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**MP leader sparks Ladli Behna scheme controversy**



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

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**Open graveyards in open skies**



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**Jaishankar meets European, UK, Egyptian counterparts in UAE**



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SPORT**

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



**PIONEER IN  
SHORT**

**INDIA REACHES SQUASH WORLD CUP FINAL**

The hosts produced a fearless, all-round performance on Saturday, sweeping aside two-time champions Egypt 3-0 to storm into their first-ever Squash World Cup final. Seeded second, India will now face Hong Kong China in the title clash at Express Avenue Mall, after Hong Kong edged past Japan in the other semifinal. India set the tone early. National champion Velavan Senthilkumar blitzed past Ibrahim Elkabbani 7-1, 7-3, 7-6 to hand the hosts a flying start. The momentum only grew when India's top-ranked women's player, Anahat Singh, dug deep in a gritty five-game battle to beat Nour Heikal and double the lead. With Egypt wobbling, Abhay Singh sealed the deal. The Asian Games bronze medalist outlasted Adam Hawal in a tense four-game contest to complete the clean sweep and send the home crowd into raptures. The result marked a landmark moment for Indian squash. Having settled for bronze in 2023, this is the nation's best-ever showing at the World Cup. Joshna Chinappa's scheduled match became academic once India wrapped up the tie.

## Nitin Nabin to succeed Nadda

### Pankaj Chaudhary new president of UP BJP

**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE**  
■ New Delhi/Lucknow/Patna

In a surprising move, the ruling BJP is known for, the party on Sunday appointed Bihar Minister Nitin Nabin as the party's national working president. The BJP Parliamentary board picked Nabin for the post until the process of the new full-time party chief is done to replace incumbent Union Minister JP Nadda. Similarly party also announced Union Minister of State for Finance Pankaj Chaudhary's name as the new president of the BJP's Uttar Pradesh unit, who replaced Bhupendra Chaudhary.

Party sources said Nabin was rewarded for exuding greater confidence as the person in charge of the Chhattisgarh JP Assembly elections. He had consistently maintained to the top leadership that the party would sweep the Assembly polls. "Bharatiya Janata Party's



(Left) Bihar Minister Nitin Nabin who was named the BJP national working president in New Delhi and (Right), Pankaj Chaudhary, being fanned by Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath and Central minister Piyush Chawla and other leaders, after being elected the UP BJP President in Lucknow on Sunday



parliamentary board has appointed Nitin Nabin, a minister in the Bihar Government, the BJP national working president with immediate effect," BJP national general secretary Arun Singh said in a notification.

Nabin, 45, who belongs to the Kayastha community, is likely to succeed incumbent BJP chief JP Nadda and is one of the youngest leaders to occupy the post.

He has served as a minister in the Bihar Government multiple times and is a five-time MLA. At present, he is the PWD minister in Bihar and MLA from Bankipur in Patna.

Nadda was appointed the BJP President in January 2020 and has already completed his full term. He was granted extensions to lead the party through the 2024 Lok Sabha elections.

**CONGRATULATING NABIN ON**

his appointment, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said he has distinguished himself as a "hardworking Karyakarta" and expressed confidence that his energy and dedication will strengthen the party.

"He is a young and industrious leader with rich organisational experience and has an impressive record as MLA as well as Minister in Bihar for

**CONTINUED ON >> P4**

## Delhi-NCR chokes, GRAP Stage IV curbs imposed

**ABHINAV KUMAR JHA**  
■ New Delhi

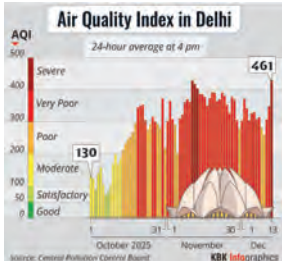
Acute air pollution across the National Capital Region (NCR) on Sunday compelled authorities to order stricter emergency measures, sharply impacting school schedules, office attendance and public activities as Delhi recorded its worst air quality of the season.

With the Air Quality Index (AQI) touching 461 firmly in the "severe" category, the Commission for Air Quality Management (CAQM) put into operation the toughest curbs under the Graded Response Action Plan (GRAP), including limits on mobility, construction, outdoor activities and physical presence in institutions.

Classes in schools across Delhi and adjoining NCR districts, including Noida and Ghaziabad, were revised with effect from Monday, 15 December, due to the aggravating pollution. As stated by a circular issued by district administrations, classes



People have tea at a roadside stall during a cold and smoggy winter morning in New Delhi



parents of the students concerned, based on the school facilities available.

The school authorities explained that the school timings from 7.50 am to 1.50 pm would remain the same, and the school buses would ply as usual. Classes for class X and class XII would continue in physical mode owing to the requirement for board examinations. Flexibility has been given to parents by allowing them to opt for online classes, a measure to decrease children's toxic air exposure.

**CONTINUED ON >> P4**

**The ByStander**



**HIMANTA INVITES VP RADHAKRISHNAN**

Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma paid a courtesy call on the Vice President of India, CP Radhakrishnan, in the national Capital on Sunday. During the meeting at the Vice President's enclave, Chief Minister Sarma personally congratulated Radhakrishnan on his assumption of the august office of the Vice President of India. The Chief Minister also extended a formal invitation to the Vice President to visit Assam and witness the state's transformation and developmental progress achieved in recent years.

**FULL REPORT ON P6**

**US ENVOYS ARRIVE IN BERLIN**

US envoys arrived in Berlin on Sunday morning for another round of talks intended to secure a deal to end the war in Ukraine. US President Donald Trump's special envoy Steve Witkoff and Trump's son-in-law Jared Kushner were spotted in downtown Berlin by a photographer for the German news agency. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said that Ukrainian, US and European officials will hold a series of meetings in Berlin in the coming days. "Most importantly, I will be meeting with envoys of President Trump, and there will also be meetings with our European partners, with many leaders, concerning the foundation of peace — a political agreement to end the war," Zelenskyy said in an address to the nation late Saturday. Washington has tried for months to navigate the demands of each side as Trump presses for a swift end to Russia's war and grows increasingly exasperated by delays. The search for possible compromises has run into major obstacles, including control of Ukraine's eastern Donetsk region, which is mostly occupied by Russian forces, and security guarantees for Ukraine.

**FULL REPORT ON P12**

## Two gunmen kill 11 at Sydney Jewish event

**ASSOCIATED PRESS** ■ Sydney

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

The suspect was in critical condition, authorities said. At least 29 people were confirmed wounded, including two police officers, said Mal Lanyon, the police commissioner for New South Wales.

The massacre at one of Australia's most popular and iconic beaches followed a wave of antisemitic attacks that have roiled the country over the past year, although the authorities didn't suggest those episodes and Sunday's shooting were connected. They said one of the gunmen was known to the security

**PM MODI CONDEMNS ATTACK**

Prime Minister Narendra Modi has strongly condemned the terrorist attack at Bondi Beach in Australia, targeting people celebrating the Jewish festival of Hanukkah. He expressed deep shock and extended condolences to the families of the victims, stating that India stands in solidarity with Australia in this hour of grief.

services, but that there had been no specific threat.

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

"This attack was designed to target Sydney's Jewish community," the State's Premier Chris Minns said.

**CONTINUED ON >> P4**



Emergency workers transport a person on a stretcher after a reported shooting at Bondi Beach in Sydney

## Congress seeks ouster of BJP, accuses it of 'Vote Chori'

**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE** ■ New Delhi

Congress on Sunday launched a scathing attack on the BJP, saying those indulging in "vote chori" are gaddars and need to be removed from power to save voting rights and the Constitution.

Addressing the party's *Vote Chor Gaddi Chhod* rally at the Ramlika Maidan, Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge said the ideology of RSS's Mohan Bhagwat, M S Golwalkar and Manusmriti will destroy the country, and only the ideology of Congress can save it.

Top Congress leaders Rahul Gandhi, Priyanka Gandhi, Sachin Pilot, Himachal Pradesh chief minister Sukhvinder Singh Sukhu, Telangana CM Revanth Reddy, amongst others, also addressed the



(L-R) Congress leader Rahul Gandhi, party President Mallikarjun Kharge and party MP Sonia Gandhi hold copies of the Constitution of India during the rally at Ramlika Maidan

massive rally held in the national Capital.

Addressing the party's 'Vote Chor Gaddi Chhod' rally at the Ramlika Maidan here, he launched a scathing

attack on the Election Commission and mentioned the names of Chief Election Commissioner Gyanesh Kumar, and Election Commissioners Sukhbir Singh Sandhu and Vivek

## Messi to meet PM Modi

**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE**  
■ New Delhi/Mumbai

Lionel Messi, the Argentine football icon, is scheduled to meet Prime Minister Narendra Modi at his official residence in Delhi on Monday. This meeting will be part of Messi's Delhi leg, following his controversial trip to Kolkata on Saturday, a successful visit to Hyderabad, and an eventual stay in Mumbai on Sunday.

Messi will also meet the Chief Justice of India and the Army Chief at the residence of Rajya Sabha MP Praful Patel, a former president of the All India Football Federation (AIFF).



Lionel Messi, Rodrigo De Paul and Luis Suarez arriving for the GOAT India tour 2025, at Wankhede Stadium in Mumbai

The final day of the GOAT India Tour will also feature Messi interacting with two Indian cricketers at the Ferozshah Kotla Stadium. Messi will arrive in the national Capital at 10.45

am, and after a 50-minute 'Meet and Greet' session at a city hotel, he will head to the PM's residence, where he will spend 20 minutes interacting with Modi.

**CONTINUED ON >> P4**

**ORGANISER DUTTA SENT TO 14-DAY CUSTODY**

**Kolkata:** A city court in Kolkata has sent Satadru Datta, the chief organiser of the Lionel Messi football event at Salt Lake stadium, to 14-day police custody. Datta was arrested by the Bidhannagar police on Saturday for alleged mismanagement of the event. The chaos erupted at the stadium a day ago, and Datta was arrested at Kolkata airport while seeing off Messi and his entourage to Hyderabad.

During the hearing, Datta's counsel questioned the basis of the arrest, stating that his client had been "victimised". The State counsel said the organiser of the event was responsible for crowd

movement, and his team members moved around on the pitch in such a way that spectators could not see the World Cup-winning captain of Argentina from the galleries.

West Bengal Governor CV Ananda Bose visited the venue on Sunday for a first-hand inspection and called for a judicial inquiry. Bose also urged the Government to frame Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) for managing such events in future. The governor, accompanied by Chief Secretary Manoj Pant and senior police officials, "visited the venue for a first-hand assessment of the stadium chaos."

**CONTINUED ON >> P4**

## Centre seeks more women, SC/ST officers in key positions

**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE**  
■ New Delhi

For an adequate representation of women and SC, ST in the Government machinery, the Centre has asked States to nominate women officers and those from the Scheduled Caste (SC) and Scheduled Tribe (ST) for appointment in key posts on central deputation.

In a communique issued to the chief secretaries of all State Governments, the Personnel Ministry sought nominations of only those officers who are not likely to be

recalled by them on the grounds of having availed promotion for at least two years.

The sponsored officers are to be appointed on deputation to the posts under the Central Staffing Scheme (CSS) and for the posts of Chief Vigilance Officers (CVOs) in Central Public Sector Enterprises (CPSEs) and other central Government organisations. CVOs act as a distant arm of the Central Vigilance Commission to check corruption in Government departments.

"Sufficient names of women and SC and ST Officers may be



sponsored so that adequate representation can be provided to them," read the communique dated December 10. Details of any inquiry/complaints/proceedings which may affect the vigilance status of the applicant may also be forwarded, it said.

In the letter, the Ministry said that such movement of officers from the States to the Centre is crucial for building up the capabilities and contributing towards developing State perspectives in the Government of India or national perspective in the State at the decision-making levels.

"I would also like to draw your attention to the Central Deputation Reserve (CDR) data for IAS officers, which determines the extent to which officers could be sent on deputation to the Government. Proper cadre management requires an adequate number of officers to be deputed to the Centre under the Central Staffing Scheme," it said.

This will also ensure that every eligible officer has an opportunity to serve at the Centre at least once at the middle management level, the communique said.

**CONTINUED ON >> P4**



# Police arrest Thar driver for stunts on city roads

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE  
■ Lucknow

The Lucknow police arrested the driver of a Thar jeep after a video circulating on social media showed him performing dangerous stunts at a busy junction, on Sunday.

The Gautam Palli police swiftly responded to the driver's reckless act that challenged public safety and traffic movement and arrested him and seized the vehicle.

The police initiated a search and interception drive on Sunday for the Thar jeep, seen in the viral video.

The accused youth also filmed a reel mounting atop the Thar.

Sub-Inspector Amit Kumar, in-charge of the Jiamau police outpost, and his team intercepted a suspicious vehicle coming from the

Samtumulak intersection during checking near the 1090 intersection.

The registration number of the vehicle matched the one displayed in the social media video.

As per police, the driver identified himself as Dilip Rawat (28) of Rahimabad police station area and said he was an interior designer in Lucknow.

The vehicle's registration is in his name.

When questioned about the video and asked for the vehicle's documents, Dilip Rawat became aggressive and tried to disrupt public peace.

Fearing a breach of public peace and law and order, and with a strong possibility of a cognisable offence, the accused was taken into police custody around 1:10 am on Sunday under sections 170/126/135 of the

Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita.

The Thar jeep was seized under Section 207 of the Motor Vehicles Act.

The Lucknow police have issued a stern warning against stunts and rash driving.

The police appealed to the public to refrain from performing stunts at public places and on busy roads.

"Such reckless actions create a serious risk for themselves and for other citizens. The Lucknow police are fully committed to citizen's safety and will continue to take the harshest legal action against those who jeopardise public peace, law and traffic safety," a police spokesman said.

He said decisive action would be taken immediately upon taking cognisance of any objectionable activity going viral on social media.

## PARA SHOOTING ACCUSED, AIDE ARRESTED

The Lucknow police, on Sunday, arrested the youth who had shot at his former girlfriend after she refused to live with him, and his aide from near Kisan Path on Sunday.

The police recovered a Scorpio SUV, a pistol, and live cartridges from their possession.

The girl was attacked on the night of December 11-12 in Para area.

The accused, Akash Kashyap of Sarojini Nagar, allegedly broke into the house of the 21-year-old girl and shot at her before fleeing with his associate.

Police identified the arrested persons as Akash Kashyap and his aide Shivam Kashyap of Unnao.

During interrogation,

Akash revealed that he had been in a relationship with the victim for about a year and she began distancing herself from him a few months ago and this enraged him. He revealed that he had shot at her in a fit of rage.

Shivam Kashyap waited outside in the street to help Akash flee. Both had escaped in their Scorpio SUV.

To recall, the 21-year-old victim lives in a rented accommodation in Para area with her elder sister, 7-year-old niece, and 3-year-old nephew. Both sisters work in an orchestra.

It is alleged that around 2:00 am on December 12, Akash Kashyap came to the house of the victim in an inebriated state. When the victim's elder sister opened the door, Akash pushed her aside and went into the

younger sister's room.

When confronted, he allegedly hurled abuses, assaulted the victim, and vandalised the house. When all attempts to mollify him failed, the victim and her sister called neighbours for help. Before they could come, Akash pulled out a pistol and shot at the victim. The victim sustained bullet injuries on her shoulder and hand. After opening fire at the victim, Akash allegedly turned toward her 7-year-old niece to shoot her as well, but the girl managed to run away.

Akash then locked the victim inside the room and escaped in his Scorpio with his associate.

The victim was admitted to Lokbandhu Hospital, from where the police were informed. An FIR was subsequently registered against Akash.

# Need to address HIV stigma, myths emphasised

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE  
■ Lucknow

The Regency Health has emphasised the pressing need to address the social stigma and persistent misconceptions surrounding HIV-- issues that continue to prevent people from seeking timely testing and treatment.

Even though HIV is now a medically manageable condition, many individuals still face discrimination, fear of judgement and emotional distress, which often leads to delayed diagnosis and avoidable health complications.

Across India, a large number of patients hesitate to walk into clinics for an HIV test, even when symptoms or risk factors are present. Healthcare experts at Regency Health say that stigma, rather than the virus is the greater obstacle today. This silence not only affects physical health but also creates deep psychological strain, especially for young adults, women and individu-

als without strong family support systems.

"Today, HIV is a manageable chronic condition, yet outdated beliefs continue to cause unnecessary fear and isolation. Many patients avoid testing because they worry about how they will be treated -- not by doctors, but by society. Creating awareness, normalising routine testing and protecting patient dignity and confidentiality are essential if we want people to come forward early and receive the care they deserve. To truly remove stigma, we must replace silence with conversation, judgement with empathy and misinformation with accurate knowledge. When families, workplaces and communities begin treating HIV like any other chronic health condition, we create a safer environment where people feel supported rather than shamed," said Dr Akanksha Gupta, consulting physician and diabetologist at Regency Health.

# Four caught for theft of ornaments

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE  
■ Lucknow

In a major breakthrough, a joint team of sleuths from Crime/Surveillance team (East Zone) and cops from Gomti Nagar police station, on Saturday night caught four thieves who used to steal ornaments from showrooms by diverting attention of the staff.

The thieves had recently stolen ornaments from the showroom of a prominent jewellers' company in Gomti Nagar.

Those arrested were identified as Badar Kumar (71), Pandurao Ganpat Pawar (75) and Mangesh Bhau Surve

(33) of Maharashtra and Shalom Chinchonkar (45) of Madhya Pradesh.

The police recovered four gold bangles studded with precious stones and diamonds from the accused, who confessed to their crime. The action came after a case was registered based on a complaint filed by Sunil Kumar Tiwari, manager of the showroom, a couple of days back.

The police had registered a case under Section 305A and 317 (2) of the BNS.

The thieves had stolen gold bangles from the display tray by opening the drawer at the showroom counter.

A police spokesman said senior officials immediately inspected the spot and forensic teams were deployed to collect samples.

"After examining the CCTV footage the images of the accused surfaced and teams were formed for arresting them. Acting on a tip-off four wanted accused related to the theft case were arrested on Saturday night from an empty plot near the railway line and four pieces of diamond-studded metal jewellery, stolen from the showroom on December 11 last were recovered from the possession of the

arrested individuals," the spokesman said.

The accused confessed to their crime and disclosed their modus operandi. The accused confessed that they would identify high-end jewellery stores in the city and then entered them in pairs or small groups at different intervals, posing as customers.

They would pretend to inspect the jewellery and while the staff was preoccupied, one of them would pick up a piece and quickly steal it. Their departure was often unnoticed and the store management would only discover the theft much later.

# KTS group strengthens ties between Kashi, TN

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE  
■ Varanasi

The seventh group participating in Kashi Tamil Sangamam (KTS) 4.0 offered prayers at the Kashi Vishwanath Temple here on Sunday. After the 'darshan' (viewing of the deity), the group partook the 'prasad' (blessed food) at the temple's communi-

detailed tour of the magnificent corridor of the Shri Kashi Vishwanath Dham by the temple administration.

During the tour, they learnt about the historical significance of the Dham, its architecture, the newly-constructed facilities and increasing flow of devotees. After the tour, lunch was arranged for the



ty kitchen. Upon the group's arrival, the KVT priests welcomed the guests with shower of flowers, the sound of 'damaru' (drum) and Vedic chants. The guests expressed their devotion at the feet of Lord Vishweshwara with chants of 'Har Har Mahadev' and 'Jai Vishwanath.'

Following the welcome, the members were given a

guests at the community kitchen run by the temple. The 'prasad' served at the community kitchen gave everyone a profound experience of Kashi's tradition of service and hospitality.

