

PAGE 6

NATION

Mamata slams SIR, urges people to protest



PAGE 7

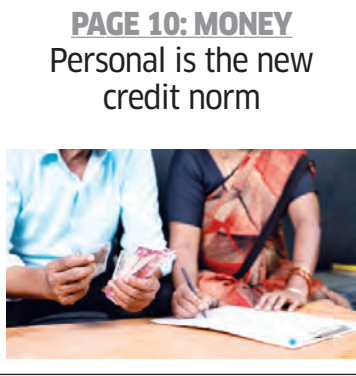
LAW & JUSTICE

EC can't treat voters with doubt, SC told



PAGE 10: MONEY

Personal is the new credit norm



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GLOBAL

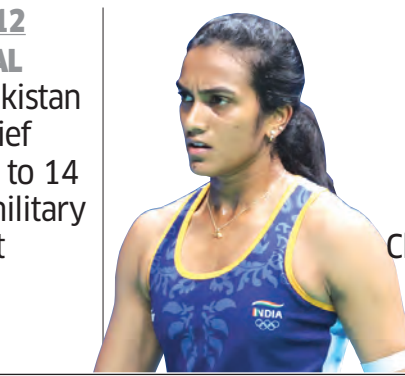
Former Pakistan spy chief sentenced to 14 years by military court



PAGE 15

SPORT

India names Sindhu, Lakshya for Asia Team Championships



PIONEER IN SHORT

WARNING AGAINST FAKE JOBS ISSUED
The Indian government has alerted Parliament about fraudulent recruitment schemes luring Indian nationals, mainly through social media, to South-East Asian countries such as Cambodia, Myanmar, and Lao PDR, often to carry out cybercrime or other illegal activities. Minister of State for External Affairs Kirti Vardhan Singh stated that over 6,700 Indians have been rescued from these nations so far, with 2,265 from Cambodia, 2,290 from Lao PDR, and 2,165 from Myanmar. The exact number of Indians still trapped is unknown, as many travel voluntarily via unscrupulous recruitment agents or illegal channels. The government has engaged host country authorities and Indian Missions to facilitate rescue and repatriation. Multiple channels, including walk-ins, WhatsApp numbers, grievance portals like MADAD and eMigrate, and social media, are available for Indians seeking help. Authorities regularly issue advisories warning job seekers to verify recruitment agents and offers. The Ministry of Home Affairs' Indian Cybercrime Coordination Centre (I4C) monitors related cybercrime activities and coordinates preventive and corrective measures.

Avoid travel, US lawyers warn H-1B visa holders

ASHOKE RAJ ■ New Delhi

Immigration attorneys in the United States are urging H-1B visa holders to avoid travelling to India after US consulates abruptly postponed thousands of visa-stamping interviews scheduled for December 2025. The appointments — essential for re-entering the US — have now been pushed to March, April, and even May 2026, leaving many workers stranded and unsure of when they can return to their jobs.

The disruption follows the US State Department's expansion of social-media screening to include H-1B and H-4 visa applicants, a process that had earlier been rolled out for student visa holders. The new vetting requirements have added to consular backlogs and operational delays.

“As of December 15, the Department of State will conduct an online presence review for all H-1B applicants and their dependents... Due

An Indian family eating in the middle of Times Square, New York City

ISTOCK

to operational constraints related to processing these visas and to ensure that no applicant poses a threat to US national security or public safety, the Consulate must reduce the number of applicants each day. The Consulate will not be able to see you on your original appointment date. Please do not show up at the Consulate,” an email sent

by the consulate to applicants read.

Interviews originally scheduled for mid-to late-December have been deferred to dates as far as summer 2026, raising the risk of prolonged separations from families and extended work absences.

Immigration attorney Rahul Reddy warned that travelling now could put H-1B

workers at serious risk. With many US companies unable to keep positions vacant for long or legally permit remote work from abroad due to compliance constraints, a delayed return could mean job loss. “Without a valid visa stamp in the passport, an H-1B employee travelling now might come back not to their job, but to unemployment,” he said.

Luthras detained in Thailand after Delhi court rejects bail

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ New Delhi

Gaurav and Saurabh Luthra, co-owners of ‘Birch by Romeo Lane’ nightclub in North Goa where a blaze claimed 25 lives, have been detained by the authorities in Thailand, officials said on Thursday, as a Delhi court rejected their transit anticipatory bail pleas citing the duo's conduct and the gravity of the offences.

The brothers, prime accused in the case related to the tragedy that unfolded at Arpora village around midnight on December 6, would be brought back to India at the earliest to face legal action, Chief Minister Pramod Sawant assured in Panaji.

A court in Goa, meanwhile, remanded Ajay Gupta, who claimed to be a silent partner and investor in the nightclub, in police custody for seven days.

A Delhi court rejected the transit anticipatory bail pleas of Saurabh and Gaurav Luthra. The duo had sought four weeks of transit anticipatory bail so that they were not

Composite image of Gaurav Luthra (left) and his brother Saurabh Luthra (right)

PIONEER PHOTO

immediately arrested on their return, but Additional Sessions Judge Vandana dismissed the pleas. “They left, they concealed, and they are now seeking leniency,” the Goa government's lawyer told the court, pointing out that they had fled immediately after the fire incident and were evading the legal process.

One of the lawyers of the Luthras submitted during the hearing that they were willing to return immediately and face the investigation.

But the court noted that the offence was serious in nature

as 25 people lost their lives in the fire. Given the “conduct” of the applicants and nature of the allegations, the court was not inclined to grant them relief, the judge said.

She pointed out that documents showed that the accused booked tickets to Phuket at 1.17 AM on December 7 (over an hour after the fire broke out), and the flight departed at 5.20 AM. This fact was “concealed”, and their counsel instead stated that they had left for Thailand before the fire broke out, the judge said.

The ByStander

TOXIC EGGS FLAGGED IN J&K

The Kashmir valley faces a new public health concern as reports emerge of adulterated eggs containing nitrofurans and nitroimidazole residues. These carcinogenic and toxic substances, banned in food-producing animals, have sparked alarm among residents and lawmakers. National Conference MLA Tanvir Sadiq flagged the issue, urging Chief Minister and health authorities to act urgently. He highlighted the serious risk posed to vulnerable groups, including children, senior citizens, and patients who rely on eggs as a primary protein source. The Jammu and Kashmir government responded swiftly, ordering an urgent investigation into the allegations. The Minister for Food, Civil Supplies, and Consumer Affairs directed the Controller of Legal Metrology to submit a report in two days.

ARUNACHAL ACCIDENT CLAIMS 18 LIVES

At least 18 labourers from Assam's Tinsukia district were killed and three remain missing after the truck they were travelling in fell into a remote gorge in Arunachal Pradesh's Anjaw district on December 8. The vehicle, carrying 22 workers engaged in a construction project in Hayuliang, skidded off the road and plummeted approximately 1,000 feet into a deep gorge. The lone survivor, Budheswar Deep, alerted authorities, prompting search and rescue operations led by the Indian Army's Spear Corps, along with NDRF personnel, GREF teams, and local police. Dense foliage and inaccessible terrain delayed recovery efforts, though 18 bodies have been retrieved so far. Officials are coordinating with Assam and Arunachal Pradesh administrations to trace the remaining missing workers and investigate the circumstances of the accident.

ECI extends SIR timeline

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

The Election Commission of India (ECI) on Thursday extended the timeline for Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls in six States and Union Territories following requests from the respective chief electoral officers.

In a statement, the ECI issued the revised schedule for SIR in Tamil Nadu, Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, the Andaman and Nicobar Islands and Uttar Pradesh.

The enumeration period for these six states and Union territories was to end on Thursday and the draft electoral rolls were to be published on December 16.

The enumeration period for Tamil Nadu and Gujarat has been extended till December 14 and the draft electoral rolls will be published on December 19, the statement said. For Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, the enumeration period has been extended till December 18 and the draft electoral rolls will be published on December 23.

The enumeration period for Uttar Pradesh has been extended till December 26 and the draft electoral rolls will be published on December 31.

According to the statement, the enumeration period for Goa, Puducherry, West Bengal, Lakshadweep and Rajasthan will end on Thursday and the draft electoral rolls will be published on December 16.

IndiGo CEO back in the DGCA dock

RAJESH KUMAR ■ New Delhi

IndiGo CEO has been summoned by the aviation regulator again on Friday, according to a regulatory filing by the company. Pieter Elbers was summoned by the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) on Thursday and asked to submit a report on the flight disruptions. He reached the DGCA office around 2.24pm, and left after a little over two hours at 4.45pm.

Meanwhile, passengers of the IndiGo Airlines who were left stranded at the airports between December 3 and 5 will be

given a travel voucher worth ₹10,000 valid for 12 months. The compensation would be in addition to flight cancellations charges under DGCA norms.

In another development, JD(U) leader KC Tyagi has alleged complicity between the DGCA and airlines, saying he was forced to shell out an inordinate sum of over ₹40,000 for a Delhi-Mumbai flight. In a letter to party colleague Sajay Jha, who is the Chairman of the Parliamentary panel on tourism, Tyagi said he became a victim of Air India's “arbitrary charging.”

Modi, Trump call to reset trade ties

FILE PHOTO

ASHOKE RAJ ■ New Delhi

Prime Minister Narendra Modi spoke to United States President Donald Trump on Thursday in what officials described as a “very warm conversation,” during which the two leaders reviewed progress in the India-US

Comprehensive Global Strategic Partnership. Both sides expressed satisfaction at the steady expansion of cooperation across multiple sectors.

According to the official readout, Modi and Trump discussed ways to maintain momentum in bilateral trade

MODI-TRUMP INTERACTIONS IN 2025

- January 27 – Phone Call: Trump congratulates Modi; discuss bilateral ties.
- February 13 – White House Meeting: Modi meets Trump in Washington; talks cover trade, defence, and strategic issues.
- April 22 - Phone Call: Trump offers condolences after the Pahalgam incident.
- June 17 – Phone Call: Trump invites Modi to a multilateral luncheon

- hosted by the Pakistan PM and military chief.
- September 17 – Phone Call: Birthday greetings and bilateral progress discussed.
- October 21 – Phone Call: Diwali greetings exchanged; ongoing cooperation discussed.
- December 11 – Phone Call: Review of India-US Comprehensive Global Strategic Partnership, trade, defence, and critical technologies.

talks and explored avenues to widen collaboration in critical technologies, energy, defence, security, and other priority areas under the India-US COMPACT frame-

work - a mechanism aimed at boosting military partnership, economic engagement and technology cooperation for the coming decades.

E-cigarette cloud over Lok Sabha

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

After BJP MP Anurag Thakur accused a Trinamool Congress member of smoking an e-cigarette in the Lok Sabha, the BJP alleged that the lawmaker has set a new record of lowering the dignity of Parliament with his conduct.

During the Question Hour, Thakur asked the Lok Sabha Speaker if e-cigarettes, which are banned in the country, have been allowed in the House, alleging, “The TMC member has been constantly smoking in the House for

Union Minister of State Sanjay Seth with BJP MPs Anurag Thakur, Jagdambika Pal and others in the Lok Sabha

PTI

the past several days.” Thakur, however, did not name the TMC MP. Amid uproar, Birla urged the members to main-

tain the dignity of the House and said he would take action if a written complaint was lodged.

Trump offers million-dollar US entry

ASSOCIATED PRESS ■ Washington

President Donald Trump announced on Wednesday that his long-promised “gold card” was officially going on sale, offering legal status and an eventual pathway to US citizenship for individuals paying \$1 million and corporations ponying up twice that per foreign-born employee.

A website accepting applications went live as Trump revealed the start of the programme while surrounded by business leaders in the White House's Roosevelt Room.

It is meant to replace EB-5 visas, which Congress created in 1990 to generate foreign investment and had been available to people who spend about \$1 million on a company that employs at least 10 people. Trump sees the new version as a way for

the US to attract and retain top talent, all while generating revenue for federal coffers. He has been promoting the gold card programme for months, and once suggested that each card would cost \$5 million, though he more recently revised that to the \$1 million and \$2 million pricing scheme.

The president said all funds taken in as part of the programme will “go to the US government” and predicted that billions would flow into an account run by the Treasury Department “where we can do things positive for the country.”

The new programme is actually a green card, effectively offering permanent legal residency with the chance for citizenship.

“Basically, it's a green card but much better,” Trump said. “Much more powerful, a much stronger path.”

Rural India roars back as household consumption hits record highs

RAJESH KUMAR ■ New Delhi

India's rural economy is witnessing a boom due to increased purchasing power, rising incomes, stronger consumption and improved financial behavior, according to a bi monthly survey by NABARD. According to the latest Rural Economic Conditions and Sentiments Survey (RECSS) 80 per cent of rural households reported higher consumption compared with last year.

“Moreover, 67.3 per cent of monthly household income was devoted to consumption expenditure, which is the

highest level among all rounds of the survey conducted since September 2024,” the survey noted. It also highlighted that the rural investment activity is accelerating, and the credit access has also improved.

The November 2025 round of the survey was conducted after the GST rate rationalisation announced on 3 September 2025, during the festival season, and against the backdrop of sharp moderation in rural inflation and food deflation. As per the NABARD survey, 42.2 per cent of rural households reported to have experienced an increase in

Women at the Pushkar market

ISTOCK

income in the last one year, which is the highest level among all rounds of this survey so far. Importantly, the percentage of households experiencing a decline in income during the last year fell to its lowest level (15.7 per cent).

While a lower percentage of rural households (21.9 per cent) reported their savings rising during last year, as against 23.7 per cent in the September 2025 round of the survey, it still showed some improvement relative to all the pre-September 2025 rounds of the survey. There was only a modest increase in the number

of households who reported taking recourse to increased borrowings/loans during last year. Thus, it appears that the higher consumption expenditure of rural households was not funded by excessive recourse to borrowings.

Further, only 15.7 per cent reported any decline in income, the lowest so far.

“During the next one year, however, the income prospects are seen by them to improve, with 75.9 per cent expecting to witness an increase in income, which is the highest level,” the survey added.

Thieves target liquor shop

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Lucknow

A theft occurred at a liquor shop located on VIP Road, Pakripul under Krishna Nagar police station area on Wednesday. The incident came to light on Thursday. The thieves allegedly broke the shop's shutter and stole liquor valued at approximately Rs 1 lakh. The entire incident was captured on the shop's CCTV cameras. As per reports, the Indian-Made Foreign Liquor (IMFL) shop, owned by Rajiv Kumar Srivastava of Snehnagar, Krishna Nagar, is situated on VIP Road, Pakripul. On the morning of December 7, when the shop employees arrived around 10 am, they found the shutter had been broken.

On reviewing the CCTV footage, a youth was seen breaking the shutter and committing the theft. The employees immediately informed the owner, Rajiv Kumar Srivastava, who was out of Lucknow at the time and therefore could not reach the spot immediately.

On his return to Lucknow, Srivastava reconciled the stock and found that liquor cases worth about Rs 1 lakh were missing. He subse-

quently filed a complaint at the Krishna Nagar police station. Krishna Nagar police confirmed that a case was registered on Wednesday following the owner's complaint. Police are currently using the CCTV footage to search for the thieves.

MAN ATTACKED

A case of assault has been reported from Junabganj Sarai Sahjadi in the Banthra police station area, where a man was allegedly attacked inside his home. The victim has filed a complaint at Banthra police station, accusing his relatives of assault and issuing death threats.

Rohit Yadav of Junabganj Sarai Sahjadi informed the police that Dharmendra Yadav (his brother's brother-in-law) and Sujay Yadav (son of Vijay Yadav, his cousin, a resident of Terwa) parked their car in front of his house and began verbally abusing him. Rohit alleged that the accused subsequently assaulted his mother and dragged and beat him as well.

MAN INJURED

A 35-year-old man sustained serious injuries when his

throat got entangled in Chinese manjha tied to a kite in Hussainganj on Thursday. The victim, identified as Ashwini Kashyap of Hussainganj, was passing the Burlington crossing when he met with the mishap.

He was on his motorcycle when the manjha slit his throat. The commuters rushed him to SPM Hospital where the doctors stitched the wound. The police said they were yet to get a complaint in this regard.

ACCUSED

The kin of deceased electrical contractor Saeed Adeel, on Thursday, accused building contractors for his death, saying they withheld his payment making their life a hell.

The electrical contractor from Vikas Nagar was found hanging on the first floor of his house on Wednesday after allegedly sending a message to one of the builders for whom he worked and did not get payment, accusing him of ruining his life by withholding his payments.

His son, Fahad Ali, stated that his father had worked for several builders and they had withheld his payments.

Fahad Ali said that his father left home on Tuesday morning to seek payments from the builders who owed him money but returned empty-handed. "He came back in the evening and went straight upstairs without talking to anyone," he said.

When Adeel did not come down, the family members went upstairs and found him hanging from the ceiling.

Fahad Ali confirmed that before taking his life, his father sent a message to a builder named Qasim Mustafa. The builder allegedly owes Rs 4,70,000 to

LOST MOBILE PHONES RETURNED

The Madiayon police recovered 72 lost mobile phones worth approximately Rs 12 lakh and handed them over to their rightful owners on Thursday.

These lost mobiles phones were recovered due to the efforts of Madiayon police's cyber team and they were traced using the Central Equipment Identity Register (CEIR) portal.

After getting their lost mobile back, smiles returned on the faces of the mobile phone owners and they praised the police a lot.

CM: No eligible voter should be left out

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Lucknow

Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath said that Bharatiya Janata Party workers should go among the general public and ensure that no eligible citizen is left out of the voter list and that no ineligible person's name is included. The CM said that the inclusion of every eligible voter's name in the list is the foundation of a strong and inclusive democracy.

Yogi was addressing a meeting held at Circuit House here on Thursday.

MLAs, MPs, district presidents, district in-charges, district coordinators, and assembly coordinators from the six organisational districts of Varanasi Commissionerate – Varanasi City, Varanasi District,

Chandauli, Machhlishahr, Jaunpur and Ghazipur – were present at the review meeting of Special Intensive Revision (SIR) work.

The CM said that Prime Minister Narendra Modi always says that "elections are fought at the booth level" therefore, booth management is extremely important. He told the workers, "Activate booth teams, scrutinise the voter list. The more effort you put in now, the less effort will be required during the elections and our victory will be certain." He also said that this is a golden opportunity to correct all errors in time and make the voter list completely accurate and up-to-date.

Yogi instructed that special attention should be paid to four main categories during the SIR campaign: unmapped voters, deceased,

absent and shifted ones. He said that two teams should be formed at each booth to conduct door-to-door contact and identify eligible voters whose names have not been included in the list due to any error or negligence. He instructed the workers to ensure that all eligible voters fill out the enumeration forms and submit them to the booth level officers on time so that no one's name is left out.

Yogi stated that organisational coordination, technical efficiency, regular monitoring and continuous public outreach are the keys to making this campaign a success. He directed that BLA-1, BLA-2, booth in-charges and booth presidents should work together to formulate a strategy and launch a campaign to reach every voter. He stated that

contact, verification and exchange of accurate information will bring transparency, speed and authenticity to the campaign.

The CM said, "Our efficiency will be proven only through the authenticity of our work." At the end of the meeting, the CM instructed all public representatives and office-bearers to go to the booth level and conduct door-to-door verification. He said that they should ensure who has submitted the SIR form and who has not so that the objective of the campaign can be fulfilled. He said that reaching out to the public and adding them to the voter list is the organisational strength and responsibility of the BJP, which must be fulfilled with complete honesty.

Stress on registering on PM-VBRY portal

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Kanpur

Amidst the historic implementation of the new labor codes, the Government of India has taken a revolutionary step to provide a strong social security cover to employees.

Regional Provident Fund Commissioner-1, Kanpur, Shahid Iqbal, announced that under the Pradhan Mantri Viksit Bharat Rojgar Yojana (PM-VBRY), Employees' Enrollment Campaign – 2025 (EEC-2025) has already begun. This

campaign will run from November 1, 2025 to April 30, 2026, and is a golden opportunity for a limited period.

Iqbal has made a special appeal to all the employees of Regional Office Kanpur to take full advantage of this historic initiative and immediately enroll their eligible employees with Employees' Provident Fund Organization (EPFO). The main objective of this scheme notified by the Central Government is to cover those employees who have been deprived of

this security cover till now.

Shahid Iqbal, while emphasizing the importance of the campaign, said, "It is not just a scheme but an opportunity through which employees can connect their employees with a strong social security framework."

He appealed to the employers not to delay and register immediately on the PM-VBRY portal. In case of any problem, they should visit the official website of EPFO or regional office and contact him, he added.

Cops reunite mentally unstable man with kin

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Lucknow

The Nigoha police on Thursday helped a mentally unstable man to reunite his family in Sant Kabir Nagar.

As per reports, the mentally unstable man was found wandering in Nigohan market in Nigohan town on Thursday morning. On being alerted by the passersby, the Nigohan police ques-

tioned him but the man was unable to provide his name or address. Police then searched him and recovered a paper slip on which a mobile phone number was written. The police succeeded in identifying the man this way.

Nigohan police station in-charge Anuj Tiwari said that the mentally unstable man found in the town had been identified as Ramesh Vishwakarma (55) of Gangoli

village, Khalilabad tehsil in Sant Kabir Nagar district.

On being contacted, the family members told police that Ramesh was mentally unstable and had been missing from home for several days. He had also gone missing during the COVID-19 pandemic and was found after an extensive search. The family heaved a sigh of relief and thanked the police for locating the missing member of their

family. Late in the evening, Ramesh's wife, Saroj Vishwakarma, arrived at Nigohan with her relatives. Seeing her husband safe, she became emotional and expressed her gratitude to the Nigohan police.

"Due to promptness of the Nigohan police and awareness of local residents, my husband who had separated from his family, was able to return home safely," she said.

Krishnanagar police arrest two wanted under NDPS Act

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Lucknow

The Krishnanagar police, on Thursday, arrested two persons wanted under the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances Act for illegally trading in codeine-containing syrup, tablets, capsules and injections.

Those arrested were identified as Suraj Mishra of Sitapur who presently lives in Faizullaganj Mama Colony in Madiyaon and Pritam Singh alias Monty Sardar, a native of Bahraich who presently lives in Badshahnagar, Mahanagar.

A police spokesman said the accused were arrested after their names surfaced

in the investigation and a drug inspector lodged an FIR.

The case was registered regarding unauthorised purchase and sale of codeine-containing syrup, capsules, injections and an accused, Deepak Manwani, was sent to jail.

Suraj and Pritam were arrested on Thursday from Baikunth Dham VIP Road on a tip-off from an informer.

During preliminary interrogation, the accused revealed that they were involved in the unauthorised trade of banned medicines with one Arush Saxena and jailed accused Deepak Manwani.

On December 9, the drug inspector of FSDA had raided the shop of Suraj Mishra and Deepak Manmani and seized illegal drugs, sealed the shop, and took Deepak Manmani into custody. He was sent to judicial custody.

Pritam purchased the banned drugs and syrups from Aarush Saxena, owner of a pharmaceuticals firm in Takrohi Vihar in Indira Nagar, and supplied them illegally.

The police are looking for Aarush Saxena.

The Pioneer

CLASSIFIEDS

NOTICE

Patients Records from 01/1/2017 to 31/12/2021 will be destroyed after 10/01/2026. Those who require their patient's file, may contact on mob. 7887037568 prior to 01/01/2026. Bhargava hospital, Civil Lines, Kanpur.

NOTICE

Be it known to all that earlier my name was MOHD ASLAM SIDDIQUI which is now changed to MOHAMMAD ASLAM SIDDIQUI. In future I shall be known as MOHAMMAD ASLAM SIDDIQUI S/o Ashfaq Husain Siddiqui, 43A Ponghat pull, Bamrauli, Prayagraj, UP.

NOTICE

Tanya Singh Tomar (Unique ID 6923257), D/o Sanjay Kumar Singh R/o.138A Kubera Enclave, Phase-2, Mishrapur Kursi Road Lucknow student of Lucknow Public College my original mark sheet Passing of class X Index no 1196301/162 , year 2019 has been lost, use of said document will be illegal.

NOTICE

It is informed that in the school certificates of my son, his name has been wrongly recorded as Aadhyan whereas his correct name is Aadyant Gupta. In future he should be known and identified as Aadyant Gupta... Anil Kumar Gupta S/O Shri Dayashankar Gupta 647B/P20 Jankipuram Garden Nahar Rd Lucknow.

NOTICE

I MUTUM TARUNI DEVI (name of NOK as per Service records) is mother of No. 9425118N, Rank Nk Name Mutum Dhanabir Singh unit 1/11 GR, declared that in the Service Records of my son the date of birth mentioned as 15.12.1952 while my correct date of birth 10.07.1956 (as mentioned in Aadhaar Card No. 7289 4651 4133) due to wrongly mentioned in service record hence same may be recorded in my son's service records

NOTICE

I, Mahjabeen Khan D/o Ata Husain Khan R/o 390/705, Rustam Nagar, Saadatganj, Lucknow, have officially changed my name from Mahjabeen to Mahjabeen Khan vide affidavit dated 06-12-2025.

NOTICE

I, No. 9425121N, Rank-Nk, Name-Aman Lama Unit- 1/11 GR, C/o 56 APO, declared that in the Service Records, my son's name inadvertently mentioned as NAMIKSON LAMA (Date of Birth- 06/01/2010) while his correct name is NAMIKASAN LAMA, which is mentioned in his Aadhaar Card (No. 3899 1770 1402) same may be recorded in Service Record.

NOTICE

It is hereby informed to the general public that I have changed my name from Triveni Prasad Yadav to Triveni Prasad Yadav in the future I shall be known and recognized by the name Triveni Prasad Yadav, Triveni Prasad Yadav S/o Ram Kailash Yadav Village Maulanipur Post Tarwa Tehsil Lalgan Diss Azamgarh UP Pincode 276123

NOTICE

Shiva has lost Class 10 ICSE Board (Unique ID:6603277, Index Number:1173587) year 2017 of school King George Inter College, Barabanki. Despite diligent search, the document could not be traced. If anyone find call 6393388230. Shiva S/o Bal Kishan, R/o Mohalla Hujaji 2, Dewa, Dewa, Barabanki, (UP).

NOTICE

I MUTUM TARUNI DEVI (name of NOK as per Service records) is mother of No. 9425118N, Rank Nk Name Mutum Dhanabir Singh unit 1/11 GR, declared that in the Service Records of my son the date of birth mentioned as 15.12.1952 while my correct date of birth 10.07.1956 (as mentioned in Aadhaar Card No. 7289 4651 4133) due to wrongly mentioned in service record hence same may be recorded in my son's service records

The Pioneer

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CHANGE OF NAME

I, hitherto known as Moni Singh D/o Surendra Singh R/o Atwa Asigaon, Hardoi, Uttar Pradesh-241001 have changed my name and shall hereafter be known as Meenakshi Singh. PD(36338)C

PUBLIC NOTICE

"Mrs. Usha Gupta W/o Manish Chandra Varshney, R/o: 16B, Muthiganj, Prayagraj, UP" has obtained Credit Facility from the Bank/Branch (Union Bank of India, (UMFB Prayagraj)) by depositing their original property papers for the property address at "House at Bhukhand no. 11/313, Awasthi Vikas Yojana No. 3, Sector-11, Jhansi, The-Phulpur, Prayagraj (UP)", whose original linked title chain i.e. "Sale Deed No. 3157, dt. 16.10.2000, Bahi No. 1, Khand- 523 on pages 359 to 388, registered with SRO Phulpur Prayagraj (UP)" is reported lost by the property owner and for the same, she had already published information dt. 27-04-2022 in two newspapers (Hindi & English). This information is provided to notice of public, that if any objection is there regarding creation of mortgage on the said property related to the aforesaid chain deed, can submit their objection to the undersigned within 15 days of publication of this notice.

