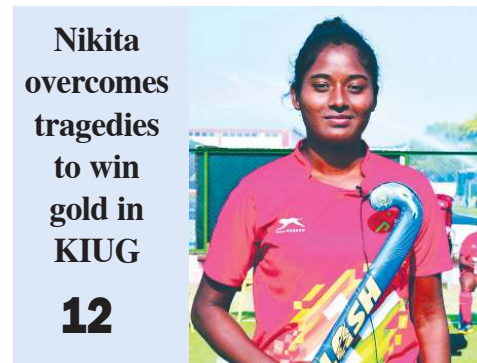




PIONEER IN SHORT

GOVT ALLOTS 480 ACRES FOR ADANI-GOOGLE AI DATA CENTRE IN VIZAG

The State government has allotted 480 acres of land in Visakhapatnam and Anakapalli districts to Adani Infra (India) Pvt Ltd, a 'notified partner' of Raiden Infotech India. Raiden Infotech India, a Google company, will set up 1 GW AI Data Centres in the state. The Google entity had informed the state government...

FULL REPORT ON P2

AP ATTRACTING MASSIVE INVESTMENTS, SAY MINISTERS

The State government has attracted investments worth Rs 20 lakh crore within just 18 months, driven by the renewed investor confidence in the Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu, according to Ministers K Durgesh and T G Bharat on Thursday. Addressing the media at the publicity...

FULL REPORT ON P3

RULING BJP CONFRONTS ITS OWN BUREAUCRACY IN MP

Ministers and BJP MLAs in Madhya Pradesh are preparing to open a coordinated front against what they describe as an increasingly unresponsive bureaucracy. They have decided to lodge a formal complaint with the chief minister, arguing that administrative resistance is now disrupting governance and weakening the authority of elected representatives...

FULL REPORT ON P5

TERROR ATTACKS INCREASED IN PAKISTAN: REPORT

Pakistan continues to reel under terrorism with a surge of 25 per cent violence-related incidents in 2025 compared to the previous year, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa being the worst hit province, a think tank report has said. Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan together accounted for over 96 per cent of all 3,187 fatalities and 92 per cent of all incidents of violence recorded through January...

FULL REPORT ON P8

QUOTE OF THE DAY



QUANTUM TECHNOLOGY HELD THE POTENTIAL TO BE AS TRANSFORMATIVE IN THE PRESENT CENTURY AS ELECTRICITY AND THE INTERNET WERE IN EARLIER ERAS. THE STRATEGY AIMS TO STRENGTHEN RESEARCH INFRASTRUCTURE, CYBERSECURITY SYSTEMS, LIFE SCIENCES INNOVATION AND HUMAN CAPITAL DEVELOPMENT

- D SRIDHAR BABU, TG IT AND INDUSTRIES MINISTER

'Implement MoUs reached during CII partnership summit'

PNS ■ Amaravati

Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu on Thursday directed officials to complete the groundbreaking of over 50 per cent CII Partnership Summit MoUs within 45 days.

The 13th State Investment Promotion Board (SIPB) meeting approved proposals worth over Rs 20,400 crore, including projects linked to agreements signed during the recent Visakhapatnam Investment and Partnership Summit sessions.

"Officials should ensure the groundbreaking of over 50 per cent of the agreements recently signed at the CII Partnership Summit within 45 days," Naidu was quoted as saying in an official press release.

The chief minister reviewed Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs) signed at the Vizag summit and noted that a few projects agreed upon, worth Rs 8 crore, have been in the implementation phase within twenty days.

CONTINUED ON >> P2



Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu presiding over The 13th State Investment Promotion Board meeting in Amaravati on Thursday

CM reviews infra projects with Adani

Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu met Adani Group Chairman Gautam Adani and Adani Ports & SEZ Ltd Managing Director Karan Adani to review ongoing infrastructure projects and discuss new investment opportunities in the state.

The chief minister noted that the meeting focused on major developments planned in

Amaravati and the potential to accelerate growth through collaborative initiatives.

"It was a pleasure to meet Gautam Adani and Karan Adani as we reviewed key infrastructure projects and explored emerging opportunities for Andhra Pradesh," Naidu said in a post on 'X' late Wednesday.

IT Minister Nara

Lokesh said he, along with the CM, held discussions with the Adani Group leadership on the progress of existing projects.

"We discussed Adani Group's ongoing infrastructure projects in Andhra Pradesh and the upcoming new investments planned for the state's future growth," said Lokesh in a post on 'X'.



IndiGo cancels over 550 flights from 3 major airports

PNS ■ Mumbai

Domestic carrier IndiGo has cancelled over 550 flights from three major airports on Thursday, as the Gurugram-based airline struggles to secure the required crew to operate its flights in the wake of new flight-duty and rest-period norms for pilots.

"IndiGo has cancelled over 550 flights on Thursday at three airports—Mumbai, Delhi and Bengaluru," a source said.

CONTINUED ON >> P2

Hyderabad airport receives bomb threat

PNS ■ Hyderabad

The Rajiv Gandhi International Airport here on Thursday received a bomb threat email concerning an inbound Indigo flight from Sharjah, prompting authorities to activate standard safety protocols after the aircraft landed, sources said.

Flight 6E 1422 landed safely here at 3.15 pm, they said.

CONTINUED ON >> P2

Govt committed to strengthening Panchayat Raj: Pawan

- The Deputy Chief Minister inaugurated 77 Divisional Development Offices to bring administration 'closer to people'

RAVI KUMAR BOPPANA
PNS ■ Amaravati

Deputy Chief Minister Pawan Kalyan said on Thursday that the newly inaugurated Divisional

Development Officer (DDO) offices will provide better services to the public and bring government schemes closer to citizens.

Speaking during the virtual inauguration of 77 DDO offices across Andhra Pradesh, Pawan Kalyan emphasised that these offices will streamline welfare programmes, ensure efficient service delivery, and strengthen Panchayati Raj and rural development initiatives.

Pawan Kalyan personal-



Deputy Chief Minister Pawan Kalyan being greeted by people during his visit to Chittoor on Thursday

Process to officially designate Amaravati as capital begins

PNS ■ Amaravati

The process to legally designate Amaravati as permanent capital of Andhra Pradesh has begun. The Centre recently initiated steps to amend Section 5(2) of the Andhra Pradesh Reorganisation Act. The Union Ministry of Law has already given its approval for the amendment. After



approval by the Union Cabinet, the amendment will soon be introduced in Parliament. Once approved there, Amaravati will be officially declared

as the new capital of Andhra Pradesh through a Gazette notification.

After the State's bifurcation, the TDP government had selected Amaravati as the capital. Farmers from 29 villages contributed 34,000 acres of land. A master plan was prepared with assistance from the Singapore government.

CONTINUED ON >> P2

'Farmers willing to participate in land pooling'

PNS ■ Amaravati

Second phase of land pooling for building Amaravati capital has begun. The proactive approach is breathing new life into the capital region, with officials noting that the current enthusiasm surpasses even the first phase of pooling carried



out years ago.
CONTINUED ON >> P2

Crop insurance denied to majority of farmers: Jagan

The former chief minister claims that only 19 lakh farmers given crop insurance

PNS ■ Tadepalli

YSRCP chief and former chief minister YS Jagan Mohan Reddy on Thursday alleged that only 19 lakh farmers were given crop insurance in the State, which faced 17 natural calamities during the present NDA coalition government.

Addressing a press conference at YSRCP central office in Tadepalli, Jagan Mohan Reddy alleged that the Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu-led coalition government ignored farmers' welfare and failed to provide timely assistance during disasters.



YSRCP chief and former chief minister YS Jagan Mohan Reddy speaking to the media in Tadepalli on Thursday

"In the 19 months of NDA coalition rule, Andhra Pradesh faced 17 natural

calamities. Only 19 lakh farmers out of 84 lakh received crop insurance. The state government failed to support those in urgent need," he said.

The input subsidies to peasants were delayed while tenant farmers were left in a pitiable condition, he added. The government

The YSRCP supreme said farming, which should be celebrated like a festival, allegedly turned into a burden during Naidu's regime.

CONTINUED ON >> P2

Minister Atchannaidu slams Jagan's 'politics of lies'

PNS ■ Amaravati

Agriculture Minister K Atchannaidu on Wednesday launched a fierce counterattack on former chief minister YS Jagan Mohan Reddy, accusing him of misleading farmers and the public with "habitual lies" and politically motivated distortions. The Minister said the people of the state know exactly who deceived farmers for five years, and asserted that the 18 months of development under the coalition government have completely exposed the failures of the previous YSRCP regime.

Atchannaidu criticised Jagan Mohan Reddy for attempting to twist facts



about ongoing procurement, stabilisation measures, and emergency assistance. He stated that the present government's agricultural policies are transparent, scientific, and farmer-centric—unlike the "Tughlaq-style governance" under the YSRCP, which failed to honour promises and pushed farmers into economic distress. He

added that Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu's administration is working round the clock to revive the agriculture sector, and that people will not fall for "irresponsible accusations" anymore.

The Minister accused Jagan Mohan Reddy of leaving the agriculture sector in ruins. In contrast, he said, the current government has allocated Rs 300 crore for market intervention in the 2025–26 budget and has already spent Rs 800 crore to stabilise crop prices. He also presented detailed crop-wise data showing unprecedented support for tobacco, mango, onion, cocoa, and tomato growers over the last 18 months.

CONTINUED ON >> P2

State sets its sight on funds of local, civic bodies

PNS ■ Amaravati

The State has now set its sights on ground-level funds as well, moving toward directly diverting the revenue of local bodies and public sector institutions. After taking over municipal corporation revenues earlier, and road cess more recently, the trend appears to be reversing from the long-promoted idea of strengthening local governance and Gram Swaraj.

With government expenditure rising sharply, efforts are now being made to tap into the funds of local bodies too. Some officials from these local institutions lament that funds meant for the development of their own areas are now being taken away by the government, which could hamper local development.

In the State, developmental works in villages and towns are carried out to some extent using the taxes collected by local bodies. But



under current financial conditions, the State government is reportedly targeting the revenues of these local institutions to raise additional income. It is already known that the government has decided to transfer certain taxes collected by several municipal corporations directly to the treasury. Two months ago, the Finance Department ordered that the professional tax collected in Visakhapatnam and Vijayawada corporations be handed over to the State. This reportedly caused some

financial difficulties for these two corporations. At the same time, the government has directed that the road cess collected across the state be transferred to the treasury. It is understood that similar steps are being prepared to take over other taxes collected by local bodies. Sources say the Finance Department is drawing up proposals in this regard.

Typically, some taxes are collected by local bodies, while certain major taxes are collected directly by the state. In addition,

the Central government also collects its own taxes within the states. The State, likewise, collects certain funds in the form of cess. These revenues are crucial for implementing developmental and welfare programmes from the ground level upward. However, as the shortage of funds has aggravated in recent times, attempts by the state government to divert grassroots revenue into the treasury are causing concern among officials, who fear these moves may hinder development activities.

Government allots 480 acres for Adani-Google AI data Centre in Vizag

PNS ■ Amaravati

The State government has allotted 480 acres of land in Visakhapatnam and Anaparthi districts to Adani Infra (India) Pvt Ltd, a 'notified partner' of Raiden Infotech India.

Raiden Infotech India, a Google company, will set up 1 GW AI Data Centres in the state.

The Google entity had informed the state government earlier that Adani Infra (India) Pvt Ltd, AdaniConneX India Pvt Ltd, Adani Power India Pvt Ltd, Bharti Airtel Ltd, Nxta Data Ltd and Nxta Vizag Limited (subsidiary of Bharti Airtel) as 'notified partners'. Raiden has specifically requested that all three land parcels identified by Andhra Pradesh Industrial Infrastructure Corporation Ltd (APIIC) may be allotted to Adani Infra (India), as the primary notified partner, subject to completing survey and handing over



possession.

"The Government, after careful examination of the proposal, and as per the approval accorded by the council of ministers in its meeting dated 28/11/2025 hereby accords permission for the transfer of 480 acres of land in Visakhapatnam and Anaparthi districts to M/s Adani Infra (India) Private Limited," the order issued on December 2 said.

Raiden Infotech India Pvt Ltd, which is setting up Data Centers in a phased manner, with a cumulative investment of over Rs 87,500 crore in Andhra Pradesh will get back Rs 22,000 crore as incentives

from the state government over a period of time.

According to the GO, Raiden has requested the government to authorise its notified partners, along with itself, to avail all incentives that the Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu's regime had promised for the benefit of the Data Centre Project.

This project will be built to the same exacting standards that power Google services like Search, YouTube and Workspace, the GO added.

Data centre capacity is typically measured by the power it consumes. The planned 1 GW (1000 MW of electricity consumption at full capacity operation) facility in Visakhapatnam is expected to use electricity equivalent to nearly 50 per cent of Mumbai's annual consumption.

CM Naidu recently said though Google had earlier announced an investment of USD 10 billion, it increased to USD 15 billion.

Commissioner orders strict action on dirty vacant plots

PNS ■ Kakinada

In-charge Municipal Commissioner NVV Satyanarayana has warned owners of vacant sites that they will face penal action if their properties are not kept clean and free of thorny bushes and garbage.

Speaking to the media, he said the Municipal Corporation has already identified several vacant plots overgrown with weeds and thorny plants, posing health hazards to nearby residents.

He emphasized that owners must not only clear any pending vacant land tax arrears but also ensure regular maintenance of their sites. Notices have already been issued, and action will be taken against those who fail to comply.

Earlier, the Commissioner made a surprise inspection of the Anna Canteen at Dairy Farm Centre, interacting with the public to understand any shortcomings. He agreed to install a shed at the token counter to provide relief to people standing in the midday heat.

Satyanarayana appealed to citizens to cooperate with municipal authorities in maintaining cleanliness across the city.

Additional Commissioner KT Sudhakar, Health Officer Dr D Prudhviraj, Sanitation Supervisor Naidu, and ward secretariat staff accompanied the Commissioner during the inspection.

AP partners with Pals Global to set up toy manufacturing park

PNS ■ Amaravati

The Andhra Pradesh government has approved the APIIC Global Toy Park in collaboration with Pals Global to develop a large-scale integrated toy manufacturing cluster, envisioned to create employment for over 30,000 women.

According to the government of Andhra Pradesh, in phase one, the state has allocated 582 acres at Nakkapalli in Visakhapatnam district for the project, which aims to build a world-class toy production ecosystem, stated officials.

"Met with Ajay Sinha, President of Pals Plush

According to the government of Andhra Pradesh, in phase one, the state has allocated 582 acres at Nakkapalli in Visakhapatnam district for the project, which aims to build a world-class toy production ecosystem, stated officials.

Limited, along with leading global toy industry investors from Japan, Korea and Taiwan. We discussed the development of an environmentally sustainable Toy Park in Nakkapalli mandal, a

project envisioned to create employment for over 30,000 women," said Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu in a post on X.

He noted that the initiative will boost investor confidence and position Visakhapatnam as a leading global toy manufacturing destination. Sinha appreciated the state's proactive approach and said both Indian and international investors have shown strong interest. A Government Order (GO) related to the project was issued on November 16, and the state expects major investor participation from India and abroad.

Hyd to be developed as 'Quantum City'

PNS ■ Hyderabad

The Telangana government on Thursday unveiled a comprehensive plan to develop Hyderabad as a 'Quantum City' and unveiled India's first long-term quantum strategy, aimed at positioning the State as a national and global hub for quantum technologies. The NITI Aayog Roadmap for Quantum and Telangana Quantum Strategy was formally released at the International Institute of Information Technology, Hyderabad (IIIT-H), Gachibowli, by Deputy Chief Minister Bhatti Vikramarka, in the presence of IT and Industries Minister Duddilla Sridhar Babu.

Addressing the gathering, Sridhar Babu said quantum



technology held the potential to be as transformative in the present century as electricity and the internet were in earlier eras. He said the State government had adopted a focused and long-term vision to ensure Telangana emerged as a global leader in quantum technologies, alongside artificial intelligence and advanced digital systems.

The strategy, he said, aims to strengthen research infrastructure, cybersecurity

systems, life sciences innovation, and human capital development, while promoting cutting-edge research in quantum computing, quantum communication, sensing, and cryptographic security. The framework has been designed not merely as a policy document for the State, but as a directional roadmap for India's engagement with quantum science and technology.

As part of the initiative, the government will establish a dedicated Centre of Excellence in Quantum Technologies to serve as a national benchmark for research, testing, and high-end skills development. A Fund of Funds to support deep-tech startups and emerging technology enter-

prises will be launched from the next financial year, Sridhar Babu announced.

The Minister also announced the institutionalisation of an 'Industry Day' programme, under which senior government officials will interact weekly with industry representatives, while Ministers will hold monthly consultations with business leaders to resolve operational challenges and jointly frame sector-specific growth strategies.

The event was attended by NITI Aayog Chief Executive Officer BVR Subrahmanyam, Member VK Saraswat, industry leader Debjani Ghosh, Special Chief Secretary Sanjay Kumar, senior bureaucrats, academic experts and technology entrepreneurs.

'Implement MoUs...

Naidu instructed officials to fast-track remaining MoUs, complete groundwork for 75 Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSME) parks before his Davos visit, and ensure weekly reviews by the chief secretary on progress.

He emphasised that government machinery must enhance technological capabilities, proposing universities for logistics, civil aviation and green energy, along with forming an advisory board for Quantum Valley development. The chief minister highlighted tourism expansion plans, directing allocation of land in the port city for hotels and convention centres, supported by a comprehensive master plan and incentive-based project categorisation.

Naidu proposed establishing a Rs 500 crore sovereign fund to support public sector investments, while encouraging Development of Women and Children in Rural Areas (DWCRA) groups to produce cattle feed with the assistance of Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS).

Likewise, IT Minister Nara Lokesh said that approvals must follow strict verification processes while ensuring industries face no delays.

Andhra man goes...

Another police official said that rebels allegedly seized a group of 10 people, including Ramachandran, while they were returning from work.

No demands have been made by the rebels so far, the police said. The incident came to light after his family and friends lost contact with him for 10 days, the official added.

However, there is no clarity from which African country he went missing.

Ramachandran's relative Sai Kumar said his uncle

went missing in Mali, West Africa and he has been working there as a borewell operator for the past one year. The company Ramachandran works for contacted his family, informing them that he was kidnapped on November 23.

Authorities are yet to identify the responsible parties, said Sai Kumar. Sai Kumar added that Ramachandran was abducted along with a man from Telangana, and added that no further information about the group's captors or their demands has been received so far.

Bonhomie reflects...

"Delighted to welcome my friend, President Putin to India. Looking forward to our interactions later this evening and tomorrow. India-Russia friendship is a time-tested one that has greatly benefited our people," the prime minister said on social media.

In the evening, Modi hosted a private dinner for the Russian president in a reciprocal gesture to the hospitality extended to the prime minister by Putin during his visit to Moscow in July last year. Modi's official residence was decorated with bright lights and flowers on the occasion. The conversation between the two leaders over dinner is expected to set the tone for the 23rd India-Russia summit talks on Friday, which is expected to produce several tangible outcomes to further broaden the time-tested relationship. Boosting defence ties, insulating India-Russia trade from external pressure and exploring cooperation in small modular reactors are set to be the focus of the summit between the two leaders that is expected to be closely watched by Western capitals. The Russian leader's visit to

New Delhi has assumed greater significance as it is taking place against the backdrop of rapid downturn in India-US relations.

Following the summit, the two sides are expected to seal several agreements, including in the areas of trade. On Friday, Putin will be accorded a ceremonial welcome and a tri-services guard of honour at Rashtrapati Bhavan, before he goes to Raj Ghat to pay homage to the memorial to Mahatma Gandhi.

It will be followed by talks between the two leaders in a restricted format and with their delegations at Hyderabad House, the venue for the summit.

Modi and Putin will also attend a business event jointly organised by the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI) and Roscongress at Bharat Mandapam.

In the evening, Putin will attend a state banquet to be hosted in his honour by President Droupadi Murmu. The Russian leader is expected to leave India at around 9 pm on Friday.

