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PIONEER IN SHORT

VIJAYASAI REDDY TAKES UP THE CAUSE OF HINDUISM

Former Rajya Sabha MP V Vijayasai Reddy has stated that any conspiracies or attempts targeting Hinduism will not be tolerated. Taking to his X (formerly Twitter) account on Sunday, he warned that those who lure people with money and attempt religious conversions will be firmly dealt with. He demanded that the government...

FULL REPORT ON P2

SEVERAL AYYAPPA DEVOTEES INJURED IN 2 SEPARATE ACCIDENTS

Several Ayyappa devotees were injured when a car overturned in Chandragiri mandal in the district. The accident happened while they were returning from Sabarimala to Koduru. Acting on information from locals, the police reached the spot and shifted the injured to a nearby hospital. Meanwhile, a severe...

FULL REPORT ON P3

10 NAXALITES SURRENDER IN MP'S BALAGHAT

Ten wanted Naxalites, including four women, surrendered before Chief Minister Dr Mohan Yadav in Balaghat on Sunday, marking a significant step in Madhya Pradesh's push to eliminate Naxal influence. Dr Yadav handed them copies of the Constitution as they laid down their weapons and urged other cadres to return to the mainstream, saying the state is...

FULL REPORT ON P5

SMITH'S PROPELS AUSTRALIA TO A VICTORY IN 2ND TEST

Steve Smith took a brilliant reflex catch to swing momentum, got into a heated exchange with Jofra Archer and then slogged the winning runs Sunday as Australia beat England again to take a 2-0 Ashes lead. Set a target of 65 for victory in the second test after dismissing England for 241 in the second innings...

FULL REPORT ON P2

QUOTE OF THE DAY



“AMBEDKAR WORKED CONTINUOUSLY FOR A SOCIETY WITHOUT INEQUALITIES. THE COMMON MAN WAS ALSO GIVEN THE RIGHT TO VOTE AND GIVEN THE OPPORTUNITY TO CHOOSE A GOOD LEADER

- MALLU BHATTI VIKRAMARKA, TG DEPUTY CHIEF MINISTER

IndiGo processed Rs 610 cr refunds

It also delivered 3,000 baggages

PNS ■ Mumbai

IndiGo has processed refunds totalling Rs 610 crore so far against cancelled or severely delayed flights, and delivered 3,000 pieces of baggage to passengers across the country as of Saturday, the government said on Sunday.

It also said the aviation network is moving swiftly towards full normalcy, and all corrective measures will remain in place until operations stabilise entirely.

On Saturday, the government had directed the airline to complete the ticket refund process for the cancelled flights by Sunday evening, and ensure baggage separated from travellers are delivered in the next two days.

Further, 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 in the next 48 hours.

"IndiGo has so far processed refunds totalling Rs 610 crore. No additional fees are permitted for rescheduling travel impacted by cancellations. Dedicated support cells have been created to proactively assist passengers so that refund and rebooking issues are resolved without delay or inconvenience," the aviation ministry said in a release.

CONTINUED ON >> P2



IndiGo cancels over 650 flights; ops slowly stabilise

The country's largest airline IndiGo on Sunday cancelled over 650 flights while the disrupted operations were slowly stabilising as the number of cancellations reduced and more than Rs 610 crore worth ticket refunds were processed for the affected passengers.

While IndiGo will carry out a "root cause analysis" into flight disruptions that continued for the sixth consecutive day, Minister of State for Civil Aviation Murlidhar Mohol said passengers

have endured mental harassment and distress due to the operational crisis and assured that steps are being taken to ensure accountability is fixed.

The board of IndiGo's parent InterGlobe Aviation has set up a Crisis Management Group (CMG), which is meeting regularly to monitor the situation, an announcement said on Sunday.

The airline expects operations to stabilise by December 10.

CONTINUED ON >> P2

CM congratulates Team India on series win

PNS ■ Amaravati

Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu has congratulated the Indian cricket team for clinching a 2-1 series victory over South Africa with a commanding nine-wicket win. The chief minister lauded the players for their skill, determination and teamwork, noting that their exceptional performance brought pride and joy to cricket fans across the country.

"Heartiest congratulations to Team India on a spectacular 9-wicket victory and a well-deserved 2-1 series triumph! Special commendations to Yashasvi Jaiswal, Rohit Sharma and Virat Kohli for their brilliant contributions," said Naidu in a post on X late on Saturday.

25 killed in Goa nightclub fire

Fireworks likely cause of blaze

PNS ■ Panaji

All 25 victims killed in the Goa nightclub fire tragedy have been identified, including 20 members of the staff and five tourists, authorities said on Sunday night.

Among the five tourists who died in the inferno, four were from Delhi, including three members of a single family. The fifth tourist was from Karnataka.

The State government released a list of all 25 victims on Sunday night.

A massive fire raged through 'Birch by Romeo Lane' nightclub at Arpora in the early hours of Sunday, killing 25 people.

The four tourists from Delhi were identified as Saroj Joshi, Anita Joshi, Kamla Joshi, and Vinod Kumar. They were identified



on Sunday by their relative Bhavna Joshi.

Another tourist who died in the tragedy is identified as Ishaq from Karnataka. He was identified by his father M D Hussain, the government said.

According to the list, 20 of the victims were staff members of the nightclub, including five from Uttarakhand, four from

Nepal, three each from Jharkhand and Assam, two each from Maharashtra and Uttar Pradesh, and one from West Bengal.

The maximum number of the victims (staff members) are from Uttarakhand, who have been identified as Jitendra Singh, Satish Singh, Surendra Singh, Sumit Negi, and Manish Singh.

CONTINUED ON >> P2

Cycling tracks to be set up soon in Vizag

PNS ■ Vishakhapatnam

Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu has announced that cycling tracks will soon be set up in Visakhapatnam. He shared this information on social media platform X. The Chief Minister mentioned that footpaths and greenery in Visakhapatnam are gradually improving. He stated, "I am happy to say that the footpaths and increased greenery in



Visakhapatnam have enhanced the experience for visitors. We are committed to working continuously to further beautify the city. As part of this



effort, we will soon be introducing cycling tracks."

Earlier, the Civic Opposition of India stated on X that they were pleased to see

Visakhapatnam being prioritised for improved footpaths and greenery instead of turning it into another Bengaluru. They mentioned that this move supports the promotion of India's next IT city and thanked Chief Minister Chandrababu Naidu.

They also tagged Education and IT Minister nara Lokesh, requesting the creation of a cycling track for the city. Responding to this, Naidu made the above statement.

Jagan to submit 'one crore signatures against privatisation of medical colleges' to Guv

YSRCP coordinator Sajjala Ramakrishna Reddy said one crore signature campaign received overwhelming support

PNS ■ New Delhi

YSRCP chief YS Jagan Mohan Reddy is expected to meet Governor S Abdul Nazeer on December 17 to submit "one crore signatures opposing privatisation of newly established government medical colleges in Andhra Pradesh," the party said.

Jagan alleged that the NDA coalition government is attempting to hand over newly established government medical colleges to private entities, "weakening essential public health services across Andhra Pradesh." "One crore signatures col-



lected from 26 districts opposing privatisation of medical colleges will be presented to the Governor at 4 pm on December 17," said a YSRCP press release issued

late on Saturday.

Signature documents are being transported to Vijayawada in specially arranged vehicles, with YSRCP leaders preparing to accompany Jagan to Raj Bhavan for the formal submission, it added.

Meanwhile, the YSRCP's one-crore signature campaign against the privatisation of government medical colleges has received an unexpected and overwhelming response from the public, said the party's state coordinator Sajjala Ramakrishna Reddy.

CONTINUED ON >> P2



Alliance will remain in power for 15 years, says Lokesh

The Human Resources Minister participated in a meeting organised by Telugu diaspora in Dalla, US

RAVI KUMAR BOPPANNA
PNS ■ Amaravati

Education and Information Technology Minister N Lokesh participated in a Telugu diaspora gathering in Dallas, where he received an enthusiastic welcome from expatriate Telugu communities.

Addressing the crowd amid cheers, he remarked that Andhra Pradesh has now become a "brand ambassador for speed." Recalling his long association with the United States, studying undergraduate and MBA programmes and working at the World Bank, Lokesh said he spent nearly nine years in the country.

Lokesh expressed gratitude to NRIs for standing firmly behind the Telugu Desam Party (TDP) when former Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu was "illegally detained" for 53 days. He quipped that after witnessing this massive

diaspora gathering, the opposition "Team 11" would lose sleep. He also praised NT Rama Rao for introducing Telugu self-respect to the world and asserted that Chandrababu Naidu remains the brand ambassador for development.

Lokesh stated that despite Naidu being 75, he still works with the energy of a 20-year-old, adding humorously that he himself is still trying to catch up to that pace. He clarified that the "Red Book" would function independently and that no one who violated the law would be spared, while insisting the government was not engaging in political vendetta.

Commenting on the 2024 election results, he mocked the YSRCP's former slogan "Why Not 175," saying the people responded with "Why Not 11" and voted them out decisively.

CONTINUED ON >> P2

Tollywood actress Mahavadi wins gold medal at international weightlifting

PNS ■ Vijayawada

Tollywood actress Pragathi Mahavadi has created history by becoming the first Telugu film actor to win a gold medal at an international weightlifting championship. Known widely as a talented character artist on screen, Pragathi has now emerged as an inspiring figure in the world of powerlifting.

What began as a casual interest in fitness soon turned into a determined pursuit for Pragathi. After taking up gym training, she

moved towards weightlifting and, within just two years, rose from the state level to national competitions. She went on to represent India at the Asian Powerlifting Championships held in Turkey, winning one gold and two bronze medals, proudly raising the Indian flag on the international stage.

Pragathi, who has always been known for her unique personality—both in films and in real life—continued to break stereotypes. Even within her gated communi-



ty, she earned the name "Bullet Actress" for riding her motorcycle regularly. At 49, she competed in the

Asian Powerlifting International Championship in Turkey in the 105 kg category and secured a gold medal.

This year has been exceptionally successful for her. Pragathi first became the Hyderabad District Champion and then went on to win the Telangana State Championship. Later, she clinched gold at the National Powerlifting Championship held in Kerala. Her consistent achievements earned her a spot on the Indian team for the interna-

tional event in Turkey, where she showcased her strength yet again.

By winning medals at an international championship, Pragathi Mahavadi has become the first Telugu actress to achieve such a rare feat. Her journey stands as an inspiring reminder that age is just a number and that determination can break any barrier. Pragathi's accomplishment marks a turning point in her life—a historic success story that will be remembered for years to come.



Monday Mirchi

NOT A SPLIT, BUT SPITE OF THE MEDIA!

It is nothing but a wild goose chase, and making illogical presumptions without ascertaining facts. An exclusive WhatsApp group formed by senior IAS officers in Telangana has triggered unease in the Secretariat. The group, comprising officers in key positions, including from the Chief Minister's Office, is reportedly influencing file movement, approvals, and fund releases, sidelining other officials. But it all turned out to be not entirely correct. The fact is that those who are officially in global summit duty have created a WhatsApp group to coordinate more effectively. CMO officials are also included in this group so that the Chief Minister is posted with every update. But to create a wrong impression, some media made this a split within IAS officers.

MLAS' IRE AND BABU'S FIRE!

Nothing happens without each other's knowledge, and they are said to be acting hand in glove, leading to ire among MLAs and suspicion of mala fide intentions. As Andhra CM Naidu's reach is so deep, the irregularities of the said senior minister and the higher official of the finance department, are said to have come to his notice. Informed sources revealed that the CM had reprimanded them and also strongly warned them to mend their ways and do things duly. What is surprising is that those who complained against the minister and his 'yes boss' official were none other than some MLAs. The reason is quite obvious. There were whispers that the duo stopped the clearance of the bills due to them. In politics, everything is allowed as long as it does not harm anyone financially. And a super boss like Babu is there. Things of this kind cannot be hidden, as the hand of CM's ethical governance is so long and deep also.

IT IS NOT ME! BEWARE OF FAKE MASTERS!

What is fake and what is fact is a million-dollar question now. With the percolation of social media, everything appears to be true unless or until the truth is exposed. From commoners to district heads, the fake news is shaking everyone, leading them to explain and clarify things. The latest to fall prey to the fake mafia is none other than the Kadapa district collector, Sreedhar Cherikuri. People went to the extent of creating fake accounts of him using his photo/DP on WhatsApp and social media to send messages asking for money or favours. The Collector had to issue a message cautioning people not to respond to any such requests, and he even went to the extent of asking people to block and report them. Fake it to make it appears to be the art of social media scammers to make quick bucks before they are busted. If it is the situation of a district collector, what about the predicament of common people and who will come to their rescue?

NAIDU NOT TO FORGO THE SERVICES OF VIJAYANAND

Efficiency glows as the light, and its spark is visible wherever it is. Take the case of the Andhra Pradesh Chief Secretary Vijayanand, who is on extension for three months. And Sai Prasad's appointment has already been confirmed, and he is to assume the charge of Chief Secretary after the extension period of Vijayanand expires. But the Chief Minister Chandrababu is not at all willing to forgo the services of Vijayanand because there is much of a great need to retain him as his services are needed further for the state's development and also for translating his vision. As Naidu confirmed Sai Prasad's appointment as the next CS three months before, with the same speed, the CM is said to be making efforts to find a suitable post for Vijayanand to make use of his proven capabilities. As the man who saw the ins and outs of bureaucracy, Naidu knows how to nurture efficiency and garner the fruits of experience and expertise.

--yours truly

Vijayasai Reddy takes up the cause of Hinduism

PNS ■ Amaravati

Former Rajya Sabha MP V Vijayasai Reddy has stated that any conspiracies or attempts targeting Hinduism will not be tolerated. Taking to his X (formerly Twitter) account on Sunday, he warned that those who lure people with money and attempt religious conversions will be firmly dealt with.

He demanded that the government appoint a committee to investigate conversion activities reported during the past two decades. Calling for unity among all social groups within the Hindu community, he said such collective strength was essential "for the nation building and for dharma," adding that this unity itself is "India's protective shield."

Vijayasai Reddy's latest



remarks sparked political speculation, particularly because he has been largely inactive in public and social media platforms for several months. His sudden reappearance, combined with strong statements around religion, has triggered discussion about his future political trajectory.

During the period when the YSR Congress Party was

in opposition, Vijayasai Reddy was considered one of its most influential leaders and a close confidant of party president YS Jagan Mohan Reddy. In recognition of his contributions, he was nominated to the Rajya Sabha multiple times. However, after the YSRCP came to power in 2019, his influence reportedly diminished, with his responsibil-

ties limited to overseeing party affairs in the Uttarandhra region. Eventually, even those responsibilities were re-assigned.

Following the YSRCP's severe defeat in the 2024 Assembly elections, when the party was reduced to just 11 seats,Vijayasai Reddy resigned from both the party and his Rajya Sabha position. He then withdrew from political visibility as well as social media engagement.

His strong comments on Hindu issues now have led to speculation that he may be preparing to align himself with another political party. Observers note that his recent emphasis on "nation and dharma" could indicate an interest in joining a national party, though no official statement has been made.

Miscreants slit throat of city bus driver

PNS ■ Nellore

In a horrific incident on Sunday in Nellore, a city bus driver and conductor were attacked with weapons by miscreants near Nakkalolla centre. The miscreants slit the throat of the driver Mansoor, and the bus conductor Saleem was also assaulted. The attackers subsequently fled the scene.

Local people immediately responded and rushed them to a nearby hospital. Doctors stated that the driver Mansoor was inflicted with life-threatening. Upon receiving information about the incident, the police arrived at the hospital and gathered details from the conductor. The police have registered a case and launched an investigation into the attack.

Badminton Championship to be held from Dec 22-28

PNS ■ Vijayawada

The logo and poster of the 87th Yonex Sunrise Senior National Badminton Championship were unveiled here on Sunday. The championship, organised by the Andhra Pradesh Badminton Association, will be held from December 22 to 28. Inter-state team events are scheduled for December 22 and 23, while singles, doubles and mixed doubles competitions will take place from December 24 to 28.

The event was attended by Andhra Cricket Association (ACA) President and MP Kesineni Sivanath, Sports Authority of Andhra Pradesh (SAAP) Chairman A. Ravinayudu, international badminton star Kidambi Srikanth and APBA Secretary and former SAAP Chairman Dr P Ankamma Chowdry, who formally unveiled the championship logo.

Speaking at the ceremony, MP Kesineni Sivanath said Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu aims to transform Andhra Pradesh into "Sports Andhra Pradesh," and the NDA government is working actively to enhance sports infrastructure across the state. He said ACA, in coordination with SAAP, would make its stadiums available for both indoor and outdoor sports, adding that Chief Minister Chandrababu Naidu, Deputy Chief Minister Pawan Kalyan and Minister Nara Lokesh

are placing strong emphasis on sports development. He noted that the state government intends to host the National Games and will create the necessary facilities by expanding stadium capacities and building new sports infrastructure. He also announced plans to establish a sports university and stadium in the state capital region.

The MP revealed that modernisation plans for the Indira Gandhi Municipal Stadium are ready and will soon be presented to the Chief Minister. He added that work will begin on a fast-track basis once approval is received. He also explained that stadiums such as the Gymkhana Grounds and Vidyadharapuram Grounds in Vijayawada will be prepared to meet National Games standards. He praised SAAP Chairman Ravinayudu for his active administration and for bringing more sports facilities within the reach of athletes across the state. Ravinayudu, he said, is working in line with the Chief Minister's goal of bringing the 2029 National Games to Andhra Pradesh.

International shuttler Kidambi Srikanth said the state government's focus on sports is encouraging and that hosting national-level badminton events in Vijayawada will help identify and promote young talent.

TDP organises free eye camp in Kakinada

PNS ■ Kakinada

Over 350 people were examined for various eye problems at a free eye camp organised by the Telugu Desam Party on the Pegoda School premises in the 36th Division on Sunday. Division in-charge Namburi Srinivasa Rao supervised the arrangements, while TNTUC state leader Gadula Saibaba inaugurated the programme.A team of specialists from Sri Surya Eye Care Hospital, led by CEO Ram



Prakash, conducted screenings, provided free medicines, and distributed spectacles to patients. TDP leader Srinivasa Rao stated that MLA

Kondababu has expressed willingness to secure financial assistance from the CM Relief Fund for patients who require eye surgeries.

Deputy CM inspects Uppal stadium ahead of Lionel Messi's match

PNS ■ Hyderabad

Deputy Chief Minister Mallu Bhattii Vikramarka on Sunday inspected the Rajiv Gandhi International Stadium in Hyderabad ahead of football icon Lionel Messi's friendly match on December 13. Addressing the media after the inspection, Vikramarka said, "Today we want to tell the football lovers that the Telangana government is hosting a friendly football match featuring Lionel

Messi at the Uppal stadium. The match is being held as part of the Telangana Rising Summit."

Vikramarka was accompanied by IT Minister D Sridhar Babu, Hyderabad Cricket Association (HCA) in-charge president Daljeet Singh, and others. The friendly match will be held between chief minister Revanth Reddy's team RR 9 and Lionel Messi's LM 10.

The Argentine football star is coming to Hyderabad as part of his "G.O.A.T. India Tour'25". Team



RR9 will comprise the chief minister and selected students from government schools who have shown exceptional football

talent. The event is designed to be once in a lifetime opportunity for these emerging athletes. Messi's visit is more than just a sporting spectacle; it is strategically positioned as a cornerstone event for the state's ambitious agenda. The exhibition match will serve as the culmination of the Telangana government's second anniversary celebrations from December 1 - December 13, and specifically, the grand unveiling of the Telangana Rising Vision Document 2047 on

December 9.

The State government aims to leverage Messi's popularity for Telangana's global image.The GOAT India tour marks Messi's first visit to India since 2011. Initially, the India tour was set for Kolkata, Mumbai and Delhi, but organisers surprised fans by adding Hyderabad as a special stop. Ahmedabad and Kerala were earlier under consideration, but cancellations opened a window, and Hyderabad grabbed the opportunity.

FROM PAGE - 1

IndiGo processed...

Stating that the Ministry has taken rapid and decisive steps to address the disruption caused by the recent IndiGo operational crisis and to ensure that passengers do not face continued inconvenience, it said air travel operations across the country are stabilising at a fast pace.

All other domestic airlines are operating smoothly and at full capacity, while IndiGo's performance has shown steady improvement on Sunday, with flight schedules moving back towards normal levels, the government said.It also said that IndiGo's flight operations have increased from 706 on Friday to 1,565 on Saturday and are likely to reach up to 1,650 by the end of Sunday, the ministry said.