(Authorised Officer)

Union Bank of India, Union MSME First Branch 92/81, Swami Vivekanand Road Prayagraj

STF arrests smuggler with opium

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Lucknow

The Special Task Force, Uttar Pradesh (Lucknow Unit) on Thursday arrested an active member of an interstate drug smuggling gang with 2.562 kg of illicit opium whose international value was approximately Rs 12.50 lakh.

The arrested accused was identified as Mohammad Wasim Javed of Jharkhand. The sleuths recovered 2.562 kg of illegal opium and Rs 2,760 in cash from the accused who confessed to his crime. The accused was arrested from near Bhithauli intersection in the Madiaon police station area around 11:45 am.

A police spokesman said for quite some time, information had been received regarding a gang involved in illegal drug trafficking in various districts of Uttar Pradesh. "In this regard, various STF teams and units were directed to gather intelligence and take action. This intelligence gathering process was being carried out under the supervision of Police, STF Headquarters, Lucknow, Deepak Kumar Singh," he said.

The spokesman said a team achieved the success in arresting the accused on being tipped off from an informer. During interrogation the

accused told that he was a resident of Chatra in Jharkhand and was in contact with Sanju, who lives near Taimara, Jharkhand. He disclosed that he bought opium from Sanju and brought it to Lucknow for sale.

He confessed that he bought the 'goods' from Sanju at Rs 2.35 lakh per kg and supplied it to Uttar Pradesh, Delhi, Uttarakhand, Punjab and Haryana at Rs 5-6 lakh per kg.

As per his confession, Sanju gave him the consignment of illegal opium in the forest near Taimara. He supplied the illegal opium to the parties in various states like Uttar Pradesh, Delhi, Uttarakhand and Punjab.

UP
संख्या

अल्यकालीन ई-निविदा सूचना संख्या

78 / 79 / ECTC (L) / 2025-26

अधोहस्ताक्षरी द्वारा निम्नलिखित कार्य हेतु पृथक निविदा दो भागों (पार्ट-I टेक्निकल बिड एवम् पार्ट-II फाईनल बिड) में आमंत्रित की जाती है।

78. कार्य का नाम:- 220 केवी0 जौं0आईएल0 उपकेंद्र, अयोध्या पर 01 अदद 33 केवी0 मेसर्स अमृत बॉटलर्स प्रा0लि0 'बे' से सम्बन्धित जानपदीय निर्माण कार्य। कार्य की अनुमानित लागत:- रू0 1.60 लाख, कार्यावधि:- 01 माह

79 कार्य का नाम :- 220 केवी0 उपकेंद्र, सुलतानपुर पर पूर्व स्थापित 160 MVA (EMCO Make) परिवर्तक के स्थान पर नये 160 MVA (JAIL Make) परिवर्तक की स्थापना हेतु टांनलियरी निर्माण कार्य। कार्य की अनुमानित लागत:- रू0 3.07 लाख, कार्यावधि:-01 माह उक्त निविदा की Technical Bid एवम् अन्य शर्तें तथा मात्रा बीजक इत्यादि का विस्तृत विवरण www.upptcl.org पर देखा जा सकता है एवम् http://etender.up.nic.in साइट पर देखा एवम् प्राप्त किया जा सकता है।

निविदा दिनांक 26.12.2025 को दोपहर 14:00 बजे तक साइट पर दाखल/अपलोड किया जा सकता है तथा दिनांक 27.12.2025 को 15:00 बजे सार्वजनिक रूप से निविदायें खोली जायेंगी।

अधीक्षक अभियन्ता विद्युत जानपद पारंपर मण्डल, उ०प्र० एस०एल०डी०सी० परिसर, विन्मूति खण्ड, गोमती नगर, लखनऊ)

पत्रांक:- 3814 दिनांक 10.12.25 "राष्ट्र हित में बिजली बचाए"

PRISONER DIES
A prisoner lodged at Gosaiganj jail and facing life term died during treatment at KGMU on Wednesday night.

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उ०प्र० पावर ट्रांसमिशन कारपोरेशन लिमिटेड

अल्यकालीन ई-निविदा सूचना संख्या

78 / 79 / ECTC (L) / 2025-26

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Office of the Chief Construction Engineer
RURAL WORKS CIRCLE, BARIPADA
"e" Procurement Notice for Building Work

Identification No. - Online Tender- Building N.C.B. No. 400 for 2025-26.

Letter No. 5487 / Date 27.11.2025 //

1. Name of the work

Construction of Building Works year 2024-25 in the District of Mayurbhanj

2. Total No. of work

13 Nos. (Thirteen)

3. Estimated Cost

Rs.104.46 Lakh to Rs.126.05 Lakh (approximately).

4. Eligible Class of Contractor

As Per Annexure

5. Period of Completion

As Per Annexure.

6. Other details

Procurement Officer	Bid Identification No.	Availability of tender On-line for bidding	Last Date & Time of sealing Tender	Technical Bid	Financial Bid
1	2	3	4	5	6
Chief Construction Engineer, Rural Works Circle, Baripada	Building On-line N.C.B. No.400	at 11.00 A.M. to 03.00 P.M.	On 28.12.2025 up to 10.30 P.M.	On 28.12.2025 up to 11.00 A.M.	Will be intimated later

Further details can be seen from the website: www.tendersodisha.gov.in.

Any Corrigendum / Addendum will be displayed in the above e-tender website only.

Chief Construction Engineer, R.W. Circle, Baripada

OPRR-26130/11/068/2626

UP gets more time for SIR exercise

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Lucknow

The Election Commission of India, on Thursday, extended the deadline for the submission of enumeration forms for the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls in Uttar Pradesh till December 26.

The earlier deadline fixed by the Election Commission for submission of enumeration forms ended on Thursday.

Uttar Pradesh has been given the longest extension, with the enumeration deadline pushed to December 26 and the draft publication to December 31.

UP Chief Electoral Officer Navdeep Rinwa, on Wednesday, had requested the Election Commission to extend the deadline for two weeks.

The Election Commission has also extended this date for Tamil Nadu, Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh and the Union Territory of Andaman and Nicobar Islands.

The chief electoral officer said "in order to ensure that no eligible elector is left behind, new electors are being encouraged to fill up Form 6 along with the declaration and submit them to the booth level officers or fill the form and declaration online using the ECINet App or website https://voters.eci.gov.in/ to get their names included in the final electoral rolls, which will be published in February, 2026".

He said with the extension of the deadline the booth level officers would re-verify the dead, shifted and absent voters from the address given in electoral rolls.

He said draft rolls would be published on December 31 and claims and objections would be accepted till January 30, 2026 and the final draft of the electoral rolls would be published on February 28.

According to the chief electoral officer, around 19 per cent of the total voters in UP, or 2.93 crore voters, are under the scanner of the

Election Commission of India for not submitting their enumeration forms under the ongoing Special Intensive Revision of the electoral rolls in the state, launched on November 4.

Those who have not submitted their enumeration forms have been categorised as "uncollectible". They are either absent, deceased, duplicate or permanently shifted voters. The names of such voters will be deleted from the electoral roll once the SIR exercise is completed and the final electoral roll is published.

According to the ECI data, there are 15.44 crore voters in Uttar Pradesh enrolled in the 2025 electoral rolls. Under the SIR work, booth level officers have distributed enumeration forms to 15.43 crore (99.97 per cent) voters. The BLOs have digitised 15.15 crore (98.14 per cent) of the submitted enumeration forms. Of them, 79.95 per cent forms have been received with the signature of the voter or a family member.

SIR EXERCISE 100 PC COMPLETE IN LUCKNOW DISTRICT

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Lucknow

The Special Intensive Revision of electoral rolls has been completed 100 per cent in Lucknow district.

Giving this information, a senior district administration official said that the number of names of voters to be deleted from the electoral rolls varied from one assembly constituency to another. According to an official, names of voters of several huts and several railway colonies which have been completely shifted are being removed as these names are in the voters list.

"Some settlements such as Akbarnagar have been completely removed while the names of the residents are in the voters list," the official added.

Similarly, the official pointed out that duplicate names and names of voters who have died are being deleted.

The official added that many voters whose location has shifted are filling Form 6 with the new addresses for inclusion of their names in the voter lists. We have received a total of 70,000 Form 6 in this SIR exercise, the official added. The official admitted that carrying out the SIR exercise in urban areas was challenging.

"The web of houses and buildings posed a challenge for us as the booth level officers found it difficult to locate the voters. In the rural areas the task was easy as people are well known in small populations. A single pradhan can provide the details of all the houses but in the urban areas high-rise buildings have come up in areas which had hutments making it difficult for the BLOs to locate the voters," the official said.

Mayor receives official letter of UNESCO honour

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Lucknow

The state capital has taken another historic step towards international recognition by securing a place in the UNESCO Creative Cities Network (UCCN) under the Gastronomy category.

Assistant Director-General for Culture at UNESCO, Ernesto Ottone R formally conveyed this honour to Mayor Sushma Kharakwal and congratulated the city.

At the Municipal Corporation headquarters on Thursday, Municipal Commissioner Gaurav Kumar handed over to Mayor Sushma Kharakwal the official letter sent by UNESCO.

UNESCO stated that Lucknow's selection reflects its cultural richness, the uniqueness of its culinary traditions and its commitment to creative development.

In its message, UNESCO clarified that after joining the network, Lucknow will need to place culture and creativity at



UNESCO also appreciated that the city has the potential to make meaningful contributions toward the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) for 2030 — especially 'Sustainable Cities and Communities.'

These joint efforts of UNESCO and the Lucknow Municipal Corporation have significantly strengthened the city's global identity. Lucknow is now emerging not only as a cultural and historical capital but also as a global 'Creative City.' The city's Nawabi cuisine, diverse dishes, etiquette and creative abilities will now receive wide recognition on an international platform.

UNESCO concluded its message with these words:

"Welcome Lucknow to the UCCN family. We look forward to an effective and inspiring collaboration with the city."

For Lucknow, this achievement is not only an honour but also a milestone that will shape the city's future direction.

the core of its development strategies. The city will now actively participate in UCCN's various programmes, reporting processes, global conferences and knowledge-exchange activities. Lucknow has also received a special invitation to participate in the annual conference to be held in 2026 in Essaouira, Morocco.

7,568 challans issued for traffic violations

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Lucknow

The Lucknow Police conducted a special checking campaign against two-wheelers on Wednesday and initiated action against traffic violators. The police slapped as many as 7,568 challans and seized 356 vehicles for violation of rules in all five zones.

During the campaign, action was taken against those violating traffic rules like riding without helmet, modified silencer, speeding, triple riding etc.

A police spokesman said an intensive checking of two-wheelers across the city was conducted in three phases (morning, afternoon and evening) — with comprehensive action taken in all zones. Those driving without helmets were challaned on the spot. Many vehicles were seized for lack of valid documents, without number plates or for illegal alterations. The checking was conducted at Kaiserbagh, Nakhas, Atal



Chowk, Bundavan Square, Babu Kheda, RR Bandha and other busy intersections. Teams led by Assistant Commissioners of police and station in-charges were deployed in all zones.

"Traffic discipline is not an option, but a fundamental condition for citizen safety. This campaign by Lucknow Police is not limited to issuing challans, but is a concrete step towards increasing

responsibility and awareness towards road safety. Such campaigns will be conducted with greater vigour in the future as well," said Lucknow Police Commissioner, Amarendra Kumar Sengar.

BMT unit inaugurated at KGMU

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Lucknow

In a significant advancement for cancer care in Uttar Pradesh, a new state-of-the-art Bone Marrow Transplant (BMT) Unit was inaugurated at the H a e m a t o l o g y Department of King George's Medical University (KGMU) on Thursday.

The facility has been established with a Corporate Social Responsibility grant of Rs 3.15 crore from Aditya Birla Capital, marking a major step toward accessible and affordable treatment for blood cancers and genetic blood disorders.

Uttar Pradesh Governor Anandiben Patel emphasised the importance of supporting poor patients and strengthening training for staff nurses involved in specialised care units like BMT. She highlighted the commitment to ensuring affordable, no-profit treatment models, with seamless coordination between the university and government bodies.

UP Minister of State for Medical Education Mayankeshwar Sharan Singh commended KGMU's extensive outreach, noting its remarkable annual patient load of 45 crore OPD visits, 15 crore IPD admissions, 45 lakh minor surgeries and eight lakh major surgeries, serving patients not only from Uttar Pradesh but also from neighbouring regions, including Madhya Pradesh, Nepal and Delhi.

STF arrests two in cough syrup case

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Lucknow

The Special Task Force of Uttar Pradesh Police, on Thursday, arrested two persons from Lucknow for illegal storage and trade of Phensedyl cough syrup and other codeine-containing medicines, which are being misused as intoxicants.

Those arrested were identified as Abhishek Sharma and Shubham Sharma, both of Saharanpur. They were arrested around 4:20 am near the Tedhi Pulia intersection on Alambagh-Mawaiya Road.

The police recovered two mobile phones, 31 documents related to fictitious firms from the arrested persons.

The STF, which was working on the case, received inputs that Abhishek Sharma, Delhi's super distributor for a company manufacturing the syrup and an accused wanted in connection with the codeine syrup case, along with Shubham Sharma had come to Lucknow for some work and were expected to meet someone in Hazratganj after getting off at the bus station. Based on this information, both were apprehended with the assistance of the local police.

During questioning, Abhishek Sharma disclosed that since 2019, he has been working at the pharmaceutical firm owned by Vishal Singh and Vibhor Rana and initially, he managed loading and unloading and related record-keeping.

He stated that Vibhor and Vishal would procure Phensedyl cough syrup along with other Abbott company medicines and then use fictitious firms to show paper transactions and supply the stock to smugglers for misuse as intoxicant, with the supply route leading to Bangladesh via Bihar, Jharkhand and West Bengal. The duo disclosed that a chartered accountant aided them in creating the bogus firms and generating fraudulent purchase/sales records.

According to their disclosure, the chartered accountant created a firm in Saharanpur and another with the same name in Bhagwanpur, Roorkee, using the names of his two employees. They would first ostensibly sell the Phensedyl cough syrup procured from parent company to firms in Uttarakhand and western

Uttar Pradesh on paper. Then, the entire stock would be shown as purchased by the Saharanpur firm.

In 2021, their stock was seized at several locations, leading to the arrest and imprisonment of Vibhor Rana in 2022 in a Malda, West Bengal, case.

Following his release, they stopped working with the trading company. Later, in collusion with company officials, Vishal became the carrying and forwarding agent (CFA) for Saharanpur under his firm, despite his younger brother, Vibhor Rana's involvement in Phensedyl smuggling.

According to Abhishek, the Phensedyl cough syrup ordered by Vishal and Vibhor was shown on paper as sold to about 65 firms registered under different names. Through Saurabh Tyagi, Vibhor Rana and Vishal would smuggle the stock to Bangladesh via Malda (West Bengal) and Tripura, using fake e-way bills, passing through cities like Agra, Varanasi, Gorakhpur, Kanpur Nagar and Lucknow.

In April 2024, a consignment of Phensedyl sent using fake e-way bills in the name of two Sitapur stockists whose drug licences had already been cancelled, was intercepted by the STF team in Lucknow.

Shubham Sharma stated that he worked as a port operational officer at Dubai Port World (DP World) in Dubai in 2017. He returned to India with the intention of moving to the USA or Australia. Upon his return, he met Vishal Singh and Vibhor Rana through his elder brother Abhishek.

Vishal Singh and Vibhor Rana managed all operations and paid Shubham approximately 1,00,000 per month. The firm operated for about eight months, during which Shubham received approximately eight lakh rupees. Shubham also traveled with Vishal and Vibhor as their driver.

Shubham further revealed that Vibhor Rana earlier supplied their stock to Shubham Jaiswal in Varanasi. Later, Shubham Jaiswal secured a super distributorship of the company in Ranchi in his father's name.

The two accused also provided information about two other collaborators involved in the smuggling from West Bengal, and the STF is currently gathering intelligence and evidence against them.



Dedicated clinic for fatty liver disease, obesity at SGPGI

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Lucknow

The hepatology department of Sanjay Gandhi Post-graduate Institute of Medical Sciences on Thursday inaugurated a dedicated clinic for comprehensive management of fatty liver disease and obesity.

The OPD was formally inaugurated by SGPGIMS Director Prof RK Dhiman in the presence of Chief Medical Superintendent Prof Devendra Gupta, head of hepatology department, Prof Amit Goel and Prof Subhash Yadav.

Speaking on the occasion, a senior doctor said that India was witnessing a rapid rise in lifestyle-related diseases and fatty liver disease and obesity were the most important ones among them.

Notice for Change of Registered Office

FORM INC 26 : Advertisement for Change of Registered Office from One State to Another (Pursuant to Section 13(4) of the Companies Act, 2013 and Rule 30 of the Companies (Incorporation) Rules, 2014)

Notice is hereby given that the Company namely **M/s Arcus Autotech Private Limited (CIN: U18100DL2009PTC187715)** proposes to make an application under Section 13(4) of the Companies Act, 2013 to the Central Government (powers delegated to the Regional Director) for approval of the change in the registered office of the Company from the State of Delhi to the State of Uttar Pradesh.

The registered office of the Company is presently situated at : J-7/80 K Shop, Ground Floor, Rajouri Garden, New Delhi – 110027

The proposed new registered office of the Company will be situated at : **Industrial Built-up Plot No. 001, Block C, Sector-88, Noida, Gautam Buddha Nagar, Uttar Pradesh – 201305.**

Any person whose interest is likely to be affected by the proposed alteration of the Memorandum of Association may intimate his/her interest to the Regional Director (Northern Region), Ministry of Corporate Affairs address at 4th Floor, Block-2 CGO Complex, Lodhi Road New Delhi – 110003 India within 21 days from the date of publication of this notice, along with his/her name, address and the nature of interest and grounds of opposition, if any.

For & On Behalf Of: **M/s Arcus Autotech Private Limited**

Chandana Sen Nandi (Director) DIN-07611494

Contact No. : 0120-4250336 Mail Id: arcusautotechpltd@gmail.com

Shivashish Nandi (Director) Din: 03006903

Contact No. : 0120-4250336 Mail Id: arcusautotechpltd@gmail.com

Date: 09.12.2025 **Place: Delhi**

Noida airport to give impetus to Western UP economy

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Jewar (GB Nagar)

Noida international airport is set to become a prime example of Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath's strong leadership and visionary thinking.

This world-class greenfield airport, which is nearing inauguration, will not only give a new direction to the global connectivity of Delhi-NCR but is also poised to give a new impetus to the economy of Western Uttar Pradesh.

The chief minister has given top priority to the timely completion of the project, continuously reviewing its progress, so that the farmers and families who have given their land to make this dream a reality can receive maximum benefits.

Yamuna Expressway Industrial Development Authority (YEIDA) CEO Rakesh Kumar Singh said, "Special

programmes have been implemented to benefit the project affected families (PAF) at the initiative of Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath".

This project, implemented under the PPP model and led by Yamuna International Airport Pvt. Ltd. (YIAPL) and Noida International Airport Ltd. (NIAL), involves the participation of more than 30 reputed companies, including Tata Projects, Indian Oil, and Bird Group. More than 5,000 employment opportunities are being created, including all government benefits such as minimum wage, PF, ESI, and gratuity.

Noida international airport will be a state-of-the-art airport working towards the goal of net-zero emissions, showcasing a perfect blend of Swiss efficiency and Indian hospitality.

Combining Swiss efficiency with Indian hospitality, NIA promises a seamless,



comfortable, and world-class travel experience. Equipped with state-of-the-art technology and global-standard facilities, the airport is being developed as a benchmark for modern aviation infrastructure.

Shailendra Kumar Bhatia, ACEO of the YEIDA, said that with its innovative design, advanced technology, and cultural depth, the airport would significantly enhance Uttar Pradesh's and India's

global profile.

The airport's architecture draws entirely from traditional Indian design to immerse travelers in the cultural spirit of North India. The terminal will feature carved elements like lattice screens that enhance aesthetic appeal while regulating natural light and airflow.

The grand entrance is inspired by the iconic ghats of Varanasi and Haridwar, reflecting the region's spiri-

tual and historical heritage. Inside, a spacious haveli-style courtyard will create an open, welcoming environment, underscoring the importance of courtyards in Indian architecture.

The terminal's white, flowing roof symbolises the calm, continuous movement of Uttar Pradesh's major rivers, embodying a harmonious blend of nature and modernity. The airport complex will rely extensively on renewable energy, particularly solar power and off-grid wind systems, to minimise dependence on conventional sources.

Rainwater harvesting, advanced waste management, and modern sewage treatment plants will further strengthen its environmental safeguards.

EV charging stations will be available across the campus to encourage electric mobility and reduce carbon emissions.



President Droupadi Murmu paying tribute to ex-President Pranab Mukherjee on his birth anniversary, at Rashtrapati Bhavan

PTI

President, PM remember Pranab Mukherjee

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

President Droupadi Murmu, Vice President C P Radhakrishnan and Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Thursday remembered former president Pranab Mukherjee on his birth anniversary.

Modi remembered Mukherjee as a "towering statesman and a scholar of exceptional depth" and said that he got to learn from the former president over his many years of interaction.

President Murmu paid floral tributes to Mukherjee at the Rashtrapati Bhavan before heading for an official visit to Manipur. Vice President Radhakrishnan said Mukherjee, in his many roles as a parliamentarian, minister, and later as the president made invaluable contributions to strengthening democratic institutions.

In a social media post, Prime Minister Modi said, "A towering statesman and a

scholar of exceptional depth, he served India with unwavering dedication across decades of public life. Pranab Babu's intellect and clarity of thought enriched our democracy at every step."

"It's a privilege that I got to learn so much from him over the many years we interacted," he said.

Congress President Mallikarjun Kharge said in every role Mukherjee assumed, he brought deep wisdom, rich experience and exemplary leadership, guiding key Governmental decisions across diverse areas and reinforcing the foundations of India's parliamentary democracy.

Born on this day in 1935, Mukherjee's political career spanned over five decades during which he played a key role in policymaking that guided the development of the country. Mukherjee, who served as the President of India from July 2012 to July 2017, breathed his last on August 31, 2020.

Bihar Govt initiates process to constitute Prakrit, Pali academies

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Patna

The Bihar Government has initiated the process for the constitution of two new vernacular academies- Prakrit and Pali - for the restoration, preservation and promotion of these languages.

These two academies will work under the administrative control of the newly created department of Higher Education, according to a notification issued by the Cabinet Secretariat department on December 10.

The state Cabinet, headed by Chief Minister Nitish Kumar, on Tuesday approved proposals to create three new departments — Youth, Employment and Skill Development, Higher Education and Civil Aviation.

Already existing language academies in Bihar have also been brought under the administrative control of the Higher Education department. "Functions which have been allocated to the Higher Education department include: Administrative control of institutions engaged in research work of university level in social, economic, scientific and other fields such Constitution of vernacular academies such as Sanskrit Academy, Prakrit Academy, Pali Academy, etc," the notification said.

Before the modern derivatives of Sanskrit existed, a group of languages known as the Prakrit or Middle Indo-Aryan languages evolved from India's classical language. These were the vernacular dialects of ancient times.

The best known of this group is Pali, which still serves as the canonical language of Buddhism. Other Prakrit languages such as Sauraseni, Magadhi and Gandhari embody various facets of the literatures of both the Brahmanical/Hindu and Buddhist traditions.

UP CM assures housing for needy, aid for treatment

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Gorakhpur

Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath on Thursday said the Government will ensure housing for the needy and financial assistance for the treatment of those suffering from serious illnesses.

During his stay in Gorakhpur, Adityanath met people at the 'Janta Darshan' held at the Gorakhnath temple on Thursday morning and heard their grievances, according to an official statement. He assured support to those seeking housing and promised financial aid for patients requiring treatment for critical ailments.

"The Government is committed to ensuring that every eligible and needy individual receives the benefits of welfare schemes and that all problems are resolved effectively," the chief minister said.

Around 300 people met the chief minister during the event. Adityanath personally reached out to those seated in the Mahant Digvijaynath Smriti Bhavan auditorium, listened to each grievance carefully, accepted applications and directed officials to address the issues in a time-bound, fair and satisfactory manner, the state-



CM Yogi holding a meeting with public representatives on SIR and development related works in Varanasi

PTI

ment said. When a woman raised the issue of not having a house, the chief minister assured her that she would be provided a home under the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana and instructed officials to take necessary action. He said the Government intends that every needy person should have a pucca house.

Another woman sought financial assistance for her husband's treatment. Adityanath assured her that funds would be provided

from the discretionary fund and asked her to proceed with the treatment without worry. Several others also sought help for medical expenses.

"No one's treatment will stop for lack of money," he said, directing officials to promptly prepare estimates for high-level medical treatment for all such applicants so that funds can be released immediately. Responding to complaints about land encroachment, the chief minister instructed the police to take strict action against

anyone forcibly occupying another person's land. In one case, where a woman complained of obstruction in taking possession of her own land, Adityanath directed officials to ensure she is given rightful possession.

He also told senior officials to examine cases where eligible beneficiaries are unable to access welfare schemes and determine whether any negligence had occurred. "Officials should show prompt sensitivity towards public grievances," the chief minister added.

BEML rolls out prototype of driverless metro trainset for Bengaluru corridors

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Bengaluru

BEML on Thursday rolled out the prototype of its driverless metro trainsets, developed for the upcoming BMRCL corridors. The 5RS-DM project will be part of Namma Metro's Phases 2, 2A, and 2B, including the much-anticipated Airport Line.

The prototype for the Pink Line was formally unveiled by Bangalore Metro Rail Corporation Limited (BMRCL) Managing Director J

Ravishankar in the presence of BEML Chairman and Managing Director Shantanu Roy and senior officials.

The dignitaries also witnessed a test run of the train at the BEML Rail Complex.

Under the contract, BEML will supply 318 standard-gauge metro cars, designed, engineered, and manufactured at its Bengaluru facility for the Blue Line (Airport Line) and the Pink Line (Kalena Agrahara in the south to Nagawara in the

north), the company said.

The trainsets will undergo a detailed programme of testing and commissioning as per BMRCL's implementation schedule, followed by comprehensive maintenance support for up to 15 years, the PSU added.

"This rollout marks a significant step toward executing the Rs 3,177-crore contract awarded to BEML through a highly competitive bidding process. The prototype reflects BEML's growing contribution to India's metro

ecosystem, especially in the domain of driverless (GoA4) urban transit systems," the company said. In August 2023, BEML secured an order for 53 driverless trainsets, which later increased to 66 trainsets comprising 396 cars. All design and engineering work for the trainsets has been carried out by BEML's in-house teams.

Speaking on the occasion, Roy said, "The unveiling of this driverless metro prototype marks yet another milestone in BEML's journey

toward delivering next-generation mobility solutions for India's growing cities."

BMRCL MD Ravishankar said the rollout of the prototype reflected BEML's commitment to supplying state-of-the-art trainsets that would enhance the commuting experience, adding that it was a milestone toward meeting the aspirations of commuters on the upcoming R6 Line and the ORR-Airport Line.

BEML said the new driverless trainsets feature energy-

efficient systems, upgraded passenger information displays, extra-wide gangways for seamless movement between coaches, USB charging ports, ergonomic seating, and improved accessibility.

The trainsets also comply with advanced fire safety and crashworthiness norms and meet international safety standards.

They are compatible with Communication-Based Train Control (CBTC) for fully driverless operations.

Microsoft is deepening its commitment to India's AI: Satya

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Bengaluru

Microsoft Chairman and CEO Satya Nadella on Thursday said the company is deepening its commitment to India's artificial intelligence ecosystem with massive infrastructure investments. Microsoft is also strengthening its cloud footprint and focusing on skilling millions of Indians for an AI-driven future, he said. Nadella also announced strategic partnerships with four leading IT companies - Cognizant, Infosys, TCS and Wipro -- as they join forces with Microsoft to accelerate the adoption of agentic AI.

Speaking at a Microsoft event here, Nadella said, "We are very excited about investing in India to make sure that we're able to bring the best in class infrastructure here, the USD 17.5 billion investment," calling it Microsoft's largest investment in Asia. The Microsoft



Chairman underlined the rapid expansion of the company's cloud footprint across the country.