The visit and tour of the seventh group of KTS proved to be instrumental in further strengthening the cultural, spiritual and historical ties between Kashi and Tamil Nadu.

The Pioneer

CLASSIFIEDS

NOTICE

I have changed my name from Sanjay Kumar to Sanjay Allwyn S/o Shiv Shanker R/o 397, Shiv Katra Lal Bangla Harjinder Nagar Kanpur for future purposes.

NOTICE

I have changed my name from SUNIL KUMAR to SUNEEL KUMAR S/o -Jang Bahadur R/o Gram daarikapur jatt kasba Kora Jahanabad Bindki Fatehpur for future purposes.

NOTICE

I have changed my name from Surendra Kumar to Surendra Gupta S/o Chet Ram Gupta R/o R 106, Sanjay Gandhi Nagar Naubasta Kanpur for future Purposes.

NOTICE

I have changed my name from Mohammad Riyaz Khan to Mohd Riyaz S/o-Mohd Taqui R/o 877/3, new bridge hindustan compound shiwans tenray Kanpur for future purposes.

NOTICE

I have changed my name from Pawan Kumar Srivastava to Pawan Srivastava S/o Om Shanker Srivastava R/o 117/M/3, Double Puliyakakadeo Kanpur for future purposes.

NOTICE

CHANGE OF NAME

I, MEHADI RAJA holder of Indian Passport No: V0796925 issued at LUCKNOW on 06/04/2021 and Permanent Resident of MOHALLA BAZBAHDUR SADAR AZAMGARH PIN 276001 UTTAR PRADESH INDIA and presently residing at VILLA 48 22 STREET AL JAFILIYA DUBAI do hereby change my name from MEHADI RAJA to MEHDI REZA (Givenname) SAYED (Surname) with Immediate effect.

NOTICE

I, Aman Hasan Khan S/o Mohammad Nayeem Khan r/o 11/103, Evershine Oak Building No.8,9,11,12 CHS Ltd., Kanakia Road, Mira Road(East) Thane-401107 do hereby declare that the original Allotment letter, Lease deed dt. 17/07/1990 sl.no. 29730 & sale deed dt. 17/07/1990 sl.no. 29733 in the name of Smt Rajia Begam are lost. The address of the property is 5/109, MIG, Vikas Nagar, Sector-5, Lucknow. I further state that I wish to create Equitable Mortgage on the said property for loan from SBI, Vikas Nagar (Brcode 12735), Lucknow. An FIR has been lodged with the police in respect of lost (Allotment letter, Lease deed & Sale deed) vide FIR No.LAR2025000923556 dated-13/12/2025. In case any party has any claim towards the said relevant property(ies), the same should be lodged with the intending party and also with the above stated branch of State Bank of India, within 15 days from publication of this notice.

# Police arrest four thieves, recover jewellery

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE  
■ Lucknow

The Bijnor police on Sunday arrested four thieves who used target houses that were lying closed in the area and decamped with booty on an auto rickshaw which they also used to identify the houses to target. The accused worked as labourers and drivers to hide their crime.

The police recovered stolen ornaments, an auto, tools used in breaking into the houses and Rs 2,190 in cash from them.

Those arrested were identified as Durgesh Dhuru of Chhattisgarh and Karan Rathor, Deepanshu Singh and Priyanshu Singh, all of Krishna Nagar. The accused, Durgesh, also stays in Krishna Nagar. The accused

confessed to their crime and disclosed that they formed a gang after they met during work. Durgesh, Karan and Deepanshu are labourers while Priyanshu is driver.

As per their confession, they drove auto rickshaw in the area while three of them pretending to be passengers and one as a driver and stopping near an earmarked house pretending looking for the addresses of passengers to do recce of houses lying closed. After having identified a house to strike at night, the accused used to reach that particular house. Priyanshu used to wait for them at the opening of the lane going to the targeted house. After collecting the stolen items they loaded it into the auto rickshaw and fled the scene.

The accused confessed that they later got the stolen items distributed among themselves.

A police spokesman said the action came while investigating a case of theft lodged at the complaint of a resident of Eldeco Shaurya Colony, Kamal Kishore Tripathi who reported the incident on November 29. The theft had taken place on November 17 when Tripathi and his family were out of the city. He said the accused mainly struck the houses located alongside the Kisan Path. "The accused confessed that they used to recce of the house two-three times to be doubly sure that the house was lying closed and the owner and inmates were not present," the spokesman said.

# Youth's death shrouded in mystery

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE  
■ Lucknow

Mystery shrouded the death of a youth whose body was found hanging from a mango tree near the Agra Expressway in Kakori police station area on Sunday. He was identified as Jogendra Yadav (19) of Mainpuri.

The family of the deceased said that he had come to Lucknow to learn how to operate heavy machinery.

The incident occurred at

the Yadav Crane Service Centre and workshop of his relative near Maunda Mod in the Kakori police station area early on Sunday morning.

On information a police team reached the spot and completed the inquest report before sending the body for post-mortem examination. The family of the deceased has been informed and they were en route to Lucknow.

Jogendra Yadav was from

Lehgaon village under the Kishni police station area in Mainpuri. He had arrived in Lucknow approximately two months ago to stay with his maternal aunt's son, Amit Yadav.

Amit owns the agency named Yadav Crane Service, where Jogendra was reportedly learning to operate a Hydra crane machine.

The reason for the youth's apparent suicide remained unknown as the police did not recover any suicide note.

# Workshop held for cops to deal with cardiac emergencies

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE  
■ Lucknow

The Lucknow Police in collaboration with Medanta Hospital organised a workshop on Sunday for police personnel to deal with emergencies like cardiac arrest. The police personnel were trained in CPR, oxygen level measurement, blood pressure monitoring and basic life support in emergency situations like cardiac arrest.

A free health check-up camp was also organised during the training, in which tests like blood pressure, pulse, temperature and oxygen saturation were conducted. Free health check-ups (blood pressure, pulse, oxygen level) of more than 70 policemen was done during the training. A police spokesman said the purpose of imparting training was to provide immediate medical assistance

during the 'Golden hour' (the first 60 minutes of an emergency), develop proficiency in CPR techniques, oxygen level measurement, blood pressure monitoring and basic life support. This training will be given in a phased manner to the policemen of all 54 police stations of Lucknow and the Medanta Hospital will provide courses and training material to police personnel at regular intervals. Refresher courses and digital learning modules will be provided for trained personnel.

Dr Dharmendra Singh Medanta, Department of Musculoskeletal Disorders and Orthopedics, Medanta Lucknow, said, "This training will enable the police force to provide immediate assistance at the accident site. This training of the police force will enhance life-saving skills in the society. Techniques like CPR prove invaluable in emergencies."

L&T Finance Limited

(formerly known as L&T Finance Holdings Limited)

Registered Office: L&T Finance Limited, Brindavan Building Plot No. 177, Kalina, CST Road, Near Mercedes Showroom Santacruz (East), Mumbai 400 098

CIN No.: 167120MH2008PLC181833

Branch office: Uttar Pradesh



GOLD AUCTION NOTICE

Notice is hereby given for the information of all concerned, that Gold ornaments pledged with the under mentioned branches of the company under respective loan numbers, which were overdue for redemption and which have not been redeemed by the concerned customers so far in spite of repeated notices by the company, will be auctioned at the concerned branch offices of the company on **Monday 22 Dec, 2025** as per the following details:-

1. SAHARANPUR Branch - L&T Finance Limited 2A 1095 Bheem Rao Ambedkar Marg Near Clock Tower Main Chowk Saharanpur Uttar Pradesh. Pin code - 247001. Phone - 9875942895 Loan Number - 16321000004879, 16321000004880, 163210000060680, 163210000006153, 163210000006106, 163210000004901, 163210000006294, 163210000006118, 163210000006236 (Time 11:00 AM).

It may please be noted that if the auction does not get completed on the above stated day due to any reason, the same will be conducted on **29th Dec 2025** at the same place and time without any further notice.

Note: Concerned customers can get the ornaments released before the auction date.

Note: L & T Finance Private Limited, on its sole discretion, has the authority to remove any of the ornaments under any loan account from the auction list without prior information.

Note: Bidders are requested to produce Identity Card, PAN Card & TIN Number in case of registered dealers. Successful bidder shall be requested to transfer the full auction amount to the company by RTGS/any other permitted mode immediately.

Sd/-

Authorized Officer

For L&T FINANCE LIMITED

For any clarification regarding the above notice, please contact at 1800 268 0000 or the concerned branch

Date: 15-12-2025

Place: Uttar Pradesh

IDFC FIRST Bank

CIN: L65110TN2014PLC097792

Registered Office: - KRM Towers, 8th Floor, Harrington Road, Chetpet, Chennai-600031.

Tel: +91 44 4564 4000 | Fax: +91 44 4564 4022

IDFC FIRST Bank Limited

(erstwhile Capital First Limited, amalgamated with IDFC Bank Limited and presently known as IDFC First Bank Limited)

APPENDIX- IV-A [See proviso to rule 8 (6) & 9 (1)]

SALE NOTICE FOR SALE OF IMMOVABLE PROPERTIES

E-Auction Sale Notice for Sale of Immovable Assets under the Securitisation and Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002 read with proviso to Rule 8 (6) & 9 (1) of the Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules, 2002

Notice is hereby given to the public in general and in particular to the Borrower (s), Co-Borrower (s) and Guarantor (s) as per column (iii) that the below described immovable properties as per column (iv) mortgaged/charged to the Secured Creditor, the possession of which has been taken by the Authorised Officer of Formerly known as IDFC Bank Ltd., will be sold on "As is where is", "As is what is", and "Whatever there is" as described hereunder, for the recovery of amount due to IDFC FIRST Bank Limited (Formerly known as IDFC Bank Ltd) from Borrower (s) and Co-Borrower (s) as per column (i). For detailed terms and conditions of the sale, please refer to the link provided on IDFC FIRST Bank website i.e. [www.idfcfirstbank.com](http://www.idfcfirstbank.com).

| S. No. | (i)<br>Demand Notice Amount                        | (ii)<br>Agreement ID                                                                  | (iii)<br>Name of Borrower (s), Co-Borrower (s) and Guarantor (s)                      | (iv)<br>Mortgaged Property Address                                                                       | (v)<br>Reserve Price Amount | (vi)<br>EMD Amount | (vii)<br>Date and Time of Auction | (viii)<br>Date and Time EMD of Auction          | (ix)<br>Date and Time of Inspection                                                   | (x)<br>Authorized Officer Name & Contact Number                                                              |
|--------|----------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------|--------------------|-----------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1.     | INR 33689061.73/- Demand Notice dated: 31-May-2019 | 8607773, 8881453, 8606023 & 8880951                                                   | M M Traders, V K Steel Traders, Vimal Kumar Agarwal & Ashish Agarwal                  | Property-2: Plot No 70, Block G, Ispat Nagar, Kanpur, Kanpur, Uttar Pradesh- 208020                      | INR 9416250.00/-            | INR 941625.00/-    | 06-Jan-2026 11.00 AM to 1.00 PM   | 05-Jan-2026 10.00 AM to 5.00 PM                 | 29-Dec-2025 10:00 AM To 4:00 PM                                                       | Name- Prashant Dixit<br>Contact Number- 8299638318<br>Name- kishor kumar karki<br>Contact Number- 9838777706 |
|        | QR Codes of Property Location & Property Images    |  |  | Property-3: Pvt Plot No 12B, situated at Rajapuram Daheli Sujapur, Kanpur, Kanpur, Uttar Pradesh- 208021 | INR 19879200.00/-           | INR 1987920.00/-   |                                   | QR Codes of Property Location & Property Images |  |                         |

Disclaimer: Please note that the said notice is issued for sale of immovable property only and IDFC FIRST Bank Limited has no right to sale of the movable assets, if any, present at the immovable property.

Date: 15.12.2025

Place: Kanpur

Authorized Officer  
IDFC FIRST Bank Limited  
(Formerly known as IDFC Bank Ltd)



# Lucknow known for ideas, culture and dialogue: Goyal

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE  
Lucknow

Union Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal highlighted the significance of Uttar Pradesh's capital, Lucknow, during the official announcement of the newly-elected state president and national council members at the Bharatiya Janata Party's Sangathan Parv at Ram Manohar Lohia Law University in Ashiyana on Sunday.

He said, "Lucknow is more than just a city; it is a unique regional capital known for its rich tradition of ideas, culture and dialogue, drawing the attention of the entire nation."

Speaking nostalgically, Piyush Goyal recalled how he used to see Atal Bihari Vajpayee representing this constituency and noted the

special connection people had with the former prime minister, who not only served the city but also inspired generations through his poetry and presence.

Referring to the state's development, he praised Uttar Pradesh's law and order and said the state was steadily moving towards becoming a model for the entire country. Reflecting on the national scenario, Goyal observed that before 2014, corruption, scams, and weak governance dominated headlines, and the situation in Uttar Pradesh was especially concerning. He added, "The election of Prime Minister Narendra Modi in 2014 marked the beginning of a transformative era. Under his leadership, India has undergone a comprehensive change in governance, mindset and global per-

ception." Goyal highlighted that today Indians are viewed with unprecedented respect worldwide, a transformation not seen before 2014.

He emphasised Prime Minister Modi's commitment to good governance, rooted in the principle of 'Antyodaya to Sarvodaya'. By extending this vision to every household, the government has dramatically improved citizens' lives. Goyal highlighted India's rapid economic growth, noting that at the current pace, the country is poised to become the world's third-largest economy in the next two to three years.

Goyal also praised Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath for transforming Uttar Pradesh over the past eight and a half years.

He said, "Under Yogi's leader-



ship, the state has tackled land, sand, and liquor mafia, established strong law and order, and become India's second-largest economy. With sustained devel-

opment, Uttar Pradesh is moving toward a one-trillion-dollar economy, reflecting a clear vision for the future and inspiring progress nationwide."

Goyal emphasised his deep connection with Uttar Pradesh, noting that his father also graduated from Banaras Hindu University. He praised the people of the state for their relentless hard work over the past eight and a half years, which has earned them admiration nationwide.

He commended Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath's vision for establishing Global Capability Centres, generating employment, and enhancing the overall profile of Uttar Pradesh, calling his approach exemplary.

Goyal expressed full confidence that the state would continue its progress in the years ahead.

Recalling his visit to Lucknow in 2017 to begin the BJP's election campaign, Goyal described the state under the previous

Samajwadi Party government. He recounted learning that businessman Shравan Sahu had been brutally murdered in broad daylight, a tragic event emblematic of the widespread lawlessness across the state.

He added, "Uttar Pradesh faced anarchy, lack of investment, mass migration, unemployment and rampant mafia rule. In response, the people of the state decisively elected the BJP-NDA to power in 2017, with the NDA winning over 300 seats and Yogi Adityanath assuming office as chief minister."

Goyal welcomed the appointment of the new BJP state president, Pankaj Chaudhary, praising him as a simple, humble, and hardworking leader whose political journey exemplifies service from the grassroots to Parliament.

## Pankaj to give fresh momentum to party, govt: Yogi Adityanath

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE  
Lucknow

Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, on Sunday, said that Pankaj Chaudhary's election as the Bharatiya Janata Party's state president would give a fresh momentum to the party and the government in the state.

Addressing a gathering after announcement of Pankaj Chaudhary's election, Yogi Adityanath thanked Union Minister Piyush Goyal and former Union minister Mahendra Nath Pandey for overseeing the poll process.

"I congratulate the newly-elected state president Pankaj Chaudhary. Today in UP, after the completion of the election process, an experienced organisational worker has been given the responsibility of the state president. This will give a fresh momentum to the party and the government in the state in line with Prime Minister Narendra Modi's vision," Yogi said, according to a statement.

The chief minister exhorted party workers to strengthen the organisation at the booth level for the 2027 Uttar Pradesh assembly polls, and



make full use of the ongoing Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls.

He described the exercise as an opportunity to "strengthen democracy". He said large gaps had emerged in the voter list following the revision.

Yogi Adityanath said the January 2025 electoral roll had 15.44 crore voters but that number had come down to around 12 crore after the SIR.

He claimed that a large proportion of the missing

voters were BJP supporters.

Yogi Adityanath also called on the party workers to celebrate the birth centenary of former prime minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee on December 25 across the state.

According to the Election Commission of India data, 15.44 crore voters are enrolled in Uttar Pradesh in the 2025 electoral rolls. Under the SIR work, booth level officers (BLOs) have distributed enumeration forms to 15.43 crore (99.97 per cent) voters. The BLOs have digi-

tised 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 voters or a family member.

The Election Commission of India, on December 11, had 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 ECI for submission of enumeration form had ended on December 11.

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

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

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

The final draft of the electoral rolls will be published in February 2026.

## Party members together for public service: Bhupendra

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
Lucknow

The outgoing chief of the BJP Uttar Pradesh unit, Bhupendra Singh Chaudhary, on Sunday said that being a member of the party means putting the nation first, and with this spirit, "we are all moving forward together with a resolve for public service".

He was addressing the party workers and leaders at a gathering in Lucknow, after the announcement of Union Minister Pankaj Chaudhary as the new president of the state unit.

"In organisational politics,

situations constantly arise where we see ourselves changing our roles. The timing of these changes depends on the circumstances. As workers of a disciplined political party like the BJP, this kind of sentiment is ingrained in all of us," he said.

Chaudhary added that as soon as information (about the changed roles) is received, the ability to rest ceases, and with prior planning for the next role, all of the workers move forward with a sense of dedication and preparation.

"Being a member of the BJP means putting the nation

first, and with this spirit, we are all moving forward together with a resolve for public service," Chaudhary said.

He added, "In the past years, we have all fought many elections together and participated in many campaigns. From the Mahila Shakti Vandana Yojana to many other organisational tasks, we have all worked with enthusiasm."

Whether it was the membership drive or other campaigns, they have been successfully completed with complete dedication, he said, adding that the party has embraced the vision of Prime

Minister Narendra Modi, 'Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikas'.

"The BJP workers in Uttar Pradesh have created history under the membership drive. For the first time, the party has more than 2.6 crore members," the outgoing Uttar Pradesh BJP chief said.

BJP state election officer, Mahendra Nath Pandey, who has also served as the state unit chief, said the number of primary members this years was 74 lakh more than in 2019.

He also said Pankaj Chaudhary will be the 17th chief of the party's Uttar Pradesh unit.

## ‘Strengthening party key focus’

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
Lucknow

Newly-elected Uttar Pradesh BJP president Pankaj Chaudhary on Sunday said strengthening the party would be his core focus and asked cadres to give top priority to the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls underway in the state.

Chaudhary urged party cadres to prioritise booth-level duties related to the SIR to ensure that the names of eligible voters were not deleted from the voter list.

"I would like to request you all to leave important work aside and focus on the SIR in the coming days. We need to go to the booth to ensure that the name of our voters is not cut," he said.

Speaking to reporters earlier, Chaudhary said action against infiltrators was necessary. "No one could accept infiltrators."

Addressing a function after being declared the state BJP chief here, Chaudhary said the responsibility entrusted to him was the most serious and challenging assignment of his political



career.

"I have been a seven-time MP from Maharajganj and have served as a Union minister several times, but the responsibility of state BJP president is the most significant I have received so far," he said.

He said it was the BJP's "internal democracy", as against "dynastic politics", that made it possible for an

ordinary worker to rise to positions of responsibility.

Chaudhary said the party workers were paramount to him. "For me, party workers are supreme. I will stand with you, listen to your concerns and make every effort to find solutions."

He added, "I do not want to rule, but to play a role, that of a coordinator, a movement

"I HAVE BEEN A SEVEN-TIME MP FROM MAHARAJGANJ AND HAVE SERVED AS A UNION MINISTER SEVERAL TIMES, BUT THE RESPONSIBILITY OF STATE BJP PRESIDENT IS THE MOST SIGNIFICANT I HAVE RECEIVED SO FAR," HE SAID.

solver and a leader who takes everyone along."

