

Performance of MLA improves, says Naidu

2

Awareness run for road safety held in Bhimavaram

3



Customs simplification next big reform: FM

4



India boosts Sri Lanka recovery efforts

8

Why meditation is non-negotiable to your mental health

12



PIONEER IN SHORT

VANDE BHARAT TRAIN SERVICES FROM NARASAPURAM TO BEGIN FROM DEC 15

Union Minister of State for Steel and Heavy Industries, Bhupathiraju Srinivasa Varma, announced that Vande Bharat train services between Narasapuram and Chennai will begin from December 15. Although the Railway Department had initially planned to start the services from...

FULL REPORT ON P2

BIHAR GOVT APPROVES TTD PROPOSAL TO BUILD TEMPLE IN PATNA

TTD chairman BR Naidu expressed happiness over the Bihar government's approval to construct a TTD temple in Patna, the State's capital. Bihar Chief Secretary Pratyay Amrit has formally written to the TTD chairman confirming the allocation of 10.11 acres of land in Mokama Khas...

FULL REPORT ON P3

GAZA CEASEFIRE AT CRITICAL MOMENT: QATAR

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

FULL REPORT ON P8

QUOTE OF THE DAY



THE WELFARE BENEFITS GIVEN BY KCR WON'T BE FORGOTTEN BY THE PEOPLE. YOU'RE TELLING BLATANT LIES, SAYING NO RATION CARDS WERE ISSUED DURING THE BRS RULE. IS IT A LIE THAT 6,47,479 RATION CARDS WERE ISSUED?

T HARISH RAO, BRS MLA



OBTUSE ANGLE



Indigo cancels 800 flight, to address refund issues on priority

PNS ■ New Delhi

Domestic carrier IndiGo has said it cancelled over 800 flights on Saturday, much lower than Friday's number of more than 1,000, and it is addressing all customer refund issues on "priority".

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

"The number of cancellations on Saturday dropped below 850 flights, much lower compared to Friday. We are continuing to work towards reducing this



number progressively over the next few days," IndiGo said in a statement.

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

For refund assistance, the airline said, customers can visit its website or contact the customer support.

Earlier in the morning, the civil aviation ministry directed the airline to complete the ticket refund process for cancelled flights by Sunday evening, and ensure baggage separated from travellers are delivered in the next two days following largescale disruption in its services.

The ministry said any

delay or non-compliance in refund processing will invite immediate regulatory action.

The refund process for all cancelled or disrupted flights must be completed by 8 pm on Sunday, the ministry said in a statement.

"Airlines have also been instructed not to levy any rescheduling charges for passengers whose travel plans were affected by cancellations," it said.

IndiGo has also been instructed to set up dedicated passenger support and refund facilitation cells.

"The system of automatic refunds will remain active until operations stabilise completely," the statement said.

Further, the ministry said the airline should ensure that baggage separated from passengers due to flight cancellations or delays should be traced and delivered to them within the next 48 hours.

Indigo crisis: Special trains from Vizag, Hyd to ease travel rush

PNS ■ Vishakapatnam

The Waltair Division of the East Coast Railway Zone is operating special trains to help passengers stranded due to mass IndiGo flight cancellations.

Among the six special trains being operated by ECoR, one will depart from Waltair Division headquarters in Visakhapatnam on December 8 for RMVT Bengaluru, with the return



service scheduled to arrive in the port city on December 9. "Because of the flight cancellations, many people are stranded. Demand for train tickets has risen sharply. Taking this into account, we

have introduced special trains to cater to the extra passengers created by this situation," ECoR official Deepak Rout said.

Rout said the railway zone is closely monitoring passenger demand to add extra coaches to regular trains, and that additional special trains will be operated in coordination with other railway zones if required.

CONTINUED ON >> P2

Boost livelihood opportunities of tribal communities: Pawan to officials

PNS ■ Amaravati

Deputy Chief Minister Pawan Kalyan has instructed officials to strengthen and expand livelihood opportunities for tribal communities, particularly those dependent on forest resources.

In a review meeting held via teleconference on Saturday with officials from Alluri Sitarama Raju district, he issued several key directives aimed at improving the economic well-being of



Deputy Chief Minister Pawan Kalyan holding a review meeting with officials through teleconference from Amaravati on Saturday

tribal populations. Pawan Kalyan emphasised

the need for a comprehensive and structured plan to

enhance income sources for tribal families. He highlighted the importance of boosting production and marketing of tribal products, noting that improved market access would significantly raise their earnings. The Deputy Chief Minister also urged officials to promote ecotourism initiatives, explaining that proper awareness and development in this sector could create substantial income opportunities.

CONTINUED ON >> P2

FAKE LIQUOR SCAM

SIT files chargesheet against YSRCP leader Jogi Ramesh

PNS ■ Vijayawada

The Special Investigation Team (SIT) has filed a chargesheet in the fake liquor case that created a sensation in Andhra Pradesh. A total of eight accused have been named in the chargesheet submitted to the Excise Court. The SIT stated in the chargesheet that the fake liquor racket in Ibrahimpattanam was started by Addepalli Janardhan Rao with the support of key YSRCP leader and former minister Jogi Ramesh. It mentioned that Jogi Ramesh had Janardhan Rao set up a fake liquor man-



ufacturing unit at Mulakalacheruvu with the intention of spreading misinformation that fake liquor was being produced widely during the coalition government. The SIT has explained the role of all eight accused in the case. Regarding the production

of fake liquor, the SIT stated that the main accused, Addepalli Janardhan Rao (A1), and his brother Jagan Mohan Rao (A2) played crucial roles. The accused had set up fake liquor manufacturing units in Ibrahimpattanam, according to the SIT. As per the chargesheet, Janardhan Rao and Jagan Mohan Rao used to send 73-5 lakh once every two to three months to Jogi Ramesh and Jogi Ramu, and on some occasions Janardhan Rao directly handed over cash, the investigation revealed.

CONTINUED ON >> P2

Centre likely to ban foreign consultants

PNS ■ Amaravati

Nowadays, for any kind of work, foreign experts are being brought in, whether it is designing water projects, monitoring IT systems, or deciding what new initiatives to undertake. Consultants are playing a major role in every sector. Among them, companies from abroad dominate. Even though some local experts work within

these teams, those who lead them and earn hundreds of thousands of crores in revenue are the heads of these foreign firms.

Across all states in the country, the influence of foreign consultants has grown significantly. The Central government is now considering putting restrictions on these companies. It has also reportedly held consultations with various states

regarding the issue.

Even though nation has highly skilled engineers capable of designing irrigation projects, foreign experts are still being hired. The same trend is observed in education, healthcare, and other infrastructure sectors. Some of the major companies operating in this space include Deloitte, EY, KPMG, and PwC. In fact, there have been instances where even

PowerPoint presentations explaining state-level projects were prepared by consultants.

Foreign consultants also enter the process when international engagements are needed. The same situation exists in the tech sector. For these reasons, both Central and State governments are reportedly planning to restrict such foreign consultants. The latest proposal aims to

promote domestic experts and the companies that employ them. These proposals have been sent to all states, encouraging them to also support local professionals. Foreign consultants continue to dominate even in the crucial education sector. In cities like Guntur and Vijayawada, considered key urban centers, there are reportedly up to two dozen such consultants. These

experts earn huge money through programmes like sending local staff abroad or training them on various methodologies. Visakhapatnam also has a significant presence of foreign consultants.

To promote domestic experts, authorities are planning to curb the influence of foreign firms. An official has commented that an official announcement is expected soon.

Performance of MLA improves, says Naidu

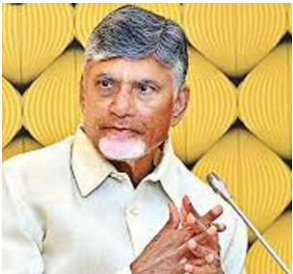
PNS ■ Amaravati

Chief Minister and Telugu Desam Party national president N Chandrababu Naidu said the performance of almost all MLAs has improved significantly. Several key review meetings and one-to-one interactions confirmed it. He added that the performance of another 37 MLAs still needed to improve further.

On Saturday, Chandrababu held a review meeting with the leaders available at the NTR Bhavan in Amaravati. On this occasion, he issued directions to the leaders on several key matters.

The Chief Minister said that he has been getting precise survey reports on each individual's performance through four to five different methods. He mentioned that the RSS has been helping selflessly the BJP without expecting any position or post. In the same way, he said the party cadre too should be prepared to work for the party.

He suggested launching an innovative program called the "School Innovative Partnership Summit." The Chief Minister stated that the programme would be conducted in collaboration with the Ratan Tata Innovative Hub to bring



out the talent in students. Leaders brought to the CM's

attention that YSRCP chief YS Jagan Mohan Reddy held a three-hour media conference. He said that there is no value in the words of someone who would appear once a month and speak without clarity. He said the people themselves would teach them a lesson. The CM remarked that there is no need to pay attention to Jagan's meaningless statements.

Ambedkar reason for justice for poor, downtrodden sections

Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu paid tribute to B R Ambedkar, the architect of the Indian constitution, on his death anniversary on Saturday and said he is the reason why the poor and downtrodden sections of society are receiving justice and their voices are heard loudly today.

In a post on X, Naidu said, "Ambedkar's constitution is the reason why the poor and the downtrodden sections in the society are receiving justice in the society and their voice is being heard loudly."

The TDP supremo urged

people to remember the services of independent India's first law minister that ignited an awakening across political, social and educational spheres of the downtrodden sections.

According to Naidu, the most meaningful tribute to Ambedkar is not just enjoying the rights guaranteed by the Constitution but also adhering to the duties it mandates. Further, he called Ambedkar the "soul of India", who gave the country its Constitution.

Ambedkar was born on April 14, 1891 in Mhow Cantonment, Madhya Pradesh.

Vande Bharat train services from Narasapuram to begin from Dec 15

PNS ■ Bhimavaram

Union Minister of State for Steel and Heavy Industries, Bhupathiraju Srinivasa Varma, announced that Vande Bharat train services between Narasapuram and Chennai will begin from December 15. Although the Railway Department had initially planned to start the services from January 12 due to the advance reservation period, he said that responding to public request, Railway Minister and officials agreed to his appeal to launch the service before the festival season.



The Union Minister held a press conference at the BJP Narasapuram Parliamentary Office in Bhimavaram on Saturday and spoke on several key issues. He stated

that railways are one of the most important modes of transport in the district, and resolving various railway-related issues, especially bringing the Vande Bharat

Express to the Narasapuram Parliament segment—was one of his key election promises. He officially announced that the Narasapuram-Chennai Vande Bharat Express (20677/20678) will start December 15. He thanked the Railway Minister and officials for positively responding to his request and ensuring the start of this service before the festival, as requested by the people.