"We're building on Azure as the world's computer and we have 70 plus data centre regions all over the world. In India, the footprint continues to grow. We now have central India, West India, South India, and we have a partnership with Jio as well," he said. He further said that

a new data centre region would become operational in 2026. "We are very excited that in 2026, we will have a new DC in south central and then the most exciting part for me is that it's 100 per cent sustainable," he said.

Nadella also emphasised the importance of digital sovereignty and cybersecurity in an era of expanding AI deployment. "We are taking sovereignty and making sure

that there's a portfolio of options for sovereignty. So you have the public cloud, you have sovereign controls in public cloud..." he noted.

He warned that sovereignty cannot be viewed in isolation from security.

"Cyber security is a signals game—you can be sovereign and not have global intelligence—you'll be vulnerable in fact," he said, noting that Microsoft processes "trillions of daily signals" to secure platforms from Azure to Windows.

Nadella said he recently met Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who was very encouraging of this investment (\$17.5 billion), in particular, to drive society, the economy and growth. This commitment, he noted, comes on top of the \$3 billion investment he had announced during his last visit. On India's talent landscape, Nadella said the company will double down on its skilling

programmes. "We are now going to skill 20 million people across India in AI skills," he said, adding that initiatives such as the Government's E-Shram programme demonstrate how AI can uplift unorganised workers.

He also highlighted India's growing influence in the global developer ecosystem.

"India is slated to become the number one community in the world with GitHub by 2030," he said, praising the "engagement and the type of projects that are coming out of this place, the contributions from India." GitHub is a web-based platform for version control and collaboration that is primarily used by developers to store, manage, and share software code.

It is built on top of Git, an open-source version control system, and provides a user-friendly graphical interface and a large suite of collaboration tools.

Coast guard seizes Pak boat in Indian waters

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Ahmedabad

The Indian Coast Guard (ICG) has seized a Pakistani fishing boat and apprehended 11 crew members operating illegally in the Indian waters, officials said on Thursday. The detainees have been handed over to Jakhau Marine Police in Gujarat for further investigation, they said.

The Indian Coast Guard, in a swift action on Wednesday, "apprehended a Pakistani fishing boat with 11 crew inside India's Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ)," Gujarat Defence PRO Wing Commander Abhishek Kumar Tiwari said in a social media post. This interdiction underscores the Coast Guard's sustained maritime operations and India's commitment to securing its fron-

tiers while maintaining robust enforcement of international laws within the Maritime Zones of India (MZI), he said. "Continuous vigilance across India's maritime domain remains a cornerstone of our national maritime security strategy," he added.

"The Indian Coast Guard intercepted and apprehended a Pakistani fishing vessel along with 11 crew operating illegally inside Indian waters. This decisive action reflects the unwavering vigilance of the ICG and India's firm resolve to protect its maritime frontiers and uphold international maritime law within the MZI. Relentless surveillance and proactive operation remain the bedrock of our maritime security strategy," Coast Guard said in a social media post.

Marble sculpture adorns Bikaner House in Delhi

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

A striking 10-foot-tall sculpture titled As the Wind Rises, carved from a single block of pink Makrana marble, has become the new talking point at Bikaner House in the heart of the capital.

Created by renowned sculptor and Delhi Art Society president Neeraj Gupta, the 42-tonne monumental work. Crafted over eight months from marble sourced from Rajasthan's Nagaur district, the sculpture features undulating waves at the base that rise into intertwined, swirling forms. Gupta describes it as "a metaphor for the eternal processes of creation, growth and transformation," evoking cosmic energy, unity in diversity and the rhythm of life itself. "Art is fundamentally subjective," Gupta said.



"Its purpose is to make people appreciate and remember a work with passion." Blending contemporary abstraction with India's rich sculptural heritage, As the Wind Rises is being hailed as a bold statement on the evolution of Indian art on global platforms.

The sculpture will remain on public display at Bikaner House daily until September 20, 2026.

Odisha CM Majhi awards citizenship certificates to 35 applicants under CAA

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ Bhubaneswar

Odisha Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi on Thursday handed over Indian citizenship certificates to 35 people from Nabarangpur district under the Citizenship (Amendment) Act, 2019 (CAA). At a special programme organised by the Odisha Census Directorate and the Union Home Ministry, Majhi said India's "traditional values of humanity and asylum" had been revived through the process launched by Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

"This holy legislation has provided a ray of hope and reassurance to minorities persecuted for years," he said. As per the rules notified on March 11, 2014, minority community



members who entered India from Bangladesh, Pakistan and Afghanistan before December 31, 2014 are eligible for Indian citizenship. Stating that these 35 people are now citizens of India, the chief minister said: "You are now part of our future. Your safety,

respect and progress are our responsibility and duty. I welcome you as citizens of India". Majhi pointed out that if a person of any other religion is persecuted in any country, there are many nations in the world that can give him shelter. "However, if a Hindu is per-

secuted in any other country, there is no other place except India that can give them shelter. If there is no such law in India, then where will they go?" the CM asked. Revenue and Disaster Management Minister Suresh Pujari said many persecuted minorities in neighbouring countries may have ancestral links to India. "Keeping in mind their persecution, the PM designed the CAA amendment law," he said, adding that the new citizens will be eligible for all benefits, including land for the landless and caste certificates where necessary. One Bapin Mirda, who came from Bangladesh in 1998 and was accorded Indian citizenship here on Thursday, said the certificate has given him a new identity.

President meets displaced persons in Imphal

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ Imphal

President Droupadi Murmu on Thursday met internally displaced persons (IDPs) at the Lok Bhavan here and assured them that the Government stands with them.

In a post on X, the President of India's office said, "President Droupadi Murmu met and interacted with a few Internally Displaced Persons in Imphal. She assured that the Government stands with them at all times to address their needs." "She affirmed that the Government is working to secure their homes, livelihoods, and the future of their children. She further assured them that taking necessary measures to facilitate their progress towards a peace the post said.

No harm in cars from ethanol petrol, says Nitin Gadkari



Ethanol-blended petrol has greatly benefitted farmers and resulted in saving of over ₹1.40 lakh crore of foreign exchange, Lok Sabha was informed on Thursday. Amid concerns over the use of ethanol-blended petrol, Union Minister of Road Transport & Highways Nitin Gadkari said after extensive testing, no adverse impact has been found in cars where ethanol mixed petrol is used.

Bihar CM inspects tourist centre in East Champaran

Bihar CM Nitish Kumar on Thursday said the upcoming tourist facility centre in East Champaran district would benefit thousands of visitors to the historic Kesariya Buddha Stupa each year and help them better understand Buddhism. Kumar inspected the centre, visited the Buddha Stupa and interacted with villagers, including women and schoolgirls, during his tour of the district, the CM's Office (CMO) said in a statement.



RS Chairman hails Deepavali's inclusion in UNESCO list



Rajya Sabha Chairman CP Radhakrishnan on Thursday welcomed the inclusion of Deepavali in Unesco's Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, and called it a moment of "immense pride" for the nation.

BJP MP accuses Opposition of unconstitutional impeachment

BJP MP Tejasvi Surya on Thursday accused the DMK and the Congress of "unconstitutional weaponisation of impeachment" after several Opposition MPs submitted a notice seeking the removal of Madras HC Judge GR Swaminathan. Raising the issue during Zero Hour in the Lok Sabha, Surya said the move amounted to "an attack on the judiciary and the impartiality of judges", alleging it was driven by "anti-Hindu sentiments" within the Opposition bloc.



JP Nadda urges equal status for Vande Mataram as anthem, flag

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

Asserting that the national song Vande Matram is linked to "nationalism," BJP President JP Nadda on Thursday said the country should take a resolve to accord equal status to it as is given to the national anthem and flag.

He also charged the Congress with appeasement and negating the importance of Vande Mataram during previews and post-independence, even though the national song was linked to our ancient cultural heritage. Vande Mataram was a mantra of uniting the country, which the British feared, he said in the Rajya Sabha.

Concluding a discussion on the 150th Anniversary of National Song Vande Mataram, Nadda, Nadda, who is the Leader of the House in Rajya Sabha, also stated that the objective of this debate

was not to defame former Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru but to keep the record of India's history "straight".

The BJP leader said he fully respects the national anthem 'Jan Gana Mana' and was ready to sacrifice his life for it.

"Whenever there is an incident, then responsibility lies with the leader. Jawaharlal Nehru was the leader of the Congress party at that time," Nadda said.

He said the Congress party has always been opportunistic and cites the Nehruvian age to take credit when the situation suits the party.

However, the party does not take responsibility when the situation is adverse and seeks to put the blame on others, he alleged.

"I want to say with a sense of full responsibility that the respect and status that Vande Mataram was to be accorded, it did not receive the same and those in power at the time are fully



Union Minister of Health and Family Welfare JP Nadda speaking in the Rajya Sabha during the Winter session of Parliament in New Delhi on Thursday

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responsible for it," he said.

Nadda alleged that the importance of Vande Mataram and its link to our cultural heritage was negated by then Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru, which is our charge, as he cited Nehru's words in the House from the archives.

Nadda's speech was marked by constant barbs from both sides, even as the Leader of Opposition Mallikarjun Kharge asked whether the debate was on Nehru or Vande Mataram.

Right from the beginning, the Congress Party has compromised with India's culture, ethos and thought process, Nadda alleged.

The BJP president mentioned that the Prevention of Insults to National Honour Act, 1971, does not have any provision for a penalty if one disrespects or does not sing the national song Vande Mataram.

"The country is not run by making compromises. This is our ideology. It is governed by keeping

in mind unconditional national sentiments. Therefore, the Vande Mataram song is linked to our nationalism, and one should move forward keeping nationalism at the fore," Nadda said.

Hence, he asserted that Vande Mataram should be accorded the same status as the national flag and the national anthem have in the Indian constitution, and the same should be done.

"Meaningful discussion on 150th anniversary can take place only if we take resolve that Vande Mataram has the same status as national anthem and national flag in the Constitution and it should be added," he said, while wrapping up his around 50-minute speech in the Upper House.

To this, senior Congress Member Jairam Ramesh said the national song and national anthem always had the same status, and it would continue to have the same status.

Ramesh recalled that India's

first President, Rajendra Prasad, had said the same on January 24, 1950.

Earlier in his speech, Nadda attacked the Congress Party for not giving due importance to the national song. "In 1937, it was under the Presidentship of Jawaharlal Nehru that, under pressure from communal elements, they altered the sacred song discarding stanzas that invoked Bharat Mata as Maa Durga, wielding weapons of freedom," he alleged.

Talking about the importance of the national song, Nadda said Vande Mataram has been a witness to many events in history.

"The events that occurred during the time of independence, in them, the chant of Vande Mataram has served as energy. Vande Mataram is a chant, an energy, a vow, a resolve. Vande Mataram is the devotion to Mother India, service, and worship," he added.

Over 6,700 Indians rescued from SE Asia fake job scams: Govt

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

The Centre on Thursday informed Parliament that it has taken notice of instances of dubious firms involved in fake recruitment job offers, having lured Indian nationals mostly through social media channels to South-East Asian countries, and till date over 6,700 Indians have been rescued from Cambodia, Myanmar and Lao PDR. Minister of State for External Affairs Kirti Vardhan Singh said this in a written response to a query in Rajya Sabha.

"It has come to the notice of the Government instances of dubious firms involved in fake recruitment job offers having lured Indian nationals mostly through social media

channels to South-East Asian countries including Cambodia, Myanmar, Lao PDR and made them to carry out cyber crime and other fraudulent activities from scam centres operating in these countries," he said.

The exact number of Indian nationals stuck in these countries is not known as Indian nationals reach these scam centres on their own volition through fraudulent or unscrupulous recruitment agents or agencies and through illegal channels, the MoS said.

The Government of India has raised this issue at political level with the host Government from time to time, the Centre said.

"Missions/Posts take up the issue of rescue and repatria-

tion of Indian nationals actively with the local Ministry of Foreign Affairs and other concerned Government agencies of the host country like immigration, labour department, home affairs, defence and border affairs and law enforcement agencies," he said.

Singh, in his response, also shared the number of Indian nationals including software engineers rescued till date, with concerted efforts of Indian embassies in Cambodia, Lao PDR and Myanmar.

These figures stood at 2,265 in Cambodia, 2,290 in Lao PDR and 2,165 in Myanmar.

The exact span of time over which these Indian nationals were rescued, however, was not specified in the data

shared. Singh said the Government has established various channels to enable Indian nationals abroad to reach out to the Mission or Post concerned, in case they need any assistance.

"They can contact the Missions/Posts through walk-in interview, email, multilingual 24x7 emergency numbers, WhatsApp numbers, grievance redressal portals like MADAD, CPGRAMS, and eMigrate, and social media etc.," he said.

The Ministry of Home Affairs has set up the 'Indian Cybercrime Coordination Centre (I4C) as an attached office to deal with all types of cyber crime in a coordinated and comprehensive manner, Singh said.

The ministry issues advi-

sories and social media posts about the fake job rackets from time to time.

Similar communications are also issued by the respective Indian Missions or Posts abroad through their official websites, social media handles and print media.

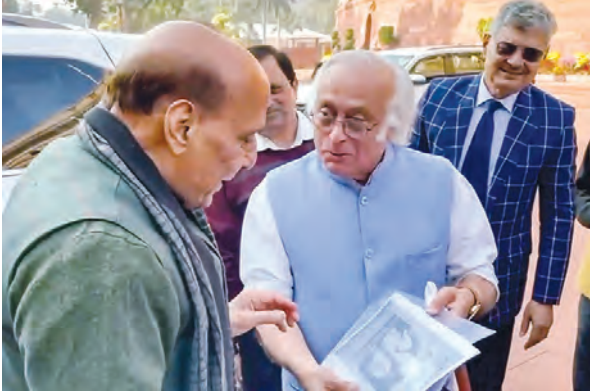
"Our Missions in South-East Asian countries issued various detailed advisories, upon receiving such information on Indian nationals being lured by fake job rackets in South-East countries, to job seekers, and advise them to verify all antecedents of recruiting agents and companies before accepting any kind of employment offer and not be enticed and entrapped in the fraudulent job offers in these countries," he said.

Congress refutes Shah's vote theft claim against Nehru

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

Congress on Thursday rebutted Home Minister Amit Shah's "vote theft" charge against Jawaharlal Nehru, saying the claim that he was made the prime minister despite Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel being the popular choice is a "lie" and a "figment of imagination".

Congress general secretary in-charge communications Jairam Ramesh said party colleague Piyush Babele has "totally exposed" one of the home minister's "many lies" in the Lok Sabha and shared his video on X. The Congress also shared Babele's video and said



Defence Minister Rajnath Singh being given a copy of Vallabhbhai Patel's daughter Maniben Patel's diary entries in Gujarat, that appeared in a book, by Congress leader Jairam Ramesh, during the Winter session of Parliament in New Delhi on Thursday. Ramesh told him that there was no mention in them of his claim that Jawaharlal Nehru wanted to build the Babri Masjid using public funds

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it exposes the "outright lie" of Shah. Intervening in the debate on election reforms in the Lok Sabha on Wednesday, Shah cited three instances of alleged "vote theft" by Jawaharlal Nehru, Indira Gandhi and Sonia Gandhi.

"So, 28 votes went to Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel and two were cast in favour of Jawaharlal Nehru. But Nehruji ended up being the prime minister," he had said, prompting an uproar in the Opposition benches. In the video shared by Ramesh and the Congress, Babele said the claim that Nehru was made PM despite Patel being the popular choice is a "figment of imagination" of the RSS.

President on 2-day visit to Manipur



President Droupadi Murmu being welcomed by Manipur Governor Ajay Kumar Bhalla on her arrival in Imphal on Manipur

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PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Imphal

President Droupadi Murmu will begin her two-day visit to Manipur from Thursday, during which she will attend a function commemorating women's struggle against

the British colonial rule, and may offer prayers at the renowned Shree Govindajee temple, officials said.

Security has been beefed up across Manipur as militant organisations have called for a shutdown against the President's visit.

This will be Murmu's first trip to the strife-torn state after becoming the President of India.

Her visit comes around three months after Prime Minister Narendra Modi visited the state on September 13 for the first time since ethnic violence broke out in May 2023.

After her arrival, she will attend a polo event organised by the Youth Affairs and Sports Department at Mapal Kangjeibung (Imphal Polo Ground), few metres from the Lok Bhavan, in the afternoon, they said.

Later in the day, she may offer prayers at the Three Govindajee temple, the citadel of Vaishnavism in Manipur. In the evening, she will attend a civic reception at the City Convention Centre before retiring for the night at Lok Bhavan, the officials said.

CBI charges 13 in digital arrest cyber fraud scam

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

The CBI has filed a chargesheet against 13 individuals for allegedly running "digital arrest" cyber fraud scams, controlled by masterminds located in Southeast Asian countries, officials said on Thursday.

The agency also ran a parallel investigation into cyber-slavery and the organised digital exploitation networks in Southeast Asia, with slave compounds in Myanmar and neighbouring areas, that are emerging as incubators for the execution of such frauds.

In the chargesheet filed in

a special court here, the CBI said its technical analysis of 15,000 IP addresses associated with the scam network showed "extensive cross-border connections" with several key bank accounts, used for collecting and routing victims' funds, "being controlled from abroad".

From the vast technical dataset, India-based IP addresses were isolated, enabling targeted searches and identification of domestic operatives, officials said.

The agency pinpointed these accounts being controlled by "masterminds based in Cambodia, Hong Kong and China".

NIA files chargesheet against 11 in Odisha explosives loot

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Bhubaneswar

The National Investigation Agency (NIA) has filed a chargesheet against 11 accused persons in a case relating to the loot of around 4,000 kg of explosives by armed cadres of the CPI (Maoist) during transportation to a stone quarry in Odisha's Sundergarh district, an official said.

According to a statement released by the NIA on Thursday, all the 11 accused have been charged under various sections of UA (P) Act, BNSS, Arms Act and Explosive Substances Act. The charge sheet has been filed in a special court.

"During the investigation, NIA found the 11 accused to have been actively involved in criminal conspiracy, planning

and execution of the loot of around 200 explosive packets, each containing 20 kg of explosives. The explosives were being transported from Itma Explosive Station to the Banko stone quarry on May 27, 2025," it said. The vehicle, along with its driver, had been forcibly seized by 10-15 armed Maoists and was being taken to a stronghold of the CPI(Maoist) in the nearby

Saranda jungle in neighbouring Jharkhand. The NIA took over the case from the local police in June this year.

The statement said that during the investigation, the NIA found that a huge quantity of explosives had been looted for use against the Government machinery, including police and security forces, through the commission of terror acts.

States Focus



GOVT HIRE 5,215 TEACHERS IN FIVE YEARS: TRIPURA CM

Tripura Chief Minister Manik Saha on Thursday said the State has recruited 5,215 teachers over the past five years to ensure quality education in schools. Addressing an education department programme at Rabindra Bhavan here, he said the shortage of teachers was primarily due to the termination of a large number of teachers several years ago.

“People know for whom so many teachers lost their jobs in 2017, and now they have joined hands. This is political talk and I don’t want to dwell much on it,” he said, indirectly referring to the CPI(M) and Congress alliance. Following a petition filed by a group of job aspirants, the Tripura High Court had dismissed the services of 10,323 teachers, a decision later upheld by a Supreme Court division bench. As a result, 10,323 teachers lost their jobs in 2017, a year ahead of the 2018 Assembly elections.



GOVT GAVE 37,916 JOBS IN 18 MONTHS: ODISHA CM

Odisha Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi on Thursday said his Government has appointed 37,916 people during its 18 months in office and is committed to fulfilling its promise of filling 65,000 Government posts within the first two years. Majhi made the remarks while handing over appointment letters to 591 newly recruited officers and employees in three departments – Water Resources (252), Housing and Urban Development (142) and Works (197). Majhi said, “Our Government has promised to fill all the 1.5 lakh vacant posts in five years and to fill 65,000 Government posts in two years.”

Justice will be delivered: Himanta ahead of charge sheet filing in Zubeen’s death case

TONY DAS ■ Guwahati

Appealing to people to have faith in the judicial process, Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Thursday said he believes justice will be delivered in the death case of singer Zubeen Garg.

Sarma made the statement as the police are scheduled to file the charge sheet in the sensational case on Friday.

“The SIT will submit its chargesheet, and the court will examine it. The culprit will be punished by the court,” the CM said.

“From tomorrow, the police job will be over, and the court’s role will start. I believe that the court will



definitely deliver justice,” he said, exuding confidence in the entire process.

The celebrated singer died under mysterious circumstances in Singapore on September 19 while swimming in the sea. He had gone to that country to attend the 4th edition of the

Arunachal: 18 dead, 3 missing as truck falls in gorge

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ Tinsukia/Dibrugarh (Assam)

At least 18 people from Assam’s Tinsukia district were killed and three others are missing as the truck they were travelling in fell into a remote gorge in neighbouring Arunachal Pradesh, officials said on Thursday.

The accident took place on Hayuliang-Chaglagam Road in Anjaw district in the eastern part of the hill State on December 8 when a truck was carrying 22 labourers from Tinsukia district, Defence PRO Lt Col Mahender Rawat said, citing the lone survivor’s version.

The site, approximately 12 km from Chaglagam, lies in difficult terrain with limited connectivity and the accident had not been reported by any local agency, contractor or civil representative until the survivor’s arrival, Rawat said in a statement.

“Eighteen bodies have been sighted and are being retrieved using delay ropes. ADC of Hayuliang has informed SP of Anjaw, who has reached the site, while the District Medical Officer is moving to facilitate evacua-

tion of casualties and mortal remains,” he said.

Rawat said that preliminary inputs from the survivor, who managed to reach Chipra General Reserve Engineer Force (GREF) camp, indicate that a truck carrying 22 workers from Tinsukia fell off a cliff on the night of December 8.

“The Indian Army has launched a major search and rescue operation in the Chaglagam region of Arunachal Pradesh. The operations were initiated based on information received late on December 10 regarding a vehicle accident along the Hayuliang-Chaglagam road near KM 40,” he added.

The Defence PRO said that the Army’s Spear Corps on the early morning of Thursday mobilised multiple search and rescue columns, medical teams, GREF representatives, local police, NDRF personnel and the ADC of Hayuliang.

“At 1155 hours, after four hours of intensive search and rope descent, the truck was spotted around 200 metres below the road near KM 40 in a re-entrant, inaccessible and not visible from helicopters or the road due to dense tree

cover and thick foliage,” he added.

The Anjaw District Administration has requisitioned the SDRF, which is en route at present.

“ADC Hayuliang is also questioning the sub-contractor of the Zila Parishad Member, Chaglagam, to verify the antecedents and exact strength of the workers hired,” Rawat said.

“Despite harsh terrain and poor visibility, the Indian Army, in coordination with civil administration and other agencies, is making all possible efforts to trace the remaining individuals and provide immediate assistance,” he added.

Earlier during the day, Assam’s Tinsukia District Commissioner Swapneel Paul said that at around 11 am, they received information about a vehicle falling into a gorge in Arunachal Pradesh’s Anjaw district.

“Accordingly, we contacted the DCs of Anjaw and Teju for confirmation. Both the DCs said that rescue teams have so far recovered several bodies and found one person alive. Some more persons are still missing,” he added.



Firefighters dousing a fire that broke out at Swagata Square Complex on Wednesday in Guwahati

PTI

GUWAHATI FIRE RAGES FOR OVER 38 HOURS; MULTIPLE AGENCIES CALLED

Guwahati: A massive fire that broke out at a commercial complex in Guwahati remained untamed for over 38 hours even as more than two dozen fire tenders have been struggling to douse the blaze, officials said on Thursday.

The fire broke out at Swagata Square Complex in ABC Point around 12.30 am on Wednesday. The multi-storey building houses SBI’s zonal office, commercial branch and the premium banking branch, and a shopping mall, ‘Sohum Emporia’.

More than 25 fire tenders have been struggling for over 38 hours. Water tenders from the Indian Air Force, Indian Army and Guwahati Refinery also joined the efforts to douse the blaze, while NDRF was called in to assist with their high-tech smoke reduction machine.

Apart from Guwahati, fire tenders came from Morigaon, Kamrup and Nalbari districts, as well. “There is fire on the sixth floor. We are trying to douse it,” a senior official of the Fire & Emergency Services (F&ES) said. Smoke is also billowing from the second floor, where the fire originated at the godown of the shopping mall, he added.

“There is fire at the backside of the building. However, due to non-adherence to safety norms while construction, fire tenders are unable to reach the rear,” another official said.

J&K LG Manoj Sinha gives jobs to NoKs of Jammu terror victims

MOHIT KANDHARI ■ Jammu

After a wait of over 20 long years justice was delivered to the next of kin of Dharam Singh, brutally killed by terrorists along with four other villagers from Kotranka area of frontier Rajouri district on June 28, 2005.

During this time, Naseeb Singh, son of Dharam Singh, lived in misery, constant fear and insecurity.

“Akhtar Hussain, a resident of Reasi, was shot dead by terrorists on July 13, 2005. His wife and children endured immense hardship for two decades. It had left a deep scar on the family”.

On November 15, 2004, SPO Sanjeet Kumar was murdered along with his friend by two terrorists in Balan Tundwa, Kishtwar, while they were preparing for a neighbour’s wedding.

On Thursday, Next of Kins (NoKs) of

all these victims of terrorism of Jammu Division received an appointment letter from Lieutenant Governor Manoj Sinha at a simple ceremony.

Appointment letters were also handed over to 22 beneficiaries in Age relaxation cases and 19 wards of J&K Police martyrs under Compassionate Appointment Rules SRO-43 and Rehabilitation Assistance Scheme (RAS).

On the occasion Lieutenant Governor Manoj Sinha said, “the dark days in their lives have ended. It is a new dawn of hope and dreams for these families”.

With the government job appointment letters to 41 terror victim families, 22 age relaxation cases and 19 wards of J&K Police martyrs, we have fulfilled our commitment,” the Lieutenant Governor said.

Earlier, on July 28, 2025, the



Lieutenant Governor had handed over the appointment letters to 94 Next of Kins (NoKs) of terror victims from Jammu division. The move brings relief to 135 terror victim families from Jammu Division who were

denied justice for decades.

The families of terror victims spoke out fearlessly, recounted decades of terror and hardship and exposed the Pakistan-sponsored terrorists and their local sympathizers.

Mamata slams SIR, urges people to protest

SAUGAR SENGUPTA
■ Krishnagar

Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee continued her tirade against the “mischievous implementation” of special intensive revision (SIR) of electoral rolls in Bengal “with a one-point agenda to help the BJP, asking the people to descend on the streets with kitchen tools and resist the “nefarious designs of the BJP Government” if a single name was deleted from the voters’ lists.

“They will take away the rights of mothers and sisters in the name of SIR and then they will bring police from Delhi during the election and intimidate the people of Bengal mothers and sisters, if your names are struck off, you



West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee addressing a public meeting, in Krishnagar in West Bengal on Thursday

PTI

have the kitchen tools in your hands your names are deleted. The women will fight in the front, and the men will be behind them,” Banerjee on Thursday thundered from an anti-SIR rally at Krishnagar in Nadia district.

“The people of Bihar could not understand the trick so they could not retaliate but we will not spare you here, remember an injured tiger is more dangerous than a general one,” Banerjee said. She warned of staging a

mighty dharna (sit in demonstration) “if a single name is deleted from the voters’ lists and asked the people particularly women to get prepared for a sustained struggle on the streets.

Continuing her diatribe against the BJP Government, particularly Union Home Minister Amit Shah called him a dangerous person whose eyes emitted the “villainy” of Duryodhana and Duhshasana — the two anti-heroes of epic Mahabharata.

Launching a scathing attack against Shah she said “he is a dangerous person you can see it all in his watch them one is that of Duryodhana and the other is that of Duhshasana,” alleging that the SIR was being conducted to politically help the BJP.