In the summit talks, New Delhi is expected to press for addressing the increasing trade deficit caused by India's procurement of large volumes of Russian crude oil. The Russian president's trip to India is taking place at a time when India-US relations are going through possibly the worst phase in the last two decades after Washington imposed a whopping 50 per cent tariff on Indian goods, including 25 per cent levies for New Delhi's procurement of Russian crude oil.

IndiGo cancels...

Besides, it had cancelled as many as 33 flights at Delhi Airport for Thursday, the

source said, adding, "The number of cancellations is expected to be higher by the end of the day."

The airline's On-Time Performance (OTP) nosedived to 19.7 per cent at six key airports -- Delhi, Mumbai, Chennai, Kolkata, Bengaluru and Hyderabad -- on December 3, as it struggled to get the required crew to operate its services, down from almost half of December 2, when it was 35 per cent. IndiGo has been facing acute crew shortage since the implementation of the second phase of the FDTL (Flight Duty Time Limitations) norms, leading to cancellations and huge delays in its operations across the airports," a source said.

DGCA has already said it is investigating IndiGo flight disruptions and has asked the airline to submit the reasons for the current situation, as well as its plans to reduce flight cancellations and delays. It may be mentioned here that the pilots' body Federation of Indian Pilots (FIP) has alleged that IndiGo, despite getting a two-year preparatory window before the full implementation of new flight duty and rest period norms for cockpit crew, "inexplicably" adopted a "hiring freeze."

FIP said it has urged the safety regulator, DGCA, not to approve airlines' seasonal flight schedules unless they have adequate staff to operate their services "safely and reliably" in accordance with the New Flight Duty Time Limitations (FDTL) norms. In a letter to the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) late Wednesday, FIP urged the DGCA to consider re-evaluating and reallocating slots to other airlines, which have the capacity to operate them without disruption during the peak holiday and fog season if IndiGo continues to

"fail in delivering on its commitments to passengers due to its own avoidable staffing shortages."

Hyderabad airport...

"On December 4, 2025, a Bomb threat email was received on Hyderabad airport customer support id at 2 PM for the Sharjah-Hyderabad flight 6E 1422. The Flight landed safely at Hyderabad at 3.15 PM. Standard safety protocols were initiated," sources said.

The standard safety protocols include isolation of the aircraft, screening of baggage and passengers, keeping fire engines ready and pressing sniffer dogs into service, among others. The incident marks the second bomb threat received by the airport on Thursday. The first threat targeted the Madina-Hyderabad IndiGo flight, which was diverted to Ahmedabad airport.

Process to officially...

Under the TDP government, the Assembly and Secretariat buildings were constructed, and administration began. Large-scale construction of roads and buildings started. When the YSRC came to power in 2019, work in Amaravati stalled. Then CM Jagan Mohan Reddy proposed a three-capital plan. With the coalition coming back to power in 2024, Amaravati got a fresh lease of life. Work resumed with an investment of Rs 58,000 crore. They promised to amend the Reorganization Act to prevent future issues and requested the Centre to amend the law to notify Amaravati as the capital of Andhra Pradesh.

'Farmers willing...

Municipal Administration Minister P Narayana and Pedakurapadu MLA

Bhashyam Praveen visited Endrayi village in Amaravati district to meet with farmers who have been expressing readiness to hand over their lands for the capital project. Before beginning their interactions, the leaders offered special prayers at the village Shiva temple, seeking divine blessings for the smooth progress of Amaravati's development.

Farmers from four revenue villages welcomed the Minister, reflecting their willingness to support the ambitious capital plans. In a notable demonstration of trust, Endrayi farmer Namburi Balaram voluntarily handed over the original documents of his 4 acre land to the RDO even before the official land pooling notification was issued. The gesture, made in the presence of the Minister and MLA, set a positive precedent for others.

The Minister and MLA also shared breakfast with farmer Dharmarao at his residence, interacting with villagers to understand their expectations and concerns. Later, a detailed meeting was held with farmers from the four revenue villages included in the pooling zone. Minister Narayana assured them that he would personally address any issue related to land pooling, reaffirming the government's commitment to transparency and farmer welfare.

Govt committed...

During a visit to Guntur district, the Deputy Chief Minister inaugurated seven DDO offices virtually, urging officials to work diligently toward the objectives of the system. Guntur Zilla Parishad Chairperson Kristina noted that a new chapter in Panchayati Raj has begun and assured full support from the Zilla Parishad, while District Collector Thameem Ansariya got the initiative

would greatly enhance inter-departmental coordination.

On his tour of Chittoor district, Pawan Kalyan met farmers at Damedu near Tirupati, stopping his convoy to personally listen to their grievances. Farmers highlighted longstanding land issues under the 1961 Estate Abolition Act, explaining that 175 acres of land were incorrectly recorded as government property during a 1962 survey, despite being cultivated by 26 families. Pawan Kalyan assured the farmers that he would work with the District Collector to resolve the matter and provide proper land records.

The Deputy Chief Minister reiterated that the newly launched DDO offices will play a pivotal role in bringing government services closer to the people, improving coordination, and advancing rural development across Andhra Pradesh.

Crop insurance...

He said that under the previous YSRC government between 2019 and 2024, 62 per cent of people depended on agriculture. Jagan alleged that despite prior information about cyclones and harvest-ready crops, the Naidu-led coalition government could not prevent losses.

"Bananas are selling at Rs 0.5 per kg. Paddy, coconut, cotton and every crop is affected. Governance is being run in a disastrous manner," Jagan said. "Under Naidu's rule agriculture which should have been like a festival turned into a disaster. Under the YSRC government, farmers received free crop insurance as a right. The Chief Minister only made empty promises about input subsidies. In these 19 months of governance, natural calamities occurred 17 times. Out of 8.4 million farmers in the state, only 1.9 million

have crop insurance," the YSRC chief said.

"Under the coalition government, the condition of farmers deteriorated significantly, with Rs 1,100 crore in input subsidies still outstanding. In contrast, the previous YSRC government had made free crop insurance a fundamental right, allocating Rs 7,800 crore for this purpose," he said. He demanded that the government make it clear when the input subsidy arrears would be cleared.

Minister Atchannaidu...

Atchannaidu said the YSRC inflated figures and lied about spending, whereas official records show that only Rs 1,475 crore was actually spent out of the Rs 2,140 crore allocated — far below the exaggerated claims made by Jagan Mohan Reddy.

The Minister highlighted that procurement and payment timelines have drastically improved. Farmers who once waited 54 days for paddy payments under YSRC are now receiving 95 per cent of payments within 48 hours. He said the coalition government cleared Rs 1,674 crore pending dues left unpaid by the previous regime and procured more from farmers in one year than the YSRC did annually.

The Minister also criticised Jagan Mohan Reddy for withholding input subsidies and failing to provide compensation to families of farmers who died by suicide. He said the coalition government paid the Rs 5.67 crore denied by the past regime and released Rs 310 crore in input subsidies to 21 lakh farmers since June 2024, including increased compensation per acre. The Minister called the previous government's crop insurance scheme "a massive fraud," claiming that Rs 1,990 crore in unpaid premiums left thousands of farmers without claims.

AP attracting massive investments, say Ministers

PNS ■ Amaravati

The State government has attracted investments worth Rs 20 lakh crore within just 18 months, driven by the renewed investor confidence in the Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu, according to Ministers K Durgesh and T G Bharat on Thursday.

Addressing the media at the publicity cell in Velagapudi Secretariat, the Ministers detailed the major approvals granted during the State Investment Promotion Board (SIPB) meeting chaired earlier by Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu.

Minister Durgesh stated that the 13th SIPB meeting approved fresh investments amounting to Rs 20,444 crore, paving the way for 26 companies to establish their units across the state and create 56,278 direct jobs. He added that six more companies were cleared under the Early Bird Incentive scheme, and the government has prepared an action plan to ensure these approvals are implemented at the ground

level within the next 45 days. Agreements signed during the recent CII Summit in Visakhapatnam with six companies were also ratified during the meeting.

The Chief Minister has directed the creation of a dedicated portal to constantly track MoU implementation, while a high-level committee involving the Chief Minister, the Chief Secretary, the Cabinet Sub-Committee, and Ministers of concerned departments will oversee the grounding of all projects. The CM has further instructed that maximum projects be grounded before he leaves for the World Economic Forum in Davos.

According to Durgesh, nearly 50 per cent of all MoUs signed so far have already moved into the process stage. Investments worth Rs 7.69 lakh crore are currently under active progress, including Rs 1.69 lakh crore in the Visakhapatnam Economic Region, Rs 87,000 crore in the Amaravati Region, and Rs 73,000 crore in the Tirupati Region. Across 13 SIPB meet-



Ministers K Durgesh and TG Bharat addressing a press conference in Amaravati on Thursday

ings, the government has approved Rs 8.29 lakh crore in investments that will generate 7,62,148 direct jobs. He asserted that the coalition government is firmly moving towards fulfilling its promise of creating 20 lakh jobs. This, he said, is clear evidence of investor confidence in Chief Minister Chandrababu Naidu's leadership. "This is not just ease of doing business—this is speed of doing business," he remarked. He added that granting industrial status to the tourism sector has triggered a surge in

new hotels and resorts across the state.

Industries Minister T G Bharat said that after the previous administration damaged the "AP brand," the state has now regained national and global attention under Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu's leadership. The recent CII Summit in Visakhapatnam received overwhelming investor response, and the government is ensuring that every agreement signed is grounded without delay.

The state has attracted massive investments across

departments including energy, industries, tourism, IT, food processing, APCRDA, municipal administration, irrigation and infrastructure, APADCL, education, health, and textiles. He highlighted that the Escrow Mechanism introduced by the government has drawn nationwide praise and strengthened investor trust. With the arrival of the Google Data Center in Visakhapatnam, Andhra Pradesh has regained international visibility.

Responding to media questions, both Ministers clarified that certain remarks made by the Deputy Chief Minister in Konaseema were being deliberately distorted. They emphasised that he has always held deep respect for Telangana and has never made derogatory statements. They urged that casual remarks should not be misinterpreted or sensationalised. Commenting on statements made by former minister Perni Nani, they observed that personal attacks were unwarranted and counterproductive.

Minister assures 4G network in Palnadu constituency

PNS ■ New Delhi

During the Question Hour in Lok Sabha, the question was asked by TDP MP Lavu Sri Krishna Devarayalu, representing Narasaraopet in Palnadu district was answered by Union Minister Pemasani Chandrasekhar, who represents the Guntur Lok Sabha constituency.

Lavu Sri Krishna Devarayalu first asked when 4G network connectivity would be provided to tribal villages in his Lok Sabha constituency. He said: "There are a large number of tribal people in the Palnadu district that I represent. In Bollapalli, Veldurthi and Macherla mandals, there is a significant Scheduled Tribes population, along with areas inhabited by PVTGs. Although land has been allocated for establishing 4G network facilities in these villages, the service has not yet become available.

Is there any specific timeline for bringing 4G network connectivity to these PVTG areas?"

Responding to this,



There are a large number of tribal people in the Palnadu district that I represent. In Bollapalli, Veldurthi and Macherla mandals, there is a significant Scheduled Tribes population, along with areas inhabited by PVTGs

Pemasani Chandrasekhar said, "We have decided to set up 27,000 4G network towers in areas without network coverage. These regions are remote, and obtaining environmental and forest clearances is also an issue. Therefore, to get a clear understanding of the actual problems in such locations, I have written letters to every MP. Through this, the local MP

and BSNL can work together to expedite network installation.

It is difficult to specify exactly what problem exists in which village. Nevertheless, we are working to resolve all these issues and ensure faster network deployment. Palnadu is my own region. I am very happy to work for its development."

Hidma tortured, killed in fake encounter: Maoist party

PNS ■ Bhadrachalam

The Communist Party of India-Maoist, commonly referred to as the Maoist party, has claimed that the recent encounter involving Madvi Hidma was completely staged. This assertion was made in a statement attributed to Vikalp, a spokesperson for the Maoist Party's Dandakaranya Special Zone Committee.

"The Hidma encounter is entirely fake. The ailing Hidma and Shankar had gone to Vijayawada for medical treatment. They were caught while travelling with timber traders from Andhra Pradesh. It was because of the betrayal by some of these timber traders that the two top Maoists were captured. The police tortured them for three days and then killed them. A thorough investigation must be conducted into this encounter," the Maoist party stated in the statement.

The encounter of top Maoist leader Madvi Hidma has created a sensation across the country. The central government described Hidma's killing as a major victory in the fight against Maoists, calling it a severe blow to the Maoist party. However, Maoist sympathizers allege that the encounter was fake and that he was captured and killed in custody.

Against this background, the Dandakaranya Special Zonal Committee of the Maoist party released a sensational statement. In it, they alleged that Hidma, who had come to Vijayawada for medical treatment, was arrested, tortured for three days, and later killed in a fake encounter at Maredumilli. They also alleged that this was carried out under the direction of Union Home Minister Amit Shah. The party denied allegations that Dev Ji alias Tippiri Tirupati played a role in Hidma's arrest and



subsequent encounter in which he died.

As part of Operation Kagar, initiated by the Central government to eliminate Maoists, encounters recently took place in the Maredumilli and Rampachodavaram areas. In a statement released under the name Vikalp, the Dandakaranya Special Zonal Committee claimed that Maoist Central Committee member and DZSC Secretary Madvi Hidma, along with five others, including AOB SZC member Shankar, were delib-

erately killed. They stated that the Andhra Pradesh police arrested Hidma on November 15 when he came to Vijayawada for treatment. They alleged that he was tortured for three days and then, on November 18, he and his followers were secretly taken into the Maredumilli forest area in Alluri Sitarama Raju district and killed by the AP police to avoid suspicion.

They further alleged that on November 19, Shankar and six others were also killed in Rampachodavaram.

A statement by the party alleged that betrayal by some timber merchants led to the arrest of Madvi Hidma and others in Vijaywada

that this was not an AP police operation alone but a joint operation involving Central and State intelligence agencies, orchestrated by Union Home Minister Amit Shah.

The Maoist party denied allegations that senior leader Dev Ji was responsible for Hidma's death. They said claims that Dev Ji had struck a deal with the police and passed on information were false. They accused opponents of slandering a battle-hardened warrior and stated that this was part of a conspiracy against the Maoist party. They further made sensational remarks, alleging that the RSS-BJP governments, driven by "Brahminical Hindutva fascism," were waging the Kagar war to turn India into a corporate Hindu nation. The Maoist party demanded an immediate judicial inquiry into the killings of its members and punishment for those responsible.

Police blamed for girl student's death



PNS ■ Puttaparthi

The death of an intermediate student in Sri Sathya Sai district, has sparked outrage. She died while undergoing treatment after attempting to commit suicide. Parents of the girl alleged that the police negligence cost their daughter her life.

Spandana, the daughter of Amala and Anjaneyulu from Pulletipalli village, was an intermediate student at a private college in Dharmavaram. A male student from Mushtikovela village in Chennekothapalli Mandal was studying Intermediate second year at another college in Dharmavaram. The male student allegedly harassed Spandana inappropriately while they travelled to and from college on the bus.

When the girl warned him to change his behavior, the student allegedly verbally abused her severely and indiscriminately attacked her on the bus. He attacked the student again when she got off the bus in Dharmavaram and was heading to her college.

The victim attempted to file a complaint against the

student at the Dharmavaram One Town Police Station. However, the police informed her that since the incident happened within the jurisdiction of Chennekothapalli, she should go and file the complaint there.

The victim and her parents then went to the Chennekothapalli Police to file a complaint. There, too, she was reportedly met with disappointment. Both the Dharmavaram One Town Police Station and the Chennekothapalli Police allegedly failed to take her complaint seriously.

Deeply distressed by the attitude of the police, the student allegedly attempted to hang herself on November 26. Her family members noticed it and immediately rushed her to the Dharmavaram Government Hospital for treatment. As her condition was critical, she was transferred to the Anantapur Government Hospital. She was undergoing treatment there for a week before she succumbed to her injuries.

The student's parents accused the police for their daughter's death.

Equal priority to welfare, development: MLA



MLA Pantham Nanaji performing bhoomi puja for laying cement concrete road in Kakinada on Thursday

PNS ■ Kakinada

Rural MLA Pantham Nanaji stated that the coalition government is committed to giving equal priority to welfare and development initiatives despite the prevailing financial constraints.

Speaking after performing Bhoomi Puja for the construction of a cement road from the G Convention Hall in Kakinada second division to the Valasapakala village junction, an infrastructure project estimated at Rs 2.90 crore, Nanaji criticised the previous YSRCP government for leaving behind debts amounting to Rs 10 lakh crore. He said that Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu and Deputy Chief Minister Pawan Kalyan were working tirelessly to continue welfare schemes, while also pushing forward developmental activities.

He alleged that the pre-

vious regime had left nearly 80 lakh tonnes of garbage along roadsides without creating proper dumping yards. "Despite facing a severe financial crunch and the burden of paying interest on massive debts, the government has not only cleared all the garbage but has also undertaken significant road development works," he added.

The MLA further noted that once the new road is completed, heavy vehicles will be diverted away from the city, significantly reducing traffic congestion. He instructed the officials to ensure high quality in road construction.

MLC Karri Padmasri, Rural MPP Nandipati Anantha Lakshmi, alliance leaders Penke Srinivasa Baba and Rambhala Venkateswara Rao, Civil Supplies Director Kadali Esveri, and Municipal Corporation Commissioner Satyanarayana were among those present.

Pensioners willing to pay 'house tax' after receiving pension: officials

PNS ■ Kakinada

A video went viral claiming that house tax was recovered from the old age pension in the Tuni area of Kakinada district. The incident reportedly took place in the SC Colony at Lovakotturu village under Tunni mandal. It was alleged that surveyor Satish distributed pensions to beneficiaries and collected house tax from some of them. The video spread widely on social media.

Surveyor Satish was supposed to distribute pen-

sions to 67 people in his jurisdiction. During the distribution, he asked beneficiaries about paying their house tax. Twenty-one people paid amounts ranging between Rs 37 and Rs 478, after which the surveyor issued receipts to them. A video went viral showing some locals questioning why house tax was being deducted from pension.

However, the Tuni MPDO gave clarification on the matter. He stated that no orders were issued to deduct house tax from pen-

sions. He explained that some pension beneficiaries themselves expressed willingness to pay house tax from the money they received by way of pension, and therefore the staff discussed the matter with them. He said that no one collected house tax forcibly from pension funds and assured that a full investigation would be conducted.

Recently, the AP Fact Check team also provided clarification. They tweeted a video of local women stating, "After receiving our pension, we voluntarily

paid the house tax. Some people are spreading misinformation."

The AP Fact Check team tweeted, "Some people are spreading false news on social media claiming that house tax was deducted from pension amounts in the Tunni area of Anakapalli district. The women of Lovakotturu state that the secretariat staff did not demand house tax from them; they paid it voluntarily. Therefore, we request everyone to verify facts and stop spreading misinformation."

VMRDA to introduce 'integrated cards' to attract tourists

PNS ■ Visakhapatnam

A key decision has been taken in Visakhapatnam to attract more tourists and increase revenue. The Visakhapatnam Metropolitan Region Development Authority (VMRDA) is preparing to introduce a new plan called the Integrated Card for tourists. Using this card, visitors will be able to access more than nine tourist spots in the city, including museums and parks. These cards are expected to be offered with validity periods ranging between one day and one year. They are being designed keeping in mind daily walkers and people who frequently visit parks. The cards will be made avail-

able very soon. Based on the type of membership, users will get free entry, and the system will operate using QR codes and a pass mechanism. The authorities also plan to use this card to promote tourism in Visakhapatnam.

Through this integrated card, VMRDA aims to further enhance the tourism experience in Visakhapatnam. Those who purchase this card can visit a variety of attractions in the city easily and at a lower cost. Especially local residents and people who visit parks regularly will benefit from these membership cards. As part of the implementation, QR code technology will be used, which will speed up

the entry process. Additionally, by printing information about Visakhapatnam's tourist highlights on these cards, the authorities hope to encourage more visits. They also believe this new system will significantly boost VMRDA's revenue.