The civil aviation ministry, which has taken various

measures, including capping airfares and directing IndiGo to expedite ticket refund process, on Sunday said air travel operations across the country are stabilising at a fast pace.

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The ministry also said IndiGo has processed Rs 610 crore refunds and delivered 3,000 pieces of baggage to passengers across the country as of Saturday.

IndiGo said it will be operating 1,650 flights of its 2,300 daily domestic and international flights on Sunday, and 650 remain cancelled for the day.At the Delhi airport, at least 118 flights were cancelled on Sunday, while the

number was 121 at Mumbai airport, officials said.

In a video message to the staff, IndiGo CEO Pieter Elbers said, "step by step, we are getting back" and that the airline's on time performance (OTP) is expected to be 75 per cent.

The OTP, an indicator of punctuality, was 20.7 per cent on Saturday, as per the latest official data.

A senior airline official on Sunday said that it will do a "root cause analysis" and asserted that the carrier has adequate number of pilots and there is no deficiency.

"Our pilot numbers are fine while we may not be having the luxury of a buffer," the official said.

He also said there has been no hiring freeze amid concerns being raised in certain quarters that lean-operating model might have led to the current situation. Lack of proper crew planning while implementing the new flight duty norms is being cited as a key reason for the significant operational disruptions.

According to the ministry,

all other domestic airlines are operating smoothly and at full capacity, while IndiGo's performance has shown steady improvement on Sunday, with flight schedules moving back towards normal levels.

A statement issued by IndiGo said its Board of Directors is doing everything possible to take care of the challenges faced by its customers and ensure refunds to passengers.IndiGo's parent InterGlobe Aviation is a listed company.Meanwhile, a Parliamentary panel is also likely to summon top airline executives and aviation regulator DGCA officials over the significant disruptions.

Opposition party Congress also took a swipe at the government in relation to the flight disruptions.

Against the backdrop of the introduction of airfare caps, Congress leader P Chidambaram on Sunday said the Ministry of Civil Aviation has finally woken up and said such price containment should remain in force till a duopoly in the airline sector exists.

25 killed in Goa...

The four Nepalese nationals are identified as Churna Bahadur Pun, Vivek Katwal, Sabin, and Sudeep.

Those from Maharashtra include Dominic and Manoj Jora, while Rohan Singh and Sunil Kumar were from Uttar Pradesh. The lone victim from Darjeeling (West Bengal) was identified as Subhash Chetri.

Those from Jharkhand are identified as Mohit, Pradeep Mahto, and Binod Mahto, while three from Assam are Manojit Mal, Rahul Tanti, and Digambar Patir.

Fireworks was the likely cause of the blaze at 'Birch by Romeo Lane' nightclub at Arpora, 25 km from Panaji, officials said, adding that four of its staff members were arrested and owners Saurabh Luthra and Gaurav Luthra, named in the FIR, too would be taken into custody soon.

Alliance will remain...

He accused the previous YSRCP government of destructive governance from

2019 to 2024 and claimed that voters had "kicked out" those who once mocked Naidu and Jana Sena chief Pawan Kalyan.

Lokesh declared that the TDP-Jana Sena-BJP alliance government would rewrite records and likened Andhra Pradesh to the nation's only "double-engine bullet train government," driven by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Chief Minister Chandrababu Naidu, and Pawan Kalyan, whom he described as "a brother."

He said the coalition aims to create 20 lakh jobs and emphasized the need to transform from job seekers to job creators. He further stressed that continuous governance is essential for sustained development, citing Gujarat and Odisha as examples.

Lokesh expressed confidence that the alliance would remain in power for the next 15 years and reminded the audience that Pawan Kalyan, too, had pledged to work together for the state's progress. Finally, he assured that the government would

"cherish and take care of" the Telugu NRIs who supported them during their years in opposition.

Jagan to submit...

On Sunday, Ramakrishna Reddy held a teleconference with YSRCP MLCS, Parliament coordinators, Mayors, Deputy Mayors, Zilla Parishad Chairpersons, Vice-chairpersons, and PAC, CEC, SEC members.

He said, "Both the one crore signature campaign and the Rachabanda programmes have received tremendous response. People from all sections have extended strong support. We have collected more than one crore signatures. The public has responded strongly against the privatization of government medical colleges. The copies of the collected signatures would be sent to the district headquarters on December 10. The district-level programme would be held not on December 13. On December 17, former chief minister YS

Jagan Mohan Reddy, along with key leaders, will meet the Governor."

Over the past few days, Ramakrishna Reddy has been conducting consecutive zoom meetings and teleconferences with party leaders regarding the one crore signature campaign. He has been gathering details about the campaign's progress from the leaders and also offering various suggestions.

Shocking...

Meanwhile, a road accident occurred in Kanaganapalli mandal of Sri Sathya Sai district. Near Mamilapalli, on National Highway 44, a scooter hit the divider. In this incident, a woman lost her life. It is known that the accident happened due to dense fog. According to the details revealed by the police... Vineela, daughter of Kusuma and Dharma Rao from Secunderabad, completed her PhD in Psychology and was working as a tutor at NIMHANS.



Assistant professor suspended for ‘impregnating’ student

PNS ■ Tirupati

In an upsetting incident that has surfaced, an assistant professor from the National Sanskrit University in Tirupati has been suspended due to serious allegations of misconduct. It is alleged that the professor engaged in an inappropriate relationship with a first-year female student, leading to her becoming pregnant. This incident has raised significant concerns among students who are now demanding a thorough investigation. Assistant professor Lakshman Kumar, reportedly exploited the vulnerability of the young woman, who hails from outside the State, through manipulative tactics that included sexual harassment.

Over the past months, he allegedly maintained a physical relationship with her, which ultimately resulted in her pregnancy. Following this revelation, the student took the courageous step of filing a complaint with the University Vice-Chancellor. An internal inquiry was launched based on the complaint, resulting in Kumar's suspension. However, this has not quelled the outrage among faculty and students. Many professors expressed their discontent and were inclined to approach the Tirupati West Police Station to file a complaint, although they were advised that it was the victim's responsibility to initiate legal action.



In a related development, Rajinikanth Shukla, the In-charge VC, has also lodged a complaint against two other assistant professors. According to the allegations, another assistant, recorded private moments of the student and attempted to blackmail her by showing the video on his cellphone. He reportedly pressured her to engage in similar conduct with him as well. Unable to bear the harassment, the student sought assistance from the VC, prompting the suspension of the professor. As this situation unfolds, students at the university are uniting in their call for a comprehensive investigation into these shocking events.

PNS ■ Amaravati

It is known that the government has been supplying ration rice to the poor. However, in accordance with changing food habits, it has now decided to supply nutritious millets, too, free of cost. As part of this initiative, since last April, the government has already been distributing ragi (finger millets) and jowar (sorghum) through the Public Distribution System (PDS) to ration cardholders in Rayalaseema districts, along with rice and sugar. The government has now decided to distribute ragi and jowar to the people

of the north coastal districts as well. From December onwards, ragi is being distributed in Visakhapatnam, Viziana garam, Parvathi puram, Anakapalli, Srikakulam, Alluri, and Manyam districts. In Guntur, Palnadu, NTR, Prakasam, and Nellore districts, the distribution of jowar has also begun. Soon, ragi and jowar will be supplied in these regions as well. Currently, ration cardholders are receiving 5 kg of rice per person free of cost. Hereafter, the government has decided to replace a portion of this rice with up to 3 kg of ragi or jowar. For example, instead of 20 kg of



ration rice, beneficiaries can take 2 kg of ragi and 18 kg of rice. In the past too, ragi and ragi flour were distributed to ration cardholders in packet form. Now, the government has decided to provide millets in a similar manner through ration shops. Previously, under the

National Food Security Scheme, the Central government allocated the required quantities of ragi and jowar to the State through the Food Corporation of India (FCI). However, the Centre has now stopped allocating millets. As a result, the State government is procuring them through a tendering

process and distributing them free of cost to ration cardholders. People are showing interest in ragi and jowar. Since they are already being supplied in Rayalaseema, the government aims to distribute them gradually in all districts. To ensure that all eligible beneficiaries receive ration supplies, the government has decided to speed up the distribution of smart ration cards. Through village and ward secretariats, cards are being issued to beneficiaries. The government has instructed officials to deliver the cards directly to the homes of the elderly and disabled.

People in large number participate in Tanuku Run

PNS ■ Tanuku

A Tanuku Road Run (10K, 5K, 3K) was organized under the leadership of the local MLA, in collaboration with the Tanuku Runners Society at the Chittoori Indiraiah Government Degree College here on Sunday. District Minister-in-charge Gottipati Ravikumar attended the event as the chief guest. District Collector Chadalavada Nagarani, District Superintendent of Police Adnan Nayeem Asmi, Tanuku MLA A Radhakrishna, APIIC chairman Mantena Rama Rao, RDO, and Municipal Commissioner T Ram Kumar were present at the Road Run event.



District Minister-in-charge Gottipati Ravikumar, District Collector Ch Nagarani and others taking part in Tanuku Run in Tanuku on Sunday

Speaking on the occasion, Minister Gottipati Ravikumar said that he was very happy to see such a large-scale road run being organised in Tanuku as part

of the Fit India initiative envisioned by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, with the support of the Tanuku Runners Society. He noted that as part of the initiative, an unprecedented yoga session with five lakh participants was conducted

in Visakhapatnam. He urged everyone to contribute towards achieving the Chief Minister's goal of a Healthy Andhra Pradesh. He also emphasised the Chief Minister's vision of maintaining cleanliness in every house,

village, and town. He urged people to devote some time every day to physical fitness and health. District Collector Nagarani expressed her happiness that a large number of youth participated in the Tanuku Road Run. She stressed the importance of everyone focusing on their health. As part of the Yogandhra programme, yoga activities were conducted daily for a month across the district, from village level to district level, she said. Inspired by today's Road Run under the Fit India initiative, she urged the youth to dedicate time daily for fitness. Tanuku MLA Radhakrishna said that the Road Run was conducted in 3K, 5K, and 10K categories under the guidance of the Tanuku Runners Society. He said that the event was held for the second time with the

objective of keeping Tanuku town cleaner, greener, and healthier, and to ensure the well-being of its people. He added that 2,500 youth enthusiastically participated in the program. He stated that such events will contribute significantly to achieving a Healthy Andhra Pradesh. In the 3K run category of the Tanuku Road Run, District Collector Nagarani, District SP Adnan Nayeem Asmi, MLA Arimilli Radhakrishna, APIIC Chairman Mantena Ramarao, and RDO took part. Students from various schools, representatives of voluntary organisations, district officials from various departments, the public, and Road Run organisers Vishwateja, Saideepthi, Krishnakiran, Vinayapavan, and others participated in the event.

HIKE IN FITNESS TESTING FEES FOR OLD VEHICLES

AP lorry owners assn threatens indefinite strike from Dec 9

PNS ■ Vijayawada

The Andhra Pradesh Lorry Owners' Association has urged the Central Government to promptly withdraw the recent hike in fitness testing fees. Leaders of the association have demanded cancellation of the notification that raises fees for vehicles over 13 years old. They have issued a warning that if the government fails to rescind the decision, all goods transportation throughout the State will come to a halt starting at midnight on December 9. Furthermore, operations for goods vehicles at railway goods sheds and shipyards across the state will be suspended. Association general secretary YV Eeswara Rao said that the Centre had sharply increased the fitness fee for vehicles older than 13 years, forcing vehicle owners to bear a heavy financial burden. He said the fee for vehicles older than 20 years has been raised to Rs 33,400. Thousands of lorry owners will suffer severe losses due to this increase. "We strongly oppose the additional testing and fitness charges



AP Lorry Owners Association leaders speaking to the media in Vijayawada on Sunday

imposed on old vehicles," he said. He added that if the law is implemented, small vehicle owners would be severely affected, and goods transport operators would face excessive burden. He noted that the State government was not required to enforce the Central government notification. The State government should immediately halt its implementation, he demanded. Chief Minister N Chandrababu should take a decision to reduce the fees immediately. If no decision was taken, protests will begin from December 9, and 10,000 goods vehicles operating

in the State would be stopped. The Centre has also mandated the installation of Vehicle Location Tracking Devices (VLTDS) in all vehicles. Eeswara Rao said that while it was appropriate to install VLTDS in passenger vehicles, there is no need to install them in goods vehicles. If adequate time was given for implementation, they would cooperate with the installation of VLTDS in goods vehicles as well. He urged the Central and State Governments to take steps to ensure that struggling lorry owners were not further burdened.

Building workers seek welfare schemes

PNS ■ Kakinada

The City Building Construction Workers Union, affiliated with the AITUC, resolved at its meeting here on Sunday to demand that the government ensure the effective implementation of welfare schemes through the Welfare Board. The union also sought strict enforcement of the Building and Other Construction Workers (Regulation of Employment and Conditions of Service) Act, 1996.



City Building Construction Workers Union holding a meeting in Kakinada on Sunday

Union president T Annavaram, who presided over the meeting, called upon workers, including masons, electricians, painters, carpenters, tile workers, welders and plumbers—to unite in the struggle for proper implementation of welfare measures.

Speaking as chief guest, union district general secretary Thokala Prasad said building construction workers continued to face severe hardships, with construction-site accidents being common. Many workers, he noted, either

lost their lives or suffered injuries, leaving their families without stable livelihoods. He explained that the government had earlier supported workers by implementing welfare schemes funded through the Welfare Board.

Revenue collected as labour cess was credited to the Building Workers Welfare Board. Initially, labour officers collected the cess manually, but in recent years it has been collected through the Development Permission

Management System (DPMS) and paid by engineers, builders, traders and contractors. "But no one knows whose account these funds are going into now," he alleged.

Prasad further claimed that the previous YSRCP government had misused these funds for party-related activities. He expressed hope that the present coalition government would ensure proper utilisation of the funds for the welfare of building construction workers.

Several Ayyappa devotees injured in 2 separate accidents

PNS ■ Tirupati

Several Ayyappa devotees were injured when a car overturned in Chandragiri mandal in the district. The accident happened while they were returning from Sabarimala to Koduru. Acting on information from locals, the police reached the spot and shifted the injured to a nearby hospital. Meanwhile, a severe road accident happened in Nellore district. At Chillakuru Writer Satrama, a private travels bus overturned, injuring several passengers. The bus was carrying a total of 35 Ayyappa devotees, of whom five sustained serious injuries. The devotees were traveling from Guntur to Sabarimala.



Upon learning about the incident, the police immediately reached the site and launched rescue operations. The injured were promptly shifted to the local hospital. Doctors reported that the condition of several injured people is critical. The police have registered a case and are investigating the accident. It may be on Saturday, a tragic road accident in Tamil Nadu claimed the lives of five people. The Ayyappa devotees from Andhra Pradesh were on their back after visiting Sabarimala and then Rameswaram when this tragic incident happened.

Addressing the gathering, SP Bindu Madhav emphasised the crucial role of youth in nation-building and cautioned them against falling prey to the conspiracies of neighbouring countries attempting to weaken the younger generation by supplying drugs clandestinely. He recalled the Prime Minister's call under the Fit India movement, encouraging youth to take up cycling for physical and mental fitness and to stay away from harmful habits. The SP also appealed to the public to report any information on ganja supply, sale, or other illegal activities by dialing the toll-free number 1972, dialing 112, or contacting the nearest police station for prompt action.



Parents lodge complaint against teacher for 'beating up' students

PNS ■ Nellore

In Nellore, a shocking incident happened where a teacher, meant to care for his students like his own children, turned violent. The teacher allegedly beat up the students, leading to serious injuries to 20 of them. This distressing event took place in the undivided Nellore district. It is alleged that Arun, a teacher at Ekalavya Residential School located in Ojili mandal, inexplicably unleashed a violent episode against the students of Class 7. He inflicted severe injuries on all of them, prompting immediate concern. Upon hearing about the situation, the parents of the affected students arrived at the school and organised a protest in front of the institution. Following this, they filed a formal complaint against the teacher at the local police station for his violent actions against the students.



VAJPAYEE CENTENARY CELEBRATIONS

BJP bus yatra preparations in full swing

PNS ■ Vijayawada

State unit of BJP president PVN Madhav said a war room was inaugurated for the coordination of Vajpayee centenary celebrations.

On December 11, a state-wide bus yatra will begin with a public meeting in Dharmavaram. For the first day of the programme, Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister Mohan Yadav and Union Minister for Agriculture Shivraj Singh Chouhan will participate. Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu has promised that a Vajpayee Memorial Park (Vajpayee Smruti Vanam) will be constructed.

Atal Bihari Vajpayee stood as an ideal example for coalition governance. Vajpayee was a pioneer of development in the state. the occasion of Vajpayee's centenary, his

statues will be installed across the state, Madhav said. He further said Andhra Pradesh is set to become a Pharma and IT hub. Both the Central and State governments are working for the state's progress and to bring it to the forefront in the country. Rayalaseema will be developed into a power hub, he said. Those who participated in the inauguration of the war room include BJP State general secretary and Yatra convener Nagothu Ramesh Naidu, NTR district BJP unit president Adoori Sri Ram, BJP State official spokespersons Sadineni Yamini Sharma and Sheikh Baji, State Secretary Boddu Nagalakshmi, OBC Morcha State president Rongala Gopi Srinivas, Minority Morcha state president Syed Basha, Iska Sunil, and others.

Cycle rally against drug abuse taken out in Kakinada

PNS ■ Kakinada

District Superintendent of Police Garikipati Bindu Madhav on Sunday led a large-scale cycle rally as part of an anti-drug awareness campaign under the Fit India programme here on Sunday. The campaign, titled Sankalpam, is aimed to promote a drug-free society. The rally was flagged off at the district police's old office junction, with more than 800 cyclists, including students, police personnel, and members of the public, participating. SP Bindu Madhav administered an oath to the participants, urging them to keep away from drugs, stay fit through cycling, and contribute to making the district free from narcotic substances. The massive rally, with the SP cycling at the forefront and accompanied by Armed Reserve Additional




District Superintendent of Police Garikipati Bindu Madhav leading the cycle rally against drugs in Kakianda on Sunday

SP S Srinivasa Rao, Kakinada Sub-Divisional Police Officer Manish Devaraj Patil, District Special Branch DSP KVV Satyanarayana, and AR DSP Srihari Rao, passed through

Bhanugudi Junction, Two Town Police Station Centre, Apollo Hospital Junction, Masjid Centre, and concluded at Balaji Cheruvu Centre with a public meeting.

Addressing the gathering, SP Bindu Madhav emphasised the crucial role of youth in nation-building and cautioned them against falling prey to the conspiracies of neighbouring countries attempting to weaken the younger generation by supplying drugs clandestinely. He recalled the Prime Minister's call under the Fit India movement, encouraging youth to take up cycling for physical and mental fitness and to stay away from harmful habits. The SP also appealed to the public to report any information on ganja supply, sale, or other illegal activities by dialing the toll-free number 1972, dialing 112, or contacting the nearest police station for prompt action.



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Order Order

SC to hear wife’s plea challenging Sonam Wangchuk’s detention on Monday



The Supreme Court will on Monday hear a plea filed by Gitanjali J Angmo, wife of jailed climate activist Sonam Wangchuk, terming his detention under the National Security Act “illegal, and an arbitrary exercise violating his fundamental rights”. A bench of Justices Aravind Kumar and NV Anjaria is likely to hear the matter.

On November 24, the top court had deferred the matter after Solicitor General Tushar Mehta, appearing for the Centre and the UT of Ladakh, sought time to respond to the rejoinder filed by Angmo. On October 29, the top court sought responses from the Centre and the Ladakh administration on an amended plea of Angmo.

According to the amended plea, “The detention order is founded upon stale FIRs, vague imputations, and speculative assertions, lacks any live or proximate connection to the purported grounds of detention and is thus devoid of any legal or factual justification.” Angmo said the unfortunate events of violence in Leh on September 24 cannot be attributed to the actions or statements of Wangchuk in any manner.

Wangchuk was detained under the stringent National Security Act (NSA) on September 26, two days after violent protests demanding statehood and Sixth Schedule status for Ladakh left four people dead and 90 injured in the Union territory. The Government had accused him of inciting the violence. The NSA empowers the Centre and states to detain individuals to prevent them from acting in a manner “prejudicial to the defence of India”. The maximum detention period is 12 months, though it can be revoked earlier.