He said that Chennai to Narasapuram train will depart from Dr MGR Chennai Central at 5:30 am, stop at Renigunta, Nellore, Ongole,

Tenali, Vijayawada, Gudur, Bhimavaram Town stations, and reach Narasapuram at 2:10 pm.

Narasapuram to Chennai train will depart Narasapuram at 2:50 pm, stop at Bhimavaram Town, Gudur, Vijayawada, Tenali, Ongole, Nellore, and Renigunta, and reach Dr MGR Chennai Central at 11:45 PM.

He expressed gratitude to Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Railway Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw for providing world-class, fast railway services to the people of the district.

Police question students who visited Maoist encounter site

PNS ■ Maredumilli

Nearly eight students from prominent institutions, including Osmania University and the University of Hyderabad, were questioned by the police after they visited a Maoist encounter site in Alluri Sitaramaraju district, an official said on Saturday.

All of them were later allowed to leave, he

added. Under 'Operation Sambhav', police gunned down 13 Maoists over two days—six on November 18 and seven on November 19—in Maredumilli mandal of Alluri Sitaramaraju district. "Students were not detained. They were examined to prevent any further law-and-order issues," Alluri Sitaramaraju district superintendent of police (SP) Amit Bardar said, adding that the students,

who had visited the site on Friday, cooperated with police.

However, he said the students refused to share the contact details of their family members, which the police sought to inform them of the students' safety, especially at a time of increased Maoist activity along the Odisha border. "We have information that there is heavy movement on the Odisha

border now. Some trespassing has occurred from Chhattisgarh into Odisha," Bardar said.

He noted that an altercation had broken out between the students and protesters campaigning against Maoism.

According to the SP, several protests and rallies have been held in recent days by families of victims of Maoist violence and pro-development groups.

A large rally was organised on November 20 at Annavaram to protest against Naxalism and Maoist activities, particularly by residents opposed to "foreign elements entering their areas," he said.

Following these protests, Bardar added, campaigners have submitted representations seeking the construction of roads, hospitals and other basic infrastructure.

What did you achieve in two years?

Harish questions CM Revanth

PNS ■ Hyderabad

Severely castigating the Chief Minister Revanth Reddy for his claims on the development of Telangana, BRS MLA Harish Rao said the Congress government achieved nothing except blaming and crying over KCR and BRS. The Congress leaders spent the two years in power by blaming the previous government for their failures in implementing the promises given during the elec-



tion campaign, Harish Rao said. Rao accused Revanth Reddy of spreading lies and said, "The welfare benefits given by KCR won't be forgotten by the people. You're telling blatant lies, saying no ration cards were issued during the BRS rule. Is it a lie that 6,47,479 ration cards were issued?"

He questioned Revanth Reddy's intentions, asking, "Who has a grudge against Nalgonda people? Who designed the SLBC project as a never-ending project? Who stopped the project?"

Rao said, "Your reckless decisions and negligence led to the SLBC tunnel tragedy, killing 8 people. You can't even retrieve the bodies. You're playing football while people suffer."

He added, "You're not a CM, you're a world-class player."

Get out of your delusions, Revanth Reddy. People see through your lies and incompetence. You're loathing and corrupt, with no vision except loot and commissions."

Rao advised Revanth Reddy to focus on governance instead of spreading lies and playing games. "Stop making fools of people and focus on solving problems. You're a CM, not a clown," he said.

Feeling really free in mind, haven't played like this in the last 2-3 years: Virat Kohli

PNS ■ Visakhapatnam

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

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

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

"I know when I can bat like that in the middle, it helps the team a long way. Makes me

confident, any situation in the middle, I can handle that and bring it in favour of the team," he added. Kohli said self-doubt is inevitable for a batter, irrespective of experience, but felt it helps in overall improvement.

"When you play for that long — 15-16 years — you do doubt yourself. Especially as a batter, when one mistake can get you out. It's a whole journey of getting better and getting better as a person along the way. It improves you as a person, and it improves temperament as well," he said.

"I'm just glad that I'm still able to contribute to the team. When I play freely, I know I can hit sixes. There are always levels you can unlock," he added.

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

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

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

"We got tough conditions in the first two games. So, it was good to give the bowlers a break in a wet outfield. (The surface) was still a really good wicket. What we were able to do was pick up

wickets in bunches," he said after India bowled out South Africa for 270.

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

"We were able to squeeze in the middle. Prasad picked up those two or three wickets in a spell, which was really crucial and then Kuldeep came in, picking two wickets in an over. In ODI cricket, that's how you try and contain teams," he said.

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

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

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

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

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

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

FROM PAGE - 1

Amaravati land...

The chief minister added that the public, farmers, and the government are all pleased with the progress, noting that only a few individuals are unable to digest it. Positive outcomes are emerging following his recent meeting with Amaravati capital region farmers on November 27 at the secretariat, Naidu said.

The second phase of LPS is expected to supplement the existing 54,000-acre Amaravati land bank, of which 34,281 acres were pooled from 29,881 farmers across 29 villages.

Naidu reacted to YSRCP chief Jagan Mohan Reddy's alleged remarks that the Parakamani (Tirupati temple offerings counting centre) theft was minor, saying the comments "deeply hurt the sentiments of millions of devotees of Lord Venkateswara." "He (Reddy) has no regard for God, no respect for the faith of devotees, and no concern for the sanctity of temples. A person who allegedly tried to 'settle'

even his own uncle's murder also attempted to 'settle' the Tirumala Parakamani theft. What could be more atrocious?" Naidu said, adding that such statements trivialise sacred offerings made by devotees.

The CM also said law and order in the state has improved significantly, asserting that his government will not compromise on maintaining peace.

He alleged that the previous YSRCP government had turned even peaceful regions into crime hubs by "encouraging and protecting criminals."

Naidu further highlighted that reforms in education are showing visible results and called the recent mega parent-teacher meeting (PTM) a "strong brand initiative" in the education sector.

CM condemns Jagan...

In a casual chat with reporters at the party's central office, NTR Bhavan, Naidu questioned the rationale behind the Parakamani

theft case accused donating Rs 14 crore worth of assets to TTD for a theft of mere Rs 70,000. "What else might they be hiding?" The Chief Minister expressed apprehension that Jagan Mohan Reddy's comments would offend the sentiments of devotees.

He criticised Jagan Mohan Reddy for showing disrespect towards religious beliefs, the emotions of devotees, and the sanctity of temples. He expressed strong anger at Jagan Mohan Reddy's attempts to trivialise the Tirumala Parakamani theft case. He asked how society could perceive such a narrative. He emphasised that both devotees and the public are watching these developments keenly.

Naidu pointed out that it pained him to see Jagan Mohan Reddy casually discussing the potential "settlement" of the Parakamani theft. "What does it mean to 'settle' with those who robbed the offerings to the god?" he questioned. The Chief Minister reported that

Jagan Mohan Reddy's comments about the temple hundi theft have sparked fierce outrage across various segments of society, with individuals from all backgrounds and political affiliations rejecting such statements. He recalled how some people tried to project that ghee could be extracted from curd that could be made without milk.

He said that districts like Nellore and Vizianagaram were very peaceful, but noted that during the YSR Congress government, criminal activities crept into these districts. He mentioned that after the coalition government came to power, there have been significant improvement. With all capital issues addressed and ongoing development, both farmers and the public are happy. He suggested that this political progress seems to unsettle certain individuals.

The Chief Minister also highlighted that the achievements in Hyderabad during the Telugu Desam government are still acknowledged

by the present government. He noted that the groundwork laid earlier has now resulted in significant benefits, referencing the soaring land prices in Kokapet as evidence.

Indigo crisis...

He added that the disruption is expected to continue for 10 to 15 days, and the railway zone is assessing demand daily to make necessary arrangements.

For at least five days in a row, IndiGo flight operations have been significantly disrupted, with a large number of cancellations and delays causing hardships to thousands of passengers. In many cases, baggage has been misplaced.

IndiGo has also been instructed to set up dedicated passenger support and refund facilitation cells.

The civil aviation ministry said the airline should ensure that baggage separated from passengers due to flight cancellations or delays should be traced and delivered to them

within the next 48 hours.

The refund process for all cancelled or disrupted flights must be completed by 8 pm on Sunday, the ministry said in a statement.

The South Central Railway also on Saturday announced that it would run four special trains to manage the surge in passengers resulting from the large-scale cancellation of IndiGo flights here.

The move comes as flyers face significant disruption and long queues at the airport due to the cancellation.

A release from the SCR said it is running the special trains to clear the extra rush of passengers to Chennai, Mumbai and Shalimar (Kolkata) from Hyderabad today. GMR Hyderabad International Airport Ltd, which runs Rajiv Gandhi International Airport, here in a release, said it has tied up with Telangana State Road Transport Corporation to support passengers affected by ongoing airline disruptions. As a temporary measure, special TGSRTC services are being made avail-

able from RGIA today to help travellers reach home or onward destinations with less stress. "With passenger comfort and the current challenges in mind, this joint effort aims to offer a small but meaningful bit of relief for the passengers," GMR said.

Meanwhile, as many as 74 outbound Indigo flights were cancelled from here on Saturday, Rajiv Gandhi International Airport sources said.

Similarly, 70 incoming flights were cancelled during the day, they said.

The flight cancellations drew ire from passengers, who thronged the IndiGo counters at the airport demanding to know the exact situation.

Boost livelihood...

He stressed the importance of addressing youth unemployment in tribal areas through targeted programmes and skill-based initiatives.

Further, Pawan Kalyan suggested promoting film and

television shootings in the Alluri Sitarama Raju district to generate local employment. Linking horticulture activities with the employment guarantee scheme could yield better outcomes for tribal communities, he added.

He reiterated that the administrative machinery must work towards enhancing the living standards of forest-dependent tribal populations and directed officials to design special development programmes to support sustainable income growth.

SIT files chargesheet...

The SIT stated that between 2006 and 2019, Jogi Ramesh and Janardhan Rao had personal connections. Ramesh and Ramu were partners in the Swarna Bar, which was renamed as Cherries Bar in 2019. The chargesheet also mentioned that Ramesh and Ramu played a key role in the Ibrahimpatnam bar syndicate in 2017.

Railways set to boost economic activity in Madakasira constituency

PNS ■ Anantapur

The decades-long backwardness in the Madakasira constituency of Sri Sathya Sai district is finally going to end. With minimal basic amenities, poor transportation, and limited development, the region has long remained neglected. Now, the Andhra Pradesh government is providing solutions. Construction of a new railway line and a railway station is progressing rapidly.

