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FULL REPORT ON P2

DALIT MINOR GIRL RAPED BY AUTORICKSHAW DRIVER

A minor Dalit girl was allegedly raped by an autorickshaw driver after he took her to his house under the pretext of helping her in relocating, police said on Tuesday. The incident occurred on December 3 when the girl was shifting from one hostel to another and sought assistance from the driver whom she had earlier met. The driver was identified as Sai Kumar. "Kumar lured the minor Dalit girl home under the guise of helping her and then raped her," a police official said.

FULL REPORT ON P3

LITHUANIA GOVT DECLARES NATIONAL EMERGENCY

Sri Lanka Air Force bid farewell to two IAF helicopters after they ended their rescue mission in cyclone-hit island nation, even as INS Gharial reached Trincomalee with 700 tonnes of essential relief material from Tamil Nadu. The Indian Air Force (IAF) choppers, which departed on Monday, were involved in airlifting immediate relief supplies to distressed...

FULL REPORT ON P5

TENDULKAR RECALLS GURSHARAN'S GESTURE IN SCORING IRANI CUP TON IN 1989-90

Sachin Tendulkar on Tuesday recalled former India player Gursharan Singh's gesture to walk out at No 10 with a broken hand only to help him score a valiant 103 for the Rest of India in their Irani Cup match against Delhi in 1989-90. A rampant Delhi crushed the Rest of India by 309 runs in the contest played here at the Wankhede Stadium in which Tendulkar waged a lone battle scoring 103, with...

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QUOTE OF THE DAY



THE WELFARE DEPARTMENTS ARE PROVIDING BASIC FACILITIES SO THAT INCLUSIVE GROWTH CAN BE SEEN IN INDUSTRIES, IT, PHARMA AND TOURISM. WE WILL GIVE PRIORITY FOR INNOVATIVENESS AMONG STUDENTS.

— PONNAM PRABHAKAR, TG MINISTER FOR TRANSPORT

CM: Extend all govt services to people online from Sankranti

PNS ■ Amaravati

Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu has directed officials to extend all online services to people from the Sankranti festival. Reviewing Real Time Governance System (RTGS), the chief minister underscored that online services will usher in transparency and also elevate people's "satisfaction" on governance.

"Chief Minister Chandrababu Naidu directed officials to extend all services online from next Sankranti. He asked all the departments to take measures towards it," said an official release late on Monday, quoting the CM. Naidu called on some departments which are still extending their services offline to change their course of services.

According to the TDP supremo, all government services are being extended virtually through WhatsApp via Mana Mitra app, "obviating" the need for people to run around offices.

CONTINUED ON >> P2



Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu holding a review meeting with officials in Amaravati on Tuesday

Set up task force to prevent scrub typhus spread: CM to officials

Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu has directed officials to set up a special national-level task force with medical experts to study scrub typhus and to devise measures for its prevention in the future. The Chief Minister reviewed the functioning of the Medical and Health Department at the Secretariat, assessing

the severity of scrub typhus in the state and the medical assistance being provided to affected patients.

Officials informed the Chief Minister that 1,592 people in the state have been affected by scrub typhus, with Chittoor district reporting the highest number at 420 cases. They clarified that there

has been no confirmed evidence so far that any deaths occurred solely due to scrub typhus. In all nine reported deaths, the cause of death was reviewed and none were confirmed to be due to scrub typhus; instead, they resulted from other health complications and multi-organ failure.

CONTINUED ON >> P2



In world's first Australia bans social media for children

PNS ■ Sydney

Australia has become the first country to ban social media for children under 16, blocking access to platforms including TikTok, Alphabet's YouTube and Meta's, Instagram and Facebook from midnight. Ten of the biggest platforms were ordered to block children from midnight on Wednesday or face fines of up to \$49.5 million under the new law, which drew criticism from major technology companies and free speech advocates, but was welcomed by parents and child advocates. The ban is being closely watched by other countries consid-

ering similar age-based measures amid growing concerns about the impact of social media on children's health and safety. In a video message that Sky News Australia said would be played in schools this week, Prime Minister Anthony Albanese said the ban aimed to support young Australians and ease the pressure that can come from endless feeds and algorithms. "Make the most of the school holidays coming up. Rather than spending it scrolling on your phone, start a new sport, learn a new instrument, or read that book that has been sitting there for some time on your shelf," he said.

Microsoft's mega investment in India Rs 1.5 lakh crore for 'AI 1st Future'

PNS ■ New Delhi

Microsoft CEO Satya Nadella met Prime Minister Narendra Modi Tuesday evening and committed the United States-based software giant's largest ever Asia investment – over US \$ 17.5 billion, or Rs 1.5 lakh crore – towards developing Artificial Intelligence capabilities.