Chaudhary, who was elected unopposed as the Uttar Pradesh BJP president on Sunday, listed as his core principles: Organisation, communication, dialogue, and coordination.

"It is my responsibility to ensure coordination between the organisation and the government, and to convey your concerns, ideas, and problems to the government," he said.

## Reluctant politician to helm of state BJP

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
Lucknow

Pankaj Chaudhary, fondly known as 'Pinky Babu' among family and friends, was on Sunday named the 17th president of the BJP's Uttar Pradesh unit, with his election being formally announced here by Union Minister Piyush Goyal.

The announcement was made in the presence of Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath and Deputy Chief Ministers Keshav Prasad Maurya and Brajesh Pathak. Chaudhary, the Union Minister of State for Finance, had filed his nomination papers for the post on Saturday and was the sole candidate in the fray.

He submitted the papers to former Union minister

and BJP state election officer Mahendra Nath Pandey and central election observer Vinod Tawde.

A seven-time Lok Sabha MP from Maharajganj and a key Kurmi leader from Purvanchal, Chaudhary is regarded as a strategic choice as the party looks to consolidate its social base and counter the opposition's PDA (Backward, Dalit, and Minorities) narrative ahead of the 2027 Uttar Pradesh Assembly polls.

Born on November 15, 1964, Chaudhary hails from the Harbanshram Bhagwandas Ayurvedic oil lineage, a prominent local business family known for producing the 'Rahat Rooh' brand. According to the people close to him, Chaudhary was academi-

cally bright and inclined towards social work till his elder brother, Pradeep Chaudhary, persuaded him to enter public life, telling him that politics offered the most effective platform for public service.

Chaudhary began his political career as a municipal councillor at the age of 25 and quickly earned a reputation for executing development works, becoming deputy mayor within a year.

He formally joined the BJP in 1990 and won his first Lok Sabha election from Maharajganj in 1991 during the Ram Temple movement.

Since then, Chaudhary has remained a dominant political figure, known for his soft-spoken demeanour and ability to maintain

cordial relations across party lines. Chaudhary's mother, Ujjawal, said on Saturday that her son's rise was the result of years of consistent hard work. "He is very simple and hardworking. He cares for everyone, and I am very happy," she told reporters.

His daughter-in-law, Himangi Chaudhary, thanked Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Adityanath for reposing faith in him. She said the family, including his grandchildren, was planning a grand welcome for Chaudhary in Gorakhpur.

Locals described Chaudhary as a hardworking and approachable leader and expressed confidence that he would effectively discharge his new role.

# Metaphor Litfest focusses on heritage, cinema and art

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE Lucknow

Metaphor Lucknow Listfest, on Day 2 on Sunday, focused on heritage, cinema and art.

The session on 'Restoring Constantia: Reviving heritage through thoughtful restoration' was a compelling account of how vision, craftsmanship and respect for heritage came together to revive Constantia, the magnificent central building of La Martiniere College.

Educationist Carlyle McFarland spoke with architect Vandana Sehgal about the philosophy, challenges and discoveries behind the restoration journey.

Reflecting on what first sparked the decision to restore the building, McFarland was candid.

"It was quite a mess, to be honest. If we are not going to look after a thing, it is going to collapse. You need the right people, at the right time," he said.

Originally conceived as a crypt or tomb, the structure gradually expanded over time, evolving far beyond its initial purpose. When Constantia was first built, its appearance was stark and utilitarian. Interiors were finished in the limited palette available at the

time — muted, matte colours with no sheen — reflecting both the materials and aesthetics of the era.

McFarland was careful to acknowledge that the true groundwork of restoration had been laid before his tenure.

"When we talk about restoration, you have to know that it was my predecessor who did the actual donkey work. He retired after doing the foundation work and after raising the funds."

As Vandana Sehgal noted, conserving or restoring a historic building is inherently multi-layered — involving sealing cracks, resurrecting foundations, and understanding that historic buildings were designed to function very differently from modern ones.

One of the most fascinating discoveries during the process was the building's original ventilation system. Designed by architect Major General Claude Martin, the structure was engineered to remain cool naturally.

However, time had taken its toll. Bats had occupied nearly every ventilation shaft, with one shaft alone containing over 120 kilograms of bat droppings. Alongside

this, the restoration team uncovered layers of contraband materials and gained new insight into the sophistication of the original ventilation design.

Central to the restoration philosophy was the idea of respectful reuse.

"How do you repurpose a building? By trying to go back to the original plan as much as possible," McFarland said.

Recreating the original ambience was no small feat. The quality and authenticity of the work were ultimately recognised at an international level, when the French Ambassador personally awarded a silver medal to Ansaruddin — the individual who assembled and led the restoration team.

Architect Dr Nita Das provided a phased blueprint for the restoration, ensuring structural and historical integrity at every stage.

McFarland also reflected on his own role in recognising the building as part of his personal heritage, while crediting Ansaruddin and his team for completing the work at a remarkably reasonable cost.

Meanwhile the session '80s Cinema' featured film historian Avijit Ghosh in conversation with

Kanak Rekha Chauhan, offering sharp insights into a decade of upheaval and transition in Indian cinema.

Ghosh examined how the growing exchange with South Indian cinema in the 1980s transformed Hindi films, as traditional production houses receded and a new commercial style emerged. Mass entertainers such as Himmattwala and Mawali, featuring stars like Jeetendra and Jaya Prada with memorable dialogues by Kader Khan, came to define the period.

He noted that the rise of television and video piracy drew the educated middle class away from theatres, turning cinema-going largely into a working-class activity during the decade. The industry's recovery, he observed, arrived in the 1990s with the introduction of multiplexes.

The discussion also addressed why serious films like Satyakam were overlooked, citing weak distribution networks as a key factor. Reflecting on women in 80s cinema, Ghosh underscored Rekha's artistic authority — beginning with Umrao Jaan — and acknowledged the remarkable ascent of Sridevi and Jaya Prada.

## MARIA SHARES MUMBAI'S UNDERWORLD STORIES

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE  
Lucknow

Metaphor LitFest featured Rakesh Maria, former Mumbai Police Commissioner, in conversation with Sathya Saran, discussing his book 'When It All Began' and his extraordinary career at the frontlines of India's crime history.

With sharp insights, rare anecdotes and a deep understanding of crime and policing, Rakesh Maria offered the audience an unforgettable window into the hidden world that defined Mumbai for decades.

Maria shared gripping accounts of Mumbai's underworld — from Haji Mastan, Varadarajan Mudaliar and Karim Lala to the rise of Dawood Ibrahim and the gang rivalries that shaped the city. He recalled being posted to ensure Varadarajan did not return to Mumbai, the circumstances of the gangster's death and the unexpected visit from Haji Mastan who sought permission to bring back his friend's body — an event that opened the door to taped conversations about underworld's internal dynamics.

He recounted his interactions with several key figures: the Pathan gang led by Alamzeb and Shehzada, Dawood's sources and constable Ibrahim Kaskar, Dawood's father, who became an unlikely intermediary between law enforcement and gang networks. Maria also spoke about land-

mark moments such as Mumbai Police's first encounter in 1982, the capture of Charles Sobhraj in 1986 and how these events altered the balance of power in the underworld.

The session shed light on the culture of trust, rivalry and 'supari' killings, early peace pacts among gang leaders and how betrayal between Haji Mastan and Yusuf Patel triggered the first major contract killing in Mumbai's crime history.

Maria also narrated lesser-known spiritual influences on gangsters — including Dawood's visits to pirs and the prophecies linked to his rise — and the ways in which faith, fear and power shaped decisions within the underworld.

Meanwhile Metaphor LitFest's Lawn session 'Crime Ka Paatal Lok' featured crime writer Manoj Rajan Tripathi in conversation with Zeenat Siddiqui, offering a stark, deeply researched account of the evolution of organised crime in India.

Tripathi — also known for films like 'Mulk' and 'Atithi Tum Kab Jaoge' — shared chilling insights from decades of crime reporting. He recalled how a story he was writing shifted from Banaras to Kashmir, only to be overtaken by the live televised murder of Atiq Ahmed. He explained how Atiq's assassination was carried out by killers disguised as journalists, trained with the assassination footage of Ahmad Shah Massoud, and armed with foreign weapons worth nearly Rs 9.5 lakh despite having almost no money themselves.



## IN FOCUS



Workers carrying their boats to the shore after fishing at Elathur Beach in Kozhikode, Kerala

PTI

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE  
■ New Delhi

The CBI has filed a chargesheet against 17 people, including four Chinese nationals, and 58 companies for their alleged roles in a transnational cyber fraud network that siphoned off over ₹1,000 crore through a sprawling web of shell entities and digital scams, officials said on Sunday.

After busting the racket in October, investigators unravelled a single, tightly coordinated syndicate that relied on an elaborate digital and financial infrastructure to run a range of frauds. These included misleading loan applications, fake investment schemes, Ponzi and multi-level marketing models, bogus part-time job offers and fraudulent online gaming platforms. According



to the probe agency's final report, the group layered the flow of illicit funds through 111 shell companies, routing about ₹1,000 crore via mule accounts. One account received more than ₹152 crore in a short span. The shell companies, the

CBI said, were incorporated using dummy directors, forged or misleading documents, fake addresses and false statements of business objectives. "These shell entities were used to open bank accounts and merchant accounts with various

payment gateways, enabling rapid layering and diversion of proceeds of crime," a CBI spokesperson said in a statement. Investigators traced the origins of the scam to 2020, when the country was grappling with the COVID-19 pandemic. The shell companies were allegedly incorporated at the direction of four Chinese handlers — Zou Yi, Huan Liu, Weijian Liu and Guanhua Wang.

Their Indian associates procured identity documents from unsuspecting individuals, which were then used to establish the network of shell companies and mule accounts to launder proceeds from the scams and obscure the money trail. The investigation exposed communication links and operational control that, the agency said, nailed the role of Chinese masterminds running the

fraud network from abroad. "Significantly, a UPI ID linked to the bank accounts of two Indian accused was found to be active in a foreign location as late as August 2025, conclusively establishing continued foreign control and real-time operational oversight of the fraud infrastructure from outside India," the CBI statement said.

The probe found that the racketeers employed a highly layered, technology-driven modus operandi, using Google advertisements, bulk SMS campaigns, SIM-box-based messaging systems, cloud infrastructure, fintech platforms and multiple mule bank accounts. "Each stage of the operation — from luring victims to collection and movement of funds — was deliberately structured to conceal the identities of the

actual controllers and evade detection by law enforcement agencies," the spokesperson said.

The chargesheet names 17 individuals, including the four Chinese nationals, and 58 companies.

The investigation was launched on the inputs from the Indian Cyber Crime Coordination Centre (I4C) under the Ministry of Home Affairs, which flagged large-scale cheating of citizens through online investment and employment schemes, resulting in the arrest of three individuals in October.

"Though initially appearing as isolated complaints, detailed analysis by CBI revealed striking similarities in applications used, fund-flow patterns, payment gateways and digital footprints, pointing towards a common organised conspiracy," the agency said.

## Violence reported in several parts of Kerala

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
■ Kozhikode

Violence erupted at various places across Kerala, particularly in the northern districts, following the announcement of local body election results on December 13, police said on Sunday.

In Eramala in Kozhikode district, tension prevailed throughout the Saturday night after the Indira Gandhi Bhavan, a Congress office, was allegedly attacked by CPI(M) workers.

According to an FIR registered at Edachery police station, around 200 people marched towards the Congress office carrying weapons and vandalised the building, causing damage estimated at around Rs five lakh. A statue of the late Prime Minister Indira Gandhi was also damaged in the attack, police said. Soon after, UDF activists gathered at the spot, further aggravating the situation.

However, with the deployment of additional police personnel, the situation was

brought under control, an officer said. Police said another violent incident was reported at Marad, where stones were allegedly pelted at a UDF victory procession, leaving several people injured.

In Sultan Bathery in Wayanad district, police registered a case after a car carrying a UDF activist and his family members was allegedly attacked by around 40 CPI(M) workers, an official said. Sultan Bathery police also booked UDF activists in a separate incident for allegedly attacking a CPI(M) worker who objected to the bursting of crackers near his house, the officer added. In Panoor in Kannur district, houses of several Muslim League activists were allegedly attacked by CPI(M) workers, and vehicles parked at the houses were also damaged. According to Panoor police, the violence broke out after a UDF victory rally was allegedly stopped by CPI(M) workers armed with swords and daggers. Some UDF leaders sustained injuries in the clash.

## Inquiry ordered into bribe charge against 3 Rajasthan MLAs

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
■ Jaipur

The Rajasthan Government on Sunday ordered a high-level inquiry into allegations against three legislators of seeking commissions for the release of MLA funds, while the BJP and Congress issued notices seeking an explanation from the accused leaders. As part of the action, the MLA-Local Area Development (MLA-LAD) accounts of the accused leaders have been frozen pending the outcome of the inquiry.

The action followed a sting operation by a newspaper accusing BJP MLA from Khinvsar Revantram Danga, Congress MLA from Hindaun Anita Jatav, and Independent MLA from Bayana Ritu Banawat of taking commissions in exchange for sanctioning amounts from the MLA-LAD funds.

"Our Government follows a strict zero-tolerance policy against corruption by any

public servant. No matter how influential a person may be, if found guilty of corruption, they will not be spared," Chief Minister Bhajanlal Sharma said in a post on X.

"Instructions have been issued to the chief secretary and the director general of police to conduct an inquiry through a high-level committee headed by the chief vigilance commissioner (additional chief secretary, home)," Sharma said. Accordingly, a four-member committee headed by ACS Bhaskar A Sawant has been constituted, which will submit its report within 15 days. The committee includes Jogaram, Secretary, Panchayati Raj department, and Finance Secretary Rajan Vishal as members, and Special Secretary (Home) Manish Goyal as the member secretary.

On the chief minister's instruction, the Government's chief whip in the Assembly, Jogeshwar

Garg, wrote to Speaker Vasudev Devnani, requesting him to refer the case to the ethics committee of the House for inquiry.

"The speaker has also taken cognisance of the matter," a Government spokesperson said. Meanwhile, state BJP president Madan Rathore issued a notice to MLA Revantram Danga, seeking an explanation on the charges against him within three days.

In the notice issued on the instruction of the party's central leadership, Rathore said the act falls under the definition of breach of discipline as mentioned in the party constitution.

"Submit your clarification regarding the allegations within three days, explaining why no strict action should be taken against you under the provisions of the constitution of the Bharatiya Janata Party for the aforementioned disciplinary breach," Rathore said. Leader of Opposition in

Rajasthan Assembly, Tikaram Jully, said the Congress has issued a notice to MLA Anita Jatav, and an inquiry is underway. "Public representatives are trustees of the people, and corruption or commission-taking in the MLA fund is highly condemnable. Even if the MLA is from our party, this will not be tolerated," he said. Jully demanded that the Government rise above party politics, conduct an inquiry against all the guilty legislators, and bring the facts to light. Addressing a cleanliness awareness and labour donation programme at the Jal Mahal here, Chief Minister Sharma said that public money should be used for the welfare of people, and those involved in graft will not be spared under any circumstances.

"Public funds are not meant for corruption; they should serve the interests of the common people, including farmers, labourers and the poor," Sharma said.

## FROM PAGE - 1

## Nitin Nabin to succeed Nadda

multiple terms. He has diligently worked to fulfil people's aspirations. He is known for his humble nature and grounded style of working. I am confident that his energy and dedication will strengthen our Party in the times to come.

Congratulations to him on becoming the BJP National Working President," PM Narendra Modi said on social media.

Earlier in the day, Chaudhary's announcement as UP BJP chief by Union Minister Piyush Goyal was made in the presence of UP Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath and deputy chief ministers Keshav Prasad Maurya and Brajesh Pathak. Pankaj Chaudhary will be the 17th chief of UP BJP.

Yogi Adityanath said Pankaj Chaudhary's election to the BJP's State president's post would give fresh momentum to the party and the Government in the State. The chief minister exhorted party workers to strengthen the organisation at the booth level for the 2027 Uttar Pradesh Assembly polls, and make full use of the ongoing Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls. He described the exercise as an opportunity to "strengthen democracy." He said large gaps had emerged in the voter list following the revision.

Chaudhary had filed his nomination for the post on Saturday and was the sole candidate in the fray. Goyal presented Pankaj Chaudhary with his certificate of election. At the programme, Sangathan Parv, Goyal called the BJP the world's largest political organisation, and said the global community is astonished by its disciplined and democratic functioning.

Goyal also announced the names of the party's newly elected national council members, whose numbers ran up to 120, and included Prime Minister Narendra Modi. Modi represents Varanasi, while Adityanath represents Gorakhpur. Defence Minister Rajnath Singh is from Lucknow, Maurya from Prayagraj, and Pathak from Unnao.

Other members of the national council include Bhupendra Singh Chaudhary (Sambhal), Smriti Irani (Sultanpur), Dr Mahendra Nath Pandey (Varanasi), Surya Pratap Shahi (Salempur), Swatantra Dev Singh (Banda), and Dr Ramapati Ram Tripathi (Gorakhpur).

A seven-time Lok Sabha MP from the Maharajganj constituency, Pankaj Chaudhary, belongs to the Kurmi community, categorised under Other Backwards Classes (OBC). He is considered a close confidant of Modi, Union Home Minister Amit Shah and Defence Minister Rajnath Singh.

Maurya said the 2027 UP Assembly election is the next major challenge for the party and asserted that the BJP would secure an overwhelming victory under Chaudhary's leader-

ship.

## Centre seeks more women, SC/ST officers...

Further, it is requested to ensure that an officer, "once placed on the offer list," continues to be available for consideration throughout the year, it said. The Ministry said withdrawal of the name of an officer, after his or her name has been recommended, may result in five years of debarment from central deputation, including foreign postings.

"The Government of India has been following a policy of debarring an officer for five years if he/she fails to join the central deputation as per orders of DoPT (Department of Personnel and Training), either on personal grounds or the refusal of the cadre to relieve him.

"It may be noted that withdrawal of the name of an officer after a panel has been recommended by the Civil Services Board results in debarment for five years," said the communique issued by Manisha Saxena, Establishment Officer and Additional Secretary, DoPT.

It also asked them to ensure the names of officers debarred from central deputation should not be forwarded for appointments. The DoPT said the nomination process for posts under the CSS, CVO positions in CPSEs, and other organisations will be routed through a dedicated portal from January 1, 2026.

The Government usually invites nominations every year to fill key posts, such as joint secretaries, directors, deputy secretaries, and CVOs. A similar communique has been sent to secretaries of all Central Government departments to recommend officers on central deputation.

## Congress seeks ouster of BJP, accuses it of Vote...

Kharge, who claimed that he did not go to Karnataka to attend a family medical emergency and gave priority to the people's demand, alleged that the BJP-RSS people are engaged in efforts to finish off the Constitution.

"In the name of Hindutva, these people want to enslave the poor again. But we must remember that the Congress got Independence for the country, Modi-Shah were not even born at that time. These people talk against Jawaharlal Nehru, Mahatma Gandhi and B R Ambedkar; they sow a rift of ideas between Patel and Nehru, but we will not allow it," he said.

"On the other hand, there is vote chori. These people are 'gaddars', you will have to remove these gaddars. If you want to protect yourself, remove these gaddars. For that purpose, Rahul Gandhi walked throughout the country BJP people are 'dramebaaz', they only believe in their own propaganda," Kharge said.