Through this integrated card, VMRDA aims to further enhance the tourism experience in Visakhapatnam. Those who purchase this card can visit a variety of attractions in the city easily and at a lower cost

tourists can visit all tourist spots conveniently and at a much lower cost. Normally, an adult has to spend around Rs 485 on tickets to visit all major attractions, while children need to spend Rs 250. But with the new integrated card, adults will be able to see all places

for just Rs 250 to Rs 300.

It will take another two months for this new system to come into effect. A special software is being developed for this purpose. With the help of this software, tourists will not have to wait in line for tickets at each attraction. Moreover, users can also choose a few specific places they wish to visit through the same card. The integrated card will also include a QR code feature, which makes it easy to track how many times a person visited a particular place. This will help estimate tourist footfall and plan better facilities in the future. Officials believe that this new system will give a strong boost to the tourism sector in Visakhapatnam.



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Order Order

HC declines to put on hold order allowing lighting of oil lamp on TN hill



The Madurai Bench of the Madras High Court on Thursday declined to stay an order of a single judge allowing the lighting of traditional “Karthigai Deepam” oil lamp at a stone pillar, meant for that purpose, on the Thirupparankundram hill, housing the Lord Subramaniya Swamy temple. A bench led by Justice G Jayachandran and Justice KK Ramakrishnan declined to interfere with the order of Justice GR Swaminathan allowing the lighting of the lamp on the hill.

On December 1, Justice Swaminathan allowed writ petitions that sought a direction for appropriate arrangements to light the Karthigai Deepam at the “Dheepathoon,” which is the stone pillar. A devotee Ram Ravi Kumar approached the High Court, represented by Advocate MR Venkatesh. By lighting the lamp at Deepathoon, which is meant for that purpose, the structure of the Dargha is not in any way affected and the Dargha is located at a safe distance of not less than 50 meters away from the stone pillar, the judge had said in the order.

Ensure 30 per cent quota for women lawyers in State Bar Councils, SC to BCI



The Supreme Court on Thursday asked the Bar Council of India (BCI) to ensure 30 per cent reservation for women in the upcoming State bar council elections. The top court, while hearing a petition seeking mandatory women's representation in state bar councils, was told by the apex bar body BCI that implementing such reservation would require amendments to the Advocates Act.

“We expect that the BCI will construe the rules in such a manner that it will ensure 30 per cent reservation in State Bar Councils; such a position should also be available for some posts of office bearers,” said the bench comprising Chief Justice Surya Kant and Justice Joymalya Bagchi.

When the lawyer for the BCI expressed uncertainty on whether sufficient number of women lawyers would contest, the bench referred to a workshop held by the Supreme Court Bar Association based on a survey among women lawyers. “You were not there in yesterday's workshop. 83 per cent of the women want to be members in the SCBA,” the CJ said.

Delhi HC asks MEA to facilitate communication between Celina, her brother detained in UAE

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

The Delhi High Court on Thursday asked the Centre to facilitate communication between actor Celina Jaitley and her brother, a former Indian Army officer detained in the UAE for more than a year.

The court was hearing a plea filed by the actor seeking effective legal representation for her brother Major Vikrant Kumar Jaitley (ret'd).

The actor's application claimed that her brother has been residing in the UAE since 2016. She said that he was employed with the MATITI Group, which is engaged in trading, consultancy, and risk management services.

Major Vikrant had been “illegally abducted and detained” in the UAE on September 6 last year, the petition said.

However, despite the passage of over one year, the Ministry of External Affairs



Celina Jaitley

(MEA) has failed to secure basic information about the actor's brother, including his welfare conditions and legal status, the plea alleged.

On November 3, the court had directed the Government to file its response.

On Thursday, Justice Sachin Datta directed the MEA to inform Major Vikrant in the next consular access that his sister wished to talk to him.

Besides, Justice Dutta also asked the MEA to facilitate Celina's communication with her brother via the TAMM

SC asks States to provide more staff to ECI

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

Taking note of a plea alleging extreme work pressure faced by the Booth Level Officers (BLOs) engaged in the time-bound special revision of the electoral rolls, the Supreme Court directed the States on Thursday to consider deputing additional employees for reducing their working hours.

The court was hearing an application filed by actor Vijay's party, Tamilaga Vetri Kazhagam (TVK), seeking a direction to the Election Commission of India (ECI) not to take coercive actions under the Representation of the People (RP) Act against the BLOs for not performing the duty in a time-bound manner and pointing out that many of them have committed suicide due to the work pressure.

A bench of Chief Justice Surya Kant and Justice Joymalya Bagchi took note of the submissions made by senior advocate Gopal Sankaranarayanan, who appeared in the matter for the TVK, that some instructions are needed to be issued as many BLOs, who are either teachers or anganwadi workers, have died due to the extreme pressure exerted on them by EC officials.

Sankaranarayanan said moreover, the EC officials are also getting FIRs lodged against the BLOs if they fail to perform their duties.

The CJ said the States may consider deploying additional staff, so that the work pressure is eased. “In

case they are facing hardships, including being overburdened with their routine duties as well as the additional duties assigned by the Election Commission, the State Government can obviate such hardships,” the bench noted.

The States may consider the “desirability of deputing additional staff at the disposal of the EC, so that the working hours can be proportionately reduced”, an order issued by the court said.

The bench said if any employee has any “specific reason” for seeking exemption from the SIR duty, the competent officer of the state can consider such requests on a case-to-case basis and replace such an employee with another.

“However, it shall not be construed or understood as if they can withdraw the employees who have been assigned the duty if their substitutes are not provided,” it added.

The court further said the States where the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of the electoral rolls is underway, “shall be obligated to deploy the requisite workforce at the disposal of the EC, though the strength of such employees can be increased as explained above”.

The bench disposed of the plea, saying the other prayers like seeking ex-gratia compensation for the BLOs who died during SIR duties can be revived later, either by the aggrieved persons or the petitioner, by filing another application at a later stage. During the hearing, Sankaranarayanan said FIRs under section 32 of the RP Act



have been filed by the poll panel against BLOs.

Section 32 of the Act deals with a breach of official duty by electoral officers, making it punishable with imprisonment and fines for neglecting their duties related to the electoral rolls.

The senior lawyer said BLOs are not equipped to perform the SIR duties in such a short span of time and moreover, there are internet-related issues. He said the teachers and anganwadi workers have to go for SIR duties early morning or late at night, before or after their regular work.

He said a youngster, who had to go on leave for his wedding, was denied leave and suspended.

“He committed suicide.... When

you are doing this, at least show the human side. Criminal action is harsh, it should not be initiated,” the lawyer said. The bench said the state Governments cannot run away from their obligation.

“If there is a difficulty being experienced, then on a case-to-case basis, the State Government can exempt employees and provide an alternative,” the CJ said. “Why should the Election Commission register FIRs?” Sankaranarayanan asked. “It is not for the first time, earlier also they have been registering it,” the CJ said.

Senior advocate Kapil Sibal said the pressure on the BLOs is a “harsh reality”. Citing the example of Uttar Pradesh, the CJ said the election in the State is due in 2027, yet the BLOs

are asked to complete the exercise in a time-bound manner.

The bench said no state has so far approached the court citing difficulties. Senior advocates Rakesh Dwivedi and Maninder Singh, appearing in the matter for the EC, said in Tamil Nadu, more than 90 per cent of the enumeration forms have been supplied.

Dwivedi said the poll panel resorted to criminal proceedings only when the BLOs showed reluctance to perform their duties. He said such arguments are used to create a particular kind of political narrative.

On November 30, the EC extended the entire schedule for the ongoing SIR exercise in nine States and three Union territories by a week, amid allegations by opposition parties that the “tight timelines” were causing problems for people and ground-level poll officials.

The EC announced the SIR in the nine states and three Union territories on October 27. Nearly 51 crore electors will be covered in the massive voter-list cleanup exercise.

These states and Union territories are — the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, Lakshadweep, Chhattisgarh, Goa, Gujarat, Kerala, Madhya Pradesh, Puducherry, Rajasthan, Tamil Nadu, Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal.

Among these, Tamil Nadu, Puducherry, Kerala and West Bengal are scheduled go to polls in 2026. For Assam, where polls are also due in 2026, the revision of the electoral rolls was announced separately.

No GST on leasing out residential premises as hostel for students: SC

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

The Supreme Court on Thursday held that leasing out of residential premises to an entity which is using it as hostel for students and working professionals is exempted from GST.

A bench of justices JB Pardiwala and KV Viswanathan upheld the verdict of the Karnataka High Court which said that leasing out of residential premises to an entity which is using it as hostel to students and working professionals is exempt under GST.

“In the case on hand, the ultimate use of the property as residence remains unchanged. However, if 18 per cent GST is levied on this transaction between the respondent No. 1 and the lessee ie, M/s DTwelve Spaces Private Limited, the same would ultimately be passed on to the students and working professionals which would lead to a situation where the legislative intent behind granting exemption for residential use is defeated,” the bench said.

The top court was hearing a plea filed by a co-owner of the residential property having 42 rooms in Bengaluru.

The petitioner along with

other co-owners executed a lease deed in favour of the lessee, namely M/s D Twelve Spaces Private Limited.

The lessee leased out the aforesaid residential property as hostel for long term accommodation to students and working professionals with the duration of stay ranging from three to 12 months.

The petitioner sought clarification with regard to its eligibility to seek exemption for the renting services provided and filed an application before the Authority of Advance Ruling, Karnataka.

The AAR, Karnataka held that the renting of residential dwelling for use as residence is not covered under entry 13 and the benefit of exemption according to notification is not available.

The petitioner filed an appeal before the Appellate Authority for Advance Ruling which held that the property rented out is a hostel and cannot be termed as residential accommodation or residential dwelling and denied the benefit of exemption.

The Karnataka High Court held that the leasing out of residential premises to an entity who is using it as ‘hostel’ to students and working professionals is exempt under GST.

SC asks all High Courts to submit details of pending acid attack cases in four weeks

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

Terming tardy trials in acid attack cases as a “mockery of the system”, the Supreme Court on Thursday directed all the High Courts to submit details of such pending cases across the country within four weeks.

Mooting the idea of setting up special courts for expeditious disposal of acid attack cases, the top court also asked the Centre to consider amending the law through legislation or even an ordinance so that the survivors are formally included within the definition of persons with disabilities under the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act to avail welfare schemes. A bench comprising Chief Justice Surya Kant and Justice Joymalya Bagchi also issued notices to the Centre and the Department of Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities on a PIL filed by acid attack survivor Shaheen Malik that the victims be categorised as persons with disabilities to ensure access to welfare schemes.

Solicitor General Tushar Mehta assured the court that the issue would be taken up with “due seriousness” by the Government.

The bench termed as “national shame” the prolonged delay of 16 years in Malik's own case, which has been pending since 2009 before a Rohini court here.

Malik, who also argued personally, said that she was attacked in 2009, yet the trial has still not concluded. ‘Mere saath 2009 mein attack hua tha, abhi tak trial chal raha hai’ (I was attacked in 2009; the trial is still going on), she said. Till 2013, nothing happened in the case and the trial, which is now taking place in Rohini in Delhi, is now at the stage of final hearing, she said. Expressing surprise over the delay of over 16 years, the CJ said, “The offence is of 2009 and the trial is not completed! If the National Capital cannot respond to these challenges, then who will deal with them? It is a shame on the system! This is a national shame.”

The CJ asked Malik to file an application in the PIL itself explaining why the matter has not been concluded, assuring her that the court may even take suo motu cognisance. The CJ said the trial in her case must be held on a day-to-day basis. “Issue notice. Learned Solicitor General who was present in the court has graciously accepted notice.

“He has also expressed concern

about the causes raised in the instant petition. We also direct the registrar generals of all high courts to furnish the details of pending trials in the cases of acid attack victims in their respective jurisdiction,” the bench ordered.

The CJ said that the aspect of pendency of cases and covering acid attack victims within the definition of persons with disabilities will be taken up after four weeks. The bench, however, said that it will take up next week the issue of the delay in the trial in Malik's case at a Rohini court here.

During the hearing, Malik highlighted the plight of victims who are forced to ingest acid, often surviving with artificial feeding tubes and severe disabilities. The CJ expressed shock and said he had heard about the incidents of acid-throwing but had never come across cases where victims were forced to consume acid. CJ Kant further remarked that these offences ought to be tried in special courts, given the gravity and the impact on survivors. “This is a mockery of the system. There should be no sympathy for such persons (accused),” he said.

The perpetrators “should meet with the same ruthlessness as done by them,” the solicitor general said.

States Focus



CENTRE BEGINS 100-DAY PUSH FOR CHILD MARRIAGE-FREE INDIA

Union Minister of Women and Child Development Annapurna Devi on Thursday said child marriage snatches childhood away from daughters and pushes them towards early maternity and "unimaginable suffering". She was speaking at the launch of a '100-day Intensive Awareness Campaign for a Child Marriage Free Bharat', where she stressed that the country must adopt "zero tolerance" towards child marriage. The minister urged states, civil society groups, and community leaders to unite with an "unwavering commitment" to eliminate the practice. She said India had made "historic progress", but that far more remained to be done. "Even one child marriage is unacceptable for us," she said.



ODISHA GOVT SANCTIONS ₹1 CRORE FOR DHANU JATRA FESTIVAL

The Odisha Government on Thursday sanctioned ₹1 crore for Baragarh's Dhanu Jatra, during which the town transforms into an open-air theatre with the life of Lord Krishna being enacted over 11 days. The decision was taken at a meeting chaired by Odia Language, Literature & Culture Minister Suryabanshi Suraj. The festival is scheduled to be held from December 24 to January 3.

Chaos at West Bengal CEO office as BLOs protest SIR deadlines

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ Kolkata

There quite a commotion outside the office of the State Chief Electoral Officer (CEO) when a large section of the Trinamool Congress backed booth level officers — engaged in the special intensive revision (SIR) of electoral rolls on Thursday staged a restive demonstration demanding extension of the submission of enumeration forms.

A group of 400 strong officials of BLO Protection Committee shouted slogans against the Election Commission of India (ECI) and breached the barricades trying to enter the CEO office where they were stopped by the security forces forcing them to stage a sit-in.

Accompanied by the family members of the BLOs who had died during the SIR they complained "we have been running against time and are on the verge of a breakdown. We have to attend to our duties in schools, remain awake all night to digitise the enumeration forms the ECI has not been extending the deadline despite our appeal to do so they are issuing fresh notifications and orders over WhatsApp every day," one of the agitating BLOs said.

Incidentally about 99 per cent of the enumeration forms had been digitized in Bengal which stood fourth behind Lakshwadeep, Rajasthan and Goa in terms of digitising the forms. Meanwhile, Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee once again thundered from a rally in Murshidabad district accusing once again Union Home Minister Amit Shah for creating a panic of President's Rule in Bengal so as to enforce an "unplanned SIR" in two months "which is a work of two years." She said "it was Amit Shah's trick to enforce SIR with a hidden threat of President's Rule if we had blocked SIR then they would have enforced a President's Rule," adding however that till she was there she would not allow anyone to

TMC suspends MLA for planning Babri Mosque replica

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ Kolkata

The Trinamool Congress (TMC) has finally suspended maverick yet, powerful party legislator and former minister from Murshidabad Humayun Kabir for trying to "communalise" the political situation by announcing his plans to construct a Babri Mosque in his district and later in all the districts of the State.

Announcing the decision senior party leader Firhad Hakim on Thursday said that despite being cautioned against making communal remarks Kabir chose to remain indifferent to the party line leading to his suspension.

"We cautioned him twice and asked him to refrain from communally sensitive remarks but he still refused to mend his ways that is why we have taken the decision to suspend him, the party will have no relation with him hence forward," Hakim who besides being the Mayor of Kolkata and a senior member



West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee during a public rally at Berhampore in Murshidabad district West Bengal on Thursday

of Mamata Banerjee Cabinet as well as the TMC's Muslim face said.

Kabir a former Congress leader was initially mentored by the then Behrampur MP Adhir Chowdhury before the both parted ways and the

former joined the TMC.

Considered a leader with considerable following is an MLA from Bharatpur constituency of Murshidabad district.

"The party leadership noticed that an MLA from

Murshidabad had been making unnecessary, irresponsible and communal remarks he was cautioned thrice but he would not listen then he suddenly declared that he would construct a Babri Masjid in his district

Shiv Sena leader alleges theft from Karnataka bank locker

TN RAGHUNATHA ■ Mumbai

In a shocking development, Shiv Sena (Shinde) deputy leader and former MLA Krishna Hegde has lodged a complaint with the police alleging a 'theft' of valuables from his safe deposit locker in the strong-room of the Parle East branch of Karnataka Bank in north-west Mumbai.

In his complaint lodged with the Vile Parle Police Station, Hegde said he had kept in his ban locker several valuables — including his mother's jewellery, cash and some key documents — on September 19 and when he opened the locker on October 22, he found many of the items in it had gone missing.

Apart from his mother's jewellery, cash and some key documents, the other items kept in his burgled bank locker included his licensed revolver and watches. "Some of the items in my locker have gone missing," Hegde said. He however did not disclose the estimated value of the articles lost.

Following the "theft", he had taken up the matter with bank's branch manager Manish Kumar, Cluster Manager Hari Sarin, DGM Rajgopala Bhatt and others on November 27.

On the following day, he submitted a formal theft complaint with Vile Parle Police Station Senior Police Inspector Gabajji Chintre; and

a probe is underway.

Accusing the bank management of delaying the internal probe and attempting him to deter him from lodging a complaint, Hegde said: "The bank officials did not act quickly on my complaint. They called a Godrej key-maker and involved the bank's internal vigilance. This was not to probe the theft, but to bury the matter and somehow deter me from filing a police complaint".

"There is utter lack of response from the Karnataka Bank's top brass. I have sent several emails to the Managing Director and CEO, Raghvendra Bhat, but I have not received a single reply from him. The only responses I have received are from

the very branch where my locker was burgled".

Hegde alleged that the modus operandi behind the lock theft could be that the miscreants had made duplicate keys of mostly dormant lockers with the help of some unscrupulous locksmiths as the banks already hold the 'master key' to all lockers.

While seeking stringent action is needed against all the offenders, Hegde said that banks must modernize security and surveillance systems. Bank customers deserve protection, not excuses.

Hegde said that he had approached the ombudsman of the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) for necessary action in the matter.

Tezpur University shutdown enters 6th day as proposal rejected

TONY DAS ■ Guwahati

The shutdown by students of Tezpur University in Assam entered its sixth day on Thursday over their demand for the removal of the vice-chancellor, while staffers of the varsity rejected Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma's proposal for the appointment of a pro VC.

State Congress president Gaurav Gogoi has also accused Sarma of "masking the failures" of current VC Shambhu Nath Singh by suggesting the appointment of a pro vice chancellor.

The students of the varsity have been protesting since mid-September for alleged corruption and financial irregularities, and have started the shutdown of all academic activities on the campus from November 29 for an indefinite period. A faculty member said the shutdown has been relaxed for departmental emergencies and pending work for a few hours in the morning for three days since Wednesday.



Sarma on Wednesday said he had spoken to Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan regarding the shutdown of Tezpur University and urged him to appoint a pro VC immediately, pending an impartial enquiry into the conduct of the present VC.

"The Tezpur University fraternity strongly rebuts the Assam chief minister's recent statement regarding the ongoing crisis on the campus. His suggestion to appoint a pro vice chancellor reflects a clear misunderstanding of the movement's

long-standing and repeatedly communicated demand: the urgent appointment of an acting vice chancellor," Tezpur University United Forum (TUUF) said in a statement late on Wednesday.

The ongoing agitation in the central varsity in Sonitpur district is being carried out under the aegis of the TUUF.

The forum also claimed that the university has been in "turmoil" for 76 days, and during the entire period, the chief minister "chose to remain silent".

"His sudden involvement

- only after the situation gained national attention - raises serious concern about whether he is acting out of genuine responsibility or political self-preservation," the TUUF questioned.

The chief minister "ignored the crisis for weeks" despite continuous protests, appeals and institutional paralysis, the forum alleged, adding that "leadership demands timely engagement, not last-minute statements".