Goa, Israel boost tourism ties as Khaunte meets IMOT team

ASHOKE RAJ ■ New Delhi

In a significant step toward deepening tourism cooperation, the Israel Ministry of Tourism (IMOT) held a constructive meeting with Minister for Tourism, Rohan A Khaunte, in Panaji. The discussions underscored shared interest in strengthening bilateral engagement and enhancing direct connectivity between India and Israel.

The IMOT delegation — comprising Galit Hoffman, Consul — Tourism Affairs for India, and Amruta Bangera, Director of Marketing, IMOT India highlighted Israel’s interest in exploring a direct air link between Goa and Tel Aviv. The proposed route, they noted, could greatly improve accessibility and support the rising travel demand between India and Israel.

Rohan A. Khaunte reaffirmed Goa’s strong position in India’s tourism landscape and expressed the State’s commitment to expanding its global connections. He also assured the delegation of Goa’s support should an airline undertake the evaluation of the Goa-Tel Aviv



route, including assistance with operational requirements.

“Goa welcomes every opportunity to strengthen its global tourism partnerships. A direct connection with Tel Aviv holds strong potential to enhance two-way travel, and we are committed to extending all possible support to airlines evaluating the Goa-Tel Aviv route,” said the Minister for Tourism.

The meeting also saw discussions on hosting a tourism roadshow in Goa, aimed at spotlighting Israel’s diverse tourism offerings and engaging key travel trade

stakeholders across the State.

Expressing appreciation for the positive dialogue, Galit Hoffman, Consul — Tourism Affairs for India, IMOT, said, “Goa has long held a special place for Israeli travellers, and strengthening connectivity will only deepen this relationship. We are optimistic about the potential of a direct Goa-Tel Aviv flight and look forward to continued collaboration with the Government of Goa. We truly appreciate the support extended by Minister for Tourism, Rohan A. Khaunte.”

Goa remains one of the most preferred Indian desti-

nations for Israeli visitors, known for its beaches, culture, and warm hospitality. Each year, around 50,000 Israelis visit India, with a significant share opting for Goa — reflecting a deep cultural affinity and strong traveller interest.

On the outbound front, Israel continues to draw increasing numbers of Indian travellers, offering a blend of spirituality, history, natural landscapes, adventure activities, and culinary richness. Between January and November 2025, Israel recorded 1.18 million international tourist arrivals, with projections to close the year at approximately 1.3 million. India remains Israel’s leading Asian source market and one of its top ten inbound markets globally.

Both sides concluded the meeting on a positive note, aligned on continuing discussions to enhance direct air connectivity and strengthen tourism ties.

The proposed Goa-Tel Aviv route is seen as a promising avenue to unlock new opportunities and bolster travel flows between the two destinations.

BJP MPs flag Yamuna River pollution, highway woes

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

Two BJP members on Thursday raised concerns in the Rajya Sabha regarding the pollution in the Yamuna river, which affects the Mathura-Vrindavan pilgrimage circuit, and the deteriorating condition of the Goa-Belgaum National Highway.

Speaking during Zero Hour, Tejveer Singh from Uttar Pradesh acknowledged infrastructure improvements

in Mathura and Vrindavan, but highlighted challenges, particularly Yamuna river pollution, faced by pilgrims and locals.

He also called for enhancing sewage treatment plant capacity, strict monitoring of pollution sources, and enhanced safety measures along the riverbanks.

Singh proposed a metro rail service connecting Mathura, Vrindavan, Barsana, and Govardhan to ease traffic congestion during

major festivals like Navratri, Janmashtami, and Barsana celebrations, when devotee footfalls increase manifold.

“This will not only make the journey of crores of devotees comfortable but will also reduce traffic in the entire Vrindavan area, help in environmental protection and provide global recognition to pilgrims,” he said.

He also suggested smart traffic management systems, e-shuttle bus services, multi-level parking facilities, and a

special package for local youth in tourism-related activities.

Sadanand Shet Tanavde from Goa drew attention to the deplorable condition of the Goa-Belgaum National Highway, particularly the Anmod and Chorla Ghat sections.

He said these highways serve as lifelines for Goa and Karnataka, but remain narrow, prone to landslides, and frequently blocked during monsoons.

hindered due to the non-release of funds as per the ministry’s procedures. The progress of each scheme and the status of pending dues were reviewed during the meeting.

Regarding PMAY-G, the statement said in the financial year 2025-26, only the first part of the first instalment amounting to ₹1,497 crore had been released so far.

Bihar urges Centre to release ₹7,748 crore for PMAY-G, MGNREGA

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Patna

The Bihar Government on Thursday urged the Centre to immediately release ₹7,748.49 crore pending under the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana-Gramin (PMAY-G) and the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA).

Bihar Rural Development Minister Sharwan Kumar met

engaged under MGNREGA.

According to a statement issued by the State Rural Development Department, the ministers discussed several central schemes being implemented in Bihar, including PMAY-G, MGNREGA and the Deendayal Antyodaya Yojana-National Rural Livelihood Mission (DAY-NRLM).

It said the implementation of these schemes was being

payment of labourers

of these schemes was being



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Delhi court grants interim bail to Umar Khalid to attend sister’s wedding



A Delhi court on Thursday granted interim bail from December 16 to 29 to former JNU student Umar Khalid to attend his sister's wedding. Additional Sessions Judge Sameer Bajpai granted interim relief to Khalid, who is an accused in the case regarding the larger conspiracy behind the 2020 Delhi riots. The judge directed the accused to furnish a personal bond of ₹20,000 and two sureties of like amount.

"During the interim bail period, the applicant (Khalid) shall not use the social media," the court said, directing him to "only meet his family members, relatives and friends". It said Khalid also had to "remain at his home or at the places where the ceremonies of marriage as mentioned by him will take place".

Other conditions included the accused not contacting any witness and providing his mobile phone number to the investigating officer. The court directed Khalid to surrender before the prison authorities on the evening of December 29. Last year, he was granted interim bail of seven days to attend another wedding.

Death to one, life term to nine in Maharajganj communal clash murder

A local court on Thursday awarded one death and life imprisonment to nine people for a murder during communal violence last year in Maharajganj town during a Durga idol immersion procession. Last year on October 13, Ramgopal Mishra, 21, was shot dead when a communal clash broke in the mixed-population Maharajganj. Additional Sessions Judge, First, Pawan Kumar Sharma had on December 9 convicted Sarfaraz, Abdul Hameed, Mohammad Talib, Faheem, Zeeshan, Mohammad Saif, Javed, Soeb Khan, Nankau and Maroof Ali. It acquitting Khurshid, Shakeel and Afzal for lack of evidence and reserving the verdict on quantum of punishment.

On Thursday, the judge sentenced Sarfaraz – the man who fired the fatal shot – to death, and awarded life term to the remaining nine convicts. Three other accused were acquitted, Shukla said. On the night of the killing, 13 people were named as accused in an FIR – Two of them were killed in a police encounter while fleeing, while the rest were arrested over time. The killing triggered widespread tension in Mahsi, Maharajganj and parts of Bahraich city. Large-scale vandalism and arson were reported the following day as police strove to contain the situation from spiralling out.

‘Humanitarian grounds can’t override punishment’

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

Humanitarian considerations cannot override the statutory minimum punishment mandated by the legislature, the Supreme Court said on Thursday while refusing to interfere with the sentence imposed on a woman in a narcotic case.

The apex court delivered its verdict on an appeal by the woman challenging a June 2024 order of the Madras High Court which upheld her conviction and 10-year sentence in the case lodged under the provisions of the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (NDPS) Act, 1985.

While dismissing her appeal, a bench of justices Sanjay Karol and Vipul M

Pancholi noted that the appellant, who was 24-year-old at the time of the incident in 2019, has urged the court to consider her age, lack of prior criminal history and responsibility towards her minor child.

The bench said while it was not unmindful of the appellant's circumstances, the NDPS Act prescribes minimum mandatory sentence for possession of commercial quantity.

"The court has no discretion to reduce the sentence below the statutory minimum under section 20(b)(ii)(C) of the NDPS Act. Humanitarian considerations, though relevant for executive remission, cannot override statutory minimum punishment mandated by the legislature," the bench

ing Justice Joymalya Bagchi, said it was a difficult task to trace the elderly women, who had changed her residence in a far-flung village of Bihar and her last contact was lost as her local lawyer passed away, lauded the efforts of Railways and advocate Fauzia Shakil, who represented the widow pro bono (without any fees) to ensure she gets the financial relief.

"This young lawyer (Shakil), who represented



ECl can’t treat voters with doubt, SC told

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

The Election Commission cannot assume the role of a "suspicious neighbour" or a "policeman" treating voters with doubt, the Supreme Court was told on Thursday during the final hearings on a batch of pleas challenging the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls in various states.

A bench of Chief Justice Surya Kant and Justice Joymalya Bagchi heard detailed submissions from senior advocate Raju Ramachandran representing petitioners opposed to the SIR process being undertaken in several states.

Ramachandran assailed the conceptual foundation of the SIR and urged that the poll panel's constitutional mandate is to act as a facilitator and enabler of voting rights.

"The negative way of viewing one's own role is that of a disabler or that of a suspicious policeman," Ramachandran said, adding that when there is an adequate statutory scheme regarding citizenship, the poll panel cannot become a "nosy parker" instructing booth level officers (BLOs) to cast doubt on voters.

He said initiating an inquiry

based on a BLO's suspicion effectively amounts to "suspending citizenship".

"Now, how does the EC view its role? Because depending on how it views its role will follow how it acts. Either it sees its role as a facilitator and enabler of the societal ideal of universal adult franchise, which would mean helping citizens to vote, proactively helping and enabling.

"The negative way of viewing one's own role is that of a disabler or that of a suspicious policeman or a suspicious neighbour. So depending on how you view your own role, your sense of fairness and how you go about a particular exercise will be apparent from that," he said.

He argued that while the right to vote may be statutory, it flows from constitutional rights including Article 19(1)(a) and Article 21.

"Removal from an electoral roll on suspicion amounts to giving a power to suspend citizenship," he said.

On the definition and implication of the term "migrant", he said that in the current socio-political discourse, the term is often loaded and used to imply "illegal migrant" or "exodus" rather than domestic movement.

Offering a broader view, Justice Bagchi said, "Migration



does not have a domestic import... It is their livelihood which drives them. We have a brain drain which is also migration."

Justice Bagchi, who belongs to West Bengal, cited the example of IT professionals from his own city Kolkata taking flights to the southern States for opportunities.

The CJ added a stark reality check regarding labour migration and said, "In North India, trains are full of farm workers from Bihar... They are virtually auctioned and by the

time they come to Punjab, they are in tears."

He noted that many such workers have settled in Punjab, their children have mixed with the culture, yet their roots remain in Bihar or West Bengal.

The CJ also cited a recent visit to Havelock Island, noting that out of a population of 25,000, approximately 22,000 were migrants.

While the petitioners argued against the arbitrary nature of the SIR exercise, the bench said, "The SIR cannot

be seen too much on procedural aspects.

Let us keep in mind that they are doing something after 20 years and the SIR cannot become an annual feature. That is why we cannot intervene too much on the technical procedural aspects."

When the petitioners pressed on the "inquisitorial" nature of the process, Justice Bagchi clarified that the court's queries were "dialectical" in nature, intended to evoke responses rather than

signal a conclusion. The senior lawyer questioned the rationale behind selecting nine states and three Union Territories, including Chhattisgarh, Kerala, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh, for this exercise.

He termed the assumption that rapid urbanisation and frequent migration are regular features in places like Lakshadweep or the Andaman and Nicobar Islands as "facile" and a "lazy assumption" indicating non-application of the mind.

He specifically flagged the timing in Chhattisgarh, where elections are not due, arguing that rushing through the SIR process in such a "vulnerable state" under a tight time-frame called for judicial review. At the outset of the hearing, CJ Kant directed the registry not to accept any further fresh pleas regarding the matter.

"Many are coming now just for publicity. No fresh matters are required any more," the CJ said.

The matter will continue on December 16.

Earlier, the bench asked whether the Election Commission is barred from conducting an inquiry in case of a doubtful citizen and if an inquisitorial process falls outside its constitutional power.

SC refuses Prajwal Revanna plea for transfer of cases

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

The Supreme Court on Thursday refused to entertain a plea of former Janata Dal (Secular) MP Prajwal Revanna to transfer the trial of two criminal cases before the special MP/MLA court in Bengaluru to another court in the city on the ground of bias.

A bench of Chief Justice Surya Kant and Justice Joymalya Bagchi told Revanna's counsel that observations of the judge cannot be a ground of bias as it dismissed his plea.

"The observations of the presiding officer of the court cannot be the ground of bias. We have no reason to doubt that the officer would not be swayed by the fact that the petitioner was found guilty in the earlier case... And will confine his conclusions on the basis of evidence led in the pending trial," the bench observed.

Senior advocates Siddharth Luthra and Siddarth Dave, representing Revanna, said that the judge made some adverse comments against the lawyers too, which



Prajwal Revanna

requires expunction.

Justice Bagchi said that lawyers cannot hold judicial officers to ransom and make any allegations against them.

"Mr Dave, these remarks were inspired by the high court order itself on the same lines. You cannot hold the judicial officers to ransom. This lawyer appears in collateral cases and withdraws the vakalatnama time and again," Justice Bagchi said.

CJ Kant said that Revanna's counsel can furnish an apology before the high court as it is the most unethical thing to allege bias just because some observations were made by the presiding

officer. "This is absolutely the most unethical thing done.

Let him furnish an apology before the high court and it will consider it.

"We don't want to send a message that I went to the Supreme Court and got this done. We have to take care of the morale of our district judiciary as well," CJ Kant said, while declining to interfere with the high court order.

He told the senior counsels that there are hypothetical situations in the court and the judge's observation should not lead to allegations against him.

"There are hypothetical situations in court. We make observations. But I am not someone who will take browbeating of judges or courts lightly... As soon as the judge makes an observation there are allegations made against him," the CJ said.

The bench, however, said judges and courts also make mistakes but they are being rectified.

"Sometimes, errors happen as we deal with such a large volume of cases and evidence," the CJ said.

SC rejects Sanjiv Bhatt’s plea seeking suspension of sentence in drug case

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

The Supreme Court on Thursday rejected a plea filed by former IPS officer Sanjiv Bhatt seeking seeking suspension of the 20-year jail sentence imposed on him in a 1996 drug seizure case. A bench of Justices JK Maheshwari and Vijay Bishnoi said it was not inclined to entertain the matter.

The top court was hearing an appeal filed by Bhatt seeking suspension of sentence in the case.

A sessions court in Palanpur town of Gujarat's Banaskantha district had sentenced Bhatt to 20 years in the case dating back to 1996.

Bhatt was found guilty of falsely implicating a Rajasthan-based lawyer by claiming that in 1996, police had seized drugs from a hotel room in Palanpur where the lawyer was staying.

Bhatt, who was sacked from service in 2015, was a superintendent of police in Banaskantha district in 1996.

The district police under him had arrested Sumersingh Rajpurohit, a Rajasthan-based lawyer, in 1996 claiming they had seized drugs from a hotel room in Palanpur town where he was staying.

However, the Rajasthan police later said Rajpurohit was falsely implicated by the Banaskantha police to compel him to transfer a disputed property located at Pali in Rajasthan.

Former police inspector IB Vyas had



Sanjiv Bhatt

moved the Gujarat High Court in 1999 demanding a thorough inquiry into the case. Bhatt was arrested by the state CID in September 2018 in the drug case under the NDPS Act and is in Palanpur sub-jail since then.

Last year, the former IPS officer had approached the Supreme Court seeking transfer of the trial in the 28-year-old drug case to another sessions court alleging bias. He had also sought directions for recording of the trial court proceedings.

However, the Supreme Court had dismissed Bhatt's plea and imposed a cost of ₹3 lakh on him for alleging bias against a lower court judge conducting his trial in the drug planting case.

Doctors who died on duty during COVID-19 entitled to PMGKY cover



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

The Supreme Court held on Thursday that the families of the doctors who died while doing their duties during the COVID-19 pandemic are entitled to an insurance coverage of ₹50 lakh under the "Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Yojana". A bench of Justices PS Narasimha and R Mahadevan set aside a Bombay High Court judgment that had held that private doctors were not entitled to the coverage under the Government's insurance scheme.

"There is a requisition of the services of doctors and this is evident from the conjoint reading of the provisions of the Act, the Maharashtra Prevention and Containment of COVID-19 Regulations 2020, the Navi Mumbai Municipal Corporation Order dated March 31, 2020, the PMGKY-Package Scheme, the explanatory communication to the PMGKY policy and the FAQs released," the bench said.

It said the invocation of laws and regulations was intended to leave no stone unturned in requisitioning the doctors and the insurance scheme was equally intended to assure

doctors and health professionals in the frontline that the country is with them.

The court said individual claims for insurance made under the PMGKY-Package will be considered and decided in accordance with the law and on the basis of evidence.

"The onus to prove that a deceased lost his life while performing a COVID-19-related duty is on the claimant and the same needs to be established on the basis of credible evidence," it added.

The top court was hearing a plea moved by Pradeep Arora and others against a March 9, 2021, order of the Bombay High Court that held that private hospital staffers were not entitled to receive benefits under the insurance scheme unless their services were requisitioned by the state or the central Government. A plea was filed in the high court by Kiran Bhaskar Surgade, who lost her husband — who ran a private clinic in Maharashtra's Thane — to COVID-19 in 2020. The insurance company rejected her claim under the Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Package (PMGKP) on the ground that her husband's clinic was not recognised as a COVID-19 hospital.



Editor's
TAKE

Should India ban social media for kids?

Tech addiction demands layered responses — digital literacy, parental involvement, psychological support, and educational redesign

Once it was alcohol, then it was drugs; now addiction has a new name-social media. Its addicts are everywhere-across age groups, classes, and cities. It is an epidemic that spread before anyone even realised it. India, like other nations, is hooked 24x7 to social media, and this is more prominent amongst young children who are now exposed to all the good and bad the digital world has to offer. In this scenario, Australia's decision to ban social media access for children under 16 has reignited a global debate on how societies should confront the escalating crisis of tech addiction and its psychological repercussions.

The Australian government's move is undeniably sweeping and disruptive in its implications, even though its intent is clear: to protect young users from the toxic digital environment and online harm that has come to be accepted as digital normal. The factors that pushed Australia to ban social media for children may be just as relevant for India. While there is little disagreement on the need to limit children's access to social media, enforcing a blanket ban could be excessively harsh and may be counterproductive. That said, the case for intervention is undeniably strong and is the need of the hour. Psychologists worldwide have been sounding the alarm for years. Clinics now report children as young as eight showing symptoms of mental illness: hyperactivity, violent behaviour, throwing tantrums when devices are taken away, and an inability to disengage from screens.

Regular access to social media is changing cognitive and emotional development amongst children in a big way. Declining attention spans, inability to form coherent sentences, and eroded real-world communication skills are becoming disturbingly common. The picture becomes even murkier when you include incidents like the Blue Whale challenge or misogynistic school group chats-proof of how an immature mind can be drawn into, or even trigger, serious harm. Australia's ban may not be a panacea, as even the strictest age ban can be circumvented, and children adept at navigating technology may find proxy routes sooner rather than later. Indeed, no law can compensate for what is lacking at home, in classrooms, or in broader digital culture, but government intervention paves the way for incremental reforms in schools, colleges, and even at home.

India's challenge is more complex: its vast population, socio-economic diversity, and uneven digital literacy make a ban impractical and insufficient, though action is essential. Some progress is emerging through bottom-up efforts, with over 5,000 parents joining support groups to build healthier digital habits, reinforcing families as the first line of defence. Tech addiction needs layered solutions-digital literacy, parental involvement, psychological support, and educational redesign-because while a ban may raise awareness, it cannot replace the long-term task of building resilience and autonomy in young users. India must craft its own path.

The SC's push for CCTV accountability

Triggered by alarming reports of custodial deaths and the routine absence of surveillance footage, the Court's intervention underscores a stark reality: despite years of judicial directives, transparency inside police stations remains largely a myth



HASAN
KHURSHID

The Supreme Court of India's recent intervention into the disturbing pattern of custodial deaths has revived a long-standing and uncomfortable debate: Why does custodial violence persist despite decades of judicial directions, committees, and constitutional safeguards? On September 4, 2025, a Bench comprising Justices Vikram Nath and Sandeep Mehta registered a suo motu Public Interest Litigation (PIL) after taking cognisance of a *Dainik Bhaskar* report revealing that 11 people had died in police custody in Rajasthan in just the first eight months of 2025. The trigger was not only the shocking number but also the wider pattern of deliberate non-compliance with directives mandating CCTV surveillance in police stations across India. For years, courts have emphasised that CCTV cameras are not optional but essential tools for ensuring transparency, curbing torture, and upholding constitutional rights. Yet, police stations across states continue to function without operational cameras, or worse, with cameras that are conveniently "faulty" or whose footage is "unavailable." According to media reports, police routinely withhold CCTV footage in custodial death cases, citing technical glitches, storage issues, ongoing investigations, or legal barriers. These excuses have created fertile ground for impunity, where the monitor of oversight-the CCTV camera-is neutralised precisely when accountability is most needed.

This is not the first time the Supreme Court has intervened. Earlier rulings — DK Basu, Paramvir Singh Saini, and Shafhi Mohammad-laid down clear and mandatory directions for installing functional video and audio surveillance in police stations. In 2020, the Court issued detailed guidelines requiring uniform installation across all states and Union Territories. It even made Station House Officers personally responsible for maintaining CCTV systems, preserving recordings, and ensuring timely repairs. Yet, five years later, the Court has been forced to confront the same systemic neglect. During the hearing on November 25, 2025, the Supreme Court minced no words: "Custodial violence and deaths are a blot on the system. This country will not tolerate this practice. You cannot have deaths in custody." The Court demanded compliance affidavits from all states and Union Territories, posting the matter for further hearing on December 16, 2025. Its concern stems from the constitutional premise that surveillance in police stations is a fundamental safeguard-an obligation, not a discretionary administrative decision. High Courts have echoed similar concerns.

In *Akhillesh Pandey v. State of Madhya Pradesh* (2018), the Madhya Pradesh High Court warned



THE REAL TEST NOW IS WHETHER STATES WILL FINALLY ACT — OR WHETHER CUSTODIAL DEATHS WILL CONTINUE TO BE TREATED AS TRAGIC BUT INEVITABLE STATISTICS

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that failure to provide full CCTV coverage in any police station would be treated as contempt of court. This, however, has done little to change the ground reality. The disconnect between judicial directives and executive action has allowed custodial violence to fester. India's struggle with custodial brutality is not new. In 1997, the Supreme Court in *D.K. Basu* recognised custodial torture as an assault on the rule of law.

In later cases-Shafhi Mohammad (2018) and Paramvir Singh Saini (2021)-the Court expanded guidelines, with Justice Rohinton Nariman stressing that installing CCTV cameras was a constitutional necessity rooted in Articles 21 and 22. Yet, the implementation remains half-hearted, largely because custodial violence thrives in opacity, and the state machinery shows little urgency to disrupt this culture. The judiciary's frustration draws from a long history of ignored reform efforts. From the National Police Commission reports (1977-81) to the Ribeiro and Padmanabhiah Committees, from the Malimath Committee to the landmark Prakash Singh judgment of 2006, India has been inundated with recommendations for transforming the police from a "force" to a "service."

Despite this, real change has remained elusive. Justice AN Mulla's searing 1961 remark that no group in India matches the police force's record of lawlessness-though later expunged-continues to resonate with uncomfortable accuracy. Recent events have only reinforced these concerns. During the COVID-19 lockdowns, countless videos surfaced showing policemen mercilessly beating civilians, includ-

ing pregnant women and elderly citizens. Such images laid bare the deep-seated culture of unrestrained power. One of the most horrifying examples remains the 2020 Sathankulam case in Tamil Nadu, where the CBI charge sheet revealed the savage torture of 59-year-old P. Jeyaraj and his 31-year-old son, J. Bennicks. Over seven hours, police personnel stripped, beat, and humiliated the father-son duo, forcing them to clean their own blood from the floor. Despite Jeyaraj's pleas, citing diabetes and high blood pressure, the brutality continued until both men succumbed to their injuries. Their clothes were drenched in blood to such an extent that police officers had to change their uniforms twice before presenting them in court. The investigation also exposed medical negligence-Dr Vinila, who examined them, failed to document their injuries or provide medical support that might have saved their lives. This case stands as a grim reminder that custodial torture is not an aberration but a structural crisis embedded in policing culture. CCTV cameras alone cannot eradicate it, but they can act as a crucial deterrent-if the system allows them to function. The Supreme Court's recent intervention is not merely a legal exercise; it is a moral reckoning. India cannot claim to be a constitutional democracy while allowing citizens to be brutalised behind closed doors. The real test now is whether states will finally act-or whether custodial deaths will continue to be treated as tragic but inevitable statistics. The nation's conscience demands more than compliance affidavits; it demands genuine accountability.

The Pioneer
SINCE 1865

Why educating girls is not enough: Bridge the skill gap



DEVENDRA
KUMAR

2ND OPINION
THE PIONEER

India has spent decades strengthening girls' access to education. Through scholarships, awareness drives, and community-level campaigns, the country has succeeded in bringing more girls into classrooms than ever before. Enrolment rates for girls have risen at primary, secondary, and even higher education levels. Yet a stubborn gap remains: while more young women finish school and college, far fewer make it into the workforce. This disconnect reveals a hard truth-education alone cannot guarantee employment. For Indian girls, skill development is the missing link between learning and livelihood.

Across the country, thousands of young women hold degrees but remain unemployed. This reflects a deeper

structural issue: literacy and academic qualifications, although essential, do not automatically translate into employability. Many graduates lack the practical, digital, and workplace skills demanded by contemporary industries. Compounding this are entrenched social norms and cultural expectations that often overshadow the benefits of education. For many girls, familial restrictions, gender stereotypes, and ideas about "appropriate" work limit their ability to turn education into financial independence.

These social barriers shape everything-from whether a woman is allowed to work to what kind of job she can accept. Families frequently avoid roles that involve travel, physical tasks, or late hours, forcing even educated women into narrow, low-growth career paths. Confidence-building and communication abilities-skills critical in today's work culture-are rarely nurtured in traditional classrooms, making skill development programmes essential.

The reality becomes even harsher in India's vast informal sector, where more than 90 percent of working women remain concentrated. Most are unskilled and engaged in low-paid, insecure jobs-domestic work, agriculture, tailoring, construction, home-based production, or micro-enterprises. In rural areas especially, women face severe skill deprivation and remain trapped in unsta-

ble jobs with little chance of mobility. Skill development can change this trajectory. Training in digital literacy helps women shift from low-productivity work to stable, better-paying opportunities. Today's industries-whether health-care, manufacturing, hospitality, technology, or retail-demand a blend of theoretical knowledge and practical ability, and skill training provides this bridge.

When women acquire skills, the impact extends far beyond employment. Skilled women strengthen economic productivity, innovation, and inclusive growth. Within families, a working daughter or mother enhances financial security and decision-making power. Moreover, skilled workers are better positioned to negotiate fair wages, resist exploitation, and move into formal employment.

The next step for India must be to integrate skill development into every stage of education. Rural training centres must be expanded, especially for girls with restricted mobility. Partnerships with industry can ensure training aligns with real job market needs. Crucially, communities and families must be sensitised to value skill training as essential-not secondary-to education. For India's girls, skill is the pathway to independence, confidence, and security.

The writer is the founder of the Ladli Foundation

PIC TALK



A camel stands in the glow of the sunset light, in Pushkar, Rajasthan.
PHOTO: PTI

DIGITAL EXPERIENCE

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AUSTRALIA'S SOCIAL MEDIA BAN SPARKS CALL FOR VIGILANCE

The Prime Minister of Australia has openly appealed to young people to refrain from using social media, and teenagers are now prohibited from accessing these platforms. Yet, there remains a possibility that some adolescents may still bypass restrictions by manipulating age settings or posing as older users with fake identities.