Noting that some BJP people raised the issue of Rahul Gandhi going abroad, Kharge said when

Parliament is on, Prime Minister (Narendra) Modi goes abroad and does not come to the House to give answers. "These gaddars will have to be removed. Will you remove them?" Kharge asked the gathering. "They stole our Vande Mataram, so don't trust these thieves," Kharge said, as he urged people to strengthen Rahul Gandhi's hand in his fight for the citizens.

Priyanka challenged the BJP to win a fair election on the ballot paper and asserted that the election commissioners would have to answer to the country one day as to how they "conspired" to take away people's voting rights and made every step of the poll process "suspicious".

Priyanka said the country will never forget the three names — Chief Election Commissioner Gyanesh Kumar and Election Commissioners Sukhbir Singh Sandhu and Vivek Joshi — as no matter how much efforts are made to protect them, one day they will have to answer how they "conspired and attempted to take away" voting rights of the people. All institutions have been made to bend before the Government, she alleged.

## Messi to meet PM Modi

His next stop will be the residence of an MP, where he is also set to meet the Argentine Ambassador to India, Mariano Agustin Caucino, besides CJI Justice Surya Kant and Army Chief General Upendra Dwivedi.

The chief of the Enforcement Directorate, Rahul Navin, is also likely to be part of the select gathering at the MP's house, which will also comprise a few top Government officials. After he meets with the VVIPs, Messi's convoy will leave for the Ferozshah Kotla Stadium, where a few programmes are lined up.

At 3:30 pm, Messi is scheduled to enter the stadium via the walkway leading to the pitch, where cars will be waiting to take him directly to the airport after the GOAT concert ends. He will receive a grand welcome with music, then head to a small soccer field where Indian celebrities are playing a match. Messi will greet the players and take a group photo with the teams. A football clinic for 22 children is scheduled from 3:55 pm to 4:15 pm. Afterwards, he will move to the centre of the field, where two Indian cricketers will present him with a gift, and he will give them two pre-signed jerseys in return.

Lionel Messi arrived in Mumbai on Sunday under "World Cup-level" security measures, marking the second day of his four-city 'GOAT India Tour 2025'. He was accompanied by Inter Miami teammates Luis Suarez and Rodrigo de Paul as he reached the iconic Wankhede Stadium for the main event of the tour. Mumbai Police put in place stringent security arrangements, including restrictions on carrying water bottles, metal objects and coins inside the venues, while watchtowers have also been set up to monitor the crowd. Messi had arrived in India in the wee hours

of Saturday, but the opening leg of the tour in Kolkata quickly descended into chaos later in the day due to poor crowd management and security lapses. However, his evening programme in the Hyderabad leg stood in stark contrast to the mayhem in Kolkata, proceeding smoothly and concluding on a positive note.

## 2 gunmen kill 11 at Sydney Jewish event

The massacre was declared a terrorist attack due to the event targeted and the weapons used, Lanyon said.

Hundreds had gathered for the gathering at Bondi Beach called Chanukah by the Sea, which was celebrating the start of the eight-day Hanukkah festival.

Chabad identified one of the dead as Rabbi Eli Schlanger, assistant rabbi at Chabad of Bondi and a key organiser of the event.

Chabad is an Orthodox Jewish movement that is known for its outreach to non-religious Jews. It runs scores of centres around the world that are popular with Jewish travellers and often sponsors large public events during major Jewish holidays. Video footage filmed by onlookers appeared to show two gunmen with long guns firing from a bridge. One dramatic clip, apparently filmed by a member of the public and broadcast on Australian television channels, showed someone appearing to tackle and disarm one of the gunmen, before pointing the man's weapon at him.

## Delhi-NCR chokes, GRAP Stage IV curbs imposed

Colleges and higher educational institutions have also been told to reduce physical attendance. Offices and private establishments in Delhi will have to operate with only 50 per cent of their staff strength in line with the existing government orders, while the GRAP Stage III and IV are in force. The State Governments of NCR have been asked to consider similar work-from-home arrangements to cut down on vehicular emissions.

It also ordered an immediate ban on outdoor sports and physical activities in Delhi-NCR. By an order, the Commission expressed concern that despite a landmark SC order dated 19th November, some schools and institutions continue to hold sports in open areas. Such activities seriously expose people, especially children, to health risks.

According to the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB), Delhi's overall AQI stood at 458 at 2 pm on December 14, placing the city deep in the severe category. This came after the 24-hour average AQI stood at 431 at 4 pm on Saturday.

Under the most stringent stages of GRAP, authorities have completely banned BS-III petrol

## Punjab polls: Congress, SAD attack AAP

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
■ Chandigarh

Opposition parties Congress and Shiromani Akali Dal in Punjab on Sunday accused the ruling AAP of indulging in electoral malpractices during zila parishad and panchayat samiti elections and slammed the State Election Commission for "failing" to conduct polls in a fair manner.

Polling to elect members of 347 zones of 22 zila parishads and 2,838 zones of 153 panchayat samitis was held on Sunday. A total of 1.36 crore voters were eligible to cast their ballot. Punjab Congress president Warring alleged that the ruling AAP indulged in "gross and blatant electoral malpractices" during the elections, saying it showed its lack of confidence.

Warring, in a statement, said that reports from across the state said that the ruling party workers, allegedly supported by the

police and administration, resorted to "booth capturing" at several places. "They have gone a step ahead of their mentors in the BJP who are known for 'vote chori'," he alleged.

The Ludhiana MP said the AAP picked up another leaf from the BJP's "vote chori" book, that of not providing voter lists to the opposition parties.

The SAD too accused the AAP of stealing the elections "in league with the State Election Commission and the Punjab Police" and demanded a judicial probe into the functioning of the state election commissioner as well as its immediate removal. Senior leaders Daljit Singh Cheema and Arshdeep Singh Kler alleged that for the first time in the history of the state, a ruling party had "captured" polling booths by using arms and weapons, and attacked opposition workers and indulged in widespread rigging.



## Amitabh Bachchan’s ancestral village to get major facelift



Amitabh Bachchan’s ancestral Babu Patti village in UP’s Pratapgarh district is all set to get a facelift as a Maharashtra-based NGO has planned a series of development projects.

## Tamil kings, leaders get due recognition: VP Radhakrishnan

Vice President CP Radhakrishnan on Sunday lauded efforts to recognise and honour Tamil kings, leaders and freedom fighters who had “not received due recognition earlier”. He made the remarks at an event here to release a commemorative postage stamp in honour of Emperor Perumbidugu Mutharaiyar II. In a social media post, the Vice President’s Secretariat said Radhakrishnan appreciated the Narendra Modi Government for its continuous support to Tamil culture and language.



## Congress leader Shamanuru Shivashankarappa dies at 95



Veteran Congress leader Shamanuru Shivashankarappa passed away at a private hospital on Sunday due to age-related ailments, official sources said. He was 95 and represented the Davanagere South Assembly constituency. He had been undergoing treatment at the hospital for some time.

## Suvendu Adhikari demands probe into Messi event chaos

West Bengal’s Leader of Opposition Suvendu Adhikari on Sunday demanded a court-monitored investigation into the chaos that erupted during Argentine football icon Lionel Messi’s event at Salt Lake stadium here a day ago. Adhikari said once the BJP is elected to power in the 2026 Assembly polls, the saffron party will ensure Messi comes to Bengal again and regale his thousands of fans in Yuva Bharati Krirangan with his football skills.



# President Murmu urges citizens to embrace energy efficiency

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE  
■ New Delhi

President Droupadi Murmu on Sunday said behavioural change in every citizen is crucial to bringing energy efficiency to all sectors in the country.

Addressing National Energy Conservation Day Function here, she said the consciousness of adopting a balanced lifestyle in harmony with nature is fundamental to India’s cultural tradition — this very sentiment forms the basis of our message to the world, “Lifestyle for Environment — LIFE”.

“Participation of every sector and citizen is essential for the success of India’s energy transition. Behavioural change is crucial for bringing energy efficiency to all sectors,” she said.

The President said energy conservation is the most environmentally friendly and reliable source of energy.

Energy conservation is not just an option, but the most crucial need of today, she said.

She underlined that saving energy doesn’t simply mean using less, but utilising energy wisely, responsibly, and efficiently.

“When we avoid unnecessary use of electrical appliances, adopt energy-efficient devices, utilise natural light and ventilation in our homes and workplaces, or embrace solar and renewable energy options, we not only save



President Droupadi Murmu, Union Power Minister Manohar Lal Khattar and others during a group photographs with awardees at the presentation of ‘National Energy Conservation Awards 2025’ and ‘National Painting Competition on Energy Conservation’ prizes in New Delhi

energy but also reduce carbon emissions,” she said.

Energy conservation is also important for maintaining clean air and safe water sources, and a balanced ecosystem, Murmu said, adding, “Every unit of energy we save will be a symbol of our responsibility towards nature and our sensitivity towards future generations.”

If the youth and children are aware about energy conservation and make efforts in this direction, the goals in this area can be achieved and the sustainable development of the country can be ensured, the President said.

Access to affordable and clean energy empowers communities, she said, adding that green energy is not limited to electricity generation; it is a powerful means of

empowerment and inclusive development.

The President noted that initiatives, such as Pradhan Mantri Surya Ghar Muft Bijli Yojana and the National Green Hydrogen Mission, are reducing dependence on fossil fuels.

The Government is also promoting renewable energy adoption and energy efficiency through the Renewable Consumption Obligation and Production-Linked Incentive schemes. She noted that India’s energy efficiency efforts in 2023-24 resulted in energy savings of 53.60 million tonnes of oil equivalent.

She said these efforts are leading to significant economic savings annually and have also resulted in a substantial reduction in CO2 emissions.

The President said the par-

ticipation of every sector and citizen is essential for the success of India’s energy transition.

She appreciated all stakeholders working in the field of energy conservation and said their contribution will ensure a healthy and bright future for coming generations.

She expressed confidence that with the spirit of collective responsibility, partnership, and public participation, India will continue to play a leading role in energy conservation and achieve its goals towards a green future.

She presented the National Energy Conservation Awards 2025 and National Painting Competition on Energy Conservation prizes in New Delhi on Sunday on the occasion of National Energy Conservation Day.

## BJP alleges Congress rally aims to protect infiltrators

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE  
■ New Delhi

Ahead of the Congress’s rally over the “vote theft” issue, the BJP on Sunday alleged that the main Opposition party was holding the event in its bid to “protect infiltrators” from being removed from the electoral rolls.

The ruling BJP asserted that the Congress will not succeed in its design of misleading people as well as “insulting and defaming” constitutional institutions, because the entire world knows that India’s democracy is “very robust”.

Stepping up its campaign against the alleged “vote theft” by the BJP in elections, the Congress has organised a rally at the



Ramlila Maidan here on Sunday that will be attended by the party’s top leaders, including general secretaries Priyanka Gandhi Vadra, KC Venugopal, Jairam Ramesh, and Sachin Pilot.

Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge and former party chief Rahul

Gandhi are expected to address the gathering. Former Congress president Sonia Gandhi is also likely to be present at the event.

Ahead of the event, BJP national spokesperson Sambit Patra said the Congress was holding the rally even as Union Home Minister Amit Shah “exposed” the Opposition through his point-by-point rebuttal to their “fabricated” allegations during a debate on electoral reforms during the ongoing Winter Session of Parliament.

“This shows that you do not have truth in your hand, yet you are trying to create an atmosphere of confusion. The Congress’ rally is an exercise to protect ‘ghus-paithiyas (infiltrators)’. This is

what the Congress is doing,” the BJP MP told reporters.

“The Congress party may try all it wants to mislead the people as well as insult and defame our constitutional institutions. But, the entire world knows that India’s democracy is very robust and it cannot be shaken,” he added.

The BJP leader accused the Congress of holding the rally to pursue its “appeasement politics” and dared Rahul Gandhi to challenge the Bihar assembly polls if he felt that there was any irregularity.

“Rahul ji, you still have perhaps 10 days left in your hands. You can still file a complaint if you feel that there was any irregularity (in the poll process) in any of the seats in the Bihar assembly polls,” Patra said.

## Mata Vaishno Devi Shrine sees drop in pilgrim numbers

MOHIT KANDHARI ■ Jammu

As the Kashmir Valley looks forward to a resurgence in winter tourism in the weeks ahead, authorities at the Shri Mata Vaishno Devi Shrine Board are grappling with a sharp drop in pilgrim numbers compared to previous years.

At the time of the launch of the Vande Bharat Express connecting the Kashmir valley with the rest of the country by Prime Minister Narendra Modi in June this year, the Shrine Board authorities had expected a rise in the pilgrim traffic.

According to Yatra statistics available on the official website of the Shrine Board,



65.03 lakh pilgrims have visited the cave shrine this year. The pilgrim traffic was adversely affected due to the Pahalgam terror attack. Operation Sindoor and devastating flash floods in August, leading to the death of over 30 pilgrims along the

yatra track. The yatra remained suspended for over three weeks due to repair works and prevailing inclement weather conditions.

Ahead of the New Year celebrations, the Shrine Board authorities are now gearing

up to welcome the pilgrims and hoping the yatra figures to cross the 70 lakh mark. During the last week of December, around 3 to 4 lakh pilgrims offer prayers inside the cave shrine located in the Trikuta hills. To further boost pilgrim traffic, the Shrine board has made concerted efforts to attract pilgrims by providing improved infrastructure facilities.

Last year, 94.84 pilgrims visited the cave shrine. In 2023, the pilgrim traffic crossed 95 lakh. In 2022, 91.25 lakh pilgrims performed the yatra. For the first time, the pilgrim traffic crossed the 70 lakh mark in 2007.

## Sharad Pawar urges support for talent beyond privileged families

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE  
■ Mumbai

NCP(SP) president Sharad Pawar on Sunday said talent and leadership are not limited to persons with privileged backgrounds and stressed the need to identify and support capable individuals from ordinary families to bring positive change in society.

Speaking at the Sharad Pawar Inspire Fellowship award ceremony held at Yashwantrao Chavan Centre here, he said the fellowship programme has been designed keeping in mind the life and values of Yashwantrao Chavan, Maharashtra’s first chief minister.

“Many people succeed in life because they have a strong background and support system, but there are many others who lack such support yet have the ability and vision to work for society. They need opportunities and encouragement,” Pawar said.

Recalling Chavan’s journey, Pawar said he came from a very modest background and yet went on to become not



President Sharad Pawar addressing the gathering during the award ceremony of the Sharad Pawar Inspire Fellowship in Mumbai

only the chief minister of Maharashtra but also served the country as defence minister, finance minister and external affairs minister.

“This shows that ability is not the monopoly of a few. It exists among common people as well,” the NCP (SP) chief said while praising the work of Yashwantrao Chavan Pratishthan for identifying such individuals across Maharashtra through the fellowship programme and giving them a platform to grow.

Referring to rapid changes across sectors, Pawar highlighted the growing role of artificial intelligence (AI), particularly in agriculture. “AI-based technologies can significantly improve crop productivity while reducing the use of water and fertilisers. With the right use of technology, agricultural output can increase by 25 to 30 per cent while lowering costs,” he said.

Pawar cited the example of the Sahyadri Farmers Producer Company in Nashik

district, saying it had successfully transformed young farmers into entrepreneurs through collective efforts and confidence-building.

Pawar congratulated the fellowship awardees and expressed confidence that the knowledge and experience gained through the programme would help bring change at the village, taluka and district levels. He urged the participants to focus not only on good work but also on building strong institutions to sustain long-term impact.

Talking to reporters later, Nationalist Congress Party (SP) working president Supriya Sule said the Sharad Pawar Inspire Fellowship will be launched exclusively for women from next year. The fellowship was started by the Yashwantrao Chavan Centre to mark the ‘Sahasrachandra Darshan’ celebrations of party president Sharad Pawar and has now entered its fifth year.

Sule said the fellowship will focus on women interested in areas such as agriculture, education and social transformation. Commenting on the recently concluded

Winter session of the State legislature, Sule said its duration was very short and it failed to meet expectations. “Even as the Opposition, we look at the larger interest of the State. However, there was no positive or meaningful discussion on key issues facing Maharashtra,” the Baramati MP said. Raising concern over crimes against women, Sule said incidents of atrocities and dowry deaths are increasing in the State and should have been discussed in the House.

She said Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis needs to take strong policy decisions to address the issue. She also called for unity across party lines to bring about social change, adding the ruling dispensation should take the lead in working with the Opposition on such issues. Referring to the proposed Shakti Act, Sule said the Modi-led Government has been in power for the last 11 years but the legislation has not yet been brought before Parliament. “If the Shakti Act is introduced in Parliament by the Centre, we will strongly support it,” she added.

## Fadnavis launches Project Mahadeva to nurture football talent

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
■ Mumbai

Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis on Sunday said the State Government’s football development initiative ‘Project Mahadeva’ aims to identify and nurture talented young players who could represent India in the 2034 FIFA World Cup.

The project was formally launched at Wankhede Stadium by Fadnavis in the presence of football icon Lionel Messi, and prominent personalities, including footballers Luis Suarez and Rodrigo De Paul.



The programme is part of Maharashtra’s ‘Mission Olympic 2026’, which targets improved sporting performance and increased medal

tally at national and international events.

Under Project Mahadeva, 60 under-13 footballers, including 30 boys and 30 girls, select-

ed from across Maharashtra, will receive specialised training and mentoring. The selected players will get a residential scholarship for five years, along with world-class coaching, including training by foreign coaches.

“Project Mahadeva is a crucial initiative of the Maharashtra Government to scout football talent at the grassroots level and develop high-quality players. We are confident that this project will produce players capable of competing at the highest global level, including the FIFA World Cup,” Fadnavis said.

## Tamil Nadu to expand welfare scheme for women: CM

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE  
■ Dharmapuri (Tamil Nadu)

Tamil Nadu Chief Minister MK Stalin on Sunday said even if some more eligible persons had been left out of the ₹1,000 per month assistance scheme for women, they will be brought under the welfare initiative.

Addressing a function here, Stalin, referring to the RBI data, said Tamil Nadu has topped the GDP growth at a rate of 16 per cent and this was achieved despite obstacles.

The number of beneficiaries under the ‘rights’ scheme for women that pro-



vides ₹1,000 per month assistance has increased to 1.30 crore with the inclusion of 17 lakh beneficiaries days ago, Stalin said.

The CM said: “If even some more eligible persons had been left out, if they make a

representation, they will be provided the assistance under the scheme; I have also said that the assistance amount too would be increased.”

On SIR, the CM said, “We have to protect our right to

vote and we have done our work vigilantly.” However, “we have work till such time the Assembly election is held (due by March-April next year) and the result is announced. You must not forget it.”

Furthermore, the chief minister said that the party functionaries should reach out to the people highlighting the Government’s achievements and welfare measures.

The party must get the honour of forming the Government for the seventh time and the State’s growth should continue.



## States Focus



### CORRUPTION CAUSED CONGRESS DOWNFALL: RAJASTHAN CM

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



### VAJPAYEE'S VISION GUIDES SELF-RELIANT INDIA: CM DHAMI

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

## MP leader sparks Ladli Behna scheme controversy

GIRISH SHARMA ■ Bhopal

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

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

Madhya Pradesh Congress president Jitu Patwari launched a scathing attack, accusing the BJP of insulting women beneficiaries and displaying an ‘anti-women mindset’. Former chief min-

ister Kamal Nath also weighed in, alleging that the minister's remarks treated Ladli Behna beneficiaries as bonded labour and amounted to an attack on the civil rights and dignity of women in the state.