The presence of the Bengaluru airport just 80 kilometers away is also helping attract industries. For the first time ever, the face of Madakasira is set for a major transformation. The backward Madakasira constituency is now moving towards the path of development. These development works will completely change the region's landscape. People's living standards will improve, and new employment opportunities will increase.

In 2011, the construction of the Rayadurg-Tumakuru railway line was launched with a budget of Rs 1,050 crore. However, costs later



increased and the project is now being executed at a total cost of Rs 2,496 crore. The officials have stated that the railway line to Madakasira will be completed by December next year. The construction of the new railway station near Haresamudram is moving swiftly. Once the route is operational, it will provide easy access to Rayadurg, Kalyanadurga, Pavagada, Madakasira, Tumakuru, and Bengaluru.

With support from the central and state governments, major industries in the defence and aerospace sectors are being set up near Madakasira. The APIIC has acquired 1,600 acres of land for these developments. Kalyani Strategic Systems is launching a major manufacturing unit with an investment of Rs 1,430 crore. The company will play a key role in producing weapons and ammunition. Everest Steel Buildings is investing Rs

250 crore to manufacture pre-engineered building equipment. The reopening of the previously closed garment industry has greatly benefited local residents, providing direct employment to 2,000 people. This will boost the local economy. With these industries being established, the Madakasira region is set to achieve significant industrial development.

The State government has declared Madakasira, located on the Karnataka border, as a Revenue Division center. Earlier, people of this region had to travel long distances for their revenue-related work. To go to Penukonda, they needed to travel nearly 80 kilometers, and reaching the district headquarters at Puttaparthi used to be even more difficult—often a full day's journey. Now, with Madakasira designated as a Revenue Division, all these difficulties have been resolved. People of Amarapuram, Agali, Rolla, and Gudibanda mandals can complete their revenue work locally. This saves them time and money, making the people very happy.

Farmers' groups oppose second phase of land pooling in Amaravati

PNS ■ Vijayawada

"Farmers who gave their lands earlier have still not received justice and then how can the government ask for more land again?" said farmers' leader and former minister Vadde Shobhanadreeswara Rao, opening a round-table meeting held on Monday to discuss the second phase of land pooling in Amaravati.

Sobhanadreeswara Rao strongly objected to the government's move to acquire additional land under the new phase of land pooling, saying it was unacceptable when the promises made during the first phase remained unfulfilled. He also demanded to know why the cases filed against Amaravati farmers had not yet been withdrawn.

He criticised the expansion of earlier development plans proposed during N Chandrababu Naidu's tenure, alleging that such moves reflected political



Farmer leader and former minister Vadde Shobhanadreeswara Rao speaking at a roundtable in Vijayawada on Saturday

ambitions rather than genuine public need. He said the 24-plots formula was being used to pressure farmers and added that creating a massive township was unnecessary when Amaravati does not even have a population of two lakh. Questioning the rationale behind acquiring 5,000 acres for a Greenfield airport and 2,500 acres for a Sports City, he asked whether the government was prepared to ensure justice for all those affected by these large-scale projects. The former minister further warned that Chief Minister Naidu's ideas suggested unchecked spending in Amaravati. He accused the government of creating unnecessary hype in the name of "iconic bridges" without considering real needs on the ground. Constructing such projects, he said, was not as simple as building small wooden bridges over irrigation canals, as some seem to believe.

The meeting, attended by retired professor Dr C Ramachandraiah, State Development Committee coordinator Vasundhara, Amaravati farmer Bujji Tirumala Rao, CPI-M State Secretariat member Ch Babu Rao, and leaders of several public organisations, concluded with a collective call for prioritising farmers' welfare and reassessing the scale and necessity of proposed development in Amaravati.

Four Ayyappa devotees from AP die in accident in TN

PNS ■ Amaravati

A horrific road accident happened near Rameswaram in Tamil Nadu. A lorry rammed into a station car near Ramanathapuram, leading to death of four Ayyappa devotees from Andhra Pradesh. Another person was injured and was immediately shifted to a hospital for treatment.

All of them had visited Sabarimala and were returning after going to Rameswaram. The accident took place during their return journey at around 2:15 am on Saturday.

Among the deceased, three were identified as residents of Korapu Kottavalasa under Dattirajeru mandal in Vizianagaram district. Another person was identified as a resident of Marupalli under Gajapathinagaram mandal. The deceased were



The mangled remains of the car after it was hit from behind by a lorry near Rameswaram on Saturday

Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu expressed deep shock over the road accident. He inquired about the incident and conveyed his condolences to the families of the deceased. He instructed officials to ensure the injured receive the best medical care.

Ministers Vangalapudi Anitha, Mandipalli Ramprasad Reddy, Achchennaaidu, and Kondapalli Srinivas expressed grief over the death of the Vizianagaram district residents in the Tamil Nadu accident. Home Minister Anitha sought details of the incident from officials and conveyed her condolences to the bereaved families. She directed authorities to ensure the bodies are handed over to the families at the earliest and to provide quality treatment to the injured.

Awareness run for road safety held in Bhimavaram

PNS ■ Bhimavaram

District Collector Chadalawada Nagarani inaugurated and participated in the Traffic Awareness 3K Run organised on Saturday from BV Raju Junction. District Superintendent of Police Adnan Nayeem Asmi, District Joint Collector T Rahul Kumar Reddy, District Revenue Officer B Shivannarayana Reddy, a large number of college students, officials, the public, athletics and walkers associations took part in the event. The 3K run continued up to the Alluri Sitarama Raju statue on Juvvalapalem Road.

Thousands participated in the 5-kilometre run, displaying placards on traffic rules such as "Road Safety is Everyone's Responsibility," "Wearing a Helmet Saves Lives," "Overspeeding is



District Collector Chadalawada Nagarani and District Superintendent of Police Adnan Nayeem Asmi participating in awareness run for road safety in Bhimavaram on Saturday

Dangerous," "No Triple Riding," "Driving While on Cell Phone is Hazardous," "Do Not Drink and Drive," echoing throughout the town. Despite the severe early morning cold, large numbers of students and the public gathered at the junction by 6 am, surprising many.

District Collector Nagarani stated that losing even one life would affect not only one

family but multiple families, stressing that people, especially youth, must strictly follow traffic rules to ensure safe commuting. She noted that accidents often claim the lives of breadwinners or young sons, pushing families into unbearable distress. She emphasised that youth must listen to their parents and wear helmets without fail. Many lives have been saved in



Bihar govt approves TTD proposal to build temple in Patna

PNS ■ Tirupati

TTD chairman BR Naidu expressed happiness over the Bihar government's approval to construct a TTD temple in Patna, the State's capital. Bihar Chief Secretary Pratyay Amrit has formally written to the TTD chairman confirming the allocation of 10.11 acres of land in Mokama Khas for the proposed temple. Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu and State HRD Minister N Lokesh congratulated the TTD chairman on the development.

The Bihar government has decided to grant the land on a 99-year lease for a token rent of RS 1. BR Naidu said TTD would make the best use of this opportunity to build the temple and extend its spiritual activities in Bihar. He also thanked the Bihar authorities for appointing the Director of the Bihar State Tourism Development Corporation as the official liaison for signing the MoU.

The TTD representatives will soon hold discussions with the Bihar Tourism Corporation to initiate all necessary procedures for the temple construction. The TTD chairman conveyed heartfelt gratitude to the Bihar government for its cooperation and foresight in enabling this significant project.



Labour Minister Vasumsetti Subhash visiting Government General Hospital (GGH) in Kakinada on Saturday

Cardiology specialist will be appointed soon at GGH: Minister Subhash

PNS ■ Kakinada

Labour Minister Vasumsetti Subhash expressed serious concern over the absence of a cardiology specialist at the Government General Hospital (GGH) in Kakinada, stating that the situation was affecting patients suffering from heart-related ailments. He promised to bring the issue to the notice of Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu and ensure that a specialist is appointed at the earliest.

Speaking to the media during his visit to the hospital on Saturday, the Minister said that Hospital Superintendent Dr Lavanya Kumari had informed him about the acute shortage of doctors, particularly in the cardiology department. She explained that the previous cardiology specialist had

resigned due to personal reasons, leaving the post vacant.

The Minister, accompanied by Hospital Superintendent Dr Lavanya Veni, Deputy Superintendent Dr Srinivasan, Hospital Administrative Officer M Sridhar, and CS RMO Dr Komali, visited the cardiology and general surgery wards. He interacted with patients to understand the treatment facilities available to them.

He also inquired about the health condition of a close relative of a senior journalist who is currently undergoing treatment for heart problems in the Cardiology Intensive Care Unit, and instructed the superintendent to ensure special care for her. Additionally, the Minister visited the surgical ward to check on the condition of a journalist from P. Gannavaram who is receiving treatment.

BJP to embark on 'Atal-Modi Good Governance' Yatra in State from Dec 11

PNS ■ Vijayawada

On the occasion of former prime minister AB Vajpayee's centenary celebrations, Union Minister Bhupatiraju Srinivasa Varma and BJP State unit president PVN Madhav unveiled the poster and logo for Atal-Modi Good Governance Yatra here on Saturday. Participants included Ramesh Naidu, Syed Basha, Paturi Nagabhushanam, Adduri Sriram, and Valluru Jayaprakash. The Yatra will be conducted December 11 to December 25. "We are organising programmes on December 25, the centenary birth anniversary of Atal Bihari Vajpayee, as Good Governance Day," said Madhav Vajpayee, he said, had fought against the anti-people policies of the Congress. For the country, he advocated nuclear capability and spoke strongly about Article 374. Together with Shyama Prasad Mukherjee, he boldly spoke about the



1961 Goa Liberation, military strength, and clarity in foreign policy.

during the days of Emergency, when he went to jail, he continued to fight for the people and for the nation. surprised everyone by giving speeches not in English but in Hindi. After the formation of the BJP, he presided over its first meeting in 1980. Even when the party won only two MP seats in 1984 and faced humiliation, he did not give

up and continued to fight against anti-people policies. Connecting 27 parties and leading them was an example of his leadership style.

Yatra will begin from Dhamavaram on December 11. Every day, two public meetings will be held—one in the morning and one in the evening. On December 25, Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu will attend the centenary meeting in Amaravati.



Apurva Bharat assumes office as Joint Collector

PNS ■ Kakinada

Apurva Bharat has assumed office as the new Joint Collector of Kakinada district at his chamber in the Collectorate here on Saturday.

Several officials accorded him a rousing reception and greeted him. He worked as the Project officer ITDA Chintoor prior to his posting here. The joint collector post had fallen vacant as Rahul Meena was transferred to Rajahmundry as municipal corporation commissioner.

