Rahul Gandhi’s “official or unofficial” trips is not shared when he goes abroad, BJP national spokesperson Tuhin Sinha also asked the Congress leader what he is “hiding” from the country.

Addressing a Press conference at the BJP headquarters here, Sinha also called Gandhi “leader of paryatan” (leader of tourism) and “leader of partying”, taking a jibe at the LoP ahead of his 6-day visit to Germany next week.

Rahul does not appear to be the Leader of Opposition with the way he embarks on foreign visits by skipping



“important occasions” in the country, the BJP spokesperson charged. Rahul will visit Germany from December 15 to 20 during which he will engage with the Indian diaspora and meet German ministers, according to the Indian Overseas Congress.

Raising questions on Gandhi’s scheduled visit to Germany, Sinha asked, “At a time when Parliament Session is underway during which 13 important bills are listed for consideration and passage, what is his compul-

sion that he finds his secret travels more important than this?” Being the LoP in the Lok Sabha, Gandhi should have been here during this Parliament session, Sinha suggested. “It has become his habit to disappear on every important occasion... When the vice presidential poll was scheduled to be held on September 9, he embarked on a foreign trip from September 4 to September 8. Possibly, he was in Malaysia,” Sinha said. BJP spokesperson also referred to Rahul

Gandhi’s other foreign visits, including the one he undertook during the Bihar assembly polls, and alleged, “Where does he go on official or unofficial visits are not shared.” “What is he hiding from country?” he asked, alleging, “Leaving aside his responsibilities in India, he keeps meeting unknown people at unknown places (abroad).”

Sinha alleged that when Gandhi visited South America earlier and there was no information about his engagements there. “During his South America visit, did he meet former President of Chile Michelle Bachelet to convince her to receive the Indira Gandhi Peace prize?” he asked. Sinha also asked Gandhi if he was engaged in preparing his retirement plan. The LoP will have to decide whether he is interested in politics in India or not, the BJP spokesperson added.

Asked if intelligence agencies are not able to keep tabs on the LoP’s foreign visits, he said, “Rahul Gandhi’s activities are being watched.” He alleged that Gandhi has been running various propaganda and he has to explain the source from where he “gathers” the idea to continuously attack the country while holding an important position of the LoP.

“But the day he crosses the limit, action will certainly be taken against him. You remain assured that security agencies must be keeping a watch,” the BJP spokesperson added. Congress MP Priyanka Gandhi Vadra on Wednesday hit back at the BJP for its criticism of Rahul Gandhi over his visit to Germany next week, asking why they are raising questions on the LoP when Prime Minister Narendra Modi spends “almost half of his working time outside the country”.

Farmers-police clash in Hanumangarh over ethanol plant; internet suspended

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

■ Jaipur

A clash broke out between farmers and police in Hanumangarh on Wednesday after the farmers demolished the boundary wall of an under-construction ethanol plant with tractors.

The incident happened in Rath Kheda village of the Tibbi area, where the farmers also allegedly vandalised several vehicles and set some of them on fire. Police fired tear gas shells to disperse the crowd and used sticks on the agitators. Congress MLA Abhimanyu Poonia, who was at the post in support of the farmers, was injured and taken to the Hanumangarh district hospital.

Authorities have suspended internet services in Tibbi town and nearby villages.

Earlier in the day, farmers gathered outside the SDM office in protest against the plant. In the evening, they marched towards the factory and brought down a portion of the wall.

Farmers removed the police barricades, torched vehicles parked near the site, and vandalised an excavator inside the plant. The agitators alleged that the proposed plant would increase pollution in the region.

They had been protesting at the site for some days but were recently removed, after which a boundary wall was built. Forces have been deployed in the area to maintain law and order.

Former chief minister Ashok Gehlot, Leader of the Opposition Tikaram Jolly, and former deputy chief minister Sachin Pilot condemned police action.

“Why does the BJP Government hate farmers so much? Congress will continue to raise their voice,” Gehlot said in a post on X. Jolly called the police action “unfortunate and unacceptable.”

Nadda calls for stronger grassroots action in meeting with Gujarat MPs

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

■ New Delhi

Union Health Minister J P Nadda on Wednesday held a dialogue with members of Parliament (MPs) from Gujarat on advancing the national mission for a TB-Mukt Bharat.

The interaction, organised under the Parliamentarians Championing a TB Mukt Bharat initiative, took place at Garvi Gujarat Bhawan on the sidelines of the Winter Session of Parliament.

The session witnessed the presence of Union Minister of State for the Ministry of Consumer Affairs, Food and Public Distribution Nimuben Bambhaniya and MPs from both the Houses representing Gujarat. Nadda, according to a statement, highlighted India’s progress in the fight against tubercu-



losis under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi. He noted that the country has achieved an approximate 21 per cent reduction in TB incidence between 2015 and 2024, along with a treatment success rate of nearly 90 per cent, surpassing global averages as reflected in recent WHO assessments. The minister said that Gujarat, owing to its strong health systems, rapid adoption of innova-

tions, and robust programme ownership, has the potential to emerge as a leading state in implementing the next-generation TB elimination strategies. Calling upon the lawmakers to anchor constituency-level interventions, Nadda suggested a slew of measures, such as regular constituency scorecard reviews of TB indicators, and strengthening of TB reviews through District Development Coordination and Monitoring Committee (DISHA) meetings. Nadda urged the MPs to undertake efforts to counter stigma and motivate people to seek early testing and treatment. The minister encouraged setting up constituency-level Ni-kshay Shivirs and expansion of the Ni-kshay Mitra network to ensure TB patients get nutrition, counselling, and welfare.

Vande Bharat sleeper trials underway: Vaishnaw

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

■ New Delhi

The sleeper variant of the Vande Bharat train has been designed to cater to long and medium distance overnight travel, and two such trainsets are currently under trial, Railway Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw said in a written reply in the Lok Sabha on Wednesday.

More than half a dozen MPs raised questions regarding the timeline for its rollout, asking, “whether the Government has conducted any feasibility studies or pilot projects” along with the “details of the proposed route” of its launch. “To cater to long and medium distance overnight travel, the sleeper variant of the Vande Bharat train has been indigenously designed. Two such rakes have been manufactured and are under trial/commissioning,” Vaishnaw said. The min-



ister, while highlighting its broad technological advancements and safety features, said that these trains are fitted with KAVACH, higher acceleration with a design speed of 180 kmph and an operating speed of 160 kmph, crashworthy and jerk-free semi-permanent couplers and anti climbers, along with high fire safety standards.

Vaishnaw added that the train has fire barrier doors at the end of each coach, an

improved fire safety aerosol-based fire detection and suppression system in electrical cabinets as well as lavatories, a regenerative braking system for energy efficiency, air conditioning units with an indigenously developed UV-C lamp-based disinfection system and centrally controlled automatic plug doors and fully sealed wider gangways.

According to the railway minister, there are CCTVs in all

coaches, emergency talk-back units for communication between the passenger and train manager/loco pilot in case of emergency, special lavatories in the driving coaches on each end for Divyangjan passengers, and a centralised coach monitoring system for better condition monitoring of passenger amenities such as air conditioning, saloon lighting, etc.

On questions regarding the resumption of train operations suspended during the COVID-19 pandemic, particularly those passing through Dumka in Jharkhand and Jammu in J-K, Vaishnaw said that with a view to containing the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Indian Railways had discontinued the operation of all regular passenger carrying trains with effect from March 23 2020, and only special train services were being operated.

UAE pledges \$550 million to support UN’s 2026 global humanitarian overview

ASHOKE RAJ ■ New Delhi

The United Arab Emirates has announced a major humanitarian commitment with a pledge of \$550 million to support the United Nations’ Global Humanitarian Overview (GHO) for 2026.

The directive, issued by President His Highness Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, positions the UAE among the leading global contributors working to alleviate urgent humanitarian suffering worldwide.

The 2026 GHO aims to mobilise \$33 billion to assist an estimated 135 million people across 23 humanitarian operations. These operations span critical regions affected by conflict, displacement, natural disasters, and economic instability. They also include targeted relief for refugees, migrants, and vulnerable communities grappling with escalating global crises. Of the total amount, the UN seeks \$23 billion in immedi-



ate funding to safeguard the lives of 87 million people in dire need of urgent humanitarian support.

The UAE’s pledge reflects its longstanding commitment to international humanitarian action, an approach grounded in rapid

and effective responses to crises. Through sustained collaboration with UN agencies-chief among them the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA)-the UAE continues to prioritise equitable access

to essential aid, especially in regions where instability has severely disrupted basic services. Reem bint Ebrahim Al Hashimy, Minister of State for International Cooperation, reaffirmed this commitment, highlighting the UAE’s determination to strengthen global humanitarian solidarity. “The UAE continues its steadfast commitment to supporting global humanitarian efforts and working with our UN partners to ensure access to aid for those most impacted,” she said.

“This pledge embodies the directives of His Highness Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan and reflects our profound belief in the necessity of international solidarity in responding to urgent humanitarian appeals in an effective and sustainable manner that preserves human dignity and protects lives.” The announcement was welcomed across the UN system, with senior officials emphasising the transformative potential of the UAE’s support. Tom Fletcher, UN

Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, stated:

“Our global appeal is about saving lives where shocks have hit hardest - and turning plans into real protection. The UAE’s rapid and generous backing of our 2026 plan sends a strong signal, focused on people who need it most. We must deliver an effective, innovative response that meets the moment.” WHO Director-General Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus highlighted that the pledge comes as global health systems face unprecedented pressure.

“Warning signs of health system collapse manifest long before it occurs - outbreaks spread, malnutrition increases, and preventable deaths rise,” he said. “However, when we come together, services can be restored and lives saved. I thank His Highness Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan and the UAE for their support, which will provide

crucial humanitarian health care to millions in need.”

UNICEF Executive Director Catherine Russell stressed the significance of the UAE’s involvement for children caught in crises.

“UNICEF appreciates the UAE’s generous support, which will go a long way to save and improve the lives of children caught in humanitarian crises,” she said. “Children are always the most vulnerable when a crisis strikes.”

UN High Commissioner for Refugees Filippo Grandi also welcomed the contribution, noting:

“We value UAE’s strong commitment to humanitarian efforts. While severe funding shortfalls present a significant challenge for millions of vulnerable forcibly displaced people, contributions from governments like the UAE allow UNHCR to enhance its response efforts and provide a glimmer of hope for those in need.”

Cindy McCain, Executive Director of the World Food

Programme, described the pledge as a crucial intervention at a time when humanitarian needs are rising sharply.

“As humanitarian needs soar and resources lag dangerously behind, the United Arab Emirates’ generous pledge is a lifeline,” she said. “WFP stands ready to work with the UAE to ensure this desperately needed support reaches the millions facing acute hunger across the globe.”

This substantial commitment further strengthens the UAE’s strategic partnership with the UN humanitarian system and underscores its growing influence in global crisis response. Guided by the directives of President Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, the UAE continues to champion swift, coordinated, and impactful humanitarian action aimed at protecting lives, ensuring stability, and upholding human dignity in the world’s most vulnerable regions.

Paper ballots will revive booth capturing: BJP



Amid a push by Opposition parties to revert to paper ballot elections, senior BJP leader Ravi Shankar Prasad on Wednesday hit back, saying it would mean going back to the days of booth capturing. Participating in a debate in LS on 'election reforms', the former Union law minister said the opposition should not talk of returning to the old ballot paper system.

Congress won't reinstate expelled MLA Mamkootathil

Congress is not a party that alters its decisions based on the grant of bail, and there is no reason to reconsider the expulsion of MLA Rahul Mamkootathil, former KPCC president K Muraleedharan said on Wednesday. Responding to questions on the anticipatory bail granted to the Palakkad MLA in a second rape case registered against him, Muraleedharan said the Congress had no concern for someone who had already been ousted from the party.



Andhra CM Naidu seeks revamp of Govt business rules



Calling for an overhaul of existing Government business rules to improve governance, Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu on Wednesday said when the Constitution has been amended, what is wrong in changing the business rules to do good to people.

CM Reddy unveils ₹1,000 crore for Osmania University revamp

Telangana Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy on Wednesday announced an allocation of ₹1,000 crore for development works at Osmania University, pledging to upgrade the century-old institution to international standards. Reddy unveiled a copy of the Government order sanctioning the funds during a visit to the campus, which played a central role in the Telangana statehood movement.



Opposition stages walkout in RS

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

Opposition parties led by the Congress on Wednesday staged a walkout in the Rajya Sabha after a BJP MP withdrew, without explanation, a question he had posed to Home Minister Amit Shah on enhancing forensic capabilities in the country.

BJP MP Adiya Prasad had put a question to the Home Minister, which was admitted as a Starred Question, which requires ministers to give an answer orally and allows immediate follow-up (supplementary) questions.

According to the Question List available on the Rajya Sabha website, Prasad's question was number two in the sequence for the Question Hour on Wednesday. However, a correction note said the question may be treated as "withdrawn".

When Chairman CP Radhakrishnan skipped the question and moved to the next, Congress leader S Jairam Ramesh and others sought to know why the



Congress MP Jairam Ramesh speaking in the Rajya Sabha during the Winter session of Parliament

PTI

question was withdrawn. "You know the rules. Rule 53 permits a member to withdraw any question as he likes," the chairman said.

"You can also withdraw if you want. I cannot interfere in the rights of the members." As opposition MPs pressed, Radhakrishnan

told them that they have "no right to raise it." Radhakrishnan also refused their pleas to ask the concerned member to put the

question. "Why do I have to tell? I have no right to tell. It is his will. You also can withdraw tomorrow some questions, and I will not interfere in that," he said, ordering that nothing that Opposition MPs say on the issue would go on record. He asked them not to disturb the question hour and went ahead with the listed questions. Unhappy with the response, the Opposition MPs staged a walkout in the House.