"Our demands remain unchanged - immediate suspension of the current vice chancellor, pending enquiry, appointment of an acting vice chancellor — not a pro VC and publication of all inquiry reports already submitted to authorities," the TUUF added.

Gogoi has also expressed his 'disappointment' with the chief minister's stand on the issues.

"Real leadership would have meant that the chief minister would have stood with the faculty, staff and students of this prestigious uni-

versity. Instead, the chief minister is masking the failures of the current vice chancellor by suggesting a pro vice chancellor," he said in a post on X on Thursday.

Citing old news reports, Gogoi claimed that there were "enquiries about financial irregularities from the office of Principal Accountant General" during Singh's term as VC of Patna University in Bihar.

"It would be best that the prestige of Tezpur University should be paramount, and a new Vice Chancellor be appointed. Stop using the University of Northeast for posting controversial VCs," the Congress deputy leader in the Lok Sabha added.

All end-term examinations have been cancelled, and other activities have also stopped in the varsity.

The Tezpur University Teachers' Association (TUTA) and Tezpur University Non-Teaching Employees' Association (TUNTEA) have extended their support to the agitation.

BJP MLAs walk out of Himachal Assembly over alleged lathi charge on ABVP workers

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Dharamshala/Shimla

BJP legislators walked out of the Himachal Pradesh Assembly on Thursday in protest of the alleged lathi charge on ABVP workers near the Zorawar Stadium in Dharamshala.

Raising a point of order after the question hour, Leader of Opposition Jai Ram Thakur said the sub-divisional magistrate (SDM), Dharamshala, had granted permission to the Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad (ABVP) to organise the protest march to the Zorawar Stadium, yet the police resorted to lathi charge on the protesters.

He also accused the chief minister of misleading the House, saying Sukhu had earlier told the assembly that the ABVP had not been granted permission for the protest demonstration.

Several people were



Leader of Opposition in Himachal Pradesh Assembly Jai Ram Thakur speaking with the media during the Winter session of the State Assembly in Dharamshala on Thursday

injured following a scuffle between ABVP activists and the police at the Zorawar ground on Wednesday after workers of the RSS-affiliated students' organisation arrived in large numbers to gherao the Vidhan Sabha to press for their demands.

The ABVP workers alleged that women activists were

kicked by male police personnel and demanded action against the police, specifically the suspension of station house officer, Dharamshala, for taking the ABVP workers to a community hall after the protest, and allegedly threatening and thrashing them.

As per Chief Minister

soon announce my formal decision to float a new political party and will field candidates in all the districts I don't believe in blank fires I am saying this with enough confidence that the Muslim people of Bengal are disgusted with the TMC and its leadership they do not want to be exploited any more...My will be a truly secular party evenly represented by all the communities now we will show what we can do," Kabir who is likely to lay the foundation stone of his proposed Babri Mosque on December 6 said.

Meanwhile, Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Thursday said that there were some leaders who were in the payroll of the BJP and were trying to harm the secular ambience of the State. Though she would not name anyone she said, "we will not tolerate communalisation of politics by anyone or members of any community these people are being paid by the BJP to communally divide the voters" to make way for the saffron party.

Ruling BJP confronts its own bureaucracy in MP

GIRISH SHARMA ■ Bhopal

Ministers and BJP MLAs in Madhya Pradesh are preparing to open a coordinated front against what they describe as an increasingly unresponsive bureaucracy. They have decided to lodge a formal complaint with the chief minister, arguing that administrative resistance is now disrupting governance and weakening the authority of elected representatives.

The latest flashpoint surfaced at the Madhya Pradesh BJP headquarters, where two ministers are stationed each day under a new coordination mechanism meant to improve interaction with party workers. Minister of State for Housing and Urban Development Pratima Bagri, who handled the outreach on Thursday, said the arrangement helps workers raise issues directly with ministers. But she stressed that the core problem lies in the functioning of the bureaucracy.

Bagri said ministers and MLAs are routinely facing situations where officials ignore their calls or fail to act on instructions. This, she said, has slowed file movement, delayed constituency work and created unnecessary pressure on elected representatives. Bagri also noted that she had recently raised a similar concern during a cabinet meeting, stating that officials "do not listen to ministers," a remark that drew attention to a widening internal governance rift.

The decision to approach the chief minister comes after months of complaints from lawmakers across regions. MLAs from Malwa, Bundelkhand, Gwalior-Chambal and tribal districts report a growing pattern of



administrative officers taking unilateral decisions without political consultation. Many say district-level functioning has become excessively rigid, with approvals and clearances moving at a pace far slower than what developmental targets require.

This strain comes at a critical time. Madhya Pradesh is entering a heavy implementation cycle for infrastructure, urban development, agriculture-linked interventions and welfare expansions for 2025-26. Any breakdown in coordination between the political leadership and the administrative machinery risks delaying flagship projects and weakening service delivery in high-need areas.

Public frustration mirrors these concerns. Citizens in several districts report long delays in land records, housing approvals, ration updates, pension processing and municipal permissions. In many cases, appeals routed through MLAs or ministers have failed to accelerate action, strengthening the perception that bureaucracy — not elected representatives — is controlling governance outcomes.

The emerging confrontation has triggered internal debate within the ruling BJP. Senior leaders argue that democratic accountability must guide administrative behaviour, not the other way around.

Sukhwinder Singh Sukhu's statement on Wednesday, one male and three female police constables were injured in the scuffle and six people were injured due to the agitation.

During the protest, ABVP workers also misbehaved with a female constable, which the Government has taken seriously, he said.

The leader of opposition also raised the issue of Youth Congress workers burning and kicking an effigy of Prime Minister Narendra Modi outside the Raj Bhavan earlier in November.

Terming the incident as unfortunate, he questioned whether the authorities had taken any action against the Youth Congress workers responsible for this.

He then said the BJP legislative party was walking out of the House in protest of the lathi charge on the ABVP activists.

Editor's
TAKE

Putin visit: Reaffirming
Indo-Russian solidarity

Russian President's visit carries significance beyond ceremony, reinforcing India's strategic autonomy and its pursuit of an independent foreign policy

India and Russia have been friends since the cold war days when India refused to join the western bloc and charted its Non-aligned course. It came at its own peril as the US sided with Pakistan and was suspicious of India's intention. But the gamble paid off as India maintained its independent foreign policy without budging to the US pressure. Russia supported it in the times of crisis and the friendship endured.

In the present context too, this holds good as India has refused to bow to the US pressure and maintained steady relation with Russia. Russian President Vladimir Putin's state visit to New Delhi will go a long way in cementing this relationship as both countries need each other than ever before. For India, the visit is far more than a diplomatic formality. It is a reaffirmation of a long-standing partnership, a signal of continuity in a turbulent world, and above all, a clear articulation of India's strategic autonomy at a time when Western world continue to frown upon India's import of discounted Russian oil. The visit is packed with symbolism and substance – from a ceremonial welcome at Rashtrapati Bhavan to paying homage at Raj Ghat, and from restricted talks at Hyderabad House to the annual India-Russia Summit, every segment reflects the depth of a relationship that has withstood vagaries of time and pressure from external actors.

This is also an occasion for balancing a heavily skewed trade basket. Although bilateral trade touched \$68 billion last year, driven largely by India's purchase of Russian oil, India's exports amounted to less than \$5 billion. The business forum organised jointly by FICCI and Roscongress was therefore crucial. Defence cooperation, traditionally the bedrock of the partnership, is set to deepen further following the visit. Just ahead of the visit, the Russian Duma ratified the Reciprocal Exchange of Logistics Agreement (RELOS), which will facilitate the movement and support of warships, military aircraft, and personnel to India. Modeled on India's Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement (LEMOA) with the US, Reciprocal Exchange of Logistics (RELOS) with Russia represents a modernisation of the defence relationship, enabling more joint exercises, humanitarian missions, and interoperability. Ongoing discussions over the supply of S-400 systems, Su-57 aircraft, and small modular nuclear reactors further underline Russia's continuing relevance to India's military and energy security architecture.

Besides, the geopolitical context of the visit cannot be ignored. Since the Ukraine conflict began, India has faced sustained pressure from Western countries to reduce its economic and strategic engagement with Moscow. Yet New Delhi has resisted these demands, choosing instead to prioritise its national interest. Putin's visit, therefore, is a reminder that India's foreign policy is shaped neither by the US pressure nor by ideological factors but by its national interest. With agreements spanning trade, agriculture, defence, academia, and media – one message stands out: the India-Russia relationship is evolving and is here to stay.



PRAFULL
GORADIA

Lately, Shri Mohan Bhagwat, RSS chief, has been speaking with renewed urgency about the unity of India. His concerns are not new. In truth, questions about the cohesion of the subcontinent have echoed since the passing of Akbar. During his nearly half-century rule, Akbar ensured that the people of northern India - and indeed their very souls – breathed in a common rhythm. The south, though geographically distant, shared a civilisational bond that had endured for centuries. Yet since the end of the 12th century, this bond was never fully spontaneous. Every ruler who ascended the throne of Delhi, including the remarkable Razia Sultan, was quietly scrutinised with a single question: is this monarch a sovereign first and a Muslim second – or the other way round?

Akbar was exceptional precisely because he answered this question with unusual clarity. For him, kingship was not a secondary identity – it was the first and the last. His life offered little room for confusion. At just thirteen, he found himself in the storm of the Second Battle of Panipat.

Over the next five years, as he consolidated his power, he thought deeply about the nature of his rule. He realised that he was destined to govern an empire in which nearly 97 per cent of his subjects were Hindu. His long-term success required not merely their obedience but their goodwill. This did not mean antagonising Muslims, but it certainly meant displeasing an orthodox clergy that envisioned the empire under the Nizam-e-Mustafa, where political authority followed religious guidance. Akbar chose a different path – one that placed the stability of the realm above sectarian demands.

Most rulers of the Delhi Sultanate and later the Mughal Empire, however, presided over a realm that resembled what Tipu Sultan would later proudly call a “religious state.” The consequence was a deep and often painful divide: rulers and their beneficiaries stood on one side, while the vast Hindu populace remained on the other.

Hindus were routinely called kafir – a term denoting a non-believer, but one that soon came to be understood as an insult in daily life. They were tolerated as taxpayers, artisans and the economic backbone of the empire. For military service, they were summoned when necessary, but rarely trusted with command. A sense of distance persisted, even when peace prevailed.

In medieval India, ideas such as “the souls of all citizens breathing together” to define nationality had not yet been articulated; such expressions would arise much later in Europe.

India’s civilisational cohesion

What emerges from this long arc of history is a simple truth: India’s unity has never rested on sameness, but on a civilisational ethos that embraces plurality while sustaining a shared rhythm of life



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DURING HIS VISIT
TO THE UNITED
STATES, CHOSE TO
USE THE TERMS
“VEDANTA” AND
“VEDANTISM”

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The Pioneer

Yet India had its own notion of unity - dosti ki ekta, the harmony of friendship and coexistence. This unity was not spoken of daily, but it revealed itself in moments of crisis: in the long turmoil of Kashmir, or even in the occasional tensions in Tamil Nadu that could reverberate across the subcontinent. Indians instinctively sensed that unity was not a poetic abstraction but a lived necessity.

The trauma of 1947 was the most severe test of this idea of unity. One-third of the country broke away to follow Mr Jinnah's vision. Yet within twenty-four years, in 1971, more than half of Pakistan rejected that very vision, abandoning the dream of a “New Medina.”

The episode demonstrated that religious identity alone cannot hold a country together. What many in the subcontinent failed to grasp – then or now – is that Hinduism, with its inductive, voluntary and internally diverse nature, forms a deeper and more enduring basis for unity than a rigid, prescriptive ideology.

The Hindu ethos, often described simply as “culture”, has historically fostered an implicit unity across India's immense diversity. One example is the idea of karma.

A Hindu is taught to believe that one's circumstances are shaped by one's own past actions. Whether or not one remembers the details of past lives, the underlying philosophy encourages introspection rather than blame. A Hindu tends to hold oneself responsible for adversity, instead of attributing calamity to

others or to the state. This worldview, for centuries, prevented large-scale politicisation of suffering. Had the population of western Pakistan embraced such a view, its violent break from its eastern wing might have unfolded very differently.

The greatest virtue of Hinduism is that it is rarely against anyone. Precisely for this reason, Swami Vivekananda, during his visit to the United States, chose to use the terms “Vedanta” and “Vedantism.” He wanted to make it clear that Hinduism was not a negation of other faiths but a vast philosophical tradition.

Significantly, India has never witnessed a Hindu-Christian riot, even in regions like Nagercoil where conversions have been widespread. Scuffles may have occurred, but not large-scale communal violence. The more frequent historical clashes were between Hindus and Muslims, often triggered by anxieties nurtured by sections of the clergy. From time to time, religious leaders warned their communities that a relaxed attitude might allow Hindus to grow complacent – or even to grow in number. Partition, however, dramatically reduced the political potency of this rhetoric.

Across these centuries, one truth has quietly endured: the unity of India does not rest on uniformity of religion, language or ethnicity. It rests on a civilisational ethos – rooted in Hindu thought yet open to all – that absorbs difference without erasing it. Akbar sensed this. Modern India, too, must remember it.

Gen Z inspires carefree living and confidence



ASHA IYER
KUMAR

2ND OPINION
THE PIONEER

Pushing into the second half of my fifties can feel like either a renaissance after a lifetime of plodding or a slow slide into becoming a relic condemned to decrepitude. For me, navigating this terrain has taken an unexpected turn. I now find myself looking up to a generation many decades younger, with equal measures of wariness and admiration. Gen Z has me quite jazzed these days. There is something about them that intrigues me, even drawing me to emulate certain aspects of their disposition.

The criticisms laid against them by older generations are plentiful. The cavernous gap that exists between them and us manifests in many ways. There is a mutual 'sus' that pervades our interactions, and their presence invariably makes me feel like I lack the 'rizz'. Like many in my generation, I

too have had qualms about the way they conduct the business of life, but I now wonder if their new ways are being misunderstood and dismissed by us rather too quickly.

Gen Z has grown up in a world that demands constant self-presentation on social media, in academics, in job markets, and in every space they inhabit. They don't have it easy anywhere. Confidence, for them, is not vanity; it is a survival skill. Even when they're unsure, they must sound sure. Older generations mistake that certitude for arrogance. That very conviction mirrors back the diffidence I carried through my youth, even in a world far less competitive than theirs. I envy the self-assurance they possess. I wish I could borrow a fragment of it now, to keep myself afloat in a world that seems to be in rush hour all day.

There are traits that mark them as products of a modern age to which we are somewhat alien. Yet they get several things right-skills that help them navigate life with striking ease. They do not glorify suffering and are unapologetic about setting boundaries. They keep toxicity at bay and walk away from manipulation without hesitation. You cannot arm-twist them; they know better. I find this deeply admirable. Gen Z has no desire to appear perfect. They are cavalier in their ways and do not take critics too seriously. Their humour and candour often mask a quiet sensitivity to self-worth. They care about how they are

treated and cannot tolerate dismissal, even if it sometimes reads as haughtiness. They are less apologetic about who they are and what they want from life. It is an attitude I often wish to emulate, for remaining unbothered when judgement flies in your face is a rare liberation. There is also a breeziness in how they handle personal affairs. Permanent relationships are not assumed. They enter them knowing endings are possible. They invest, but do not chain themselves. They prioritise emotional safety over emotional endurance. They avoid deriving identity solely from relationships and steer clear of over-sentimentality. Their low-intensity connections do not break them when they end; they simply move on, letting bygones be bygones. This is not detachment but self-preservation-a clarity that helps them distinguish between being kind and being merely nice. They are not frivolous; they are cautious and self-loving. Yes, they have traits old-schoolers may disapprove of, but they also possess a knack for making the most of whatever life offers-lemons or laughter. They show me how to live with more ease, openness and a dash of flair. One day, when I am ready, I will take a leaf from the Gen Z scrapbook and learn to be carefree.

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

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Ignoring soil pollution costs lives

Soil pollution has not received adequate attention. Land degradation inevitably leads to soil contamination, and chemicals released through industrial and agricultural activities are the primary culprits. Untreated waste and wastewater have already destroyed thousands of species of fish, birds, plants and other organisms. Although soil has the natural ability to filter contaminants, it can do so only to a limited extent. Remaining pollutants may seep into the atmosphere, contributing to air pollution, or into water bodies, compounding water pollution. Direct human contact with contaminated soil is also a serious possibility. As more than ninety per cent of food comes from soil, its conservation is vital for the ecological chain.

The crippling effects of soil pollution-including congenital disorders, infectious diseases and non-communicable illnesses such as cancer – have alerted health professionals to its dangers. Environmental scientists possess various remedies, such as surface leaching, bioremediation, thermal remediation, mycoremediation and phytoremediation. Nonetheless, on World Soil Day, observed on December 5, the responsibilities of individuals in preventing and eliminating soil pollution cannot be overstated.

GANAPATHI BHAT | AKOLA

Internship scheme fails to deliver

The Centre's ambitious Prime Minister's Internship Scheme has failed to attract the majority of unemployed youth, as confirmed by official data submitted to Parliament.

Harsh Malhotra, Minister of State for Corporate Affairs, informed the Lok Sabha that only 33,300 young people accepted internships during the first two rounds, of whom 6,618 dropped out midway. Companies offered 82,000 internships in the first phase and 83,000 in the second. It is worth noting that the government launched this scheme with great fanfare during the last Lok Sabha elections.

Interns were promised a one-time payment of ₹6,000 and a monthly allowance of ₹5,000 for twelve months. The government also claimed that the initiative would train ten million young people over five years, making them more employable.

The first two years' outcomes are plainly disappointing, as such superficial measures cannot address the unemployment crisis. What is needed is a fundamental shift in economic thinking, with sustained investment in the real economy and human development. Without tackling these structural issues, the government's assurances offer little substance.

ABHIJIT ROY | JAMSHEDPUR

Justice cannot be negotiated away

The recent ruling in the Sandesara case raises troubling questions about the state of our criminal justice system. Allowing fugitives to return, repay a negotiated amount and see multiple criminal proceedings erased may strengthen bank books, but it does little to strengthen public confidence.

What message does this deliver to those who have complied with the law? Banks are forced to absorb significant losses, enforcement agencies are left adrift midway through their efforts, and the perception grows that financial crime can be bargained away if one can produce a sufficiently large cheque. Even more concerning is the possibility that other absconders may now attempt similar "settlements", further straining an already burdened system.

A justice system must impose consequences for wrongdoing, not merely attach a price tag to it. Without transparent findings, proportionate penalties and a firm commitment to prosecute where culpability is clear, such outcomes risk becoming blueprints for evasion rather than models of resolution. Judicial leniency is admirable, but when it eclipses criminal responsibility, it weakens the very rule of law it is meant to uphold.

GOPALASWAMY J | CHENNAI

PIC TALK

Hands that pick the world's favourite morning brew. In Assam's Nagaon district, a tea worker continues a craft handed down through generations.

PHOTO: PTI

DIGITAL EXPERIENCE

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RUSSIA TWISTS PEACE EFFORTS TO
SUSTAIN ITS IMPERIAL AMBITIONS

Russia is clearly toying with peace efforts from the West and elsewhere. Behind this lies a layered blend of strategy, politics and narrative shaping. Its core instinct remains geopolitical: Moscow views control over its neighbourhood as essential strategic depth, making any concession in Ukraine a setback rather than a diplomatic trade-off.

This outlook is further strengthened by domestic politics. The war has evolved into a tool for regime consolidation and political control at home. Economic adaptation has also inured Russia to sanctions that were expected to bite much harder.

Energy reorientation towards Asia, deeper strategic ties with China and the creation of alternative supply chains have

significantly reduced the pressure on Moscow to negotiate.

Russia now believes that time favours its attritional strategy. Incremental territorial gains, fortified defensive lines and the perception of gradual advantage leave it with little incentive to alter course. China's quiet but steady support helps dilute its sense of international isolation.

At the same time, Western inconsistency, political shifts in Washington, wavering European unity and growing public fatigue reinforce the Kremlin's ideological framing.