The risks facing teenagers online are well documented, and in countries like India the lack of transparency and effective oversight only heightens these concerns. With parents increasingly occupied by demanding professional lives, attentive supervision has reduced significantly. Many single children grow up without the stabilising presence of grandparents, and even when grandparents are present, their guidance is often overlooked in an over-indulgent

culture. Consequently, teenagers turn to unsolicited advice from social media posts, videos, or equally uninformed peers, creating a cycle of immature and sometimes harmful influence.

Decades ago, society provided an additional layer of support through close relatives and elderly neighbours, whose guidance parents accepted with respect. Over time, however, such involvement has come to be seen as interference, leading to the loss of a valuable safeguard.

Parents in Australia have welcomed the government's decision. A similar measure is urgently needed in India, where constant guidance for teenagers should be seen not as dictatorship but as essential support that protects their curiosity from harmful and inappropriate content.

SUNIL OKHADE | INDORE

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Urban India needs coordinated reform

One of the most pressing issues in India today is the widening disconnect between rapid urban expansion and the slow pace of essential infrastructure development.

Cities continue to grow outward at extraordinary speed, yet public transport, waste management systems, and affordable housing consistently fail to keep pace, leaving both residents and municipal authorities under severe strain. The challenge is not purely financial; it also lies in weak institutional coordination, outdated planning frameworks, and a persistent tendency to prioritise high-visibility projects over everyday necessities. Consequently, even well-designed reforms often lose momentum and struggle to deliver meaningful improvements.

A more realistic solution begins with strengthening municipal governance. Cities must be granted the autonomy and technical expertise required to plan for the coming decade rather than the next election cycle. Transparent budgeting, reliable service delivery, and people-centred urban design should guide all development. If governments adopt such an approach, India's cities can evolve in a manner that is efficient, liveable, and environmentally sustainable.

Diwali's heritage glows anew

India's Diwali, newly inscribed on UNESCO's Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity, arrives as a moment of cultural pride and personal joy. This recognition feels profoundly affirming. Diwali has never been merely a spectacle; it embodies India's civilisational spirit, carried in the quiet radiance of a single diya and the belief that renewal is always within reach.

Across centuries, the festival has gathered many layers of meaning: Rama's triumphant return to Ayodhya, Mahavira's nirvana, Guru Hargobind's liberation, and the mercantile traditions that once illuminated ancient trade routes.

Yet Diwali's deepest strength lies in its ability to anchor ordinary lives, reminding families and communities that clarity, compassion, and moral courage endure even amid turmoil.

UNESCO's recognition honours not only Diwali's history but also the people who have safeguarded it-artisans shaping earthen lamps, storytellers preserving memory, and generations who kept the flame alive in difficult times. In an increasingly anxious world, may this acknowledgement serve as a gentle reminder that harmony is a practice renewed each year.

Reimagining a song for India

Reimagining *Vande Mataram* requires sensitivity to history, culture, and contemporary identity. Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay's iconic song portrayed the motherland as nurturing, protective, and divine, and the phrase "I bow to thee, Mother" captured the emotional and spiritual bond felt during the freedom struggle. In an independent and secular India, however, there is space to consider a modern interpretation that reflects today's pluralistic values.

Vande Bharatam — meaning "I bow to thee, India" — is more direct and less symbolic, potentially making the song more inclusive for those uncomfortable with religious imagery. The name Bharat resonates across languages and regions, offering a shared identity that avoids specific cultural or devotional associations. Such universality may encourage collective participation without hesitation. Culturally, this shift signals modernisation. While the maternal depiction remains integral to the independence movement's memory, adapting the song acknowledges India's multi-faith, diverse society. Yet any alteration must be approached with care, as *Vande Mataram* is inseparable from the freedom struggle and continues to evoke the sacrifices of earlier generations.

India redraws its strategic lines with Putin’s Delhi visit

When Prime Minister Narendra Modi greeted Vladimir Putin with a bear hug and handed him a Russian translation of the Bhagavad Gita, it was more than ceremonial warmth — it was a calculated message. The gesture signalled that India will chart its own course regardless of Western discomfort

FIRST
Column



NILANTHA
ILANGAMUWA

That was no ordinary greeting; on the frosty evening of last Thursday, Indian Prime Minister Modi embraced Russian President Vladimir Putin in a bear hug at Delhi airport and, within moments, presented him with a copy of the Bhagavad Gita in Russian. The choice of gift was laden with symbolism-echoes of Robert Oppenheimer, who drew profound philosophical reckoning from the same text, declaring, “Now I am become Death, the destroyer of worlds,” after witnessing the first atomic explosion. Was Modi signalling the weight of nuclear-age responsibility to Putin, or was this a deliberate affirmation of India’s comfort in maintaining ties with a pariah state under global sanctions?

The streets of Delhi, festooned with Russian and Indian flags and dominated by colossal billboards of Modi and Putin, suggested more than ceremonial protocol-it was pageantry of influence, an audacious statement of India’s strategic independence. In that gesture, New Delhi appeared to assert that moral judgement from the West would no longer dictate its choices, and that the Indo-Russian relationship, forged during the Cold War and hardened by decades of defence dependence, remains a pivot capable of unsettling the established order in South Asia and beyond.

Putin’s first visit to India in four years, coinciding with talks in Washington over a possible Ukraine peace framework, came at a time when New Delhi is walking an increasingly delicate tightrope between Moscow and Washington. The optics of the visit-from ceremonial receptions at Rashtrapati Bhavan to summit talks at Hyderabad House-reflected not merely diplomacy but an overt projection of influence. Modi’s presentation of the Bhagavad Gita in Russian was emblematic: a centuries-old text of dharma and duty, layered with the moral weight of choice, now inserted into the theatre of high-stakes realpolitik.

Putin himself, in an interview with India Today, described India as a “major global player, not a British colony,” praising Modi as a “reliable person” who does not succumb to pressure. These words, spoken against the



PUTIN’S FIRST VISIT TO INDIA IN FOUR YEARS, COINCIDING WITH TALKS IN WASHINGTON OVER A POSSIBLE UKRAINE PEACE FRAMEWORK, CAME AT A TIME WHEN NEW DELHI WAS WALKING AN INCREASINGLY DELICATE TIGHTROPE BETWEEN MOSCOW AND WASHINGTON

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backdrop of US sanctions, EU manoeuvres to leverage frozen Russian assets for Ukraine, and growing Chinese assertiveness, highlight India’s determination to claim agency in a multipolar world where Washington and Brussels no longer set the rules unilaterally.

Historically, the Indo-Russian relationship has oscillated between strategic necessity and opportunism. Declassified CIA documents from the 1980s reveal the delicate dance India played with the USSR during the Cold War. Indira Gandhi’s approach, as the CIA observed, was staunchly nationalist and fiercely protective of India’s regional supremacy. The United States feared that India’s policies towards its neighbours, coupled with its Soviet alignment, could destabilise South Asia while simultaneously granting Moscow a strategic foothold. Today, the echoes of that era reverberate: New Delhi remains Moscow’s top arms buyer, leases nuclear-powered submarines, and maintains energy ties that have drawn ire from Washington, while ensuring that its engagement with Russia does not fully alienate the United States or Western partners.

What is important to note here are the economic metrics. India-Russia trade in FY

2024-25 amounted to approximately USD 68.7 billion, heavily skewed in Moscow’s favour due to energy imports, with a trade deficit of around USD 59 billion. Both Russia and India aim to expand bilateral trade to a target of USD 100 billion by 2030, a goal that falls just two years after the next general elections, when Prime Minister Modi is widely expected to contest again despite the symbolic 75-year age limit for party leadership-a restriction largely treated as political theatre and quickly forgotten. Meanwhile, India continues to negotiate with the United States to mitigate punitive tariffs, including a 25 per cent secondary tariff imposed on India’s purchases of Russian oil. It is also worth noting that India recorded a goods trade surplus of about USD 41.18 billion with the US in FY 2024-25, with exports of USD 86.51 billion and imports of USD 45.33 billion, reflecting strong bilateral trade despite earlier concerns over tariffs. Remittances provide a partial counterweight: total remittances to India reached roughly USD 135.46 billion, including USD 25-30 billion from the US, while Russian remittances are negligible in comparison. This indicates that while India faces challenges in trade metrics, its diaspora injects substantial

financial resilience into the economy.

The summit also highlighted defence collaboration in stark terms. India’s USD 2 billion lease of a Russian nuclear-powered attack submarine, with delivery scheduled for 2028, signals an unprecedented deepening of underwater capabilities.

The vessel, unable to enter combat under lease terms, is intended to train crews and refine India’s nuclear submarine operations — a critical step for strategic deterrence in the Indian Ocean amid rising Chinese and US naval competition. Russia, despite sanctions and Western pressure, continues to sustain a military-industrial complex capable of producing tanks, missiles, and drones at accelerating rates. As reports from Ukraine’s Centre for Analytical Studies and Countering Hybrid Threats indicate, nearly half of Russian defence enterprises remain unsanctioned, exposing the limitations of Western punitive measures. In this context, India’s engagement with Russian defence capabilities is both a practical necessity and a symbolic assertion that strategic imperatives can outweigh Western orthodoxy.

Sanctions, however, remain a persistent backdrop. The European Union, under Ursula von der Leyen, has attempted to

deploy emergency measures to convert frozen Russian assets into loans for Ukraine, challenging EU treaties and raising the prospect of legal confrontations with countries such as Hungary and Belgium. The United States, meanwhile, has explored using the same assets in US-led investment frameworks to facilitate reconstruction or political leverage. India, observing these efforts, has maintained a stance of strategic neutrality-resisting calls to condemn Russia while advocating for diplomacy, and emphasising that selective sanctioning by Western powers is inconsistent and self-serving. Putin, speaking to India Today, noted that Washington and Moscow presented papers in parallel but reached no compromises, and highlighted that over 90 per cent of Russia-India transactions are conducted in national currencies-a subtle yet potent challenge to dollar dominance.

The optics extend into nuclear and high-tech collaboration. India is developing nuclear-capable submarine-launched ballistic missiles, advancing its underwater fleet, and exploring high-tech partnerships with Russia, recalibrating the strategic environment in South Asia. Putin’s rhetoric that “Kiev is the mother of all Russian cities” and his framing of Russia’s role in eastern Ukraine resonate with historical narratives of great power assertion, yet they also serve as a conscious projection of strength aimed at partners like India. Modi’s reception was far from ceremonial; it underlined a shared understanding that global power is increasingly multipolar and that alliances must be flexible, resilient, and insulated from Western censure.

Even in the economic sphere, India challenges conventional assumptions. While the trade deficit with Russia persists due to energy imports, India’s broader engagement with global markets-including remittances from its diaspora and ongoing negotiations with the US-allows New Delhi to balance sovereignty with strategic interest. Putin’s discussions emphasising bilateral trade growth, high-technology collaboration, and future energy projects further solidify this interdependence. The bottom line is clear: the India-Russia partnership, far from being a relic of Cold War calculations, has evolved into a sophisticated framework for navigating sanctions, economic competition, and regional security challenges, and it may yet redefine the balance of power in South Asia.

Is Delhi crafting a new role for Ghulam Nabi Azad in Jammu and Kashmir?



ANIL
ANAND

A rather mysterious post appeared on the social-media platforms recently focused on former Congress veteran and head of the now defunct Democratic Progressive Azad Party (DPAP) Mr Ghulam Nabi Azad. It neither quoted anyone nor was attributed to any source but suggested that Prime Minister Mr Narendra Modi is mulling over assigning a key role to Mr Azad, most probably in the demoted and dissected Union Territory (UT) of Jammu and Kashmir.

“Prime Minister Narendra Modi has dropped a significant hint about a major role for veteran leader Mr Ghulam Nabi Azad. Sources indicate that Azad may be assigned an important position in Jammu & Kashmir, signalling a possible political shift in the Union Territory,” read the social media posts.

What makes it more interesting is that neither the Prime Minister’s Office-BJP nor Mr Azad have either confirmed or rejected these posts. It will be interesting to know how and from where these posts originated.

What role? Will a leader of national stature such as him be appointed as the Lt Governor of Jammu and Kashmir? An erstwhile state of which he was not only the chief minister but also lorded over and influenced governmental and political decisions from New Delhi.

Or, if the post has any credibility, is he being considered to helm yet another political experiment cooking in the annals of Delhi’s power corridors? Hinting at a possible chief ministerial role for him in the BJP-included future government in the UT? Or was it a mere kite-flying exercise as the post evoked no further response, particularly from the ruling dispensation-BJP and the Narendra Modi government?

What makes the post related to Mr Azad’s future curious was that it almost coincided with yet another exodus from the DPAP and leading towards the Congress-the party which he served for decades and, in turn, took the boy from the remote area of erstwhile Doda district to towering national heights. It is another matter that after his unceremonious exit from Congress he refuses to give any credit to the party for his stature as a towering national leader. And quite unconvincingly!

With his closest aides and former Minister Mr GM Saroori, credited with having backed Mr Azad to walk out of Congress and float a new

political outfit, having already joined the Congress, the new setback for him came when his two more trusted aides Mr Jugal Sharma and Mr Abdul Majid Wani, both former ministers, announced their plans to rejoin Congress. Suddenly, the mysterious posts appeared on social media about the possibility of a fresh J&K-centric assignment for Mr Azad.

Not that these developments, of Azad aides’ “ghar wapsi”, had happened suddenly. More than half-a-dozen DPAP leaders, including them, had made efforts to join Congress before the assembly elections but their attempts were foiled by a group of leaders dominating the J&K Congress and thwarting all efforts at its revival or growth. Most of these DPAP leaders later contested elections as independents to avoid any linkage with Mr Azad, whom people perceived to be soft towards the BJP, and lost narrowly.

Adding a few more seats-as these leaders would have won as Congress nominees-to the Congress kitty would have made the party a formidable partner in the ruling alliance. It would also have broken the hegemony of a set of people controlling Congress in the UT. No probe was ever held and no heads rolled even one year after the assembly elections.

The discontent in the DPAP had started simmering a few months after the party came into being. Most of these leaders, dyed-in-the-wool secular Congressmen, had pinned their hopes on Mr Azad to provide a secular option to Congress in Jammu and Kashmir as the party had not only lost its moorings but had failed to meet the Narendra Modi-anchored BJP’s challenge. Ostensibly, they were dismayed at Mr Azad not taking a clear political stance in the politically charged Muslim-majority UT with a considerable presence of Hindus, thereby giving an impression of soft-peddling towards the saffron party.

Ever since the dilution of Article 370 on August 5, 2019, and the corresponding Constitutional changes resulting in the UTs of J&K and Ladakh, BJP’s moves at installing its government have failed. Although the Centre is adamant in ignoring the demand for restoration of statehood in J&K, and a similar demand has gained foothold in Ladakh along with bringing the tribal-dominated UT under the 6th Schedule of the Constitution of India, and their reiteration that it will be done at an appropriate time, the political winds have started blowing in different directions.

A big self-inflicted setback for the Centre and the RSS-BJP combine was the Modi government’s decision to restore the over-a-century-old tradition of ‘Durbār move’ that entails shifting the capital to Jammu and Kashmir in winters and summers respectively. This was

done, despite their earlier jubilation on discontinuing the process, under pressure particularly from people in BJP’s stronghold of Jammu which has been under economic stress due to wrong and anti-Jammu policies of the Centre and the UT governments.

Durbār move entailed Kashmiris moving to Jammu in winters. This was a major source of contribution to Jammu’s economy which has been in dire straits after the opening of the Jammu-Srinagar railway link via the holy town of Katra (Vaishno Devi) and later stoppage of Durbār move. In the absence of any alternate and viable plan to sustain Jammu’s economy, despite the region having voted for BJP in the last eight elections-from Lok Sabha down to Panchayat via UT Assembly-and religion-related and communal issues showing signs of weakening as a counter to divert people’s feelings connected with their economic survival, the Central dispensation could be toying with an idea of yet another Azad-centric political move after the failure of his DPAP experiment.

Given the none-too-pleasant political scenario in Jammu and Kashmir and with the DPAP fiasco behind his back, the question arises: Will Mr Azad bite the bullet in the twilight of his political career?

To be fair to Mr Azad, all through his political association with Congress-during which he was always, within the government and the Congress, at the decision-making levels-he had safely avoided getting involved in murky political experimentation as part of the statecraft. He definitely had his hands soiled in the Congress’s internal power dynamics which led to many stalwarts quitting or retiring from the scene, and no one even from the younger lot who held any promise was allowed to come up. The ruptures in the Congress’s organisational set-up were clearly visible once Mr Azad quit the party, with none other of any consequential stature available to take charge.

How could he be relevant in Jammu and Kashmir’s political scenario under these circumstances, despite the fact that he still has some credibility left?

In any new experiment, even if he accepts Mr Modi’s offer-which could range from becoming Lt Governor, simultaneously of the two UTs, or functioning in an interlocutory capacity focused on the problems of J&K and Ladakh, and not a direct political role-he would only be seen as a representative of the Modi government, with BJP being the political arm of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh.

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A sustainable sporting future for new India



NASIR
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India’s sporting rise is no longer measured only in medals or Olympic success; it is unfolding quietly in school grounds, small towns, and remote districts where a new era of sports infrastructure is taking shape. For the first time in decades, government ambition for a fitter and more inclusive nation is aligning seamlessly with private sector innovation. Together, they are creating an ecosystem defined by accessibility, sustainability, and world-class standards, marking a transformative chapter in India’s sporting journey. Government investment through programmes like Khelo India has played a central role in this shift. What started as a mission to identify talent and nurture young athletes has evolved into a nationwide movement to strengthen grassroots infrastructure. With more than a thousand Khelo India Centres sanctioned across the country, access to sporting facilities is no longer a privilege restricted to metropolitan areas.

The rapid development in remote regions underscores this change. When a multi-purpose indoor hall opens in Arunachal Pradesh’s Kamle district or when Himalayan states receive hundreds of crores for sports facilities, it reflects a deeper reorientation of development priorities. Sports infrastructure is now seen as integral to inclusive growth, not an optional extra. A child in Ladakh, Nagaland, or Meghalaya should have the same chance to train, play, and dream as a child in Delhi or Mumbai, and India is beginning to make that aspiration real. By taking modern facilities to remote, tribal, and hilly regions, the country is not merely constructing fields and courts — it is building a future pipeline of talent that previously remained invisible due to lack of access. But infrastructure alone cannot drive change. The private sector has stepped forward to bridge the gap between policy and execution. India’s sporting future must evolve without compromising the planet’s well-being. For example, Gallant’s partnership with Nike Grind, Nike’s global sustainability initiative, is a testament to this commitment. Providing world-class sports gear is of utmost importance for the country’s sporting excellence — rubber infill, delivering football turfs, multi-sport courts, and athletic tracks that meet global standards while remaining suited to India’s climate and usage patterns. These surfaces are durable, safe, weather-resis-

tant, and engineered to ensure sustainability never comes at the cost of performance. India’s varied geography and climatic extremes make it essential to pair global technology with local delivery. Many companies, including Gallant, work on the model that integrates international expertise with strong on-ground execution, ensuring that facilities in rural districts rise to the same benchmarks as those in major cities. Today, world-class facilities are emerging in district schools, universities, sports academies, and community grounds, creating a more level field for talent across regions. This is also an era where public vision and private execution are reinforcing each other. Government funding through Khelo India and Special Area Games schemes is reaching even difficult terrains.

Private innovators are ensuring these facilities are built using sustainable materials that reduce long-term costs and environmental impact. CSR support from corporates is further enhancing the reach and quality of sports infrastructure across communities. Together, these collaborations are building a model that is scalable, eco-conscious, and socially impactful. The future demands more than just building more fields; it demands facilities that are greener, smarter, and longer-lasting. With rising environmental concerns, the sports sector too must move towards responsible innovation. Materials like Nike Grind contribute to a circular economy by reducing waste and repurposing discarded material into high-performance surfaces. Gallant Bounce installations reflect this mindset, prioritising accessibility, safety, and longevity. These facilities become inspirational spaces where children discover confidence, athletes sharpen their skills, and communities gather with pride. India’s next sporting leap will likely emerge from its remotest corners. A new turf in a tribal school or a synthetic track in a hilly region reinforces that talent is not determined by geography. As India prepares for global competitions and future Olympics, the foundations being laid today will determine the champions of tomorrow. The road ahead is filled with promise. India’s sporting aspirations now reflect a larger cultural commitment to fitness, resilience, and collective growth.

With government vision and industry innovation working in tandem, the nation is steadily moving towards a future where world-class, sustainable sports infrastructure becomes the norm. The fields being built today will shape not only athletes but the spirit of a confident and progressive India.

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TRADE LOCKED



Yet another deadline seems to have gone. According to India's chief economic advisor, V Anantha Nageswaran, the India-US trade deal will most possibly be sealed by March 2026. During the summers, there was the anticipation that the agreement would be finalised by September. It did not, and the next target was the festive month of November. Several ministers and trade negotiators backtracked and voiced a belief that Christmas-New Year, or December, will mark the end of the ongoing bilateral talks. Now comes a new deadline, which is three months later, and creates new apprehensions, worries, and disruptions. It implies that Indian exports, which witnessed a slowdown due to the US tariffs, will suffer for another few months. The trade deficit for 2025-26 may increase, and if the dollar outflows do not stem, this will create a further downward pressure on the rupee. However, Nageswaran is confident that the economic and growth outlook for 2026-27 remains strong, and the current devaluation of the currency is because it is "undervalued relative to fundamentals." In effect, the tide will change soon.

Speaking to a TV channel, the economic advisor agreed that the November-December target turned out to be "elusive," but added that he would be surprised if the March deadline was not met. In the recent past, the American side has become more optimistic about the bilateral deal. The US trade representative, Jamieson Greer recently told a Senate subcommittee that the latest trade proposals from India were among the "best" that the US had received. "They (Indians) have been a very difficult nut to crack... but they have been quite forward leaning... the type of offers that they have been talking to us about have been the best we have ever received as a country," Greer said. It indicates that India has agreed to proposals that other nations did not, or that New Delhi has softened its stance over the months. One can flip the argument to believe that the US, which wanted a lot more, has decided to be content with a little less.

Farm imports from the US still seem to be the most sensitive issue on the trade agenda. Greer admitted that there were disagreements especially on American crops and meat, which include the imports of corn, soybean, wheat, and cotton. Throughout the year, the Indian side, including the prime minister and ministers have maintained that they will not allow any compromises with the interests of the local farmers. However, in the recent past, India has made a few concessions, albeit cloaked in national necessities. For example, cotton imports were eased, and allowed at zero import duties to help the textile sector, which faced shortages. The Government aimed to convince the farmers that the imports will be used by the industry, and not enter the open marketplace. Farm unions were unhappy, and voiced their concerns over low domestic prices. Similarly, there is talk to use American corn for making ethanol to blend with petrol. A 20 per cent blend is mandatory, and this time too the reason will be that the corn will be used by the refiners, and not enter the market.

Since any bilateral trade deal will logically include the import of American goods, apart from farm produce, Piyush Goyal, the industry and commerce minister, has urged the Indian business community not to be perturbed about such free trade agreements. In a public meeting, he said that Indians oppose the bilateral or regional trade deals even if they adversely impact 5-10 per cent of the market share in specific segments. He urged the industry to be strong, and resilient, and not be affected by such small changes. In effect, the policy-makers wish to prepare the business community for the concessions that India will need to give to the US as part of the trade deal. This is akin to the way the former are preparing the farmers to face the implications of higher imports from America. This explains why India is on a signing spree to ink bilateral deals so that the India-US one, when it happens, seems logical and inevitable.

Finally, Nageswaran made a telling comment in the interview with the TV channel. He maintained that the India-US trade deal was not just about economics and business, or agriculture. It was about geopolitical considerations. The trade agreement was linked to other areas such as national security, diplomacy, new world order, and regional and subcontinent security. A recent report by the White House connected economic relations with Indo-Pacific security. The study wanted closer India-US trade relations, which would logically enhance closer ties in the Indian Ocean to counter China. While India has moved towards China because of the retaliation by the US, New Delhi perceives Beijing as a long-term security threat. Hence, India wants to have a larger relation with America, even as it stays close to Russia, and inches towards a few agreements with China. But New Delhi has realised that in terms of geopolitics, and long-term view, it cannot completely isolate itself from the US. Some analysts argue that Russia is India's past, which will continue in the future. The US is India's future. The India-China destinies are interlinked.

India's MAGA vs Trump's MAGA

The future lies in wooing Microsoft, Amazon, Google, Apple

Like Donald Trump's MAGA, but in an unobtrusive manner, and without the theatrics and circus of the US president, India has its own business-economic weapon, which is also MAGA. In the long run, the Indian weapon of mass market will prove to be more durable and consequential than Trump's trade-tariff-investment warhead. The US republicans wish to 'Make America Great Again.' The Indian Government believes in 'Microsoft, Amazon, Google, and Apple.' Ironically, both nations' futures depend on the tech giants.

But before we go down that road, a trip down the nostalgia lane first. Scrolling down the India-US news on diverse digital platforms, I had a flashback from the past, some three decades ago. I recalled a similar political schizophrenia coupled with business mania, a kind of parallel track in the relations between India and the US. Back then, Robin Raphael, the US assistant state secretary in the Department of State, caused diplomatic tremors and waves in India.

Raphael, a South Asia expert who was subsequently investigated by the FBI on charges of being an ISI mole with leanings towards Pakistan, claimed that a genuine dispute existed between Pakistan and India, and Kashmir was not an inalienable part of India. This caused considerable agitation among the Indian leaders. Yet, while Raphael hectoring India, the American soft-drinks icon, Coke, made grand announcements about coming back to India with a bang. Other well-known American brands were also enthusiastic about the vast, untapped, and growing Indian consumer market.

Fast forward a few years, and the US did what even India had never anticipated. The former compelled Russia to stop the supplies of cryogenic engines to India, which could have aided the latter in its space and missile programme. It is a different matter that India managed

without Russian help. But around the same time that diplomatic hostilities with the US were on the rise, McDonald's announced that it would open thousands of fast-food stores across India. Mac-D realised the potential of the Indian market.

A similar kind of schizophrenia-excitement is visible today. After imposing a 50 per cent tariff on Indian exports, hankering about H-1B visa regime, and targeting pharma shipments, Trump recently instructed his aides that there were complaints about India dumping rice in the US. He hinted at new tariffs on rice imports. His tariff war against India seemed unabated. Do remember that after new sanctions were imposed by the European Union, and others against two Russian crude oil exporters, Indian importers stopped, or curtailed purchases from Russia. Or at least publicly announced it.

However, the likes of Microsoft, Amazon, Google, and Apple, the Indian MAGA, announced major investment plans for their Indian operations. This was despite Trump's threats to reduce their exposures to the subcontinent, and invest more in the US. The tech giants did both. Satya Nadella, the CEO of Microsoft, said that he had a wonderful meeting with the Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, and that his firm will commit \$17 billion to promote, develop, and encourage AI (Artificial Intelligence) in India.

Nadella added that this was the largest investment by Microsoft in Asia. Not to be outdone, within no time, Amazon, which is the largest e-commerce platform in India, claimed that it would invest a much-higher \$30 billion until 2030 to improve, develop, and upgrade the AI capabilities in India. The firm stated that it saw endless potential and possibilities in the Indian market.



Sutanu Guru
Author, Journalist and Academician

OUR TAKE



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

A Contrarian Investor

Personal is the new credit norm

Going crazy on credit cards, loans to buy cars and appliances



per cent year-on-year. Fresh sanctioned limits rose 13 per cent quarter-on-quarter, after three quarters of decline, which subdued the annual growth. The market remains concentrated, and the top four issuers raised their collective share from 70 per cent to 72 per cent. Average credit limits increased, and the portfolio health strengthened, which was backed by an improvement in delinquency from two per cent to 1.8 per cent.