Bihar Govt to constitute 100 fast-track courts to expedite criminal cases

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Patna

Bihar Home Minister Samrat Choudhary on Sunday announced that the State Government will establish 100 fast-track courts (FTCs) to ensure the swift disposal of pending cases. He said that the move also aims to ease the burden on regular courts for them to accord due attention to sensitive cases.

Choudhary said the decision in this regard has been made considering that over 18 lakh cases are pending before different courts in the State. The constitution of FTCs will “bring in a big relief” to the judicial system and litigants, he said.

“To operationalise 100 FTCs across 38 districts and sub-divisions, the Government will undertake large-scale recruitment,” the home minister asserted in a statement.

He said that a total of 900 posts, including those of bench clerks, office clerks, stenographers, deposition writers, data entry operators, drivers, process servers and peons, will be filled.

Choudhary also announced that 79 courts will be designated as ‘act courts’ to fast-track cases related to the Arms Act. Swift resolution of such serious cases, he said, will strengthen law and order in the State.

The minister said that Patna alone will get eight fast-track courts, while four courts each will be set up in Gaya, Muzaffarpur, Darbhanga and Bhagalpur. Three FTCs each are planned for Nalanda (Bihar Sharif), Rohtas (Sasaram), Saran (Chhapra), Begusarai, Vaishali (Hajipur), East Champaran (Motihari), Samastipur and Madhubani.

Similarly, two courts each will be established in West Champaran (Bettiah), Saharsa, Purnea, Munger, Nawada, Jehanabad, Arwal, Aurangabad, Kaimur (Bhabhua), Buxar, Bhojpur (Arrah), Sitamarhi, Sheohar, Siwan, Gopalganj, Supaul, Madhepura, Araria, Kishanganj, Katihar, Banka, Jamui, Sheikhpura, Lakhisarai and Khagaria. One FTC each is also proposed for the sub-divisional courts of Naugachia and Bagaha.

Sandesara settlement tests India’s fight against financial crime



RANJIT
KUMAR
SINHA

A recent decision by the Supreme Court to quash all criminal proceedings against the Sandesara brothers — Nitin and Chetan Sandesara, promoters of the Sterling Biotech group — has seized national attention. The order, based on a One-Time Settlement (OTS) of ₹5,100 crore, carries significant implications for the prosecution of fugitive economic offenders and large-scale bank fraud.

The case originated from allegations of a multi-crore bank fraud (initially pegged at over ₹5,383 crore in the FIR) involving loan defaults and money laundering, following which the Sandesara brothers fled India in 2017.

The Apex Court’s November 19, 2025, order is strictly conditional. The Supreme Court agreed to drop all parallel actions by a host of investigative agencies, including the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI), the Enforcement Directorate (ED), the Serious Fraud Investigation Office (SFIO), the Income Tax Department, and all proceedings under the Fugitive Economic Offenders Act, 2018.

This sweeping quashing is entirely contingent upon the Sandesara brothers depositing the sum of ₹5,100 crore as a “full and final settlement” with the Supreme Court Registry on or before December 17, 2025. This figure was proposed by the Solicitor General, representing the Government and agencies, after consultation with the lender banks.

The Apex Court’s primary objective was the recovery of public money, noting that continuing criminal prosecution would serve little purpose if the defalcated amount is substantially returned to the banks.

Crucially, the Supreme Court explicitly clarified that these directions were based on the “peculiar facts of this case” and “shall not be treated as a precedent” in future matters, limiting the order’s potential use by other offenders.

In a nutshell, the Supreme Court’s extraordinary order is a trade-off where the Government and banks accepted cash over jail. This decision has generated a significant and sharply divided reaction across the legal, financial, and political spheres.

The core of the reaction centres on the tension between the immediate recovery of public money versus the long-term goal of deterrence and penal justice for economic crimes.

Critics believe that despite the warning, this order creates a powerful road map for any wealthy economic criminal to negotiate



their freedom if they can settle their debts, potentially weakening laws meant to punish fugitives and major fraudsters. The order has generated keen interest and intense legal scrutiny, particularly when considering the complex background against which the Sandesara saga reached the Apex Court around 2020, resulting in the definitive quietus of all criminal litigation.

This is more so when the Sandesara case has been connected to several politicians, bureaucrats, and other influential people, leading to a political controversy that ran parallel to the financial fraud investigations.

The connections primarily involve allegations of corruption, kickbacks, and the use of influence to facilitate the fraud and impede investigations. Consequently, the quashing of the proceedings against the brothers automatically shields their alleged co-conspirators and facilitators, who were also under investigation.

In the Sandesara case, another noteworthy feature was that the brothers had secured an order of protection from arrest or any coercive action from the Supreme Court. They were also at an advantage as the Government agencies failed in their effort to bring them back from a foreign land.

In this background, a question arises regarding the existence of back-channel negotiations before the matter formally reached the Supreme Court for settlement. While clarity on these discussions rests with the Government, it appears that this back-channel consensus was formally presented to the Supreme Court in a crucial, non-public manner. The Solicitor General, representing the Government and the investigating agencies, submitted the final proposal of ₹5,100 crore demand in a sealed cover — a figure the Sandesaras then accepted. The Supreme Court order immediately

raises another question: why must the Sandesara matter be brought under the category of ‘peculiar facts’ — to be not treated as a precedent for other fugitive economic offenders of nearly equal magnitude?

Does the existence of an extradition treaty or deportation provisions with the countries of refuge deprive them of the same legal remedy?

The quashing of all criminal proceedings also suggests that the Sandesaras will escape any finding of criminal intent (mensrea).

The settlement guarantees the recovery of money, but it simultaneously ensures that the accused are never found criminally guilty of fraud or money laundering, thereby undermining the foundational principle of criminal law — punishment based on intent.

Further, agencies like the ED and SFIO spent years building their cases (money laundering, corporate fraud). The ultimate resolution, being a cash-for-freedom deal, could demoralise investigators and incentivise them to focus solely on asset attachment rather than conviction.

Giving an insight about the order, noted jurist and senior advocate AK Ganguli, said it is true that the Apex Court has not referred to Article 142 of the Constitution, but it is evident that the Top Court has invoked its inherent powers for quashing the FIRs and the related proceedings that were pending against the petitioners in various fora for violation of several provisions of PMLA, FEOA (Fugitive Economic Offenders Act, 2018), Black Money (Undisclosed Foreign Income and Assets) and Imposition of Tax Act, 2015, Section 447 of the Companies Act, 2013, Prevention of Corruption Act read with Section 120B (Criminal Conspiracy), 420 (Cheating), 467 (Forgery), 468 (Forgery for the purpose of Cheating) and 471 (Using as genuine a forged document) IPC etc.

Ganguli said it is also evident from the Order passed by the Court that all the proceedings pending against the petitioners in various courts and tribunals were in relation to complaints of serious offences being committed by them that attracted penal provisions of several statutes.

The Writ Petitions filed by the petitioners sought the quashing of all proceedings listed in the Order. It is also evident that the prosecuting agencies agreed that if the petitioners pay a lump sum of ₹5,100 crores, which includes liabilities of overseas companies, the pending proceedings would be all quashed. The Court has accepted that proposal given by the parties, including the proposal given by the prosecuting agencies in a sealed cover. However, Ganguli is of the view that it appears that none of the parties brought to the notice of the Court the legal position applicable to the case.

The Senior Advocate said it is well settled that an agreement to stifle prosecution is not enforced by the courts on the ground that the consideration for such an agreement is opposed to public policy and is a violation of Section 23 of the Contract Act.

He said way back in 1962, the Supreme Court in B NarasimhaRaju v. V. GurumurthyRaju, 1963 (3) SCR 678, had ruled that “the principle underlying this provision (Section 23 of the Indian Contract Act) is obvious. Once the machinery of the Criminal Law is set into motion on the allegation that a non-compoundable offence has been committed, it is for the criminal courts and criminal courts alone to deal with that allegation and to decide whether the offence alleged has in fact been committed or not.

“The decision on this question cannot, either directly or indirectly, be taken out of the hands of criminal courts and dealt with by private individuals. When, as a consideration for not proceeding

with a criminal complaint, an agreement is made, in substance it really means that the complaint has taken upon himself to deal with his complaint and on the bargaining counter he has used his non-prosecution of the complaint as a consideration for the agreement which his opponent has been induced or coerced to enter into.”

Ganguli said that the Supreme Court further held that “In dealing with the question as to whether the consideration for the agreement is opposed to public policy or not, it is immaterial that the debt in respect of which an agreement is made for the illegal consideration was real, nor was it necessary to prove that a crime in fact had been committed.

All that is necessary to prove in such a case is “that each party should understand that the one is making his promise in exchange or part exchange for the promise of the other not to prosecute or continue prosecuting.”

Clarifying further, the noted jurist said that the Supreme Court held that “it is clear that if the appellant proves that the consideration for the arbitration agreement was the promise by respondent not to prosecute his complaint, then the said consideration would be opposed to public policy and the agreement based on it would be invalid in law.”

Citing certain Privy Council decisions, Ganguli said that the Apex Court further held that “In dealing with the question as to whether the consideration for the agreement is opposed to public policy or not, it is immaterial that the date in respect of which an agreement is made for the illegal consideration was real, nor is it necessary to prove that a crime in fact has been committed.

All that is necessary to prove in such a case is “that each party should understand that the one is making his promise in exchange or part exchange for the promise of the other not to prosecute or continue prosecuting”.

One is not certain as to how the Court would have concluded the case, had this clear, unequivocal legal position been brought to its notice, Ganguli said.

Regardless of the uncertainty over whether the Supreme Court was fully apprised of the legal position on stifling prosecution, the resulting order in the Sandesara case is clear. While it is not a formal legal precedent that grants a right to settlement, it has created a powerful institutional signal that economic criminals with the financial capacity to make a significant repayment can negotiate a “cash-for-freedom” deal at the highest judicial level.

The writer is a senior journalist covering legal affairs

Faced criticism from my own community on creamy layer principle: Ex-CJI Gavai

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Mumbai

Former Chief Justice of India BR Gavai has said he has been “widely criticised” by people from his own community for stating in a judgement that the creamy layer principle should be applied to reservation for the Scheduled Castes. In Dr BR Ambedkar’s view, affirmative action was like providing a bicycle to someone who is lagging behind, Gavai said, asking whether Ambedkar thought that such a person should never give up the bicycle. Ambedkar did not think so, he claimed.

Gavai, who retired as CJI recently, was delivering a lecture on “Role of Affirmative Action in Promoting Equal Opportunity” at Mumbai University on Saturday.

Paying tributes to Ambedkar on his death anniversary, Gavai said the iconic leader was the architect not only of the Indian Constitution but also of the affirmative action enshrined in it.

“Babasaheb, in so far affirmative action is concerned, was of the view that it is like providing a cycle to those who are lagging behind.... Suppose somebody is at tenth km and somebody at zero, he (the latter) should be provided a cycle, so that he reaches faster till the tenth km. From there, he joins the person who is already there and walks along with him. Did he (Ambedkar) think that the person should not leave the cycle and carry forward and thereby ask the people who are at zero km to continue to be there?” he asked.

“In my view, that was not the vision of social and economic justice as contemplated by



Babasaheb Ambedkar. He wanted to bring social and economic justice in the real sense and not in a formal sense,” the former CJI added. The Indra Sawhney and Others Vs Union of India case enunciated the creamy layer principle, and in another case, he himself held that the creamy layer should also be made applicable to the Scheduled Castes, said Gavai.

The principle demands that those who are sufficiently advanced economically and socially should not get the benefit of affirmative action, even though they are members of the backward community for which it is meant.

He was “widely criticised” by the people of his own community for this judgement, Gavai said, adding that he was accused of taking benefit of the reservation himself to become a Supreme Court judge and then advocating the exclusion of those who fell in the creamy layer. But these people did not even know that there is no reservation for the constitutional office of High Court or Supreme Court judge, Gavai said. Can applying the

same yardstick to the son of a chief justice of India or chief secretary and the son of a labourer who has studied in a gram panchayat school satisfy the test of equality as enshrined in the Constitution, he asked. Gavai, however, emphasised that in the last 75 years “no doubt affirmative action has played a positive role”.

“I have travelled across the country, travelled across the world, I have seen many people belonging to the Scheduled Caste becoming chief secretary or director general of police or ambassadors and high commissioners,” he said. Maharashtra is a land of social reformers, and the “region can truly be described as the birthplace of the idea of modern India”, Gavai said. “We are all aware of Jyotirao Phule and Savitribai Phule’s pioneering work in the eradication of inequalities in society,” he said.

When women were among the most oppressed in society, it was the Phule couple who opened the door of education for them, he noted.

Unrest in Jharkhand HC over judges’ appointments

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Ranchi

Jharkhand High Court is facing a silent unrest over the recommendations on the appointment of judges. The conflict focuses on the Collegium, comprising the Chief Justice and the two most senior judges of the High Court. According to individuals aware of the development, the Collegium has ignored certain names that were previously under active consideration for elevation. Lawyers assert that for more than eight years, not a single name from the local Bar (advocates practising at the High Court) has been successfully recommended for elevation to a High Court judge post.

Sources claim that the selection process is being driven by personal interest and nepotism, rather than merit, preventing the appointment of the most competent advocates. They maintain that this is the reason for the continuous failure to fill posts from the local Bar.

Facing an extreme shortage of judges and impending retirements in December 2025 and January 2026, the Collegium is reportedly sending names of seven Advocates to the Supreme Court for elevation, as mandated. However, sources contend that this new list was deliberately prepared to include candidates who are over the age of 55 and have little to no actual legal practice.

The purpose of recommending these aged and less-practising candidates, according to sources, is to ensure the Supreme Court rejects the list. This rejection would then stall the process until other favoured lawyers, who currently do not meet the eligibility criteria, become eligible for recommendation at a later date. Additionally, some of the can-

didates being recommended are reportedly close to a Collegium member, highlighting a pattern of internal politics and favouritism. This current unrest echoes past conflicts. Sources recall that when the previous Chief Justice recommended six lawyers for elevation, one Collegium member dissented.

The actual concern, according to the Bar, was the inclusion of an advocate who was not a regular Jharkhand High Court practitioner but was made to appear in a few cases just prior to the recommendation.

In addition, sources said the aforesaid Collegium member had in fact given his dissent for all six recommended names in the absence of the names of his favourites, and this time he has ensured, except for one all the previously recommended names have been removed in the current recommendation. It is noteworthy that the earlier panel had the names of eminent and able lawyers with impeccable integrity, whose age profile was excellent.

Lawyers argue that this “dirty politics” scuttled the elevation of several other very able advocates. These procedural issues are occurring while the court operates with a crippling shortage of judges.

The sanctioned strength for the Jharkhand High Court is 25 judges (20 Permanent and 5 Additional). The current working strength stands at just 15, leaving 10 crucial vacancies. This represents a 40 per cent shortfall, and the entire quota of five Additional Judges remains unfilled.

This persistent gap places immense pressure on the serving judges, exacerbating the backlog of cases and severely compromising the efficiency of the justice system in Jharkhand.



States Focus



HP GOVERNOR CALLS FOR FIGHT AGAINST DRUG ABUSE

Himachal Pradesh Governor Shiv Pratap Shukla on Sunday said that coordinated and determined efforts are required to combat drug abuse in the state. After inaugurating a workshop on 'War on Drugs – Chitte Par Chot' organised by 'Sanjeevani', a group of NGOs, the governor said the fight against drugs demands both strict action by police and a sensitive approach towards the affected individuals. Along with the NGOs, participation from religious institutions is crucial to break the drug network backed by foreign entities, Shukla said. Appreciating the efforts of the state Government in tackling the drug menace, particularly the manner in which both the ruling and Opposition parties united on this issue, Shukla said, "Without collective political resolve, it would not be possible to save the Devbhoomi from this crisis."



GOGOI HAILS TEZPUR STUDENTS AS SYMBOL OF NEW ASSAM

Congress leader Gaurav Gogoi on Sunday lauded the student-led agitation at Tezpur University as a symbol of "new Assam". Gogoi, the deputy leader of the Congress in Lok Sabha and chief of the party in the state, criticised the government for its handling of the unrest, which started in mid-September following the death of singer Zubeen Garg. "It is disappointing to see the manner in which Tezpur University is being tackled by the government. At the same time, I am proud of the manner in which the students and faculty of Tezpur University have conducted themselves. Firm, unbending and dignified," Gogoi said in a series of posts on X.

Gangsters in uniform: BJP's Jakhar hits at Punjab Police

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Chandigarh

In a sharp attack on the Punjab Police, state BJP chief Sunil Jakhar Sunday called it "gangsters in uniform" and alleged that certain police personnel have "bowed" to the AAP dispensation, helping in "undemocratic tasks". Jakhar also attacked the Bhagwant Mann Government for the alleged deteriorating law and order, claiming there is a prevailing atmosphere of fear in Punjab, as he cited extortion threats and firing incidents. He referenced AAP leader Arvind Kejriwal's warning to gangsters to leave Punjab within seven days or face consequences.

Instead of leaving, Jakhar claimed, gangsters have openly accepted this challenge, committing crimes daily, while Kejriwal has not been seen in Punjab since making the threat. During a media address, Jakhar cited several alarming incidents, including the murder of the son of an RSS leader in Ferozepur, two deaths during a shooting at



a marriage palace in Ludhiana, and an attack on the residence of AAP leader Daljit Raju in Phagwara.

He remarked that hardly a day goes by without a shocking crime committed by

gangsters. Jakhar noted that despite Punjab having 17 officers with the rank of Director General of Police (DGP) and 13 with the rank of Additional DGP, crime continues to rise.

In comparison, Haryana has only one DGP, he said. "A disease, worse than gangsters prevalent in Punjab, is 'gangsters in uniform'. They engage in extortion. When the land pooling policy (of the AAP government) could not be successful, those in power deployed police for extortion activities," he alleged. "I say this with full responsibility but with a sense of deep worry: police officers bowed before the ruling party," he further alleged, adding that these cops were now engaged in "undemocratic tasks" such as helping AAP leaders rig elections, as well as pressuring people for money.

Jakhar also raised the issue of a purported audio clip in which the Patiala senior superintendent of police, along with some senior officers, were allegedly heard conspiring to prevent Opposition candi-

dates from filing nomination papers for the upcoming Zila Parishad and Panchayat Samiti polls.

He said the police "hastily" labelled the audio as AI-generated, without any inquiry, and instead issued a summons to political leaders. He called for an impartial investigation into the situation and urged all political parties and media organisations to unite against these issues.

The Punjab BJP leader also mentioned the arrest of a deputy inspector general of police by the CBI in October. He said that if the people of Punjab give the BJP a chance, such "extortionists within the police" will be firmly disciplined. While he acknowledged that the Punjab Police is a capable force, he expressed concern that a few individuals in uniform have tarnished its reputation.

Lakhs of people assemble in Kolkata to chant Gita

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ Kolkata

Lakhs of *sanatani* devotees led by prominent *sadhus* and *sadhvis* on Sunday assembled at the historic Brigade Parade Ground in Kolkata to participate in a mega Bhagwad Gita recital programme christened *Paanch Lakkho Konthe Gita Paath* (chanting of Gita in 5 lakh voices).

While Governor CV Ananda Bose addressed the gathering — interpreted by many a critic as a pre-electoral show of strength by the pro-BJP groups — senior BJP leaders, including Union Minister and former Bengal BJP state president Sukanta Majumdar, ex-MP Locket Chatterjee and MLA Agnimitra Paul, and prominent religious figures, including Dharendra Shastri and Kartik Maharaj attend

the event. Speaking to the media men after the programme Majumdar said "Gita is not a religion specific book, it is applicable not only to the Hindus but members of all religions."

On whether Bengal was getting split along communal lines after former Trinamool Congress MLA Humayun Kabir's laying of the foundation stone of a Babri Mosque at Murshidabad on Saturday followed by chanting of Gita by lakhs of people on Sunday, he said, it was Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee who had brought the situation to such pass. State BJP spokesperson Sajal Ghosh said, "alarmed by the steady alienation of the Muslim votes Mamata Banerjee has fixed Humayun Kabir to unite the Muslim



A youngster during the 'five-lakh-voices Gita chanting' event, at the Brigade Parade Ground in Kolkata on Sunday

votes in the name of Babri Mosque, she knew that his suspension from the party would trigger communal sentiments more than on normal conditions after the elections if Kabir manages to

get some seats he will claim the chair of Deputy Chief Minister and Mamata will happily grant that, so it is time the Hindus should unite and identify the real communal forces of Bengal and get

rid of them one is sure Gita chanting will cleanse the heart of people and focus them on the real cause."