Bharat has taken charge after a lapse of fifty days. Assistant Collector Manisha, DRO Venkat Rao, Kakinada RDO Sripada Mallibabu, district supply officer RSS Satyanarayana Raju, district Manager civil supplies corporation D Devula Naik, District endowments officer K Nageswerrao, Endowments Inspector V Phanindra Kumar, Kakinada Urban Tahasildar V Jithendra were among those called on the new joint collector and greeted him.

Techie, mother found hanging in hotel room

Police suspect that the mother-son duo could have died by suicide

PNS ■ Visakhapatnam

A tragic incident has unfolded in Visakhapatnam, where the lifeless bodies of a mother and son were found in a private lodge, sending shockwaves throughout the community. The incident took place in Addivaram, part of the 98th division of the Greater Visakhapatnam Municipal Corporation (GVMC). Initial reports suggest that the duo may

have taken their own lives at the lodge on Post Office Street, sparking widespread outrage. The underlying reasons behind the suicide is yet to be established.

Police confirmed that the son, 39-year-old Gayappanjan, lived in Srinivasanagar near Pata Gajuwaka and worked as software professional for a well-known IT firm in Hyderabad. His mother, 59-year-old Neelavathi, accompanied him on this



unfortunate day. On Thursday evening, Gayappanjan and

Neelavathi checked into a lodge on Post Office Street after visiting Simhachalam. After 24 hours, staff members knocked on their door to see if they would be staying longer, but received no answer. Concerned, the lodge management contacted the Gopalapatnam police.

Responding to the situation, the Gopalapatnam Circle Inspector forced entry into the room and made the harrowing dis-

covery of both individuals hanging from the ceiling. Police filed a case and sent the bodies for a post-mortem examination while investigating the circumstances leading to this heartbreaking event.

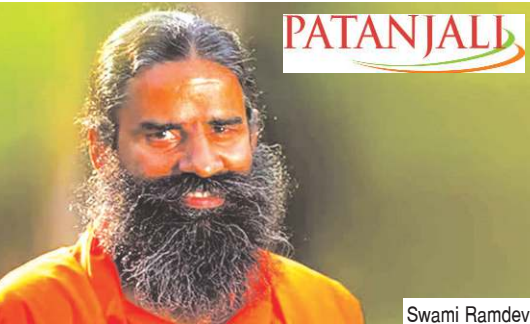
It has come to light that Gayappanjan was previously married to a woman from Hyderabad but had been facing marital issues. In 2023, Gayappanjan's wife had allegedly filed a complaint against him at the

Nampally Police Station, leading to an official case being registered. Investigators are now looking into a potential link between these marital problems and the tragic decision made by the mother and son.

The shock of finding two bodies in what is typically a peaceful area has left the community in shock. Police are working to piece together the factors that led to this devastating incident.

PROSPECT

Patanjali Group signs MoU to enter Russia with its Ayurveda products



Swami Ramdev

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

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

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

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

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



Nayab Singh Saini

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

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

Customs simplification next big reform: FM

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

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

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

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



ARAMAN

Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman

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

assignment," she said.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Ahmedabad

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Need stronger arbitral institutions for infrastructure sector: Justice Rajesh Bindal

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

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

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

He said the rapid growth of India's infrastructure, including power, roads, metro, ports and dams, has naturally increased disputes. "Activity is increasing, so percentage of disputes will go up — some genuine, some creative.

"We should solve them at each stage, instead of taking the entire dispute to the end and stalling the project," Justice Bindal said. He endorsed institutional arbitration in construction disputes, to combat its current issues of inflated costs and delayed proceedings by ensuring the availability of technical experts, proper record-keeping, and structured case management.

He also stressed contract drafting as a key area for reducing disputes. "The best form of agreement is where all relevant laws and terms are incorporated in a single document, avoiding overlaps and patho-



Justice Rajesh Bindal

logical clauses," he said.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

TONY DAS
■ Guwahati

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

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

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



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

Pioneer photo

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

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

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

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

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

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

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

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

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

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



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

Pioneer photo

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

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

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

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

Five arrested for gold heist in Delhi posing as officials

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

The Delhi Police have arrested five persons for allegedly looting around one kg of gold from a jewellery workshop in central Delhi by impersonating enforcement officials conducting a 'raid'. The accused — inspired by the Bollywood film 'Special 26' — staged a raid at the workshop on November 27 by posing as Delhi Police and income tax officials, and 'confiscated' around one kg of gold before fleeing. The investigation — stretching across Delhi, Rohtak, Hisar, Hansi and other parts of Haryana — culminated in a 1,200-kilometre pursuit.

According to the police, the gang, inspired by the Bollywood heist film Special 26, carried out the robbery on November 27 after entering the workshop disguised as law-enforcement officials. One of the men wore a police uniform, while the others claimed to be Income Tax officers conducting an "inspec-

tion". The group seized mobile phones from workers, announced a search operation, uprooted the CCTV DVR, and fled with approximately 1 kg of gold. Five men — including a Delhi Government employee, and another claiming to be an Officer on Special Duty (OSD) in the Madhya Pradesh Government's public relations department — were arrested following a 72-hour chase across Delhi-NCR and several districts of Haryana, police said. A case was registered immediately at the Prasad Nagar police station, and a team began cross-checking every possible route the suspects might have taken.

During the staged raid, one accused wore a fake police uniform while others acted as income tax officers, seizing mobile phones of workers, wiping CCTV footage, and escaping with the gold, the senior officer said. Subsequently, the police launched a massive operation spanning over 1,200 km



across Bahadurgarh, Gurugram, Sonapat, Panipat, Rohtak, Jhajjar, Hisar and Jind. The officer said footage from over 250 CCTV cameras were scanned and advanced technical surveillance was mounted to track the movement of the gang across multiple cities. Based on technical leads, police first apprehended Sandeep (30), a native of Jind and currently living in Bhopal, from Bahadurgarh on December 2. He claims to be an OSD in the Madhya Pradesh Government, which is being verified, police said.

His interrogation led to the arrest of four other accused — Rakesh Sharma (41) from Rohtak, Shaminder Pal Singh (43) and Lavpreet Singh (30) from Hisar, and Parvinder (42) from Delhi. Police recovered 435.03 grams of the stolen gold, ₹3.97 lakh in cash, three cars used in the crime — including an SUV — and five fake ID card holders and lanyards (piece of uniform) bearing 'Delhi Police' markings. The disguises worn during the 'raid' were also

seized. According to investigators, Parvinder, a Delhi Government employee, and Sandeep devised the plan after learning from an associate that jewellery workshops in the Karol Bagh-Dev Nagar belt handled large quantities of gold.

The gang then acquired ID cards, lanyards, and a fake police uniform and conducted the raid on November 27.

Police say that immediately after the robbery, the gold was divided. Parvinder allegedly took 500 grams, Sandeep kept 500 grams out of which 428 grams were sold. He reportedly handed ₹25.5 lakh to Rakesh for further distribution among the team. The rest of the proceeds, police say, were used by Sandeep to settle personal debts.

Efforts are underway to trace the remaining stolen gold and arrest the absconding accused — identified as Akram, Suresh alias Jammal, and Naveen alias Kala, they added.

Pollution nearly doubles in November: CREA

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

Delhi's air pollution nearly doubled in November, pushing the national Capital to the fourth spot among the most polluted cities in the country.

A report released by the Centre for Research on Energy and Clean Air (CREA) on Saturday highlighted that while the impact of stubble burning on Delhi's air quality was significantly lower compared to last year, pollution levels in the city remained severe. Delhi ranked as the fourth most polluted city in the country in November, recording a monthly average PM2.5 level of 215 micrograms per cubic metre — nearly double its October average of 107 micrograms per cubic metre.

The national Capital witnessed 23 'very poor' days, six 'severe' days and one 'poor' day during the month. Despite the deteriorating air quality, the contribution of stubble burning averaged only 7 per cent in November, compared to 20 per cent last year.

Peak stubble-burning contribution touched 22 per cent, significantly lower than the 38 per cent recorded in November 2024, the report said.

Meanwhile, air quality across India deteriorated sharply in November, with nine of the country's ten



most polluted cities recording higher pollution levels than the previous year, according to the analysis.

The report revealed that all but one of the top ten polluted cities failed to record even a single day within the safe daily National Ambient Air Quality Standards (NAAQS) limit throughout the entire month.

Ghaziabad emerged as the most polluted city in India, with a monthly average PM2.5 concentration of 224 micrograms per cubic metre, breaching the NAAQS on every single day in November. The city recorded 19 'very poor' days, 10 'severe' days and one 'poor' day.

Noida, Bahadurgarh, Delhi, Hapur, Greater Noida, Baghpat, Sonapat,

Meerut and Rohtak also featured among the ten most polluted cities.

Uttar Pradesh accounted for six of these cities, followed by Haryana with three and Delhi with one. Except for Bahadurgarh, none of the top ten cities recorded even a single day within the safe NAAQS threshold.

Several other NCR cities, including Charkhi Dadri, Bulandshahr, Jind, Muzaffarnagar, Gurgaon, Khurja, Bhiwani, Karnal, Yamunanagar and Faridabad, also remained above safe pollution levels throughout the month.

"Despite a significant reduction in stubble-burning influence, 20 out of 29 NCR cities recorded higher pollution levels than the previous year. This clearly indicates

that the dominant drivers are year-round sources such as transport, industry, power plants and other combustion sources. Without sector-specific emission cuts, cities will continue to breach standards," said Manoj Kumar, Analyst at CREA.

At the state level, Rajasthan recorded the highest number of polluted cities, with 23 out of 34 exceeding the NAAQS in November.

Haryana followed with 22 out of 25 cities breaching safe limits, while Uttar Pradesh had 14 out of 20 cities above the standard. High pollution levels were also recorded across Madhya Pradesh, Odisha and Punjab.

In contrast, Shillong in Meghalaya emerged as the cleanest city in India in November, with a monthly average PM2.5 concentration of just 7 micrograms per cubic metre. The list of the ten cleanest cities included six from Karnataka, and one each from Meghalaya, Sikkim, Tamil Nadu and Kerala. Out of 255 cities with sufficient monitoring data, only 114 complied with India's NAAQS of 60 micrograms per cubic metre.

Compliance with the World Health Organisation's daily safe guideline of 15 micrograms per cubic metre remained extremely low, with just two cities meeting the benchmark, the report noted.

Govt forms expert group to tackle air quality

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

The Delhi Government has constituted an "Expert Group on Air Pollution Mitigation" to provide evidence-based guidance on prevention, control and long-term management of air quality.

The expert body has been set up to advise the Delhi Government on sector-specific interventions, emerging technologies and policy reforms needed to address the pollution caused by multiple anthropogenic and natural factors.