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



However, a video clip of the meeting that later went viral sparked controversy. In the footage, Shah is heard telling officials that beneficiaries who fail to attend the proposed programme could face scrutiny of their documents, including Aadhaar verification, and that their applications could be kept pending. The remarks were quickly

seized upon by the Opposition, which accused the minister of using a welfare scheme as a tool for political mobilisation and intimidation. The Ladli Behna Scheme was launched in June 2023, a few months ahead of the Assembly elections, and currently provides monthly financial assistance of Rs 1,500 to more than 1.26 crore women.

The state Government has promised to increase the amount to Rs 3,000 per month by 2028, making the scheme a central pillar of its welfare and political strategy.

As the controversy escalated, speaking to The Pioneer on Sunday, Shah asserting that his remarks had been ‘twisted and misrepresented’. He denied any suggestion that women were being threatened or coerced and said there was no ill intent behind his comments. Emphasising the Government's commitment to women's empowerment, Shah said the objective of the scheme is to make women self-reliant and economically secure.

He explained that during an informal discussion at the meeting, concerns were raised about reports of ineligible women allegedly availing benefits under the Ladli Behna Scheme, which had caused resentment among

sections of the public.

According to Shah, the discussion focused on the need for proper verification to ensure that only eligible beneficiaries continue to receive assistance and that ineligible names are filtered out in a transparent manner. He maintained that the intent was administrative correction and accountability, not pressure on beneficiaries.

Despite the clarification, the episode has added to a growing list of controversies surrounding the senior minister, reviving debate over the language and conduct of public representatives. With the Ladli Behna Scheme occupying a central place in the BJP's political narrative, the controversy has also sharpened the Opposition's attack, setting the stage for a prolonged political confrontation over welfare, accountability and the dignity of beneficiaries.

## CM Himanta invites VP to witness Assam's progress

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

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

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

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

The Vice President appreciated the gesture and interact-



ed warmly with the Chief Minister during the meeting which lasted for around 30 minutes.

Later taking to X, formerly Twitter, Chief Minister Sarma wrote, “Honoured to call upon Vice President of India,

CP Radhakrishnan in New Delhi today.

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

## ISRO plans seven launches by March including Gaganyaan test

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

An ISRO-built PSLV will put in orbit an earth observation satellite (EOS-N1) for a strategic user and 18 smaller satellites of Indian and international customers. The GSVL-Mk II rocket is expected to launch the EOS-5 satellite or GISAT-1A, which will be a replacement for GISAT-1 which failed to reach the intended orbit in 2021.

## Arunachal sets stage for panchayat and civic polls

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Itanagar

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

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



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

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

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

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

for municipal elections, are eligible to cast their ballots. There will be 2,171 polling stations for panchayat elections, 67 for IMC and 12 for PMC, the SEC said.

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

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

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

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

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

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Patna

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

style and compatible with the surrounding historic character and streetscapes.

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

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

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

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

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Amaravati

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

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

An Expert Appraisal Committee (EAC) under the ministry examined the proposal earlier this month and recommended it for ‘in-principle’ approval for the diversion of the first land parcel.

“Bhabha Atomic Research Centre is setting up a new campus on the east coast near Visakhapatnam for strategic reasons. The selection of the site was based on recommendations from the Site Selection Committee and approved by the Atomic Energy Commission,” the EAC noted in the minutes of the meeting.

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

have already been acquired for the project.

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

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

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

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

## BNHS trains staff ahead of vultures release in MTR

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Mumbai

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

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



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

## Indian Coast Guard carries out medical evacuation

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Kochi

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

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

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

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

The aircraft landed at Agatti island at 11.20 pm,

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

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

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

## Jharkhand to procure 60 lakh quintals of paddy

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Ranchi

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

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

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

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

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

The state council of ministers also approved ₹48.60



crore as a bonus against paddy procurement from the farmers.

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

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

Leader of Opposition and Jharkhand BJP chief Babul Marandi, during the winter

session, which concluded on Thursday, had alleged,

“Farmers are forced to sell their paddy at a meagre price of ₹1,500 and ₹1,600 per quintal in the open market, as Government procurement has not yet started.”

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

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



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## Order Order

### Unauthorised coke plants demolished in Meghalaya's East Jaintia Hills



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

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

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

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

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

### SC to hear plea on protection of persons with autism today



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

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

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

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

**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE**  
■ Thiruvananthapuram

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

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

The award was instituted by the LAW Trust (Legal

Assistance and Welfare Trust).

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

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



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



**RANJIT KUMAR  
SINHA**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Madhumita Bhattacharjee prefers to provide a purely legal perspective.

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

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

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

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

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

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

The writer is a senior journalist covering legal affairs

## ED aims to end legacy FERA cases by early 2026

**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE**  
■ New Delhi

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE**  
■ New Delhi

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

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

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

rifying tale of brutality".

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

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

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

**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE**  
■ Cuttack

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

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

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

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

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



CJI Surya Kant

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

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

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

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

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

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





Editor's  
TAKE

## A dispute written in stone

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

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

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

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

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

# How a Jaish network was uncovered

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



ANIL BHAT

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

The author, Col Anil Bhat, VSM (Retd), a strategic affairs analyst and former Defence Ministry and Indian Army spokesperson

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# Justice delayed leaves truth unanswred still



ASHA IYER KUMAR

2<sup>ND</sup> OPINION  
THE PIONEER

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

# LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

## Parliamentary praise for Ladakh institute

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

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

BHAGWAN THADANI | MUMBAI

## Messi event signals administrative failure

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

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

SANJAY CHOPRA | MOHALI

## Centralisation threatens higher education

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

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

VIJAYKUMAR H K | RAICHUR

## FOREIGN CAMPUSES EXPOSE NEGLECT OF INDIA'S PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES

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

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

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

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

KYAMUDIN ANSARI | MUMBAI

Please send your letter to the [info@dailypioneer.com](mailto:info@dailypioneer.com). In not more than 250 words. We appreciate your feedback.

## PIC TALK



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

PHOTO: PANKAJ KUMAR

## DIGITAL EXPERIENCE



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US vs THEM



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

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

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

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

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

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

The Pioneer



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BUSINESS10

# Open graveyards in open skies

Over the past few decades, most successful airlines crashed

OUR TAKE

Sutanu Guru  
Author, Journalist and Academician

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## A Contrarian Investor

# 57 months of equity inflows

Since 2021, investors thronged to invest in equity mutual funds

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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SINCE 1865



PIOTECH

SBI aims to double YONO app users to 20 crore



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

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

(PTI)

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



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

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

(PTI)

Rubrik drives trusted AI adoption with amazon bedrock



Rubrik (NYSE: RBRK), the Security and AI Operations company, has announced availability of Rubrik Agent Cloud for Amazon Bedrock AgentCore. The new integration will allow Amazon Bedrock AgentCore customers to easily enable monitoring, governance, and remediation for agents across multi-cloud resources and infrastructure. Rubrik Agent Cloud is designed to monitor and audit agentic actions, enforce real-time guardrails for agentic actions and finally, undo agent mistakes. Built on the Rubrik Platform that uniquely combines data, identity and application contexts, Rubrik Agent Cloud will provide customers with security, accuracy and efficiency as they transform with AI.

"Amazon Bedrock AgentCore gives developers the flexibility to build and deploy intelligent agents using their choice of AI model or framework," said Devvret Rishi, General Manager of AI at Rubrik. "With Rubrik Agent Cloud, organisations will have a single plane of glass for the complete AI agent lifecycle, one that enables customers to see every agent in action, enforce policies in real-time, and instantly rewind mistakes before they become catastrophic errors." Today's agents help increase productivity, however if not properly governed, they are also capable of taking real-world, destructive actions on behalf of users, often without centralised oversight.

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

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

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



NISHANT SAHDEV

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

And none of these jobs can be automated away. Automating a call centre is one thing; automating the installation of a 400-kilovolt transmission line is quite another. No robot climbs a 60-metre tower in monsoon winds. No algorithm swaps a failed transformer at midnight. No predictive model walks into a solar field under 45°C heat to realign panel arrays.

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

**AI is modifying work, not removing it**

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

Sensors in power plants, turbines and substations generate continuous data. AI analyses this data to predict failures, but prediction is not repair. Humans still diagnose issues, replace components and restore service. AI simply makes their work timelier and more effective. AI-enhanced grid analytics forecast demand spikes, detect faults and improve load management. But crews still rebalance flows, upgrade infrastructure and respond on the ground. AI speeds up permitting and compli-ance as well, helping projects break ground sooner — leading not to fewer jobs but to more physical work being done faster.

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

The economic truth is straightforward: when efficiency rises, sectors expand. And when sectors expand, demand for human labour increases. Predictive tools reduce break-downs, so companies deploy more infrastructure and need more tech-nicians. Better grids enable more renewable integration, creating manufacturing and installation jobs.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

**A final reckoning: The myth and the moment**

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

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

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

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

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

New technologies chugs Indian railways



SHITANSHU SHEKHAR SHUKLA

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

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

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

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

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



PAMBAN BRIDGE



CHENAB BRIDGE



VANDE BHARAT

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

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

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

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

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

unchartered territories. Renewable energy capacity reached 2,014 MW, with 375 MW solar and 103 MW wind energy commissioned in 2024-25. Production milestones included 700 locomotives by CLW and 477 by BLW, setting new annual records. Coach production also saw a 9 per cent growth, with 7,134 coaches manufactured. Track renewal reached 6,450 km, turnout renewals 8,550, and 6,200 km of rails were renewed, with speed upgrades on 2,000 km to 130 kmph and 7,200 km to 110 kmph. Freight loading reached 1,473 million tonnes (MT), showing a 3.86 per cent growth, supported by Dedicated Freight Corridors (DFCs) which facilitated over 72,000 train runs. Average speed of goods trains improved by 18.1 per cent, from 13.40 to 15.82 kmph and mail/express punctuality stood at 93.78 per cent for the year. A record 136 Vande Bharat trains were introduced, with the launch of the first Namo Bharat Rapid Rail. Vande Bharat now operates on over 40 routes nationwide. The Amrit Bharat Station Scheme saw work start on 1,198 stations out of 1,337 targeted, modernising station infrastructure. Over 10,000 locomotives were equipped with Kavach, the indigenous train protection system, enhancing safety. Indian Railways electrified a record 7,188 km of railway lines, averaging 14.5 km per day, surpassing previous years and advancing the goal of 100 per cent electrification. The Amrit Bharat Station redevelopment scheme is modernising stations across the country, improving amenities and accessibility.

Indian Railways has prioritised digital transformation, renewable energy adoption, and eco-friendly practices to ensure a sustainable future. These developments collectively demonstrate a clear upward trend in Indian Railways' operational efficiency, safety and passenger experience over the last five years. Over 23,000 track kilometers have been upgraded to support speeds up to 130 kmph, and 54,337 km upgraded for 110 kmph, enhancing both passenger and freight transit efficiency. Electrification of broad-gauge tracks has advanced rapidly, with 6,577 route kilometers electrified in 2023 alone. Modernisation efforts include the introduction of LHB coaches, onboard Wi-Fi at over 9,000 stations, smart ticketing and enhanced safety technologies.

Author is a senior journalist and political communications expert



FROM THE WORLD

PAIKISTAN

Army kills three  
TTP terrorists

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

SOUTH AFRICA

Indian killed in temple collapse

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

Jaishankar meets European, UK, Egyptian counterparts in UAE

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
Dubai

External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar has met with his counterparts from Europe, the UK and Egypt on the sidelines of a high-level international summit in the United Arab Emirates(UAE), where leaders and policy-makers gathered to discuss key geopolitical and security challenges. In a social media post on Saturday, Jaishankar said "it was great to be" with Luxembourg's Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Xavier Bettel, Poland's Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Radoslaw Sikorski, and Latvia's Foreign Minister Baiba Braze. The minister was in the UAE capital Abu Dhabi to attend the three-day Sir Bani Yas Forum 2025, which

US envoys arrive in Berlin for Ukraine peace talks

ASSOCIATED PRESS  
Berlin

US envoys arrived in Berlin on Sunday morning for another round of talks intended to secure a deal to end the war in Ukraine. US President Donald Trump's special envoy Steve Witkoff and Trump's son-in-law Jared Kushner were spotted in downtown Berlin by a photographer for the German news agency dpa. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said that Ukrainian, US and European officials will hold a series of meetings in Berlin in the coming days. "Most importantly, I will be meeting with envoys of President Trump, and there will also be meetings with our European partners, with many leaders, concerning the foundation of peace — a political agreement to end the war," Zelenskyy said in an address to the nation late Saturday. Washington has tried for months to navigate the demands of each side as Trump presses for a swift end to Russia's war and grows increasingly exasperated by delays. The search for possible compromises has run into major obstacles, including control of Ukraine's eastern Donetsk region, which is mostly occupied by Russian forces, and security guarantees for Ukraine. "The chance is considerable at



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

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

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

would stay in parts of eastern Ukraine's Donbas even if they become a demilitarised zone under a prospective peace plan — a demand likely to be rejected by Ukraine as US-led negotiations drag on. Ushakov warned that a search for compromise could take a long time, noting that the US proposals

that took into account Russian demands had been "worsened" by alterations proposed by Ukraine and its European allies. "We don't know what changes they are making, but clearly they aren't for the better," Ushakov said, adding: "We will strongly insist on our considerations." German Chancellor Friedrich Merz, who has spearheaded European efforts to support Ukraine alongside French President Emmanuel Macron and UK Prime Minister Keir Starmer, said Saturday that "the decades of the Pax Americana are largely over for us in Europe and for us in Germany as well." He warned that Putin's aim is "a fundamental change to the borders in Europe, the restoration of the old Soviet Union within its borders." "If Ukraine falls, he won't stop," Merz warned on Saturday during a party conference in Munich. Putin has denied plans to restore the Soviet Union or attack any European allies. As peace efforts continued, Russia and Ukraine exchanged another round of aerial attacks. Ukraine's air force said overnight that Russia launched ballistic missiles and 138 attack drones at Ukraine. In its daily report, the air force said 110 had been intercepted or downed, but missile and drone hits were recorded at six locations. Zelenskyy said Sunday

that hundreds of thousands of families were still without power in the south, east and north-east regions and work was continuing to restore electricity, heat and water to multiple regions following a large-scale attack the previous night. The Ukrainian president said that in the past week, Russia had launched over 1,500 strike drones, nearly 900 guided aerial bombs and 46 missiles of various types at Ukraine. "Ukraine needs peace on decent terms, and we are ready to work as constructively as possible. These days will be filled with diplomacy. It's very important that it brings results," Zelenskyy said. Russia's Defence Ministry said that air defences downed 235 Ukrainian drones late Saturday and early Sunday. In the Belgorod region, a drone injured a man and set his house ablaze in the village of Yasnye Zori, regional governor Vyacheslav Gladkov said. Ukrainian drones struck an oil depot in Uryupinsk in the Volgograd region, triggering a fire, according to the regional governor, Andrei Bocharov. In the Krasnodar region, the Ukrainian drones attacked the town of Afipsky, where an oil refinery is located. The authorities said that explosions shattered windows in residential buildings, but didn't report any damage to the refinery.

Cambodian rocket fire caused its first civilian death, says Thailand

ASSOCIATED PRESS  
Kantharalak (Thailand)

Thailand's Government said a rocket attack from Cambodia on Sunday killed a 63-year-old villager, its first civilian death reported as a direct result of combat over the past week along the border of the two Southeast Asian nations. Both countries confirmed that large-scale fighting, which was set off by a skirmish on December 7 that wounded two Thai soldiers, continued Sunday. The two sides are battling over longstanding competing claims to patches of frontier land, some of which contain centuries-old temple ruins. More than two dozen people on both sides of the border have officially been reported killed in the past week's fighting, while more than half a million have been displaced. Reporters from The Associated Press arrived at the scene of Sunday's rocket impact in Sisaket province's Kantharalak District about 10



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

minutes after it hit. They witnessed the body of a man totally wrapped in bandages being put on a stretcher that was taken to an ambulance. A house a couple of hundred metres away was in flames, with village volunteers attempting to put out the fire with buckets of water. A piece of shrapnel believed to be from the same

rocket was embedded nearby in the road. The victim, identified as Don Patchapan, was killed in the heart of a residential area near a school, according to a Thai Army statement. Thai Government spokesperson Siripong Angkasakulkiat condemned Cambodia for deliberately firing into civilian areas,

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

Cambodia has launched thousands of the rockets on virtually a daily basis. Thailand, meanwhile, has been carrying out airstrikes with its fighter planes, with Cambodia saying the bombing continued on Sunday. Both sides have employed drones for surveillance and delivering bombs. The Thai military has acknowledged 15 of its troops have died during the fighting, and estimated Sunday that there have been at least 221 fatalities among Cambodian soldiers. Cambodia denounced the Thai count of its dead as disinformation but has not yet acknowledged any military casualties. It has said at least 11 civilians have been killed and more than six dozen wounded. Cambodia Prime Minister Hun Manet delivered a morale-boosting message to his countrymen on Sunday, writing on social media that he is proud to see this nation's strength "in this situation where our country is

facing difficulties due to aggression from neighbouring countries". The new fighting derailed a ceasefire promoted by US President Donald Trump that ended five days of earlier combat in July. It had been brokered by Malaysia and pushed through by pressure from Trump, who threatened to withhold trade privileges unless Thailand and Cambodia agreed. It was formalised in more detail in October at a regional meeting in Malaysia that Trump attended. Trump announced this past Friday that the two countries had agreed at his urging to renew the ceasefire, but Thai Prime Minister Anutin Charnvirakul denied making any commitment and Cambodia announced it was continuing to fight in what it said is self-defense. A Thai Navy warship in the Gulf of Thailand joined the fighting on Saturday morning, trading fire with guns based in Cambodia's southwestern province of Koh Kong.

UK hikes security near Jewish sites after attack in Australia

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
London

British Prime Minister Keir Starmer condemned the terrorist attack at Bondi Beach in Sydney, Australia, as he confirmed increased vigilance around Jewish sites across the country on Sunday. The attack in Sydney was earlier described by Australian authorities as a terrorist attack targeted at members of the Jewish community celebrating the holy festival of Hanukkah, or Chanukah, at the time of the shooting. The Metropolitan Police in London issued a statement in solidarity soon after, reiterating plans to bolster security around synagogues. "The news that the Bondi beach attack was an antisemitic terrorist attack against Jewish families at a Chanukah event is sickening," said Starmer. "My thoughts are with the victims and their families. The United Kingdom will always stand with Australia and the Jewish community. We are actively working with the Community Security Trust (CST) on the policing of Chanukah events," he said. New South Wales Premier Chris Minns said two individuals fired on a "crowded group of families" at the park in a "cowardly act of terrifying violence". At least 11 fatalities and 29 injuries have been reported from the site of the attack, categorised by Australian officials as a "terrorist incident". "While the details of the incident continue to emerge, the Australian authorities have now confirmed that the target was a Hanukkah gathering taking place on Bondi Beach," the Met Police said in a statement. We were already working closely with partners, including the Community Security Trust, to provide an increased presence around synagogues and other community venues at this important time.

Anti-immigrant rhetoric across Europe

ASSOCIATED PRESS  
London

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

The overt demonisation of immigrants and those with immigrant roots is intensifying in the UK — and across Europe — as migration shoots up the political agenda and right-wing parties gain popularity. In several European countries, political parties that favour mass deportations and depict immigration as a threat to national identity come at or near the top of opinion polls: Reform UK, the Alliance for Germany and France's National Rally.