Two-wheeler financing registered robust growth, with the assets under management touching ₹1.8 lakh crore, or 18 per cent year-on-year rise. New loan sanctions grew nine per cent year-on-year in Q2-FY26. The NBFC dominance continued, aided by higher sourcing from the first-time borrowers. Higher-ticket loans in the Rs 1-2 lakh bracket gained traction, reflecting a shift towards premium vehicle purchases. The delinquency rate reduced from 6.2 per cent to 5.4 per cent, although the longer-duration stress remained elevated.

Consumer durable loans posted the fastest growth among the unsecured products, with

the assets under management rising 16 per cent year-on-year to ₹1 lakh crore. New sourcing expanded 22 per cent year-on-year, supported by aggressive NBFC participation, and strong retail penetration. Loans under ₹20,000 accounted for nearly 65 per cent of the volumes, which aligned with the country's expanding small-ticket digital EMI ecosystem.

As India's credit ecosystem evolves with stronger underwriting, digital enablement, and rising consumer confidence, unsecured lending appears well-positioned for sustained, responsible expansion. The Reserve Bank of India recently cut the repo rate by 25 basis points to 5.25 per cent, which will offer relief to several sections of the borrowers, especially those considering personal loans. As the overall cost of borrowing drops, banks and NBFCs are expected to gradually reduce the interest rates on personal loans. The impact may not be visible immediately, but may see marginally lower rates in the coming weeks. The lenders will slowly realign pricing to reflect the revised repo rate. This bodes well for the unsecured lending

segment.

Recently, at a press briefing, the central bank's deputy governor, Swaminathan J, said that it remains confident about the sustainability of the credit growth, supported by stable asset quality, and a measured rise in unsecured lending, which so far shows no signs of stress. He noted that apart from monitoring year-on-year credit expansion, the regulator evaluates how each loan segment is growing relative to the others, along with slip-page trends across the portfolios. The earlier regulatory measures on unsecured credit, he explained, were introduced when such loans were expanding at nearly twice the pace of the rest of the loan book.

At present, the overall credit growth stands at about 10-11 per cent. Lending to the large industries is growing at 10 per cent, home loans are expanding at 11 per cent, and personal loans are rising at 14 per cent. "The growth has been seen more in secured segments like gold loans or home loans, and unsecured loans have significantly moderated. So, there are no indicators at this point in time which are creating a concern for us," Swaminathan said. Unsecured lending at this stage forms less than 25 per cent of the retail book, and accounts for only 7-8 per cent of the total banking system credit.

However, experts contend that there are several pitfalls in unsecured credit. Although the current delinquency rates indicate borrowers' discipline, and ability to pay the loans, the situation can quickly go out of control. In the past, the robust trends in unsecured loans led to over-borrowing, largely driven by over-spending, and an inability among the borrowers to pay the EMIs, or settle the credit card bills. This is especially relevant as the central bank warns borrowers of cyber-crime, and online loan frauds. In the recent past, aggressive loan pitches by Chinese apps created havoc in the credit system.

Debt traps, when overextended loan payments constitute 30-40 per cent of monthly incomes, can lead to spiralling debt, impact savings especially for emergencies and crucial expenses, and lead to bankruptcy-like situations. Hence, individuals need to be careful, and calculate their loan payment outgoes, before opting for fresh loans. Never forget that unsecured credit is more expensive.

Trade agreement to enhance bilateral ties: Huizenga

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ New York / Washington

A new trade deal between India and the US under President Donald Trump and Prime Minister Narendra Modi would further enhance the bilateral relationship, a top US official has said, underlining that Washington's partnership with New Delhi is critical.

These remarks were made by House Foreign Affairs South and Central Asia Subcommittee Chairman Bill Huizenga on Wednesday at a subcommittee hearing titled 'The US India Strategic Partnership: Securing a

Free and Open Indo-Pacific'.

"The US-India relationship is no longer just important. It is a defining relationship of the 21st century. If America wants a free Indo-Pacific, resilient supply chains and a world where democracy, not authoritarianism, sets the rules, then our partnership with India is critical," Huizenga said in his opening remarks.

The hearing heard from witnesses, Director of Asian Studies Centre, Heritage Foundation, Jeff Smith, Executive Director of the Observer Research Foundation America, Dhruva Jaishankar and External Senior Advisor, Special

Competitive Studies Project, Senior Fellow, Indo-Pacific Programme, German Marshall Fund of the United States, Sameer Lalwani.

Describing India as one of the fastest-growing major economies in the world, Huizenga said American companies increasingly see India not just as a market but as a partner to innovation, especially in AI, communications, and advanced technologies, where collaboration already exists. "American companies are eager to enter the Indian market on a level playing field. A new trade deal with India under

President Trump and Prime Minister Modi would further realise this goal and enhance the relationship. Open markets, strengthening supply chains and driving innovation, all of which would chart a new beginning in our storied partnership," he said.

Huizenga stressed that every American administration, whether Republican or Democrat, has "strengthened ties, or certainly at least attempted to, making clear that the United States does not see India as a temporary or transactional partner."

Referring to Russian President Vladimir Putin's recent visit to

India and Prime Minister Modi's participation at the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation summit in China in September, Huizenga said, "we must view this moment with clear eyes."

"President Putin's warm visit to India last week and India's participation in China's Shanghai Cooperation Organisation summit this September raised some understandable concerns."

"Moreover, authoritarian powers like China and Russia are redrawing borders by force, undermining democratic norms and coercing their neighbours. Nowhere is this more evident

than in the Indo-Pacific, where an increasingly aggressive China threatens regional stability, global prosperity and the open flow of commerce," he said.

"China's string of pearls ideology is no longer just a theory, but rather an overt attempt to encircle and control the Indian Ocean, its sea lanes, and expand the militarisation of these strategic ports and trade routes. We cannot allow this to happen. India knows these risks firsthand," Huizenga said.

He also noted that India has agreed to purchase more American energy, thereby signif-

icantly reducing its reliance on Russia. Huizenga underscored that US-India cooperation today spans defence, technology, counterterrorism and trade.

On counterterrorism cooperation, which he described as "significant", Huizenga noted that organisations responsible for the heinous April 22 Pahalgalam attack — Lashkar-e-Tayyiba (LeT) and The Resistance Front (TRF) - were designated by the Trump administration as foreign terrorist organisations in July this year. The designation reflected "our shared commitment to fighting terror wherever it occurs".

If happy with India's offer, US should sign trade deal: Goyal

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ Mumbai

The US should sign the free trade agreement with India on the "dotted lines" if Washington is happy with what has been offered by New Delhi, Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal said on Thursday.

Goyal welcomed the Trump administration's views on India's offer, but refrained from giving a deadline for the signing of the long-awaited free trade agreement between the two nations.

The minister was reacting to a comment by US Trade Representative Jamieson Greer in Washington, who said that the US has received the "best ever" offer from India.

"His happiness is very much welcome. And, I do believe that if they are very happy, they should be signing on the dotted lines," Goyal told reporters here.

He, however, declined to specify India's offer to the US.

The minister said there have been five rounds of negotiations with the US on the trade deal, and added that US Deputy Trade Representative Rick Switzer's ongoing visit to India is not centred around negotiations.

Switzer's visit to India, his first since taking over three months back, is an effort at getting to know each other well, Goyal said, adding that he had "substantial discussions" with the visiting official.

The two-day talks between the US delegation led by Switzer in New Delhi were concluded on Thursday. They have held talks with the Indian team led by Commerce Secretary Rajesh Agrawal.

The two sides have exchanged views on matters related to India-US trade and economic ties, including on the ongoing negotiations for a mutually beneficial bilateral trade agreement (BTA).

Meanwhile, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Thursday held a telephonic conversation with US

President Donald Trump that focused on enhancing economic ties at a time when the two countries are eyeing a trade deal.

The two leaders exchanged views on expanding cooperation in trade, critical technologies, energy, defence and security, officials said.

Further, when asked about Chief Economic Advisor V Anantha Nageswaran's assertion that the pact with the US would be signed in March next year, Goyal said he is not aware of the comment and refrained from putting any timeline.

"A deal is only done when both sides stand to benefit. And I don't think we should ever negotiate with deadlines or hard stops because you tend to make mistakes then," Goyal said, limiting himself to saying that negotiations with the US are progressing well.

Speaking at a Senate Appropriations Subcommittee hearing on Tuesday in Washington, Greer said there is resistance in India to certain row crops and

other meat and products. Row crops in the US include corn, soybeans, wheat and cotton.

"They have been very difficult nuts to crack... but they have been quite forward leaning... the type of offers that they have been talking to us about ...have been the best we have ever received as a country, so I think that is a viable alternative market," he said.

These remarks are important as both sides are trying to conclude the first phase of the proposed bilateral trade agreement.

The talks are important as the Trump administration has imposed steep 50 per cent tariffs on Indian goods entering American markets. The outcomes will also have a positive influence on the trajectory of the rupee, which has depreciated to lifetime lows lately and also breached the psychologically important 90-to-a-dollar mark.

The Indian industry and exporters are eagerly waiting for the conclusion of the negotiations

and announcement of the 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.

First, the US imposed a 25 per cent duty on Indian goods, stating trade deficit concerns with India, which stood at around USD 46 billion in 2024-25. An additional 25 per cent penalty was imposed later 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 agri products like almonds, corn and apples, and industrial goods. India has strongly opposed any concessions on the agri and dairy sectors. India has stated that it will not compromise the interests of farmers and MSMEs.

Unilever sees 'massive opportunities' in India

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ New Delhi

India, with a high GDP growth and recent GST reduction, presents "massive" opportunities for British multinational consumer goods maker Unilever and its Indian arm Hindustan Unilever, according to a top company official.

The companies believe they will be the main beneficiaries of a much more dynamic economic environment in India, said Unilever Chief Executive Officer Fernando Fernandez.

Indian consumption was significantly affected over the last three years due to double-digit food inflation, said Fernandez in a JP Morgan Fireside Chat.

"I feel the government in India has taken very relevant measures lately. So, GST reduction, that is the VAT of India, personal income tax reduction, interest rate reduction, when the government does something like this, it's because things in the economy are not right, and really that's what's happening the last couple of years," he said.

Moreover, there is some food deflation and have seen immediately in the Indian GDP growth.

"I think in the last quarter it was 8.2 per cent. So I see a lot of opportunities in India. This GST reduction affects 40 per cent of our portfolio," he said, adding, "I believe the GST reduction, the impact on the whole economy will be very, very significant."

Unilever has recently made

changes in the top leadership of HUL by appointing Priya Nair as the new CEO.

"We have brought also another two CEOs into our Indian leadership team, the CEO of Hero MotoCorp, as the CEO of the company, the CEO of Britannia, as a head of our Food business. They have the mission of really putting our volume growth in similar level to the one of GDP growth, it will take some time, but I'm very confident of the opportunity," he said.

Fernandez, who was in India recently on an official visit, said, "Opportunities there are massive", noting that India has 60 million people with a per capita income comparable to France.

"You have 700 million with income per capita of Indonesia, Thailand, Philippines and another 700 million with the income per capita of East Africa and West Africa. There is growth for everyone in India. And we believe that we will be the main beneficiaries of what will be a much more dynamic economic environment in India," he said.

He said: "Our brands are perfectly suited to really take advantage of what will be an explosion of wealth expansion. So I'm super excited with India."

Hindustan Unilever (HUL) is consistently ranked as Unilever's second-largest market globally by revenue, after the United States, with India contributing around 12-14 per cent of total sales.

Manufacturing to contribute 25 pc of GDP by 2047: Report

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ New Delhi

The manufacturing sector's share in the Indian GDP will rise to 25 per cent from approximately 17 per cent at present, and the country is poised to become a global industrial powerhouse by then, said a joint report from the Boston Consulting Group (BCG) and Z47.

Flagship programmes, such as Make in India, Atmanirbhar Bharat, and production-linked incentive (PLI) schemes, are rapidly expanding domestic capacity, said the report 'Digitizing Make in India 3.0'. The report outlines five sectors — electronics, defence, automotive and EV, energy, and pharmaceuticals — that could anchor a USD 25 trillion industrial opportunity by 2047.

"Multiple priority areas emerge for India's growth vision in the manufacturing sector going forward, such as Electronics and Semiconductors, Defence, Automotive and EV, Energy Manufacturing and Transition, and Pharmaceuticals — as they combine strong growth, industry push and a clear policy investment runway," the report said.

The report also mentioned that India's next manufacturing leap could revolve around four poten-

tial pillars — fostering innovation, strengthening strategic depth, enhancing competitiveness and driving efficiency through technology adoption.

"Each pathway represents a set of options for policymakers and industry participants to consider in enabling India's manufacturing transformation," it added. To realise its 2047 vision, India is leaning on regional manufacturing clusters across defence, EV, and semiconductors.

"Corridors like Noida-Chennai-Hosur and Dholera are already showing results. These clusters enable co-location of suppliers, shared labs, logistics, and skilled talent. They reduce cost, increase speed, and foster innovation," it noted.

In sectors as electronics and semiconductors, India's end-market was at USD 33 billion in 2022 and is projected to reach USD 117 billion in 2030.

In defence, the allocated budget of '6.81 lakh crore for (FY25-26), doubled over a decade, with a clear Make-in-India push. "Imports have declined 9.3 per cent (vs 2015-19), 92 per cent of FY25 contracts were awarded to the domestic industry. Exports have reached Rs 23,000 crore and over USD 160-190 billion domestic pipeline currently exists across 75+ platforms," it said.

Italy's Deputy Prime Minister Antonio Tajani on Thursday expressed hope that the India-European Union Free Trade Agreement (FTA) will be signed in the next six months.

Speaking on the sidelines of the Italy-India Business Forum here in the presence of Union Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal, Tajani said the deal between the fourth-largest economy and the 27-country bloc is very important as it will help his country's exports.

"I want to be optimistic, if during the first six months of next year, it is possible to achieve the goal (of signing the deal)," Tajani said.

Goyal, however, declined to give a timeline by which he expects the deal to be signed, but opined that all the issues will be resolved to have a fair, balanced and equitable deal which will be a win-win for all.

The minister said the deal between two economies of a size, scale and growth potential as India and the European Union will be a "defining agreement" of the 21st century.

"Obviously, it takes time. Obviously, we have a lot of things to consider. You need to crystal gaze into the future, you need to ensure that sensitivities on both sides are protected, and you need to grab the low-hanging fruit so that businesses and people on both sides can benefit," Goyal said, adding that negotia-

tions are with a sense of urgency, but never in haste or with a deadline.

"Every issue is important, and no issue is such that it cannot be resolved to mutual satisfaction. There are issues under discussion," Goyal said.

The minister said countries, like Italy, will be able to export their wines and automobiles to India and in turn, India will be able to export whiskies, textiles and auto components to the 27-country bloc.

Teams are putting in their best efforts to deliver a good agreement, leaving no stone unturned.

Both Goyal and Tajani stressed the need for cooperation between democracies for the smooth supply of

raw materials in the global market, while the Indian minister also flagged concentration risks amid the weaponisation of trade.

Tajani said one country cannot play a "kingmaker" in deciding the raw material prices, which are critical for production.

The Italian Deputy PM said there is a need for a "political agreement" between Italy, Europe, India, Japan, and the US on this aspect.

Goyal also said that given the deepening ties between Rome and New Delhi, India-Italy ties will be a defining relationship of the 21st century.

Tajani marked pharma, maritime security, technology and defence as among the sectors where India and

Italy can cooperate, and also stressed the important role that the bilateral partnership will play in making the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor a reality.

"We (Italy and India) are paving the way for strong action in favour of trade and in favour of infrastructure. This corridor is very, very important also for peace," the visiting minister said.

Goyal said both countries have discussed setting up a "startup bridge", where both budding enterprises and talent can interact with each other, and also exhorted focused work on waste-to-energy, which can focus on making access to technologies cheaper for India.



Union Minister Piyush Goyal during a meeting with the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs of Italy Antonio Tajani in Mumbai on Thursday. PTI

Federal Reserve cuts key rate

ASSOCIATED PRESS
■ Washington

The Federal Reserve reduced its key interest rate by a quarter-point for the third time in a row on Wednesday but signalled that it may leave rates unchanged in the coming months.

Chair Jerome Powell signalled at a news conference that the Fed would likely hold off on further rate cuts in the coming months while it evaluated the health of the economy. And in a set of quarterly economic projections, Fed officials signalled they expect to lower rates just once next year.

Wednesday's cut reduced the rate to about 3.6 per cent, the lowest it has been in nearly three years. Lower rates from the Fed can bring down borrowing costs for mortgages, auto loans, and credit cards over time, though market forces can

also affect those rates.

Fed officials "will carefully evaluate the incoming data," Powell said, adding that the Fed is "well-positioned to wait to see how the economy evolves." The chair also said that the Fed's key rate was close to a level that neither restricts nor stimulates the economy.

Three Fed officials dissented from the move, the most dissents in six years and a sign of deep divisions on a committee that traditionally works by consensus. Two officials voted to keep the Fed's rate unchanged, while Stephen Miran, whom Trump appointed in September, voted for a half point cut.

December's meeting could usher in a more contentious period for the Fed. Officials are split between those who support reducing rates to bolster hiring and those who would prefer to keep rates unchanged.

Sonowal flags off India's first indigenous hydrogen fuel-cell vessel in Varanasi

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ Varanasi

Union Minister Sarbananda Sonowal on Thursday flagged off India's first indigenous hydrogen fuel-cell vessel in Varanasi, marking a key milestone in the country's push towards clean, and sustainable inland water transport.

At a ceremony held at Namo Ghat, the Ports, Shipping, and Waterways minister inaugurated the vessel's commercial operations.

Sonowal said the hydrogen-powered vessel reflects India's growing technological capabilities and its commitment to sus-

tainable energy. "This is not just technological progress, but a sign that we are advancing confidently towards green energy and indigenous solutions," he said.

The minister said it was a matter of national pride that India has now joined the list of countries such as China, Norway, the Netherlands, and Japan that operate hydrogen-powered vessels.

"This proves that our technical capabilities are ready for the future. This has been made possible due to the Prime Minister's visionary leadership. The speed and approach with which every sector has been advancing has

ensured that inland waterways now play an important role in India's development journey," he said in Varanasi, Prime Minister Narendra Modi's parliamentary constituency.

Uttar Pradesh's Minister of State for Transport (Independent Charge) Dayashankar Singh, Minister of State for Ayush, Food Safety and Drug Administration (Independent Charge) Dayashankar Mishra, and Minister of State for Stamp and Court Fees and Registration (Independent Charge) Ravindra Jaiswal were among the public representatives present on the occasion.



Sonowal said the development marks a major step in India's shift towards green energy and indigenously developed clean-technology solutions.

He noted that hydrogen engines are an emerging technology offering clean, sustainable energy with near-zero emissions, though research and testing are still underway

before full-scale commercial adoption.

Highlighting the sector's expansion, the minister said the number of national waterways has increased from five to 111 in the past decade. Cargo traffic on inland waterways rose from 80 million tonnes in 2014 to over 145 million tonnes at present, while tourism activities are operational on 13 waterways.

He added that the foundation for this transformation was laid by the Jal Marg Vikas Project, which created a modern navigation corridor from Haldia to Varanasi on National Waterway-1, with multimodal terminals, advanced

equipment, and community jetties.

"Projects worth more than '300 crore have already been completed in Uttar Pradesh for waterway development, while schemes worth around '2,200 crore will be launched in the coming years," the minister said.

According to an official statement, the hydrogen vessel initiative is part of the ongoing modernisation of India's inland waterways under the leadership of PM Modi, who has prioritised clean transport, improved connectivity and enhanced public convenience.

In recent years, the Central

government and the Inland Waterways Authority of India (IWAI) have expanded navigation channels, launched modern terminals, and operationalised new passenger and cargo routes to strengthen water-based communication and reduce logistics costs, it stated. These efforts align with long-term strategic frameworks, including the Maritime India Vision 2030 (MIV 2030) and Maritime Amrit Kaal Vision 2047 (MAKV 2047), which outline the roadmap for greener transport, smart infrastructure, and increased use of alternative fuels on inland waterways, it added.

FROM THE WORLD

CROATIA

Migrant boat capsizes, 3 dead

A boat carrying migrants overturned early on Thursday on the Sava river in eastern Croatia, killing at least three people and injuring eight, officials said. The accident happened in the eastern town of Slavonski Brod, by the border with Bosnia. Migrants were apparently trying to cross the Sava River in dense fog when their boat capsized, rescuers told HRT State television.

Firefighter Ivan Vuleta said emergency services received a call around 5.30 am. That people were in the river and they rushed to the scene in rescue boats. Police said a man from Bosnia is suspected of people smuggling. He has been hospitalized. The migrants' nationalities have not been specified. People fleeing violence or poverty in the Middle East, Asia or Africa often face perils as they try to reach Western Europe.

PAKISTAN

Two children killed in blast

Two children were killed and 16 others injured when a mortar shell exploded inside a seminary in Pakistan's northwestern Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Province, local police said on Thursday. The incident occurred in the Esuri area of Mirali tehsil, North Waziristan district bordering Afghanistan, on Wednesday. Some students brought an abandoned mortar shell they had found outside the seminary, Madrassah Shams-ul-Quran, in Sher Mohammad Kot village, which later exploded.

According to initial reports, the children mistook the device for a toy and were playing with it when it went off. The explosion left two young children dead on the spot, while 16 others sustained injuries. The wounded were shifted to hospitals in Bannu and nearby areas for treatment.

Choi Sang-mok faces charges over Yoon's martial law declaration

ASSOCIATED PRESS

Seoul

South Korea's former acting leader Choi Sang-mok was indicted on Thursday on charges related to the brief imposition of martial law in December 2024 by then-President Yoon Suk Yeol, becoming the latest high-profile figure embroiled in legal troubles over the case.

Choi is one of three top Yoon administration officials who served as caretaker presidents after Yoon was impeached and removed from office over the martial law declaration that plunged South Korea into massive political turmoil.

Yoon is now in jail while facing a high-stakes criminal trial on rebellion charges. Dozens of high-level officials and military commanders of the Yoon administra-

ASSOCIATED PRESS

Tokyo

US strategic bombers joined a fleet of Japanese fighter jets in a joint military exercise meant to demonstrate their military cooperation around Japan's airspace, defence officials said Thursday, as tensions with China escalate.

The exercise showcasing joint Japanese-US air power came a day after Chinese and Russian bombers flew together around western Japan, prompting Tokyo to scramble fighter jets, though there was no airspace violation. It also follows China's military aircraft locking radar on Japanese jets Saturday, another incident that has caused Tokyo-Beijing relations to further deteriorate.

Japan's Air Self Defence Force and the US military conducted the joint exercise Wednesday as "the security environment surrounding our country is becoming even severer," the Japanese Joint Staff said.

It said the allies "reaffirmed the strong resolve to prevent unilateral attempts to change the status quo by force and the readiness between the SDF and the US

forces." Two US B-52 strategic bombers and three Japanese F-35 stealth fighter jets and three F-15 jets conducted their joint flight drills near Japan's western airspace, above the waters between the country and South Korea, officials said.

Exercises held as the security environment grows more tense. The Joint Staff denied that the exercise was conducted in response to a specific incident, but acknowledged Chinese military aircraft's recent radar-locking on Japanese jets and the China-Russia joint bomber exercises Tuesday as examples of a worsening security environment around Japan. Relations between Japan and China have deteriorated after Japan's Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi said in early November that Japan's military could get involved if China were to take action against Taiwan, the self-governing island that Beijing claims as its own.

The row escalated over the weekend when separate Chinese drills involving a carrier near southern Japan prompted Tokyo to scramble jets and to protest that Japanese aircraft were target-



Japan Air Self-Defense Force's F-15 fighters holding a joint military drill with the US B-52 bomber in the vicinity of Japanese airspace PTI

Former Pakistan spy chief sentenced for 14 years by military court

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Islamabad

A military court on Thursday sentenced Pakistan's former spy chief Faiz Hameed to 14 years in jail after his conviction on multiple charges, including violating the Official Secrets Act and engaging in political activities. According to a statement by the army, the process of Field General Court Martial (FGCM) against Hameed was initiated on August 12, 2024, under provisions of the Pakistan Army Act, and continued for 15 months.

He was tried on four charges related to engaging in political activities, violation of the Official Secrets Act in a manner "detrimental to the safety and interests of the State", misuse of authority & Government resources, and causing wrongful loss to individuals. "After lengthy and laborious legal proceedings, the accused has been found guilty on all charges and sentenced to 14 years rigorous imprisonment by the



court," the army said. It is for the first time that a former chief of the powerful Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) has been convicted and sentenced. He served as the Director General of the ISI from 2019 to 2021.

He last served as Commander of the XXXI Corps before taking premature retirement in December 2022 after Asim Munir took over as the army chief. Hameed was considered close to the then Army chief

General Qamar Bajwa.

The army said that the Court-Martial complied with all legal provisions and that the accused was "afforded with all legal rights, including (the) rights of (a) defence team of his choice." It said that the convict has the right of appeal at a relevant forum after conviction.

"Involvement of the convict in fomenting vested political agitation and instability in cohorts with political elements and in certain

other matters is separately being dealt with," the army said.

Hameed, a former lieutenant general, was arrested in connection with a petition filed by Top City housing society's chief executive officer in the Supreme Court last year, wherein he was accused of land grabbing and stealing valuables from the owner of a private housing society during a raid. However, the Supreme Court asked the Pakistan Army to investigate complaints against him in the Top City case. The army began the court-martial process against the former spy chief based on these complaints.

Speaking to *Geo News*, Information Minister Atta Tarar described the verdict as a "historic", saying the decision strengthens the rule of law and accountability mechanisms in Pakistan.

He said that red lines had been crossed and political interference had taken place. He said the former ISI chief had acted as a political adviser to PTI and provided

Khan's party with "full political support." The information minister said that the decision would reinforce the rule of law and the country's accountability mechanisms.

He added that the trial was fair, saying Hameed was given a full opportunity to defend himself, including the chance to present evidence and witnesses in his favour. Tarar said that investigations into Hameed's alleged involvement in political matters were still ongoing and would continue. Defence Minister Khawaja Asif was more cautious in his reaction. He said the nation will face the consequences of decisions made under Gen (retd) Bajwa and the ex-spy master.

"The country will keep reaping the harvest of seeds sown by Faiz Hameed and General [retd] Bajwa for years," he wrote on X. "May God forgive us. May those in power recognise that authority is a divine trust and use it for the welfare of His (God's) creation (people)! May the fear of God guide the rulers!"

Senator Faisal Vawda, considered to be close to the army, told *Geo News* that the conviction marks "just the beginning," adding that the May 9-related cases are expected to move forward next.

Vawda said that if a former senior army officer can be tried in the May 9 cases, "you can imagine the fate of the real perpetrators" involved in the violence.

He said that a foundation has now been laid for a system of accountability and justice in the country and stressed that "no one is bigger than Pakistan."

The senator said that Hameed had caused harm to the country, its institutions, politics, and judiciary through misuse of authority.

Hameed made headlines for the first time after he played a vital role in an agreement signed between the Government and the radical Islamist party Tehreek-e-Labbaik Pakistan (TLP) to end the 21-day sit-in at Faizabad in November 2017.

ed by repeated radar-locking — a move considered as possible preparation for firing.

Tokyo protested to Beijing, asking for an explanation and preventive measures. China denied the allegation and accused Japanese jets of interfering and endangering the Chinese exercise.

Washington stressed its "unwavering" alliance with Japan, saying the incident was not "conducive to regional peace and stability."

The exercise came one day after Chinese and Russian strategic bombers conducted joint long-distance flight from the waters between Japan and South Korea down to the Pacific, the Joint Staff said.

Two Russian strategic bombers Tu-95 that flew down from the airspace east of the Korean Peninsula joined a pair of Chinese H-6 bombers over the East China Sea for a joint flight down to the Pacific off the southern coast of Japan's Shikoku island. The four bombers were also joined by four Chinese J-16 fighters as they flew back and forth between two Japanese southwestern islands Okinawa and Miyako, the area where China is expanding its military presence.