Meanwhile, in a parallel Kabir said that he too would give a call to Muslim clerics to chant hymns from Quran. "I respect the Hindu sentiments and I respect their chanting of their religious scripture Gita, I too call upon the cleric to do the same and I am giving a call to chant Quran in one lakh voices the event will be decided and the date will be declared soon," he said.

Referring to the Sunday's the TMC said that it was being done to further political goals. "When religion comes out of the home and peddled in public it surely has political purpose, the BJP and its associates are doing the same with an eye on the 2026 Assembly elections."

10 Naxalites surrender in MP's Balaghat

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Bhopal

Ten wanted Naxalites, including four women, surrendered before Chief Minister Dr Mohan Yadav in Balaghat on Sunday, marking a significant step in Madhya Pradesh's push to eliminate Naxal influence.

Dr Yadav handed them copies of the Constitution as they laid down their weapons and urged other cadres to return to the mainstream, saying the state is committed to achieving Naxal-free status by January 2026.

He said the government, working in line with targets set by Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Home Minister Amit Shah, will ensure the safety, rehabilitation and development of those who abandon violence. "No individual has the licence to take up arms. Those who choose the path of law will find full support in rebuilding their lives," Dr Yadav said.

The Chief Minister said anti-Naxal operations have been strengthened through new camps, increased personnel and sustained field action. Fifteen temporary camps and 882 posts for a special support battalion



have been sanctioned to reinforce the campaign. He said continuous surveillance, intensive checks and coordinated action have sharply reduced the Naxal footprint in the state.

Dr Yadav said last year's opening of 46 single-window centres in affected regions has helped provide employment, forest rights documents and essential services, aiding rehabilitation efforts. Paying tribute to policeman Ashish Sharma, he said 328 Hawk Force personnel and other officers demonstrating exceptional service have been granted out-of-turn promotions.

Director General of Police

Kailash Makwana said expanded operations, increased manpower and consistent encouragement for field teams have produced visible results, with surrenders rising in Madhya Pradesh and neighbouring states. Job and skill development initiatives, he said, are helping connect youth and residents in affected areas with the mainstream.

Transport and School Education Minister Uday Pratap Singh, senior police officials and personnel attended the programme, where authorities released the names of all ten cadres who surrendered across Sukma, Bijapur, Dantewada and Gadchiroli.

Rajnath reaffirms push for self-reliant defence sector

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Jammu

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh on Sunday reiterated the commitment of the Narendra Modi-led central Government to make the nation 'Atma Nirbhar' (Self-Reliant) in defence manufacturing.

Speaking during the launch of the 125 'game-changing' infrastructure projects in Leh, Singh emphasised that India, which was once dependent on imports, is today witnessing a paradigm shift in defence manufacturing, from being an import-dependent nation to an emerging producer-exporter.

He said the country once lacked a robust system to manufacture arms and equipment domestically, but sustained efforts over the last decade have reversed that situation.

"Due to our hard work in the last 10 years, our defence production, which was approximately ₹46,000 crore in 2014, has now grown to a record ₹1.51 lakh crore. Our defence exports, which were less than ₹1,000 crore 10 years ago, have now reached nearly ₹24,000 crore," Singh said.

Lauding the BRO for



Defence Minister Rajnath Singh dedicated 125 border infrastructure projects of Border Roads Organisation (BRO)

making great progress in technological innovation, Singh asserted that advanced engineering methods are accelerating the completion of infrastructure projects.

He made special mention of BRO's adoption of Class-70 modular bridges indigenously developed in partnership with Garden Reach Shipbuilders and Engineers under the Aatmanirbhar Bharat (Self-Reliant India) vision.

"The successful construction of these modular bridges at several forward locations is a powerful example of how indigenous technology is transforming infrastructure in border areas. These bridges, completely designed and manufactured in India, mark a significant milestone in India's engineering self-reliance," he said.

The defence minister also pointed out that in the financial year 2024-25, BRO

incurred a record expenditure of ₹16,690 crore, the highest ever, and a target of ₹18,700 crore has been set for FY 2025-26, which underlines the government's confidence in BRO's capabilities.

The Government has enhanced the BRO budget from ₹6,500 crore to ₹7,146 crore in the Union Budget 2025-26 in recognition of its critical role in national security and development, he added.

"We have received a proposal (from the Opposition) regarding the appointment of the Leader of the Opposition. A decision will be made at an appropriate time after consulting with all stakeholders," Shinde told reporters in Nagpur on the eve of the winter session of the state legislature.

Virtually dismissing the Opposition's argument about adherence to legislative traditions vis-a-vis the appointment of LoPs, Shinde said it was not necessary that legislative practices followed after 1947 reflect the same manner in 2025. "It is not expected in 2025 that the functioning should continue in the same manner as it did according to the traditions and practices followed after independence in 1947," he said.

Following the Opposition's rout in the state assembly polls last year, no party could win 10 per cent of the total 288 seats in the assembly. As per the norm, it is necessary for any Opposition to win at least 10 per cent seats to stake a claim for the post of LoP.

Congress leader Vijay Wadettiwar had said that in 1980, the BJP had 14 MLAs, still the LoP's post was given to the saffron party. Similarly, in 1985, the BJP had 16 MLAs, yet it was given the LoP's post.

New disease found: Judiciary must be shielded from political attacks



A ASHVATHAMAN

Judiciary should be protected from personal attacks and from colouring judges with wrong intentions. In a constitutional democracy, the courts stand as the final sentinel on the qui vive, always alert to protect rights. Judiciary should be free from unwanted colourings, because the faith of the judges should never be allowed to faint. Once that faith weakens, the entire edifice of constitutional governance starts to crumble.

If such colouring is allowed, if every judicial order is casually attributed to political or ideological bias, the trust

over the judiciary will fall. Recent public discourse has shown how quickly narratives spread, especially when amplified by party machinery or social media ecosystems.

What then remains for a citizen? A citizen obeys court orders because he believes the judge is neutral. When neutrality is doubted, the rule of law becomes a rule of convenience.

In the Thirupparangunram issue, for protecting the religious rights of Hindus conferred by the Indian Constitution, Justice GR Swaminathan passed an order. Around the same time, across India, debates on temple rights, minority rights, and Article 25 freedoms have become flashpoints, showing how sensitive such matters are. Whether one agrees or disagrees with the reasoning, the constitutional remedy is appeal, not slander.

Yet a DMK MP, TR Baalu, stood in Parliament and declared that they

"got an order from an RSS judge". A senior parliamentarian forgetting that the conduct of judges in their official duties generally cannot be discussed in Parliament or State Legislatures, as per Article 121 of the Constitution, undermines the very safeguard created to ensure judicial independence.

The act of TR Baalu demands action for breach of parliamentary privilege or contempt of the House. In legal tradition this is scandalising the court, an established category of contempt recognised since the Privy Council's 1899 decision in McLeod v St Aubyn, reiterated in Indian jurisprudence from Brahma Prakash Sharma (1953) to Arundhati Roy (2002).

Even more disturbing is that the High Court Registrar has not taken cognisance of this grave breach. Is this allowed? By remaining passive, the institution risks letting a dangerous precedent take root.

If this passes without action, every judge becomes vulnerable. Anyone unhappy with a judicial order will simply pour colour, attach a political label, and escape accountability. A state Government may claim political rhetoric as free speech, but freedom of speech ends where intimidation of the judiciary begins.

When a citizen sees a Member of Parliament openly attacking a judge in this manner, and the institution not responding, what confidence will he have to follow a court order? This silence sends the wrong signal, that judicial orders can be selectively obeyed. The message becomes dangerous: "Obey if it suits you; defy if it doesn't." That is the death of constitutional morality.

This attitude resurfaces when a Commissioner of Police is shown declaring publicly, "We are not following the order; we will face the conse-

quences", and this defiance is projected as heroism of the Chief Minister.

In legal language this is nothing but executive overreach dressed as bravery. Across India, debates on police non-compliance, from Delhi to Tamil Nadu, have raised the same concern: politicians celebrating disobedience erodes public discipline. In the concept of the rule of law, heroism lies in obedience to the Constitution, not rebellion against it. The police commissioner says he has no fear of consequences, it is the duty of the court to ensure that disobedience of a court order will ensue in consequences not only for a layman, but also for a police commissioner. That "ensure" is a real equality.

Due to the disease that an "accepted vengeance towards Hinduism" in the common mind of India, the Thirupparangunram incident has been allowed to pass as if it were normal.

That silence has given birth to a new disease, attacking the judiciary as the new normal. Attacking Hindus is old normal; attacking the courts is becoming the new normal. If the judiciary is targeted, constitutional morality is weakened at its root. If this continues, the greatest casualty will not be a judge or a political party but the very idea of justice.

A democracy must protect its judges from personal attacks, ideological branding, and institutional silence. The courts have always been described as temples of justice; their sanctity cannot be compromised by political mudslinging. Otherwise, the people will lose their last refuge, an impartial courtroom. And when that refuge collapses, nothing remains to protect the citizen.

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Editor's

TAKE

India's moment in an uncertain world

Prime Minister Modi's recent remarks offer both a reflection on how India has navigated recent crises and a vision of where the nation must head next

When Prime Minister Modi asserted on Sunday that India is shining in a world of uncertainties, he was largely on the mark. The phrase neatly captures India's current growth trajectory. At a time when global volatility has become the new normal – marked by economic disruptions, geopolitical tensions, technological upheavals and rising environmental concerns – his remarks sought to position India as an island of stability and a country with clear purpose. Yet the address went beyond optimism; it attempted to outline both the architecture of India's present momentum and the roadblocks that remain. The first quarter of the 21st century has tested nations in unprecedented ways. A global financial crisis, a pandemic, supply-chain breakdowns, wars and deepening political polarisation have shaken the international order to its core. Modi rightly noted that India has weathered these storms through a deliberate shift in its governance culture. There was a time, he said, when reforms were reactionary – driven by crises rather than conviction. Today, reforms are calibrated to national goals rather than global panic. This, he argued, is the essence of being “constant, consistent and nation-first”. There is truth in the narrative of India as a strong and resilient economy, somewhat insulated from the vagaries of international push and pull. Much of the Prime Minister's confidence stems from India's macroeconomic trajectory. Despite global slowdowns, India remains among the fastest-growing major economies. Investment activity has strengthened, and inflation is relatively under control compared with many advanced economies. India is also benefiting from shifts in the global trade environment, including the new tariff regime of the United States.

As South-South cooperation becomes increasingly important, India is well placed to emerge as a leading force. As a manufacturing base, a digital partner and a diplomatic stabiliser, India is positioning itself as a contributor to global stability. However, not all is rosy. Where exactly does India stand today, and where is it headed? Modi's speech implicitly portrayed a country in transition – from a service-heavy model to a more balanced economy, from welfare delivery to welfare empowerment, and from being merely a large market to becoming a global player shaping norms and supply chains. This moment of confidence, however, demands clarity about unresolved challenges. Job creation must accelerate, particularly in high-productivity sectors. Skilling needs to keep pace with rapid technological change. The manufacturing push still requires smoother regulation, deeper logistics reform and faster dispute resolution. Social challenges – urban stress, recurring rural distress and climate vulnerability – require sustained, long-term planning rather than episodic responses. Externally, India must navigate carefully. Conflicts in the Middle East and shifting trade alignments could unsettle even the most resilient economies. What the Prime Minister's address captured well is a vital balance: confidence is warranted, but complacency would be costly. India may be shining – but sustained effort will be essential to keep it that way.

A firm assertion of strategic autonomy

Putin's presence in Delhi is a moment of quiet defiance, diplomatic confidence, and sovereign self-respect in an era marked by geopolitical flux and the overreach of superpowers



BHOPINDER SINGH

The visit of the Russian President, Vladimir Putin, to India in the midst of the Russia-Ukraine war and the ensuing peace talks mediated by the United States is reflective of “multilateralism” and “strategic autonomy”, as opposed to the bulldozing and unilateral ways of superpowers. In earlier days, the two “blocs” (USA-led and USSR-led) insisted on pre-defined and conformist tendencies.

However, the end of the Cold War with the implosion of the Soviet Union in the early 1990s led many to prematurely posit the USA as the sole, definitive, and unchallenged superpower. Commentators in the 1990s, such as the former US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, noted, “We are the indispensable nation”, while Charles Krauthammer claimed, “The centre of world power is the unchallenged superpower, the United States, attended by its Western allies” and the political scientist Samuel P. Huntington thundered, “The United States is the sole state with pre-eminence in every domain of power-economic, military, diplomatic, ideological, technological, and cultural.”




Ironically, the concurrent diminishment of multilateral platforms such as the United Nations added to the misplaced superiority of the USA. Even though history has repeatedly taught that global dominance is never permanent, the ostrich-like behaviour of the USA debarred it from recognising the sudden emergence of an expansionist China, or the more measured rise of India. Unipolarity was a seductive idea that lulled the USA into a false sense of invulnerability and hubris as it imperiously (and selectively) launched its War on Terror. However, it took twenty years of the longest, most inconclusive, and most expensive war against a ragtag militia, namely the Taliban, for the USA to be humbled. In recent times, the US has been made to eat humble pie in various other interventions across the globe – yet many within the corridors of power in Washington DC still harbour dated notions of grandiosity, imperiousness, and authority.

US President Donald Trump's rallying cry of MAGA (Make America Great Again) is born from that same fount of presumed invincibility, which routinely leads to open threats, coercion, and even bullying. This unrestrained lust for power in Washington DC does not spare any friend or “ally”, as the likes of India, Canada, Mexico, or even NATO countries (North Atlantic Treaty Organisation) are fair game for arm-twisting, as far as Trump is con-



IN RECENT TIMES, THE US HAS BEEN MADE TO EAT HUMBLE PIE IN VARIOUS OTHER INTERVENTIONS ACROSS THE GLOBE — YET MANY WITHIN THE CORRIDORS OF POWER IN WASHINGTON DC STILL HARBOUR DATED NOTIONS OF GRANDIOSITY, IMPERIOUSNESS, AND AUTHORITY

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cerned. During his first presidency, he targeted Delhi for its civilisational relations with Iran, seeking to debar them from trading with each other, as Iran was unfairly and unilaterally sanctioned by Trump after reneging on the Iran nuclear deal. Similarly, deep displeasure was expressed with India as it sought the S-400 missile systems from Russia—even though the US had not done anything substantial to support India against China during the tense 2020 face-off.

Today, in his second presidency, Trump has further derailed and vitiated relations with allies as he has pursued patent tariff wars without any care or consideration for their sensitivities and urgencies. The ham-handedness of Trump has led to some unthinkable portents, as was optically captured in the surreal moments of bonhomie between the troika of Vladimir Putin, Narendra Modi, and Xi Jinping, chatting on the sidelines of a meeting and giving a loud thumbs-down to Trump's unilateralism. While there may be too much bloody history between Delhi and Beijing to suggest anything beyond symbolism at this stage, the fact remains that the persistent unreasonableness of the USA under Trump can lead to the stitching together of counter-intuitive alliances (which may be tactical rather than strategic) as a rebound effect of the pressures exerted by Trump.

India hosts its long-time and dependable ally, Russia, as it juggles multiple balls in the air to avoid attracting further punitive tariffs from the US, while still extracting the necessary wherewithal from Russia, which has his-

torically been forthcoming, accommodating, and reasonable in commercial terms. This forms part of India's new-found “strategic autonomy”, which affords it the dignity to pursue diplomacy and relationships that are favourable to its own citizens, first and foremost. India is simply too large a sovereign state—and even too significant an “idea”—to act like a vassal state of the USA that must kowtow to all its diktats.

This is not to suggest that India should sever its growing and natural ties with the USA, but rather to nuance and assert itself to levels that are mutually beneficial, not exclusively skewed towards one side. Russia under Putin has demonstrated an accommodating template, having not insisted upon India or imposed conditionalities even as India went into overdrive to build relations with the “West”, especially the US. Meanwhile, India reciprocated in kind by not militating against Russian interests (Delhi took a muted stand on Ukraine that was not anti-Russia) wherever it could.

It is this lack of reciprocal accommodation and respect that blinds the policies of the Trump administration and could translate into alternate pressure groupings, potentially composed of the unlikeliest partners. While visits by a Russian head of state have always warranted a high-profile welcome, this time the warmth, pomp, and display reflect a sense of defiance, independence, and an inherent sovereign pride and dignity in the face of pettiness and pressure exerted ungracefully by the Trump administration.

The Pioneer

SINCE 1865

Why we fail at control: The Gita on surrender



AJIT KUMAR BISHNOI

2ND OPINION

THE PIONEER

We all wish to be in control, yet we fail repeatedly — and often miserably. The simple reason is that control never truly rests in our hands. Lord Krishna explains this with crystal clarity in the Bhagavad Gita: “The place of action, the doer, the instruments, the efforts, and providence—these five are the causes of all action.” (18.14) He adds, “Whatever action a person performs through body, speech, and mind, these five are its causes.” (18.15)

We are constantly acting—physically, verbally, and mentally. Speech and mind are mentioned separately in the Gita because they shape our lives more deeply than other senses. Consider a simple accident where both parties are at fault. If both apologise, the matter ends peacefully. If harsh words are exchanged, a brawl erupts.

The mind's influence is even subtler: it colours our reactions, directs our moods, and silently writes our destiny. Thus, the mind and speech hold a special place among the instruments of action. What are these five causes?

First, the place of action: the circumstances we are placed in. Whether we are in burning Delhi in June or freezing Toronto in January, whether we live in a nuclear family with a newborn or in a bustling joint family—circumstances shape our actions, yet we do not choose them.

Second, the doer: we ourselves. But are we in control of our nature? Not really. Our inherent tendencies steer our responses. An irritable person will shout in the same situation where a calm person would forgive.

Third, the instruments: the tools we possess. Someone with a modern smartphone can perform tasks much faster than one with outdated technology. Our tools decide the quality of our output.

Fourth, the efforts: even effort is not fully ours. Health, energy, mood, and environment—countless factors determine how much effort we can actually put in.

And finally, providence: the results that unfold are shaped primarily by our past karmas. Whether something succeeds or fails often depends far less on our present labour and far more on the ledger of past actions. If all these factors are beyond our complete control, then how much control do we truly have? Not much. The only real controller,

Krishna says, is God. All circumstances originate from Him, all instruments arise from His creation, and the fruits of action operate under His moral order. Even our free will exists within the boundaries of the divine system.

What, then, should we do? Krishna instructs: “In all respects, take shelter of Me alone. By My grace, you will achieve supreme peace and the eternal abode.” (18.62) Where Krishna and Arjuna stand together, the Gita promises opulence, victory, righteousness, and unwavering success. (18.78) Yet most of us resist sur-

render. Ego whispers: “I will succeed this time. I know better.” But Krishna warns: “You have a right only to action, never to its fruits.” (2.47) Those who try to predetermine outcomes, He says, are “pitiable.” (2.49) My own experience is no different. Whenever I try to control situations—especially in emotional matters such as a loved one's illness—I find myself anxious and frustrated. Even when I pray sincerely, peace does not immediately follow. I still expect God to act according to my timeline. Slowly, I am learning that acceptance, not control, is the lesson; past karmas must play out, and God acts when the time is right. The journey from understanding to realisation is long. But the Gita assures us that surrender—not control — is where true freedom lies.

The writer is a spiritual teacher

Cess alone cannot end pan masala

The Lok Sabha's decision to impose a 40 per cent cess on pan masala, with proceeds directed towards public health and national security, invites deeper reflection. While taxation is often promoted as a deterrent, the reality is that habitual users of addictive substances rarely abandon them due to higher costs. Instead, they adjust by cutting down on other essential household expenses, which undermines the intended health benefits. Oral cancer and related diseases caused by pan masala remain a major public health crisis, and taxation alone cannot solve it. A more effective approach would be to gradually phase out pan masala manufacturing altogether, while ensuring that workers and small businesses dependent on this industry are provided with alternative livelihoods. Moreover, linking cess revenue from pan masala to national security appears misplaced.

Defence requires stable and predictable funding, not revenue streams tied to harmful consumption patterns that may decline over time. It would be far more prudent to channel pan masala cess exclusively towards health initiatives, while securing national security funding through broader, assured sources. Such a calibrated approach would strengthen both public health outcomes and national priorities in the long run.