Prasad had wanted to know from the Minister of Home Affairs "whether the Government is expanding Central Forensic Science Laboratories (CFSs) to collect evidence as mandated under the new criminal laws, if so, the details thereof." He also wanted to know of "the measures taken to enhance forensic capabilities under the Nirbhaya Fund in light of the new criminal laws; and the steps being taken to systematically store and manage forensic data electronically as mandated under the new criminal laws."

RS Chairman urges protection of human rights, especially for marginalised groups

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

Rajya Sabha Chairman CP Radhakrishnan on Wednesday called on elected representatives to ensure human rights remain "living, breathing realities" for every citizen, particularly the marginalised sections of society, as he marked the 77th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Speaking on Human Rights Day, he said the historic 1948 document "continues to stand as the bedrock of human dignity, freedom, equality and justice for every individual across the world." Highlighting this year's global theme 'Human Rights: Our Everyday Essentials', the chairman said it underscores three simple yet profound truths: Human rights are positive, essential, and attainable. "Human rights empower individuals and communities, prevent harm, protect dignity and transform societies for the better," he said.



Drawing on India's constitutional framework and ancient philosophy, Radhakrishnan said the country has "always been a resolute champion of these universal values." He invoked the Sanskrit phrase '*Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam*' (The world is one family) and noted that India's Constitution guarantees Fundamental Rights, and Directive Principles of State Policy. "As elected representatives of the people, it is our bounden duty to ensure that human rights remain living, breathing realities for every citizen," he said, calling

on members to "pledge anew to work tirelessly towards a nation and a world where human rights are truly our everyday essentials."

Meanwhile, after papers were laid in the Upper House, Parliamentary Affairs Minister Kiren Rijiju announced that the discussion on the 150th anniversary of Vande Mataram would continue in the second half of the day and could extend until 7 pm.

The discussion on election reforms, Rijiju said, will be taken up on Thursday and is expected to conclude on Monday.

Congress slams BJP over Vande Mataram controversy

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

Congress MP Syed Naseer Hussain on Wednesday attacked BJP for creating an unnecessary controversy over the national song Vande Mataram, asking whether those who bowed their heads at Muhammad Ali Jinnah's tomb should teach nationalism to them.

Participating in the debate on the 150th anniversary of Vande Mataram in the Rajya Sabha, he claimed that it is a historical fact that the Congress party has worked to spread Vande Mataram to every nook and corner of the country.

According to him, the controversy over deletion of some stanzas in the original Vande Mataram poem was settled in the CWC meeting in 1937 and subsequently in the Constituent Assembly.

He claimed that BJP leader L K Advani visited Pakistan in 2005, and paid homage at the tomb of Jinnah by bowing his head. "Nationalism is important for every Indian born in the country. Now, will those who bowed their heads at Jinnah's tomb teach us nationalism?"

Hussain added that everyone respects Vande Mataram as India's national song. "Fringe elements will not decide who will sing



Vande Mataram and who will not."

BJP MP Ram Chander Jangra from Haryana called Vande Mataram "a source of inspiration" for everyone, while AAP member Swati Maliwal described it as the soul of the country.

Bhagwat Karad, BJP MP from Maharashtra, attacked the Congress, stating that it is in the party's culture to oppose the recital of Vande Mataram. MP Kartikeya Sharma said the British tried to suppress the song because they wanted to suppress ideas that awakened political consciousness.

"Singing it invited fines, arrests, expulsions and reprisals. Yet, the song travelled from classrooms to jails, from Bengal to the rest of India and from whisper to war cry during the Swadeshi movement of 1905," Sharma said. He added, "Vande

Mataram is not history. It is a philosophy still in motion. Its philosophy of self-reliance, moral courage, knowledge and national confidence is more relevant today than ever before."

Naresh Bansal, BJP MP from Uttarakhand, while blaming the Congress for the partition of the country, said that Vande Mataram is a prayer to the nation. AAP MP Vikramjit Singh Sahney called the song "a mantra that paved the way for our freedom." Ramdas Athawale, Minister of State for Social Justice and Empowerment, spoke in a poetic style to convey his view that Vande Mataram gives energy.

Ramji, an MP from BSP, said that people from all regions fought for the Independence of the country, and this song runs in the blood of every Indian.

11 Naxals surrender in Maharashtra

TN RAGHUNATHA
■ Mumbai

Less than two months after prominent naxalite leader Malloujula Venugopal Rao alias Bhupathi alias Sonu, eleven more Maoist leaders — including two divisional committee members Ramesh Lekami and Bhima Kowasi — surrendered before Maharashtra Director General of Police (DGP) Rashmi Shukla in Gadchiroli district of eastern Maharashtra.

The surrendered Maoists, who included four hardcore naxalites, were carrying a bounty of ₹82 lakh on their heads.

Apart from Lekami (57) from Gadchiroli and Kowasi (35) from Chhattisgarh, the others who laid down their arms included Poriye Gota (41), Ratan Oyam (32), and Kamal Veladi (30), all from Chhattisgarh.

The others who surrendered before the State DGP comprised area committee members Poriye Veladi (36) and Ramaji Pungati (35), and platoon members Sonu Kato (19), Prakash Pungati (22), Sita Pallo (22), and Sainath Made (23).

Attributing the surrender by the eleven naxalites to their "disillusionment" by the "hollow claims" of the Maoism, the Gadchiroli police said that they were "frustrated" with the banned outfit CPI (Maoist)'s



"mindless" violence against civilians "A large number of members of the banned CPI (Maoist) are attracted to the Surrender cum Rehabilitation Policy implemented by the Government of Maharashtra since 2005," the police said. Under the state's Government's rehabilitation policy, if a group of Maoists surrenders together, they are eligible for collective assistance of ₹10 lakh announced jointly by the Centre and Maharashtra Government. In all, 146 hardcore Naxalites have surrendered in Gadchiroli since 2022. "Thanks to the effective implementation of this Policy, a total of 783 active Maoists till date have surrendered before the

Gadchiroli Police," the police said.

Of the surrendered Maoist leaders, the surrendered Naxal leader Ramesh alias Bhima alias Bajju Guddi Lekami was carrying a reward of ₹16 announced by the Maharashtra Government, while Poriye Kumari- Bhima Veladi was carrying a reward of ₹8 lakh. The others like Sonu Podiyam alias Ajay- Sanu Kato and Sita alias Jaini Tonde- Pallo were carrying rewards of ₹4 lakh each. After surrender, Ramesh alias Bhima alias Bajju Guddi Lekami will receive ₹8.5 Lakh as reward, Bhima alias Situ alias Kiran Hidama Kowasi will receive ₹8.5 Lakh reward declared by the Central and

Maharashtra Government for rehabilitation and Poriye alias Lucky Adama Gota will receive ₹5 lakhs as reward. Other surrendered Maoists will receive different amounts as rewards.

Wednesday's is the major instance of surrender by the Maoists in recent months. It may be recalled that October 13, 2025, influential naxalite leader and senior politburo member of the Communist Party of India (Maoist) Malloujula Venugopal Rao alias Bhupathi alias Sonu, had along with 60 Maoist cadres had laid down arms in Gadchiroli district. Bhupathi was carrying a bounty of approximate ₹6 crore announced by various States.

SEVERED HEAD OF TRIBAL WOMAN FOUND ON RIVER BANK IN MALKANGIRI

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ Malkangiri

The Odisha Government on Wednesday extended the suspension of internet services for another 24 hours in violence-hit Malkangiri district, while the missing severed head of a tribal woman was recovered from a river bank, police said.

The severed head of 51-year-old Lake Podiami of Rakhelguda village was recovered about 15 km from where her body was found on December 4. The head was found on the Poteru riverbank close to a Kanya Ashram, the police said.

The prohibitory orders clamped in the two villages- Rakhelguda and MV 25 - continued to remain in force, while the Government further extended the internet service suspension period by another 24 hours based on the recommendation of the Malkangiri District Collector. The earlier ban was in force till 12 noon on Wednesday, an official said. The woman's mortal remains were buried at her village on Tuesday amid tight security and in the presence of senior officers. "After recovery of the severed head, the police was examining it and undertaking related investigation to ascertain the circumstances that led to the woman's murder," an officer said. The woman remained untraced since December 1, and her family members lodged a missing persons case on December 3. Her body was found on December 4, while the head was recovered on Wednesday, police said.

Violence erupted on Sunday afternoon after the recovery of the woman's headless body. A large number of tribals from Rakhelguda village allegedly attacked MV-26 village, a settlement of Bengalis in the district. Around 200 houses were damaged, some of them set on fire as the tribals went on a rampage at MV-26 village.

Meanwhile, the police have arrested Subha Ranjan Mandal (42) on charge of killing the tribal woman, whose killing led to violence in the tribal dominated district.

Protecting rights of fellow citizens shared duty: President Murmu

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

President Droupadi Murmu on Wednesday called upon citizens to recognise that guarding human rights are "not the sole responsibility" of Governments, the NHRC or other such institutions, rather protecting the rights and dignity of fellow citizens is a "shared duty".

In her address at an NHRC-hosted event here to mark Human Rights Day, Murmu also said this is an "occasion to remind us that the universal human rights are inalienable and they form the bedrock of a just, equitable, and compassionate society". Nations Human Rights Commission Chairperson Justice V Ramasubramanian

(ret'd) and Principal Secretary to the Prime Minister, PK Mishra, were also present on the dais.

Vice President and Rajya Sabha Chairman CP Radhakrishnan called on elected representatives to ensure human rights remain "living, breathing realities" for every citizen, particularly the marginalised sections of society, as he marked the 77th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Each year, since 1950, the world comes together on December 10 to celebrate this day, which marks the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) by the United Nations in 1948.

"Today, I call upon every



citizen to recognize that human rights are not the sole responsibility of Governments, the NHRC, civil society organisations and such other institutions. Protecting the rights and dignity of our fellow citizens is a shared duty. This duty rests with all of us as members of a compassionate and responsible society," President Murmu said in her address.

President Murmu said human rights promote social democracy, and they "encompass the right to live without fear, to learn without barriers, to work without exploitation and to age with dignity".

Speaking on Human Rights Day, Radhakrishnan said the historic 1948 docu-

ment "continues to stand as the bedrock of human dignity, freedom, equality and justice for every individual across the world." Highlighting this year's global theme 'Human Rights: Our Everyday Essentials', the chairman said it underscores three simple yet profound truths: Human rights are positive, essential, and attainable.

"As elected representatives of the people, it is our bounden duty to ensure that human rights remain living, breathing realities for every citizen," he said, calling on members to "pledge anew to work tirelessly towards a nation and a world where human rights are truly our everyday essentials."

States Focus



JAYA URGES DEDICATED AMBULANCE LANES, CITES DELAYS COSTING LIVES

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



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

BJP MP Kangana Ranaut on Wednesday said in Lok Sabha that Prime Minister Narendra Modi does not need to manipulate voting systems to win elections because "he has hacked the hearts of the people". Participating in a discussion on 'Election Reforms', Ranaut said the past year had been "deeply worrying" because of what she described as daily disruptions by opposition members. She said watching them often felt "traumatic", adding that MPs had repeatedly "jumped into the Well, shouted 'SIR, SIR', created a spectacle, tried intimidation and misbehaved in every possible way". Ranaut said that the disruptions prevented Parliament from functioning. "Maybe, barring the last two or three days, they did not let the House run at all. We are representatives of the people; we come here to learn, especially as new MPs," she said, accusing the Opposition MPs of turning every session into theatre. On allegations of EVM tampering, Ranaut said Congress leaders were unwilling to accept electoral defeats. "Let me tell the Congress people that the Prime Minister does not hack EVMs, he hacked people's hearts," she said. She mocked demands for a return to the paper ballot system, calling it an "outdated relic of another era".