UN TO MOBILISE \$35 MILLION GRANT FOR CYCLONE-HIT SRI LANKA

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Colombo

The United Nations is set to mobilise \$35 million grant for cyclone-hit Sri Lanka in the next four years as the island nation is unable to afford debts after the economic crisis and the debt default, a UN official said on Thursday.

The UN and humanitarian partners launched post Ditwah Humanitarian Priorities Plan (HPP) for Sri Lanka, which covers immediate life-saving assistance in education, food security, agriculture and nutrition, health, protection, shelter, non-food items, camp coordination, water, sanitation and hygiene and early recovery, Marc-Andre Franche, the UN Resident Coordinator, told reporters. At least 638 people have died, and 193 are missing as of Sunday, 6 am, due to the catastrophic floods and landslides caused by extreme weather conditions since November 16.

"Cyclone Ditwah has hit the poorest and the most vulnerable the hardest", Franche said. "The disaster has compounded the impact after Sri Lanka's economic crisis, where 25 per cent of the population is living in poverty", he added. The UN called on the international community to contribute towards HPP. The UN has already received \$9.5 million for the initiative with the support extended by Australia, Canada, the European Union Switzerland, the United Kingdom and the United States, Adaderana quoted Franche as saying.

He noted they are seeking to mobilise a further \$26 million in the coming months with a coordinated programme. "While initial contributions from bilateral partners and 4.5 million dollars from the UN Central Emergency Fund are enabling rapid assistance, significant gaps remain," he said. Franche said protection risks are increasing with crowded shelters and limited facilities.

Indian envoy meets Canadian Speaker

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Toronto

Indian High Commissioner to Canada has met Canadian Speaker of the House of Commons and discussed advancing parliamentary ties between both the countries along with productive exchange on shared democratic values and future collaboration.

In January, India will be welcoming a delegation led by the Speaker Francis Scarpaleggia at the 28th Conference of Speakers and Presiding Officers of Parliaments of Commonwealth Countries (CSPOC). "High Commissioner @DineshKPatnaik met with the Speaker of the House of Commons @HoCSpeaker Honourable Francis Scarpaleggia @ScarpaleggiaSL today to discuss advancing India-Canada parliamentary ties.



Productive exchange on shared democratic values and future collaboration.

India looks forward to welcoming a delegation led by the Speaker at the 28th CSPOC next month," the Indian High Commission in Ottawa posted on X on Thursday. On Wednesday, Patnaik had a productive meeting with Minister

of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Lena Metlege Diab which focussed on enhancing bilateral cooperation between India and Canada.

"Productive meeting held between High Commissioner @DineshKPatnaik and Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship

@LenaMetlegeDiab focused on enhancing bilateral cooperation between India and Canada. The discussions covered immigration processes, student-related issues, and a deeper understanding of our respective systems, with an emphasis on strengthening people-to-people ties," the post on X read.



Maduro Govt did not know where she was hiding: María

ASSOCIATED PRESS

Oslo

Opposition leader María Corina Machado said on Thursday that she doesn't believe the Venezuelan Government knew where she was hiding for most of this year, as she met Norway's leader a day after her daughter received the Nobel Peace Prize on her behalf. Machado arrived in Oslo hours after Wednesday's prize ceremony and made her first public appearance in 11 months in the early hours of Thursday, emerging from a hotel balcony and waving to an emotional crowd of supporters. She had been in hiding since January 9, when she was briefly detained after joining supporters in a protest in Caracas. Machado was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in October after mounting the most serious peaceful challenge in years to the authoritarian Government of Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro.



ICIMOD transfers HUC to Kathmandu University

ASSOCIATED PRESS

Kathmandu

The ICIMOD has signed a deal to formally transfer the Himalayan University Consortium (HUC) to Kathmandu University, launching its next phase as an "independent and regionally rooted" consortium. The ICIMOD (International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development) signed a Memorandum of Understanding on Wednesday at a ceremony in its headquarters in Kathmandu. ICIMOD is a regional intergovernmental organisation that represents all eight Himalayan nations. "This MoU reflects our shared commitment to strengthening regional leadership and research for sustainable mountain development. Kathmandu University is exceptionally well placed to guide HUC into its next phase as an independent and regionally rooted

Airstrike on hospital leaves 34 dead in Myanmar

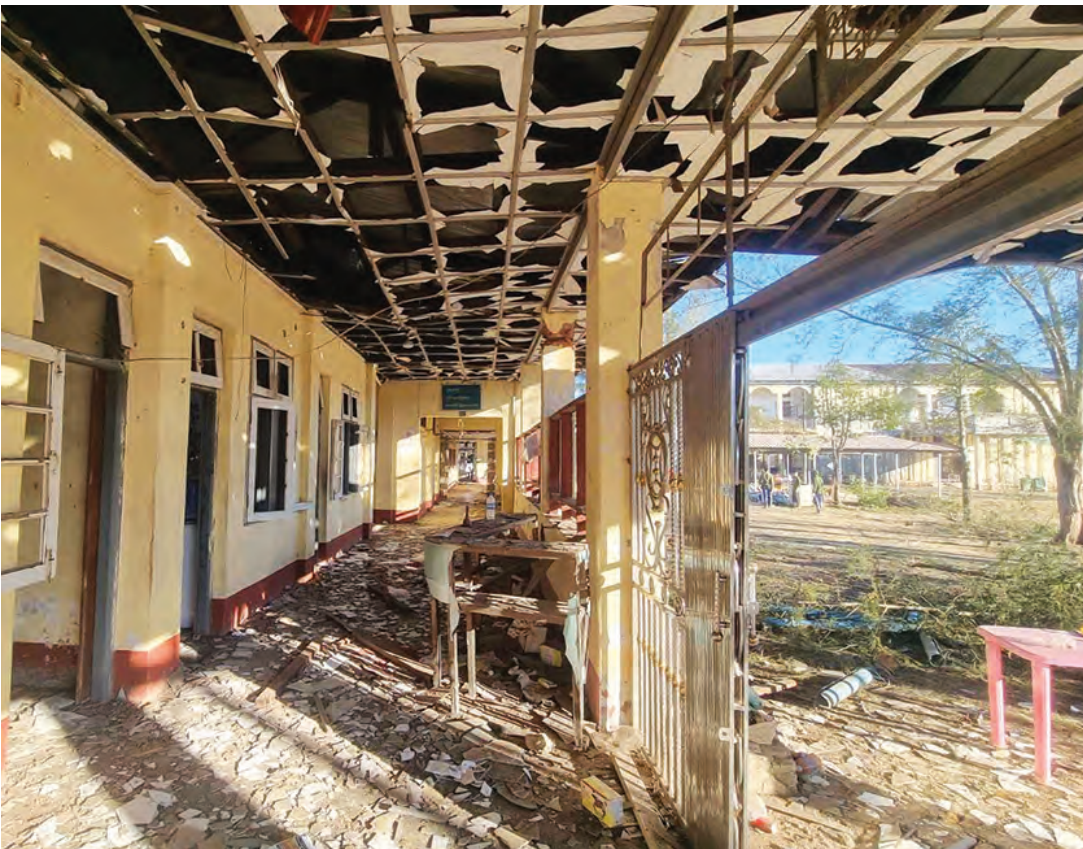
ASSOCIATED PRESS ■ Bangkok

An airstrike by Myanmar's military destroyed a hospital in an area controlled by a leading rebel armed force, killing 34 patients and medical staff, according to a local rescue worker and independent media reports on Thursday.

About 80 other people were injured in the attack Wednesday night on the general hospital in Mrauk-U township, an area controlled by the ethnic Arakan Army in the western state of Rakhine.

The ruling military has not announced news of any attack in the area. Wai Hun Aung, a senior official for rescue services in Rakhine, told The Associated Press that a jet fighter dropped two bombs at 9.13 pm with one hitting the hospital's recovery ward and the other landing near the hospital's main building. He said he arrived at the hospital early Thursday to provide assistance and recorded the deaths of 17 women and 17 men. He said that most of the hospital building was destroyed by the bombs, and taxis and motorbikes near the hospital were also damaged.

Rakhine-based online media posted photos and videos showing damaged buildings and debris, including medical equipment. The hospital has been the main source of health care for people in Rakhine, where most hospitals have closed because of



Damaged building is seen at the hospital that was allegedly hit by a military air strike in Mrauk-U township in Rakhine state, Myanmar AP

Myanmar's ongoing civil war, said Wai Hun Aung. It was reopened after doctors gathered in Mrauk-U to provide much-needed medical services. Mrauk-U, located 530 kilometres northwest of

Yangon, the country's largest city, was captured by the Arakan Army in February last year. The Arakan Army is the well-trained and well-armed military wing of the Rakhine ethnic minority move-

ment, which seeks autonomy from Myanmar's central Government. It began its offensive in Rakhine in November 2023 and has seized a strategically important regional army headquarters

and 14 of Rakhine's 17 townships. Rakhine, formerly known as Arakan, was the site of a brutal army counterinsurgency operation in 2017 that drove about 7,40,000 minority Rohingya Muslims to seek safety across the border in Bangladesh.

There is still ethnic tension between the Buddhist Rakhine and the Rohingya.

Myanmar's shadow National Unity Government, established by elected lawmakers who were barred from taking their seats in 2021, condemned the airstrike.

The organisation urged the international community to pressure the military to end its actions, take action against perpetrators and provide humanitarian assistance as soon as possible.

Myanmar has been in turmoil since the army took power in 2021, triggering widespread popular opposition. Many opponents of military rule have since taken up arms, and large parts of the country are now embroiled in conflict. The military Government has stepped up airstrikes ahead of planned December 28 elections against the armed pro-democracy People's Defence Force, which is closely associated with the National Unity Government. Opponents of military rule charge that the polls will be neither free nor fair, and are mainly an effort to legitimise the army retaining power.

Ex-PM Khaleda is responding to treatment: Doctor



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Dhaka

Bangladesh's critically ill former prime minister Khaleda Zia is "responding" to treatment, but no decision has yet been taken on whether she will be flown abroad for further medical care, her personal doctor said on Wednesday. The 80-year-old Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) chairperson has been undergoing treatment at Dhaka's Evercare Hospital since November 23 for multiple health complications. "She is being provided treatments which are needed for a critically ill patient," Zia's personal physician and BNP's decision-making standing committee member, AZM Zahid Hossain, told reporters outside the private hospital. "In medical terms, she is responding to the

treatment as she did in the past," he added, noting that foreign doctors are involved and medical-board decisions are being taken in nighttime meetings. Hossain said the three-time prime minister is receiving care in the hospital's intensive care unit (ICU). He said while a transfer abroad remains a possibility, no date has been fixed, urging people not to give in to speculation. "The time has not yet come to give a definite date," the doctor said. A medical board led by cardiologist Shahabuddin and including specialists from Bangladesh, the UK, the US, and China, is supervising Zia's treatment. Her daughter-in-law, Zubaida Rahman, a doctor by profession, has been attending the medical board's meetings in person since returning to Dhaka from London on December 5.

Pragmatic engagement with Taliban: India at UN



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ United Nation

India told the UN Security Council that it calls for a "pragmatic engagement" with the Taliban as New Delhi underlined that a focus on only punitive measures will ensure a 'business as usual' approach.

Addressing the UN Security Council meeting on the Situation in Afghanistan on Wednesday, India's Permanent Representative to the UN Ambassador Parvathaneni Harish said India calls on the United Nations and the international community to adopt nuanced policy instruments that help bring sustainable benefits for the people of Afghanistan.

"India calls for a pragmatic engagement with the Taliban. A coherent policy of engagement should incentivise positive actions. A focus on only punitive measures will only ensure that a 'business as usual' approach continues as we have been seeing now for the last four and a half years," Harish said.

He reiterated India's commitment to meeting the development needs of the people of Afghanistan.

Harish said the recent decision by the Indian Government to restore the status of Delhi's Technical Mission in Kabul to that of an Embassy "underscores this resolve."

"We will continue our engagements with all stakeholders to augment our contribution to

Afghanistan's comprehensive development, humanitarian assistance, and capacity-building initiatives, in keeping with the priorities and aspirations of Afghan society," he said.

Afghan Foreign Minister Amir Khan Muttaqi was in New Delhi on a six-day trip in October, the first senior Taliban minister to visit India after the group seized power in Kabul in 2021. External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar held wide-ranging talks with Muttaqi, announcing the upgrading of Delhi's technical mission in Kabul to the status of an embassy and pledging to renew its development works in Afghanistan.

India had withdrawn its officials from its embassy in Kabul after the Taliban seized power in August 2021.

In June 2022, India re-established its diplomatic presence in the Afghan capital by deploying a "technical team". India continues to closely monitor the security situation in Afghanistan, Harish said.

He emphasised that the international community must coordinate efforts towards ensuring that entities and individuals designated by the UN Security Council - the ISIL and Al Qaida and their affiliates, including the Lashkar e Tayyiba and Jaish-e-Mohammed and proxies of LeT such as the Resistance Front, along with those who facilitate their operations - no longer indulge in cross border terrorism, a thinly-veiled reference to Pakistan.

Bangladesh to hold elections on February 12

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Dhaka

Bangladesh will hold the general elections on February 12, its first since the ouster of the Sheikh Hasina-led Awami League Government in a violent student-led protest in August 2024.

"Voting will take place on February 12, 2026, from 7.30 am to 4.30 pm," Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) AMM Nasir Uddin said in an address to the nation on Thursday.

A referendum will simultaneously be held on the voting day, February 12, to elicit public opinion on a series of reform proposals of the Chief Adviser Muhammad Yunus-led National Consensus Commission. The announcement came a day after the CEC met President Mohammed Shahabuddin, who assured him "optimum support and cooperation" to conduct the general elections in a "free, fair and meaningful" manner. According to the election



schedule, the last date for submission of nomination papers is December 29, and scrutiny of nominations will be held from December 30 to January 4. The last date for withdrawal of candidature is January 20. The final list of candidates will be published on January 21. Election campaigns will begin

on January 22 and continue until 7.30 am on February 10, Nasir said.

The last general elections were held in January 2024. Hasina won the elections marred by controversy and boycott by major parties.

Six months after Hasina's victory in the 2024 election,

protests erupted against her Government. The violent street protests forced Hasina to leave for India on August 5, 2024. Three days later, Yunus took over as chief adviser of the interim Government.

The interim Government has disbanded Hasina's Awami League.

Winter storm rips through Gaza, exposing failure to deliver enough aid

ASSOCIATED PRESS ■ Jerusalem

Rains drenched Gaza's tent camps and dropping temperatures chilled Palestinians huddling inside them Thursday as storm Byron descended on the war-battered territory, showing how two months of a ceasefire have failed to sufficiently address the spiralling humanitarian crisis there.

Children's sandaled feet disappeared under opaque brown water that flooded the camps. Trucks moved slowly to avoid sending waves of mud toward the tents.

Piles of garbage and sewage turned to waterfalls. "We have been drowned. I don't have clothes to wear and we have no mattresses left," said Um Salman Abu Qenas, a mother displaced from east of Khan Younis to a tent camp in Deir al-Balah. She said her family could not sleep the night before because of the water in the tent. Aid groups say not enough



Palestinians crossing a flooded street following heavy rain in Khan Younis, southern Gaza Strip PTI

shelter aid is getting into Gaza during the truce. Figures recently released by Israel's military suggest it has not met the ceasefire stipulation of allowing 600 trucks of aid into Gaza a day, though Israel disputes that finding. "Cold, overcrowded, and unsanitary envi-

ronments heighten the risk of illness and infection," said the UN agency for Palestinian refugees, UNRWA, in a terse statement posted on X.

"This suffering could be prevented by unhindered humanitarian aid, including medical support and proper shelter."

Sabreen Qudeeh, also in the Deir al-Balah camp, said her family woke up to rain leaking from their tent's ceiling and water from the street soaking their mattresses.

"My little daughters were screaming and got shocked when they saw water on the

floor," she said. Ahmad Abu Taha, a Palestinian man in the camp, said there was not a tent that escaped the flooding. "Conditions are very bad, we have old people, displaced, and sick people inside this camp," he said.

In Israel, heavy rains fell and flood warnings were in effect in several parts of the country — but no major weather-related emergencies were reported as of midday.

The contrasting scenes with Gaza made clear how profoundly the Israel-Hamas war had damaged the territory, destroying the majority of homes. Gaza's population of around 2 million is almost entirely displaced and most people live in vast tent camps stretching for miles along the beach, exposed to the elements, without adequate flooding infrastructure and with cesspits dug near tents as toilets. The Palestinian Civil Defence, part of the Hamas-run Government, said that since the

storm began they have received more than 2,500 distress calls from citizens whose tents and shelters were damaged in all parts of the Gaza Strip. Aid groups say that Israel is not allowing enough aid into Gaza to begin rebuilding the territory after years of war. Under the agreement, Israel agreed to comply with aid stipulations from an earlier January 2025 truce, which specified that it allow 600 trucks of aid each day into Gaza and an agreed-upon number of temporary homes and tents. It maintains it is doing so, though Associated Press has found that some of its own figures call that into question. COGAT said December 9, without providing evidence, that it had "lately" let 260,000 tents and tarpaulins into Gaza and over 1,500 trucks of blankets and warm clothing. The Shelter Cluster, an international coalition of aid providers led by the Norwegian Refugee Council, sets the number lower.



Bulgaria's Govt resigns amid public protests

ASSOCIATED PRESS ■ Sofia

Bulgaria's Government resigned on Thursday as mass protests gripped the country just weeks before it's due to join the eurozone. The resignation of the minority coalition, led by the centre-right GERB party, was announced minutes before parliament was scheduled to vote on a no-confidence motion tabled by the opposition over economic mismanagement and supported by growing public anger with widespread corruption. "Ahead of today's vote of no confidence, the Government is resigning," Prime Minister Rosen Zhelyazkov told reporters in parliament. "The decisions of the National Assembly are meaningful when they reflect the will of the people. We want to be where society expects us to be," Zhelyazkov said, referring to the anti-Government protests.



Washington State under emergency due to heavy rain

ASSOCIATED PRESS ■ Mount Vernon

Washington state was under a State of emergency Thursday from a barrage of torrential rain that has sent rivers flowing over their banks, caused a mudslide to crash down on a highway and trapped people in floodwaters. Tens of thousands of residents could face evacuation orders. Heavy rain continued to fall over parts of the state Thursday morning, prompting road closures, water rescues and suspension of Amtrak trains between Seattle and Vancouver. Rainfall intensity increased in several counties in Washington's Cascade Mountains, which had seen up to 6 inches of rain in a 24-hour period. One area, Snoqualmie Pass, picked up an additional 1.7 inches of rain in six hours, the National Weather Service said.

PROSPECT



Ahead of PM Narendra Modi's visit, Assam Minister Pijush Hazarika attended a preparatory meeting with Assam Chief Secretary Dr Ravi Kôta and other senior officials of the Govt of Assam to review all arrangements at new terminal of Lokpriya Gopinath Bordoloi International Airport at Guwahati PM will inaugurate the new terminal on 20th December

Regional PR talent to shine as IRPRA 40 under 40 returns this January

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

The fourth edition of India's Regional PR Awards (IRPRA) 40 Under 40 will be held virtually on January 10, 2026 and registrations are now open for participants.

Like its previous editions, the awards will recognise and honour PR professionals from regional India who, through their dedication and consistent efforts, continue to raise the standards of communication excellence. The last date for submitting nominations has been extended to December 25.

According to Pawan Tripathi, Organiser of IRPRA, "The inaugural edition of IRPRA 40 under

40 received an overwhelming response from across the country, re-affirming our belief in the power of regional PR. Building on that success, we are thrilled to launch the fourth edition, which continues our mission to celebrate the next generation of PR and communication leaders who are redefining regional storytelling through creativity, innovation and impact."

Registrations and fulfillment of nominations for IRPRA 40 under 40 are free of cost. Criteria for applicants should be 40 years or below as of the event date and should be practicing PR and Corporate communication within the geographical territory of India.

ICAI clears new global networking guidelines

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

Chartered accountants' apex body ICAI has approved new global networking guidelines as well as changes to advertising guidelines, a significant move that will help create large homegrown domestic chartered accountant firms and compete at the global level.

The ICAI Central Council, during its meeting held on December 10 and 11 in the national capital, approved the ICAI (Global Networking) Guidelines, 2025 and changes to the Code of Ethics under which advertising norms are being eased.

At a briefing in the national capital on Thursday, ICAI (Institute of Chartered Accountants of India) President Charanjot Singh Nanda said the Council has

cleared the global networking guidelines, which have been a long-pending demand of CAs. The revised Code of Ethics, which also provides for limited advertisements, will help Indian firms to compete globally, he added. The approvals assume significance against the backdrop of larger Government efforts to have homegrown big accounting firms that can help create more opportunities in the country's growing economy and also compete at the scale of global players.

The guidelines have been formulated with the objective of facilitating global networking opportunities for Indian Chartered Accountant (CA) firms, domestic networks of CA firms and management consultancy services companies registered with ICAI.

Ambani calls for tech, industry self-reliance

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Gandhinagar

Billionaire Mukesh Ambani on Thursday said India must become self-reliant in critical technologies and industries to tide over geopolitical situations that may pose challenges to the country's future progress. Speaking at the 13th convocation of Pandit Deendayal Energy University here, he contrasted India's "sprinting" 8 per cent economic growth with "erosion of confidence all around."

"There is erosion of confidence all around. In contrast, India is bubbling with hope and self-confidence," he said.

"A decade ago, the rest of India was talking about Vibrant Gujarat. Today, the rest of the world is talking

about a Vibrant India."

Ambani, chairman of Reliance Industries Ltd and president of PDEU, Stated that the geopolitical situation has created certain challenges for India's future progress. "India must become Atma Nirbhar — self-reliant — in critical technologies and industries," he said.

While he did not identify the global geopolitical challenges, China's tightening grip on global supply chains and critical minerals has emerged as a major strategic concern for economies worldwide.

As the dominant supplier of rare earths and a key processor of lithium, cobalt, graphite and other essential inputs for batteries, renewable energy and advanced electronics, Beijing wields



Mukesh Ambani

significant leverage over industries central to the energy transition and future technologies.

Its export controls on gallium, germanium and other strategic minerals — coupled with supply-chain

consolidation in sectors like solar manufacturing, EV components and electronics — have triggered a global push for diversification.

Countries are now accelerating efforts to secure alternative supply routes, invest in domestic processing capacity and forge mineral partnerships to reduce dependence on China's tightly managed, State-backed ecosystem.

Ambani urged graduating students to harness curiosity, courage, perseverance and gratitude as guiding principles in a world of rapid technological change, telling them they represent the "unstoppable spirit of New India".

He said India was at a defining moment, growing at nearly 8 per cent amid global economic uncertainty and

stressed that the country must achieve self-reliance in critical technologies such as AI, new energy, space, biotechnology and life sciences.

"In this race, jo jeeta wohi sikandar. Under PM Modi's leadership, Bharat jeetega," he said, calling on PDEU to strive to become one of the world's best universities in green energy, green materials and green economy.

Addressing students, Ambani said their graduation comes at a time of unprecedented opportunity. Encouraging them to ask better questions in the age of AI, he said curiosity keeps individuals relevant, courage enables big dreams, perseverance ensures long-term success and gratitude keeps achievers grounded.

BSES launches campaign to promote cleaner air — #CleanAirWithBSES

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

As Delhi's skyline fades behind layers of haze, BSES has rolled out a high-impact social media campaign that transforms concern into collective responsibility. Launched across digital platforms—Facebook, X (formerly Twitter), LinkedIn and Instagram—under the hashtag #CleanAirWithBSES, the campaign comprises multiple sets of evocative creatives and short-form videos, each spotlighting how everyday choices directly impact the air we breathe.

Through a series of powerful visuals depicting Delhi's iconic landmarks, neighbourhoods and streetscapes increasingly



enveloped in smog, BSES urges citizens to rethink mobility and energy habits. Several creatives make a compelling case for switching to electric vehicles, highlighting how EV adoption can reduce dependence on fossil fuels and significantly cut vehicular emissions. Other posts champion rooftop solar and clean energy choices, reinforcing the role of decentralised green power in lowering pollution levels.

Health and safety form a key pillar of the campaign narrative. Dedicated creatives advise citizens to plant trees, grow indoor plants, seal homes to prevent polluted air from entering and limit outdoor exposure during severe AQI periods. Other posts highlight the

importance of regular vehicle servicing and promote the use of energy-efficient appliances, underscoring that informed choices can be as critical as long-term solutions.

Equally central are behaviour-led messages encouraging cleaner commutes—walking, cycling, carpooling and public transport—to reduce vehicular congestion. The campaign also promotes responsible waste practices based on Reduce, Reuse and Recycle, linking everyday habits with sustained improvements in air quality.

With its strong visuals and clear calls to action, BSES's digital campaign positions clean air not as an abstract ideal, but as a shared responsibility that will help Delhiites breathe cleaner.

From conflict to development: Govt grants financial assistance to former BLT cadres

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Guwahati

In a special programme held at the Srimanta Sankardev Kalakshetra, financial assistance was ceremonially distributed to former BLT cadres residing outside the BTC region, in the presence of BTC Chief Executive Member Hagrama Mohilary and Minister for Housing and Urban Affairs, Jayanta Mallabaruah.

Minister Baruah, alongside CEM Hagrama Mohilary, distributed the grants as part of the State Government's continued efforts to support the rehabilitation and reintegration of individuals returning to the mainstream.

Speaking at the programme, Minister Baruah conveyed gratitude on behalf of Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma and the State Government. He thanked the former cadres for choosing the path of rehabilitation and development and for realising that armed struggle could not fulfil their aspirations. "Today we celebrate your homecoming and we hope you begin a self-reliant and peaceful life ahead," he said.

These agreements have brought 9,022 cadres of peace signed groups back



The Minister noted that since 2020 the Government of Assam and the Government of India have signed five historic Memorandum of Settlements, including the NDFB Accord, Karbi Peace Accord, Adivasi Peace Accord, DNLA Agreement and ULFA Peace Agreement, paving the way for lasting peace in the region.

For the first time in many years, development is reaching people in a way that

into the mainstream, in addition to more than 2,000 members of smaller groups rehabilitated under State schemes.

Reflecting on the past, Minister Baruah said Assam had suffered for decades as young people were compelled to take up arms due to neglect and lack of opportunity. "Your return to the mainstream is honourable.

For the first time in many years, development is reaching people in a way that

earlier Governments could not ensure," he said.

He recalled how Assam once had to revolt to defend its natural resources. "Forty years ago, Assam protested crude oil being taken out without benefiting the State. Today, under the NDA Government, pipelines are being built to bring oil into Assam to run our refineries. This turnaround reflects the vision of Prime Minister Narendra Modi who has brought long-awaited cor-

rection to decades of imbalance," he said. Minister Baruah said that armed revolution only prolonged insecurity and delayed growth. "Today, under Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma, we finally have a leadership that delivers solutions where earlier Governments left gaps.

Industries are coming, peace prevails and communities feel included in the development journey," he said. He added that investments which once seemed unimaginable are now becoming reality. "Through Advantage Assam, five lakh crore of investment is coming to the State, with more than one lakh crore already invested. This was never possible in earlier years, when instability overshadowed progress," he said.

Minister Baruah informed that 442 former BLT cadres, residing outside the BTC region were granted financial support of two lakh rupees each to begin a dignified new life today. "We warmly welcome you to this new journey. The State today values peace and empowers those who contribute to development,"

he said. He urged beneficiaries to pursue skill development programmes and commended BTC Chief Executive Member Hagrama Mohilary for initiatives that have strengthened peace in the region. "We must move from being consumers to becoming producers. The Government is committed to supporting every step of this transformation," he said.

Concluding his remarks, Minister Baruah said, "Assam today is moving with confidence under the leadership of Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma who is working tirelessly to place the State among the top five in India.

His decision to extend Scheduled Tribe status to six communities while protecting the rights of existing ST groups reflects a fair and progressive approach. Together, let us build a peaceful and prosperous Assam that earlier generations could only hope for."