O PRASADA RAO | HYDERABAD

Putin and Russia's power paradox

Russian President Vladimir Putin, who recently undertook a whirlwind tour to India, has been at the helm of the “new Russia” since 1999 and is currently in his fifth term. Termed the “king” or “emperor” by loyalists, Putin is seen by many Russians as a saviour who restored stability after inheriting a fractured legacy from the erstwhile Soviet Union. Over the years, he has grown in stature in a manner only he could manage.

Alongside this, the master strategist has held the Kremlin together through turbulent times. His bitter critics, however, spare no criticism, describing him as authoritarian and arrogant. His near-absolute control over institutions and suppression of dissent have become defining features of his leadership.

Putin is poised to steer Russia's fortunes until 2036, being constitutionally entitled to contest another election in 2030. His firm outlook, quick decision-making, risk-taking ability, keen eye for detail and unwavering focus are frequently cited as strengths.

Admirers also credit the former KGB officer with raising living standards and shaping a broad economic vision. While corruption concerns persist, the 73-year-old leader's commitment to his country is rarely questioned.

GANAPATHI BHAT | AKOLA

RBI signals growth over inflation

Apropos “RBI cuts interest rate”. The Reserve Bank of India has opened a new monetary cycle with its first rate cut since mid-2025, signalling a shift towards supporting growth as inflation shows clearer signs of moderation. By lowering the repo rate to 5.25 per cent, the central bank has laid the groundwork for softer lending rates, particularly benefiting home buyers. Banks are expected to bring housing loan rates close to 7.1 per cent, among the lowest levels outside the pandemic period, offering meaningful relief to both new and existing borrowers. What distinguishes this move is the strong liquidity support accompanying the cut. The RBI plans to inject nearly ₹1.45 lakh crore into the financial system through bond repurchases and a sizeable three-year dollar swap. This is aimed at stabilising credit flows amid global financial volatility.

The RBI has also presented a more optimistic outlook, raising its FY26 growth forecast to 7.3 per cent while sharply revising down inflation expectations, citing easing food prices and resilient domestic demand. Despite the rupee's weakness, robust foreign exchange reserves have provided policy comfort. Markets responded with cautious optimism, reflecting confidence in the central bank's calibrated approach.

VANDANA | CHANDIGARH

PIC TALK




People ice skate at a rink on a cold winter day, in Shimla.


PHOTO: PTI

DIGITAL EXPERIENCE

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PAKISTAN'S CHIEF OF DEFENCE FORCES ESTABLISHES MILITARY SUPREMACY

Pakistan's President, acting on the “advice” of the Prime Minister, has announced the appointment of General Asim Munir as the country's first Chief of Defence Forces for a five-year term under the 27th Constitutional Amendment. Officially, the move seeks to establish a unified command and accelerate decision-making across land, air, sea, space and cyberspace, projecting coherence in Pakistan's security apparatus. The amendment centralises operational, administrative and strategic authority in a single office, which Islamabad has described as a historic reform.

In reality, however, the development surprises few. Pakistan's power structure has long been dominated by the military, regardless of constitutional labels or civilian

endorsements. Many observers believe that General Munir was not merely the beneficiary of the decision but its principal architect, with civilian authorities providing formal approval rather than genuine direction.

Supporters will argue that a consolidated command could improve coordination and modernise defence management. Critics, however, see the appointment as further institutionalising military predominance at the expense of civilian oversight. In a system where elected governments operate under persistent constraints, the creation of the CDF post reinforces an existing reality rather than altering it. The announcement therefore represents continuity dressed up as reform.

RS NARULA | PATIALA

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Jihadi radicalisation: A growing threat to national security

As extremist narratives move seamlessly from religious spaces to peer groups and online platforms, India confronts a challenge that is psychological, ideological and social in equal measure.

FIRST
Column



KARNAL
SINGH

Radicalisation today stands as one of the most serious challenges to India's national security. Modern terrorism does not begin with the gun or the bomb — it begins with the mind. No terror attack is possible unless someone is first convinced, manipulated and mentally prepared to commit violence. The recent arrests in Faridabad, the recovery of explosives and detonators, and even the involvement of highly educated individuals such as doctors in the Delhi blast demonstrate how deep and sophisticated the radicalisation machinery has become. These cases show that the threat is no longer confined to the poor, the uneducated or those living on the fringes of society.

The new targets are educated, urban youth — young men seeking identity, purpose and belonging in a complicated world. Radicalisation generally begins in two key environments. The first is the religious space — madrasas and mosques — where a small number of preachers with Salafi or extremist leanings deliver emotionally charged, misleading interpretations of religion. They twist noble concepts such as Ummah, Zakat and Jihad to create a sense of grievance, victimhood and moral justification for violence.

The radicalisers deliberately misuse verses and stories to convince young minds that their "religious duty" lies in fighting or opposing the State. Over time, these false interpretations become the ideological entrance gate for deeper radicalisation. The second environment (peer group radicalisation) is far less visible but equally dangerous: quiet street corners, small tea shops, college hostels, student groups, parks and closed conversations among friends.

In these informal spaces, long discussions take place on religion, alleged injustices, communal grievances and global events. Slowly, these conversations become an echo chamber. Anger is reinforced, isolation develops, and extremist ideas begin to appear reasonable. Peer-group radicalisation is especially powerful. Once a few individuals in a college or locality adopt extremist thinking, they can easily influence others through trust, friendship and emotional



RADICALISATION IS A PSYCHOLOGICAL WEAPON DELIBERATELY DESIGNED TO MANIPULATE EMOTIONS, DISTORT RELIGION, EXPLOIT GRIEVANCES AND PROVIDE A FALSE SENSE OF IDENTITY AND HEROISM

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bonding. Young people do not want to lose their place in the group and, therefore, begin accepting ideas they would otherwise reject.

This pattern has been seen in Indian Mujahideen modules, PFI circles and sleeper cells of Lashkar-e-Taiba and Jaish-e-Mohammed. After these initial stages, many youths are sent for several months of training to Pakistan or Pakistan-occupied Kashmir.

There, they are taught how to handle weapons, assemble IEDs, communicate secretly, avoid surveillance and maintain operational discipline. When they return, their behaviour changes in noticeable ways. They withdraw from family, become serious or secretive, avoid normal conversations, express rigid religious views or cut themselves off from their old lifestyle. These behavioural changes are visible to parents and neighbours. A disturbing example of structured radicalisation comes from the confession of an Indian

Mujahideen leader. He described how he radicalised educated youth through a step-by-step psychological process. He would begin by discussing the meaning of life and the concept of life after death. Gradually, he introduced manipulated beliefs — such as that real life begins after death, that paradise is full of pleasure, and that martyrdom in jihad guarantees entry into heaven. He claimed that a jihadi receives "72 hoorein" and that his parents will also enter jannat because of his sacrifice. According to him, one act of jihad was more valuable than lifelong namaz, roza or charity.

This kind of spiritual poisoning creates a false sense of moral superiority. Then he would show videos of global conflicts and alleged atrocities against Muslims — in Palestine, Iraq, Afghanistan and Kashmir. He repeatedly displayed photographs of the Gujarat riots, the Babri Masjid aftermath, Israeli-Palestinian clashes and alleged US operations. The aim was to fill

young minds with anger, helplessness and the feeling that "someone must take revenge". To intensify this emotional impact, he distributed radical literature — books like Maidan Pukarate Hain, Salah ad-Din Ayuubi, Sayyid Qutb's Milestones and biographies of Osama bin Laden. Graphic magazines showing dead bodies and destroyed villages were used to bypass logic and directly trigger emotions. He also used PowerPoint presentations and motivational jihadi songs to create a charged atmosphere. Radicalisation by Abdul Karim Tunda — Madrasa Setting Another major example is Abdul Karim Tunda, the dreaded Lashkar-e-Taiba bomb-maker. Tunda used a madrasa-linked method of recruitment. He targeted poor, uneducated and semi-educated youth, especially those who were frustrated or carrying emotional wounds from communal events. He portrayed himself as a fatherly guide.

Through fiery speeches, he misquoted religious texts, glorified violent jihad and

convinced youth that terrorism was their religious duty. He also displayed injuries he had suffered in earlier attacks, building an image of a "battle-hardened warrior". Unlike some radicalisers who only preach, Tunda offered immediate operational roles — teaching bomb-making, logistics and safe-house procedures. This made young boys feel "important" and "chosen". By isolating them from their families and creating a cult-like brotherhood, he ensured total loyalty. Today, radicalisation has a new and even more dangerous dimension — online grooming. Terrorist organisations use encrypted apps, anonymous social-media profiles, short propaganda videos, online games and closed chat groups. Algorithms push vulnerable youth deeper into extremist content without them even realising it. Online radicalisation is fast, private and boundaryless, making it extremely difficult to detect. Because radicalisation is psychological and emotional, countering it is not just the job of the police or intelligence agencies. Family members, neighbours, teachers, religious leaders and community elders often notice the warning signs much earlier. A youth suddenly becoming secretive, cutting off friends, disappearing for long periods, or adopting a rigid interpretation of religion — all these are important signals. Beat constables, because of their daily interaction with the community, also play a major role in early detection.

The Government of India is taking major steps in Jammu and Kashmir by promoting community policing, counselling, religious guidance and rehabilitation. Effective counter-radicalisation requires a cooperative model. Parents, elders, imams, teachers, police and civil society must stay alert and communicate openly. Timely counselling and emotional support can prevent many youths from going down the dangerous path of extremism. In conclusion, radicalisation is a psychological weapon deliberately designed to manipulate emotions, distort religion, exploit grievances and provide a false sense of identity and heroism. It transforms ordinary young people into instruments of violence. Countering terrorism is therefore not only about catching militants or seizing weapons — it is about dismantling the ideological machinery that creates terrorists. Early identification, family involvement, community vigilance and timely intervention are the most powerful tools to protect vulnerable youth and safeguard India's long-term peace and national security.

Time to bid adieu to the Macaulay mindset and restore cultural confidence



GEETA
BHATT

As the Dharma Dhvaj rose high into the sky during the flag-hoisting ceremony marking the completion of the Ram Temple Complex in Ayodhya, Prime Minister Narendra Modi remarked that nearly 190 years ago, Macaulay had sown the seeds of uprooting India from its civilisational roots. The very questions raised about the existence of Shri Ram and the prolonged struggle and delay in the construction of the Ram Temple after Independence were, he said, consequences of the "Macaulay mindset." This mindset was cultivated through the "Minute on Education" introduced and authored in 1835 by Thomas Macaulay in his capacity as a member of the Executive Council of the then Governor-General William Bentinck. It fostered an attitude of apathy towards Bharat's native knowledge systems and languages, shaping generations under a framework that devalued their own cultural, religious and intellectual heritage.

The conviction and self-belief of a nation are rooted in the socio-cultural footprints of its history. Yet, in the decades following Independence, India's education and administrative systems continued to bear deep colonial imprints. The language, curriculum and work culture remained largely unchanged even as white sahibs were replaced by brown sahibs. Macaulay ultimately succeeded in advancing what he had envisioned: the establishment of an intrinsic superiority of the Western model and the English language, while Sanskrit, Arabic and other classical traditions were sidelined. Our ancient knowledge systems-ranging from science and mathematics to philosophy-were dismissed as outdated, irrational or merely religious, weakening the confidence of posterity in their own cultural and intellectual heritage.

The Charter Act of 1813, passed by the British Parliament to renew the East India Company's mandate in Bharat, introduced a significant clause that provided for the allocation of one lakh rupees annually for the revival and improvement of education among its Indian subjects. In the decades that followed, the debate over how this fund should be used intensified. Thomas Macaulay vigorously campaigned for directing this financial support exclusively towards English-medium education and Western literature, arguing against the continuation of funding for classical Sanskrit, Arabic and Persian learn-

ing. Macaulay prevailed, and state patronage for Oriental texts and traditional learning centres declined sharply, marking a decisive shift in education policy. Macaulay's education policy was not confined merely to creating "brown sahibs" to serve as a British-oriented workforce. It carried a deeper, concealed objective: to undermine and ultimately displace the existing socio-cultural foundations of Bharatiya society.

A letter written by Thomas Macaulay to his father on 12 October 1836, published in The Life and Letters of Lord Macaulay by his nephew George Otto Trevelyan, clearly reveals how a larger ideological agenda was being embedded into Bharatiya society through British education policy. In this letter, Macaulay candidly states:

"Our English schools are flourishing wonderfully. We find it difficult-indeed, in some places impossible-to provide instruction for all who want it. At the single town of Hoogly, fourteen hundred boys are learning English. The effect of this education on the Hindoos is prodigious. No Hindoo who has received an English education ever remains sincerely attached to his religion. Some continue to profess it as a matter of policy; but many profess themselves pure Deists, and some embrace Christianity. It is my firm belief that, if our plans of education are followed up, there will not be a single idolater among the respectable classes in Bengal thirty years hence. And this will be effected without any effort to proselytise; without the smallest interference with religious liberty; merely by the natural operation of knowledge and reflection. I heartily rejoice in the prospect."

It is rather ironic that while Macaulay dismissed the traditional knowledge systems and culture of this land, the very foundations of national schooling in England and several European countries were inspired by Indian educational practices-particularly the methods of "monitor", "slate", and "group learning." Dr Andrew Bell, a chaplain with the British Army, arrived in Madras in 1787. During his stay, he observed local children learning their alphabet by drawing letters in sand, guided by the brighter students in the class. Struck by the efficiency of this method, he adapted it into what he called the "New Schooling System" and introduced it in England. The model became highly popular and soon spread across Europe. Known as the "Madras Monitorial System," it offered an economical and scalable approach to mass education. Dr Bell later established a college in Scotland, naming it "Madras College," which still exists, in recognition of the system's origin. His student, Mr Lancaster, promoted a similar method, which became widely known as the "Bell and Lancaster Model." Yet neither Bell nor Lancaster acknowledged the Indian traditional schooling practices that inspired their innovations. Brigadier-General Alexander Walker, who served the British admin-

istration in Bharat between 1780 and 1810, offered a remarkable testimony on the indigenous education system in the Malabar region. He observed: "The children are instructed without violence and by a process peculiarly simple. The system was borrowed from the Brahmans and brought from India to Europe. It has been made the foundation of National Schools in every enlightened country. Some gratitude is due to a people from whom we have learnt to diffuse among the lower ranks of society instruction by one of the most unerring and economical methods which has ever been invented." Walker further noted that "no people probably appreciate more justly the importance of instruction than the Hindus." His account stands as a powerful acknowledgment of the effectiveness of traditional modes of education that later inspired key models of mass schooling in Europe, even as they were undermined by the colonial education policy imposed on us.

Dr S. Radhakrishnan, as Chairman of the first University Education Commission constituted after Independence, stated in his 1949 report that higher education should be imparted through

the regional languages, and that English as the medium of instruction in higher education should be replaced by an Indian language as early as practicable. The challenge is not English as a language, but its long-standing dominance as the primary marker of intellect and academic success in the seven decades since Independence. Had the recommendations of this Commission been implemented earnestly in the early decades after Independence, the "Macaulay syndrome" that continued to shape our intellectual and cultural outlook might well have faded away by the twenty-first century.

The National Education Policy 2020 has acknowledged and endorsed the traditional Bharatiya Knowledge Systems, integrating them with the contemporary global knowledge ecosystem that has evolved through experimentation, innovation and cross-cultural exchanges. For the first time, Bharatiya languages have been given a level playing field in education, and the vision and ingenuity of an education policy have begun to reverse the long colonial practice of undermining our native knowledge, sciences and skills — a practice that left a lasting dent in the foundation required to strengthen our national consciousness. Rebuilding this confidence demands that we reclaim and restore the intellectual traditions that once nurtured a vibrant, self-assured civilisation. It is time to bid adieu to the Macaulay mindset.

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CHAITANYA
K PRASAD

For years, IndiGo has lived off the reputation of being the airline that rarely slips. "On-Time, Every Time" wasn't just advertising; it became part of its personality, the shorthand for discipline in a country where delays, long queues, and fraying tempers at airports were almost a given. But today, that tagline feels like a relic from another era. It hangs awkwardly over a crisis that has unfolded in slow motion, then all at once, leaving passengers stranded, confused, angry, and wondering how a crisis of this magnitude blindsided the country's largest carrier.

What we are watching is more than a scheduling mishap. It is far bigger than pilots being unavailable or duty-time rules tightening. This is a communications collapse, one that exposes the hollowness of a brand that has long believed efficiency alone was enough to secure loyalty. The trouble with IndiGo right now isn't just that flights are being cancelled; it's that the airline seems strangely detached from the chaos it has created. The #Manmade #AviationCrisis dominating timelines and airport lounges is the direct result of an organisation that underestimated the new Flight Duty Time Limitation rules, miscalculated crew requirements, and then appeared genuinely shocked when the entire system buckled.

The DGCA's assessment was blunt: IndiGo simply didn't plan. It didn't forecast enough pilots for Phase 2 of the FDTL rollout, even though the norms were public knowledge for months. How does a carrier with over 400 aircraft, thousands of crew members, and a 60 per cent domestic market share stumble on something so fundamental? Perhaps this is what happens when a company begins to operate as though competition is merely decorative. When you behave as the marketplace's default airline, you stop imagining worst-case scenarios. And then, when the cracks appear, you act surprised.

But IndiGo's bigger failure, and the reason public anger feels so visceral, is the vacuum in communication. People can understand delays. They can forgive the occasional cancellation. What people can tolerate, sometimes even with grace, is a delay. What they cannot stomach is the feeling of being dismissed. That is what has cut deepest in this crisis. Passengers have been treated as though their time, their plans, their money, and, in many cases, their simple dignity,

are just footnotes in IndiGo's larger story. At airports across the country, travellers have been left to piece together their own understanding of what's going on. No proper announcements. No clear updates. No realistic timelines. No explanations that sound like they come from a place of honesty rather than corporate defensiveness. Social media has become the only functioning bulletin board in this mess, an accidental newsroom where stranded families are sharing videos of toddlers asleep on cold floors, elderly passengers leaning against walls after hours of standing, and frantic travellers being forced into last-minute, overpriced bookings simply to get home. Even the staff, who are often the first to face the public's fury, look lost, overwhelmed, under-prepared, and painfully unaware of what's happening behind the scenes. IndiGo hasn't just lost control of its operations; it has surrendered control of the story.

And this is where a brand's true nature surfaces. IndiGo, for all its scale and swagger, has looked strangely hollow during these last few days. Distant. Unfeeling. Robotic. As if admitting to the chaos would somehow bruise the pristine corporate image it has been polishing for years. What we got instead of clarity were stitched-together apologies that felt photocopied. Instead of a leader taking charge publicly, we got templated statements with all the warmth of an automated receipt. Instead of empathy, we got... nothing. Silence has its own tone, and in the service industry, it always sounds like indifference.

It is impossible not to think of Vistara in moments like these, an airline that understood something fundamental: people don't remember the aircraft; they remember how they were made to feel. Vistara wasn't faultless. No airline is. But it carried a kind of emotional intelligence in the way it engaged with passengers. There was a warmth, a steadiness, a transparency that said, "You matter." Even today, long after operations merge and brands evolve, people speak of Vistara with an affection they don't extend to most airlines. That's what IndiGo is missing in this moment: the simple humanity that travellers cling to when things go wrong. In today's world of reels, instant outrage, and hyper-amplified experiences, that human layer isn't a luxury; it is survival.

If anything, this crisis has exposed a hard truth: communication is not a box to tick; it is the backbone of public trust.

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

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Endless opportunities in India: Israeli officials

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
Jerusalem

The ties between Israel and India are “very strong” and there are “endless opportunities” for collaboration between the two countries, Israeli officials have said while describing the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC) project as a “very good” initiative.

They also said the two countries can work together, along with partners in the international community, to encourage states to assert their authority over all activities within their borders and ensure that non-state actors do not play a significant role.

“The ties between Israel and India are very, very strong and getting even stronger. Both civilian and I think also in terms of military cooperation, defence cooperation,” a senior Israeli foreign ministry official said while talking to a group of Indian journalists. Another official from the foreign ministry said there are “endless opportunities” for the two countries to work together.

Speaking about the IMEC project, the official said that for Israel, it’s a “very, very good initiative”.

“It’s something that we are really looking into. At the moment, there are two countries which are not part of the signatory - Jordan and Israel. And for the first stage, this is what we’re looking to see: these two countries are



part of the larger framework,” the official said.