The group will function as a high-level advisory panel to guide, evaluate and strengthen Delhi's air quality management strategy. As per the order, retired IAS officer and former Union environment secretary Leena Nandan will chair the expert group.

Other members include former Central Pollution Control Board member secretary Dr JS Kamyotra, IIT Delhi professor emeritus Mukesh Khare, IIT Kanpur professor emeritus Mukesh Sharma, TERI's Circular Economy and Waste Management director Dr Suneel Pandey, and representatives from the Commission for Air Quality Management (CAQM), India Meteorological Department (IMD), APAG and PHD Chamber of Commerce and Industry (PHDCCI).



The secretary (environment and forest), Delhi Government, will also be a member, while the chairman of the Delhi Pollution Control Committee (DPCC) will act as the member secretary.

The primary objective of the group will be to provide independent, science-based and actionable advice to the Delhi Government on air pollution mitigation, including short-term emergency responses and long-term structural reforms.

It will also monitor and review air pollution control programmes being implemented by various departments, suggest policy measures aligned with best global practices and offer corrective inputs on air quality-related decisions and initiatives.

The expert group will meet at least once every month and may hold meetings in physical or virtual mode. The DPCC will provide secretarial and logistical support to the panel.

The group has been constituted for an initial period of six months, with the Government retaining the power to extend its tenure or modify its composition as required.

All members have also been directed to maintain confidentiality of internal discussions, unpublished assessments and Government documents.

The order states the constitution of the group has been approved by Chief Minister Rekha Gupta.

Govt fines over ₹7 crore for construction site violations

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

Delhi Environment Minister Manjinder Singh Sirsa on Saturday said the Government imposed more than ₹7 crore in penalties on construction sites violating pollution norms this year.

"A total of 1,750 sites were inspected, 556 notices were issued and 48 units were ordered shut for violating pollution control norms, he said. In the last two days, the Delhi Pollution Control Committee officials carried out 230 road and garbage inspections, 110 by Municipal Corporation of Delhi officials, 36 by the Public Works Department, 32 by the Delhi Development Authority, 17 by the Delhi State Industrial and Infrastructure

Development Corporation, and eight by the Delhi Metro Rail Corporation, resulting in a show-cause penalty of around ₹1 crore, the minister said.

He said the agencies issued 7.97 lakh Pollution Under Control challans this year, compared to 4.33 lakh challans in 2024. A total of 42,017 potholes were fixed this year, against 18,000 repaired a year ago.

Sirsa said the number of electric vehicles registered in Delhi has risen to 4.54 lakh on November 15 this year, up from 3.46 lakh on December 31, 2024.

He said DPCC will appoint 100 surveyors for door-to-door and road-to-road assessments to strengthen on-ground checks. Currently, 1,823 enforcement teams are deployed, includ-



ing 536 for dust control and 633 for action against open burning.

Around 350 new mist-spray poles have been installed across Delhi, while 3,377 electric heaters have

been supplied to 1,407 resident welfare associations as part of a plan to distribute 10,000 heaters city-wide, the environment minister added.

The Delhi Government is

soon to sign an MoU with IIT Delhi and IITM for a Pollution Source Apportionment Study to scientifically identify and address city-specific pollution sources. This will further strengthen the Government's data-backed approach to air quality management, Sirsa said. The Government has issued strict directions for retrofitting all BS-IV and below generators with anti-pollution devices. "No generator — domestic or commercial — will be allowed to operate without retrofitting. Violators will face heavy penalties," the Minister warned. Earlier in the day, the minister inspected the Saidulajab ward area as part of the ongoing mega cleanliness drive across all parts of Delhi.

AQI remains very poor settling at 330

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

A thick blanket of Pollution hung over the capital on Saturday as Delhi's air quality stayed locked in the 'very poor' category, with the 24-hour average AQI settling at 330.

Among the 40 monitoring stations, 31 stations remained in the 'very poor' levels in the evening, with Nehru Nagar reporting the highest AQI at 369, according to CPCB's Sameer App.

Earlier, Delhi woke to another choking morning with the AQI at 335 at 9 am. A total of 36 stations were in the 'very poor' category, with Mundka recording the worst levels at 387.

According to the Decision Support System for Delhi's air

quality management, transport within the city remained the highest local contributor at 14.8 per cent, followed by industries in Delhi and surrounding areas at 7.3 per cent, residential sources at 3.6 per cent and construction at 2 per cent.

Among neighbouring NCR districts, Jhajjar contributed 13.9 per cent, while Rohtak accounted for 5.2 per cent.

Delhi's air quality has swung sharply through the week. The city recorded an AQI of 279 on Sunday, 304 on Monday, rose to 372 on Tuesday, and stood at 342 on Wednesday. It remained in the 'very poor' category at 304 on Thursday and 327 on Friday. According to the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB), an AQI between 0 and 50 is 'good', 51 to 100

'satisfactory', 101 to 200 'moderate', 201 to 300 'poor', 301 to 400 'very poor' and 401 to 500 'severe'.

On the weather front, the India Meteorological Department (IMD) said the maximum temperature settled at 24.6 degrees Celsius, 0.7 notches below normal, while the minimum was 6.8 degrees Celsius, 2.7 notches below normal.

Evening relative humidity stood at 56 per cent, while morning humidity climbed to 95 per cent. The weather department predicted shallow fog for Sunday morning.

For Sunday, the IMD has forecast a minimum temperature of 9 degrees Celsius and a maximum of 24 degrees Celsius, with a partly cloudy sky.

CM Rekha Gupta leads cleaning and washing drive amid pollution rise

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

Amid concerns of a rise in Pollution in the national capital, Delhi Chief Minister Rekha Gupta led a cleaning and washing drive on the Ring Road at Khyber Pass Chowk in Civil Lines, and personally participated in sweeping and water-sprinkling operations. The Chief Minister said that this campaign is a significant step towards making Delhi pollution-free and ensuring effective dust control. She added that regular road washing,

mechanical sweeping, and on-ground monitoring across the city are being undertaken with great speed and seriousness. She said that for the first time in Delhi's history, a washing campaign has been carried out across the entire Ring Road.

She added that dust is a major contributor to pollution. To address this permanently, roads are being constructed wall-to-wall. She alleged that previous Governments neither took interest in road construction nor ensured that roads were built wall-to-wall, resulting in

dust being blown across Delhi throughout the year. However, her Government has now ensured a permanent solution.

The Chief Minister further informed that elected representatives are being given adequate budget allocations to construct such strong and dust-resistant roads. She said that each MLA is being allocated Rs 10 crore so that they can initiate the construction of these roads in their constituencies. The Chief Minister stated that the Delhi Government is working to stop the use of coal and wood

in the open, alongside addressing pollution on a long-term basis. For this, the Government has begun providing electric heaters to security guards and electric irons to those who iron clothes, so that reliance on traditional fuels can end. She appealed to all sections of society and companies to contribute through CSR funds to help provide electric heaters and electric irons to citizens in need, enabling them to adopt cleaner alternatives.

Sharing details of the Government's efforts to control pollution, the Chief



Minister said that the Government is rapidly moving towards its target of fully transitioning public transport to electric vehicles (EVs). Currently, around 3,500 electric buses are operating on Delhi's roads, and the Government aims to convert the city's entire public transport system to EVs by the end of 2026. The Chief Minister urged the public to use carpooling and public transport more frequently.

Speaking on dust control, the Chief Minister said that extensive cleaning operations are underway across

Delhi. Around 200 water-sprinkler vehicles are deployed daily on the Ring Road to clear dust from trees, remove roadside silt, and carry out regular watering along the central verge.

She said the Government is taking a new step every day to reduce pollution. Appealing to the public, she said that citizens must also contribute to this campaign. She emphasised that Governmental efforts will only succeed when people understand their responsibility and actively participate in this movement.



States Focus



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

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



JAGANNATH TEMPLE OWNS OVER 60,000 ACRES IN ODISHA

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

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

MOHIT KANDHARI ■ Jammu

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

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

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



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



In view of the above, and keeping in mind the principles of fairness, equity and equal opportunity for all aspirants, I would urge the Commission to take cognizance of the prevailing circumstances and consider postponement of the forthcoming examination by a reasonable duration, purely in the interest of the candidates.

I am confident that the Commission as always, will take a compassionate and balanced view of the matter in the larger public interest".

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

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

The advertisement notice for the examination was published by the Jammu and Kashmir Public Service Commission on 22/08/2025. The exam was notified to be conducted on 07/12/2025 through a notice on 06/11/2025".

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

The ruling National Conference accused the BJP-PDP alliance Government for reducing the age limit during their tenure in power. "Which Government permanently reduced the age limit for all students of Jammu and Kashmir to apply for Government services? It was the PDP-BJP Government in 2018, said a post of the JNC handle on X (earlier Twitter). Hitting back, PDP wrote back on X, "Excuses and finger-

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

People's Conference Chairman Sajad Lone in a post on X said, "The JKAS age relaxation issue is turning out to be yet another classical case of passing the buck at the cost of young aspirants. First CM posted, suggesting that he had no role in the scuttling of the age relaxation file. And now the LG has suggested that they had sent the file back on the 2nd of December. For heaven's sake, can the CM put something in writing? The CMs office cannot be run through TV bytes. What stops him from issuing written orders? Let them defy written orders. If the other side is falsifying facts. Let us call their bluff. Every single day we have a moaning CM complaining about his file being turned down. Yet nothing in the form of written communication".

Female Greylag Goose tagged for migration study

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Patna

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

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



was recently captured.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Ayodhya under heavy security on Babri demolition anniversary

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Lucknow/Ayodhya

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

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

"December 6 is

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

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

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



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

PTI

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

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

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

"Jai Shri Ram, On Shaurya

Diwas, a hundred salutations to the Sanatanis who, by offering their lives in the Shri Ram Mandir movement, paved the way for the cultural renaissance of the nation," a post on the official handle of the BJP's Uttar Pradesh unit said.

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

Even the main litigants, including Hashim Ansari and Triloki Nath Pandey, in whose name the court decree for the Ram temple was issued, have passed away. Meanwhile, the five-acre plot allotted by the Supreme Court to the Sunni Central Waqf Board for building a mosque remains barren.

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

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

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

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

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Jaipur

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



this time.

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

TNCC chief denies reports of Praveen, Vijay meeting

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Chennai

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

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

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

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

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

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

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ Kolkata

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

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

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



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

PTI

rapist and a robber. His name was invoked without any permission," Adhikari said blaming the Chief Minister for making what Kabir had become today. Adhikari was taking part in a rally on the occasion of "Saurya Diwas" that started in front of Swami Vivekananda's residence and marched a few kms till Shyambazar crossing in North Kolkata.