The programme was also attended by Director General of Police Harmeet Singh, Additional Chief Secretary Ajay Tewari and Special ADGP Hiren Chandra Nath.

Himanta launches bicycle scheme to boost school attendance

TONY DAS
■ Guwahati

In a significant move to enhance student safety and attendance, Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma inaugurated a bicycle distribution scheme under the Chief Minister's Special Scheme for Class IX students from Government and provincial schools. The launch, held in Dibrugarh, will benefit 3,10,031 pupils, particularly those residing in rural and interior areas, making their daily commute quicker and safer.

The initiative, which includes tea garden model schools and Adarsha Vidyalayas, aims to significantly increase school enrolment and curb the student drop-out rate. Of the beneficiaries, 1,34,432 are male students and 1,75,608 are female students. Speaking at the event, Sarma highlighted the critical issue of school dropouts, noting that forty per cent of students leave education by the higher sec-



ondary level. He stressed that a suitable environment nurtures talent, which educational institutions are uniquely placed to provide. To combat poverty-related dropouts, the Government has already introduced free textbooks, uniforms and midday meals.

Sarma pointed out that the bicycles address the challenge of long travel distances to secondary schools. This scheme complements other student-centric measures, such as free college enrolment and financial aid like the Nijut Moina scheme,

which provides monthly stipends to girl students at the higher secondary, undergraduate and post-graduate levels. A similar scheme for boys is reportedly forthcoming. The Chief Minister affirmed the Government's relentless efforts over the past five years to improve the academic environment, citing the construction of new school buildings, colleges, medical and engineering institutions. He also encouraged students to utilise their mobile phones for educational purposes,

stating, "The mobile phone in our hands should not be used only to scroll through Facebook or Instagram.

We should use it to learn about geography, history, science, sports and new events around the world." Education Minister Ranaj Pegu, Indigenous and Tribal Faith and Culture Minister Jogen Mohan, Power Minister Prasanta Phukan, Cultural Affairs Minister Bimal Borah, MLAs Chakradhar Gogoi, Binod Hazarika, Terosh Gowala and Taranga Gogoi, Dibrugarh Municipal Board Chairman Saikat Patra, Sonowal Kachari Autonomous Council Chief Executive Member Tonkeswar Sonowal, Moran Autonomous Council Chief Executive Member Saroj Gohain, Dibrugarh Zila Parishad Chairperson Pushpanjali Sonowal, Chairman Assam Tourism Development Corporation Ritupomo Baruah, Secretary Education and host of other dignitaries were present on the occasion.

Power grid cyber security on shaky ground as critical upgrades stall

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

India's national power grid is facing renewed scrutiny as major cyber-security gaps and stalled upgrade plans raise concerns over the country's energy resilience.

With the power sector moving rapidly toward digital and smart-grid technologies, experts warn that inadequate cyber defences leave the grid exposed to potentially catastrophic attacks.

Insiders confirm that several key transmission substations across the country still lack Next-Generation Firewalls (NGFWs) and other advanced protection systems. Despite a rise in cyber threats globally — many of them targeting critical infrastructure — these vulnerabilities remain unresolved, prompting alarm among security agencies.

A major cyber-security tender floated by Power Grid Corporation earlier this year, aimed at strengthening the grid's defences, was cancelled in August. Sources indicate that a company allegedly backed by certain officials failed to meet eligibility requirements, leading to pressure for the tender's withdrawal. The cancellation has raised questions about the corporation's preparedness during a time when global



grids are frequently targeted by sophisticated cyber actors.

The matter has now reached Parliament. An unstarred question scheduled for response on December 9 seeks detailed clarification from the Union Power Minister on substations identified as cyber-security weak points, facilities requiring urgent intervention, whether a comprehensive audit has been conducted within the past year and the roadmap for upgrades following the cancelled tender. MPs have also asked whether any national agency is assisting in real-time grid monitoring.

Cyber-security specialists warn that the power grid remains a high-value target for adversaries. They caution

that a single breach could trigger widespread outages affecting homes, industries and essential services. Given the surge in State-sponsored cyber-attacks worldwide, experts say India cannot afford delays in strengthening its power infrastructure.

Analysts argue that urgent central intervention is required to break the current impasse. They recommend immediate installation of multi-layer cyber defences, expedited security audits and strict compliance with global standards such as NERC-CIP and ISO 27001. Without decisive action, they warn, the national grid remains dangerously exposed at a time of escalating cyber risk.

BRIEFLY

WOMEN'S FOOTBALL LEAGUE
TO START ON DECEMBER 20



The Indian Women's League 2025-26 will kick off on December 20 at the National Centre of Excellence (NCoE) in Kolkata, with Sethu FC taking on Kickstart FC in the opening match. The IWL will be played in two phases, with the first one stretching from December 20 to January 9, 2026, during which the eight teams will play 28 matches, the All India Football Federation (AIFF) said on Thursday. The NCoE in Kolkata and the Kalyani Municipal Stadium in Kalyani are the two venues for the league, which is being held in two centralised venues this season. The second phase of the IWL is set to be held from April 20 to May 10, 2026, thus allowing player availability for the senior and U20 women's national teams, which will participate in their respective AFC Women's Asian Cups categories next year.

CHANDIGARH STADIUM HONOURS
YUVRAJ, HARMANPREET



World Cup winners Yuvraj Singh and Harmanpreet Kaur were on Thursday immortalized at the New Chandigarh Stadium with stands named in their honour. Yuvraj, player of the tournament for the 2011 ODI World Cup, and Harmanpreet, who recently captained India to their first ever Women's World Cup trophy, were surrounded friends, family and Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann on the occasion. Yuvraj was also seen giving a pep talk to the Indian team in a huddle before the second T20 International against South Africa. His longtime teammate Harbhajan Singh has a pavilion named after him at the stadium and Harmanpreet joined him on the other side of the sightsscreen on Thursday.

Salmon makes Arsenal debut in Champions League

ASSOCIATED PRESS
■ London

Marli Salmon became the sixth youngest player to feature in the Champions League when brought on as a late substitute in Arsenal's 3-0 win at Club Brugge. Salmon is 16 years, 103 days and came on for Ben White at Jan Breydelstadion on Wednesday, with manager Mikel Arteta saying: "We knew that at some point we had to use him." "He's so young, 16 still, and he's playing in the Champions League," Arteta said. But Salmon is not even the youngest player that Arsenal has fielded this season. That distinction goes to Max Dowman, who was 15 years, 308 days when he entered as a second-half substitute against Slavia Prague last month. According to UEFA, Salmon is the third player 16 or younger that Arsenal has fielded in the Champions League after



Dowman and former midfielder Jack Wilshere. "That's why we put so much work and everybody in the academy puts (in) so much enthusiasm and work," said Arteta. "And for a long time, you have to prepare those talents. So, thanks to them, because when we need them, they are there, they are ready to perform."

India names Sindhu, Lakshya for Asia Team Championships

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ New Delhi

Two-time Olympics medalist PV Sindhu, Lakshya Sen and the star pair of Satwiksairaj Rankireddy-Chirag Shetty will form the core of Indian squad to take part in the Badminton Asia Team Championships to be played in Qingdao, China from February 3-8.

India are defending champions in the women's category of the competition, whereas the men's team had won two bronze medals in the past.

"Selected on the basis of ranking, performance, and experience, the women's team will once again be led by former world champion and two-time Olympics medalist, PV Sindhu," the Badminton Association of India said in a release.

The world No 13 Sen will be the top ranked men's singles player in the squad which also features Kidambi Srikanth, HS Prannoy, US Open winner Ayush Shetty, and Tharun Mannepal.

Satwik-Chirag will be lead the doubles unit along with Guwahati Masters runners-



up Sai Pratheek K and Pruthvi Krishnamurthy Roy, as well as Hariharan Amsakarunan. In the women's category, Sindhu will be supported by world junior championships silver medalist Tanvi Sharma, Unnati Hooda, Rakshita Sree Santhosh Ramraj and Malvika Bansod in singles. Syed Modi International champions Gayatri Gopichand and Treasa Jolly will lead India's charge in

the doubles while Priya Konjengbam, Shruti Mishra, and Tanisha Crasto complete the squad. BAI secretary Sanjay Mishra said, "Over the last few years, Indian teams have consistently been medal contenders at the Asian and World level and this squad has the right mix of form and experience and is capable of challenging for the crown in both categories."

Aston Villa faces Basel in Europa League

ASSOCIATED PRESS
■ Basel

Boosted by a victory over the Premier League leader, in form Aston Villa meets Basel in the Europa League on Thursday.

After a slow start to the season, Villa bounced back to be currently on a seven-game winning streak in all competitions, including a 2-1 victory over Arsenal on Saturday.

Beside a top-three place in the English top flight, the Villans are tied with Lyon and Midtjylland atop the standings of the second-tier European competition on 12 points with four wins from five games.

"The most important thing is how we are building the team, how we are



achieving in our process during each competition, our stronger mentality in everything," manager Unai Emery said ahead of the

match at St. Jakob-Park in Basel. Emery has won the Europa League trophy four times during stints in charge of Sevilla

and Villarreal. Lyon hosts Dutch newcomer Go Ahead Eagles while Midtjylland faces Genk at home.

The top eight teams after eight games go directly to the round of 16 in March.

At the other end of the 36-team table, struggling Nice will look to earn the first points against Braga.

Teams placed ninth to 24th advance to the knockout playoffs in February.

In other games, Nottingham Forest is away at Utrecht, Celtic and Roma meet in Glasgow and Maccabi Tel Aviv travels to Stuttgart.

In the third-tier Conference League, Crystal Palace plays Shelbourne in Dublin and Fiorentina hosts Dynamo Kyiv.

Bembem, Ashalata named in AFC All-Time Dream XI

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ New Delhi

Indian football legends Bembem Devi and Ashalata Devi have been nominated for the AFC Women's Asian Cup All-Time Dream XI football team in recognition of their stellar performances in the continental showpiece.

Former captain Bembem, the only Indian woman footballer to have been conferred the Padma Shri, is one of the 12 midfielders nominated for the Dream XI team.

Both Bembem and Ashalata belong to Manipur, the women's football powerhouse in the country.

"During an international career spanning over two decades, Bembem Devi was the true leader of a generation of Indian women's footballers," the Asian Football Confederation (AFC) said.

"She was the captain of the Blue Tigresses during their AFC Women's Asian Cup appearance in 2003 and has been adjudged the AIFF Women's Player of the Year twice. India's third most capped player has won several domestic and international honours laying the foundation for the rise of women's football in the South Asian nation."

India could not get past the group stage in the 2023 Women's Cup, after winning against Uzbekistan (6-0) but losing to

eventual runners-up China (0-12) and Vietnam (1-2).

Ashalata captained the India in the 2022 edition of the Women's Asian Cup hosted by the country.

In a fateful tournament, several Indian players contracted COVID-19 despite being inside the bio-bubble. Hosts India played out a 0-0 draw against Iran in their first group match and then could not assemble team for the match against Chinese Taipei.

"Ashalata Devi is one of the Indian women's national team's most accomplished defenders. A commanding centre-back, she made her AFC Women's Asian Cup debut in 2022. In 2019, she was named the AIFF Women's Player of the Year in recognition of her consistency and leadership," the AFC said.

"Known for her strength, aerial ability, and calmness under pressure, Ashalata has been instrumental in guiding and inspiring a new generation of Indian footballers."

Ashalata is one of the 12 defenders nominated for the Dream XI.

Five goalkeepers and 12 forwards were also nominated for the Dream XI, for which voting opened on November 21 and will continue till January 10, 2026.

The 2026 edition of the Women's Asian Cup will be held in Australia from March 1-21.



Alonso feels Real Madrid will overcome rough patch

ASSOCIATED PRESS
■ Madrid

Xabi Alonso thanked his players for their attitude after another defeat and said he was positive Real Madrid would overcome its slump soon.

Madrid lost 2-1 to Manchester City in the Champions League on Wednesday, remaining with only two wins in its last eight matches in all competitions.

"The players gave it everything they had, and I have nothing to criticize today. I really value their attitude. We have to keep going," Alonso said. "Right now the results aren't as good as we'd like."

"We're critical, we demand a lot of ourselves, and we understand the fans. We have to keep working hard. We believe we'll get through this because everything passes, and I'm convinced we can do it."



The result increased criticism against Alonso and prompted some jeers by the crowd at the Santiago Bernabeu stadium.

"We can understand why they whistle, and we have to accept it as normal because the demands here are so high," Alonso said. "We want to turn things around, improve our mental and physical condition, and get the injured players back. There's still a long way to go." Spanish

media has been reporting there's a split between Alonso and part of the squad, but players were quick to come out supporting him after the defeat.

Goalkeeper Thibaut Courtois and defender Raúl Asencio were among those saying the team was united and everyone was behind Alonso. Rodrygo hugged Alonso by the sideline after scoring and admitted it was to show that the players are together with the coach.

REAL MADRID TRIO BANNED FOR 2 MATCHES FOR REFEREE MISCONDUCT

ASSOCIATED PRESS
■ Madrid

Real Madrid players Dani Carvajal, Álvaro Carreras and Endrick were suspended for two games for their behavior toward the refereeing crew in a Spanish league match last weekend.

Defender Carreras was sent off in stoppage time in Madrid's 2-0 home loss against Celta Vigo, a match in which the hosts finished with nine men as Fran Garcia had already been shown a red card. Forward Endrick, an unused substitute, was sent off for complaining from the bench. Carvajal, who was on the bench but was not dressed for the game because of an injury, was accused of disrespecting the referees in the tunnel after the game at the Santiago Bernabeu stadium. Garcia, sent off with two yellow cards, was handed a one-game suspension.

Bastar Olympic opens with 3,500 participants; new team comprises surrendered Naxalites

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ Jagdalpur (Chhattisgarh)

Chhattisgarh Chief Minister Vishnu Deo Sai on Thursday asserted that his government is committed to taking development to every village in the Bastar division, which he said is steadily moving towards peace, harmony and prosperity. Addressing the 'Bastar Olympic 2025' at Indira Priyadarshini Stadium in Jagdalpur, the headquarters of Bastar district, he said the massive participation of youth, including the surrendered Naxalites and victims of Maoist violence, has made the

event historic. Indian boxing legend MC Mary Kom was also present on the occasion.

Sai said the government is determined to connect the youth from tribal-dominated Bastar with the mainstream and ensure their active contribution to the region's development.

Winners of the Bastar Olympic would become role models and would be provided advanced training and opportunities to compete at international levels, he said.

The government will provide better opportunities and training to the youth of Bastar, preparing



Chhattisgarh CM Vishnu Deo Sai, back right, Deputy CM Arun Sao, center, Olympic medalist and Padma Vibhushan awardee boxer Mary Kom, back second left, Mayor Sanjay Pandey, left, and others holding the torch during the opening ceremony of Bastar Olympics at Jagdalpur in Bastar district Chhattisgarh

them for global competitions, said Sai.

Those winning gold, silver, and bronze medals in the international Olympic Games will be awarded honorariums of ₹3 crore, ₹2 crore, and ₹1 crore, respectively, he said.

Deputy CM Vijay Sharma, who also holds the Home portfolio, called the Bastar Olympic an important initiative to integrate youth from interior regions into the mainstream.

The government has been encouraging the youth from the remote areas of Bastar by providing them with more opportunities, and this initiative will continue

in an even more robust form in the future, he added.

Mary Kom met the participants and encouraged them.

State's Sports and Youth Welfare Director Tanuja Salam said around 3,500 athletes from all seven districts of Bastar division and 761 participants from the 'Nua Bat' team are competing in the division-level events (finals) in Bastar Olympic this year.

The Nua Bat (a term in local Halbi dialect which means a 'new path') team comprises surrendered Naxalites and victims of Maoist violence as partici-

pants.

Last year, the event saw 1.65 lakh participants in division, district and block levels. The number has surged to over 3.92 lakh, including more than 2.27 lakh women, this year, she said.

The final stage of the Bastar Olympic, featuring 11 sporting disciplines, including athletics, archery, badminton, football, karate, kabaddi, kho-kho, volleyball and tug of war, will be held from December 11 to 13.

Union Home Minister Amit Shah will attend the closing ceremony on December 13, officials said.

SA beat India by 51 runs in second T20I

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ Mullanpur

The lean run of Shubman Gill and Suryakumar Yadav was extended as Indian batters stumbled on a good batting surface to lose the second T20 against South Africa by 51 runs here on Thursday.

Quinton de Kock made an effortless 90 of 46 balls, pushing South Africa to a challenging 213 for four after India opted to field.

India were expected to chase down the steep target but South Africa removed Indian trio of Abhishek Sharma (17), Gill (0) and Suryakumar Yadav (5) inside the powerplay to put the hosts on the backfoot. India were eventually bowled out for 162 in 19.1 overs with Tilak Varma (62 off 34) playing a lone hand..

The five match series now stands at 1-1 with the third match scheduled in Dharamsala on December 14. The local crowd was expecting their home heroes, Gill and Abhishek, to fire but it was not to be. Yet to realise his potential in the shortest format, vice-captain Gill, facing his very first ball, got a beauty from Lungi Ngidi that seamed away from length to take a thick outside edge.

Abhshek was caught



South Africa's players celebrating the wicket of India's Shubman Gill during the second T20 International cricket match of a series between India and South Africa in New Chandigarh

PTI

behind in the following over from Marco Jansen. Next to depart was skipper Suryakumar who too got a faint edge after Jansen angled it away from the India skipper.

Batting at three, Axar Patel (21 off 21) was pounced at cover with Reeza Hendricks just about managing to have his fingers under the ball. From thereon, Tilak batted at a high tempo but lack of

partnerships and soaring run rate pushed the game out of India's reach..

Earlier, de Kock entertained the crowd with his remarkable strokeplay.

When in full flow, De Kock is among the most attractive batters in the game and he flaunted his special skills on a true pitch. He was mainly dealing in sixes in the middle and majority of his seven maximums came in the deep

square leg region.

De Kock, who recently reversed his ODI retirement and was not sure about his T20 future post the World Cup last year, is back with a renewed purpose and remains on top of his game.

An innings like this just less than a week before the mini auction will also create the buzz among the franchises, who might indulge in a bidding war for the multi-

skilled cricketer.

Arshdeep Singh, who had De Kock caught behind in the series opener, was at the receiving end on Thursday. De Kock began the assault with a pick up shot for six off Arshdeep before pulling the left-arm pacer for a maximum over deep mid-wicket. Jasprit Bumrah too conceded 16 runs in his second over after being disdainfully pulled for six by Reeza Hendricks.

WTC finals now the pinnacle of Test cricket: ICC CEO Sanjog

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ Mumbai

The three World Test Championship (WTC) finals held so far have "definitely delivered" on the aim of creating a pinnacle event for the traditional format of the game, said ICC CEO Sanjog Gupta on Thursday.

New Zealand, Australia and South Africa have each won the WTC once with India finishing runners-up twice. Gupta highlighted that a packed Lord's during the previous edition's final between Australia and South Africa, despite the absence of India and hosts England, was a landmark moment for the global governing body."What the World Test Championship final attempts to do, beyond just being a five-plus-one-day event where the two best teams compete for the greatest prize in the format, is to give context to the two years of Test cricket that precedes that final," Gupta said during the announcement of ICC's global partnership with AB InBev India (Budweiser 0.0) here.

"That was the endeavour with which the World Test Championship was launched and what we've



seen with three editions past us now, is that the World Test Championship final has definitely delivered on the goal of providing a pinnacle event for Test cricket."

He said the turnout at Lord's showed that the WTC final has stirred interest among fans, who now look forward to it just as they do with other flagship events.

"The last World Test Championship final was played between Australia and South Africa in England, and Lord's was packed," he said.

"India was not playing, England was not playing, (but) Australia was taking on South Africa, and Lord's was packed, which means that

we now have a pinnacle event in Test cricket which the world waits for, or the world that enjoys Test cricket waits for."

Gupta added that the growing anticipation among fans in the months leading up to the final also strengthens the broader storytelling around Test cricket.

"The other thing that it did was, in the six months leading up to the World Test Championship final, the entire narrative was around who will feature and that gives additional meaning, context, and significance to the bilateral Test cricket that's being played in the lead-up to that World Test Championship final," he added.

Suryavanshi, Mhatre to head India's U-19 Asia Cup

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ Dubai

India's Asia Cup U-19 campaign will be fronted by Gen Z batting sensations Vaibhav Suryavanshi and Ayush Mhatre, but equal focus would be on whether the BCCI allows the youngsters to exchange handshakes with their Pakistani counterparts, in what would be construed as maintaining sporting civility at the junior level.

While the India U-19 side, under the able leadership of dashing Mumbai and CSK opener Mhatre start its campaign against UAE on Friday, it is the match against Pakistan on Sunday that will certainly gain the most traction in the junior continental championship seen as a dress rehearsal for the World Cup early next year.

In the senior men's Asia Cup, followed by the Women's ODI World Cup and Rising Stars Asia Cup T20 tournament, Indian players have refused to shake hands with Pakistani players as a mark of solidarity with the Indian Army and victims of the Pahalgam terror attack. However, when it comes to the U-19 cricketers, it is believed that even the ICC wants politics to be kept away from it and the normal protocol of sports-



man spirit should be adhered to. "The boys haven't been told anything. But obviously BCCI has given explicit instructions to its manager Anand Datar. Now if Indian boys don't shake hands with Pakistan team then match referee will have to be informed in advance.

"We know for a fact that ICC doesn't want politics to take front seat when it comes to junior cricket. So it is a case of both bad optics and public sentiment," a BCCI official in the know of things told PTI on the condition of anonymity.

As far as the tournament is concerned, India and Pakistan are almost sure to qualify for the semi-finals as

the top two teams from group A. Apart from India and Pakistan, the other two sides are Malaysia and UAE, and they don't have a lot of experience of playing 50 over cricket.

Both Suryavanshi and skipper Mhatre are coming into the tournament following a great run of form in the ongoing Syed Mushtaq Ali Trophy. While Mhatre played a massive role in the group league stages with back-to-back centuries and a fifty, Suryavanshi became the youngest player in SMAT history to hit a century, against Maharashtra.

In India's squad of 15, these are two boys, who have played more than 30

senior level games across the three formats and cumulatively scored nine centuries. That, in fact, is the most number of senior level centuries when all the other seven teams are combined and it does make India the runaway favourites in the junior continental championship.

India U19 squad for Asia Cup: Ayush Mhatre (C), Vaibhav Sooryavanshi, Vihaan Malhotra (vc), Vedant Trivedi, Abhigyan Kundu (wk), Harvansh Singh (wk), Yuvraj Gohil, Kanishk Chouhan, Khilan A. Patel, Naman Pushpak, D. Deepesh, Henil Patel, Kishan Kumar Singh, Udhav Mohan, Aaron George.

CAN'T PLAY AROUND WITH ROLES, ABD RESPONDS TO GAMBHIR

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ New Delhi

Former South Africa captain AB de Villiers said he agrees "to a certain extent" with India head coach Gautam Gambhir's belief that ODI batting orders are "overrated", but stressed the need for teams to balance flexibility with clearly defined roles.

Following India's 2-1 ODI series win against South Africa, Gambhir had said that he thought batting orders are overrated in the ODI format. "I do agree with him to a certain extent. I've always enjoyed a floating batting lineup in ODIs. But it's a fine line because you can't really play around too much with the players' roles," De Villiers said on his YouTube channel.

"It's the top three, four to six, and then your tailenders who can hold the bat. It's almost like three segments, and you can really be creative with that. "Play with right and left-hand combinations and certain situations of the game." India won the first T20I against South Africa to extend their winning run to 27 victories out of 31 games.

Rupa Bayor rises to career-best 8th in world rankings



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ New Delhi

Asian bronze-medallist Rupa Bayor has become India's first Taekwondo player to be ranked as high as eighth in the latest world rankings, rising a rung from her previous career-best position.

The 24-year-old Poomsae competitor from Arunachal Pradesh won a bronze medal at the World Taekwondo President Cup Europe held in Innsbruck, Austria, from November 29 to 30.

Earlier this year, she also won a bronze at the Australia Open Taekwondo

Tournament in August.

Poomsae is a non-combative form of Taekwondo in which competitors perform a pattern of moves like gymnastics routines to be evaluated by a panel of judges.

This format is currently a non-Olympic category but features in the Asian Games.

Bayor, who trains at the Indo Korean Taekwondo Academy in Mumbai, was inducted into the Target Asian Games Group (TAGG) of the Sports Ministry in April this year.

She is the only Indian in the top 100 of the world rankings across categories.

Whatever is good for cricket, BCCI should do it: Kapil on split coaching

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ New Delhi

Former India captain Kapil Dev on Thursday steered clear of endorsing the idea of split coaches after the team's recent 0-2 Test series loss to South Africa at home, saying the BCCI should adopt whatever coaching structure best serves Indian cricket.

Asked whether separate coaches for red-ball and white-ball formats could be an answer to end India's recent run of reverses in Tests at home, Kapil said: "I don't know... I can't answer that. You have to really work something like that in your mind and say what should happen. Whatever is good for cricket, I think they should do it."

Kapil, the 1983 World Cup-winning captain, rejected the notion that it is tougher to be an athlete in the social-media era than during his playing days.

"No, it's always the same. It was difficult then,



it is difficult now. It was easy then and it is easy now. Your mindset is more important," he said.

On whether the growing financial pull of T20 leagues has overshadowed national representation, Kapil said each player

weighs priorities differently. "Everybody loves money, but some players feel that is very important. I still feel playing for India is more important than playing IPL. But everybody is individual, they have their own thought process.

Good luck to them."

Asked if he preferred any particular format, Kapil said he simply enjoys the game in all its forms.

"I just love cricket. Doesn't matter even two balls cricket or 100 balls or 100 overs or 10 overs... Cricket is cricket. See golf is golf, whatever format you play, end of the day you enjoy golf."

He also offered a light-hearted remark on Virat Kohli and Rohit Sharma when asked about their performances.

"Good luck, they should play golf also," quipped Kapil, who is currently the president of Professional Golf Tour of India (PGTI).

Kapil was speaking at the launch of '72 The League', a city-based golf event announced by the PGTI and scheduled for next year.

The former skipper said India needs golfers who can win big global titles to trigger a mass shift in how the sport is perceived nationally.

Karandeep Kochhar claims maiden IGPL title in Dubai

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ Dubai

Karandeep Kochhar on Thursday shot a third straight 3-under 69 to end his wait for a maiden title on the IGPL Tour with a hard-earned victory at IGPL Invitational UAE.

Kochhar pipped young Veer Ganapathy and Pukhraj Singh to the post at the Els Club in Dubai at the Shiv Kapur hosted event, the tenth IGPL meet of the inaugural season.

Kochhar, a recent winner on the Asian Development Tour, made up for his runner-up finish at the IGPL Invitational Kolkata, even as Ganapathy's wait for a first pro win continued as he was left knocking on the doors yet again.

Kochhar totalled 9-under, while Ganapathy, who was seemingly coasting to fine win, was left ruing a costly triple bogey on Par-4 14th hole on the back nine. He shot even par 72 and finished one shot behind Kochhar.

Also finishing tied second was Pukhraj, the winner of IGPL Jamshedpur. He shot 2-under 70, and like Ganapathy, was left at 8-under and one behind the winner.

Pranavi Urs, the history-maker at IGPL Mumbai, was sole fourth. She shot 1-under 71 and totalled 7-under for the 54 holes.

Gaganjeet Bhullar's streak of wins ended with a fifth-place finish after a round of 71 and a total of 6-under.

Tournament host Shiv Kapur (72) was tied for 16th place with Ridhima Dilawari (75) at 1-under total, while Jeev Milkha Singh, who flew in straight from Mauritius where he was the runner-up in the European Legends Tour, shot 73 and finished Tied-18th in his first appearance on the IGPL Tour.

Another Teen star, Kartik Singh (71), legend SSP Chawrasia (72) and another young rookie pro, Raghav Chugh (72) were tied for the sixth place.