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

President Donald Trump, who recently called Somali immigrants in the US "garbage" and whose national security strategy depicts European countries as threatened by immigration, appears to be endorsing and emboldening Europe's coarse, anti-immigrant sentiments. Amid the rising tensions, Europe's mainstream parties are taking a harder line on migration and at times using divisive language about race. "What were once dismissed as being at the far extreme end of far-right politics has now become a central part of the political debate," said Kieran Connell,

a lecturer in British history at Queen's University Belfast. Immigration has risen dramatically over the past decade in some European countries, driven in part by millions of asylum-seekers who have come to Europe fleeing conflicts in Africa, the Middle East and Ukraine. Asylum-seekers account for a small percentage of total immigration, however, and experts say antipathy toward diversity and migration stems from a mix of factors. Economic stagnation in the years since the 2008 global financial crisis, the rise of charismatic nationalist politicians and the polarizing influence of social media all play a role, experts say. In Britain, there is "a frightening increase in the sense of national division and decline" and that tends to push people toward political extremes, said Bobby Duffy, director of the Policy Unit at

King's College London. It took root after the financial crisis, was reinforced by Britain's debate about Brexit and deepened during the COVID-19 pandemic, Duffy said. Social media has exacerbated the mood, notably on X, whose algorithm promotes divisive content and whose owner, Elon Musk, approvingly retweets far-right posts. Across Europe, ethnonationalism has been promoted by right-wing parties such as Alliance for Germany, France's National Rally and the Fidesz party of Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán. Now it appears to have the stamp of approval from the Trump administration, whose new national security strategy depicts Europe as a collection of countries facing "economic decline" and "civilisational erasure" because of immigration and loss of national identities.



Three children killed as drone crashes in Pakistan

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
Peshawar

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



Bangladesh foreign ministry summons Indian envoy

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
Dhaka

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



# Lithuania-India Relations Gain Momentum Through Trade, Aadhaar 2.0 and Cybersecurity

ASHOKE RAJ ■ New Delhi

In an in-depth conversation with *The Pioneer*, Lithuania Ambassador Diana Mickeviciene spoke about India-Lithuania trade dynamics, high-tech cooperation, her country's surprising role in India's proposed Aadhaar 2 upgrade, and the cultural bridge connecting Lithuanian and Sanskrit.

● **How do you assess the current trade relationship between India and Lithuania? Which sectors show the greatest potential for growth?** I am happy to see the positive trade dynamics between our countries. Lithuania started from a very small base-almost ground zero. But as of 2024, our bilateral trade has crossed €300 million, which is significant for us. It is still a humble number, but what's important is the steady, stable growth, increasing annually by 20-30 per cent. Indian exports to Lithuania were once very small, but they are now growing rapidly-by almost 40 per cent annually. Lithuanian exports to India have also grown by about 30 per cent. Among all sectors, technology holds the greatest potential. Over the last few years, we have seen a clear

rise in tech-oriented trade-engineering products, machinery, devices. Lithuania is a small but highly advanced tech economy. India is huge, fast-growing, and always expanding its digital footprint. That naturally creates complementarities. One success story is Teltonika, a leading Lithuanian IoT company. Their devices-sensors, trackers, industrial applications-are already used across India, from mining to public transport. They've also decided to Make in India, beginning with assembly and gradually expanding.

● **Many in India are curious about Lithuania's involvement in Aadhaar 2. Could you explain your country's role?** Lithuania has a very strong reputation in biometrics, robotics, and identity technologies. Our company Neurotechnology is internationally known for expertise in identity de-duplication, which prevents duplicate or fraudulent identity records. In the case of Aadhaar 2, Neurotechnology has been shortlisted-along with one French and one Japanese company-for a very specific technical function: deduplication of identities, to ensure



Lithuania Ambassador Diana Mickeviciene

Aadhaar remains unique for every individual. Aadhaar is fully Indian. India rightly does not hand over a nationally sensitive system to any foreign entity. But for highly specialised components, Indian project leaders source the best global solutions. That is why Neurotechnology is among the top three companies selected. This is a de-risked, multi-vendor model. No foreign company gets access to the full system-only to the segment they are contracted for. This protects sovereignty and privacy.

● **If Lithuanian firms excel in de-duplication, does that expertise extend to voter**

**rolls or other identity systems as well?** Lithuanian companies have performed voter-list deduplication in Africa and Asia, and similar tasks in property and identity databases. These systems use high-accuracy criteria-fingerprints, retina scans, and other biometric markers. But how Aadhaar is linked to voter cards in India is not something I can comment on. Each country decides how to integrate its systems.

● **Beyond Aadhaar, which other high-tech areas can Lithuania and India collaborate in?** Lithuania is known as the "country of lasers." We spe-

"We're proud to announce a significant milestone for Neurotechnology! In the latest Aadhaar benchmark evaluation, Neurotechnology achieved the #1 ranking among all participating solutions, emerging as the top-performing technology. This recognition underscores our unwavering commitment to precision, innovation, and world-class biometric performance. The achievement was formally recognized today at the Aadhaar Head Office during the award ceremony. Building on this moment, we will be hosting a technical presentation and knowledge-sharing session in Mumbai on the 13th, where we'll highlight the capabilities, system architecture, and performance insights behind our benchmark-leading solution. This accomplishment is a testament to the dedication, expertise, and hard work of our entire team? A truly proud moment for everyone at Neurotechnology," says Lithuania Ambassador.

cialise in femto-second and pico-second precision lasers, used in research, manufacturing, and semiconductor industries. Indian research institutions already use our lasers, and we are keen to support India's smart manufacturing initiative. Cybersecurity-Lithuanian companies are very strong in this domain. For example, a Lithuanian firm designed the National Cybersecurity System of Bhutan, including its CERT. These are private companies competing globally without Government backing. Fintech-After the UK left the EU, Lithuania became the #1 fintech hub in the European Union. Despite being only a 3-million-population country, it hosts over

300 global fintech operators. This is an area of significant collaboration potential with India. Biotech & Pharma-Lithuania offers high-quality labs and research facilities at competitive costs. We already work with several Indian pharmaceutical companies for testing and joint development.

● **If a Lithuanian company participates in Aadhaar 2, would it work independently or with an Indian partner?** That depends entirely on the tender conditions. In India's case, Tata Consultancy Services (TCS) is the main agency commissioned by the Government of India for Aadhaar. To speed up work and ensure the best solu-

tions are used, they may outsource very small specialised functions to foreign partners. Given Aadhaar's national importance, India naturally would not hand over control to any non-Indian entity. But for specific tasks that do not compromise access or privacy, collaboration is possible.

● **Lithuania and Sanskrit often appear in discussions. What is the linguistic connection between the two?** It surprises many people, but Lithuanian is considered the closest living sister language to Sanskrit. Linguists, not diplomats, established this connection. It is a purely scientific, linguistic link. We have published a small dictionary of 108 identical Lithuanian-Sanskrit words, and we are now preparing a much larger dictionary with scholars from both countries. As someone who studied Sanskrit at university, I can personally attest to the similarities-especially in grammar, declensions, and roots. This connection serves as a beautiful bridge between our cultures.

● **What about visas? How easy is it for Indians to travel or study in Lithuania?** Lithuania is a Schengen country, so Schengen rules

apply uniformly. Anyone with a valid Schengen visa can travel to Lithuania. However, applicants must ensure they actually intend to visit Lithuania. Some travel agents misuse the system, which leads to visa rejections. A useful provision for travellers is the visa cascade rule, which grants longer-term visas to applicants with a consistent past travel history. On education, around 2,000 Indian students go to Lithuania every year, mainly in engineering and increasingly in other fields. Our universities offer English-medium Bachelor's, Master's, and PhD programmes. For long-term stays, Lithuania now offers a fully online national residence permit application, valid for two years.

● **Finally, where do you see India-Lithuania ties heading in the next few years?** We started from a small base, but the direction is upward. The future lies in technology, cybersecurity, lasers, IoT, fintech, biotech, and of course in our cultural ties through Sanskrit. Our companies are small but highly advanced, and India is vast, innovative, and full of opportunity. It is a natural partnership.

## Russia's increasing influence and the looming threat from America are both consequences of the Trump era



SURJIT SINGH FLORA

Amidst a chaotic landscape of conflicts, economic sanctions, and global threats, the recent meeting between Russian President Vladimir Putin and Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi during his visit to India on December 4 and 5, 2025, represents a turning point in the enduring friendship between India and Russia, as well as in the broader international arena. Indeed! Prior to arriving in India, he departed from Moscow. Initially, he dismissed US President Donald Trump's 28-point peace proposal concerning the Ukraine-Russia conflict, which was presented following talks with his special envoys Steve Witkoff and Jared Kushner (Trump's son-in-law). Secondly, he commanded Russian forces to carry out a 'special military operation' against Ukraine for the second time, following Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. The whole world is once again on the brink of war. Nations find themselves entangled in both minor and major conflicts with one another. Civil wars are also taking lives in many countries. The year 2025 was very chaotic. This year, it

has become difficult to even recognize strangers. Everyone is following the policy of selfishness. The greed of the second-time elected President of the United States, Donald Trump, is not hidden from anyone; in the name of the rights of Americans, he is busy in a different game to increase his business. That is why he has made tariffs a big weapon, and it is used to attack anyone. India has also come under the influence of this weapon. Apart from this, America's increasing tendencies toward Pakistan have also forced India to distance itself. During his first term, Trump praised Prime Minister Modi, but in his second term, he is doing everything he can to trap India, while India remains silent. Due to these tricks of America, India's inclination towards Russia is increasing. Just a few weeks ago, Russian President Vladimir Putin came to India on a visit. During his visit, he formed numerous business partnerships, attracting the attention of the world, particularly America, which understands the significance of India. Apart from this, his own country's political opponents are not letting him live; they clearly say that the reason for India's increasing inclination towards Russia is President Trump's unnecessary strictness and wrong policies. Due to Trump's wrong policies, we are losing a valuable friend. A photo of Putin and Modi was also

shared regarding the growing India-Russia relations so that Trump's eyes can be opened. In addition to this, Trump and the American people are deeply concerned about Russia's increasing dominance. Trump tried very hard to stop the Russia-Ukraine war so that he could pressure Russia. For this, the support of allied countries was also taken, weapons were also given to Ukraine, and financial sanctions were also imposed, but Putin is not ready to come under pressure or stop. In fact, a week ago, Russia also openly threatened its opponents that if a war is started to suppress Russia, then in the end there will be no one left for the agreement; that is, Russia can bring destruction. After this, NATO chief Mark Rutte warned the European allies of the alliance about the risk of a possible conflict, for which he urged all allies to intensify their defense efforts and be prepared. Expressing his concerns, Rutte warned that NATO allies could be Russia's next target in the future; we must be prepared. Speaking in Berlin, the NATO chief asserted that conflict is imminent and that Russia has returned war to Europe. According to him, this potential conflict could be like the war that our grandparents endured. Rutte urged allies to increase defense spending and production to prevent wars witnessed by previous generations. Rutte

warned that it is wrong to assume that time is on our side and that action is now. Rutte said that Russia could be ready to use military force against NATO allies within years. The NATO chief said that Russia has fired more than 46,000 drones and missiles against Ukraine so far this year. Rutte also highlighted Russia's relations with China, describing it as a lifeline for Moscow's war efforts in Ukraine. Apart from this, now that Trump has threatened Venezuela with a ground war, Putin has taken the front in favor of Venezuela and has announced all kinds of open support. However, the American report, spanning 33 pages, indicates that Europe and its nations are facing a significant crisis. Consequently, it has requested that the European (NATO) allies assume their security responsibilities by 2027. If the decline of Europe persists, the continent risks losing its identity. In this context, the friendship and partnership between India and Russia will undoubtedly mark the start of a new chapter in the geographical and political history of the world. On the other hand, the border dispute between Thailand and Cambodia is escalating in severity. Despite US President Donald Trump's recent assertion that he could resolve the conflict with a simple phone call, the present circumstances appear to be intensi-

fying military activity along the border. The Thai Air Force conducted airstrikes in regions adjacent to Cambodia on Saturday. Based on available information, the Thai Air Force deployed two F-16 fighter jets to strike and bomb multiple sites. The Thai Air Force actually bombed the Tamor Da area of Cambodia's western province of Battambang at 5:50 am local time. The Thai Air Force similarly attacked another nearby hotel at 5:55 am. The assaults subsequently extended to critical infrastructure. Reports indicate that the Chhey Chomnas Bridge was struck at 6:02 am, followed by another bombing of the same bridge at 6:07 am. The old Chhey Chomnas Bridge was struck at 6:12 am. Amid the escalating tensions at the border, President Donald Trump recently asserted his ability to halt the ongoing conflict between Thailand and Cambodia. He mentioned that his involvement might bring back peace to the area. Nonetheless, the actual situation indicates that the tensions between the two countries are intensifying instead of subsiding. Overall, Russia's increasing influence and strong ties with India and China have raised significant concerns globally, yet the misguided policies of Trump are evidently to blame for this situation.

The author is Flora is a freelance writer and journalist who lives in Brampton, Canada

## 6 peacekeepers killed in drone strike in Sudan

ASSOCIATED PRESS  
■ Cairo

A drone strike hit a United Nations facility in war-torn Sudan on Saturday, killing six peacekeepers, UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said. The strike hit the peacekeeping logistics base in the city of Kadugli, in the central region of Kordofan, Guterres said in a statement. Eight other peacekeepers were wounded in the strike. All the victims are Bangladeshi nationals, serving in the UN Interim Security Force for Abyei, UNISFA. "Attacks targeting United Nations peacekeepers may constitute war crimes under international law," said Guterres, who called for those responsible for the "unjustifiable" attack to be held accountable. The Sudanese military blamed the attack on the Rapid Support Forces, RSF, a notorious paramilitary group at war with the army for the control of the country for more than two years. There was no immediate comment from the RSF. The attack "clearly reveals the subversive approach of the rebel militia and those behind it," the military said in a statement. The military posted a video on social

media showing plumes of dense black smoke over what it said was the UN facility. The oil-rich Abyei is a disputed region between Sudan and South Sudan, and the UN mission has been deployed there since 2011 when South Sudan gained its independence from Sudan. Guterres also called for an immediate ceasefire in Sudan to allow "a comprehensive, inclusive and Sudanese-owned political process" to settle the conflict in the northeast African country. Sudan was plunged into chaos in April 2023 when a power struggle between the military and the RSF exploded into open fighting in the capital, Khartoum, and elsewhere in the country. The conflict has killed over 40,000 people - a figure rights groups consider a significant undercount. The fighting has recently centered on Kodrofan, particularly since the RSF took control of el-Fasher, the military's last stronghold in the western region of Darfur. The war has wrecked urban areas and has been marked by atrocities, including mass rape and ethnically motivated killings which the UN and rights groups have said amount to war crimes and crimes against humanity.

## India sends essential medicine to Sri Lanka

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
■ Colombo

India on Sunday donated a 25 tonnes shipment of 17 essential medicines and over 14,200 kilograms of dry food items to Sri Lanka's Ministry of Health to help it cope better after the devastating Cyclone Ditwah, officials said. The essential medicines and dry food items were donated on a request by Sri Lanka in wake of the catastrophic cyclone that has left over 640 dead. Widespread flooding, landslides and severe infrastructure collapse across the island nation severely strained the country's disaster-response capacity since mid-November. India was the first country to respond to Sri Lanka's international appeal for assistance under its Operation Sagar Bandhu. A special Indian Airforce aircraft brought the supplies following a meeting between Health Minister

Nalinda Jayathissa and the Indian High Commissioner Santosh Jha, officials said. The same aircraft took home a team that helped Sri Lankans with a field hospital. Days after the cyclone made a landfall, India has sent a Mobile Field Hospital and over 70 medical personnel to Sri Lanka as part of its humanitarian assistance following the devastating floods and landslides triggered by Cyclone Ditwah. "As the Indian Army Field Hospital team concludes its mission and returns home today under #OperationSagarBandhu, the Minister @NalindaJay conveyed appreciation for the team's dedicated service," the Indian High Commission said in a post on X. As much as 10 tonnes of medicines and 15 tonnes of dry rations, as requested by Colombo, "were delivered through @IAF\_MCC17 Globemaster, in which the team returned, for providing relief to affected communities," the Indian mission said in the post.

## EC demands extra security as unrest grips Bangladesh

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
■ Dhaka

The Election Commission (EC) of Bangladesh has demanded extra security for its chief, other commissioners and officials as fresh unrest visibly gripped Bangladesh after gunmen shot an upcoming parliamentary polls candidate and frontline leader of last year's violent street movement dubbed 'July Uprising'. "The EC has written to the Inspector General of Police (IGP) urging comprehensive security arrangements for the Chief Election Commissioner (CEC), Election Commissioners (ECs), senior officials of the Election Commission Secretariat," the state-run BSS news agency reported on late Saturday. The EC simultaneously sought the extra security for its field-level offices ahead of the 13th national election, as two of them came under attack in southeastern Lakshmipur and southwestern Pirojpur by unidentified miscreants after the announcement of the schedule for the upcoming polls on



Thursday. The commission demanded an additional escort vehicle for the CEC, while one such police escort with a vehicle was currently in place for him. It asked for round-the-clock police escorts for the four commis-

sioners and the senior secretary. The letter said the enhanced security measures were "urgent and necessary," while EC officials said their 10 regional offices, 64 district election offices and 522 sub-district level offices would

store important documents and election materials. The EC on Thursday said the upcoming parliamentary election would be held on February 12 next year, while a day later, Sharif Osman Hadi was shot from a close

range in the head, critically wounding him, as he initiated his election campaign from a constituency in the capital. Critically ill former prime minister Khaleda Zia's Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) simultaneously asked Muhammad Yunus' Government to provide security for all candidates in the upcoming election after the attack on Hadi, who leads a radical right-wing cultural group called Inquiab Mancha. "We demand that the real culprit be identified immediately and brought under the law, and we call upon this Government to ensure the security of all candidates without delay," BNP Secretary General Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir said. Hadi was also a frontline leader of last year's student-led violent uprising that toppled then-prime minister Sheikh Hasina's Awami League Government on August 5, 2024. His Inquiab Mancha was also at the forefront of a campaign to disband the Awami League, which the interim Government complied with in May this year,

disqualifying the party from contesting the polls. The Government on Saturday ordered a nationwide security clampdown called 'Operation Devil Hunt 2' amid escalated fears over the law and order situation and promised to issue firearms licenses for election candidates for their own security. Home adviser (retd) Lieutenant General Jahangir Alam Chowdhury said the Government had taken steps to ensure special security for the "frontline fighters" of the July Uprising and promised to issue firearms licenses for the election candidates. He emphasised that the second phase of the 'Devil Hunt' was aimed at helping ensure public safety and combat the growing threat of illegal arms. The operation was initially launched in February this year following protests over an attack on the private house of a former minister of the ousted Government in the northern suburb of the capital, when it targeted alleged "henchmen" and supporters of the now disbanded Awami League.



PROSPECT

Parl panel backs easing clearances for underground coal mining projects



A Parliamentary panel has suggested simplifying the policy and standardised protocols for allowing underground coal mining, saying that the complex clearance process, similar to large open-cast mines, leads to delays in projects that have low environmental impact. The Government has set a target to produce 100 million tonnes (MT) of coal from underground coal mines by 2030. Underground coal mining minimises surface disturbance, thereby preserving land, forests and infrastructure while reducing land reclamation costs and indirect greenhouse gas emissions. This method also allows access to high-quality, deep-seated reserves and ensures year-round operations regardless of weather conditions, the Standing Committee on Coal, Mines and Steel has said in a report.

“Despite low environmental impact, several UG projects undergo the same clearance and documentation processes as in the case of large open-cast coal mines, thereby reportedly facing delays. The committee, therefore, emphasise the need for policy simplification and standardised protocols for UG coal mining practices in India,” it said.