Wondering why the Chief

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

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

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

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

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

Sudanese paramilitary drone attack kills 50

ASSOCIATED PRESS
■ Cairo

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



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

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

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

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

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

Protesters held for smearing custard on King Charles jewels



ASSOCIATED PRESS ■ London

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

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

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



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ Dhaka

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

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

11 killed in mass shooting at South African bar

ASSOCIATED PRESS
■ Cape town

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



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

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

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

12 arrests in Minneapolis as part of immigration operation

ASSOCIATED PRESS
■ Minneapolis

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

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

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

Russia unleashes a massive drone, missile attack on Ukraine

ASSOCIATED PRESS
■ Kyiv

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



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

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

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

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



Mexico freezes Miss Universe co-owner's bank accounts

ASSOCIATED PRESS ■ Mexico City

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



US to expand travel ban to more than 30 countries

ASSOCIATED PRESS ■ Washington

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

FROM THE WORLD

USA

Woman charged with smuggling

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

PAKISTAN

Nine terrorists gunned down

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

India boosts Sri Lanka recovery efforts

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Colombo

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

PTI

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Major terror bid foiled in Pak, 24 terrorists arrested

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Lahore

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

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

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



tors and four bombs were recovered from those arrested.

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

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

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

Miniature model of Gandhi statue set for UK auction

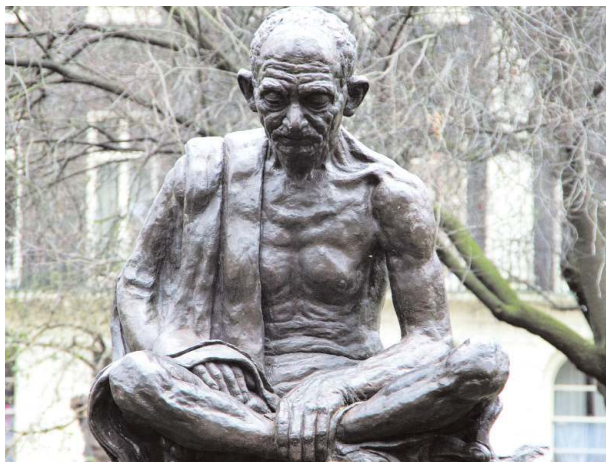
PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

London

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

Indian student dies from injuries in US house fire

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New York

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



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

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Jerusalem

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Gaza ceasefire at critical moment: Qatar



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

AP

ASSOCIATED PRESS

Doha

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Sao Paulo

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





Putin Dials Delhi

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



Indo-Russia: Cementing strategic ties

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



VIKAS SWARUP
Ambassador

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

Beyond Ceremony: Practical Priorities

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

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

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

The Energy Equation

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

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

Defence: The Unspoken Dimension

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

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

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

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

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

Expanding Horizons

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

CONTINUED ON >> P11

The most reliable partnership in the world

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

CONTINUED ON >> P11



Manipur: Timeless beauty and a cuisine rooted in nature



ANIL
RAJPUT

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

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

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

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



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

The spread of Vaishnavism in the eighteenth century during the reign of King Pamheiba (Garib Niwaz) introduced another set of transformations in the valley. Hymns, devotional poetry and the Ras Leela dance form gave Manipur's society the depth of the bhakti tradition that blended seamlessly with earlier beliefs. The emergence of this new devotional identity did not erase the earlier beliefs but created a harmony of philosophies where rituals for ancestors, forest spirits and Vaishnava beliefs coexist even today.

Cuisine in Manipur, one of the most intricate food cultures of the region, is mostly inspired by its geography and reflects its religious and social traditions. Much like the varied tribal cuisines of the north-east, Manipuri cuisine cannot be generalized because it is created on a foundation of ecological diversity, traditional methods of cooking and nuances of subtle flavours. An abundance of local produce provides diverse ingredients that are native to the region's ecology. Fresh herbs, seasonal greens, fermented ingredients, and fresh water fish form the basis of everyday meals, while techniques such as steaming, slow-cooking, and light seasoning bring out natural flavours rather than being overpowering. Manipuri food reflects a long tradition of using what the land and waters provide and is prepared in ways that preserve both nutrition and taste.

The cuisine of Manipur's valley regions is characterised by fresh, seasonal ingredients especially herbs, greens, and river fish and prepared with

minimal oil to preserve natural flavours. Light fermentation, gentle spicing, and simple cooking methods like boiling and steaming give the food an earthy taste and ensures nutritional value. Ngari, fermented fresh water fish that is sun-dried, forms the base of many local dishes and is known for its strong aroma and deep flavour. It is a key ingredient in popular dishes such as iromba and kangsoi and various chutneys, adding a punch to everyday meals. Iromba is made by combining boiled vegetables with mashed ngari and hara mirch (green chilli) with vegetables such as yongchak, seasonal beans, colocasia stems, and lai, a leafy green, that are stirred together into a delicious dish to be eaten with steamed rice. Iromba varies from one household to another, with some preferring it milder and others enhancing its sharpness with additional chillies. Another celebrated valley dish is singju, a spicy and crunchy salad of shredded vegetables, lotus stems, cabbage and herbs mixed with ngari. The use of roasted til (sesame) and a hint of lemon lends the salad its nutritious and nutty character.

A signature preparation of the Meitei culinary repertoire is chak hao, the famed black rice of Manipur, cooked during festivals and special occasions. It is often transformed into a sweet pudding with doodh (milk) and a touch of gur (jaggery), creating a rich and irresistible dessert. Another preferred dish is kangsoi, a boiled vegetable stew flavoured with adrak (ginger), hara mirch and a few herbs, cooked gently until the vegetables release their natural juices. This dish is an almost daily fare across the valley because of its lightness and nourishment, especially when the seasons are changing since it has properties that enhance immunity. Paaknam,



a savoury cake made of besan (gram flour), herbs, vegetables and sometimes fish, and wrapped in banana leaves and steamed, creates a fragrant dish served during festive periods. To top it all, Morok metpa, a fiery chutney made from roasted mirch (chilli), onions and herbs, along with ngari accompanies nearly every meal and reflects the local preference for heat balanced with freshness.

The valley also has a unique relationship with freshwater fish. Loktak Lake provides a wide variety that feature in dishes such as nga thongba, a fish stew prepared with adrak, pyaaz (onion), tomatoes, potatoes and herbs simmered slowly until the fish becomes tender. Nga atoiba, a fresh water fish stew, cooked with ingredients such as colocasia stems (paangkho), yong-chak, mustard leaves, chilli, turmeric, and sometimes herbs like maroi. Unlike spicier dishes, nga atoiba keeps the seasoning minimal to let the natural flavour of the fish stand out. The harmony between the natural sweetness of vegetables and the depth of ngari forms the heart of daily meals, creating a palette that is distinct, refined and deeply rooted in the land.

In the hill districts to the north, east, west, and south, tribal communities like the Tangkhul, Mao, Paite, Kuki, and Thadou have their own unique cuisines. These cuisines rely on forest produce, smoked meats, and traditional preservation methods. In the northern hills where the Tangkhuls live, the food is richer and often includes smoked or dried meats. Smoking happens carefully at home, allowing the meat to take in the aroma of firewood. This process creates flavors that fit well with the cool monsoon season. One beloved dish is hentak, made from a blend of sun-dried fish powder and a paste of edible Alocasia petioles, shaped into small balls and left to ferment. Hentak has a mildly pungent smell and is rich in protein. It is often used to add flavor to everyday meals, especially in stews, vegetable dishes, and chutneys. In the valley region, it is a household essential, valued for its long shelf life and the deep flavor it brings to home-style Manipuri cooking.

In the western hills, where the Mao Nagas live, the cuisine emphasises ginger, yam, fermented bamboo shoots and leafy vegetables. Smoked pork cooked with bastenga, fermented bamboo shoot, is a common delicacy symbolic of their reliance on preservation methods perfected over generations. The dish combines pork, bamboo shoot, mirch and adrak, simmered long enough to merge flavours yet still preserve the natural textures. Another traditional western hill dish is anishi made from fermented taro leaves cooked with pork. The slow cooking brings out an inten-

sity that pairs well with steamed rice and seasonal vegetables.

In the southern hills inhabited by Kuki and Paite groups, cuisine shifts toward heartier stews, dried meats and dishes cooked with a greater amount of pyaaz and tomatoes. Pork and chicken are central to many dishes, where meat is stewed with bamboo shoots, lai and seasonal herbs collected from nearby forests. One popular preparation is sai bhaji, where pork is simmered with beans, vegetables and adrak until it becomes tender and richly flavoured and is eaten during family gatherings or community feasts. The southern tribes also prepare dried fish broths that combine dried river fish with mirch and herbs to create warming meals suited to the cooler hill climate.

In the eastern districts bordering Myanmar, cross cultural influences emerge more prominently. Here, communities prepare rice noodles used in broth-based dishes enriched with vegetables, herbs and sometimes fish. The technique of boiling, steaming and using minimal spices reflects a shared culinary heritage shaped by both Manipuri and Southeast Asian practices. Seasonal greens feature in broths that are mild but nourishing, providing comfort during rainy months. Bamboo shoot curries, steamed fish seasoned with adrak and hara mirch, and boiled yam preparations are widespread across the eastern settlements, reinforcing a shared culinary identity that is both local and trans-regional.

As can be seen from the above recipes, fermentation holds deep significance in Manipuri gastronomy across both valley and hills. Ngari in the valley and hentak or bastenga in the hills reflect a deep understanding of natural preservation techniques. Rice also plays an essential role, not only as a staple but a cultural symbol. The valley's sticky rice, known as chak-hao (black aromatic rice) and other varieties in white, are staple in daily diets. Local beverages made through natural fermentation are also popular during rituals, reflecting the continuity of age-old practices linked to changing seasons.

Manipuri cuisine is being kept alive in contemporary times by the increasing numbers of cafes and restaurants that reinterpret traditional dishes while taking care to preserve their basic flavors. Indeed, this trend is welcome and calls for applause. Chefs are presenting classics like iromba, singju, chak-hao kheer, and ngari-based stews by reinventing them in lighter textures to suit the taste of modern times. Every care is undertaken to get farm-to-table sourcing that appeals to the health-conscious young. Ingredients hitherto confined to home kitchens-like hawaijar, wild herbs, black rice, and seasonal greens-now feature in curated menus and fusion dishes. Community-led food festivals and local entrepreneurs ensure authentic cooking ingredients and methods using family recipes remain central, allowing Manipuri food to evolve without losing its original character.