The conflict is portrayed as a civilisational resistance to Western intrusion. For Moscow, peace has become a tactical convenience-no longer a strategic objective.

R NARAYANAN | MUMBAI

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

The lost art of ethical rule: Revisiting Milinda’s inquiry

Democracy today resembles a circus, where rulers mistake spectacle for statesmanship and genuine governance remains elusive. Anarchist thought is misread as disorder, Buddhist nations drift from ethical foundations, and corruption corrodes institutions. In this vacuum, the Milinda Pañha offers a rare philosophical corrective and moral compass

FIRST
Column



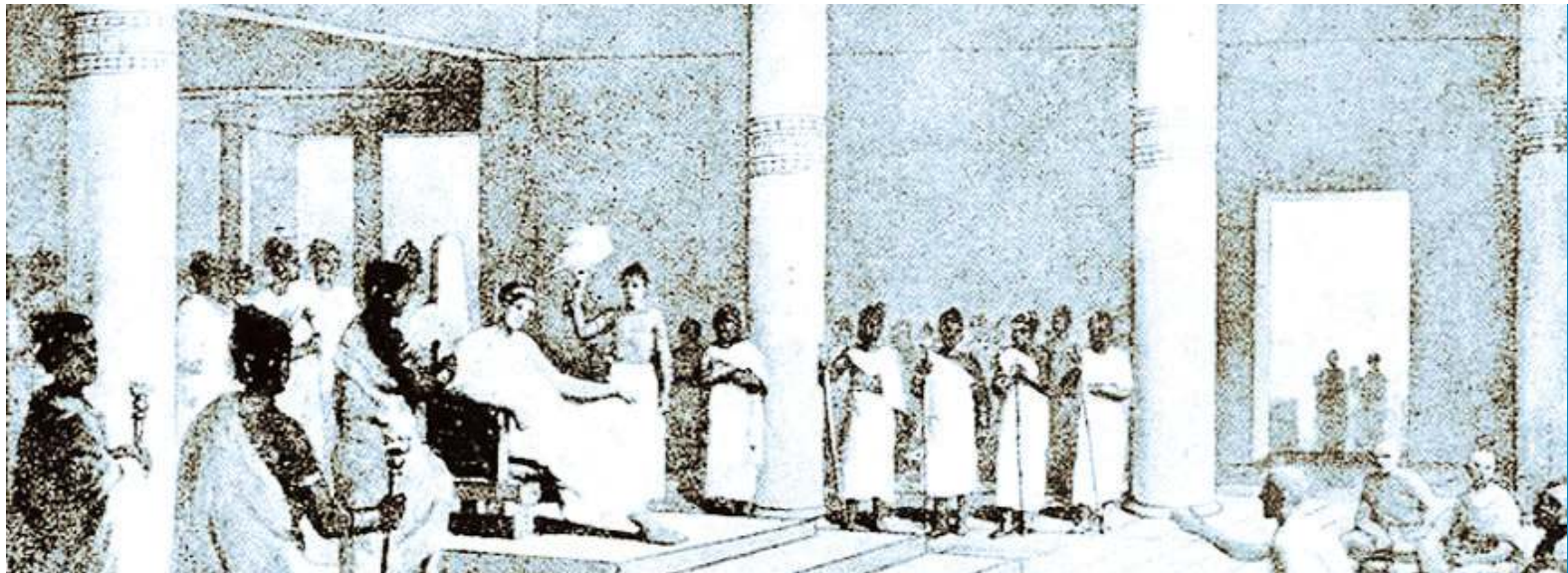
NILANTHA
ILANGAMUWA

Most of the time, what we see in modern rulers is reminiscent of a Turkish proverb: when a clown enters a palace, he imagines he will become a king, but the palace instead turns into a circus. Democracy is ironically crumbling, yet a new form of governance has not yet emerged. The most pragmatic governance, as outlined in anarchist thought, has been grievously distorted, and the popular conception now equates anarchism with violence and disorder. However, seminal texts and contemporary interpretations by thinkers such as Noam Chomsky reaffirm that anarchism, properly understood, offers mechanisms to dismantle structural inequalities and bureaucratic apathy, enabling participatory and decentralised decision-making. Yet the gestation of a new paradigm of governance inevitably exceeds the temporality we anticipate, and perhaps only in the coming decades might an unprecedented, universal mode of administration take shape.

Meanwhile, it is lamentable to observe what has transpired in nations nominally anchored in Buddhist principles. Presently, most Buddhist-majority countries suffer from extreme corruption, with political systems that have ossified into nearly irreparable constructs. Leaders no longer trust monastic institutions; temples have transformed into quasi-financial conglomerates sustaining the ostentatious lifestyles of monks.

The ethical substratum the Buddha enjoined — equanimity, compassion and selfless service — has largely vanished. As Aravind Adiga remarks in his novel *The White Tiger*, if the Buddha were to witness the contemporary state of his religious progeny, he would depart immediately without a backward glance. Societies that once pursued ethical coherence and dharmic governance have now become distorted caricatures of their philosophical ideals.

It is precisely here that the *Milinda Pañha* provides an intellectual corrective, a text of extraordinary lucidity and profundity which, while ostensibly a religious-philosophical dialogue, contains the kernel of a gover-



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MILINDA PAÑHA

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nance ethos that modern rulers might desperately need. The text chronicles the engagement between King Menander I, the Indo-Greek sovereign remembered in Buddhist tradition as Milinda, and the venerable monk Nagasena. Menander, who reigned c. 165-130 BCE, roughly a century after Emperor Ashoka, presided over a geographically modest realm encompassing parts of north-western India and Afghanistan. Unlike Ashoka, whose Mauryan empire was vast and centrally administered, Menander ruled a fragmented polity more reflective of Hellenistic city-state governance. His coins, with Greek inscriptions and iconography fused with Indian motifs, and surviving inscriptions attest to a sovereign both culturally syncretic and administratively shrewd. While no extant source suggests he learned directly from Ashoka, the philosophical and religious atmosphere shaped by Ashoka's dissemination of Buddhism undoubtedly influenced the intellectual milieu Menander inhabited. The *Milinda Pañha* thus enshrines a historic cross-cultural encounter: a Hellenistic king engaging rigorously with Indian philosophical traditions, adopting an epistemological humility and openness that modern rulers conspicuously lack.

The dialogues themselves exemplify a method of inquiry that parallels the Socratic and Platonic traditions. Milinda's questions are probing, sometimes sceptical, at times provocative, much like

Plato's interlocutors in *The Republic* or Meno. Nagasena responds with meticulous reasoning, often employing analogies such as the chariot, the rope and snake, the river and the lamp. Consider the famous opening exchange: "Venerable sir, what is your name?" asks Milinda. Nagasena replies, "I am called Nagasena, Majesty. But this is only a name, a designation, a convenient expression. In the ultimate sense, there is no Nagasena here." When Milinda presses, "How can you say there is no Nagasena? Are your robes Nagasena is your bowl Nagasena? Is your body Nagasena Is your mind Nagasena?" Nagasena elucidates, "No, Majesty. None of these is Nagasena. Yet because all these parts occur together, people use the name 'Nagasena', just as one speaks of a chariot, though no single piece is the chariot." The sophistication of this method, rooted in Buddhist epistemology and the doctrine of impermanence, mirrors the Socratic elenchus, where a proposition is deconstructed through critical questioning and dialectical reasoning.

The Pioneer
SINCE 1865

What makes this dialogue extraordinary for contemporary governance is that it instantiates an ethos of disciplined inquiry and ethical reflection that is evidently absent in today's political apparatus. Milinda's probing mirrors the inquisitiveness that should guide a state's executive: questions not merely about power or prestige but about the self, ethical action and the consequences of policy. The text

repeatedly foregrounds the impermanence and interdependence of phenomena, as exemplified in Nagasena's extended metaphors: "A fruit tree does not bear fruit the moment you plant it; it must mature. In the same way, karma ripens when conditions are right." Here, the philosophical principle of conditionality offers a remarkable lesson for policymakers: outcomes depend on the interplay of multiple variables, and rash or short-sighted interventions invariably yield unintended consequences.

Historically, Menander's engagement with Buddhist philosophy was not mere ornamentation; it influenced his governance ethos. While his kingdom remained smaller than Ashoka's, it displayed a striking pragmatism intertwined with ethical deliberation, a feature reinforced in the *Milinda Pañha*. By contrast, modern Buddhist-majority nations frequently conflate religiosity with ceremonial display or institutional patronage rather than ethical governance. The erosion of dharmic principles is compounded by excessive bureaucratisation, monetisation of monastic institutions and prioritisation of personal or party gain over collective welfare. A Milinda-inspired polity would not conflate the symbolic with the substantive; it would foreground reflective engagement with moral and structural consequences.

Interestingly, the questioning method in the *Milinda Pañha* is anticipated in earlier Buddhist texts such as the *Kalama Sutta*, wherein the Buddha exhorts practitioners not to rely on tradition, hearsay

or authority alone, but to test teachings through reasoned analysis and direct experience. "Do not go upon what has been acquired by repeated hearing; nor upon tradition; nor upon rumour; nor upon what is in a scripture," the Buddha advises, encouraging a culture of scrutiny and empirical ethical reasoning. This same epistemological rigour underpins Nagasena's dialogues: the king is urged not merely to accept Buddhist doctrine but to interrogate it until understanding is internalised. In contemporary governance, such a principle is strikingly absent; policy decisions are rarely subjected to sustained dialectical examination or reflective critique, and when they are, incentives for superficial compliance often outweigh those for substantive analysis.

The parallels with Greek philosophical methodology deepen here. Socrates, in the Platonic dialogues, similarly interrogates interlocutors to reveal inconsistencies in their understanding of justice, virtue and knowledge. Menander, although a foreign king in a non-Greek land, essentially embodies a Hellenistic inquirer transported into the Buddhist epistemological universe. In both traditions, authority is decoupled from truth: the king's power or the interlocutor's status does not confer correctness. This detachment is precisely what is missing in today's political spheres, where charisma or inherited office substitutes for reflective ethical reasoning, and where institutional and religious oversight often becomes perfunctory or complicit. Moreover, the *Milinda Pañha* demonstrates that inquiry is inseparable from ethical imagination. Questions about the self, impermanence and moral causality are not abstract; they carry direct implications for governance. Policies enacted without such reflection are analogous to rulers attempting to drive a chariot without understanding its wheels or axles: the structure may move, but direction and integrity are compromised. Modern Buddhist-majority nations, by ignoring this model, have allowed corruption, patronage networks and institutional sclerosis to metastasise. Practically, this has meant temples act as financial hubs, civic oversight is subordinated to political expediency, and the teachings of the Buddha are commodified into ritualised spectacle, divorced from ethical praxis. Without the missing links of Milinda's wisdom, can modern Buddhist rulers ever move beyond a hollow performance?

Tackling Delhi’s air pollution: A Systems problem demanding a systemic reform



PRAVIN
KAUSHAL

Each winter, Delhi descends into its now-familiar public health emergency. As temperatures fall and winds weaken, a heavy grey blanket settles over the NCR, pushing daily life into crisis mode — schools shut, construction halts, and citizens track AQI readings as routinely as the time of day. Yet this seasonal panic obscures a deeper truth: Delhi's pollution is not a winter anomaly but a year-round structural failure. Meteorology merely exposes what governance has failed to fix.

Having worked within the Delhi government ecosystem and now leading a data and AI centre, it is clear to me that the science of the problem and the strategy of our response remain misaligned. To move beyond temporary relief, the capital needs systems-level interventions that tackle the roots of emissions - not only their winter manifestations.

A Misdiagnosed Crisis

Much of the public discourse reduces Delhi's air problem to a single culprit: stubble burning in Punjab and Haryana. There is truth in this - data from the Ministry of Earth Sciences' Decision Support System shows that during peak episodes, crop-residue fires can contribute up to one-fourth of Delhi's PM2.5 load. But this is only a part of a much broader emissions landscape. The more uncomfortable reality is that the pollutants choking Delhi in winter are present all year. What changes in October and November is the atmosphere: cold air sinks, moisture captures particulates, and stagnation prevents dispersion. Vehicles, industries, waste burning and construction dust continue producing the same pollutants in summer and monsoon — but winter's inversion conditions magnify their impact. This is why emergency measures such as smog guns, cloud seeding or the hasty implementation of the Graded Response Action Plan (GRAP) offer limited relief. They treat symptoms, not the disease.

The GRAP Paradox

GRAP was designed as a last-mile emergency protocol, not a primary strategy. Its annual invocation signals a governance gap: if the baseline emissions were lower, winter conditions would not plunge Delhi into the "severe" category so

quickly. Even when fully implemented, GRAP yields only marginal improvements. Halting truck entry or shutting schools disrupts daily life but barely shifts average air quality because the underlying emission load remains unchanged. GRAP is, at best, a tourniquet - useful during haemorrhage, but not a substitute for long-term treatment. The real work must focus on three structural sectors: mobility, industry and waste.

1. Mobility: Move People, Not Cars
Vehicles remain among the largest contributors to Delhi's internal PM2.5 load. The adoption of BS-VI fuel — reducing sulphur content dramatically — was a significant achievement. But the gains are being cancelled out by sheer volume: Delhi registers nearly 2,000 new vehicles daily, a figure that overwhelms any technological improvement. A transformative mobility strategy must include:

Fleet Replacement: A targeted, time-bound scrappage and replacement programme is essential — particularly for ageing commercial vehicles, which are big emitters. Incentivising transitions to electric, CNG or compliant engines is far more effective than periodic bans.

Public Transport Revitalisation: No city can fight pollution while expanding private vehicle dependence. Delhi's public transport — buses, metro, last-mile services - needs capacity expansion, better frequency and integration. The policy focus must shift from "restricting cars" to "enabling people to not need cars".

2. An Economics Problem
A persistent misconception is that Delhi has minimal industrial activity. In reality, the NCR's industrial belt — Ghaziabad, Faridabad, Gurugram, Bhiwadi - burns large volumes of dirty fuel. The barrier to clean energy adoption is economic, not technological. Natural gas, the cleaner alternative, becomes prohibitively expensive due to high taxation outside the GST regime. As long as dirty fuels remain cheaper, compliance will remain sporadic. Bringing natural gas under GST would be one of the most impactful policy reforms for clean air. By aligning economic incentives with environmental goals, industry will transition voluntarily instead of under coercion.

3. The Missing Scale
Crop burning persists not because farmers prefer it, but because alternatives lack the scale, infrastructure or economic reward. Technologies exist — baling, in-situ decomposition, biogasification, ethanol production - but deployment remains fragmented. Similarly, within Delhi, waste burning often continues because segregation at source remains inconsistent. Landfills routinely smoulder, and municipal systems struggle with volume.

Addressing this requires:

- Assured procurement and incentives for biomass-based fuels,
- Statewide logistics for residue collection and

processing.

- Strict enforcement coupled with community-level waste segregation,
- Modern waste-to-energy and composting capacity.

Without addressing biomass and municipal waste, Delhi cannot sustainably lower its particulate load.

Lessons from Beijing

Cities like Beijing demonstrate that clean air is not an impossible aspiration. Their gains did not come from symbolic measures but from structural transitions:

- Shifting industries from coal to natural gas
- Phasing out old vehicles through aggressive scrappage schemes,
- Managing construction and road dust with strict, technology-driven enforcement,
- Creating a unified regional governance

A Systems Approach

Pollution in Delhi is not a local issue; it is a regional systems problem involving meteorology, agriculture, mobility, fuel economics and governance architecture. Solutions must therefore be structural and coordinated, not reactive.

A sustainable roadmap should include:

- A regional clean-air council integrating Delhi, Punjab, Haryana, UP and Rajasthan for unified action,
- Adaptive agricultural policies responsive to meteorological forecasts and residue-management capacity,
- Year-round mobility reforms prioritising public transport and fleet renewal,
- GST reform for clean fuels, enabling industries to switch affordably,
- Community-level participation supported by micro-monitoring and transparency dashboards.

When policy, science and public will align, Delhi's air can improve dramatically - just as other global megacities have shown.

The Path Ahead
Delhi's pollution crisis is often portrayed as inevitable. It is not. It is the result of fragmented planning, delayed decisions and reactive governance. But just as the smog reveals the consequences of inaction, it also reveals a path forward. Clean air is not a seasonal aspiration - it is a constitutional right and a collective responsibility. The transition demands structural honesty, regional cooperation and a willingness to move to systemic reform. India has the knowledge, the institutions and the civic energy to achieve this. What remains is the resolve to treat clean air not as an annual headline, but as a national mission.

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Reclaiming India’s role as a global education hub

VK PAUL,
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India carries a formidable legacy as the cradle of ancient knowledge systems and universities such as Takshashila, Nalanda, Vallabhi, Vikramshila and Odantapuri. For millennia, it has sustained multidisciplinary higher learning that reached far beyond the subcontinent. Today, the global skills and talent landscape is being reshaped at a dramatic pace. This moment offers India an opportunity to reclaim its heritage as a civilisational educator and position its higher education institutions as global hubs of knowledge, research and innovation in the 21st century.

Over the last seventy-five years, India's higher education system has expanded enormously. With the launch of the National Education Policy 2020, the country has taken a decisive step towards future readiness by identifying the internationalisation of higher education especially "internationalisation at home" — as a key driver of systemic transformation. An overwhelming 97 per cent of Indian students study in Indian institutions.

They will form the backbone of India's workforce and contribute to the global talent pool as well. Ensuring that their academic experience meets world-class standards is therefore not just a matter of educational quality but of national competitiveness. Yet, a sharp disparity persists in student mobility. Outbound student numbers have surged, with more than 13.35 lakh Indians studying abroad in 2024, predominantly in Anglophone destinations such as Canada, the United States, the United Kingdom and Australia. In contrast, India hosted only about 47,000 foreign students in 2022, nearly a third of them from Nepal. For every international student studying in India, approximately twenty-eight Indian students are enrolled abroad. This is despite regulatory provisions that allow supernumerary seats for international students and a variety of scholarships to support their education in India. The imbalance underscores both the challenge of retaining talent within the country and the difficulty of positioning India as an attractive host destination.

Several forces continue to push Indian students overseas: the appeal of immersive international exposure, the lure of post-study work opportunities and the perception of higher academic quality abroad. The financial implications of this trend are significant. Indian families spend between US\$47-70 billion annually equivalent to ₹3.8-6 lakh crore on overseas education in tuition fees and living expenses alone. This outflow is estimated to be eight to twelve times the central government's higher education budget. Addressing this imbalance makes internationalisation at home not merely desirable but necessary, both

for fiscal prudence and systemic strengthening.

Recognising this urgency, India has initiated several major reforms in recent years. The establishment of the IFSCA GIFT City framework in 2022 and the UGC's regulatory framework in 2023 paved the way for international universities to enter India. Deakin University and the University of Wollongong became the first foreign institutions to start operations in GIFT City. The University of Southampton set up the first international branch campus in Gurugram, and several more including the University of Liverpool, University of York, University of Aberdeen, University of Western Australia, Illinois Institute of Technology and Istituto Europeo di Design — have announced plans to launch campuses in Bengaluru and Navi Mumbai's emerging International Education City.

The National Forensic Sciences University opened a campus in Jinja, Uganda, in 2023. IIT Madras and IIT Delhi have launched campuses in Zanzibar and Abu Dhabi, while IIM Ahmedabad has established a presence in Dubai and IIT Bombay in Sendai, Japan. Joint, dual and twinning degree programmes are now possible through collaborations between Indian and foreign universities, and the newly notified Equivalence Regulations 2025 offer clarity on recognising foreign qualifications. For India to evolve into a genuine global education destination, it must strengthen the larger ecosystem. This requires world-class infrastructure, cutting-edge research ecosystems, globally competitive curricula and the ability to attract and retain top faculty, including members of the Indian diaspora.