Underground mines (UG), Underground Coal Gasification (UCG) projects and clean coal technology-based pilot projects represent special categories of coal sector initiatives that offer significant environmental and operational advantages. Besides, the panel has also recommended exploring the feasibility of putting in place a standard Terms of Reference (ToRs) and Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) on a single-window clearance system for open-cast mining, on the lines of similar provisions for underground mines.

The coal ministry has earlier said that it has introduced a series of transformative policy measures aimed at promoting underground coal mining. These bold reforms address the traditional challenges of high capital investment and longer gestation periods, reaffirming the Government’s resolve to modernise the coal ecosystem while aligning with the broader vision of sustainable development.

Army promotes youth empowerment through sports

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE  
■ Kohima/Nagaland

Reinforcing its enduring commitment to youth empowerment, peace-building and nation-building through sports, the Indian Army is organising the inaugural edition of the Red Shield Division Rising Hockey Tournament (Under-19) at the Khuman Lampak Hockey Stadium, Imphal, Manipur.

The week-long tournament commenced on 14 December 2025 and witnessed enthusiastic participation from budding hockey players across Manipur. The initiative was conceptualised following an appeal by Olympian Kshetrimayum Thoiba Singh, a celebrated hockey legend from Manipur, who approached the Indian Army with a vision to provide a constructive platform for young sports-persons from the state, particularly in the backdrop of recent challenges.

Recognising the earnest and noble intent, the Indian



Army responded promptly, translating the idea into a meaningful sporting event aimed at nurturing talent, fostering discipline and instilling hope among the youth.

The tournament was inaugurated by Shri Kuldeep Singh, Security Advisor to the Government of Manipur, who graced the occasion as the Chief Guest, in the presence of KT Singh Hockey Olympian, Dr M Veto Singh, Director YAS and other civil dignitaries and sports enthusiasts,

hosted by GOC and officers of the Red Shield Division.

While interacting with the participants, the Security Advisor highlighted the transformative power of sports in channelising youthful energy, promoting unity and resilience and contributing to long-term peace and development in the region. The opening ceremony captivated spectators with a series of vibrant performances, including a disciplined and energetic display by cadets of

Sainik School Imphal, an impressive Wushu demonstration by athletes supported by the Youth Affairs and Sports ecosystem and colourful cultural performances by Manipuri troupes alongside displays by Army personnel. The performances reflected a harmonious blend of tradition, martial spirit and youthful exuberance. Eight teams are participating in the tournament.

The inaugural match was played between Khongman



Students Club (KHSC) and Taobungkhok Welfare Club (TWC) wherein KHSC emerged victorious by 2 goals to 1. Whereas in the 2nd Match Hockey Union, Lairik Yengbam Leikai (HU) defeated South East Youth Organisation (SEYO) with 8 goals to 1. The final match will be played on 21 Dec 2025.

Through this tournament, the Indian Army, under the aegis of the Red Shield Division, has reaffirmed its role as a guardian of national security

and as a catalyst for social cohesion and youth development. By promoting sports as a vehicle for positive engagement, the Army continues to inspire confidence, resilience and aspiration among the young generation of Manipur.

The tournament stands as a testament to an unwavering dedication to empowering youth, strengthening community bonds and fostering a brighter, more inclusive future through the unifying power of sports.

Leh students bags award at National Energy Conservation Day contest

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE  
■ New Delhi

Droupadi Murmu President of India presented the Second Prize of ₹50,000 alongwith a silver medal and a laptop to Master Stanzin Chosyangs, a student from Standard X of Druk Padma Karpo School, Shey, Leh, UT of Ladakh for his outstanding painting on energy conservation under Category “B”.

The award recognises his creativity, talent and awareness showcased at the National Level Painting Competition 2025 on Energy Conservation.

Manohar Lal Union Minister for Power and Housing and Urban Affairs, Shripad NaikMinister of

State for Power and New and Renewable Energy, Pankaj Agarwal, Secretary (Power), Government of India and Dhiraj Kumar Srivastava, DG, BEE were also present during the National Energy Conservation Day Awards Ceremony held in Vigyan Bhavan, New Delhi on 14.12.2025.

Bhupender Gupta, CMD, NHPC, while congratulating the winners for their exceptional talent and artistic excellence in effectively conveying the message of energy conservation, stated that NHPC takes pride in supporting young talent committed to promoting energy conservation and will continue to be an active partner in the

National Awareness Campaign on Energy Conservation, conducted under the aegis of the Bureau of Energy Efficiency (BEE), Ministry of Power, Government of India.

Under the National Awareness Campaign on Energy Conservation launched by the Ministry of Power, Government of India, NHPC was entrusted the States/UTs of Arunachal Pradesh, Jammu and Kashmir, Sikkim, Ladakh and Madhya Pradesh to organise School & State Level Painting Competition on Energy Conservation for the year 2025. NHPC successfully organised the school and State-level painting competitions in the above States/UTs.



CM Sarma receives 28th SIES Chandrasekarendra Saraswati Eminence Award in Mumbai

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE  
■ Mumbai

In recognition of his exemplary governance and service to the people of Assam, South Indian Education Society conferred Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma with 28th SIES Chandrasekarendra Saraswati Eminence Award at a function held in Mumbai this evening.

It may be noted that instituted in the sacred memory of Pujyasri Chandrasekarendra Saraswati Mahaswamigal, the 68th Sankaracharya of the venerated Sri Kanchi Kamakoti Peetam, the award is an acknowledgement of Sarma's leadership in public.

Speaking on the occasion, Chief Minister Sarma paying rich obeisance to His Holiness Pujyasri Sankara Vijayendra Saraswathi Swamigal, the Jagadguru Shankaracharya of Kanchi Kamakoti Peetam expressed his gratitude to the South Indian Education Society for considering him for the award. Drawing a connection, Chief Minister Sarma reminded how closely Assam's spiritual history is woven with the larger civilizational story of Bharat. Adi Shankaracharya himself travelled through ancient Kamarupa, debating great scholars like

Navagupta and established the Advaita tradition in the Northeast. A mandapam at Kamakhya Temple stands as testimony to that visit. He also said that the setting up of Sankardeva Nethralaya and Poorva Tirupati Mandir with the initiatives of Jayendra Saraswathi Swamigal deepened this connection.

The Chief Minister said that Poorva Tirupati Balaji Mandir has become a spiritual anchor for the people of Assam, who once travelled thousands of kilometres to Tirupati, now find the same divinity, the same grace, right at home. The Sankardeva Nethralaya that carries the name of the greatest spiritual luminary of Assam, Srimanta Sankardeva, is a beautiful confluence of Shankaracharya and Sankardeva, of Advaita and Bhakti, of Kanchi and Assam.

Speaking on the Sanatana Dharma, the Chief Minister said that it is the eternal, ever-renewing civilisational philosophy that has shaped the soul of Bharat for thousands of years. It is not merely a religion; it is a way of life, an ethical compass, a spiritual inquiry and a timeless quest for truth. It is eternal not only because it is ancient, but because its essence continues to remain relevant, open to reform,



renewal and reinterpretation across generations.

He said that within Hinduism itself, diversity is not merely accepted, it is celebrated. A Hindu may choose a personal deity, an ishta devata; another may find solace in the silence of the formless; another in ancestor worship; another in local traditions. Outsiders may mistake this as confusion. But in reality, it reflects the vast freedom that Sanatana Dharma accords to

every seeking soul.

The Chief Minister observed that Assam represents one of the most vibrant expressions of this lived diversity. Assam has always been a meeting ground of cultures where tribal cosmologies, indigenous rituals and classical Hindu traditions have coexisted and enriched one another. Hinduism did not arrive in the Northeast as a conquering force; it arrived as a cultural companion. It adapted to the land,

absorbed local traditions and preserved ancient spiritual impulses connected to nature, ancestors and the cosmic order.

He also said that the communities like the Bodos worship Bathou through the sacred siju plant, symbolising nature's purity. The Rabha people blend ancient spirit worship with Shakta and Vaishnavite traditions. The Tiwas regard Mahadeo as supreme, fusing tribal rituals with Shaivism. The Dimasas

worship ancestral gods like Sibrai and Ranachandi, while embracing elements of mainstream Hinduism. The Karbis preserve deities of protection, illness, forest and home echoing Vedic-era nature worship. The Tai-Ahoms honour a Supreme Being and celestial deities yet eventually embraced Vaishnavism and Shaktism.

Sarma further referred to the issues of political appeasement, intellectual mockery, and ideological hostility after Independence and also shed light on the challenges faced by Sanatan Dharma in its land of origin.

He pointed out the legal asymmetries created by the Places of Worship Act, 1991 and the Waqf Act, 1995, as well as historical distortions that weakened Hindu identity. The Chief Minister also spoke about the civilisational challenges posed by demographic aggression in Assam. He elaborated on how policies such as the 1941 land development scheme led to large-scale settlement of Muslim immigrants from East Bengal, fundamentally altering the state's demographic structure, threatening the cultural continuity of indigenous communities and resulting in encroachment on government land, forest land and the sacred

lands of Satras. Sarma asserted that his government has taken bold steps to address these issues, including freeing nearly 15,000 hectares of forest land from encroachers and clearing encroachments from Bordowa, the sacred birthplace of Srimanta Sankardeva.

He stated that maintaining demographic balance means protecting the civilisational continuity that Assam has preserved for centuries. Sarma strongly reiterated his commitment to nurturing the nation's spiritual heritage and to building an India that is modern in capability, ancient in knowledge and universal in outlook.

It may be noted that this year along with Dr. Sarma the 28th Sri Chandrasekarendra Saraswati National Eminence Award, 2025 was presented to Padma Bhushan Dr A Sivathanu Pillai, Founder Managing Director and Chief Executive Officer, BrahMos Aerospace and Padma Dr Prahlad Ramarao, the first Project Director of the Akash Missile System. The Collective Leadership Award was presented to the Mumbai's Dabbawalas, the city's renowned lunchbox delivery network, while the award for Social Leadership and Philosophy was conferred upon Dr Mani David Shastigal.

Budget 2026-27: CII suggests reforms to drive investment-led growth

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
■ New Delhi

Industry lobby Confederation of Indian Industry CII has proposed a comprehensive set of reforms for the forthcoming Union Budget 2026-27 to drive sustained investment growth spanning public, private, and foreign investments and maintain India's momentum as one of the world's fastest-growing major economies.

The Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) suggested increasing central capital expenditure by 12 per cent and capex support to states by 10 per cent in FY27; launching a ₹150 lakh crore National Infrastructure Pipeline (NIP) 2.0 for 2026-32; offering incremental tax credits or compliance relaxations for firms achieving significant new investment, production, or tax contribution milestones; and establishing an NRI Investment Promotion Fund.

It also called for reinstating accelerated depreciation benefits to further incentivise

fresh capital expenditure and technology upgrades, particularly for MSMEs and manufacturing industries, provided the measure is structured to stimulate modernisation without triggering Minimum Alternate Tax (MAT) obligations.

Besides, CII urged for strengthening the National Investment and Infrastructure Fund (NIIF) by forming a Sovereign Investment Strategy Council (SIFC) to align investments with national priorities.

The Union Budget for the 2026-27 fiscal year is expected to be presented on February 1. According to CII, reinforcing fiscal stability through an economic-cycle-based public debt framework, in place of inflexible annual deficit rules, would also enhance resilience by allowing counter-cyclical flexibility during global shocks and avoiding repeated breaches of yearly targets.

Such a framework would strengthen credibility by

aligning fiscal policy with medium-term debt sustainability, it said. “The forthcoming Union Budget 2026-27 has to serve the dual role of stabiliser and growth enabler, and promoting investments will be one of the most critical components in this regard,” CII Director General Chandrajit Banerjee said. Towards this objective, CII has proposed a comprehensive investment strategy anchored in fiscal prudence, capital efficiency, and investor confidence.

The recommendations emphasise strengthening public capital expenditure as the backbone of infrastructure-led growth, while simultaneously unlocking private and foreign investment through targeted incentives, institutional reforms, and enhanced global engagement.

Bolstering public investment remains essential, CII said, observing that public capital expenditure has been the key driver of India's post-

pandemic recovery, catalysing infrastructure expansion and crowding in private capital.

To strengthen project selection and execution, CII has proposed institutionalising a Capital Expenditure Efficiency Framework (CEEFF) to prioritise high-impact projects, track physical and financial progress and evaluate outcomes based on productivity and regional spillovers.

Second, facilitating private investment will be the next major priority.

While public investment lays the foundation, private and foreign capital will be the true accelerators of India's transformation. “The Government of India has provided a big demand push via income tax relief in last year's Union Budget and recently via GST 2.0. Investments, especially private sector investment, will be the next big driver for economic growth that needs to be focused on in the next fiscal to continue

the growth momentum,” added Banerjee.

In this context, incremental tax credits or compliance relaxations for firms achieving significant new investment, production, or tax contribution milestones will encourage reinvestment of profits into productive assets and the scaling of capacity in high-growth sectors such as clean energy, electronics, semiconductors and logistics, CII said.

It suggested creating an NRI Investment Promotion Fund, which can be a government-private holding company, with up to 49 per cent government stake, that channels NRI, FPI and institutional investments into sectors such as infrastructure and AI. The fund can raise capital through long-term convertible bonds benchmarked to FCNR rates, offering secure returns with equity upside, including special India Global Diaspora Bonds, the industry lobby said.

FPIs withdraw ₹17,955 cr from equities in December; total outflow at ₹1.6 lakh cr

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE  
■ New Delhi

Foreign investors pulled out ₹17,955 crore (\$2 billion) from Indian equities in the first two weeks of this month, taking the total outflow to ₹1.6 lakh crore (\$18.4 billion) in 2025. This sharp withdrawal follows a net outflow of ₹3,765 crore in November, extending the pressure on domestic equity markets.

The current trend comes after a brief pause in October, when Foreign Portfolio Investors (FPIs) infused ₹14,610 crore, snapping a three-month streak of heavy withdrawals. FPIs sold equities worth ₹23,885 crore in September, ₹34,990 crore in August and ₹17,700 crore in July.

According to data from the National Securities Depository Ltd (NSDL), FPIs withdrew a net ₹17,955 crore from Indian equities

between December 1-12.

Market experts attributed this sustained outflow to several factors including sharp depreciation of the rupee and rich Indian valuations. Explaining the outflow, Himanshu Srivastava, Principal Manager Research at Morningstar Investment Research India, said elevated US interest rates, tighter liquidity conditions and a preference for safer or higher-yielding developed-market assets have weighed on investor sentiment.

Adding to the pressure, India's relatively rich equity valuations have made it less attractive compared to other emerging markets that currently offer better value, he added.

In addition to these concerns, Vaqarjaved Khan, Senior Fundamental Analyst at Angel One, pointed to weakness in the Indian rupee, global portfolio rebal-

ancing, year-end effects and lingering macroeconomic uncertainty as key reasons behind the continued pullout. Despite this persistent foreign selling, the impact on markets has been largely offset by strong domestic institutional investor (DII) participation. DIIs invested ₹39,965 crore during the same period, effectively eclipsing FPI outflows.

Looking ahead, some market experts believe the selling pressure may ease.

VK Vijayakumar, Chief Investment Strategist at Geojit Investments, noted that sustained selling appears unsustainable given India's strong growth and earnings outlook, suggesting that FPI selling is likely to decline going forward.

Khan added that an expedited US-India trade deal could potentially trigger a reversal in foreign investment trends.



BRIEFLY

REAL SOCIEDAD FIRES COACH SERGIO FRANCISCO



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

TEENAGER BARTESAGHI SCORES TWICE BUT MILAN HELD TO DRAW



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

Young players shine as PSG beats Metz

ASSOCIATED PRESS  
■ Paris

Defending champion Paris Saint-Germain returned to the top of Ligue 1 with a 3-2 win at last-place Metz that highlighted the strength of its flourishing youth academy. Teenage forward Ibrahim Mbaye, who in September was taking a high school diploma exam, set up two goals. After coming through the PSG academy he made his Ligue 1 debut at the age of 16 years, 6 months, 23 days last season, making him the youngest PSG player to start a league game. After Portugal striker Gonçalo Ramos put PSG ahead in the 31st minute, Mbaye set up 18-year-old Quentin Ndjantou — another player who came through PSG's academy — with a cross from the left to make it 2-0 in 39th. It was Ndjantou's first goal for the club.



"Is this a big moment for me? Yes, absolutely. It's my first goal, I'm very happy to have scored it," Ndjantou said. "I thank the coach for having faith in me today." Metz midfielder Jessy Deminguet pulled one back just before halftime, before Mbaye's pass sent 20-year-old Désiré Doué sprinting through on a counterattack from deep to score PSG's third, midway through the

Odisha Masters: Unnati Hooda, Kiran George clinch singles titles

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
■ Cuttack

Top seed Unnati Hooda and Kiran George delivered commanding performances to clinch the women's and men's singles titles respectively in the Odisha Masters Super 100 tournament on Sunday. Hooda was a picture of composure as she defeated compatriot Isharani Baruah 21-17, 21-10 in just over half an hour. The 18-year-old controlled the rallies from the outset, denying Baruah the momentum that had powered her impressive run in the BWF World Tour event. Despite the loss, Baruah capped a memorable week with a well-earned silver medal after a series of standout performances at the Jawaharlal Nehru Stadium. The men's singles final witnessed a gripping contest with second seed George prevailing over Indonesia's Muhamad Yusuf 21-14, 13-21, 21-16 in a hard-fought battle



that lasted 65 minutes. George took the opening game before Yusuf fought back to level the match. Showing resilience and tactical clarity, George closed out the decider to secure the title. Indonesia enjoyed success in the mixed

doubles, where Marwan Faza and Aisyah Pranata defeated compatriots Dejan Ferdinansyah and Bernadine Wardana 21-15, 21-10. In women's doubles, Bulgaria's top seeds Gabriela and Stefani Stoeva overcame

Malaysia's Ong Xin Yee and Carmen Ting 21-19, 21-14. The men's doubles crown went to Indonesia's Ali Faathir Rayhan and Devin Artha Wahyudi, who rallied past Malaysia's Khang Khai Xing and Aaron Tai 15-21, 21-12, 21-16.

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

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
■ Mumbai

Cricket legend Sachin Tendulkar on Sunday termed Argentine football superstar Lionel Messi's visit to Mumbai as a golden moment for the city and the country. Tendulkar compared the 2011 Cricket World Cup triumph at the same ground with the visit of Messi, along with his Inter Miami team-mates Luis Suarez and Rodrigo de Paul. "I have spent some incredible moments here. As we call it, Mumbai is a city of dreams. And a number of dreams have seen the finish line here on this very venue. And without your support, we would never have seen those golden moments on this ground in 2011,"

Tendulkar said referring to India's ODI World Cup triumph in which he played a major role. "And today, having all three of them here is indeed a golden moment for Mumbai, Mumbaikars and India. The way you have received all three greats of the game has truly been remarkable." Talking about Messi, he said, "When it comes to Leo, if I have to speak about his game, it wouldn't be the right platform. And you know, what does one talk about him? He has achieved everything. We really admire his dedication, determination, commitment. "And above all, his humility, the person that he is. And on behalf of Mumbaikars and Indians, I would like to wish him and



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

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

CM Reddy thanks Messi, team for GOAT India tour

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE  
■ Hyderabad

Telangana Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy on Sunday thanked Argentine football icon Lionel Messi, and his Inter Miami teammates, Luis Suarez and Rodrigo de Paul, for enthralling sports lovers, especially youth, during the second leg of Messi's GOAT India Tour 2025. Messi's programme in Hyderabad on Saturday evening ended on a positive note thanks to thorough preparations, sound planning, and discipline. "I wholeheartedly thank GOAT Lionel #Messi football greats Luis

Suarez and Rodrigo de Paul, for accepting our invitation and gracing our city of #Hyderabad and enthralling all our sports lovers, especially youth. We are deeply grateful to our leader Shri @RahulGandhi ji for joining us and making the evening a memory of a lifetime", Reddy said in a post 'X'. Reddy also thanked and congratulated all officers, security personnel, organisers and staff on duty across the city for ensuring Telangana was able to showcase to the world that "Telangana means sports, Telangana means excellence, and Telangana means hospitality".