The IMEC, a transformative initiative aimed at boosting connectivity, trade, and sustainability across three regions, was formed on the sidelines of the G20 Summit in Delhi in September 2023.

An agreement was signed by India, Saudi Arabia, the European Union, the UAE, the US and some other G20 partners for the corridor.

Less than a month after the IMEC launch, Hamas launched a multi-front attack on Israel on October 7 that impacted the project.

“It’s true that the 7th of

October attack actually put a lid for the moment on all these initiatives. There’s a lot of hesitation for other countries as to how they should be included when there’s still a war going on. And even though there’s a ceasefire, there’s a peace plan by (US President Donald) Trump, there’s still hesitation. What if a war breaks out again?” said the senior diplomat.

“So, I think it would still take time. There’s nothing at the moment Israel can do to persuade or to progress unless Saudi Arabia sees some kind of progress in

Gaza, because Saudi Arabia clearly said that it has to give something to the Palestinians. Any gesture that can pacify the Palestinians before it goes on and normalises relations with Israel,” the official said.

“Until that happens, we don’t see how we can move forward, but we are laying the foundation with Americans, with the Emirates. With other neighbouring countries. So when the time comes, we can pick up from where we left off,” the official added.

The senior diplomat described the IMEC as an “amazing project”, saying it

would stabilise the area and the regional countries could gain from it.

Many strategic affairs watchers have described the IMEC as perhaps an answer to China’s Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), a multi-billion-dollar infrastructure and connectivity project that involves dozens of countries.

The official also said Israel is pushing India, as well as the rest of the world, to designate Hamas as a terror outfit.

“Is there a doubt that Hamas is a terrorist organisation after the October 7 (attack)? Is there doubt about what they have (done)? Their

actions. The way they operate. Their activities?” the official asked.

The official said that India’s listing of Hamas would have a “strong global impact”.

It will send a “very strong message” to the world, because there are a lot of neighbouring countries that look up to India, and when India declares something, it has a great impact.

“It sends a message that India has clearly seen what Hamas is doing, and no operative should step on Indian soil,” the official said.

On the two-state solution, the official said India has a very clear understanding of policy, promoting the two-state solution, seeing the two nations living side by side, and it has never neglected this policy.

“We respect that. We don’t see the vision at the moment of this happening, especially when you don’t have the right reforms and conditions from the Palestinian side,” the official added.

Speaking on condition of anonymity, another official said that there was a thought in Israel that possibly Iran would shift its approach and maybe stop the proxy war after what happened to Hezbollah, Hamas and the Operation Rising Lion.

“But the understanding now is that there was no shift, and Iran is doubling down and reinvesting in the proxy system with slight changes as to where to put the emphasis,” the official said.

Security forces foil attack on Jaffar Express in Pakistan



ASSOCIATED PRESS
Mexico City

Security forces foiled an attempt to attack the frequently-targeted Jaffar Express passenger train in Pakistan’s Balochistan province, according to a media report on Sunday. Unidentified insurgents planted an improvised explosive device (IED) on the track used by the Peshawar-bound train in the Nasir-abad area of the province on Saturday, the Dawn newspaper reported. Law enforcement agencies cordoned off the area after receiving information about the device and defused it, the report said, quoting a police official. The attack attempt comes almost a month after the train narrowly escaped an explosion in the same area. Months before that, it came

under a deadly insurgent attack that left 26 people dead. Meanwhile, the Peshawar to Quetta Jaffar Express was stopped at Jacobabad due to security reasons. Another train was also halted there. According to the report, services for these trains will be resumed after the situation is assessed. It is not the first time insurgents have attacked the Jaffar Express, and its service has already been hit multiple times this year. The most devastating attack came on March 11, when the banned Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA) hijacked the Jaffar Express with 380 passengers on board, triggering a two-day standoff in a mountainous area and claiming 26 lives. Security forces later rescued around 354 passengers, while 33 insurgents were killed.

Man held over pepper spray incident at UK airport



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
London

A man was arrested on suspicion of assault at the Heathrow Airport on Sunday after police were called to reports of a number of people being attacked with pepper spray, with the incident causing major travel disruptions.

The Metropolitan Police said the morning incident was not terrorism related and that the injuries to the victims were not thought to be “life-threatening or life changing”.

The force believes the incident involved an argument between a group of people known to each other.

“A number of people were sprayed with what is believed to be a form of pepper spray by a group of men who then left the scene,” the Met Police said in a statement.

“Armed response officers attended and arrested one man on suspicion of assault. He remains in custody and enquiries continue to trace further suspects,” the statement said.

The incident caused major disruption to flights, with the airport advising passengers to allow extra time for their journeys.

“Our teams are current-

ly responding to an incident involving the emergency services in the Terminal 3 multi-storey car park,” Heathrow Airport said.

“Passengers are advised to allow extra time when travelling to the airport and to check with their airline for any queries,” it added.

Armed police rushed to the airport and London Ambulance Service also attended the scene as the victims were taken to hospital. “At this stage, we believe the incident involved a group of people known to each other, with an argument escalating and resulting in a number of people being injured,” said Commander Peter Stevens of the Met Police. “Our officers responded quickly and there will be an increased police presence at Heathrow Airport throughout the morning, to continue enquiries and ensure the safety of those in the area.

“We are not treating this incident as terrorism. I understand the public’s concerns and would like to thank those in the area for their cooperation this morning,” he said.

The police are also appealing for anyone with information about the incident.

Russian strike kills 1 as US-Ukraine talks end day three

ASSOCIATED PRESS
Kyiv

Russian missile and drone attacks overnight into Sunday killed at least one person in Ukraine, after US and Ukrainian officials wrapped up a third day of talks aimed at ending the war. A man was killed in a drone attack on Ukraine’s northern Chernihiv region Saturday night, local officials said, while a combined missile and drone attack on infrastructure in the central city of Kremenchuk caused power and water outages. Kremenchuk is home to one of Ukraine’s biggest oil refineries and is an industrial hub.

Kyiv and its Western allies say Russia is trying to cripple the Ukrainian power grid

and deny civilians access to heat, light and running water for a fourth consecutive winter, in what Ukrainian officials call “weaponising” the cold.

The latest round of attacks came as Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said Saturday evening he had a “substantive phone call” with American officials engaged in talks with a Ukrainian delegation in Florida. He said he had been given an update over the phone by US and Ukrainian officials at the talks.

“Ukraine is determined to keep working in good faith with the American side to genuinely achieve peace,” Zelenskyy wrote on social media.

Speaking Saturday at the Reagan National Defence



Forum, US President Donald Trump’s outgoing Ukraine envoy, Keith Kellogg, said efforts to end the war were in “the last 10 metres.”

He said a deal depended on the two outstanding issues of “terrain, primarily the Donbas,” and the

Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant.

Russia controls most of Donbas, its name for Donetsk and neighbouring Luhansk, which, along with two southern regions, it illegally annexed three years ago.

Benin’s interior minister says coup announced earlier has been foiled

ASSOCIATED PRESS
Cotonou (Benin)

A coup that was announced in Benin on Sunday has been “foiled,” the interior minister said in a video on Facebook.

“In the early morning of Sunday, December 7, 2025, a small group of soldiers launched a mutiny with the aim of destabilising the state and its institutions,” Alassane Seidou said. “Faced with this situation, the Beninese Armed Forces and their leadership, true to their oath, remained committed to the republic.”

Earlier, a group of soldiers had appeared on Benin’s state TV Sunday to announce the dissolution of the government in an apparent coup, the latest of many in West Africa.

The group, which called itself the Military Committee for Refoundation,



announced the removal of the president and all state institutions. Lt Col Pascal Tigri was appointed president of the military committee, the soldiers said.

Following its independence from France in 1960, the West African nation witnessed multiple coups, especially in the decades following its independence. Since 1991, the country has been

politically stable following the two-decade rule of Marxist-Leninist Mathieu Kérékou.

There has been no official news about President Patrice Talon since gunshots were heard around the presidential residence. However, the signal to the state television and public radio which was cut off has now been restored.

Hong Kong votes in legislative election after deadly fire

ASSOCIATED PRESS
Hong Kong

Hong Kong voters are casting ballots Sunday in their second legislative election since a 2021 overhaul of the system eliminated the pro-democracy opposition in the Chinese territory.

The poll, coming less than two weeks after an apartment fire that killed at least 159 people, is a possible test of public sentiment about the government’s handling of the tragedy.

The focus is on voter turnout, which fell to about 30 per cent in the last election in 2021, after the overhaul dampened interest. Some analysts believe mounting public anger over government accountability in the blaze could suppress turnout further. Turnout stood at about 20 per cent of



eligible voters at 3:30 pm local time, after the polls had been open for eight hours. The polls close at 11:30 pm.

“I’m performing my civic duty as a citizen to vote but I’m not too certain which candidate is hard-working and which is not,” retiree Kwan Lam said outside a polling station. “I chose the one who cares for the elderly.”

City leader John Lee called

on citizens to vote, saying it would send a signal on promoting reforms. He said he would put forth a proposal to the new legislature on how to support the fire survivors, many of whom have been left homeless.

Ahead of the vote, Chinese authorities called foreign media to a rare meeting to warn them that they need to comply with the city’s national security laws.



Nobel laureates arrive for Stockholm, Oslo events

ASSOCIATED PRESS
Stockholm

Nobel week was underway in Stockholm and Oslo with laureates holding news conferences and lectures before they will be awarded the prestigious prizes. Hungarian László Krasznahorkai, who won the Prize in literature for his surreal and anarchic novels that combine a bleak world view with mordant humour, was expected to give a lecture in Stockholm on Sunday in one of his rare public appearances. When the Nobel judges announced the award in October, they described the 71-year-old as “a great epic writer” whose work “is characterised by absurdism and grotesque excess.” “Krasznahorkai’s work can be seen as part of a Central European tradition,” the Nobel Prize organisation said.



4.6 quake hits western Nepal; no damage reported

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
Kathmandu

A 4.6-magnitude earthquake hit western Nepal’s Sudurpashchim province on Sunday morning. There were no immediate reports of damage. The earthquake was recorded at 8:28 am with an epicentre located in the Ghusa area of the Darchula district, according to the National Earthquake Monitoring and Research Centre. Tremors were felt in the neighbouring districts as well. However, there were no immediate reports of any damage caused by the tremor. Western Nepal is frequently hit by earthquakes. On November 30, an earthquake measuring 4.4 magnitude was recorded in the Saipal mountain region in the Bajhang district of the province.

Prompts to perception: The next leap in human-AI interaction

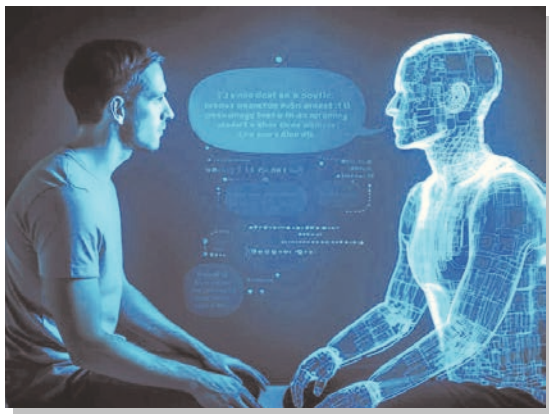


XI ZENG

As artificial intelligence advances, the relationship between humans and machines is evolving, moving from simple typed commands and algorithmic responses toward a deeper, more intuitive level of human perception and interaction. This paper explores how the human-AI relationship is shifting from straightforward prompts ("tell me ...", "show me ...") to more complex perceptual interactions — how systems understand context, adjust to human signals, and become collaborators in meaning-making rather than mere tools.

1. The era of prompts: controlling AI through language

Historically, human-AI interaction has been dominated by prompt textual instructions or queries that instruct an AI to perform a task. With the rise of large-language models (LLMs) and generative AI, the prompt became the primary interface: users write or speak a directive, and the model responds.



As Olla et al. observe, "prompts serve as the primary language for communicating with these models" and mark the transition from traditional command interfaces to more open-ended predictive systems.

Prompt engineering has emerged as a discipline focused on crafting concise, precise and layered inputs to elicit desirable outputs. However, this prompt-based approach has limitations: it assumes users know what to ask and that AI can respond correctly. This places the burden of meaning-making largely on humans, often requiring trial and error, refinements and domain expertise.

2. Enter perception: beyond the prompt

The next leap moves from prompts to perception, transitioning from what we say to how the system sees, senses and interprets context, human intent, non-verbal cues, and richer modalities. Research shows humans interacting with AI already treat these systems as social actors. McKee et al. found people attribute warmth and competence to AI systems — judgments shaping their willingness to cooperate.

Similarly, users' mental models of AI affect engagement: perceiving a system as intentional, independent, or aligned with human interests changes trust and interaction dynamics. This shifts the interface from text-prompting toward a face-to-face-like relationship, raising significant design, ethical and cognitive questions.

Additionally, evidence shows human — AI interaction influences human perception and decision-making: a recent study found biased AI systems create feedback loops, increasing bias in human judgments over time. This indicates that as AI perceives and responds, so does the human side, not just in outputs but in perception, judgment and

decision — making.

At Chance AI, we have witnessed firsthand how the shift from prompts to perception reshapes user experience in profound ways. Our app, Chance, is built as the world's first visual agent — a platform where users simply point their camera at anything that sparks curiosity and receive instant, contextual understanding without typing a single word.

One of our core features- AI Decode demonstrates this perceptual leap: when users upload an image, our multi-agent visual reasoning model doesn't just identify what's in the frame — it reverse-engineers the creative and contextual DNA of that image, generating a precise, model-agnostic prompt that captures its essence. This process, compact yet powerful, exemplifies how AI can move beyond responding to commands and instead become an intuitive collaborator that sees, interprets and acts, turning sight into insight seamlessly.

3. Why perception matters: richer collaboration, greater challenges

Richer collaboration: When AI understands more than prompts — interpreting context,

modality (voice, image, gesture), State and intent-it becomes a collaborator rather than a mere executor. For example, students using generative AI to solve creative problems reported greater progress when they treated AI as a partner rather than a tool. In human-AI research, Dalsgaard et al. argue that prompts are often treated as static interfaces, neglecting their role in mediating cognition and collaboration. As AI grows perceptual capacities, image, video, audio, real-world sensors, the potential opens for human-AI partnerships that understand gesture, tone, visual context and emotion.

Greater challenges: At the same time, shifting toward perception brings new issues:

- **Trust & misalignment:** If the AI "perceives" incorrectly, the human partner may be misled. The aforementioned bias-amplification feedback loop shows that perceptions matter not only for the AI, but also for human judgements.

- **Human psychological effects:** When humans treat AI as social actors, attributing intention or "mind" to it, this can influence how they treat both machines and people. Guingrich et al. show that perception of AI as conscious may carry over into human-human relations.

- **Interface complexity:** What used to be a typed prompt may become a multi-modal interaction-voice, gesture, environment. Designing for perception means designing for context, ambiguity, user State and emotion.

- **Ethical & privacy concerns:** Perception often implies sensing-collecting more data about a user: their voice tone, gaze, environment, emotion. This raises serious questions about consent, bias, and autonomy.

Author is a founder and CEO of Chance AI

Please read the complete article online in www.dailypioneer.com

India's HR transformation: How AI, AGI and quantum technologies are redesigning foundations of work



YATINDER DWIVEDI

India has entered a period in which human resource management is no longer characterised by paperwork, checklists or rigid administrative routines. Instead, it is increasingly shaped by intelligent systems—machines that can interpret context, generate insights, collaborate with humans and increasingly operate with a level of autonomy once unimaginable.

As companies seek to retain competitiveness in a technology-driven economy, HR is quietly moving through its most significant shift since economic liberalisation. What once functioned as a support department is evolving into a digitally amplified and strategically influential system — built on Generative AI (GenAI), emerging Artificial General Intelligence (AGI) capabilities, agentic AI frameworks, Retrieval-Augmented Generation (RAG), the Model Context Protocol (MCP) and early signals from quantum innovation.

This transformation aligns closely with India's current policy ecosystem. Initiatives such as Digital India, the IndiaAI Mission from MeitY, the National Quantum Mission and the Ministry of Labour and Employment's Labour Codes are collectively steering the country toward a labour environment where digital infrastructure and public policy reinforce one another. Research from global advisory firms describes this moment as a move from traditional workforce administration to an environment where human capability is enhanced and scaled by intelligent systems.

The earliest wave of change was driven by Generative AI. Its significance for HR is not limited to drafting documents or automating communication. Instead, GenAI brings analytical and creative intelligence into routine decision-making. Indian organisations are learning that GenAI can model cultural attributes, forecast talent gaps, design multilingual learning pathways and adapt communication to diverse regional contexts. For the first time, creativity, analytics and cultural understanding are fused — transforming HR from a repository of forms into an adaptive talent engine.

Beyond this, the early contours of AGI are becoming noticeable. While true AGI remains in research territory, emerging systems that can



reason, interpret uncertain human inputs, and offer higher-order insights hint at what is to come. Within HR, such intelligence could one day integrate economic indicators, workforce sentiment, external skill-market data and internal performance patterns to propose future organisational designs. Instead of responding to what employees do, these systems could analyse the motivations behind behaviour — enabling proactive workforce shaping



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grounded in advanced reasoning. As India's economy becomes increasingly knowledge-centric, AGI may guide everything from leadership pipelines to nationwide skill strategies.

Agentic AI takes this transformation further. Unlike rule-based chatbots, agentic systems combine planning, memory, reasoning and autonomous execution. These agents can independently run multi-step HR processes — from talent sourcing and compensation benchmarking to employee experience monitoring and workflow coordination. They behave less like software tools and more like operational partners. Indian public-sector enterprises and large corporates can leverage such agents to continuously scan labour markets, manage hiring cycles, identify learning trajectories or oversee organisational health with minimal manual intervention. This mirrors global predictions that autonomous AI systems will become deeply embedded in business operations within the decade.

Accuracy and contextual relevance in these systems are rooted in RAG, which grounds AI in an organisation's internal knowledge base — policies, compliance records, case archives, labour advisories, audits, and skill frameworks. This is crucial in India, where labour regulations differ across states and HR must adhere to directives from entities such as MoLE, EPFO, ESIC, and SEZ authorities. When RAG indexes these sources, HR gains something akin to a highly precise institutional memory — always accessible and free from interpretive ambiguity.

The Model Context Protocol (MCP) extends this intelligence into real-world action by connecting AI with HR and enterprise platforms such as HRIS, ERP, payroll, compliance tools, and IT systems. MCP enables automated onboarding, adaptive role changes, workload balancing and seamless internal mobility. It effectively closes the gap between insight generation and operational execution, turning HR into an always-engaged, intelligence-driven system rather than a reactive service unit.

Another emerging dimension is "vibe coding" — the effort to develop AI systems capable of understanding emotional tone, cultural nuance and collective organisational mood. Unlike conventional sentiment analysis, vibe coding uses multimodal AI to recognise psychological patterns across interactions. In a country as diverse as India — with its broad linguistic, cultural, and interpersonal variations—emotionally aware AI systems can provide leadership with a clearer view of organisational wellbeing. In an era of hybrid work and digital overload, such systems could become essential tools for empathetic, people-centric management.

Quantum computing represents the next frontier. Supported by India's National Quantum Mission, the country is positioning itself among global contenders preparing for quantum capabilities. Quantum technology will not simply speed up HR tasks; it will address optimisation problems that classical computers struggle with — scenarios involving vast combinations of variables. HR planning fits precisely into this category. With qubits that can store

multiple states simultaneously, quantum systems can evaluate millions of workforce arrangements at once. Quantum entanglement could allow these systems to quickly identify relationships between employee attributes, performance outcomes, cultural alignment and future skill potential. This could revolutionise team design, long-term workforce planning, capability forecasting, pay structuring and even diversity modelling. Quantum-driven HR tools may eventually allow Indian enterprises to simulate entire organisational futures—something beyond the limits of today's analytics.

This technological shift coincides with a historic redesign of India's labour ecosystem. The new Labour Codes — covering wages, industrial relations, social security and workplace safety — signal India's most comprehensive labour reforms since Independence. These codes emphasise consistency, digitisation and transparency. Organisations will need HR systems that can interpret regulatory changes in real time and adapt instantly. AI-driven HR environments become essential here. Autonomous systems can track compliance exposure, interpret state-level variations and align company policies with evolving Government notifications. Complementing this is India's developing Labour Stack — a digital public infrastructure envisioned to create portable worker identities, authenticated skill records, digital career histories and integrated social security data. When combined with AI, this infrastructure could enable frictionless talent movement across industries, employers and regions—unlocking India's demographic potential more efficiently than traditional reforms alone.