It is my belief that we have an obligation to protect these culinary traditions and keep them alive for future generations. The flavours of Manipur are not simply recipes but an expression of a people's tradition shaped by their land, their beliefs and their ancestral wisdom. They are the collective repository of the knowledge of generations who worked with forests, rivers, hills and fields, understanding nature and its importance for nourishment. Preserving this heritage is therefore an act of cultural responsibility that we must assume for ourselves. By valuing these traditions today, we affirm that the cuisine of Manipur will continue to nourish, teach and inspire the generations to come.

(The writer is Secretary, Cuisine India Society)

Naples comes calling with its Sourdough legacy



TEAM AGENDA

The aroma of rested sourdough and blistered tomatoes has finally found its way to Delhi. For a city that takes its food seriously, the arrival of Si Nonna's feels timely and assured. Celebrated across continents, it brings with it the legacy of Naples-five centuries of Neapolitan sourdough tradition and the distinction of being the world's largest AVPN-certified pizzeria network.

At Si Nonna's, the emphasis remains firmly on craft and discipline. Dough rests patiently for 24 hours, flour is thoughtfully sourced, cheese stays fresh, and every step-from fermentation to firing-follows methods shaped long before pizza became global currency. The result is flavour built on balance and restraint, confident without excess.

That philosophy runs through the menu. Pizza No. 2, topped with tomato sauce, buffalo mozzarella, basil and olive oil, achieves quiet harmony. Pizza No. 3 deepens the profile with garlic, olives, capers, basil and Fior di Latte, delivering layered flavour that remains

light on the palate. Other selections-numbers 6, 8 and beyond-continue this careful conversation between crust and topping, where nothing competes and everything belongs. Paired with a cup of strong hot coffee, the experience feels satisfying and complete.

Beyond pizzas, the menu reflects the comfort of a Neapolitan table. *Panuozzo sandwiches*, *Eggplant Parmigiana*, *fresh gelatos*, *kombuchas*, cooling beverages and a *classic Tiramisu* add depth and variety. Vegetarian, vegan and Jain-friendly options sit naturally alongside the rest, without implication or afterthought.

The space reinforces the experience. An open kitchen allows diners to watch dough being stretched, topped and eased into the oven. Guests — both children and adults — are invited to participate, crafting sourdough pizzas with aprons, chef hats and gentle guidance, creating a shared

family tradition rather than a staged performance.

Ayush Jatia, the force behind Si Nonna's, describes Delhi as a city "curious, energetic and deeply passionate about food" — a fitting stage for its presence. With GK2 as its home, Si Nonna's presents a revival of Neapolitan heritage, blending Italian kitchen traditions with Delhi's appreciation for authentic flavours.



Chronicles of Deccan delights



TEAM AGENDA

There are food festivals, and then there are culinary experiences that feel like stepping into someone's home, where the air is fragrant with slow-cooked spices and every bite carries memory. Hyderabad's Rasoi, hosted at Hyatt Place Gurgaon, firmly belonged to the latter. Across a week-long celebration, the hotel revived a culinary legacy rooted in warmth, patience and tradition, led by the quietly formidable Nizami Dilnaz Baig.

Hyderabad cuisine reflects centuries of cultural dialogue — Nizami opulence shaped by Persian finesse, Mughlai richness, Turkish depth and Deccan earthiness. At this festival, those influences unfolded with rare authenticity. Dilnaz Baig, 74 and fiercely passionate, brought to Gurgaon the flavours of Hyderabad's home kitchens rather than theatrical interpretations. Her presence transformed the event into an intimate cultural exchange. Having travelled through Pakistan, Iran, Turkey, Thailand and Europe, Dilnaz absorbed global influences without losing sight of her culinary origins. Her cooking draws from memory and instinct, both shaped by generations of practice.



"Hyderabad cuisine is about heritage," she explained. "Every dish carries a story from the royal kitchens of the Nizams, where spice, aroma and time work together."

The menu honoured that philosophy. *Khatti Dal* set a comforting tone, while *Hyderabad Dum Biryani*, *Haleem*, *Mirchi ka Salan* and *Bagara Baingan* showcased depth, balance and restraint. *Pathar ka Gosht* and *Shikampur Kebab* impressed with simplicity and technique, while thoughtful vegetarian options ensured inclusivity.

Guests could choose a relaxed table d'hôte lunch or a generous buffet dinner. What stayed was a sense of belonging. As General Manager Neha Kapoor observed, this was food steeped in familiarity and tradition. For one memorable week, Hyderabad arrived — alive on every plate.

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“I DON’T KNOW!” WHEN WE LIVE THE
BEAUTIFUL MYSTERY OF LIFE SO TOTALLY, JOY
DAWNS.’

Why meditation is non-negotiable to your mental health

GURUDEV SRI SRI RAVI SHANKAR

See, in schools, teachers often tell children not to get angry or not to feel sad. But nobody teaches you how not to get angry or how to handle this restless mind or negative emotions. We teach dental hygiene to our children, but forget to teach them about mental hygiene. What is mental hygiene? Taking care of your mind is mental hygiene. Everybody likes to wear clean clothes; everybody takes a shower daily. In the same way, we need to learn how to keep our minds free from the impressions we gather in the course of daily life.

Mental hygiene is necessary, and you can maintain it through practices like meditation. Taking some time out every day to consciously relax the mind and repose in your Self is like pressing the delete button on all the unnecessary files on your computer. It lets you start afresh with a clear slate. We teach children to brush their teeth when they are very young, so their teeth remain healthy and their smiles intact. But a smile comes not only from healthy teeth, but from a pleasant state of the mind, which you get from meditation to begin with. And then where does it lead us? Is it limited only to hygiene or wellness of the mind? No, it leads us to another dimension deep within us, which is a field of all possibilities.

The Antidote to Stress

A primary mental health concern today is stress, which does not go away just by talking or advising alone. We need to learn some techniques and tools to get rid of stress and calm the mind. Meditation is for those who have a lot to do in the world. It helps those with responsibilities, deadlines, challenges, and pressure. It gives you inner stability. It makes you peaceful within and dynamic outside. The quality of your life depends on the quality of your mind. If the mind is not centred, external influences can easily disturb it. Meditation helps you achieve that centredness.

The formula for stress is too much to do, too little time, and no energy to do it. Now, you cannot reduce your workload, nor can you have more time; you are left with only one thing to do, which is to increase your energy level. And this is where meditation can be of immense help.

Meditation gives you deep rest, deeper than the deepest sleep. When the mind becomes calm and centred, it gains access to the enormous intelligence and energy that reside within us. Meditation is a way to take that deep rest, and yet remain alert and conscious.

People have a common misconception that meditation is about focusing the mind. No, meditation is effortless and fun. It is what your soul has been looking for. When the mind becomes calmer with practice, you make better decisions and create a positive, harmonious atmosphere around you. When the mind is disturbed, your perception is disturbed, and any decision you take from that place is one you end up regretting.

What Does Science Say About Meditation and Stress?

Today, there are more than enough scientific

A primary mental health concern today is stress, which does not go away just by talking or advising alone. We need to learn some techniques and tools to get rid of stress and calm the mind



studies on how meditation benefits both body and mind. Studies show that stress, anxiety, and negative feelings create lesions in the hippocampus of the brain. When these lesions are removed through deep conscious relaxation, you begin to feel better, fresher, and more alert. Meditation empowers you to be in the present moment — not worried about the future or brooding over the past.

Another study shows that the amygdala, the central part of the brain, starts shrinking when you begin meditating. When the amygdala is larger, you are more prone to nervousness and other emotional imbalances. Scientists also say that grey matter increases in the brain with meditation. Grey matter processes information and controls muscles, memory, and emotions.

Researchers at Harvard Medical School have found that under stress, the brain may shift from cognitive to survival mode, which can cause memory loss over time, as more energy goes into surviving than cognition.

Chronic stress can lead to atrophy of brain mass and a decrease in its weight. These structural changes impact how you respond to stress, cognition, and memory. Stress can lead to irritability, moodiness, anxiety, and depression. Meditation works at the root of this by calming the system and restoring balance. Through meditation and breathing techniques, we can cleanse the mind of negative emotions and address mental stress effectively.

Modern medicine also supports these spiritual practices in reducing stress hormones. Psychiatrists at the National Institute of Mental Health and Neurosciences have found that cor-

tisol levels — the stress hormone — are significantly lower among practitioners of SudarshanKriya, a powerful breathing technique and meditation practice. Research from Sweden shows that SudarshanKriya reduces stress and anxiety and increases optimism and well-being. It is as effective as standard drug therapy, free of side effects, and does not strain the wallet. You can also increase your energy levels by chanting, which is a path to meditation. These chants have existed in human consciousness for thousands of years. When you chant, the deepest level of consciousness begins vibrating, energising you while calming your mind at the same time. It is because of these practices — singing bhajans and chanting — that people in ancient times did not experience many instances of depression, despite living modest lives in India. People chanted often, so the subtle energy remained high.

Meditation and Sleep

The biggest casualty of a stressful lifestyle is the quality of sleep. Every night when you sleep, you wake up energised and rejuvenated because the mind, body, and breath come together into one rhythm, eliminating the stress of the day. But there is another way of resting that is far superior to natural sleep — meditation. In meditation, you relax consciously.

With conscious meditation, or conscious rest, and this state of restful alertness, you can remove stress from the body-mind system in a very short period of time. It brings clarity to the mind, makes your skin glow, and your heart glow as well.

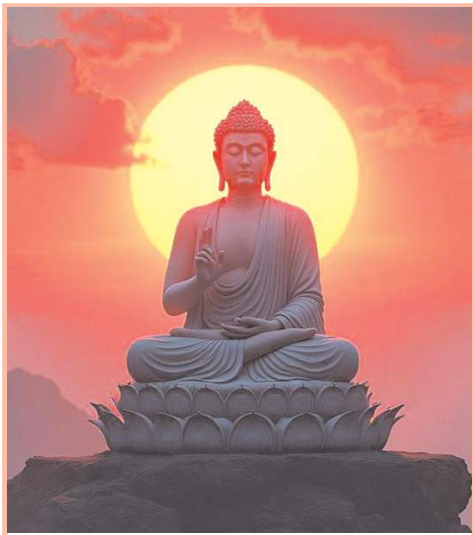
Power of Intention

There are more than 400 benefits of meditation; over 100 have been proven and documented. Meditation enhances intuition, creativity, decision-making, work-life balance, and interpersonal relationships. It also boosts immunity. Beyond these benefits, it strengthens the power of intention.

When there is disturbance in the world, if you can remain calm and maintain equanimity, ideas arise in your mind about what to do. Peace becomes possible when the mind is serene. When we are disturbed, we are of little help to ourselves or to others. People seek altered states of consciousness through harmful means because they want relief, but the state they seek is already present in their breath. Sit and meditate for a few minutes, and you experience joy within. Millions have emerged from harmful habits, violence, and extreme stress through meditation.