Regulatory processes — from visa facilitation to qualification recognition — must be simplified, and internship opportunities for international students must become more accessible. India must also strategically fund international research collaborations, global teaching exchanges and faculty mobility to ensure sustained knowledge flows. Equally important is a strong branding and outreach strategy that communicates India's distinctive academic strengths and showcases the achievements of global alumni who studied at Indian institutions. Tailored academic offerings — whether STEM and Bharatiya Gyan Parampar programmes for Western learners or specialised courses in agriculture, healthcare, education and digital finance for African students — can help India address diverse global needs. Looking ahead, India must aim to triple inbound international student enrolment to at least 1.5 lakh by 2030. With the right systemic reforms, regulatory coherence and institutional strategies, India has both the heritage and the capability to re-emerge as a global centre of learning well before 2047.

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FROM THE WORLD

CHILE

Phones in schools banned

Chile has passed a bill outlawing the use of mobile phones and other smart devices during classes at elementary and middle schools. The new law will take effect next year, making Chile the latest country to restrict smartphone use among young students to reduce its harmful effects and curb classroom distractions. Other nations with various levels of restrictions on smartphone use at schools include France, Brazil, Hungary, the Netherlands and China. "We are advancing a cultural change for children and adolescents who today, more than ever, need to see each other's faces again, socialise during recess, and regain concentration to further boost learning," Education Minister Nicolás Cataldo wrote on social media after the decision.

PAKISTAN

Afghan militant killed in raid

Security forces on Thursday killed an Afghan militant belonging to the banned Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan in northwestern Pakistan's restive Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, police said. The deceased militant was killed in an intelligence-based operation carried out in the Loi Mamond area of Bajaur district of the province, an official added. According to the security sources, the militant was an Afghan national belonging to Afghanistan's Nangarhar province and was involved in many disruptive activities in Bajaur. Pakistan continues to reel under terrorism with a surge of 25 per cent terror incidents in 2025 compared to the previous year, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa being the worst hit province, according to a report by Islamabad-based Centre for Research and Security Studies on Wednesday.

Putin rejects key US proposal on Ukraine

ASSOCIATED PRESS
■ Moscow

Russian President Vladimir Putin says some proposals in a US plan to end the war in Ukraine are unacceptable to the Kremlin, indicating in comments published Thursday that any deal is still some ways off.

US President Donald Trump has set in motion the most intense diplomatic push to stop the fighting since Russia launched the full-scale invasion of its neighbour nearly four years ago. But the effort has once again run into demands that are hard to reconcile, especially over whether Ukraine must give up land to Russia and how it can be kept safe from any future aggression by Moscow.

Trump's special envoy, Steve Witkoff, and son-in-law Jared Kushner are set to meet with Ukraine's lead negotiator, Rustem Umerov, later Thursday in Miami for further talks, according to a senior Trump administration official who wasn't authorised to comment publicly and spoke on condition of anonymity.

Putin said his five-hour talks Tuesday in the Kremlin with Witkoff and Kushner were "necessary" and "useful," but also "difficult work," and some proposals were unacceptable.

Putin spoke to the India Today TV channel before visiting New Delhi on Thursday. Before the full interview was broadcast, Russian state news agencies Tass and RIA Novosti quoted some of his remarks in it. Tass quoted Putin as saying



that in Tuesday's talks, the sides "had to go through each point" of the US peace proposal, "which is why it took so long."

"This was a necessary conversation, a very concrete one," he said, with provisions that Moscow was ready to discuss, while others "we can't agree to."

Trump said Wednesday that Witkoff and Kushner came away from their marathon session confident that he wants to find an end to the war. "Their impression was very strongly that he'd like to make a deal," he added. Putin refused to elaborate on what Russia could accept or reject, and none of the other officials involved

offered details of the talks. "I think it is premature. Because it could simply disrupt the working regime of the peace effort, Tass quoted Putin as saying.

European leaders, left on the sidelines by Washington as US officials engage directly with Moscow and Kyiv, have accused Putin of feigning interest in Trump's peace drive. Russian barages of civilian areas of Ukraine continued overnight into Thursday. A missile struck Kryvyi Rih on Wednesday night, wounding six people, including a 3-year-old girl, according to city administration head Oleksandr Vilkul.

The attack on Ukrainian

President Volodymyr Zelenskyy's hometown damaged more than 40 residential buildings, a school and domestic gas pipes, Vilkul said. A 6-year-old girl died in the southern city of Kherson after Russian artillery shelling wounded her the previous day, regional military administration chief Oleksandr Prokudin wrote on Telegram.

The Kherson Thermal Power Plant, which provides heat for over 40,000 residents, shut down Thursday after Russia pounded it with drones and artillery for several days, he said. Authorities planned emergency meetings to find alternate sources of heating,

he said. Until then, tents were erected across the city where residents could warm up and charge electronic devices.

Russia also struck Odesa with drones, wounding six people, while civilian and energy infrastructure was damaged, said Oleh Kiper, head of the regional military administration. Overall, Russia fired two ballistic missiles and 138 drones at Ukraine overnight, officials said. Meanwhile, in the Russia-occupied part of the Kherson region, two men were killed by a Ukrainian drone strike on their vehicle Thursday, Moscow-installed leader Vladimir Saldo said.

Terror attacks increased in Pakistan: Report



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ Karachi

Pakistan continues to reel under terrorism with a surge of 25 per cent violence-related incidents in 2025 compared to the previous year, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa being the worst hit province, a think tank report has said.

Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan together accounted for over 96 per cent of all 3,187 fatalities and 92 per cent of all incidents of violence recorded through January to November 2025, according to the Islamabad-based Centre for Research and Security Studies (CRSS).

"Till November, an overall surge of 25 per cent was observed in violence, which resulted in 3,187 deaths in comparison to 2,546 casualties in 2024, a rise of around 20 per cent," the report, published on Wednesday, by CRSS, a non-profit, independent think tank, said.

In 2024, 2,546 deaths and 1981 injuries were reported. The figures include civilians, security personnel, and militants killed in anti-terror operations. The fatalities reported were from 1,188 recorded incidents of violence, including terror attacks and counter terrorism operations, mainly concentrated in the northwestern Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan provinces.

After clashes and tense relations with Afghanistan, violence has been at its peak in recent months in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, observed the report by CRSS, founded by civil society activists to monitor the security landscape in the country.

The Pakistan Government accuses the banned terror

CLASHES AND TENSE RELATIONS WITH AFGHANISTAN, VIOLENCE HAS BEEN AT ITS PEAK IN RECENT MONTHS IN KHYBER PAKHTUNKHWA

outfit Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) of carrying out terror attacks after its ceasefire deal ended in November 2022. Khyber Pakhtunkhwa was the worst hit region with around 68 per cent (2,165) of the total deaths, and over 62 per cent (732) of the incidents of violence, followed by Balochistan, accounting for over 28 per cent of the total fatalities (896) and over 30 per cent of the incidents reported (366).

The remaining regions of Pakistan — Sindh, Punjab, Pakistan-occupied Kashmir and Islamabad Capital Territory (ICT) — collectively experienced 90 incidents, with 126 lives lost, constituting just 4 per cent of all fatalities, the report said.

The CRSS said on average there were approximately 15 casualties per day throughout the reporting period. It also said that counter terrorism operations by security forces were impactful in the first 11 months of 2025, resulting in 1,795 militant fatalities — approximately 30 per cent more than the 1,392 lives lost in terrorist attacks.

However, in Balochistan, terrorist attacks by mainly banned insurgent groups were responsible for 517 fatalities among security forces personnel and civilians, outnumbering the militants killed in security operations by 36 per cent.

UN warns of new wave of atrocities in Sudan's Kordofan region

ASSOCIATED PRESS
■ Cairo

The UN's top human rights official issued a stark new warning on Thursday about Sudan, saying he fears "a new wave of atrocities" amid a surge in fierce fighting in the Kordofan region.

UN Human Rights Chief Volker Turk urged "all states with influence over the parties to take immediate action to halt the fighting, and stop the arms flows that are fueling the conflict." Fighting between the paramilitary group the Rapid Support Forces, also known as the RSF, and the Sudanese military, who have been at



war for over two years, has recently shifted to the oil-rich Kordofan region after the paramilitary group took over el-Fasher in Darfur.

According to the UN, the conflict in Sudan has killed 40,000 people — though

some rights groups say the death toll is significantly higher — and has created the world's worst humanitarian crisis with over 14 million displaced. The RSF's takeover of el-Fasher, the Sudanese military's last stronghold in

Darfur, was marked by the executions of civilians, rapes and sexual assaults. Over 100,000 people have fled el-Fasher since October, and thousands are feared trapped or believed to have been killed along the way, according to rights groups. The RSF has had major gains since then. "It is truly shocking to see history repeating itself in Kordofan so soon after the horrific events in el-Fasher," Turk said

"We must not allow Kordofan to become another el-Fasher," he said. He said over 269 people were killed in the town of Bara in North Kordofan in aerial strikes, artillery

shelling, and summary executions since the end of October, but that the numbers could be higher because telecommunications and internet outages have made numbers hard to verify. He called for "the restoration of telecommunications to facilitate lifesaving assistance and to allow essential information to flow to civilians."

His statement said an RSF drone strike on November 3 killed 45 people, mostly women, in a tent in el-Obeid in Kordofan, and that Sudanese military aerial strikes killed at least 48 people, mostly civilians, in Kauda, South Kordofan.

Critically ill former Bangladesh PM Zia to be taken to London: reports

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ Dhaka

Family of former Bangladesh prime minister Khalada Zia, who remains in a critical condition here, is preparing to transfer her to London, where her son and BNP acting chairperson Tarique Rahman lives, media reports said Thursday.

Zia, the 80-year-old Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) chairperson, was admitted to a private hospital on November 23 when she developed a chest infection that affected both her heart and lungs.

Four days later, the three-time prime minister was shifted to the coronary care unit (CCU) after several of her health complications worsened. BBC Bangla Service and Ittefaq newspaper said Zia's son and BNP's self-exiled acting chairperson Tarique

Rahman's wife Zubaida Rahman, a doctor herself, is expected to arrive in Dhaka soon to oversee the transfer of her ailing mother-in-law. "After arriving in Bangladesh, Zubaida Rahman will take her to London (after) assessing Zia's physical condition," at the Dhaka hospital, the BBC Bangla reported saying, several BNP leaders confirmed the decision without mentioning their names.

Qatar, meanwhile, said it is ready to provide an air ambulance for Zia for taking her to London even as two military and air force helicopters on Thursday staged landing tests at the rooftop of Dhaka's Evercare Hospital, where she is admitted.

"If madam's (Zia) health is suitable for travel, we plan to take her to London tomorrow morning. It all depends on her health," Zia's adviser Enamul Haque Chowdhury

told The Daily Star newspaper. A four-member Chinese medical team, comprising doctors Chi Jiang Fang, Yan Xin, Zhong Yuhui, and Meng Huang Wu, arrived at the Evercare Hospital late on Wednesday night and met with the medical board to review treatment options for the BNP chairperson, the state-run BSS news agency reported. BNP Secretary General Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir met the specialists upon their arrival and discussed Zia's treatment with them, according to news portal bdnews24.Com.

The Chinese doctors joined a four-member UK specialist group led by Dr Richard Buell that had arrived earlier in the day to help chart an advanced treatment plan. The team's arrival marked the second batch of Chinese doctors, who had arrived earlier this week.

Flood death toll in Asia surpasses 1,500 as calls grow to fight deforestation

ASSOCIATED PRESS
■ Padang

Deaths from last week's catastrophic floods and landslides in parts of Asia surged past 1,500 Thursday as rescue teams raced to reach survivors isolated by the disaster with hundreds of people still unaccounted for across the region.

The tragedy of so much death and destruction was compounded by warnings that decades of deforestation caused by unchecked development, mining and palm oil plantations may have worsened the devastation.

Calls grew for the Government to act. "We need the Government to investigate and fix forest management," said Rangga Adiputra, a 31-year-old teacher whose home in West Sumatra was swept away. The hills above his village on the outskirts of Padang city had been scarred by illegal logging. "We don't



want this costly disaster to happen again," he said.

Authorities said 837 people were confirmed dead in Indonesia, 479 in Sri Lanka and 185 in Thailand, as well as three in Malaysia. Many villages in Indonesia and Sri Lanka remained buried under mud and debris, with 861 people still unaccounted for in both countries. Thousands

reportedly faced severe shortages of food and clean water in cut off areas. The floods and landslides washed away roads and bridges and knocked out telecommunications, leaving many communities inaccessible.

Indonesian television showed images of huge amounts of felled timber carried downstream in North

Sumatra, West Sumatra and Aceh provinces. The leading Indonesian environmental group WALHI said that decades of deforestation — driven by mining, palm oil plantations, and illegal logging — stripped away natural defences that once absorbed rainfall and stabilised soil. "The disaster was not just nature's fury, it was

amplified by decades of deforestation," said Rianda Purba, an activist with the group.

"Deforestation and unchecked development have stripped Sumatra of its resilience." The group recorded more than 240,000 hectares (nearly 600,000 acres) of primary forest were lost in 2024 alone, leaving Sumatra's small river basins dangerously exposed.

Another environmental group, Global Forest Watch, has said the flood-inundated Indonesian provinces of Aceh, North Sumatra and West Sumatra have since 2000 lost 19,600 sq km (7,569 square miles) of forest, an area larger than the state of New Jersey.

"Unless restoration begins now, more lives will be lost," Purba warned. Massive piles of neatly cut timber lay scattered among the debris across Parkit Beach, a sight that stunned emergency crews deployed to the area.



Lithuanian court convicts leader for antisemitic speech

ASSOCIATED PRESS
■ Vilnius

A Lithuanian court on Thursday convicted the leader of one of the parties in the country's coalition Government for making antisemitic comments and fined him 5,000 euros (about \$5,800). The district court in the capital, Vilnius, found that Remigijus Žemaitaitis incited hatred against Jews, grossly downplayed Nazi Germany's crimes and grossly minimized the Holocaust in an offensive and insulting manner. The punishment fell short of prosecutors' call for him to be fined 51,000 euros (around \$60,000) and ordered to pay into a fund for victims of crimes. The case relates to social media posts and public statements from May and June 2023 in which, among other things, he wrote: "Apparently, for our journalists and local Lithuanian Jews, the demolition of schools in Palestine is yet another pastime?"



One dead in targeted shooting in Washington

ASSOCIATED PRESS
■ Oxon Hill

A man was killed in a targeted shooting at the food court at MGM National Harbor hotel and casino in the Maryland suburbs of Washington, police said. Detectives were working to determine the circumstances, and Prince George's County Police Chief Chief George Nader said at a news conference that they are searching for the shooter, who was captured on video. Officers responded to the shooting just before Wednesday noon and found one victim, a man, who died, Nader said. The shooting was not random, he said. The shooter went to the food court to find the victim, who was ordering food when the suspect appeared and opened fire, he said. The shooter and victim did not exchange any words before the shooting.

Thai worker’s remains returned from Gaza

ASSOCIATED PRESS
■ Jerusalem

Remains that militants in Gaza handed to Israel as part of the first phase of the ceasefire deal were those of a Thai agricultural worker, Israeli and Thai officials said Thursday. The return of Sudthisak Rinthalak’s remains leaves just one more hostage to be returned under the agreement.

Sudthisak was an agricultural worker who had been employed at Kibbutz Be’eri, one of the hardest-hit communities in the attack. Israeli officials said the 42-year-old was killed on October 7, 2023, during the Hamas-led attack in Israel that triggered the Israel-Hamas war and that his body was taken by the militant group Islamic Jihad.

He was officially declared dead on May 16, 2024. Sudthisak’s remains were returned on Wednesday, a day after militants handed over remains that didn’t match either of the last two hostages. Thai Foreign Ministry spokesperson Nikorndej Balankura said Sudthisak’s family has been notified and thanked the Israeli Government for assistance that led to the release of all 31 Thai hostages taken at the start of the war. Of those, 28 were returned alive, and three were dead.

Thais were the largest group of foreigners to be held in captivity. The Thai Foreign Ministry has said that, in addition to the



Hamas hand over a body bag believed to contain the remains of a deceased hostage to the Red Cross for transfer to Israeli authorities, in Beit Lahiya, in the northern Gaza Strip

hostages, 46 Thais have been killed during the war. Israeli Ran Gvili is now the last hostage whose remains have yet to be returned. Gvili was an Israeli police officer who helped people escape from the Nova music festival during the Oct. 7 attack and was killed fighting at another location.

Since the October 10 start of the ceasefire, 20 living hostages and the remains of 27 others have been returned to Israel. In exchange, Israel has released the bodies of hundreds of Palestinians to Gaza. Most remain unidentified.

The return of all the hostages is an essential

element of the first phase of the US-brokered ceasefire that began in October, which both Hamas and Israel have accused the other of breaking. In exchange, Israel has been releasing Palestinian prisoners.

The plan is still in the early stages, and many questions linger over its implementation. The plan to secure and govern the territory authorises an international stabilisation force to provide security, approves a transitional authority to be overseen by US President Donald Trump and envisions a possible future path to an independent Palestinian state.

More violence reported in Gaza

In Gaza, the Kuwait Speciality Hospital in Rafah said on Thursday it had received the bodies of five people, including two children, following an Israeli airstrike in the south of the strip late Wednesday.

Another 32 people were treated for wounds sustained in the strike on the town of Muwasi, the hospital said. Israel said it launched an airstrike targeting a Hamas militant in retaliation for an attack earlier in the day that wounded five Israeli soldiers. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said Hamas vio-

lated the ceasefire when, according to the army, militants emerged from a tunnel and attacked Israeli soldiers in an area under their control.

Relatives angry at ceasefire violation

Relatives of the dead Palestinians wept and waited over their loved ones’ bodies being transported in white body bags through the city of Khan Younis on Thursday.

All five of the dead belong to the same family. Blood stains still marked the mattresses on the floor of a tent encampment that was struck.

Some relatives voiced their outrage that people are still being killed during what’s supposed to be a cessation of fighting. Aisha Abu Jazar, a woman living near where the Palestinians were killed, said she was shocked to hear “unusually intense fire” by Israelis overnight.

“They fired a missile at a tent made of cloth, plastic, and wood. The children were asleep. What did the children do to deserve being torn apart in their sleep? What did they do to deserve this?” she said. “We were supposed to be in a ceasefire,” she added.

Israel names new spy chief

Netanyahu appointed his military secretary, Maj. Gen. Roman Goffman, as chief of the country’s Mossad spy agency, the prime minister’s office said in a statement Thursday. Goffman replaces outgoing agency boss David Barnea,

whose five-year term ends in June 2026. The appointment will be put to the Advisory Committee for Appointments to Senior Positions for ratification. Goffman served as commander of several Israeli army brigades, battalions and divisions before leading the country’s National Ground Training Centre and the Government Operations Headquarters in the Territories, the statement said.

Netanyahu believes Goffman is the most worthy and capable candidate who possesses “exceptional professional abilities” and demonstrates “creativity, initiative, cunning, deep knowledge of the enemy, absolute discretion and secrecy,” the statement said. Gaza’s Health Ministry says 366 Palestinians have been killed there since the start of the ceasefire. Israel still carries out strikes in response to what it has called violations of the truce, and bodies from earlier in the war are being recovered from the rubble.

The war began with a Hamas-led attack on southern Israel on October 7, 2023, in which around 1,200 people were killed, and more than 250 others were taken hostage. Almost all of the hostages or their remains have been returned in ceasefires or other deals. The Palestinian death toll has surpassed 70,100 [since the war began, according to Gaza’s Health Ministry, which operates under the Hamas-run Government.

It is staffed by medical professionals and maintains detailed records viewed as generally reliable by the international community.

Mexican farmers protest new water law proposal



ASSOCIATED PRESS
■ Mexico City

Dozens of farmers drove their tractors in a caravan to Mexico City and blocked an entrance to Mexico’s Congress to protest a new national water law that imposes stricter controls on water use. The farmers amassed outside the congressional chamber on Wednesday to protest the General Water Law proposal, which they say will take water away from the countryside and re-allocate it for discretionary use. They say the proposal threatens their livelihoods and chips away at their fundamental right to water. “If it affects the countryside, it affects the city!” read a banner hanging from two tractors. “We are protesting against the imposition by the federal

Government of a new water law, a reform that puts at risk the ownership of our lands,” said Jorge Robles, a farmer from the northern state of Chihuahua. The proposal backed by Mexican President Claudia Sheinbaum is being discussed in the Chamber of Deputies, where the president’s Morena Party has a majority. The law aims for the federal Government to impose stricter penalties for water-related crimes and regulate water concessions — a sector plagued by high-profile corruption cases.