Sex workers flock to Kolkata booth to register as voters

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Kolkata

Forty-year-old Sumita Koley (name changed), a resident of the Chetla red-light area, has never voted. This year, she is determined to change that. She queued up on Wednesday at a Special Intensive Revision (SIR) assistance camp at Chetla area in south Kolkata, hoping to secure their place as voters. Koley was among nearly 200 women who crowded the small club room at 29/A Rakhaldas Addya Road, a narrow stretch surrounded by slums and single-storey homes that have long been inhabited by sex workers. The camp followed similar ones held a day earlier in Sonagachi, Asia's largest red-light district, in north Kolkata. Watching the turnout, Swapna Gyne, an office-bearer of the NGO Amra Padatik, said the enthusiasm masks deep anxieties. Around 3,500 sex workers earn their livelihood in Chetla, but nearly 30 per cent have stayed away from enrolment despite being Indian citizens, she said. "They have made new lives here; new relationships, whether those were accepted by the society or not. For years, they knew only the importance of Aadhaar cards, ration cards and the passbook of the Usha Multipurpose Cooperative



Society of which they are members, Gyne said. Now, for the SIR mapping, they are suddenly asked to trace parents they have not contacted in decades, she said. "Many of them fear humiliation if they go back to their old homes, which they left years ago. Some even fear physical assault," Gyne said. She stressed that Koley's case is far from unique. Women aged between 20 and 60 face the same dilemma. "Some have voter IDs and have voted before, even in the 2002 elections. But many have never voted and have no EPIC cards. They also lack school certificates or birth documents. We have requested the Election Commission to find alternatives if they meet the citizenship criteria. Where will they go if they are left out? This is their country," Gyne said. At the camp, the chal-

Bengal Govt impossible to form without me in 2026: Humayun

SAUGAR SENGUPTA
■ Kolkata

Rebel and expelled Trinamool Congress MLA Humayun Kabir — who recently shot into prominence for laying the foundation stone of a second Babri Mosque in Murshidabad district of Bengal drawing lakhs of Muslims to attend the function — on Wednesday iterated that he would emerge as the "kingmaker" post 2026 Assembly elections as no political party in the State would be able to gain majority. Kabir who is likely to announce a new political outfit on December 22, asked the "media and all other stake holders" to "watch out the names of the office bearers of my party and then make a conclusion." Slamming the Trinamool Congress for considering the Muslim population of the State as their "paternal fie" so as to perennially use them as vote banks, he said, "now on I will tell the Muslims not to be a vote bank but a stakeholder in the power politics." Disclosing that his party would field candidates in 135 seats, Kabir said that, "in Bengal Muslims voters have an influence in about 90 seats with a voter percent-



Expelled Trinamool Congress MLA Humayun Kabir

age hovering between 40 and 70 percent. so I wish to tell them to vote for me and let my party win these 90 seats. I the remaining 204 seats let the TMC and BJP fight whoever wins will have to come to me to form a Government without the support of my party no party in Bengal will be able to form a Government just wait and watch what happens in the State's electoral arena in a few months from now." Kabir was recently suspended from the TMC after he openly proposed to construct a Babri Mosque in Murshidabad. It is another matter

however that a section of the critics suspect whether he has been fielded by Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee to pull back the fleeing Muslim votes on the one hand and help Hindu votes come behind her after her suspending him on Babri Mosque issue. Referring to Kabir's "confidence" of winning 90 seats, TMC spokesperson Arup Chakrabarty said "let him first win his own seat at Rejinagar and let his party first save the deposits in the seats they would contest he is presently day-dreaming let him day-dream by the time he emerges from his sleep the

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

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

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ Raissen (MP)

A man from Raissen district in Madhya Pradesh has alleged that his village panchayat ordered a social boycott against him and his family after he ate food at a Dalit's family as part of a post-death ritual, prompting the authorities to launch a probe. The incident occurred in Piparia Puaria village of Udayapura, around 100 km from the district headquarters around a month back and came to light on Tuesday during a "jan sunwai" (public hearing) of the matter. The village panchayat allegedly ordered the social boycott of three members of an upper caste community for consuming food at the Dalit man's house, and set certain conditions before them, including organising a feast, to avoid ostracism. While two of the three men

accepted the panchayat's conditions and performed 'penance', one of them - Bharat Singh Dhakad - approached the police and lodged a complaint against the village body, alleging that he and his family members were being treated like "untouchables" and barred from taking part in social events, a police official said. The village sarpanch, however, dismissed the allegations. Udayapura is the assembly constituency of Madhya Pradesh Minister of State for Health Narendra Shivaji Patel. Udayapura tehsildar Dinesh Bargale said that the Dhakad filed an application to the collector during the public hearing on Tuesday, accusing the panchayat of issuing the social boycott order. Dhakad made these allegations against the sarpanch, deputy sarpanch, and panchs of the concerned gram panchayat, he said.

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

"The matter is being investigated and if the allegations are found to be true, legal action will be taken against those involved," Bargale said. Dhakad said he and his fellow gram panchayat assistant secretary Manoj Patel and teacher Satyendra Singh Raghuvanshi had a meal at a Dalit family's house in the village as part of a 'shradddha' ceremony. But after the incident, the panchayat passed a resolution declaring that eating at a Dalit's house was a "greater sin than cow slaughter" and those who indulged in it must purify themselves by bathing in the Ganga river and by offering a

feast in the village, he said. Dhakad claimed that under pressure from the panchayat, Patel and Raghuvanshi bathed in the Ganga river and organised a feast in the village, but he refused to comply. After this, he and his family were socially boycotted and excluded from all events, he said. Dhakad said that he was being treated like an untouchable and barred from entering the temple. He also claimed that when he raised this issue with the panchayat, he was asked to have his head shaved to absolve himself of the sins and perform the "pind daan" (a post-death ritual) for his father while he was still alive. When contacted, sarpanch Bhagwan Singh Patel dismissed the allegations as baseless. "If someone in the village is not inviting him to their programme due to personal reasons, then it is his personal matter.

Allegations like untouchability are not correct," he said. The sarpanch said that MLA and Minister of State Narendra Shivaji Patel also came and tried to convince the people. "But if they are not listening, what can he do?" Sub-Divisional Police Officer (SDOP) Kunwar Singh Mukati said that excluding someone from social events in the village, treating them as untouchables, or imposing punishments such as bathing in the Ganga, performing feasts, and tonsuring ceremonies are punishable offences under the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS). "Spreading social animosity, forcing social punishment through pressure or threats, and preventing social participation are crimes. Every citizen has the right to live with dignity and equality. Therefore, if such a case comes to light, an investigation will be conducted and

the culprits will be prosecuted," he said. When Satyendra Singh Raghuvanshi, the teacher who ate with Dhakad at the Dalit's house, was contacted about this, he said that he is no longer facing any boycott. He said he has been posted at the Government middle school in the village for the last 16 years and the Dalit man, where he went to have meal, has been his friend. "I do not believe in the caste system, so I went to my friend Santosh Mehtar's house to eat during the 'shradddha' ceremony. Someone made a video of the incident and circulated it locally, which led to a controversy," he said. Talking to PTI, Raghuvanshi admitted that as per the panchayat's order, he went to his guru's ashram in Allahabad and came back after bathing at the sangam (confluence) of rivers. "I don't have complaints against anyone," he said.

Vande Mataram debate maligns Nehru: Ramesh

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ New Delhi

The Opposition on Wednesday accused BJP leaders of distorting history, with Congress leader Jairam Ramesh saying that the whole aim of the debate on 150 years of Vande Mataram was to malign first prime minister Jawaharlal Nehru. Participating in the debate in the Rajya Sabha, Ramesh accused the BJP of insulting freedom fighters who sacrificed their lives for the country. "Those who have spoken from the other side have proved. They wanted to be historians, but they have become 'distortions'," Ramesh said. He gave details of letters exchanged between leaders including Subhas Chandra Bose, Rabindranath Tagore, Rajendra Prasad, and Jawaharlal Nehru over Vande Mataram. "Rajendra Prasad wrote to Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel on September 28, 1937, raising concerns and worries prevalent in large sections of our political system on Vande Mataram, and requesting Patel that the Congress Working Committee (CWC) take a stand. Was it appeasement? Are you accusing Rajendra Prasad, Sardar Patel of appeasement?" Ramesh said. "On October 28, 1937 CWC passed a resolution about Vande Mataram. Mahatma

Gandhi, Subhas Chandra Bose, Vallabhbhai Patel, Jawaharlal Nehru, Maulana Azad, Acharya Kripalani, GB Pant. They were all present," Ramesh said. He added that on October 30, 1927, Tagore issued a press statement that he had advised the CWC that they pass a resolution to adopt the first two stanzas of Vande Mataram as 'national anthem', and it was later adopted as the national song. He said a communal environment was created in 1937. "Many organisations were responsible. One of them is celebrating centenary now. They spread communal fire, and today they tell us Congress did appeasement," he said. Ramesh accused the ruling party of insulting Tagore, and said, "Why is the Government making this Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay vs Tagore. They wanted to insult Nehru, but they ended up insulting Tagore". The Congress leader slammed the BJP for its "appeasement" jibes at his party, and said BJP ideologue Syama Prasad Mookerjee had formed a Government with AK Fazlul Huq, who later presented the Lahore resolution for the formation of Pakistan. "A lot has been said, the aim of this whole debate is to malign Nehru. This is a part of that project. You are insulting people who sacrificed their lives for the nation," he added.

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

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Raipur

Chhattisgarh's efforts to strengthen transportation in its remote forested regions took another significant step forward with the launch of the second phase of the Mukhyamantri Gramin Bus Seva Yojana. Chief Minister Vishnu Deo Sai inaugurated the expansion and virtually flagged off the new buses from his residential office on Wednesday. Under this phase, 24 additional buses have begun operating on 23 routes across 10 districts of the Bastar and Surguja divisions. With this rollout, 180 more villages are being brought under direct bus connectivity. Several residents from remote tribal areas arrived at the programme in the same buses introduced during the first phase of the scheme. They shared with Chief Minister that travel to block headquarters, which once demanded long and difficult journeys, is now considerably easier and more reliable. Villagers from the Sukma-Dornapal-Konta route said they travelled nearly 110 kilometers by bus to attend the event, a journey that earlier posed considerable hardship. Chief Minister Vishnu Deo Sai noted that the Government is committed to



ensuring that no village in Chhattisgarh remains cut off from mainstream development. He said the initiative is not only expanding transport services but is also helping bridge social and economic gaps by connecting rural communities to towns and essential services. The strengthened public transport network in remote regions is proving to be a milestone, offering safer, timely and more convenient transportation. Conveying good wishes to residents of the 180 newly connected villages, Chief Minister said the improved transport links are expected to ease daily life and open new pathways for growth. Transport Minister Kedar Kashyap stated that bus services are now reaching even

those forested and inaccessible pockets where no public transport had ever operated. He described the scheme as especially beneficial for the tribal-dominated belts of Bastar and Surguja. The first phase of the scheme was launched on October 4, 2025, by Union Home Minister Shri Amit Shah, connecting 250 villages. With the second phase now in operation, the coverage has expanded further, adding another 180 villages. Deputy Chief Ministers Vijay Sharma and Arun Sao along with other cabinet ministers Chief Minister's Secretary Rahul Bhagat, Transport Secretary S. Prakash and senior officials were present.

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Order Order

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



Chanda Kochhar Deepak Kochhar

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

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

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

SC directs Haryana to restore green land to its original State

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



IndiGo crisis: Delhi HC pulls up Govt, airlines

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

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

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

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

action will be taken against them.

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

between the beneficiaries and officials of Noida.

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

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

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

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

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



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

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

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

In 2017, Sandesara brothers Nitin and

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

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

Chandrashekhar trust dispute revived, court allows suit alleging mismanagement

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

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

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

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

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



Chandrashekhar

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

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

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

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

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



Editor's
TAKE

India's fire safety complacency

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

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

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

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

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

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

Breaking away from Macaulay

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



JS
RAJPUT

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

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

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

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

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



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CONTRIBUTION TO
THE WORLD
OUTSIDE

The author is an
educationist, a Padma Shri
awardee, and works in
religious amity and social
cohesion

dailypioneer
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 The Pioneer

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

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

The English language, Western literature, Western civilisation, and culture were to be firmly established in India as the only path to becoming advanced and superior human beings. Not that everyone who mattered agreed, as some were interested in supporting Sanskrit and Arabic, but they were ignored and left to

their fate under the argument that these needed financial support, while English schools had a rush of fee-paying students from the upper echelons of society. It is a long story that has established Macaulay even in schemes of futuristic educational planning.

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

The Pioneer
SINCE 1865

Reimagining family for India's queer youth



SUBROTO
CHATTERJEE

2ND OPINION
THE PIONEER

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

After the 2014 NALSA ruling, single individuals-regardless of gender identity or sexual orientation-can adopt under secular law. Yet

barriers persist: queer couples cannot adopt jointly due to the requirement of a "stable marital relationship", and single queer adopters still face bias from case workers.

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

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

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

The Pioneer
SINCE 1865

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Deepavali gains global heritage status

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

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

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

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

BHAGWAN THADANI | MUMBAI

Protect electoral workers from intimidation

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

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

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

N SADHASIVA REDDY | BENGALURU

Patriotism reduced to hollow theatre

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

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

NOOPUR BARUAH | TEZPUR

TARIFFS RISK CONSTRAINING FARMERS VIA SHORT-SIGHTED PROTECTION

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

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

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

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

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

VIDYASAGAR KETHIRI | NEW DELHI

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PIC TALK



Artists perform a traditional dance during the UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage event at the Red Fort in New Delhi.

PHOTO: PTI

DIGITAL EXPERIENCE



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Muslims have been insecure in India for a long time

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



BALBIR PUNJ

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

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

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

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

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

How does one explain this perfidious



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

iation were inflicted.

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

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

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

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

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

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



KRIPA NAUTIYAL

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

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

The Invisible Underwater Menace

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

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

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

Swarm Intelligence and Saturation Attacks

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

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

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

The Cyber-Physical Convergence

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

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

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

The Professional Recruitment Threat

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

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

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

Global Best Practices

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

A Comprehensive Implementation Strategy

A three-phase implementation strategy for India spanning five years may be considered:
● Phase 1 (0-12 months) should focus on deploying underwater sensor arrays at five major ports, installing counter-drone systems at critical infrastructure, integrating AI-enabled systems with the existing National Coastal Security Operations Centre, and procuring autonomous underwater defence vehicles.

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

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Why India needs its own LLMs: beyond using AI tools



ASHVATHAMAN

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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BLASÉ CAPITAL

HOWDY, INDIA

As with several issues, one can see wide and visible oscillations in the US' look-East policy, especially on how to deal with India and China, separately and collectively. Washington plays the carrot-and-stick game with New Delhi, as the former tightens screws in some areas, and its leaders verbally praise the Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi. America changed its stock-and-stick policy vis-à-vis China to a stick-and-carrot one, after President Donald Trump inked a temporary, but sweet deal with the Chinese counterpart, Xi Jinping.

Now, a White House document reflects a pivot to deepen ties with India, despite the tariff overdose, and delays in signing a bilateral trade deal, as a counterweight

to China in the Indo-Pacific region. The 'National Security Strategy of the United States of America November 2025' states, "We must continue to improve commercial (and other) relations with India to encourage New Delhi to contribute to Indo-Pacific security, including through continued quadrilateral cooperation with Australia, Japan, and the United States."