World Cup-winning captain reciprocated with a football. Messi arrived in Mumbai around noon under "World Cup level" security measures, marking the second day of his four-city 'GOAT India Tour 2025'. He will wind up his visit on Monday in New Delhi where he will meet Prime Minister Narendra Modi. Messi had arrived in India in the wee hours of Saturday, but the opening leg of the tour in Kolkata quickly descended into chaos later in the day due to poor crowd management and security lapses. However, his evening programme in the Hyderabad leg stood in stark contrast to the mayhem in Kolkata, proceeding smoothly and concluding on a positive note.

Liverpool beat Brighton in Premier League

ASSOCIATED PRESS  
■ Liverpool

The first stage of Mohamed Salah's rehabilitation at Liverpool is complete after the Egypt forward returned to the team for its 2-0 win over Brighton in the Premier League. The question now as Salah heads off to the Africa Cup of Nations: Is there a future for him at Anfield when he comes back? Salah, who let rip last weekend about his current frustrations at Liverpool, entered as a 26th-minute substitute to a big ovation and set up the second of Hugo Ekitike's goals as the defending champions jumped to sixth place and extended their unbeaten run to five games in all competitions. "For me, there is no issue to resolve," Liverpool manager Arne Slot said of his star player's current situation

at the club. Arsenal is attempting to take Liverpool's title and opened up a five-point lead by beating last-placed Wolverhampton 2-1 — but only thanks to two own-goals, the second of which came in stoppage time. On a run of just one win in their previous three games, the leaders looked like dropping more points when Tolu Arokodare equalized for Wolves in the 90th minute, canceling out an own-goal by goalkeeper Sam Johnstone in the 70th. Then Yerson Mosquera headed into his own net from Bukayo Saka's cross to gift Arsenal the win. Also Saturday, Chelsea beat Everton 2-0 and was set on its way to victory by Cole Palmer's first goal in three months. Salah held talks with Liverpool manager Arne Slot on Friday in an effort to overcome their issues and the



result was that Salah was recalled to the matchday squad for the Brighton game. He had been a substitute for the last three Premier League matches before being left at home for the midweek Champions League trip to Inter Milan as a punishment for his explosive comments to reporters last weekend. "It was an easy decision to put him in the squad," Slot said. "I have said many times before what has been said

between us will stay between us." Liverpool's fans demonstrated they are willing to excuse Salah for his show of anger and gave him a rapturous welcome when he came on as a substitute for the injured Joe Gomez midway through the first half. By then, Liverpool was leading 1-0 thanks to Ekitike's rising shot inside the first minute and Salah showed glimpses of his class, especially on the counterattack.

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

ASSOCIATED PRESS  
■ Barcelona

Raphinha scored a brace as Barcelona beat Osasuna 2-0 to increase its La Liga lead and pile more pressure on beleaguered Real Madrid coach Xabi Alonso. The Brazil forward broke the deadlock with a shot from the top of the area in the 70th minute at Camp Nou. He then put the result beyond doubt by scoring from close range with six minutes remaining. A seventh league win in a row left the defending champions seven points clear of Real Madrid before its game at Alaves on Sunday. That is likely a must-win game for Alonso after the powerhouse has won just two of its last eight games across all com-

petitions. Madrid had led Barcelona by five points in the Spanish league after winning a clasico match in late October. But a huge dip in form with just one win in five rounds, including a humiliating 2-0 defeat to Celta Vigo at home last weekend, has left Madrid reeling. Relishing the trouble of Barcelona's top rival, the Camp Nou crowd chanted "Stay Xabi! Stay Xabi!" in Spanish at one point during the Osasuna match. Raphinha, however, stayed focused on his team. "We need to focus on ourselves and if we do our job then we won't have to worry about anyone else," Raphinha said. "We are playing better than before and the more points, the better."



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

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

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

generated little in attack but its defense and goalkeeper Sergio Herrera frustrated Barcelona until Raphinha struck. Herrera saved a shot by Lamine Yamal while Marcus Rashford's goal-bound effort was blocked by a defender. Raphinha's first goal came after Barcelona recovered the ball and Pedri González led a counterattack before laying off for him to score from distance. His second was easier: a tap-in after Osasuna defender Alejandro Catena redirected a cross from Jules Koundé to the far post where Raphinha was unmarked. Antoine Griezmann scored the winner after coming off the bench to help fourth-placed Atletico beat Valencia 2-1 and stay nine points

behind Barcelona. Griezmann replaced Julián Álvarez with half an hour to go with Atletico leading after Koke Resurrección scored from a rebound in the 17th. Lucas Beltrán pulled the visitors level in the 63rd with a shot from outside the area as the Argentine striker skirted past a defender and lashed a long strike just inside the post. Griezmann restored the lead in the 74th at the Metropolitano Stadium when he used an exquisite control, hooking down a long ball with the tip of his boot, before he fired in the winner. The 34-year-old Griezmann has taken a more limited role with Atletico this season, but he is still proving to be decisive. The former France star scored two goals as a

substitute in a 3-1 win over Levante last month and also netted after coming on in the second half against Sevilla and Real Madrid. His winner against Valencia increased his record haul for Atletico to 204 career goals. The loss for Valencia will increase the pressure on coach Carlos Corberán with the team in 17th place just on the edge of the relegation zone. Leandro Cabrera's header helped Espanyol beat Getafe 1-0 on the road and secure a fourth consecutive league win. Espanyol is the surprise of the season approaching the winter break. The Barcelona-based team is in fifth place after 16 rounds, having barely avoided relegation on the final day of last season.



# India beat South Africa in third T20I

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
■ Dharamsala

Abhishek Sharma played a sparkling little innings after the pacers produced a riveting exhibition of swing bowling, powering India to a smooth seven-wicket victory in the third T20I on Sunday.

Chasing a modest 118 for a 2-1 lead in the five-match series, vice-captain Gill (28, 28 balls) and his opening partner Abhishek (35, 18 balls) added 60 runs in 5.2 overs as India achieved their target without much effort in 15.5 overs.

The lone point of interest in India's chase was whether the South African pacers could emulate their Indian counterparts with the new ball and make the opponents' task tougher. However, Abhishek and Gill never allowed the South African bowlers to settle, as the former carted Lungi Ngidi for 16 runs in the first over. In fact, the very first ball of the chase went for a six — an early indicator of the Indian openers' intention.

In the second over, Gill too joined his partner to garner 16 runs as India sped to 32 for no loss in the initial two overs.

Abhishek, as is his wont, batted in a single gear and it required a gem of a catch by Aiden Markram in the deep off Corbin Bosch to snap his stay. Once the left-hander was dismissed, India's chase of the remaining 58 runs settled into a much more sedate rhythm as Gill, who was saved by a DRS call early



India's Varun Chakravarthi, left, celebrating with captain Suryakumar Yadav, second left, after taking the wicket of South Africa's Donovan Ferreira during the third T20 International cricket match of a series between India and South Africa at HPCA Stadium in Dharamshala Himachal Pradesh on Sunday

PTI

in his innings and Tilak Varma (26 not out) did not look for any adventure. Gill's run-a-ball 28 will certainly not rank among his fluent ones, but it might have boosted his confidence after two lukewarm outings in the first two matches of the series. He eventually dragged a Marco Jansen delivery back on to his stumps and skipper Suryakumar Yadav too failed to remain till the end. But those were the minor aberrations on the night.

All the credit for this canter should go to India's pacers, who produced a mesmerizing spell of

swing bowling to bundle out South Africa for a below-par 117.

Leading India's show with early wickets were Arshdeep Singh (2/13), Harshit Rana (2/34) and Hardik Pandya (1/23) after the hosts chose to bowl. Skipper Markram offered a tiny spark for South Africa with a spirited 46-ball 61. Undoubtedly, the brightest stars under a cool sky were India's quick bowlers, who procured lethal swing and lateral movement with the new ball.

It had its effect on the low-key power play effort of South Africa — 25 for three — and the

phase contained just two fours. Arshdeep, who had a horror outing at Mullanpur a couple of days back, redeemed himself with a dream first spell (3-0-9-1). He bowled three deliveries which angled away from Reeza Hendricks and then jagged one back to trap the South African opener leg before with the help of DRS. Rana did precisely the same to Quinton de Kock, a nip-backer, trapping the frozen-legged left-hander inside the crease.

Dewald Brevis was slightly unfortunate to get castled while attempting a release shot off a wide deliv-

ery from Rana. South Africa suddenly found themselves at 7 for 3 in 3.1 overs and it was always going to be an uphill climb for them from there. Markram crunched a couple of sweet drives in between to keep the board moving but Tristan Stubbs and Bosch departed in quick succession to further derail South African innings.

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

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

Spinner Varun Chakravarthi (2/11 in 4 overs) too reached a milestone, capturing his 50th T20I wicket while flattening the stumps of Donovan Ferreira (20, 15 balls).

The big-hitting Ferreria was dropped on 13 by Arshdeep at long-on off Shivam Dube, but that did not hurt India.

Chakravarthi cut open the lower-order with his bottomless bag of tricks as the pitch also continued to offer good pace and carry.

The spinner also added the wicket of Jansen to keep South Africa pinned to the mat. Markram completed his fifty off 41 balls with a slashed six off Rana, as the 18th over produced 19 runs. But the South African surge came tad too late.

## Coughlin, Novak lead mixed-team Golf event



ASSOCIATED PRESS  
■ Naples (US)

Lauren Coughlin holed a bunker shot for eagle on the par-5 17th hole and she and Andrew Novak teamed for a stout 4-under 68 in four-omes to build a one-shot lead going into the final round of the Grant Thornton Invitational.

It's another chance for Novak to pick up a team title this year. He partnered with Ben Griffin to win the Zurich Classic of New Orleans. The Grant Thornton is the only mixed-team event.

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

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

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

## Cameron Green blames manager after IPL auction listing error

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
■ Adelaide

Australia all-rounder Cameron Green on Sunday clarified that he will be available to bowl in the IPL saying a "stuff-up" by his manager led to him being mistakenly registered as a batter for next week's mini auction.

The 26-year-old, who missed the 2025 IPL season as he recovered from back surgery, returned to international cricket as a specialist batter in June. However, he has since been cleared to bowl and has been rolling his arm in the ongoing Ashes series between Australia and England.

"I'll be good to bowl. I don't know if my manager would like to hear this, but there was a stuff-up on his end," Green was quoted as saying by ESPNcricinfo.

"He didn't mean to say 'batter'. I think he accidentally selected the wrong box. It was pretty funny



how it's all played out, but it was actually a stuff-up on his end.

The lanky all-rounder, who previously represented Mumbai Indians in 2023 and Royal Challengers Bengaluru in 2024, is among the biggest names in the auction and is likely to be in the highest demand.

Green has entered the auction with a base price of ₹2 crore. He has been

listed under the batters' category instead of the all-rounders' lot.

The auction will take place in Abu Dhabi on Tuesday.

"I'm sure I will be (watching), with a few other guys. They're always good fun to watch. It's a bit of a lottery where you might go, but also who might be in your team, so it's always been fun to watch," he added

## India outplay Pakistan in U19 Asia Cup

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
■ Dubai

A disciplined bowling performance, led by all-rounder Kanishk Chouhan and seamer Deepesh Devendran, powered India to a comprehensive 90-run victory over Pakistan in their Group A match of the Under-19 Asia Cup, here Sunday.

After being put in to bat, India posted a competitive 240 all out in 46.1 overs, riding on a fluent 85 from Aaron George and useful contributions from captain Ayush Mhatre (38) and Chouhan (46).

Pakistan were then bundled out for 150 in 41.2 overs, never quite recovering from the early setbacks in a chase of 241.

India got off to a brisk start with skipper Mhatre striking four boundaries and three sixes during his 25-ball knock before Mohammad Sayyam removed both openers inside the first 10 overs.

George then held the innings together, finding the gaps consistently and adding stability through



the middle phase. Chouhan's late flourish, which included three sixes, helped India cross the 230-run mark despite losing wickets regularly.

For Pakistan, Sayyam (3/67) and Abdul Subhan (3/42) were the standout bowlers, while Niqab Shafiq chipped in with two wickets.

Pakistan's chase faltered early as they slipped to 30 for four, with Devendran striking thrice in a sharp opening spell.

Captain Farhan Yousaf (23) and Huzaifa Ahsan attempt-

ed to steady the innings, but Chouhan's incisive off-spin broke the resistance. Ahsan top-scored for Pakistan with 70 off 83 balls, but lacked support at the other end.

Chouhan finished with 3 for 33, while Devendran returned figures of 3 for 16 as India maintained a firm grip on the contest throughout to register a dominant win in the marquee Group A clash. The players of the two teams did not shake hands with each other at the toss and after the match, continuing the 'no-hand-

shake' protocol observed by the Indian men's team during the recently concluded Asia Cup 2025, where they refused to receive the winner's trophy from PCB Chairman Mohsin Naqvi.

**Brief scores:**

**India U-19:** 240 all out in 46.1 overs (Aaron George 85, Kanishk Chouhan 46; Mohammad Sayyam 3/67, Abdul Subhan 3/42).

**Pakistan U-19:** 150 all out in 41.2 overs (Huzaifa Ahsan 70; Kanishk Chouhan 3/33, Deepesh Devendran 3/16).

## RUSSELL'S LATE CHARGE IN VAIN FOR ABU DHABI KNIGHT RIDERS

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
■ Abu Dhabi

Andre Russell displayed his hitting prowess with an unbeaten 33-ball-53 but failed to take Abu Dhabi Knight Riders past Dubai Capitals which won a close ILT20 League match by nine runs.

Dubai Capitals posted a competitive 196 for 5 riding on US international Shayan Jahangir's 54-ball-99 and then stopped ADKR in its blocks at 187 for 8 despite Russell hitting four sixes and an equal number of boundaries.

Batting first, the Capitals recovered from early setbacks through a defining 115-run partnership between Jordan Cox (29 off 30) and Jahangir. He anchored the innings before falling agonisingly short of a century having hit 10 fours and five sixes and propelling the Capitals to a formidable 196/5.

This was the highest score by an associate player in the ILT20 tournament.

Although Russell's explosive late cameo injected hope, it ultimately proved insufficient as the Capitals held their nerve to seal a deserved win.

"I'm proud to now be part of the ILT20, representing the USA, where cricket is making strong progress. Performances like these will bring greater recognition to US cricket. Being entrusted with this responsibility means a lot and I'm glad I could repay that trust," Player of the Match Jahangir said after victory.

Dubai Capitals skipper Dasun Shanaka said: "We had runs on the board, but with the dew around, you never know against such power-hitters. Having Nabi there made my job easier. Jahangir was under pressure early and didn't have the best powerplay, but he showed character to go on and make 99. Hopefully, he will build on this in the matches to come."

## Andhra wins against Punjab in SMAT

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
■ Pune

Young Andhra batter Hemanth Reddy proved way too strong-willed in the face of some hostile bowling from Punjab as he smashed an unbeaten 109 to lead his side to a thrilling five-wicket win in a high-scoring Syed Mushtaq Ali Trophy Super League A match, on Sunday.

Reddy, playing only his second career SMAT game, saw the entire Andhra top and middle order being wiped out and leaving them perilously close to defeat at 56 for 5 while chasing 206 for victory.

But the 23-year-old, who has played most of his cricket in the Andhra Premier

League, came up with his career-best performance, blazing to a 53-ball 109, studded with 11 boundaries and seven sixes as Andhra reached 211/5 on the penultimate ball of the match.

Tall Punjab pacer Gurnoor Brar (3/23) made life difficult for Andhra batters, removing openers Srikar Bharat (1) and Ashwin Hebbar (4) in the very first over, reducing the opponents to seven or two.

Brar, a former net bowler for five-time IPL champions Mumbai Indians who was bought for ₹1.3 crore by Gujarat Titans ahead of the 2025 season, struck again in the fifth over by dismissing Andhra skipper Ricky Bhui (15). In between, pacer Ayush Goyal also got the



wicket of India all-rounder Nithish Kumar Reddy as Andhra reeled at 4/35, which quickly became 5/56 in the ninth over.

Needing someone who could really thwack the Punjab bowlers and also play a sensible innings, Reddy stepped up.

## Had to reinvent my running, Shelly Ann on shedding poor finisher tag

DEVARCHIT VARMA  
■ Pune

Legendary Jamaican sprinter Shelly-Ann Fraser-Pryce says she hated being labelled "a great starter but not a great finisher," and had to reinvent her running style in her formative years to rise to the elite level.

Fraser-Pryce, an eight time Olympic and 17-time World Championship medallist, said she put in a lot of effort in 200m to sharpen her 100m sprint race in which she owns the third-fastest time in history at 10.60 seconds.

"I had to really reinvent the way I ran, growing up in high school to becoming an elite sprinter because how I ran wasn't ideal, it wasn't going to make me win races," Fraser-Pryce, a brand ambassador of the Bajaj Pune Marathon, told PTI in an exclusive interview.

"People would say 'man, she's a great starter but not a great finisher' and I used to hate hearing those things, because I'm like, 'but I can finish too!'"

"I had to get stronger in the gym. I had to do more 200m if I wanted my 100m to be better. I really had to

put myself out there, challenge myself more and come out of my comfort zone." "I used to literally run and fall on my face. I had to learn and relearn how to stay upright, strike the ground, swing my arms and go forward. For me, yes people talk about your height and say 'oh you're too short' but that wasn't something that I could control."

Fraser-Pryce, whose list of achievements include three Olympics and 10 World Championships gold medals, said she did not have big goals growing up in the Waterhouse district of Kingston, Jamaica. (PTI)

## Over 3,000 runners from across India participate in 5th Assam Rifles Half Marathon

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE  
■ Shillong

More than 3,000 people from across the country took part in the fifth edition of the Assam Rifles Half Marathon here on Sunday, an official statement said.

The annual event was organised at the headquarters of the Directorate General Assam Rifles at Laitkor, attracting runners from 26 states and two Union territories. Held against the scenic back-

drop of the headquarters of the force in the higher reaches of East Khasi Hills district, the event was attended by senior officials from the armed forces, Government representatives and volunteers from different parts of the country.

The event was conducted in three categories — Cloud Chase (21 km), Pine Path (10 km) and Crystal Stream (5 km). The 21 km run was flagged off by Director General Assam Rifles Lt Gen Vikas Lakhera, while the 10 km and 5 km cate-



gories were flagged off by senior officers of the force.

A total of 3,038 runners participated, including 559 in the half marathon, 1,502 in the 10 km run and 977 in the 5 km run, the statement said. Participants were awarded medals, certificates and commemorative T-shirts, while cash prizes of ₹20 lakh were presented to 48 runners across categories, along with several consolation prizes. In the overall category, Sandeep Devrani of Kumaon

Regiment of the Indian Army, won the men's 21 km race with a timing of 1 hour 7 minutes, while Tamsi Singh from Uttar Pradesh's Varanasi emerged as the winner in the women's 21 km category with a timing of 1 hour 23 minutes.

Air Marshal Surat Singh, AOC-in-C Eastern Air Command, attended the event as the chief guest and presented prizes to the winners of the 21 km and 10 km categories, praising the enthusiasm and sporting spirit of the participants.