The farmers brought their demonstrations to the country’s capital less than a week after they and groups of truck drivers lifted road and highway blockades in at least seven of the country’s 32 States.

EU’s former chief diplomat quits amid fraud probe

ASSOCIATED PRESS
■ Brussels

The European Union’s former foreign policy chief resigned on Thursday as head of a prestigious institute of European studies after becoming embroiled in a fraud investigation over a training programme for junior diplomats. Federica Mogherini said she was stepping down as Rector of the College of Europe, based in the Belgian city of Bruges, and as of the European Union Diplomatic Academy.

Mogherini’s statement gave no reason for the resignation, saying only that she had done so “in line with the utmost rigor and fairness with which I always carried out my duties.” “I am proud of what we have achieved together, and I am deeply grateful for the trust, esteem, and support that students, faculty, staff, and Alumni of the College and the Academy have shown

and are showing to me,” she said. As the EU’s top diplomat from 2014 to 2019, Mogherini was responsible for supervising the Iran nuclear talks, leading efforts to improve long-strained relations between Serbia and Kosovo, and a host of other foreign policy and security issues.

The arrest and resignation of the former Italian foreign minister could tarnish the EU’s image on the world stage as it seeks to assert influence in negotiations aimed at ending the war in Ukraine. The bloc has been urging Ukraine to tackle rampant corruption. Mogherini was detained for questioning Tuesday, along with a senior college staff member and a senior official from the European Commission, after authorities in Belgium raided the offices of the EU diplomatic service in Brussels and the college in Bruges.

Massive power outage hits Cuba



ASSOCIATED PRESS
■ Havana

A blackout hit Havana and the rest of the western half of Cuba on Wednesday afternoon, leaving millions of people without power on an island struggling with chronic outages blamed on a crumbling electric grid.

Lázaro Guerra, general director of the Ministry of Energy and Mines, said the massive outage was caused by a failure on a transmission line that connects two major plants.

The power grid was operational once again by Wednesday afternoon, but the Government warned that the restoration of electricity would not be immediate and that generation deficits persisted.

The nearly 12-hour blackout snarled activities in the capital and beyond. In Havana, dozens of police officers tried to direct traffic while many students who were already in school were sent back home. Small businesses that have generators resumed their sales, especially of food.

Some areas had intermittent internet service, so many residents were left wondering what had happened. “There’s no connec-

tion. No one knows why the power is out. They’re not saying anything; it’s all silence,” grumbled Raúl Calderón, an 82-year-old retiree, as he waited to hear official reports on the radio. The outage followed two days of peak-hour power shortages across the island.

A total blackout hit Cuba in September, with officials blaming aging infrastructure and fuel shortages at power plants. The ongoing outages also affect water service and impact the island’s fragile business sector. “Things are bad. The power plants are breaking down a lot. I have two children, and food is hard to come by,” said Liubel Quintana, a 47-year-old cafe owner. “It’s very tough everywhere you look.”

Cuba is going through a severe economic crisis that deepened during the coronavirus pandemic, which paralysed the key tourism sector, and was exacerbated by an increase in US sanctions and a failed internal financial reform to unify the currency.

Meanwhile, thermal power plants have been operating for over 30 years and receive little maintenance, which is expensive for Cuban budgets.

Trump administration orders H-1B, H-4 visa applicants to make social media profiles public

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ New York/Washington

The US Government has expanded screening and vetting measures for H-1B visa applicants and their H-4 dependents, directing them to keep the privacy settings on all their social media profiles set to “public.”

In a new order issued Wednesday, the State Department said beginning December 15, a review of the online presence for all H-1B applicants and their dependents will be conducted. Students and exchange visitors were already subject to

such scrutiny, which has now been extended to include those applying for H-1B and H-4 visas.

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

Underlining that a US visa is a privilege and not a right, the department said it uses all available information in screening and vetting to identify visa applicants who are inadmissible or

pose a threat to America’s national security or public safety. “Every visa adjudication is a national security decision,” it said.

The department said the US “must be vigilant” to ensure applicants do not intend to harm Americans and that all visa applicants credibly establish eligibility and intent to comply with the terms of their admission.

The directive is the latest in a series of steps by the Trump administration to tighten immigration rules.

The administration has launched a massive crackdown to check abuse of the

H-1B visa programme, used largely by US technology companies to hire foreign workers. Indian professionals, including tech workers and physicians, form one of the largest groups of H-1B visa holders.

In September, US President Donald Trump issued a proclamation, titled ‘Restriction on Entry of Certain Nonimmigrant Workers’, imposing a one-time \$100,000 fee on new H-1B work visas, an order that could significantly impact Indian workers seeking temporary employment in the US.

Pak lifts ban on festive kite flying after 20 years

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ Lahore

Amid pressure from artists and civil society members, a ban on kite flying during the Basant festival has been lifted in Pakistan’s Punjab province after 20 years.

The decision by Maryam Nawaz led the administration has evoked widespread excitement across cities and villages in the province of 13 million people.

Celebrated towards the end of winters to mark the arrival of spring (Basant) season, the Basant festival has been an occasion for community celebrations across the province.

Kite flying during Basant festivities was an integral part for centuries but was banned about two decades ago. Announcing the details of the decision made on

Wednesday, Punjab’s Minister for Information and Culture Azma Bokhari said on Thursday that there will, however, be several restrictions and fines for those violating new rules regarding the same.

“After 20 years, the joy of Basant has finally returned to Punjab. But this time, it comes under strict safety regulations. No one will be allowed to break the law during the festival,” Bokhari said in a statement.

In 2005, the Government imposed the ban on kite-flying following several deaths, especially of motorcyclists and children, in accidents when the kite’s sharp glass-coated strings got entangled around their necks leading to serious injuries.

Azma added that children under 18 will not be allowed to fly kites.

Trump hosts leaders of Congo, Rwanda to sign key deal for peace in eastern Congo

ASSOCIATED PRESS
■ Washington

US President Donald Trump will host the leaders of the Democratic Republic of Congo and Rwanda on Thursday for a deal-signing aimed at ending the conflict in eastern Congo and opening access to the region’s critical minerals for the US Government and American companies.

The moment provides Trump—who has repeatedly and with a measure of exaggeration boasted of brokering peace in some of the world’s most entrenched conflicts—another chance to tout himself as a dealmaker extraordinaire on the global stage and make the case that he’s deserving of the Nobel Peace Prize. The US leader hasn’t been shy about

CONGO HAS BEEN BATTERED BY FIGHTING WITH ARMED GROUPS, THE MOST POTENT BEING THE RWANDA-BACKED M23

his desire to receive the honour. Trump is welcoming Presidents Felix Tshisekedi of Congo and Paul Kagame of Rwanda, as well as several officials from other African nations travelling to Washington to witness the signing, in the same week he contemptuously derided the war-torn country of Somalia and said he did he did not want immigrants from the East African nation in the US.

Lauded by the White House as a “historic” agreement brokered by Trump, the

pact between Tshisekedi and Kagame follows monthslong peace efforts by the US and partners, including the African Union and Qatar, and finalises an earlier deal signed in June. But the Trump-brokered peace is precarious. The Central African nation of Congo has been battered by decades-long fighting with more than 100 armed groups, the most potent being the Rwanda-backed M23 rebels.

The conflict escalated this year, with M23 seizing the region’s main cities of Goma and Bukavu in an unprecedented advance, worsening a humanitarian crisis that was already one of the world’s largest, with millions of people displaced.

Fighting, meanwhile, continued this week in the conflict-battered region with

pockets of clashes reported between the rebels and Congolese soldiers, together with their allied forces. Trump, a Republican, has often said that his mediation has ended the conflict, which some people in Congo say isn’t true. Analysts say deal also isn’t expected to quickly result in peace. A separate peace deal has been signed between Congo and the M23.

“We are still at war,” said Amani Chibalonza Edith, a 32-year-old resident of Goma, eastern Congo’s key city seized by rebels early this year. “There can be no peace as long as the front lines remain active.” Pact will also build on a Regional Economic Integration Framework that officials have said will define the terms of economic partnerships involving the three countries



Pilot safely ejects before F-16 crashes in US

ASSOCIATED PRESS ■ Trona

A fighter jet with the Air Force’s elite Thunderbirds demonstration squadron crashed in the Southern California desert, but the pilot managed to eject safely, the military said. The pilot was being treated at a hospital for injuries that were not life-threatening, according to the San Bernardino County Fire Department. The F-16C Fighting Falcon crashed around 10:45 am on Wednesday during a training mission “over controlled airspace in California”, according to a statement from Nellis Air Force Base in Nevada. The fire department said it had responded to an “aircraft emergency” near Trona, an unincorporated community in the Mojave Desert about 180 miles (290 kilometers) north of Los Angeles. In 2022, a Navy F/A-18E Super Hornet crashed near Trona, killing the pilot.



Officers wounded, suspect killed in US shooting

ASSOCIATED PRESS ■ Omaha

Three Omaha police officers have been wounded and a suspect killed in an exchange of gunfire at a gas station. The suspect, a man in his 20s, had earlier shot a 61-year-old man several times in the chest about noon at a grocery store, Police Chief Todd Schmaderer said. Officers obtained a license plate number from the scene and followed the suspect’s car to the gas station, he said. The officers watched the suspect get out and enter a restroom on Wednesday. He then left the room and began firing on the officers, the chief said. Two officers were hit, and a third was hit by shrapnel. The officers returned fire, and the suspect was killed. “This is a very dangerous day involving this suspect in the city of Omaha,” Schmaderer said. The officers suffered non-life-threatening injuries and were taken to a local hospital.



Cinema Actors Teja Sajja and Meenakshi Chowdary attended the inauguration of Varahi Silks in Vijayawada on Thursday.



Meenakshi Chowdary



Manideep and Spandana



Teja Sajja and Manideep



PARTY

Photos by- Ch.Vijaya Bhaskar



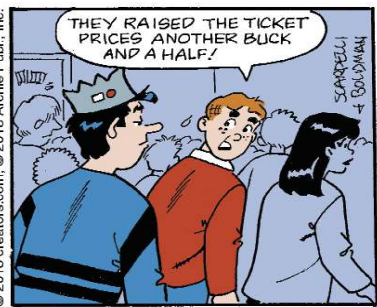
Actors Aadi, Archana and team of Shambhala Cinema unit to promote their cinema at a press conference in Vijayawada on Thursday



Bhavani Devotees carry Kalasa Jyothulu as part of the Bhavani Dekshalu in Vijayawada on Thursday.

FUN

ARCHIE



CALVIN AND HOBBS



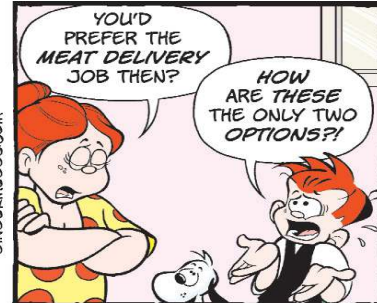
GARFIELD



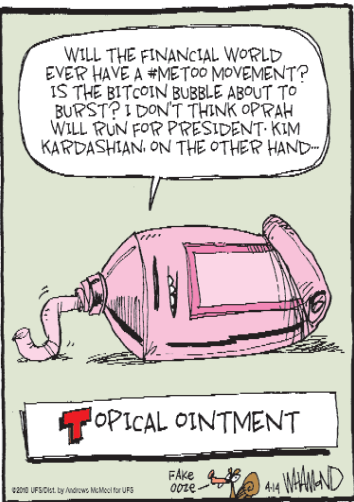
NANCY



GINGER MEGGS



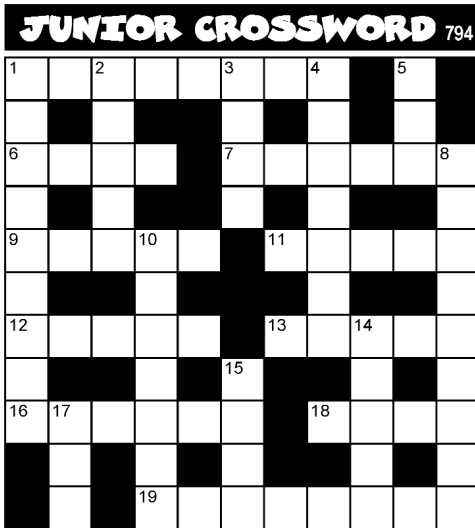
REALITY CHECK



SPEED BUMP



CROSSWORD



ACROSS

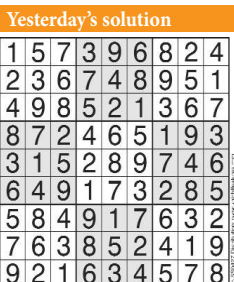
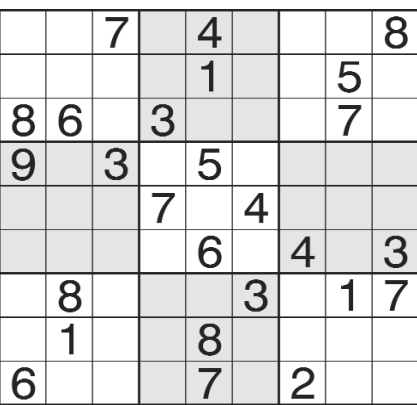
- Sick people in hospital
- A feeling that makes you scratch
- Ran after trying to catch
- One of your five senses
- Pimples on the face
- Requires
- Opposite of winner
- Attend classes here
- Young child
- Studied closely
- Wash your hair with this
- Frozen water
- Smashed to pieces
- This turns into a frog
- The country of the Spanish
- A biting insect
- A popular pet

DOWN

- See these at an art gallery
- Small nails for carpets
- Pleasant



SUDOKU



- Rules
- Each row and column can contain each number (1 to 9) exactly once.
 - The sum of all numbers in any row or column must equal 45.

DIFFICULTY RATING: ★★★★★

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BLASÉ CAPITAL

DEFICIT TRADE

As Russia's powerful Vladimir Putin lands in India, there is huge excitement about the potential and possibilities to further concretise the trade, cultural, social, and business links between the two nations. Media reports talk about massive deals in areas such as energy, defence, and other areas. A few days before his visit, there were reports that despite the new US and European sanctions, crude oil imports from Russia went up after a brief drop. Indians, it seems, have mastered the art and science to use grey ships, or illegal smuggling shipments to import oil. Since the global sanctions are against the exports of petrochemicals that use Russian crude, Indian refiners can use the latter to make petroproducts to cater to domestic demand. Thus, in both legal and grey areas, the partnership and friendship between the two nations is on the rise.

Yet, there are a few issues that India needs to contend with in its seemingly-blind pursuit of Putin's pacts. The first is that even as the two nations talk about increasing the annual trade between them by more than 40 per cent to \$100 billion within five years, the current balance is clearly lopsided. Of the nearly \$70 billion trade now, Indian exports constitute a mere seven per cent of the total. The large proportion of the value is about the goods that India imports. Indeed, most of its defence needs, despite purchases from non-Russia suppliers in the recent past, is focused on Russia. The industry and commerce minister, Piyush Goyal rightly analysed the situation, although in a slightly-garbled way, as one where "we cannot rest, we need to grow, we need to balance that." What he means is that India needs to export more goods and services to Russia.

Of course, on paper, there are several areas where India can emerge as an attractive supplier of world-class products. According to Goyal, in manufacturing, there are huge opportunities to expand the trade, and reduce the huge deficit. These include consumer goods, food products, automobiles, tractors, heavy commercial vehicles, consumer electronics, industrial components, and textiles. Similarly, there is a latent potential to push services exports. If India can sell services to the US, and Europe, and the rest of the world, why not Russia? The Russian side seconded Goyal's assessment, and talked about India can increase its current two per cent share in Russia's overall imports. However, there are several problems which, as the Indian commerce secretary, pointed out includes process simplification. The policy-makers on both sides need to sit together to ferret out solutions, which are not likely to be easy, or simple.

Let us start with agriculture and food products. This is a contentious issue, both for exports and imports. Indian policy-makers have articulated the need to increase exports to push up farm incomes. However, exports rarely help the farmers. They mostly benefit the middlemen, and industry, who buy cheap, and sell dear. The second is that as soon as India enters the market, global prices swing wildly. If India is a purchaser, prices zoom. If it is a seller, prices dip, and both happen because of the high volumes in question. Thus, the full benefit of global prices, either high or low, do not accrue to Indians. Finally, there is a strong industry lobby against exports, which invariably sways the other way for cheaper imports. In addition, the current atmosphere, where India is being pushed by America to import higher farm products, is not conducive.

Now, let us move to consumer electronics, and telecom equipment. One of the biggest exports in this area is of the smartphones, especially the iPhones. But, as most of us know, the iPhones are being shipped to the US by Apple, which is under pressure to make more of them in the US. Obviously, while Apple will continue to 'Make in India,' it will surely not export to Russia from India, given the current stalemate between Putin and America's Donald Trump. Unless Russia agrees to a ceasefire in Ukraine, the US, and other global sanctions, prevent American and European firms from trading directly with Russia. So, essentially, iPhones are out of the India-Russia trade equation, especially over the next two years. India makes some components, and assembles the Chinese phones. But China may not wish to export to Russia from India. It will want to use the factories in its country for this purpose.

Despite the cultural affinities, and cultural exchanges between India and Russia, language is a huge barrier in the services sector. Indian IT and outsourcing firms have performed well in nations that are either fluent in English, or comfortable with it. In the case of, say, Russia, and China, one needs to know the local language. Decades ago, we had several Russian-speaking Indians but the tribe has slowly vanished. Russian, since the age of economic reforms, has not been a top priority for the Indians, who wanted to acquire English skills. If the services firms wish to expand in Russia, they need to focus on the language, as well as soft skills that are specific to the Russian culture. The soft-skill training that they impart to fresh hires need to be expanded to include possible entry into Russia.

A story of boom, gloom and doom

Opposing factors will influence Indian indices and equities in 2026

Marc Faber, the stock soothsayer who is famous for his 'Gloom, Boom, Doom' report, feels that the Indian stock market is not going anywhere in 2026. This view is contradictory to those of the analysts, and brokerage houses that believe that the Sensex, the Bombay Stock Exchange index, may gain more than a quarter by December 2026. As we prepare to step into the new year, there are reasons that can be used by both sides, the bulls and bears, and optimists and pessimists. Like the Indian economy's 'Alice in Wonderland' story, the country stock markets imply another trip down the rabbit hole.

One of Faber's main concerns revolves around the value of the rupee, and its exchange rate vis-à-vis the dollar. Already, the Indian currency is below ₹90, and has shed several percentage points this year. This is why the investor-predictor claims that Indian equities gave negative returns if one considers their worth in dollars, rather than in rupees. In contrast, a few markets have registered positive returns in dollar terms. Brazil, for example, went up by 5.5 per cent. Indeed, despite the recent rise, the Indian stock market was one of the worst performers among emerging markets, and Asian peers.

Next year may not see any worthwhile changes. There is a growing fear among currency traders that the rupee may dip to ₹100-a-dollar within a year. The efforts by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) to protect the currency has not yielded results. Despite temporary upward blips, the rupee has continued its free fall. Faber feels that the returns from Indian equities in 2026 in dollar terms, largely due to the state of the

rupee, may be marginally positive, or even negative. Hence, he is not enthused about them, as he is not about equities elsewhere, except for a few niche segments.

However, there are several players who think that Faber's gloom-and-doom tale is a fable. The former experts argue that there is momentum in the Indian economy, as indicated by the GDP growth in the first two quarters, low inflation, adequate space for the RBI to intervene, positive consumer sentiments, and good monsoons that will benefit agriculture. This year (2025) was a bad one for equities, but it is behind us. There will be a re-rating of the stocks, as corporate earnings perk up. Valuations are still high, but are down from their post-Covid peaks. There is bullish steam left.