Quad representatives recently met in New Delhi for a counter-terrorism conference, despite the US sanction on India over Russian oil. "Moreover," adds the security document, "we will also work to align the actions of our allies and partners with our joint interest in preventing domination by any single competitor nation." Note the reference to "any single competitor nation," whose inherent meaning obviously refers to China. The relationship with China may be framed as a strategic competition with episodic summitry, marked by deep economic interdependence alongside tensions over trade and technology. These include tariffs, export controls, and restrictions on advanced semiconductors, with a security posture focused on deterrence around Taiwan and maritime disputes.

Ties with India are increasingly cooperative and transactional, driven by expanding commercial links, and supply-chain partnerships, growing technology collaboration, and a security partnership that emphasises Quad cooperation, and defence interoperability. The US thus uses trade, investment, and joint exercises to deepen alignment, and enlist India as a partner in shaping the Indo-Pacific balance. "America should similarly enlist our European and Asian allies and partners, including India, to cement and improve our joint positions in the Western Hemisphere and, with regard to critical minerals, in Africa," states the report.

However, such grand rhetoric, and vision is punctuated by what seems like a caveat. "America's economic partners should no longer expect to earn income from the United States through overcapacity and structural imbalances but instead pursue growth through managed cooperation tied to strategic alignment and by receiving long-term U.S. investment," adds the report. President Trump's "G-2" moment with Jinping revived an old idea of US-China co-leadership, even as Indian analysts cautioned that the remark was possibly rhetorical, and did not erase deep structural rivalry.

Washington's codified posture in the National Security Strategy appears to balance a desire to manage competition with a clear push to deepen commercial and strategic ties with India. The US hopes to explicitly link improved economic relations to India's contribution to regional security, and continued Quad cooperation. However, the language signals a shift from bilateral hedging to coalition-building using trade, technology partnerships, and defence ties to align like-minded states against coercive behaviour by "rivals."

"Love you not-maybe love you" appears' to be Washington's alternating relationship with Beijing, depending on the need of the hour. It swings from an economic interdependence, and global coordination to rivalry over technology, allegations of human rights, among others. "A related security challenge is the potential for any competitor to control the South China Sea," observes the White House. It adds, "This could allow a potentially hostile power to impose a toll system over one of the world's most vital lanes of commerce or, worse, to close and reopen it at will."

The mentions of "South China Sea," "potentially hostile power", among other phrases possibly point to a single nation, but can be a matter of interpretation, and conclusion. For Washington, either of the two outcomes, a toll system, or willfully closing or opening the channels, is harmful to the US economy, and broader US interests. The White House advocates "strong measures... along with the deterrence necessary to keep those lanes open, free of "tolls." It admits that this will require not just further investment in our military, especially naval, capabilities, but strong cooperation with every nation that stands to suffer, from India to Japan and beyond.

One of the points that emerges is the ongoing spat between Beijing and Tokyo over the latter's stand on Taiwan. With India, which possibly believes in quiet accommodation if it serves its interests, the dynamic shifts more towards strategic convergence on Indo Pacific security, supply chain resilience, and technology despite trade frictions. New Delhi can leverage ties with Washington with an emphasis on trade, investments, and technology to deepen interoperability and align incentives for regional security. While rhetorical gestures like "G-2" can ease tensions between America and China, it requires backing through crucial agreements.

However, pushing partners to choose sides risks fracturing multilateral institutions, and complicating cooperation on global issues. The Trump-Xi meeting, White security document, and ongoing India-US trade talks reflect an American approach through engagements, if possible, and competition, where necessary. The aim is to build partnerships, and shape a stable Indo-Pacific order. This will define Washington's diplomacy in the future, and determine whether rivalry hardens into containment or is managed.

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BUSINESS

10

Mee too as an investor, Meesho

The new target price, ₹200, is 80 per cent higher than offer price

Despite an explosive debut on the Indian exchanges, or possibly because of it, a few analysts scaled up the stock's target price to ₹200, or 80 per cent higher than the offer price (₹111). The listing gain for Meesho Ltd, an e-commerce platform, was more than ₹50, or over 45 per cent, and higher than the pre-listing grey market premium of ₹43. On the first trading day, Day Zero as CEO Vidit Aatrey described it, the stock scaled a high of over ₹177, and ended at just over ₹170, or over 50 per cent higher than the offer price.

At the listing ceremony, Aatrey said that there were still millions of Indians who had never transacted online, and this section that the firm wished to serve was just beginning to open. The narrative is backed by the events that began less than 10 years ago. Meesho started in a two-bedroom apartment in Bengaluru, where the founders worked on a dining table to find an entry point into online commerce. The original idea, FashNear, was a hyperlocal women's fashion concept that never scaled up. Only when it targeted small makers, home-based sellers, and buyers in the smaller cities like Surat, Jaipur, and Panipat that the trajectory shifted.

This helped the platform to reach nearly 200 million transacting users in 2024-25, of which more than 170 million were from outside India's top eight cities. The growing number of sellers, buyers, and orders excited the investors. The IPO was oversubscribed on the first day, with the final figure being nearly 80 times. The portion for the qualified institutions was oversubscribed by 120 times. The response from the retail investors was substantial, though less muted. The Net Market Value (Marketplace), or cumulative checkout value of successfully-delivered orders, went up from less than \$200 billion in 2022-23 to nearly \$300 billion in 2024-25.

However, the run-up to the listing day witnessed several debates, and controversies.

During the pre-IPO anchor-investor allocation process, global funds like Capital Group and Norges Bank Investment Management, and domestic institutions like ICICI Prudential and Nippon India Mutual Fund withdrew from it. They were peeved because nearly a quarter of the anchor portion was allocated to a single entity, SBI Mutual Fund. They claimed that this raised an issue of fairness, and indicated discretionary and opaque allocation. Meesho and its bankers maintained that they had merely honoured prior commitments to SBI Mutual Fund.

As is usually the case with tech firms, the IPO valuation attracted attention. At ₹111, Meesho's worth is more than ₹50,000 crore, which is now higher due to the gains on the first day. Whether such premium is justified, or can be sustained was the question that critics asked. They highlighted the financials. Although revenues were up by more than 60 per cent between 2022-23 and 2024-25, the annual losses were up by 135 per cent. But when one compares the first six months of 2024-25 and 2025-26, the revenues were up by nearly 30 per cent, and losses were down by more than 70 per cent.

Despite incurring losses, their reduction creates the perception that Meesho is undergoing a shift in financials, and profitability. Still, the firm's average order value (AOV) was ₹274 in 2024-25. A low AOV model requires extraordinary levels of operational precision, and cost control because each order implies a low margin. Small disruptions can distort the economics. Meesho processed 1.83 billion orders in 2024-25, with more than two billion in the 12 months ended June 2025. While this places it among the highest-volume platforms, the concentration of orders in mass market fashion and home categories makes volumes vulnerable to changes in discretionary spending.

Valmo, the parent firm's logistics arm, grew

into a massive parcel delivery operation. Media reports indicate that the former shipped 296 million parcels in Q1-FY26, which places it among the top handlers of e-commerce parcels. The share of shipments handled by Valmo rose from about two per cent in 2022-23 to 48 per cent in 2024-25, as Meesho moved more volume in-house. This increased density allows the delivery at lower costs compared to third-party logistics partners. This change is crucial for AOVs of ₹274, where costs related to deliveries, and returns cannot escalate.

Such strength in logistics is a potential point of fragility. A surge in the return rates, for example, which is common in low-priced fashion, can raise reverse costs. Disruption in

routing algorithms, fleet availability, or workforce supply can affect service levels. Regulatory scrutiny around how platforms use related-party arms can add to compliance costs, and complexity. Meesho depends on a network of small sellers, whose quality can vary widely, and the draft prospectus identifies this, and seller compliance as explicit risks.

Technology is a primary lever to stabilise such variables. The company's discovery engine, cataloguing systems, and AI-driven classification tools are designed to handle fragmented inputs. In investor interactions before the IPO, Aatrey claimed that the technology was built to eliminate friction for the small sellers, rather than to replace them. This includes tools that standardise product attributes, match buyers to inventory pockets, and reduce failed deliveries. These backend systems may not be visible, but sit at the centre of the claims that Meesho can scale up low-value commerce.

Analysts contend that India's e-commerce market is ₹6 trillion, and will reach ₹15-18 trillion by 2030. This indicates an annual growth rate of 20-25 per cent. The bulk of this growth is expected to come from Tier 2, and 3 cities, and smaller towns. Meesho's user base in these smaller markets makes it a proxy for consumption trends beyond the metros. This positioning will play a role in how sellers, buyers, and investors frame the company in the future. Strong adoption may make it a long-term bet. Any slowdown in rural or small-town spending can, however, magnify the challenges.

The quarter-to-quarter path in the future will be shaped by several scenarios. If Meesho can continue improving its take rate through value-added services, advertising, and logistics, and maintain cost discipline, it is positioned to strengthen cash flows. If competition intensifies in the mass market segment, discounting pressures may rise. Regulatory oversight of market-places and logistics compulsions, especially around quality and accountability, may hike compliance costs. If consumer sentiments weaken, the spend on discretionary categories that anchor Meesho's volumes may witness volatility. The experience may establish whether mass market e-commerce can deliver financial viability for firms, valuation gains to investors, and easy product accessibility for the consumers.

KAUSHIK MOITRA

NANDINI TYAGI

India's data-protection landscape is undergoing a necessary reset. The Digital Personal Data Protection (DPDP) Act, 2023, and DPDP Rules, 2025, now partially in force, represent a significant shift in how personal information is processed, protected, and governed. For those familiar with the mechanics of data, and ease with which ambiguity has historically been exploited, this transition is overdue. The framework is the country's first comprehensive digital privacy regime, which is citizen-centric, consent-driven, and innovation-aligned. It is built on seven principles: consent and transparency, purpose limitation, minimisation, accuracy, storage limits, security, and accountability.

The Government has opted for a phased implementation. Provisions establishing the Data Protection Board are operational; it will investigate violations, and impose penalties. The remaining obligations such as consent notices, retention standards, safeguards, breach reporting, grievance handling, and protections for children and persons with disabilities will happen within 18 months after the notification. This staggered rollout is intended to give citizens and companies realistic adjustment timelines.

The new regime seeks to transform personal data from something passively surrendered to something users actively control. Platforms must explain, in a user's preferred language, what data they collect, why and how they will use it, and how consent may be modified or withdrawn. However, the DPDP Rules stop short of mandating disclosures on recipient categories, cross-border protections, or retention periods, thereby undermining fully-informed consent. Concentration of appointment powers for the Data Protection Board in the Executive has drawn criticism for diluting independence.

Firms must promptly report breaches to both the Board, and affected users, with fuller details within 72 hours. Users must be told what happened, and how to mitigate harm. Additional safeguards apply where users lack the capacity to give consent. Processing children's or disabled persons' data requires verifiable guardian consent, and are subject to narrow welfare-based exceptions.

Republic strikes back; data reset

A data privacy regime with focus on citizens, consent, and innovation

Platforms cannot monitor children's behaviour or target them with advertising.

Research and archiving enjoy limited allowances but must meet baseline privacy standards. The Rules remain silent on whether AI (Artificial Intelligence) training qualifies as 'research,' leaving a significant issue as unresolved. Significant Data Fiduciaries, or entities processing high-risk or large-scale personal data, face heightened compliance. These include annual impact assessments, independent audits, and scrutiny of systems, algorithms, and hosting infrastructure. Cross-border transfers are permitted in principle, but the Government may restrict datasets processed by these fiduciaries, and impose conditions on access requests from foreign authorities. This reflects a shift toward risk-sensitive data mobility.

The Act introduces strict retention logic. Data must be erased when consent is withdrawn, or the purpose ends. Organisations must retain personal data, and logs for at least one year to support legitimate state functions. After this period, erasure is the default mode, unless another law requires retention. E-commerce, gaming, and social-media platforms must delete users' data after three years of inactivity, with a notice, and an opportunity to re-engage. This curbs extreme data accumulation but may entrench prolonged monitoring by both the corporations and State.

The State may ask for information for reasons that may range from national security to compliance reviews, sometimes without notifying the users, which raises concerns over broad surveillance powers. A new rights ecosystem obliges organisations to explain how users may access, correct, or erase data, with a uniform 90-day limit for grievance resolution. Consent managers, who are modelled on India's account-aggregator framework, will allow users to centrally view, and revoke permissions across platforms while remaining data-blind and audit-compliant.

Modern platforms behave like industrial-scale data refineries, and aggregate vast

behavioural datasets with little transparency or consent. Dark patterns continue to push users toward maximal data sharing. Apps rely on third-party tools that transmit their own streams of information. Cross-border cloud routing adds opacity. Even pricing models are influenced by surveillance logic. Reports suggest differential pricing based on device type or battery level.

Courts are beginning to address these practices. In the US, a ruling accepting Meta's use of books from 'shadow libraries' for AI training as fair use highlights the asymmetric treatment between the individuals and large platforms. Indian regulators have flagged this imbalance: WhatsApp's 2021 policy update was deemed abusive because the users lacked real choice. When combined with opaque AI training datasets, the ANI versus OpenAI dispute, and government advisories on dark patterns, it is clear that several entities continue data practices that they cannot defend or trace.

Surveillance extends into hardware. Smart TVs monitor viewing habits, phones continuously generate telemetry, wearables store intimate health metrics, and cars generate behavioural data. These are monetised abroad. Across the ecosystem, data capture is continuous, consent fleeting, and deletion rarely meaningful.