The convergence of AI, agentic intelligence, RAG-enhanced accuracy, MCP-enabled execution, and advancing quantum computing is steering HR toward a role far more strategic than administrative. With India's digital-policy foundation and the scale of its enterprises, the country is uniquely positioned to adopt these technologies at national scale. The future of HR in India will belong not to organisations that simply automate tasks, but to those that design intelligent systems capable of continuous learning, reasoning and workforce orchestration. As India prepares for the next phase of economic growth, this augmented HR function could emerge as one of the most influential engines of institutional and national transformation.

AI is teaching a generation to sound smart. That's not the same as being informed

As students worldwide turn to AI for learning, the divide isn't between users and non-users — it's between those who can question algorithmic output and those who must accept it - education systems aren't prepared for the consequences.



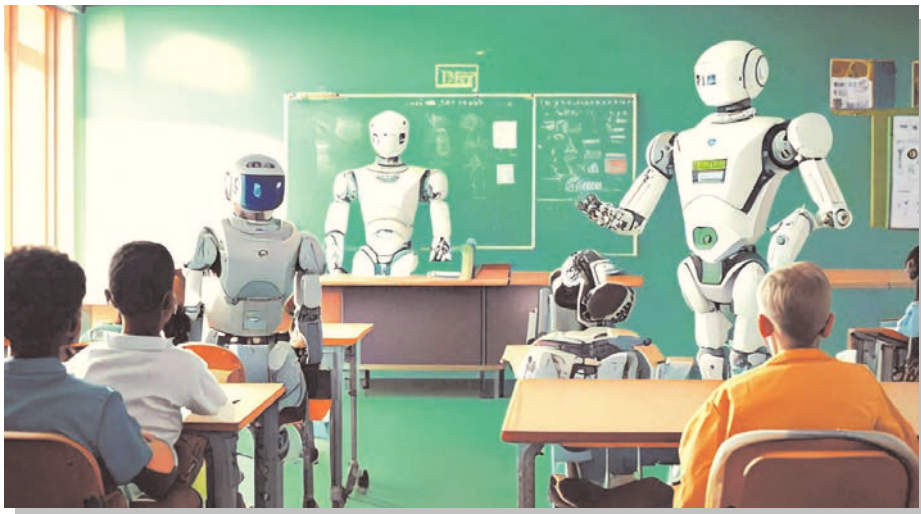
NISHANT SAHDEV

Artificial intelligence didn't storm into education. There was no grand moment when classrooms suddenly changed. Instead, AI arrived slowly — through shortcuts during late-night study sessions, through apps that explained equations more patiently than tutors, through quick rewrites before a deadline. Over time, these small interactions added up. What once felt novel became routine. For many students today, AI is simply part of how thinking happens.

A final-year engineering student in Delhi said something recently that captured this shift perfectly: "Sometimes I'm not sure where my thinking ends and where the AI's suggestion begins." She wasn't admitting guilt. She was trying to describe a new intellectual experience — the sense that the boundary between her own reasoning and digital assistance is fading.

The numbers across India and globally show just how quickly this shift has taken root. In the US, surveys of teens show that one in four now uses generative AI for schoolwork, double the number from 2023.

Adults, too, are interacting with AI at unprecedented rates, with more than 60 per cent saying they use it several times a week. In India, AI adoption in schools and colleges is accelerating even



faster. A national survey reported that over 70 per cent of Indian teachers already use AI tools for creating lesson plans or automating administrative work, with the figure even higher among experienced teachers.

In higher education, more than half of Indian universities now permit students to use AI tools and many institutions are incorporating generative AI into curriculum design and learning materials.

The Indian market shows this momentum. AI in education here was valued at roughly \$196 million in 2024 and is projected to cross \$1.1 billion by 2030 — a compound annual growth rate of more than 30 per cent. That growth is driven by scale: India has over 40 million higher-education students and one of the world's largest school systems, with 260 million schoolchildren and more than 8.5 million teachers. When a technology

touches this system, even quietly, the effects ripple widely. But numbers only tell part of the story. What matters more is what AI is doing to the inner life of education — the process of thinking itself.



For centuries, education relied on a simple assumption: the work that mattered happened inside the student. The essay or the problem set was just evidence of that internal struggle. Learning meant grappling with ideas, wrestling with confusion, taking wrong turns and correcting course. It was slow, often frustrating work, but it built the kind of understanding that stays with a person for life.

AI scrambles this logic. It can produce clean, fluent,

confident answers instantly. A student need only provide the prompt.

Studies from leading universities have found that AI-generated essays now match or outperform undergraduate writing in structure, clarity, and argumentation. Students who use AI to improve their essays often submit stronger work— but when asked to explain the same ideas orally, their understanding is noticeably weaker. The surface looks polished, but the depth is missing.

Students feel the difference. Surveys in India and abroad show increasing anxiety: many students worry that AI is dulling their ability to think independently. A large majority say they often cannot tell how much of their work reflects their own reasoning. And this isn't laziness; it's human psychology. When a system gives a smooth, immediate answer, it's difficult to resist trusting

it, especially under academic pressure. The trouble is that AI is not always correct. Large language models still generate fabricated information — so-called "hallucinations" — with surprising confidence. Depending on the question, error rates can range from a few per cent to nearly a quarter. But students rarely have the time or context to verify every detail. When uncertainties are wrapped in fluent language, they blend into the student's mental model without detection.

This challenge is magnified in countries like India, where access to high-quality teaching remains uneven. UNESCO reports that hundreds of millions of students globally lack regular access to trained teachers and India alone faces a massive shortfall at multiple levels. In such environments, AI sometimes becomes a substitute for human instruction.

That can be a powerful equaliser — AI can deliver explanations anytime, in multiple languages, tailored to a student's pace. But it also carries risks. When students rely on AI without the conceptual framework to evaluate it, they may absorb inaccuracies that weaken their foundations. This creates a new kind of inequality. In well-resourced institutions — elite engineering colleges, private universities, top public universities — students often use AI thoughtfully.

They test ideas, refine drafts, or explore alternative approaches. In under-resourced settings, students may use AI as a primary teacher. The difference is not

access; it is epistemic resilience — the ability to question the information a system gives you.

Meanwhile, universities are struggling to respond. Some tried banning AI, but detection tools remain unreliable and risk penalising honest students. Other institutions welcomed AI but did not rethink how assignments are designed, even though many traditional tasks no longer measure what they once did. If a machine can produce a persuasive answer in seconds, what does an essay or a problem set really test?

International organisations have begun sounding alarms. Analysts warn that without assessment reform, countries could see a decline in deep literacy, reasoning skills, and independent thinking. These warnings apply strongly to India, where millions of students will interact with AI daily long before institutions fully adapt.

So what would meaningful change look like?

First, we need to redesign assessments so that they capture reasoning, not just results. Oral exams, in-class analytical tasks, multi-stage assignments with required reflections and reasoning logs bring the cognitive process back into view. These practices won't eliminate AI use, but they make it harder for AI to replace thinking.

Author is a theoretical physicist at the University of North Carolina, United States

Please read the complete article online in www.dailypioneer.com



Children participated in fancy dress competitions at the flower show in Vijayawada on Sunday.



PARTY

Photos by- Ch.Vijaya Bhaskar



Vijayawada MP Kesineni Sivanath (Chinni), International Player Srikanth and others release a Logo for forthcoming 87th Senior National Badminton Championship in Vijayawada on Sunday.



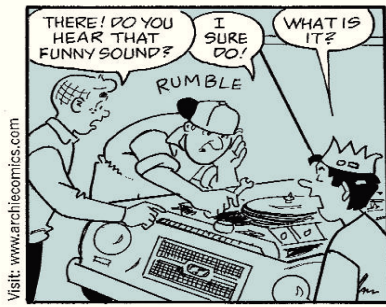
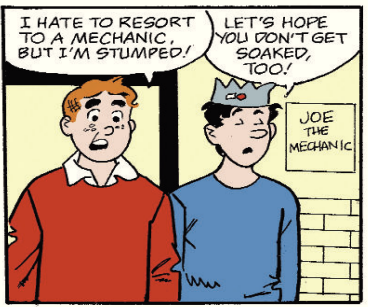
Members of the Amaravati Balotsav Committee released a poster of Three-Day Childrens festival in Vijayawada on Sunday.



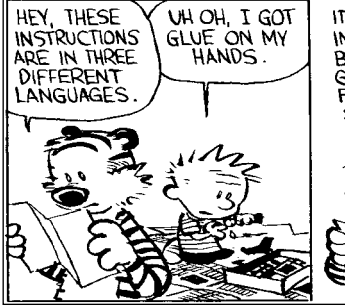
The Sports Day, organized under the theme "Astiva," witnessed the participation of more than 1,000 students in various sports competitions. Along with sporting events, cultural programs performed by the students captivated the audience. kickboxer Naisha Bajaj. She attended the Sports Day celebrations held at Meridian School, Madhapur, as the chief guest and presented prizes to the students. Meridian Educational Institutions Founder Butta Renuka, CEO Tejaswi Butta, Principal Karanam Bhavani, President Lalitha Naidu, and others were present at the event.

FUN

ARCHIE



CALVIN AND HOBBS



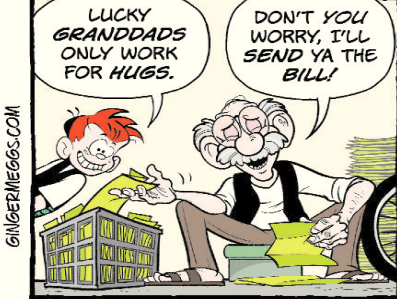
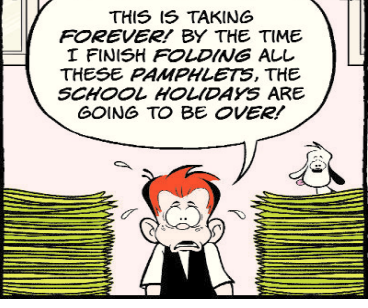
GARFIELD



NANCY



GINGER MEGGS



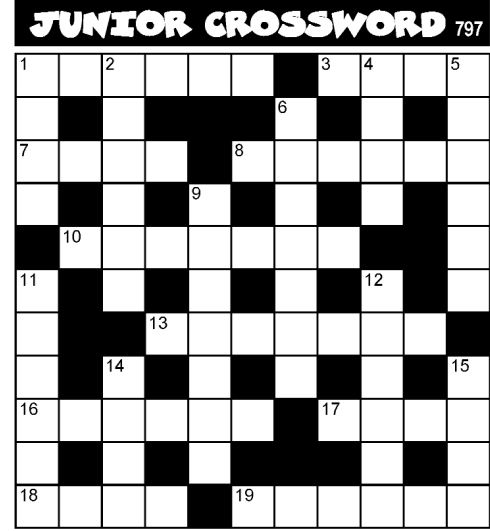
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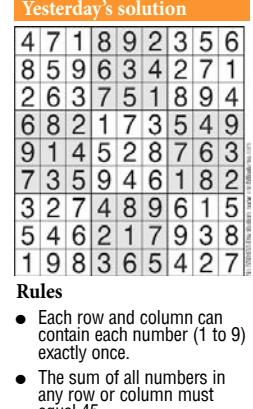
SPEED BUMP



CROSSWORD



SUDOKU



ACROSS

- 1 Further up
- 3 A stopper for a bottle
- 7 Follow orders
- 8 Say again
- 10 Cooked over boiling water
- 13 Not normal
- 16 A hole through a hill
- 17 Your body's covering
- 19 Devours
- 19 A baby's toy

DOWN

- 1 A horse's foot
- 2 Invited visitors
- 4 Opposite of under
- 5 Baby cat
- 6 Set free from captivity
- 9 An artist
- 11 A stinging plant
- 12 A short coat
- 14 A tied joint in string
- 15 A leg joint



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HUMAN AI

If a recent survey is to be believed, it is humans who may derail the growing use of Artificial Intelligence (AI). A software firm concludes that while senior management and executives love it, the mid-managers and lower employees shun it, or pay lip-service to it. Almost 90 per cent of the first section use AI at workplaces, and senior management sings praises in earnings calls. In recent times, according to an article in 'The Economist,' "two-thirds of executives at S&P 500 companies mentioned AI. At the same time, the people actually responsible for implementing AI may not be as forward-thinking, perhaps because they are worried about tech putting them out of a job." So, less than 60 per cent of the mid-managers, and less than 30 per cent of the employees use AI on the job. This implies that while these two categories happily go ahead with the AI-related efforts to please their seniors, they quietly refuse to use the tools.

A similar thing happened with desktops, laptops, and mobiles. In India, for instance, desktops inundated the state-owned banks and finance firms, as they did in progressive and forward-thinking private firms. Employees used them mostly to play games in the late 1980s, and early 1990s. In some cases, especially at the banks, desktops were purchased because of the top management's decisions, but remained wrapped in original packaging for months, and years. The same happened with the laptops, and mobiles, when they became office tools to work, and communicate. Only over time, when there was no escape, and the Internet and web became a necessity did employees and mid-managers upgrade skills to handle the new tools, and new ways of working. Hence, AI may go through the same learning tech curve before the bulk of the employees adopt it actively, and adapt to its social and job disruptions at workplaces.

Yet another piece of insight lies in perception and imagination, which is subjective. New technology, whether it is hardware, Internet, or AI initially may lead to extra work, lower productivity, and lesser efficiency. In the case of desktops, and laptops the employees needed to learn new skills, which were more easily acquired by the youngsters. In the case of mobile-as-moving-offices, it was excruciating to work with the small screens to read, write, and monitor work. AI leads to such delays. Rewiring offices, as was the case with desktops, and making them wireless (Internet and mobile) takes time. Processes and workflows need to be re-defined. Employees need to get used to the newer ways. This may take months, or years. Erik Brynjolfsson of Stanford University dubs it the 'J-curve' of technology. Yvonne Chen, and others of ShanghaiTech University refer to it as "gen-AI's mediocrity gap." AI helps the weak workers, and does the opposite with the better ones, who may decide to work less since they can get the same work done faster.

When it comes to small and mid-sized firms, tech-led gains in productivity and profitability do not come naturally and logically. A recent poll by a global think tank finds that 45 per cent said that the returns from the use of AI were below their expectations. Only 10 per cent agreed that their expectations were exceeded. The same goes for profits, as most entities conclude that tech has not "significantly affected enterprise-wide profits." This may be due to a dual strain of human nature. In most cases, we overestimate returns, and thus find that the benefits are not adequate. In addition, since we need to rewire the workflows, the transition takes more time than expected, and we get frustrated with tech. The small things matter, which change our subjective perceptions. For example, in the early period of desktops in India, it took a minute or two for the machines to start. This was deemed to be a waste of time compared to the old days when one could start work as soon as one sat at the desk.

For the experts, this translates into either non-adoption of AI, or delays in adoption. Some surveys hint that this is indeed the case in the US. "John Hartley of Stanford University and colleagues found that in September (2025) 37 per cent of Americans used generative AI at work, down from 46 per cent in June.... Ramp, a fintech firm, finds that in early 2025 AI use soared at American firms to 40 per cent, before leveling off. The growth in adoption really does seem to be slowing," states 'The Economist' article. But there can be human-related reasons for this slowdown. When new tech arrives, there is the initial excitement to try, and experiment with it. Top management forces managers, and employees to try it out. Within a few months, many of the users get frustrated, and the number of new people opting for it begins to wane. This may explain why the adoption percentages have come down steeply within months.

Even if the adoption is accelerated due to internal and external pressures, 'The Economist' piece gravely concludes that the "pause suggests that the economic pay-off from AI will arrive more slowly, more unevenly, and at a greater cost than implied by the current investment boom." Yet, until adoption accelerates, the "revenues required to justify \$5 trillion in AI capex will remain out of reach."

Russia is past, is the West future?

New Delhi needs to balance ties with Moscow and Washington

Last week, New Delhi was enveloped, as usual, in a terrible smog. Last week, the city was shrouded by a surreal sense of romantic eco-diplomacy nostalgia, which paraded as modern-day realpolitik. Informed pundits on TV channels squawked in hoarse voices about a new world order, even as their throats and lungs were impacted by the severe air pollution. Still, the mood seemed ecstatic and jubilant. The reason: During the grand visit of Vladimir Putin, India and Russia reaffirmed their long and historical ties, which seemed to grow higher than Mt Everest, and deeper than the Indian Ocean.

One was left with no doubts that the two nations, beginning from the times when Russia was a much-larger Soviet Union, enjoy enduring relations related to defense, geopolitics, economic cooperation, energy, among others. It is a form of partnership rarely seen in history, and perhaps unmatched in the modern times. While eloquence that reached fever pitch on the bilateral links were unique, even esoteric, and strong, my mind asked a delinked question: Is New Delhi looking at the glorious past towards Moscow, and ignoring its lucrative future that seems centred in Washington?

Look at a simple assumption. The primary goal of India, as stated by everyone from policy-makers to experts, economists to opposition political parties, is to grow economically, possibly at double-digits. In other words, the aim is for the country's GDP to grow as fast as possible. How can India achieve this objective? One way to ascertain which way to lean, and which direction to look at is to compare the West with Russia. The G-7, which constitutes the US, and its key allies in western Europe, has a combined GDP of nearly \$50 trillion, or 20 times larger than Russia, which is a \$2.5-trillion economy.

If India's priority is to grow rapidly, is it not better to be closer to the West? I am not talking about friendships and partnerships. Russia was, and will always be, a friend, and partner. I am talking about relationships that include transactional ones that will propel India to become a \$10-trillion economy by the mid-1930s. Being allied more to Russia rather than the US may not provide the solution. Only Europe and North America have the economic and technological heft, and the fire power and might to help India along this journey.

To be sure, many Indians, including the policy-makers and others, are extremely angry with the antics and tactics of the US president, Donald Trump. And legitimately too. In a few months, Trump's administration has destroyed two-and-a-half decades of carefully-nurtured trust between the two hitherto hostile nations. For some strange reasons, even though the US and India are the two largest democracies in the world, the bilateral relationship has always been testy, to say the least. Only after the 1998 nuclear tests by India was there more active engagement between the two nations.

Over the past 25-odd years, the two became close, and links developed into a crucial and significant strategic relationship. Quite clearly, Trump, with his own tantrums and peculiar behavior, has more-or-less diluted the level of trust that was assiduously built over the decades. While Indians may rave and rant at Trump, and his loyalists, can India do without the US? My short answer: Absolutely not. This is the harsh reality of today. Like it or not, New Delhi needs Washington, and Brussels. Trump is likely to remain in power for another three years, unless things go against him.

Russia can offer things that allow India to

strengthen its present, through the connections of the past. Of course, a large part of our defence equipment and systems are driven by Russian technology. We need to diversify energy sources from the West, and Middle East to add new ones like Russia and Central Asia. Our agriculture, as the anchor piece on this page shows, can benefit from Russian inputs and products. Hence, the dependence on Russia will only grow, and is unlikely to come down, over the next decade or two.

But pause for a moment, and think about the future. Think about 2047, and beyond. The future belongs to adoption and adaptation of Artificial Intelligence, robotics, and other modern tech that are changing the world, and will drive the global economy over the next several decades. While Russia will remain a steadfast partner, it is no match to the West when it comes to these new-age tech areas. The tech we need, innovations-led processes that our economy demands, and the massive amounts of capital required can come from western Europe and North America. It is time for Indians to get out of their ivory towers, and face the bites of this harsh reality.

Consider another factor, which is not just a geopolitical and national security threat, but can derail India's dreams and ambitions in business, economy, and tech. The US has openly acknowledged China as a competing and equal superpower. Over the next decade, China is likely to aggressively compete with the US in areas such as AI, robotics, biosciences, and consumer electronics. Since India will be unable to partner actively with China, although we will need to keep alive the economic links, it needs to look elsewhere. The future of India lies not towards Russia, but the West to take on China.

Hence, while there is no harm in praising India-Russia ties, claiming that the bilateral partnership will be eternal, the focus needs to be on the future. Let me leave you with another insightful, and critical, thought. India's trade imbalance with Russia is enormous; of the \$70 billion trade, India exports \$5 billion worth of goods and services, or seven per cent of the total. The opposite is true in the case of the US, which runs a more than \$40 billion deficit with India. India sells more goods to the US, with some semblance of a balance in services.