Another way to see the stock market as either half-full or half-empty glass is to go beyond the overall indices, and look at the entire universe of listed stocks. A media report indicates that the bulk of the hikes in share prices is limited to the stocks that comprise the Sensex and Nifty. If one looks at the top 500 scrips by market cap, more than half are in the negative in 2025. It is not a secular uptrend. Indeed, most of the positive activity is concentrated around the large caps, with problems in midcaps, and small caps.

Of course, the die-hard optimists argue that this is how a new bull run begins. After the post-Covid frenzy, when the Sensex rose from below 30,000 in early 2020 to 85,000 now, the index took a break in 2025. It converged with the growth slowdown in GDP. As valuations have eased, and there is fresh energy and excitement

in the economy, the bull run may pick up, and gather speed. This will lead to another mini-bull run in 2026, whose future will be decided by several domestic and external factors, including the India-US trade deal.

What is more immediate, and scarier than the rupee, or the secular nature of the upcoming boom or doom, is the massive exodus of money from the equity market. In the first three days of December 2025, foreign investors withdrew more money than they did in the entire month of November. Over the past two months, according to reports, Indian retail investors have turned sellers to book profits. During 2025, when foreigners largely remained net sellers, the Indians saved the day as they poured in huge sums in mutual funds, which invested in stocks. If the ongoing dual-selling trend continues, it can derail the indices over the next few months.

One of the reasons for the retail sales, apart from profit-booking, is the switch from the secondary to primary market. Suddenly, given the plateauing trends in listed stocks, IPOs (Initial Public Offerings) offer the chances to earn better returns. In the recent past, listing gains have touched 50 per cent and more, even if the stocks have subsequently languished at lower prices. This allows the risk-takers to make 30-50 per cent within a few weeks. Apart from the Indian retail investors, foreigners too have adopted these tactics. They sell in the secondary market, and queue up for the IPOs.

Given these contradictory views, Faber advises investors to stay in cash, i.e., get out of stocks, and invest the money in gold, silver, and platinum. He contends that the dollar returns from the precious metals, and bullion, are higher. For Indians, as the rupee slides against the dollar, and if this trend continues in 2026, the metals offer more attractive propositions. Apart from normal increase in prices, as gold and silver have witnessed in 2025, the returns are higher due to the rupee-dollar exchange rate. It is a double-bonanza.

Clearly, the bullion investment strategy can turn into a lot of bull, if the metal prices come down. As trade disruptions, and accompanying disruptions ease, if the Russia-Ukraine war stalls, and if China and the US agree to a more permanent truce, the yellow metal will lose its lustre. Central banks may ease off buying, as will institutional investors. In such a scenario, buying gold or silver now may be fraught with risks. Of course, if one is already invested in them, it will make sense to buy more, after selling equities.

Evidently, stock investors have two options. Either they take the risks, and push further into equities, but trade regularly, almost daily, based on domestic and global events, to reap some rewards, albeit smaller but regularly. Or they can stay away, take a break, and look at other assets, and investment options. It is almost impossible to time a market, any market. Even the best need to be lucky to achieve it. It may be better to wait-and-watch, and assess the stock market before deciding which way it plans to move.



The Tech Wrecker

Censorship vs immigration

No visas for those who post anti-right wing and anti-US views



Already, Indians, who have some strong and ongoing connections with the US, are cagey about attaching themselves to seemingly-anti-US views and opinions. For example, professionals, whose family members work in the US, refuse to associate with controversial issues. Indian students in American colleges refuse to talk on the phone, even on encrypted platforms, about what is happening in that country. Parents and spouses of those living in the US refuse to engage in the so-called sensitive conversations. There is a fear to like, or even attach a thumbs up icon to social media posts.

In a recent cable that was sent to the US missions across the world, consular officers were urged, according to a media report, to see if the visa applicants, and family members who may travel with them, had "worked in areas that include activities such as misinformation, disinformation, content moderation, fact-checking,

compliance, online safety, among others." The cable adds, "If you uncover evidence an applicant was responsible for, or complicit in, censorship or attempted censorship of protected expression in the United States, you should pursue a finding that the applicant is ineligible."

Although the language relates to suppression of free speech through misinformation or disinformation, its practice will have a far-reaching effect. This is because, as media reports indicate, Trump's White House defines the lack of free speech as the "stifling of conservative voices online." Given this context, if you are a liberal with left leanings, you may be suppressing the freedom of expression. The same rules will apply in practice to those who oppose the new America's opinions on social and health issues like the efficacy of vaccines. Indeed, any views contrary to Trump will be included. In May this year, the US secretary of state

threatened to ban visas for foreigners who censor speech by Americans. Now, this context offers quite a long rope to the consulars, and officials, to stop certain kinds of foreigners. In such cases, any form of anti-US, rather anti-Trump, and anti-conservative views can lead to visa bans. It may have happened years, and decades ago. But if it is still alive on the Internet, and it is difficult to kill content on the web, one can be in trouble. Thus, a thorough clean-up will be required to remove it.

Over the past few months, Trump and his allies and loyalists have even accused the former Democratic president, Joe Biden, of encouraging the suppression of free speech. In this context, the former implies the latter's attempts to counter the false claims by sections of conservatives that the Biden elections were rigged. If a former president can be charged in this manner, one can only imagine what a foreigner, whose visa is rejected, can do. The idea, it seems, is deep. It is to make America home for Americans, and those who think like Americans, or rather hardcore republicans.

There may be a deep-rooted plan, and the advisory to the consulars on H-1B visas may be a part of the larger, universal, all-encompassing strategy to increase the voter base of the republicans. Experience shows that most of the recent immigrants are democrat voters, and include huge swathes of recent foreigners. By limiting entries in universities, tech firms, and corporate America to the so-called conservative, or those with republican-like views, the future electorate will reflect this change. In a sense, most of the new voters will vote republicans, and increase the party's victory chances.

H-1B visas have become a huge target for the Trump administration, which sees all the ills and evils concentrated in the regime. Limiting and changing the regime will solve most of the existing problems, change America the way Trump's wants, and 'Make America Great Again.' A new visa system will help Americans find more jobs, restrict entry to high-skilled and highly-paid foreigners, allow mostly conservatives to enter the country, and make the US more productive. It will influence the future presidential elections.

BRIEFLY

GAGANJEET BHULLAR BAGS THIRD IGPL TITLE IN STYLE



Gaganjeet Bhullar, who modestly began the week, closed it in a masterly fashion to become the first player to win three times on the IGPL Tour.

Bhullar, who opened the week with a round of 1-under 71, which included a hole-in-one, added solid rounds of 67-67 on the last two days to total a winning 11-under.

The highly talented 21-year-old Raghav Chugh gave it all, but with three pars in the last three holes, he fell one short and ended a creditable sole second.

Chugh shot 4-under 68 and totalled 10-under for the week. Three internationals, Filipino Justin Quiban, Mexican Santiago de la Fuentes and Indian-American Manav Shah, all hoping to become the first international to win on the IGPL, were thwarted at the finish and ended tied third at 8-under.

SANDHU LEADS BY THREE SHOTS IN JAIPUR



Indian golfer Yuvraj Sandhu carded an impressive third-round score of four-under 66 to establish a three-shot lead with a total of 16-under 194 at the Jaipur Open here on Thursday.

Sandhu (65-63-66), who was in second place and one shot off the lead at the start of round three, produced an eagle, four birdies and two bogeys during his 66 to take control in the penultimate round.

Sandhu is in pursuit of his sixth PGTI title this season. If Yuvraj does go on to bag his sixth win of 2025, he would match the PGTI record for most titles in a season set by Manu Gandas in 2022.

Nikita overcomes tragedies to win gold in KIUG

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

■ Jaipur

Young women's hockey player Nikita Toppo stands out not just for her exploits in the midfield but also for her resilience in overcoming tough times and a career-threatening injury early in her playing career.

The 22-year-old skipper played a pivotal role in helping Kalinga Institute of Industrial Technology (KIIT) clinch the women's hockey gold in the institution's maiden appearance at the Khelo India University Games here.

Nikita lost her parents when she was five years old, while one of her elder brothers died in an accident when she was on her way to U-23 Five-Nations Cup in Ireland three years ago. A year later,

she suffered a career-threatening injury and soon after her other brother met with an accident and suffered a skull injury from which he hasn't completely recovered yet.

But instead of getting bogged down by the series of setbacks, Nikita found solace in hockey.

"Before this (success at the KIUG), we would not clear our zone as there are many good university teams in Odisha. But from last year onwards, me and my coach have been working on building a strong team by getting good players to take admission in our university. "Before we came here, we were determined to win the title here," Nikita said after her team defeated ITM University, Gwalior, to take the top spot.

Nikita controlled the pace



of the game in the final in the defensive midfielder's role and ensured the ITM players could not penetrate her team's citadel.

However, it's not just Nikita's hockey skills but the clarity of thought and resilience that set her apart.

"I believe what happened, happened, and we can't change it. I focus on the present and accept the situation. I remain strong for my team and my family, or what's left of it, and I don't shed a tear because I don't want my insecurities and unfortunate incidents to take over me and cloud my mind," she said about her personal setbacks.

"What happened to my brother in 2022 was heart-breaking. But I didn't let it pull me down, and I didn't want

my team to suffer because of me. No matter how much I miss him, he won't come back," added Nikita, who could not even attend his last rites. The Indian team then won a silver medal in the U-23 Five-Nations Cup.

Nikita, whose hockey career started when she joined the Government Sports Hostel in Panposh, Rourkela, in 2016, was also part of the Indian U-21 team that won four matches and drew one during their South Africa tour in 2023.

But a ligament tear during a Khelo India Youth Games training camp in 2023 and an accident to her other surviving brother meant that she took almost a year to recover both physically and mentally to start performing on the field again.

Won't ask Piastri for F1 title help: Norris

ASSOCIATED PRESS

■ Abu Dhabi

Lando Norris says he won't ask his McLaren teammate Oscar Piastri to give up a place to favour him in the three-way Formula 1 title fight with Max Verstappen at the season-ending Abu Dhabi Grand Prix.

Norris has a 12-point lead over Verstappen going into Sunday's race, with Piastri four points further back.

If Verstappen is far ahead of both McLarens, it's possible Piastri could be in a situation where he can't take the title himself but can aid Norris' title bid. If Verstappen wins on Sunday, a top-three finish would be enough for Norris.

"Honestly, I mean, I would love it, but I don't think I would ask it because it's up to Oscar if he would allow it. I don't think it's necessarily down to me," Norris said, sitting alongside Piastri and Verstappen at a pre-race news conference on Thursday.

Norris added he believed



he would help out Piastri if the roles were reversed, but said they hadn't discussed any such situations within the team.

"Personally, I think I would, just because I feel like I'm always like that and that's just how I am, but this,

it's not really up to me," Norris said. "I'm not going to ask it. I don't want to ask it because I don't think it's necessarily a fair question."

Piastri left the issue open. "It's not something we've discussed," he said. "I don't really have an

answer until I know what's expected of me."

Norris had the chance to wrap up the title at last week's Qatar Grand Prix, but a pit strategy blunder by McLaren handed Verstappen the win to boost his title defence chances.

Italy receives Olympic flame for Milano Winter Games

ASSOCIATED PRESS

■ Athens

The Olympic flame for the Milan Cortina Winter Games was formally handed to Italian organisers on Thursday in the all-marble stadium in central Athens, where the first modern Olympics were held nearly 130 years ago.

From Athens, the flame will travel to Italy, where it will begin a 63-day, 12,000-kilometre relay through all 110 Italian provinces before reaching Milan's San Siro Stadium for the opening ceremony on February 6. Italy will host the flame for the first time in 20 years, and 10,000 torchbearers have been organised.

"To stand here in this historic stadium provides an inspiring reminder of the honour we have been granted and the precious treasure we will carry home with us," Milan Cortina organising committee president Giovanni Malago said before receiving the flame.

A forecast of severe rain-

storms in Athens kept large crowds away and led organisers to announce the ceremony would be shortened. But the rain held off until the very end, a weak sun filtering through the heavy black clouds, and the few hardy spectators who turned up were able to enjoy a performance featuring Greek and Italian singers and a children's choir in the stadium, which staged the first modern Games in 1896.

After spending the night burning in a cauldron outside the 5th century BC. Parthenon temple atop the Acropolis, Greece's most famous landmark, the flame was carried into the Panathenaic stadium by Greek water polo player Elena Xenaki, who lit another cauldron in the stadium along with Greece's women's national water polo team.

The flame was lit on November 26 in Ancient Olympia, the site of the ancient games which inspired the modern Olympic movement.

Kalikesh begins first full term as NRAI president

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

■ Mohali

Kalikesh Narayan Singh Deo began his first full four-year term as president of the National Rifle Association of India (NRAI) after he was elected unopposed during its general body meeting here on Thursday.

Pawan Singh, a well-known administrator and technical expert of the precision sport, was elected as the new secretary general as the results of the sports body's elections were officially declared.

The elections were conducted by Justice (Retd) Nirmaljit Kaur, who was the returning officer. The elections also put in place a new executive committee and a new governing body.

Sharing his first reactions, Singh Deo said, "Indian shooting has currently seen its most successful phase in history over the last couple of years, both in terms of



success and popularity and that increases our responsibilities manifold.

"I wholeheartedly thank the entire general body for restoring faith in my team and me, and we promise to leave no stone unturned to accelerate this growth momentum even further and to maximise the potential that our extremely talented shooting athletes possess.

"With the flag paramount in our thoughts, let us all work together to make India number one in the world in our beloved sport." Odisha's

Singh Deo has been in charge of the federation since former president Raninder Singh completed his three terms in the post.

Pawan Singh said, "All the functions in the NRAI are already online, from registration to results, and now the next step is to use technology efficiently. We want to leverage AI and performance data to identify talented shooters across the country.

"My focus will be on using technology to find and nurture promising athletes from every corner of India."

Gayatri-Treesa's reclaim their beat at Syed Modi

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

■ New Delhi

The title defence at Syed Modi International has done more than just place another trophy on Gayatri Gopichand and Treesa Jolly's shelf. It has restored the rhythm the duo had been searching for through a fragmented season.

The two-time All-England semifinalists opened 2025 in promising fashion, reaching the All England quarterfinals and then the Swiss Open semifinals. But by June, a persistent shoulder issue caught up with both, forcing them to step off the circuit after the Macau Open.

Gayatri and Treesa returned in style, winning just their second event at Lucknow, something which has given the young Indian pair the clarity and confidence as they prepare for a physically demanding 2026, when their first aim will be to regain their place in the top echelons of women's doubles.

"For me, Syed Modi felt like a reward for staying

patient and trusting the process," Gayatri told PTI in an interview. "I just started playing again, and it gave me a lot of confidence that my game is moving in the right direction."

A painful shoulder injury was followed by a long rehabilitation phase, and Gayatri said the mental grind was equally demanding.

"Even before Macau, it was there, and it was still hurting. After Macau, it was a proper two-month break... It has been a tough, challenging situation," Gayatri said.

"You focus on rehab, stay positive, lean on coaches, physios, family... Mentally, if I stay strong, that helps me."

Her father, former All England champion and national chief coach Pullela Gopichand, remains her anchor. "He talks about his injuries and tells me what to look at... It's a huge confidence for me," she said.

A five-week block to rebuild power

With just a month to go for the next season, Gayatri and Treesa know physical prepa-



ration will shape results more than appearances. "Strength wise I have to build a lot of strength, endurance as well. We've got a good five-week time now, so it's a good time to build strength, agility, endurance—all of that. It's an upward journey," Gayatri said.

The Indian pair was ranked world Number 9 for 13 weeks earlier this year, and they see 2026 as the season to reclaim that zone. "I think our biggest goals are to break into the top bracket of world doubles, win more world titles, and perform well at world championships. And of course,

work towards Olympic qualification as well," Gayatri said. "And yeah, I think improving consistency is a big thing for us right now."

Treesa's doubles stint added new dimension

While Gayatri was rebuilding, Treesa, who recovered in two months, kept herself match-ready through mixed doubles, partnering Hariharan Amsakarunan and winning the Turkiye International Challenge in October.

"Yeah, mixed doubles actually... When Gayatri was injured, I just wanted to get

a tournament feel," Treesa said. "That's how I started playing mixed doubles. I can say I'm really enjoying it."

But she admits scheduling could get complicated once the bigger tournaments begin. "We don't really have any world ranking right now to get entries for 1000s and 750s. That's why I'm a little bit confused... How to manage mixed doubles also."

Yet the stint helped her sharpen net play, anticipation and rotation awareness — elements that were visible in Lucknow. The win in Lucknow showcased Gayatri and Treesa's improved clarity in rotations.

"On court, we've developed a good understanding of each other's strengths," Gayatri said. "I know when Treesa is taking charge, and she knows when I'm going to move in. We're comfortable discussing anything, which helps us stay united through tough phases."

While the title defence signals readiness, the 21-year-olds know well that building deeper consistency at the highest level will be the key.

Marseille's prolific attack faces in-form Lille in Ligue 1

ASSOCIATED PRESS

■ Paris

The two highest scoring teams in Ligue 1 face off on Friday when nine-time champion Marseille travels north to take on Lille.

Marseille missed the chance to move to the top of the standings last weekend after being held to a home draw. On a four-match unbeaten run across all competitions, it has another opportunity to take the lead with a win. Roberto De Zerbi's Marseille sits third in the table, two points behind leader Lens.

Lille is in fourth place, five points off the pace.

With 35 goals in 14 matches, Marseille boasts one of the best attacking records in Europe this season and its highest tally at this stage in the French top flight

since 1970. Lille is also enjoying positive momentum, having won its past three matches across competitions.

Key matchups

Leader Lens plays at Nantes on Saturday on the back of a 2-1 win at Angers that moved the club to the top of the standings for the first time in 21 years. Following its second loss of the season at Monaco, second-placed Paris Saint-Germain is at home against Rennes before a trip to Athletic Bilbao in the Champions League next week.

Players to watch

Florian Thauvin's flair and efficiency have been crucial assets for Lens.

The 2018 World Cup winner is enjoying a revival since his return to the league from Italian side Udinese this summer. The 32-year-old



winger has four goals, including a brace last weekend, and produced two assists.

His performances have earned him a recall for France following a six-year absence.

If he continues to impress there are good chances he will be playing at another World Cup next summer.

"What is new today is being top of the league,"

Thauvin said. "But it is way too early to get carried away. Will we be able to compete with PSG? We'll see."

Who's out?

PSG said on Thursday that goalkeeper Lucas Chevalier is still nursing a right ankle injury. Chevalier was injured in the loss against Monaco after a violent tackle from Lamine Camara. PSG is also missing Désiré Doué, Nuno Mendes, Achraf Hakimi and Lucas Beraldo.

Off the field

Nice made headlines for the wrong reasons this week after shocking acts of violence from its fans. After a sixth consecutive loss across all competitions on Sunday, players and staff were assaulted when they returned to the club's training and academy centre.

Toyota moves further into partnership for 2026 with Haas Formula 1 team



ASSOCIATED PRESS

■ Tokyo

The Haas Formula 1 team will get a new name next season, further showcasing its relationship with Japanese automaker Toyota.

In a statement Thursday, the team said its name in 2026 will be TGR Haas F1

Team. The TGR stands for Toyota Gazoo Racing, which is the racing division of the Toyota Motor Corporation.

Taking over the title sponsorship means Toyota is now more involved in F1 than at any time since it pulled its team out after the 2009 season.

Haas and Toyota entered

into the first stages of this technical partnership a year ago and the Haas car has been carrying Toyota's branding since.

The partnership involves design and technical services but does not include a Toyota engine. Haas will run next year with Ferrari power, but it does move the company ever deeper into Formula 1.

Toyota ran a team in F1 until the end of the 2009 season. It failed to win a race despite spending heavily.

This move does not appear to mark a return to that level of involvement.

"It's naturally a privilege to deepen our relationship with TGR through this new title partnership agreement," Ayao Komatsu, team principal of Haas, said in a statement from Haas.