The Act requires organisations to justify what they collect, why they do it, who accesses it, and how long it is retained. This challenges the default-to-accumulate existing models, which have existed for the past decade. Sectoral frameworks intersect with these expectations. The Reserve Bank of India mandates strict security, storage, and audit standards. KYC (Know-Your-

Customer) data cannot be repurposed without fresh consent. The regulatory practices in European Union and the US treat lawful basis, retention limits, and algorithmic transparency as routine obligations.

Healthcare and the related platform economy face additional scrutiny. Medical data is already fenced by multiple laws, and guidelines that require explicit consent, and encrypted exchange. Children's data now faces heightened protection under the DPDP regime, which must be harmonised with the IT Act's obligations on harmful, and algorithmically-curated content. Proposed amendments to the IT Act will require labelling synthetic content, and impose provenance duties on platforms distributing AI-generated media.

Connected devices, which silently ingest telemetry, audio, and location trails must now implement layered permissions, real deletion mechanisms, and strict purpose limitation. Engineering teams will need to redesign systems on the principle that legality, and not technical capability, governs what companies may collect.

India's privacy regime is evolving, and leaves major questions open. These are related to AI governance, state access boundaries, regulatory capacity, and the copyright implications of training on protected works. Yet the shift is unmistakable. For an economy where behavioural data has operated as an unpriced asset, and digital infrastructure underpins both growth and governance, the new DPDP framework marks the beginning of a disciplined, purpose-bound data order. It does not settle all the debates, but it sets the first durable boundaries within which India's data economy must mature. The era of data drifting without form is giving way to one defined by structure, intention, and accountability.

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Help local kirana stores with dedicated tech platform: FRAI

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ New Delhi

Small and medium retailers, facing heat from intense competition from e-commerce and quick-commerce platforms, through their association FRAI, have urged the government to create a dedicated technology platform, which will help them to compete with hyper-local delivery platforms on an equal footing.

The Federation of Retailer Association of India (FRAI) has sought creating a Bharat Taxi-like digital system where customer orders are routed to nearby kirana shops, with the order going to the first store that accepts it.

The rapid growth of e-commerce and hyperlocal delivery platforms, such as Blinkit and Zepto, have caused a decline in income and livelihoods for thousands of local grocery and kirana shop owners, the FRAI said.

At least two lakh kirana stores closed last year as consumers shifted to quick commerce platforms, FRAI said, while citing a

market study. Moreover, in cities like Mumbai, a whopping number of 60 per cent offline grocery stores (kirana stores) witnessed a decline in sales volume due to the mushrooming of dark stores of quick commerce platforms, as per a December 2024 study by JP Morgan.

According to FRAI, over the past few years, digital platforms have reshaped consumer behaviour through deep discounts, rapid delivery promises, and aggressive marketing campaigns, leaving small retailers struggling to compete. “As a result, many kirana stores are witnessing dramatic reductions in footfall and sales,” FRAI, which claims to represent 80 lakh micro, small and medium retailers from across the country with a membership of 42 retail associations, said a statement.

The association further said these hyperdelivery platforms, most of which are foreign-funded, engage with the small-retailer ecosystem.

Instead of empowering shop owners to grow their independent businesses, many of these platforms are turning them into



delivery personnel or last-mile service agents, it said.

“Without intervention, the backbone of India’s informal retail economy risks collapsing — along with the livelihoods of millions of small-scale shop owners who have long served as the heart of community commerce,” FRAI said on the occasion of the 9th National

Retailers Day here.

They also recognised the growing demand for faster delivery, greater convenience, and competitive pricing, and affirmed their readiness to embrace digital tools and enhance efficiency.

However, they also emphasised that without proactive government intervention to balance the

competitive landscape, small retailers will continue to struggle against the vast financial and technological advantages of large e-commerce platforms.

Creating a Bharat Taxi-like digital system could also include a customer-rating feature for participating kirana stores, motivating them to maintain high service standards and fostering healthy competition within the local retail ecosystem. Bharat Taxi is India’s new cooperative ride-hailing platform, launched with a zero-commission mode. This is the world’s first national mobility service fully owned and run by drivers, and is designed to provide an alternative to private companies like Ola and Uber. FRAI Spokesperson Abhay Raj Mishra said, “We believe the government must urgently step in to create a fair competitive environment and empower local retailers with the right technology. Platforms like ONDC show immense promise in restoring balance by giving small businesses greater visibility, digital access, and a level-playing field.”

IMF urges China to address economic imbalances as trade surplus hits \$1 trillion

ASSOCIATED PRESS
■ Hong Kong

The head of the International Monetary Fund has urged China to fix its economic imbalances, saying the country of 1.4 billion people is too big to rely on exports for its growth.

China’s global exports have been rising while shipments to the United States have contracted after President Donald Trump hiked taxes on imports from China and many other countries. Earlier this week, Beijing reported its trade surplus for 2025 had already exceeded a record \$1 trillion.

IMF Managing Director Kristalina Georgieva said the heavy reliance on exports risks provoking more moves by its trading partners to curb imports from China.

“China’s) continuing to depend on export-led growth risks furthering global trade tensions,” Georgieva told a press conference on Wednesday. “China is now too big to rely on exports as a source for growth... and (it has) a large domestic market that can be a big aspiration for growth in the years to come.”

At a high-level meeting in October aimed at drawing up plans for the next five years, China’s leaders highlighted the need to boost domestic consumption. The ruling Communist Party has long sought to rebalance the economy away from heavy dependence both on exports and on massive investment in infrastructure.

But the COVID-19 pandemic intervened, along with a prolonged downturn in the real estate market that has slowed activity for that once powerful engine for growth. Meanwhile, Beijing has pushed hard to expand manufacturing in high-tech industries, struggling to rein in excessive capacity in some areas such as automaking.

Morgan Stanley recently predicted that by 2030,

China’s market share in global exports could reach 16.5%, up from about 15% currently, supported by its advanced manufacturing and high-growth segments like robotics, electric vehicles and batteries.

Georgieva was visiting Beijing for an annual economic forum involving the heads of major international organisations. The IMF also was concluding its annual review of China.

Softening domestic consumption and demand in China has contributed to a weakened yuan versus the dollar and other currencies. That has made China’s exports cheaper compared with those of other countries, reinforcing trade imbalances.

The IMF said comprehensive policies are needed to encourage Chinese people to spend more.

While China’s market is huge and still growing at a nearly 5% annual pace, domestic demand has weakened as consumers cut back on spending due to job and income losses during and after the pandemic.

The years-long property downturn also has hit household wealth, crimping shoppers’ appetites for spending and sapping demand for imports, amplifying the trade imbalance.

Helping to offset the decline in exports to the US, China is selling more in other countries in Africa, Latin America, Southeast Asia and Europe. That has led to complaints from China’s trading partners as its imports have failed to keep pace.

Wednesday, the EU Chamber of Commerce in China also warned its substantial trade surplus is raising worries.

The IMF’s remarks followed Chinese Premier Li Qiang’s comments to the international group of financial experts Tuesday that higher tariffs have “dealt a severe blow” to the global economy.

India, US officials discuss trade pact issues

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ New Delhi

India and the US on Wednesday reviewed the ongoing negotiations for a proposed bilateral trade agreement to further strengthen economic ties, according to the commerce ministry.

The two-day talks that began here are aimed at finalising a mutually beneficial trade pact.

On the first day, Commerce Secretary Rajesh Agrawal met US Deputy Trade Representative Rick Switzer.

“The two sides exchanged views on matters related to India-US trade and economic ties, including on the ongoing negotiations for a mutually beneficial Bilateral Trade Agreement,” the Department of Commerce said in a social media post.

The discussions will conclude on December 11.

The talks are important as the Donald Trump administration has imposed a steep 50 per cent tariff on Indian goods entering American markets.



Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri meets US Deputy Trade Representative Rick Switzer, in New Delhi. on Thursday. PTI

Indian industry and exporters are eagerly waiting for the conclusion of the negotiations and announcement of a deal, as the high import duties are hurting their shipments to America.

Though they are exploring other markets to maintain their export profits, the US is a key destination for them as

it accounts for about 18 per cent of the country’s exports.

Initially, the US imposed a 25 per cent duty on Indian goods, citing trade deficit concerns with India, which stood at around USD 46 billion in 2024-25. An additional 25 per cent tariff was imposed later as a penalty on India for buying Russian

crude. India has stated that the resolution of these tariffs would be key to firming up the first phase of the trade deal.

As part of the pact, the US is seeking duty concessions on agricultural products and industrial goods. India has strongly opposed any concessions on the agri and

dairy sectors.

Speaking at the sidelines of the Pravasi Rajasthani Divas in Jaipur, Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal on Wednesday said talks with the US on the proposed bilateral trade agreement are progressing.

“Talks are continuously progressing with them. We are moving forward towards a bilateral trade agreement,” Goyal told reporters.

The US’ chief negotiator for the pact, Assistant US Trade Representative for South and Central Asia, Brendan Lynch, is also part of the US delegation. India’s chief negotiator is the Joint Secretary in the Department of Commerce, Darpan Jain.

This is the US officials’ second trip since the imposition of high tariffs.

The US officials last visited India on September 16.

While noting that the Bilateral Trade Agreement (BTA) will take time, Agrawal has earlier said that India is engaged in protracted negotiations with the US on a framework trade deal that will address the reciprocal tariff challenge faced by

Indian exporters.

India and the US are having two parallel negotiations — one on a framework trade deal to address tariffs and another on a comprehensive trade deal.

In February, leaders of the two countries directed officials to negotiate an agreement. It was planned to conclude the first tranche of the pact by the fall of 2025. So far, six rounds of negotiations have been held. The agreement aims to more than double bilateral trade to USD 500 billion by 2030, from the current USD 191 billion.

The US remained India’s largest trading partner for the fourth consecutive year in 2024-25, with bilateral trade valued at USD 131.84 billion (USD 86.5 billion exports). The US accounts for about 18 per cent of India’s total goods exports, 6.22 per cent of its imports, and 10.73 per cent of its total merchandise trade.

India’s merchandise exports to the US declined for the second consecutive month in October, falling by 8.58 per cent to USD 6.3 billion.

Kotak Securities expects Nifty at 29,000 pts in 2026

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ Mumbai

Domestic brokerage firm Kotak Securities on Wednesday said it expects a 12 per cent jump in Nifty in 2026 on the back of better earnings growth from India Inc.

In the base case, NSE’s 50-share benchmark will reach 29,120 points by end-2025, its Managing Director and Chief Executive Shripal Shah told reporters here. This will be driven more by an acceleration in earnings growth to 17 per cent next year, Shah said, adding that this increase will be a strong affirmation of fundamentals influencing capital markets and ensures that no bubble gets built up.

“We expect stronger earnings growth next year, supported by a solid macro environment, positive policy actions, and rising domestic flows. Even with global geopolitical

and trade tensions, India’s long-term market story remains strong and intact,” Shah said.

He said the level of optimism is very high, and the brokerage expects even foreign portfolio investors to turn positive on India after a challenging 2025.

In a bull case, the Nifty estimate is pegged at 32,032 points while in a bear case, it can go down to 26,208 points, the brokerage said.

Shah said the rally in stocks, which is being seen right now is not broad-based, and it is only the Nifty stocks that are witnessing buying while the scrips in the mid and small cap space are far away from their highs.

A senior official from the brokerage said it expects interest in large caps to be high till the Budget, and added that the small and midcap space will rise March onwards.

Commercial tower in Dubai named after Shah Rukh Khan sold out for over ₹5K cr

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ Dubai

Danube Group has sold a one million sq ft premium commercial tower in Dubai, named after Bollywood star Shah Rukh Khan, for over ₹5,000 crore on strong demand for office space.

Dubai-based Danube Properties is developing a commercial tower ‘SHAHRUKHZ by Danube’ on Sheikh Zayed Road here at a total cost of around ₹3,500 crore. At an event held on late Tuesday at the Dubai Exhibition Centre, Danube group Founder and Chairman Rizwan Sajjan announced that the tower has been completely sold out. The event, which was attended by Shah Rukh Khan, saw participation of around 7,000 people, including real estate brokers. The company has achieved sales bookings of AED 2.1 billion (over ₹5,000 crore) from the tower, much higher than initial estimates.

“To see a project of this scale in Dubai carry my name is both an honour and a reminder of how generosity and vision can come together. Dubai has always embraced me

with warmth — it’s a city built on courage, imagination, and the belief that nothing is impossible,” Khan said.

Last month in Mumbai, Danube Group in presence of the Bollywood actor had launched the 55-storey commercial tower for sale. The company will complete this tower by 2029.

When asked about the total project cost, Sajjan on Monday had told PTI that it would be around Rs 3,500 crore including land, and construction among other expenses.

He said the investment would be met through internal accruals and advances from customers against sales.

“The commercial project is set to become one of the most prestigious business landmarks in Dubai,” said Rizwan Sajjan, who is an Indian, born in Mumbai. Considering the success of this project, Both Rizwan Sajjan and Shah Rukh Khan hinted that there could be more towers named after him.

Adel Sajjan, Managing Director of the Danube Group, said this celebrity tower has been conceptualised and designed after studying more



than 100 prime commercial projects across the world.

Out of one million sq ft area in this upcoming tower, more than 9 lakh sq ft would be office spaces.

Adel noted that there is a scarcity of Grade A office space in Dubai while the demand is strong from multi-national companies that want to set up base here.

The MD strongly feels that the demand for both residential and commercial space in the Dubai market would remain strong in the coming years. Danube Properties, a subsidiary of the Danube Group, is one of the leading private real estate developers in Dubai.

Founded in 1993, Danube group entered the real estate development business in 2014. It is also into building materials.

The company has so far launched 40 real estate projects, of which 18 are already delivered and the rest are at different stages of construction. Adel Sajjan said the company is expecting to achieve sales of properties worth ₹22,000 crore this calendar year, and out of that 25 per cent will be from customers of Indian nationality.