Hence, New Delhi has the trade levers to push Washington to part with its tech and capital. It can increase exports, and buy more. In the case of Russia, although there is talk of higher Indian exports, and Russian businesspersons claim that they were asked to buy more Indian goods, the opportunities are limited. We can go from \$5 billion to \$10 billion. By then, the total trade will be more than \$100 billion, and our percentage share a shade higher at 10%. Maybe it is time to accept the new normal. There is little need for an unending celebration of Putin and Russia as India's strongest friend.

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



Sutanu Guru
Author, Journalist
and Academician

OUR TAKE



"Russian President Vladimir Putin and Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi have laid the groundwork for boosting the economic partnership between the traditional allies, with the countries signing a series of pacts to raise bilateral trade to \$100 billion by 2030." This is an excerpt of the media reportage from Russia's state-sponsored RT, earlier known as Russia Today, on the day Putin wrapped up his two-day visit to India. RT commemorated a special edition to the 23rd India-Russia Annual Summit, a tradition that dates to 2000, as President Putin launched RT India on December 5.

The point is not about the RT's report as much as the optimism and euphoria that emanated from the short visit, and which was reflected in voices, opinions, and media coverage in Russia and India.



Jayanta Bhattacharya
Senior Journalist

The summit led to a detailed joint statement, and clutch of business deals that foregrounded economic resilience and agricultural security. It included a joint urea plant in Russia, which is expected to produce 1.8-2 million tonnes annually, and ease India's fertiliser supply constraints.

The joint declaration "welcomed steps to ensure long-term supply of fertilisers to India, and discussed the potential establishment of joint ventures in this area." One of the major steps, which was committed earlier, but inked during Putin's visit, was the joint venture between Russia's Uralschem, and three Indian fertiliser firms, Rashtriya Chemicals and Fertilizers, National Fertilizers, and Indian Potash. Incidentally, Indian farmers have faced recurring fertiliser shortages driven by global supply disruptions, rising demand, and logistical bottlenecks. In Madhya Pradesh, long queues were witnessed at the distribution centres, with reports of unrest in some places. The Government consistently denied the reports about shortages.

Demand has grown due to higher cropping intensity, and good monsoons, while domestic production and imports have not kept pace. This has led to periodic shortfalls in key nutrients such as urea and potash. India is the second-largest consumer, and third-largest producer of fertilisers globally. According to the official data, in 2023-24, the country's annual consumption was 601 lakh metric tonnes, with 503 lakh metric tonnes produced

Fertilising Hindi-Russi bhai-bhai

India-Russia JV to make urea may be a boon for farmers



domestically, and the remaining being imported. Fertilisers play a crucial role to enhance farm productivity, and are essential for self-reliance in production.

The Government has tried to increase domestic production, but depends upon external supplies for feedstock like natural gas and ammonia. Global disruptions, including trade curbs, shifting trade flows, and higher feedstock prices affect the availability of competitively-priced imports. It pushes procurement into the expensive spot markets, and increases the costs for suppliers and farmers. Reports from several states indicate that the central allocations fell short of requirements for the Kharif season, leaving farmers waiting in long queues in some states.

Even when imports arrive in time, delays in port handling, inland transport, and state-level distribution networks create uneven availability across districts. While urea is heavily subsidised, shortages force the governments and private buyers to opt for emergency purchases at the higher prices, which strain the Budgets of the states and Centre. This translates into delayed or uneven subsidy flows that complicate timely access for smallholders. In the recent past, New Delhi inked deals with Saudi Arabia, Nepal, Bhutan, and Sri Lanka to secure long-term supplies.

According to a report in Tass, Russian news agency, Moscow "increased its fertiliser supplies to BRICS countries by 16 per cent this year, with India leading the increase." It

quoted the head of the Russian Association of Fertilizer Producers, Andrey Guryev, who said that India accounts for more than half of the Russian mineral fertiliser exports. The share of Russian fertilisers in India's imports grew to 26 per cent in the first nine months of 2025, he added. The planned joint-plant's scale is expected to increase the steady flow of urea to India, which will reduce dependence on spot purchases, and ease seasonal shortages that led to the recent price spikes.

Russia is interested in expanding the farm input trade, but feels restricted by India's import duty. Hence, the Russians wish that the "negotiations on a free-trade agreement between the Eurasian Economic Union and India must be intensified." They want the duty to be abolished to reduce costs to the farmers, or official subsidies. According to the Russian side, "India has become the locomotive for the growth of our supplies to BRICS countries." Hence, New Delhi can take advantage of the changed position, which is imposed on Moscow due to the growing and continuing global sanctions.

The new urea unit will assure cost stability by anchoring production to Russian ammonia, and long-term offtake arrangements. India can insulate the farmers from volatile global freight and commodity cycles, lowering procurement costs for public and private distributors. Locating a plant in Russia leverages abundant feedstock in that nation, diversifying supply away from source-related risks that previously exposed agricul-

ture to curbs or logistical shocks. The deal will possibly follow a co-production and joint-venture model, where the Russian producers supply ammonia, and Indian firms provide capital and guaranteed purchases. It will align incentives to ensure continuous exports to India once commercial operations begin.

According to media reports, the three Indian firms will together hold 50 per cent in the venture, and the Russian entity the remaining 50 cent. If this is the case, the Russian firm will be the largest shareholder, but the decision-making process will be equally shared between the two nations. The model is the same as India's fertiliser venture in Oman, which operates successfully. The objective: Bag long-term supply stability, rather than seasonal purchases.

This arrangement will reduce upfront capital risks for Russian operators, and provide Indian fertiliser agencies a secured share of output, and pricing leverage during the procurement cycles. Russia's regional and industry outlets have framed the project as a natural fit to tap the abundance source of Russia's potash and ammonia reserves to serve a large, nearby market, and emphasised export potential and industrial cooperation beyond fertilisers, including pharmaceuticals and energy projects mentioned in the joint statement. Moscow's messaging highlights mutual economic benefit, and the logic of linking Russian feedstock with Indian demand.

What remains to be seen in the urea project are the further details such as project timelines, feedstock pricing clauses, logistics, and regulatory clearances. Monitoring the investment decision, offtake contracts, and phased delivery schedule will indicate how quickly the Indian farmers may see the tangible on-ground benefits. The summit's joint statement therefore marks a pragmatic approach with strategic diplomacy converted into industrial partnerships aimed at securing agricultural inputs. If implemented on schedule, the urea plant may become a durable hedge against fertiliser volatility, and a meaningful supply-side relief for India's farm sector.

(The author has more than three decades of experience across print, TV, and digital media)

BRIEFLY

VIRAT KOHLI OFFER PRAYERS AT SIMHACHALAM TEMPLE



Indian cricketer Virat Kohli, his family members, all-rounder Washington Sundar, and others offered prayers at the Sri Varaha Lakshmi Narasimha Swamy temple here on Sunday, an official of the temple body said.

Team India defeated South Africa by nine wickets, sealing the series 2-1 with a dominant win in the final match at the Andhra Cricket Association-Visakhapatnam District Cricket Association (ACA-VDCA) Stadium in Visakhapatnam on December 6.

Temple officials received Kohli and his family and escorted them for darshan. They first took part in the traditional Kappasthambham Alinganam (embracing the sacred pillar) ritual before proceeding to the deity's darshan.

CHINNASWAMY STADIUM TO HOST IPL: DK SHIVAKUMAR



Karnataka Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar on Sunday announced that Chinnaswamy Stadium will continue to host future IPL matches.

The announcement comes amid doubts over hosting the event in Karnataka following the June 4 stampede at the stadium, which occurred when a large crowd had gathered to celebrate the Royal Challengers Bangalore's victory in IPL 2025.

Speaking to reporters after casting his vote in the Karnataka State Cricket Association (KSCA) presidential elections, Shivakumar said a new large stadium will also be constructed in the future.

Rohit, Kohli experience important: Gambhir

G UNNIKRISHNAN
■ Visakhapatnam

At this moment, the Indian think tank is doing a tough balancing act of building the team around a new set of players without completely cutting ties with the old guard.

In that context, head coach Gautam Gambhir, who oversees this process, was a delighted man to see both parties chipping in with handy contributions.

Giving heft to the senior side, Virat Kohli emerged player of the series in the ODIs against South Africa, scoring two hundreds and a fifty—a quick ride back to his incredible peaks of 2015 onwards.

Rohit Sharma helped himself to a couple of fifties to underline his fine touch.

Gambhir hoped the two stalwarts would continue to churn out such perfor-

mances, which would keep the ODI outfit in good shape.

"Look, they're quality players. I've said it many times as well that they're world-class players. They are quality players in this format, and their experience is really important in the dressing room," said Gambhir at the press meet after India beat SA by nine wickets to bag the one-day series 2-1.

"They're doing what they do. They've been doing it for such a long time for Indian cricket. Hopefully, they can continue doing the same, which is always going to be important come the white ball format and the 50-over format," he added.

The rest given to seniors Jasprit Bumrah and Mohammad Siraj, and the injury-enforced absence of Shubman Gill and Hardik Pandya, gave India a chance to test the skillsets of some young tyros.



Gambhir was particularly delighted with the growth of Harshit Rana as a bowling all-rounder.

"That's one of the reasons why we are trying to probably develop someone like

Harshit, who can actually bat at Number 8 and contribute with a bat.

"That's how we need to find the balance, because come the South Africa in two years (2027 ODI WC), we

would be needing three proper seamers as well. And if he can continue to develop as a bowling allrounder, it's going to give us a massive boost," he said.

Similarly, Gambhir was also

impressed by the outings of seamers Arshdeep Singh and Prasidh Krishna in the series.

"With Jaspreet Bumrah coming back and what we saw of Arshdeep, Prasadh and Harshit in this series was incredible because all these three guys do not have a lot of experience, especially in the 50-over format. They've hardly played, what, less than 15 ODIs. But they've done a fabulous job," he said.

Gautam Gambhir's penchant for shuffling cricketers has often come under sharp scrutiny, but the head coach insisted that "batting order is overrated" in white ball cricket, strongly hinting of him sticking to his trusted ways.

Forced by the combination, Ruturaj Gaikwad, a genuine opener, had to bat at Number 4 in the just-concluded ODI series, while all-rounder Washington Sundar has been a perennial floater in the line-up.

I am bad with DRS call, says Kuldeep

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ Visakhapatnam

Left-arm wrist spinner Kuldeep Yadav admitted that he is "bad with DRS" appeals after his hilarious banter with senior pro Rohit Sharma formed a nice, little subplot of India's series-clinching victory against South Africa in the third ODI.

Fielding at first slip, Rohit was chuckling as he intervened on at least three occasions to stop an excited Kuldeep from appealing animatedly and putting pressure on skipper KL Rahul to avail the Decision Review System (DRS) on Saturday.

"Clearly, I am bad with DRS calls. I feel that one DRS is reserved for me (laughs)," Kuldeep said in the BCCI video.

"As a bowler, you always



think that it's your wicket, it's out. But Rohit bhai, KL bhai, they are standing behind the wicket, so they have a better idea if the ball is missing the stumps, about the height and impact.

"But I always think that

the batter is out," he added.

Kuldeep tore through the South Africa middle-order with four wickets to help India bowl out the opposition for 270 after they looked good for a total in excess of 325. Kuldeep said,

"There are only two DRS, so you need to have those people around to guide you correctly; otherwise, you could end up wasting the DRS. So I must give credit to them too for ensuring that the DRS option is used wisely, and we don't end up thinking that we have wasted them.

"Rohit bhai has been there always; he clearly asks me what I think about the line.

"As far as height is concerned, I can make out but with line and impact... That is a very big call."

While Kuldeep and Prasadh Krishna shone with the ball, Yashasvi Sharma slammed his maiden ODI hundred to win the player of the match award after Rohit and Virat Kohli too struck fluent half-centuries in a nine-wicket victory for the home team.



Smith's propels Australia to a victory in 2nd test

ASSOCIATED PRESS
■ Brisbane

Steve Smith took a brilliant reflex catch to swing momentum, got into a heated exchange with Jofra Archer and then slogged the winning runs Sunday as Australia beat England again to take a 2-0 Ashes lead.

Set a target of 65 for victory in the second test after dismissing England for 241 in the second innings, Australia raced to an eight-wicket win late on Day 4 as storms brewed in and around the stadium. Archer was bowling around 150 kph (93 mph) under the lights, and it only fired up Smith.

"The adrenaline was pumping at the end of the end, yeah. Jofra was bowling pretty quickly," Smith said. "It was a huge win. Great to go 2-nil up."

There were some theatrics involving the Australia captain and England's strike pace bowler, with Smith ducking under a short ball and then critiquing Archer for bowling "fast when nothing is going on, champion." He then hit a four and a six to bring up 1,000 test runs at the Gabba.

With Australia at 63-2 and needing just two runs to win the day-nighter, Smith hit a six to seal it and finished unbeaten on 23 from nine deliveries.

"Not really too sure what he said, and not sure what I said," Smith told a post-match news conference. "It's not any of your business, either," he added, laughing. "So we'll leave it out there."

prospects. England had resumed Sunday at 134-6, and took an hour and 36 minutes — 18.2 overs — to erase the first-innings deficit.

The Australian attack bowled a tight line and length and mixed it up with some short-pitch deliveries in an attempt to entice the usually aggressive England batters to have a go.

Stokes (50) and Will Jacks (41) resisted the temptation for the entire first session, knowing that a wicket would expose the tailenders. It was a completely different approach to England's usual attack-at-all-costs mentality that has attracted wide criticism in the first two Ashes tests so far.

The seventh-wicket pair put on a 96-run stand to get England to the brink of the night session, but that ended when Smith — Australia's stand-in captain — took a stunning one-hander diving to his left at slip off Michael Neser's bowling to dismiss Jacks. That was the momentum changer. The subsequent slide happened quickly, with England losing its last four wickets for 17 runs and Neser finishing with a five-wicket haul.

Stokes reached his 50 from 148 balls, the second-slowest half-century of his career. It was only four balls behind the 152 he took to make 50 at Headingley in 2019, where he scored an unbeaten 135 to guide England to a one-wicket Ashes victory.

This time, he didn't go on. The 34-year-old was incredibly caught behind by wicket-keeper Alex Carey standing up to the stumps to Neser (5-42).

Stokes twirled his bat in the air in disbelief before striding back to the pavilion. Smith took two more catches as England's lower-order crumbled.

Saraswat clinches maiden super 100 title at Guwahati Masters

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ Guwahati

India's Sanskar Saraswat clinched his maiden Super 100 title after eking out a three-game victory over compatriot Mithun Manjunath in the men's singles final of the Guwahati Masters on Sunday.

The 19-year-old from Jodhpur showcased grit and firepower while unleashing a barrage of smashes to outwit former national champion Manjunath 21-11, 17-21, 21-13 in an all-Indian final that lasted 50 minutes.

However, Tanvi Sharma, a world junior championships silver medalist, registered a runner-up finish in women's singles after losing 18-21, 18-21 to Tung Ciou-Tong of Chinese

Taipei in the finals. The 16-year-old from Punjab had reached the semi-finals at the Syed Modi International Super 300 last week. She had reached the Odisha Masters final last year and finished runner-up at this year's US Open Super 300 and the World Junior Championships as well.

Indian men's doubles pair of Pruthvi Krishnamurthy Roy and Sai Pratheek K also finished second best after losing 13-21, 18-21 to Malaysia's sixth seed Kang Khai Xing and Aaron Tai in a lop-sided final.

Saraswat, who trains at the National Centre of Excellence in Guwahati, has been making rapid strides on the domestic circuit. He won his maiden senior national doubles title alongside Arsh

Mohammad in Bengaluru last year and had earlier claimed a junior singles crown. The duo also finished runners-up in the under-19 event at the 31st Smit Krishna Khaitan Memorial Badminton Tournament in September last year.

Playing with his right leg heavily taped, Saraswat stayed marginally ahead at the outset before Manjunath clawed back to 7-7 in the opening game. While the rallies lacked prolonged exchanges, both players capitalised on each other's errors.

Saraswat carried a slim 11-9 lead into the interval before stretching it to 14-10 with a burst of attacking shots. Manjunath struggled to read his opponent's cross-court and down-the-line smashes as Saraswat surged to nine game points and



closed out the opener comfortably.

The second game saw Saraswat continue on the offensive, racing to an 8-2 lead with his steep smashes leaving Manjunath under pressure. However, the Karnataka shuttler staged a strong comeback, reeling off five consecutive points to level at 7-8 and edging ahead 11-10 at the interval. Momentum then swung decisively as Manjunath overturned a deficit to grab an 18-16 advantage before Saraswat's errors handed him three game points, which he converted to force a decider.

In the third game, Saraswat came out firing, storming to a 7-0 lead with aggressive intent. Manjunath managed to close the gap briefly, but Saraswat maintained control to take an 11-5 lead

Gary Kirsten appointed consultant for Namibia men's team

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ New Delhi

World Cup-winning former India head coach Gary Kirsten has been appointed consultant for Namibia's men's national teams and will work alongside head coach Craig Williams in the build-up to next year's T20 World Cup.

The global showpiece is scheduled to be held in India and Sri Lanka in February-March 2026. "It is indeed a privilege to work with Cricket Namibia. I have been thoroughly impressed with the



dedication and determination to create a high-performance cricket environment," Kirsten said in a Cricket Namibia statement.

"Their new state-of-the-art cricket stadium is a testament to their commitment to making sure their national teams are competing with the best cricket countries in the world. "Their senior men's national team is performing well, and I look forward to adding value to their preparation for the T20 World Cup in February next year."

A former South Africa opener, Kirsten took to coach-

ing after retiring in 2004 and was appointed India's head coach in 2007. Under his tenure, India famously won the 2011 ODI World Cup.

He later served as head coach of South Africa and has worked with several teams in T20 franchise leagues around the world. Most recently, Kirsten had a brief stint as head coach of Pakistan's men's team in 2024. "Kirsten's appointment as consultant reflects Cricket Namibia's commitment to strengthening its high-performance environment and supporting the existing

coaching structure," a statement from the board said.

"His blend of international playing experience, coaching success, and passion for player development brings valuable insight and added depth to the Eagles [men's national team] setup."

Namibia have qualified for each of the last three T20 World Cups in 2021, 2022 and 2024 and is also in contention for the upcoming edition. They will be one of the three host nations for the 2026 tournament, along with South Africa and Zimbabwe.

Smriti Mandhana, Palash Muchhal announce end of relationship; urge privacy

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ New Delhi

India batter Smriti Mandhana on Sunday announced that her wedding had been called off and urged fans and media to stop the speculation, while music composer Palash Muchhal confirmed that he had "decided to move on" from the relationship.

Muchhal also warned of legal action against those spreading defamatory rumours.

Mandhana, one of India's most prominent women cricketers, issued her first public statement on social media after rumours about

her personal life had intensified over the past month.

She was supposed to marry Muchhal on November 23 but the wedding was postponed after Mandhana's father, Shrinivasa, was hospitalised due to a heart ailment.

"I need to clarify that the wedding is called off. I would like to close this matter here and implore all of you to do the same," she wrote.

"Over the past few weeks there has been plenty of speculation around my life and I feel it is important for me to speak out at this time," she said in an Instagram post.

Calling herself a "very

private person", Mandhana said the need to set the record straight compelled her to speak.

She requested fans and the public to "respect the privacy of both families" and allow them the "space to process and move on".

Mandhana, who is preparing for India's upcoming international season, said her focus remains firmly on cricket.

"I believe there is a higher purpose driving us all and for me that has always been representing my country at the highest level. I hope to continue to play and win trophies for India for as long



as possible," she said. Soon after Mandhana's post, Palash Muchhal issued his own statement, confirming that he had "decided to move on" and expressing anguish over what he described as baseless online chatter.

"I have decided to move on in my life and step back from my personal relationship. It's been very difficult for me to see people react so easily on baseless rumours about something which has been most sacred to me.

"It's the most difficult phase of my life and I will deal with it gracefully holding on to my beliefs," he wrote.

He urged the public to

reflect before amplifying unverified claims.

"I truly hope we, as a society, learn to pause before judging someone based on unverified gossip, whose sources are never identified. Our words can wound in ways we may never understand," he added.

Muchhal also said his team would take legal action against those spreading defamatory content.

"My team will be taking strict legal action against those spreading false and defamatory content," he said, thanking those who had supported him with "kindness" during this period.