Is Meditation for Everybody?

It is a natural human tendency to seek joy that does not diminish and love that does not distort or turn into negative emotions such as anger, hate, or jealousy. Wanting comfort is natural because you once experienced that unmatched state of comfort in your mother's womb. There, you had to do nothing. Food was supplied effortlessly, and you floated peacefully. That is meditation, and meditation is absolute comfort. Meditation is an art. Just as everyone has ten fingers and only needs to learn how to use them to create something melodious with



IN SANSKRIT, IT IS SAID, “MANANATRAYATEITI MANTRA.” A MANTRA PROTECTS THE MIND FROM REPETITIVE THOUGHTS AND WORRIES. MANTRA-BASED MEDITATION TECHNIQUES SUCH AS SAHAJ SAMADHI HELP FREE THE MIND FROM THIS CYCLE

an instrument, similarly, as long as you have a mind with which you can think, you can meditate. Often, people complain that it is difficult to focus the mind or relax, but meditation does not require renunciation or drastic lifestyle changes. You do not need to go to the Himalayas or practise extreme penance. To meditate, you simply need to know how to relax — like making an effort to catch a train, but once you are on it, you can rest. You can begin meditation with the help of a qualified instructor who uses a mantra — a specific sound. In Sanskrit, it is said, “Mananatrayateiti mantra.” A mantra protects the mind from repetitive thoughts and worries. Mantra-based meditation techniques such as Sahaj Samadhi help free the mind from this cycle.

To meditate effortlessly, I offer three principles. First, *Achah* — “I want nothing.” Put all desires aside temporarily. Second, *Aprayatna* — “I do nothing.” Meditation is not about effort, focus, or control. Just let go. Third, *Akinchan* — “I am nothing.” Drop all labels you associate with yourself. For those moments, simply be nobody.

In the very first sitting, you experience something beautiful. With regular practice, once or twice a day, a transformation begins within you — one that others around you will also begin to notice, recognising the calm and positive energy you carry. No, enjoy the ride for a while. Be on it! Never mind! But see that your goal, or what you set as a goal, is already there where you are. And knowing this brings you serenity, beyond any words or explanation.

Former colonies demand reparations: Britain owes a debt – moral & otherwise

GYANESHWAR DAYAL

A few years ago, when ShashiTharoor stood at Oxford and argued that Britain owed a moral debt to India and its former colonies, his words were treated as an eloquent aside rather than a rallying cry. He suggested that even a simple apology would signal remorse for centuries of plunder and subjugation. At the time, he was largely a solitary voice. That is no longer the case. What was once an academic argument has now consolidated into the largest global demand for reparations in recorded history?

In an extraordinary development, former colonies of the British Empire have jointly advanced claims amounting to an estimated \$180 trillion. This unprecedented figure transforms decades of moral debate into a concrete economic reckoning-one that directly challenges a powerful imperial legacy that continues to shape global inequalities.

Momentum has gathered across continents. In Yemen, Sana'a University recently held an intellectual seminar examining British colonial crimes in southern Yemen. Timed with Independence Day, the event formed part of the ongoing Academics Toward al-Quds series. University President Dr Mohammed al-Bukhaiti emphasised the institution's responsibility to preserve national memory and expose the lasting impact of colonial domination, particularly in an era shaped by contested narratives and information warfare. Dr Zaid al-Warith, Assistant Rector for Centres Affairs, reminded participants that such anniversaries are not ceremonial markers; they carry the weight of generations who resisted British rule with persistence and resolve. The seminar underscored the enduring relevance of colonial history to contemporary political and economic struggles.

The staggering global claim of \$180 trillion is a composite of demands emerging from nations across the Caribbean, Africa and Asia. It reflects decades of research, the maturation of reparatory discourse, and a coordinated diplomatic realignment. African



leaders, meeting in Algiers for their second major summit this year, advanced the movement into a decisive phase. Preliminary assessments from the African Union estimate damages inflicted by British colonial rule on the continent at \$100-120 trillion, while Nigeria has independently lodged a \$5 trillion claim.

The Caribbean Community (CARICOM) has also intensified its efforts. During a visit to London in mid-November, its leaders pressed Prime Minister Sir KeirStarmer directly, reiterating collective claims valued at \$24 trillion, including Barbados's assessment of \$4.9 trillion. Their arguments draw upon extensive documentation of long-term social and economic harm rooted in slavery and indenture.

India's position lends considerable weight to the global claim. A major Oxfam study published in 2024 estimated Britain's economic extraction from India at \$65 trillion-a figure now widely cited in international legal and academic circles. Scholars and legal experts in London note that while the scale of these demands is unprecedented, the depth and credibility of the underlying research give the claims a seriousness that international courts cannot easily dismiss. The documentary From Slaves

to Bond has further highlighted the difficulty of quantifying generational trauma, structural impoverishment and the enduring economic architecture of empire.

The debate arrives at a sensitive moment in British politics. A 2024 declaration signed by Sir KeirStarmer and 55 Commonwealth leaders acknowledged the need to address “reparatory justice” for the “abhorrent” transatlantic slave trade. Now, as Prime Minister, Starmer faces a formalised global demand that extends far beyond symbolic recognition. His government, however, continues to reject financial reparations, insisting that contemporary partnerships and development assistance remain the appropriate mechanisms for redress.

With \$180 trillion proposed as the starting point for negotiation, Britain is no longer confronted with abstract historical guilt, but with a detailed accounting of imperial extraction. The months ahead will determine whether this coordinated international push reshapes global frameworks of justice-or whether it stands as an unresolved reminder of a history the world is no longer prepared to ignore.

(The writer is a Senior Editor with The Pioneer)

What really happened at Balakot: Unravelling Pakistan’s terror facade

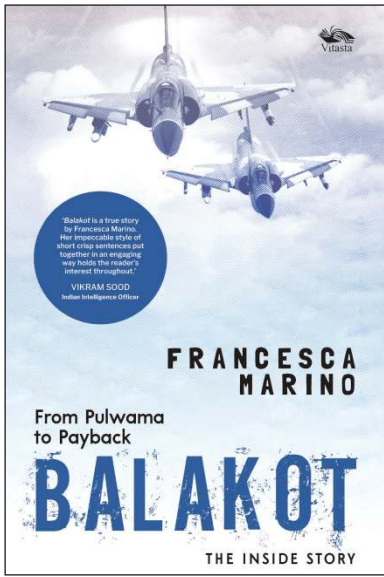
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REENA SINGH

More than six years after the Balakot air strikes, Italian journalist Francesca Marino brings readers a sharp, meticulously documented account of what really happened on the night of 26 February 2019. *Balakot: From Pulwama to Payback* cuts through political noise, propaganda, and deliberate misinformation to present one of the clearest factual narratives of the Indian Air Force's strike on a major Jaish-e-Mohammed (JeM) training camp deep inside Pakistan. The result is a book that is simple in its language but uncompromising in detail-a rare combination in reporting on the India-Pakistan conflict.

The core claim established in the book is unmistakable: the Indian strike hit its intended target, a functioning JeM training facility, killing between 150 and 170 terrorists, including trainers from outside Pakistan. Marino's evidence is neither speculative nor second-hand. She presents eyewitness testimony from a man who was at the camp that night — an account that describes the immediate chaos after the strike, the rapid arrival of Pakistani soldiers, and the urgent evacuation of bodies and injured militants to a nearby military hospital. According to this witness, the site was thereafter swiftly sanitised. Debris was removed overnight and dumped in a river; families of the dead were summoned and paid off-and silenced with threats. It is rare to find such direct testimony from inside a terror camp, and Marino uses it appropriately.

Where Pakistan attempted to weave a narrative of “missed targets”, “fallen trees”, and “dead crows”, Marino demonstrates how that story was constructed for Western media consumption. Pakistan insisted that Indian aircraft intruded and then fled, dropping bombs in empty fields. Marino's book dismantles this narrative with satellite imagery, independent intelligence, and on-ground reports from her long-established network in Pakistan-built over thirty years of reporting on South Asia. Her work exposes how Pakistan's establishment produced a



Title: Balakot: From Pulwama to Payback
Author: Francesca Marino
MRP: ₹495
Publisher: Vitasta Publishing



REENA SINGH

coordinated cover-up to hide the scale of the damage, even going so far as to rebuild structures with the same rubble material to ensure that nothing looked new when the foreign press visited weeks later.

But *Balakot* is more than an investigation into one night's events. Marino places the strike against the long, grim history of Pakistan's terror machinery. She traces the origins of JeM, profiles its leadership and trainers in meticulous detail, and explains its links with Pakistan's shadowy power centres and the ISI. Through biographies, funding trails, and the mapping of multiple training camps, she shows how deeply the Pakistani state — not just its rogue elements — has been invested in terrorism. These sections sometimes read like intelligence dossiers, but they enrich the reader's understanding of the larger ecosystem in which Balakot occurred.

A key strength of the book lies in its laying out of how ordinary Pakistani cit-

izens — many of them migrants in Europe — are drawn into this system. Marino documents how money is channelled from overseas to keep the terror infrastructure running, and how networks of mosques and religious schools contribute to ideological recruitment. She also discusses the use of social media platforms by these terror outfits-Twitter, Facebook, and X — as tools of propaganda, radicalisation, and fund-raising. The book does not exaggerate these points; it presents them plainly, supported by sources and patterns that have been observed for years.

One of the most important sections in Balakot is Marino's exclusive interview with Air Chief Marshal Birender Singh Dhanoa, who was heading the Indian Air Force at the time of the strike. Dhanoa offers a clear, jargon-free explanation of the operation: the choice of bombs, the precision of the targeting, and the unique method of triggering explosives inside a cavity to maximise shrapnel and contain the blast radius. His account stands in stark contrast to the Pakistani narrative — it is measured, technical, and evidence-based. For readers trying to understand what exactly happened that night, this interview alone is worth the price of the book.

Some parts of the narrative read with the pace and tension of detective fiction-Marino pieces together movements, timelines, intelligence inputs, reactions, and cover-up operations with the skill of a storyteller. Other chapters, listing camps, biographies, and funding chains, are more sober and documentary in tone. Together, they form a comprehensive picture of the terror apparatus, the international media's frequent gullibility, and the geopolitical stakes that continue to define India-Pakistan relations.

Marino is a journalist who has taken risks that few foreign reporters have been willing to take in Pakistan. Her access to both official sources and ordinary locals, especially those wary of the Pakistani state, gives the book its depth. This combination of high-level interviews and grassroots testimony-allows her to connect dots across borders and institutions in a way that few journalists can.

For the complete book review please see our website www.dailypioneer.com