US bankruptcy court reverses USD 1 bn damages against Byju Raveendran

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ New Delhi

A US bankruptcy court has reversed a USD 1 billion damages ruling against Byju Raveendran, according to a statement from the founders of Think and Learn Pvt Ltd - the parent firm of ed-tech platform Byju’s. The Delaware Court had, in a default ruling last month, ordered Raveendran to pay more than USD 1 billion, saying the former corporate star who set up the eponymous Indian edtech and tutoring company, had refused to cooperate with legal efforts to locate almost half the proceeds from a USD 1.2 billion US term loan made in 2021.

He, however, contested the grounds, saying the court did not give him the 30 days he had sought to arrange for a US attorney to argue his case. He vowed to appeal against the order.

“The Delaware Court has reversed the

USD 1 billion Judgement against Byju Raveendran, in view of fresh submissions made by Byju Raveendran through a motion to correct the Judgement of 20 November 2025. The Court agreed that damages had not been determined and ordered a new phase to commence in early January 2026 to determine any damages related to claims against Byju Raveendran,” the statement said. The court in the December 8 order said it will “amend its Default Judgment Opinion to remove those sections assessing damages against Byju Raveendran.” It directed parties to provide their respective positions on the issue on January 7. “An appropriate judgment order will be entered by the court following the completion of briefing on damages,” it said.

Earlier this year, Byju’s creditors, including GLAS Trust, sued and accused Raveendran, along with his co-founder wife Divya Gokulnath and another

accomplice Anita Kishore of “masterminding the theft” of USD 533 million in loan proceeds.

The founders had previously called the allegations “completely baseless and untrue” and that the entire loan proceeds were ploughed back into Think and Learn Pvt Ltd (TLPL), which used it to pay for the USD 3 billion acquisitions it did that year.

“GLAS Trust and the lenders withheld or misrepresented information, misleading courts and the public, and contributing to the collapse of the business, the loss of roughly 85,000 jobs, impacting 250 million students, and the destruction of tens of billions in enterprise value,” the statement on Wednesday said. Raveendran is considering further action against GLAS Trust and others for that conduct, it said without elaborating. He had previously said he would sue GLAS Trust for USD 2.5 billion. His litigation advisor Michael McNutt said, “Byju

Raveendran today has not been found liable to pay a single dollar in damages to the Plaintiffs (GLAS Trust Co LLC).”

“During the damages proceedings starting January 2026, we intend to demonstrate to the Court that not only have the Plaintiffs suffered no damage whatsoever due to actions of Byju Raveendran, but also that the Plaintiffs have intentionally misled the Court in this proceeding and other adversary proceedings. “We also intend to demonstrate that these Plaintiffs have sought to mislead Courts in India and elsewhere to gain advantage in those Court proceedings by harassing and damaging Byju Raveendran, Divya Gokulnath, and Rijju Ravindran,” he said.

Stating that the defendants reserve the right to seek sanctions against GLAS Trust’s counsel for their conduct in these proceedings, he said, “We will seek the necessary remedy in the Delaware Courts and through the USD 2.5 billion

lawsuit that we intend to file prior to the end of the year.”

The statement said Raveendran will submit “clinching evidence” before the US Courts, proving that GLAS Trust and the Resolution Professional (now managing Byju’s) repeatedly misled the Delaware Court, Indian and other Courts, and the public by falsely alleging that USD 533 million (Alpha Funds) was diverted by the founders for their personal benefit.

“GLAS Trust’s sworn statements that it ‘does not know’ where the money went are simply false. A review of information in the possession of GLAS Trust since at least April 2025 clearly demonstrates that the monies lent to Alpha (and sent by OCI to companies owned by Byju Raveendran) were indeed invested in Think & Learn in compliance with all relevant Indian laws and not ‘siphoned off’ to the founders,” it said. The evidence obtained by GLAS Trust’s

own lawyers in other adversarial proceedings and later obtained by Raveendran and his counsel clearly demonstrates that GLAS Trust and Shailendra Ajmera — the Resolution Professional of TLPL — had full visibility into the use of the funds from the Alpha Loan guaranteed by TLPL, it said.

“In addition, the financial records of TLPL available publicly verify that Byju Raveendran and entities controlled by him invested in excess of USD 475 million by purchasing shares in TLPL in the same period,” it said.

“This evidence will be submitted as part of a full appeal against the entire amended judgment of the Delaware Bankruptcy Court of December 8, 2025, and as part of the claim to be filed against relevant parties previously announced with a value of over USD 2.5 billion. Byju Raveendran will also share the same evidence with the Indian Courts in the coming weeks.”

FROM THE WORLD

USA

One dead in varsity shooting

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

CANADA

Envoy to US to resign

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

Ukraine can hold elections soon if security is ensured: Zelenskyy

ASSOCIATED PRESS

Kyiv

Ukrainian officials were expected to hand their latest peace proposals to United States negotiators on Wednesday, according to President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, who also said Ukraine would be ready for elections within three months if partners can guarantee a safe vote during wartime and if its electoral law can be altered. Zelenskyy was responding to comments by US President Donald Trump in which he questioned Ukraine’s democracy and suggested the Ukrainian leader was using the war as an excuse not to hold an election.

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

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



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

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

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

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

dent that he is willing to make some compromises.

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

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

Renewed Thailand-Cambodia border clash displaces thousands of people

ASSOCIATED PRESS

Surin

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

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

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



though it did not update those figures on Wednesday.

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

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

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

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

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

ASSOCIATED PRESS

Miami

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

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

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



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

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

from the two major national political parties and their leaders.

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

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

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

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

Higgins, who speaks Spanish, represented a district that leans conservative and includes the Cuban neighborhood of Little Havana. When she first entered politics in 2018, she chose to present herself to voters as “La Gringa,” a term Spanish speakers use for white Americans, because many people did not know how to pronounce her name.

“It just helps people understand who I am, and you know what? I am a gringa. So, what am I going to do, deny it?” she told.

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

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

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

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

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

Sudanese military plane crashes, killing all crew members

ASSOCIATED PRESS

Cairo

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

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

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

Among the dead was military pilot Omran Mirghani, according to his uncle, prominent Sudanese journalist Osman Mirghani, who mourned his nephew’s death on social media.

The military didn’t comment on the crash. Plane crashes are not uncommon in Sudan, which has a poor aviation safety record. In February, at least 46 people were killed when a military aircraft crashed in Omdurman, the sister city of the capital, Khartoum. The military lost el-Fasher, its last stronghold in the sprawling region of Darfur, in October, and earlier this week was forced to pull out from the country’s largest oil processing facility in the central region of Kordofan.

The war in Sudan began in April 2023 over a power struggle between the military and the RSF. The conflict has killed over 40,000 people—a figure rights groups consider a significant undercount.

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

19 killed in Morocco building collapse

ASSOCIATED PRESS

Fes

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

Sixteen people were injured in the collapse and sent for treatment at a nearby hospital. Authorities said the neighbourhood had been evacuated and search and rescue efforts were ongoing.

It was unclear what caused the collapse or how many people were unaccounted for on Wednesday morning. Fes is Morocco’s second-largest city and one of the hosts of this month’s Africa Cup of Nations and the 2030 FIFA World Cup. It is best known for its walled



city packed with medieval souks and tanneries. But beyond tourism, it’s also one of the country’s poorest urban centres, where aging infrastructure is common in many neighbourhoods.

Another collapse in May killed 10 people and injured seven in a building that had already been slated for evacuation, according to Moroccan outlet Le360. Building codes are often not

enforced in Morocco, especially in ancient cities where aging multifamily homes are common.

Gaps in basic services were a focal point of protests that swept the country earlier this year, with demonstrators criticizing the Government for investing in new stadiums instead of addressing inequality in health care, education and other public services.

Bolivia to restore diplomatic relations with Israel

ASSOCIATED PRESS

La Paz Bolivia

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

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

Bolivia said the effort came as part of a new foreign policy strategy under conservative President Rodrigo Paz aimed at “rebuilding Bolivia’s inter-



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

national prestige, opening new economic opportunities and strengthening alliances that directly benefit the country and our citizens abroad.”

Bolivian Foreign Minister Fernando Aramayo is in the midst of a whirlwind trip to Washington for meetings with American officials as his Government works to warm long-chilly relations with the United States and unravel nearly two decades of hard-line, anti-Western policies

under the Movement Toward Socialism, or MAS, party that left Bolivia economically isolated and diplomatically allied with China, Russia and Venezuela.

Paz’s Government eased visa restrictions on American and Israeli travellers last month.

In announcing his expected meeting with Aramayo on Monday, Israeli Foreign Minister Gideon Sa’ar thanked Bolivia for scrapping Israeli visa controls and said

he spoke to Paz after the centre-right senator’s October 19 election victory to express “Israel’s desire to open a new chapter” in relations with Bolivia.

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

Not long after taking power, Morales sent Israel’s ambassador packing and cozied up to Iran over their shared enmity toward the US and Israel. When protests over Morales’ disputed 2019 reelection prompted him to resign under pressure from the military, a right-wing interim Government took over and restored full diplomatic relations with the US and Israel as it sought to undo many of Morales’ popular policies.



Nepal charges 55 in airport corruption scandal

ASSOCIATED PRESS

Kathmandu

Former Nepali ministers, officials and a Chinese company were charged with corruption over financial irregularities during the construction of an international airport. The Commission for Investigation of Abuse of Authority filed on Sunday cases against 55 people and the China CAMC Engineering Company Limited, one of the biggest such cases in the Himalayan nation, accusing them of inflating construction expenses by more than \$74 million. Two officials of the Chinese company have been named in the charges filed at the Special Court. The bidding agreed on with the Government in 2012 was set at \$169.6 million, but Nepali officials increased the amount to a little over \$244 million “in collusion with the Chinese company,” the commission said.



UN chief urges Houthis to release detained staff

ASSOCIATED PRESS

United Nations

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

Bangladesh insists on Hasina extradition

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ Dhaka

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

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

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

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

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

Touhid had earlier said



Foreign Adviser Touhid Hossain

FILE PHOTO

Bangladesh was not ruling out a response from India.

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

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

extradition. India said it is examining a request by Bangladesh's interim Government to extradite Hasina, asserting that New Delhi is committed to ensuring the best interests of the people of that country.

Hasina has said the judgment has been made by a "rigged tribunal established and presided over by an unelected Government with no democratic mandate".

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

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

2 ADVISERS OF INTERIM GOVERNMENT RESIGN

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

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

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

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

Of the three SAD leaders appointed as advisers by Yunus, Nahid Islam quit in February to form the National Citizen Party (NCP), a political offshoot of the students' organisation.

Bhuiyan earlier said he would resign to take part in upcoming elections, but Alam so far has made no comment in public about his future plans. However, neither of them have officially disclosed any link with NCP or any other political party.

The EC on Tuesday said Chief Election Commissioner AMM Nasir Uddin would announce the schedule for the upcoming polls in the next two days. The EC had earlier clarified that no adviser can contest the polls while holding a position in the interim government.

Bangladesh's top electoral officials on Wednesday met President Mohammed Shahabuddin, who assured "optimum support and cooperation" to the Election Commission to conduct the February general elections in a "free, fair and meaningful" manner.

European nations set to discuss tightening of migration rules



ASSOCIATED PRESS ■ Brussels

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

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

Critics of army go on silent strike in Myanmar



ASSOCIATED PRESS
■ Bangkok

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Machado's daughter accepts Nobel Peace Prize

ASSOCIATED PRESS
■ Oslo

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

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

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



he said to applause.

The director of the Norwegian Nobel Institute and Machado's spokesperson said earlier Wednesday that she wouldn't be able to attend the ceremony. Her daughter Ana Corina Sosa did instead. Maria Corina Machado said in an audio recording of a phone call published on the Nobel website that many people had "risked their lives" for her

to arrive in Oslo.

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

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

Machado added.

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

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

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

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

ASHOKE RAJ ■ New Delhi

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

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

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

"If you have received an email advising that your visa

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

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

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

Immigration attorney Steven Brown from a promi-

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

New Social Media Rules Now Mandatory

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

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

under the same framework.

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

Part of Wider Crackdown on Skilled Worker Immigration

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

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

though critics have labelled it a deterrent to global talent.

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

Impact on Indian Professionals

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

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

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

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

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



North Korea's ruling elite prepares for party meeting

ASSOCIATED PRESS ■ Seoul

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



Lavrov lauds India for pursuing independent foreign policy

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Moscow

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

PROSPECT

Parliamentary panel urges faster green clearances for coal mining projects

A parliamentary panel on Wednesday said that efforts should be intensified to reduce the average time taken for seeking green clearances for coal mining projects in both public and private sectors. The panel also sought the reasons for the differences in the average time required to obtain environment clearance (EC) and forest clearance (FC) for the projects.

The Standing Committee on coal, mines and steel chaired by Anurag Singh Thakur said that the average time taken for EC for Central Public Sector Undertakings (CPSUs) is roughly 15 to 18 months and the same for commercial coal blocks of private sector is around 26 months, whereas, the average time taken for FC approvals ranges from 24-30 months for CPSUs and up to 34 months for commercial coal blocks of private sector. "The Committee therefore may be apprised of the reasons for this difference in average time taken and are of the view that efforts may be made to reduce the average time taken for environment and forest clearances for public and private sectors," it said.

NGT conducts Regional Environment Conference in Chennai



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

The Regional Conference on Environment – 2025, organised by the National Green Tribunal, Southern Zone Bench, Chennai, in collaboration with the Southern State Pollution Control Boards and Committees at Kalaivanar Arangam, Chennai. The event was conducted under the leadership of Justice Prakash Shrivastava, Chairperson, NGT, with the guidance of Justice Pushpa Sathyanarayana, Judicial Member, NGT, Southern Zone Bench. The Conference was formally inaugurated by Justice

MM Sundresh, Judge, Supreme Court of India. The inaugural session commenced with Justice Pushpa Sathyanarayana extending a warm welcome to the dignitaries and participants. In his address, Justice Prakash Shrivastava emphasised that environmental protection is not merely a constitutional mandate under Articles 21, 48(A) and 51(A)(g), but also a shared moral responsibility. He highlighted that the NGT's initiatives extend beyond adjudication to creating awareness and guiding institutions toward sustainable environmental practices.

ED seizes 13 bank accounts of Reliance Infra

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

The Enforcement Directorate on Wednesday said it has seized more than a dozen bank accounts, holding about ₹55 crore worth deposits, of Anil Ambani Group company Reliance Infrastructure as part of a hawala-linked FEMA investigation. The ED in a Statement that Reliance Infrastructure Ltd (R-Infra), through its special purpose vehicles (SPVs), siphoned public funds from highway construction projects awarded by the National Highways Authority of India (NHAI) and sent them to the UAE illegally.

The investigation pertains to a 2010 tender that was awarded to the company as an EPC (engineering, procurement and construction) contract to build the JR Toll Road (Jaipur-Reengus highway). The agency said

13 bank accounts having a balance of ₹54.82 crore of R-Infra have been seized for "contravention" of the Foreign Exchange Management Act (FEMA). R-Infra said in a regulatory filing on Wednesday that it has received an order from the ED "whereby it has placed lien in the Company's bank accounts for ₹77.86 crore in relation to alleged violations under FEMA".

The ED had summoned Anil Ambani (66) for questioning in this case last month but he did not depose saying he could only make a "virtual appearance". It was not clear if the agency called him again.

A Statement issued by Ambani's spokesperson last month said this was "a purely domestic contract with no foreign exchange component involved whatsoever". "The JR Toll Road has been fully completed and, from 2021 onwards,



has been with the NHAI," the Statement had said.

Describing the alleged fraud, the ED said funds were diverted under the guise of sham sub-contracting arrangements to shell companies in Mumbai and these entities were set

up in a coordinated manner using dummy directors at specific bank branches in Mumbai.

These funds, according to the agency, were "layered" through a network of other shell entities and remitted to the UAE in the guise of

import of polished and unpolished diamonds without receipt of any equivalent goods or documentation.

The UAE entities to which funds were remitted had bank accounts in both the UAE and in Hong Kong.

These entities were found to be controlled by individuals engaged in international hawala transactions, it said. "The shell entities through which these funds were siphoned are found to be involved in international hawala transactions worth more than ₹600 crore," the ED said.

This diversion of the project funds led to "severe" financial stress in the affected SPVs, resulting in bank loans turning into non-performing assets (NPAs), thereby causing losses to lenders and jeopardising public financial interests, it said.

The November Statement from the businessman's spokesperson said Ambani served the company (R-Infra) for about 15 years, from April 2007 to March 2022, only as a non-executive director and was never involved in its day-to-day management.

Realme launches Watch 5 with independent GPS at ₹4,499

ABHINAV KUMAR JHA
■ New Delhi

Realme has launched the Watch 5 in India at a starting price of ₹4,499, positioning it as a budget smartwatch with features that are usually seen in costlier adventure and sports watches. The device is available on sale from December 10, with an introductory price of ₹3,999. The company is pairing the launch with a broader push into India-led manufacturing of its IoT products, signalling the start of a major shift in its operations.

A senior Realme executive said the company plans to manufacture its entire range of IoT devices, including smartwatches, earbuds and accessories, in India by 2027. The brand has tied up with Optimus Electronics Limited for local production and aims to turn India into a key export hub for markets in South Asia, the Middle East, Russia and the European Union.

Realme expects the expansion to generate more



than 2,000 direct jobs and bring down overall production costs. The Watch 5 is central to this strategy. Realme is pitching it as a capable outdoor and fitness-focused wearable rather than just another notification device.

The watch features a 1.97-inch AMOLED display, inde-

pendent multi-system GNSS positioning and an IP68 rating, placing it ahead of most devices in its price segment. The larger screen supports a 60 Hz refresh rate, offering smoother interaction and better visibility outdoors.

Independent GPS tracking is one of the watch's

headline features. Most budget smartwatches rely on smartphones for location data, but the Watch 5 connects directly to multiple satellite systems. According to Realme, the technology improves route accuracy for activities such as running, cycling and walking. The feature is aimed at users

who prefer to leave their phones behind during workouts.

Battery life is another area where Realme is betting big. The company claims up to 16 days of typical use. Even with GNSS tracking enabled, the watch is designed to minimise energy drain during long outdoor sessions. Realme is targeting travellers and fitness enthusiasts who prefer fewer charging cycles.

On the health front, the Watch 5 includes continuous heart-rate monitoring, SpO2 measurement, sleep mapping and stress tracking. It also introduces a "body energy" score that merges activity, rest and stress indicators into a single daily metric. The companion app has been overhauled to present data in a simpler and more structured manner.

The watch supports 108 sports modes. Running, walking and cycling benefit the most from the onboard GPS, while gym-based modes use motion detection for rep counting.

Realme says it has improved accuracy over previous models but acknowledges that complex movements may still challenge the sensors.

The company has also emphasised design. The Watch 5 features a refined aluminium-alloy crown, a sturdier body and a new 3D wave strap that improves grip and reduces sweat accumulation. More than 300 watch faces are available at launch.

Realme's broader IoT roadmap ties directly into this product cycle. The company said India will play a central role in designing, testing and producing its next generation of IoT devices. The goal, the executive added, is to become one of the top IoT brands in the country within the next two to three years.

With the Watch 5, Realme is aiming to redefine expectations in the sub-₹5,000 smartwatch category while simultaneously building a long-term manufacturing base in India that will support its global ambitions.

Assam Chief Minister Sarma lauds martyrs as Swahid Smarak Kshetra opens

TONY DAS
■ Guwahati

Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Wednesday inaugurated the magnificent Swahid Smarak Kshetra at Paschim Boraogon on the solemn observance of Swahid Divas. The ceremony was filled with reverence, set to the melody of Dr Bhupen Hazarika's timeless creation, 'Swahid Pranamu Tumak'.

Speaking on the occasion, CM Sarma paid glowing tributes to the martyrs of the historic Assam Movement, which focused on the expulsion of foreigners. He asserted that the movement holds a decisive place in the State's history, reflecting the patriotism, sacrifice and major struggle to protect the identity, pride, language, culture and heritage of the Assamese people. The Chief Minister stressed that each martyr remains revered and their lives serve as a perpetual inspiration. Sarma vividly recalled the background of the first martyr, Khargeswar Talukdar.

He explained that the

movement was spurred when, on 2 December 1979, the Chief Election Commissioner decided to proceed with elections against the will of the people, who demanded the removal of foreign nationals' names from electoral rolls.

Ignoring this appeal, the Congress candidate for the Barpeta constituency, Begum Abida Ahmed, left Guwahati to file her nomination on the morning of 10 December.

Sarma recalled how, as a fifth-grade student, he joined the widespread protest to resist her journey. Police apprehended Khargeswar Talukdar, a first-year arts student of Howly College and tragically threw him into a roadside canal, leading to his death later that night. Inspired by his courage, 860 brave Assamese youths eventually gave their lives in the struggle.

The Chief Minister noted that on this sacred day, the grateful people of Assam remember the martyrs' sacrifice with deep respect. He confirmed that construction



Assam CM Himanta Biswa Sarma inaugurated the Swahid Smarak Kshetra at Paschim Boraogon, Guwahati, offered shradhanjali to the Bir Swahids of the Assam Movement at Swahid Pranam Jyoti and interacted with the families of the martyrs. Union Minister Sarbananda Sonowal, Assam Ministers Atul Bora, Chandra Mohan Patowary, Keshab Mahanta also participated the function on wednesday

of the Swahid Smarak Kshetra began in Guwahati on 10 December 2019, a memorial now built on 150 bighas of land at a cost of ₹170 crore.

He Stated that this year's observance carries special significance. He observed that long after the Accord, the people lacked security and fresh threats to their land

and identity emerged due to the lack of courage in implementing the provisions of the Assam Accord.

He lamented that strangers illegally entered Assam, encroaching upon the land of sacred namghars and satras, including the birthplace of Srimanta Sankardev at Bardowa. These elements also infiltrated

Kaziranga, where rhinos were killed and attacked the cultural heritage and economic independence of the Assamese people, creating widespread despair.

Sarma Stated that during that difficult period, the people of Assam drew strength from the martyrs' sacrifices and prepared to fight back. He observed that

in the elections of 2014, 2019 and 2021, the populace collectively resolved not to hand Assam's political future to anyone other than the Assamese, preparing for a fight on political, cultural and economic fronts. He asserted that ten years of steady effort and continued struggle have strengthened the Assamese people, who

are now ready to challenge any threat to the State.

He highlighted key Government achievements: rhino poaching in Kaziranga has stopped, encroachers have been removed from forest land and the Government is actively pushing back illegal intruders. He affirmed that Assam is now safer than ever before but cautioned that the struggle continues due to the persistent threat of demographic aggression. He appealed to the people not to sell land to outsiders, even during financial hardship and requested they refrain from engaging outsiders in trade, industry, farming, or employing them as drivers, or allowing them to run businesses on footpaths.

The Chief Minister informed that over the past five years, the State freed lakhs of bighas of land from encroachers and created a system preventing outsiders from securing Government jobs. He revealed that the Government is considering a law to bar land purchases in minority areas unless the buyer belongs to a family

that has lived in Assam for three generations, urging the protection of namghars, satras and forest land.

Recalling the days of the Assam Movement, he urged the people to join a new struggle—one that is political, cultural and economic. He concluded by calling on every Assamese to visit the Swahid Smarak Kshetra at Boraogon and take the pledge to protect the community and safeguard the State and the nation.

Union Minister of Ports, Shipping and Waterways Sarbananda Sonowal, Minister Implementation of Assam Accord etc Atul Bora, Minister Water Resources etc Pijush Hazarika, Minister Environment and Forests Chandramohan Patowary, Minister Revenue etc Keshab Mahanta, MP Bijuli Kalita Medhi, Deputy Speaker of the Assam Legislative Assembly Dr. Numal Momin, Chief Secretary Dr. Ravi Kota, Director General of Police Harmeet Singh, several legislators, members of the martyr families and many distinguished guests were present on the occasion.

Assam delivers nation's fastest limestone project launch

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Guwahati

Under the leadership of Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma, Assam achieved a remarkable feat on Wednesday, demonstrating exceptional speed in industrial project commencement.

The North Boro Hundong Limestone Block at Humdong, Umrangsoo, auctioned to M/S Dalmia Bharat Ltd, became fully operational in just nine months. This rapid commissioning made it the nation's fastest LOI-to-operation project.

Minister Kaushik Rai performed a puja at the site and



flagged off the first truck of limestone, officially marking the start of work.

The occasion was graced by several dignitaries, reflect-

ing the collective commitment behind this achievement, including Debolal Gorlosa, CEM of Dima Hasao Autonomous Council; Ajay

Tewari, Additional Chief Secretary; Paragmani Mahanta, DGM; and Pranjit Warry, Additional Secretary (Mines).

Sebi relaxes NRI re-KYC; drops physical presence

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ New Delhi

Markets regulator Sebi on Wednesday eased the re-KYC process for Non-Resident Indians (NRIs) by removing the requirement for them to be physically present in India during digital verification.

The relaxation is aimed at making the re-KYC process smoother and more accessible for NRIs. In its circular, Sebi has decided to modify the existing provisions to ease re-KYC access for NRIs after receiving references

from multiple stakeholders. Under this, the requirement of physical location of the client being in India during digital onboarding has been relaxed for undertaking re-KYC for existing clients, the regulator said.

Re-KYC (Re-Know Your Customer) is the process of updating or revalidating a customer's KYC details with a financial institution or intermediary. The digital KYC app will still need to use tools like random prompts, time-stamping and geo-tagging to ensure the interaction is genuine.

Chhatrapati Sambhajinagar Municipal Corporation (Electrical) Section.		
Contact No.0240-2333536-40	Office Address:- Chhatrapati Sambhajinagar Municipal Corporation. (Electrical) Section. Town Hall, Aurangabad.431001 Email:- ee1ight@aurangabadmahapalika.org	
Name of work		Bid Submission End Date
Shifting of MSEDCL DTL, Pole, HT/LT line due to road widening and obstruction to traffic at newly developing roads in Chhatrapati Sambhajinagar (Tender Amount 23,70,51,21,71/-) by the e-tendering, detailed information / (NIT) documents are available on the website https://www.mahatenders.gov.in		Date:20.12.2025 Time 5.00 PM
Executive Engineer (Electrical) Chhatrapati Sambhajinagar Municipal corporation.		
Advt. : 624/2025 Date : 10/12/2025		

BRIEFLY

SERGIO RAMOS BIDS
FAREWELL TO MONTERREY



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

COMMONWEALTH KHO KHO TO
BE HELD NEXT YEAR IN INDIA



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

India win bronze in FIH Men's Junior World Cup

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ Chennai

India produced a brave-heart performance, nullifying a two-goal deficit to beat Argentina 4-2 and clinch the bronze medal in the FIH Men's Junior World Cup on Wednesday. India, who won the title in 2016 in Lucknow, failed to finish on the podium on the last two occasions, ending fourth in 2021 in Bhubaneswar, and two years later in Kuala Lumpur. India produced a valiant fightback with Ankit Pal (49th minute), Manmeet Singh (52nd) and Anmol Ekka (58th) converting penalty corners, while Sharda Nand Tiwari finding the net from the spot in the 57th minute.

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

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



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

PTI

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

The Indians were guilty of giving away the ball too easily, which put paid to their chances in the first 15 minutes. India had their best shot at the goal in the 20th minute but

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

India beat Uruguay in FIH Junior Women's World Cup

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ Santiago (Chile)

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

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

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

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



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

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

With two seconds left on

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

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

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

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

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ New Delhi

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Liverpool 1-0 win over Inter Milan in Champions League

ASSOCIATED PRESS
■ London

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

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

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

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



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

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

Bayern's new star shines

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Koundé scores 2, Yamal sets record

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

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

ASSOCIATED PRESS
■ Barcelona (Spain)

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

Real Madrid beat Wolfsburg in champions league

ASSOCIATED PRESS
■ London

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

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

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



talents with the second goal against Wolfsburg.

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

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

stoppage time.

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

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

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

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

SIL to be held from February 16-26

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ New Delhi

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

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

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



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

"With mixed-team formats, compelling story-

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

The competition will feature mixed team events in multiple categories —

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

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

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

India to push ahead against SA in second T20I

BHARAT SHARMA
■ Mullanpur (New Chandigarh)

Yet to stamp his authority in the shortest format, Shubman Gill would be eying major gains on home soil when a well-rounded India look to extend their dominance over South Africa in the second T20 International on Thursday.

With only a travel day separating the first two games of the five-match series, Gill won't mind getting straight into the middle in search of a substantial knock.

India steamrolled South Africa in the series opener but the middling returns from Gill, since his T20 comeback in Asia Cup back in September, remains a talking point.

Following an impressive debut as Test captain in the UK, Gill was brought back into the T20 setup.

Even though Sanju Samson and his Punjab teammate Abhishek Sharma were doing the job at the top of the order, the team management showed immense faith in Gill's abilities as a T20 opener. The batter from Kerala was displaced and he has since then struggled to find a place in the playing eleven.

The Test and ODI captain can seamlessly perform the role that Virat Kohli performed for India till the T20 World Cup last year but the team, with batting options



Staff prepares the ground ahead of the second T20 International cricket match of a series between India and South Africa, at Maharaja Yadavindra Singh International Cricket Stadium in New Chandigarh

till number eight, has doubled down on its fearless approach since the triumph in Barbados, leaving little room for an anchor.

Gill certainly can't go hammer and tongs like Abhishek Sharma in the powerplay and therefore needs to figure out what works best for him. Besides Gill, captain Suryakumar Yadav, who has failed to find consistency over the past 12 months, is also facing additional scrutiny.

Couple of months down the line, Suryakumar would be leading India's World Cup defence at home and considering the added responsibility, flow of runs from his bat form a crucial piece of the puzzle heading into the ICC showpiece.

In the colder environment of New Chandigarh, India are unlikely to tinker with the winning combination. Returning to national duty from injury, Hardik Pandya reaffirmed his status as the

leading all-rounder in the game. His 28-ball 59 made a massive difference on a sticky wicket while it took him one ball to make an impact with the ball.

The selection on Tuesday also indicated that two strike bowlers, Arshdeep Singh and Kuldeep Yadav, will not be part of the same eleven due to the need for batting till number eight.

Arshdeep got the nod on this occasion and India's leading wicket-taker in the

format was once again able to provide the early wickets bowling alongside Jasprit Bumrah.

South Africa, on the other hand, would be looking for a drastically better outing with the bat after being bundled out for 74 in the run chase of 176. There is no time to reflect on the scale of the defeat and that can only be a good thing for the visitors.

"Nowadays in T20 cricket, there's not much time to look around and absorb. But

the biggest factor was obviously not being able to build partnerships, settling after losing wickets and getting some momentum on our side. So yeah, we'll have brief conversations," said skipper Aiden Markram.

The venue would be hosting its first ever T20 International after hosting two women's ODIs back in September.

During the last IPL, the pitches produced were not the easiest to bat on with scores ranging from excess of 200 to as low as 101.

On the sidelines of the fixture, stands named after Yuvraj Singh and Harmanpreet Kaur would also be unveiled.

Teams:

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

South Africa: Aiden Markram (captain), Quinton de Kock (wk), Tristan Stubbs, Dewald Brevis, David Miller, Donovan Ferreira, Marco Jansen, Keshav Maharaj, Lutho Sipamla, Anrich Nortje, Lungi Ngidi, George Linde, Kwen Maphaka, Reeza Hendricks, Corbin Bosch, Tony de Zorzi, Ottneil Bartman.

SA batters criticised after historic collapse



TAPAN MOHANTA
■ Cuttack

At a loss to explain South Africa's capitulation in the series-opener, their batting coach Ashwell Prince said the visitors simply failed to answer the questions posed by India's "formidable" bowlers while being dismissed for their lowest T20I total of 74. Chasing 176, South Africa folded in 12.3 overs in a 101-run defeat in the opening match of the five-match series that marked the beginning of the two sides' build-up towards the global showpiece in India and Sri Lanka from February 7. "Obviously after a batting performance as such, that is one department that we will have to improve on quickly," Prince said at the post-match media interaction at the Barabati Stadium, on Tuesday.

"I thought the Indian bowlers, quite a formidable bowling attack, asked a lot of good questions. Ultimately, as a batting unit, we're not able to answer the questions. Tonight we weren't up to the task."

The two-paced wicket with the odd one rearing up also troubled the South African batters as Indian bowlers exploited the conditions beautifully.

Prince said the bounce should not be an excuse as they are used to playing on lively wickets back home.

"I think any score that you keep to under 180 in T20 cricket is a chaseable score absolutely. There was a bit of bounce, it seemed like, but being South Africans, we should be accustomed to bounce. "As I said, the Indian bowlers asked a lot of good questions. Ultimately, we weren't able to answer," he said blaming the batting unit. The decision to bowl first after winning the toss seemed to have backfired but Prince said they did well to keep India's total in

check.

"I thought the pitch was good. Not every pitch that you bat on is supposed to be a 220 pitch," he said.

India also had their share of struggles and kept losing wickets before Pandya's late heroics lifted them to 175/6. "They had to work hard for the first part of the innings. Then, obviously Hardik came in and played a brilliant knock to give them a competitive score."

"I don't think in any cricket match you can decide at the halfway stage if you have a winning score. But what you can do is put up a competitive score and obviously it turned out to be enough."

All praise for Pandya's comeback fifty, Prince said the all-rounder is a calm six-hitter and his clarity in execution stood out once again.

"Hardik obviously played an outstanding innings. I think we have to give him a lot of credit. He has come back from an injury."

"He has come back looking sharp. He picked the right moments to attack with a spin on initially. There wasn't a lot of spin on offer so he got a couple of early sixes away," Prince acknowledged. "Against the seamers towards the end, he put the pressure on to them. He struck the ball as cleanly as ever so a lot of credit has to go to him."

Clarity in shot-execution was the key to Hardik's success, felt Prince.

"He is a six-hitter but he is also calm. I think identifying the right balls to attack comes with a lot of experience. As soon as the ball was in areas that he is very strong at, he put a good swing on it, no half measures. "I think most of the time when Hardik hits it, he is not tentative. There is clarity in his thinking and there is clarity in his execution. It was an outstanding innings."

Kohli rises to No 2 in ICC ODI rankings



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ Dubai

India great Virat Kohli's push to regain the top ODI batter spot received a boost as he moved up to the second place in the latest ICC rankings released on Wednesday.

Kohli hasn't held the No.1 position for ODI batters since he was displaced by Pakistan's Babar Azam in April 2021.

But the right-hander is closing in on the top spot following his superb recent efforts for India in the three-match ODI series against South Africa.

The 37-year-old was adjudged Player of the Series for his 302 runs across the three matches and he was duly rewarded on the latest set of rankings as he improved two places to second overall behind teammate Rohit Sharma.

Rohit amassed 146 runs across the series to hold on to his spot at the top of the rankings, with Kohli closing to within eight rating points on the back of his unbeaten innings of 65 not out in the series finale in

Visakhapatnam.

It helped India clinch the three-match series 2-1.

India ODI skipper Shubman Gill retained his fifth spot despite missing the three-match series while stand-in skipper KL Rahul rose two places to 12th overall after making two fifties in the rubber.

Left-arm spinner Kuldeep Yadav moved up three spots to third in the bowlers' chart. South Africa trio of Quinton de Kock (up three rungs to 13th), Aiden Markram (up four places to 25th) and Temba Bavuma (up three spots to 37th) also made gains on the rankings for ODI batters.

In the T20I rankings, the trio of Axar Patel (up two spots to 13th), Arshdeep Singh (up three places to 20th) and Jasprit Bumrah (up six rungs to 25th) made gains, following their comprehensive 101-run victory in Cuttack.

All of them had a good outing in the first T20I, taking two wickets apiece as India bowled out the Proteas for 74, their lowest-ever total in the shortest format.

Healthy competition brings out A-game: Jitesh

TAPAN MOHANTA
■ Cuttack

Jitesh Sharma, who has emerged as India's preferred wicketkeeper-batter in T20 format with less than two months left for the World Cup, has played down his 'competition' with Sanju Samson in the squad, saying it only brings out his "A-game" to the fore, strengthening the side.

India once again preferred Jitesh over Sanju for the opening T20I of the five-match series against South Africa, a game the hosts won convincingly by 101 runs at Barabati Stadium on Tuesday.

"He (Sanju) is a great player. If you have to compete against him and play shoulder to shoulder, then I have to bring my A-game. I think we both are trying to play for India, not for other teams," the 32-year-old said at the post-match interaction.

Sanju, who finished last year as India's leading T20I run-getter with 436 runs including three centuries, had formed a formidable opening pairing with Abhishek Sharma.

But the return of Shubman Gill to the T20I top order has unsettled the batting line-up, pushing Sanju lower than his preferred opening position.

In the last three T20Is against Australia, the management leaned towards Jitesh, seeing him as a natural middle and lower-order option more suited to finishing games.

India's T20I captain Suryakumar Yadav had also said Gill "deserved" to return as opener, a comment widely read as another hint that Sanju's role in the XI is uncertain under the current team plan. But Jitesh played down the individual competition, choosing instead to emphasise camaraderie and shared ambition. "I am very grateful that he



is in the team and I'm under him. Frankly speaking, he is like an elder brother to me. I think because of healthy competition, your talent comes out. I think it's good for the team also.

"There is so much talent in this Indian team. You can feel it that Sanju is out and I'm playing. "We are like brothers. We share lots of experience with each other. He helps me a lot whenever I do keeping or batting."

Dinesh Karthik joins London Spirit in Hundred as mentor, batting coach

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ London

Former India batter Dinesh Karthik joined London Spirit as the Hundred franchise's mentor and batting coach, the team management announced on Wednesday.

This is Karthik's maiden foray into a support staff role outside the Indian Premier League, where he works in a similar role with champions Royal Challengers Bengaluru.

"It's a pleasure to welcome DK to the London Spirit. He is a truly original thinker and his vast experi-



ence in short-format and franchise cricket will be invaluable to us," Spirit director of cricket Mo Bobat said in a statement.

"He's also great fun to work with and brings an infectious energy and enthusiasm to everything he does," said Bobat, who is also RCB's director of cricket.

Karthik has finished his playing career after the IPL 2024, but appears in other leagues. The 40-year-old is currently in the roster of Sharjah Warriorz in the UAE's ILT20.

Karthik had also appeared for Paarl Royals in the pre-

vious edition of the SA20.

"What an exciting time to be joining London Spirit. When I heard about the plans and the ambitions of Mo, MCC and the Tech Titans, I was really enthusiastic to join. To spend the English summer working at Lord's is truly a dream come true.

"It is the ground where I made my debut for India and I played my last Test match - Lord's is very close to my heart. I can't wait to see the squad come together and to work with some exceptional cricketers next year," said Karthik.

New Zealand bowl out West Indies for 205 in the second test

ASSOCIATED PRESS
■ Wellington (New Zealand)

New Zealand fast bowler Blair Tuckner was helped from the field with a shoulder injury after taking 4-32 on the first day of the second test against the West Indies on Wednesday in the latest cruel blow in a career flecked with tragedy.

Tickner fell heavily while fielding a ball at fine leg in his first test in more than two years and only the fourth of his career. He lay motionless while being assisted by medical staff



before being carefully lifted from the field on a stretcher. The teams played to a draw in the series opener at Christchurch.

Tickner bowled well in tandem with Michael Rae who took 3-65 on debut as New Zealand bowled out the West Indies for 205 in 75 overs. Devon Conway and Tom Latham were tested in the last 40 minutes but saw New Zealand to stumps at 24 without loss.

"I guess on the first day of a test match if you've rolled the other team for 200 and you're 20 or so without loss,

you're happy," Tickner said. "It's been a really surreal couple of days for me since I knew I was going to play. Pinch me."

"Today if someone asked me when do you get comfortable bowling. You don't."

Tickner's injury adds to a growing catalog for New Zealand who already are without pacers Matt Henry, Will O'Rourke, Ben Sears, Nathan Smith and Kyle Jamieson. Mitchell Hay also was handed a test debut Wednesday in place of wicketkeeper Tom Blundell who has a hamstring strain.

The injury to Tickner is particularly poignant, given the setbacks he has had to overcome throughout his career. Just before his test debut, his father's house was destroyed in a cyclone. And while playing for Derbyshire, his wife Sarah was diagnosed with leukemia.

"Things are bigger than cricket," Tickner told media before the current match.

He learned of Sarah's diagnosis as he was about to start a four-day match for Derbyshire in the English county championship.