"Thank you PM Narendra Modi for an inspiring conversation on India's AI opportunity. To support the country's ambitions,



Microsoft is committing US \$ 17.5 billion – our largest investment ever in Asia – to

help build the infrastructure, skills, and sovereign capabilities needed for

India's AI-first future," he said.

The Prime Minister responded, "When it comes to AI, the world is optimistic about India!" Had a very productive discussion with Satya Nadella.

Happy to see India being the place where Microsoft will make its largest-ever investment in Asia. The youth of India will harness this opportunity to innovate and leverage the power of AI for a better planet."

CONTINUED ON >> P2

REGISTRATION, STAMPS DEPARTMENT AP sets ₹ 10,000 cr revenue target

PNS ■ Amaravati

The Andhra Pradesh government on Tuesday said it has set a revenue target of over Rs 10,000 crore for its Registration and Stamps Department for the fiscal year 2025-26. The state has identified 430 real estate ventures and aims to facilitate nearly 15,570 user-friendly registrations through these projects.

CONTINUED ON >> P2

Impeachment move against Madras HC Judge 'political intimidation,' Pawan

PNS ■ Amaravati

Deputy Chief Minister Pawan Kalyan on Tuesday dubbed the INDIA bloc constituents' impeachment move against a Madras High Court Judge as "political intimidation".

The Jana Sena Party founder charged that it was an attempt at "silencing" the judiciary.

Several opposition MPs, led by the DMK, on Tuesday submitted a notice to Lok



Sabha Speaker Om Birla to move a motion for the removal of Madras High Court judge GR Swaminathan, whose order directing Subramaniya

Swamy temple authorities in Madurai's Thirupparan kundram to ensure that a lamp is lit at the deepathoon (pillar) sparked a row.

"Over 120 MPs from the INDIA Bloc, led by the DMK, have weaponised the Constitution to call for the impeachment of a Judge. This is not judicial accountability; this is blatant political intimidation," Kalyan said in a post on X.

CONTINUED ON >> P2

Civil Aviation Min orders 10 pc curtailment of IndiGo flights

PNS ■ New Delhi

The Civil Aviation Minister has asked for a 10 per cent cut in planned IndiGo flights to help restore order at India's biggest airline, which cancelled thousands of flights nationwide after failing to plan for tighter safety regulations.

Posting a picture of IndiGo CEO Pieter Elbers, sitting with folded hands in front of him, Minister Ram Mohan Naidu, in a post on X, said that the airline management was summoned to the ministry to provide an update.

"The Ministry considers it necessary to curtail the



overall Indigo routes, which will help in stabilising the airline's operations and lead to reduced cancellations. A curtailment of 10 per cent has been ordered. While abiding by it, Indigo will continue to cover all its destinations as before," he said. The curtailment is double of what the sector regulator DGCA had ordered on Monday.

CONTINUED ON >> P2

Officials told to prepare proposals for Rs 40,000 cr under Purvodya scheme

PNS ■ Amaravati

Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu has directed officials to swiftly prepare proposals for the development of all three regions of the State using funds allocated under the Purvodaya scheme. He instructed that these funds should be planned for irrigation projects, expansion of horticulture crops, rural roads, and other infrastructure facilities.

On Tuesday, the Chief Minister conducted a review meeting at the Secretariat on the Purvodaya scheme and irrigation projects. He asked the officials to take steps to develop 82 clusters in

Prakasam district and Rayalaseema as hubs for horticulture crops and to expand horticulture farming to 20 lakh acres. Under the scheme, proposals should be prepared for various projects totaling Rs 40,000 crore, of which Rs 20,000 crore should be allocated for irrigation projects and the remaining Rs 20,000 crore for infrastructure development. Of this, Rs 5,000 crore should be used for constructing special rural roads connecting to national and state highways, he said.

He also instructed that 23 major and medium irrigation projects and 1,021 tanks in Prakasam and Rayalaseema regions be completed to ensure adequate



water supply for horticulture crops. Discussions were held on linking the Polavaram and Nallamala Sagar projects at a cost of Rs 58,700 crore. Officials stated that this would provide irrigation water to an additional 7 lakh acres in Nellore and Prakasam districts, stabilise irrigation for another 6 lakh

acres, and supply drinking water to 60 lakh people. They also said that 20 tmc ft of water could be allocated for industrial purposes. The Chief Minister ordered that work related to this plan should begin soon.

He also directed officials to plan for diverting 200 tmc ft of Godavari floodwaters from the Polavaram project to Bollapalli and Nallamala Sagar, and 50 tmc ft of Krishna floodwaters from Nagarjuna Sagar to Bollapalli.

The Chief Minister emphasised the need to accelerate irrigation project construction in North Andhra and asked officials to prepare proposals for completing various projects with an

outlay of Rs 5,000 crore. He said that North Andhra districts are suitable for oil palm and other horticulture crops and suggested promoting natural and organic farming in the agency areas.

He instructed officials to carry out the linkage of the Vamsadhara-Nagavali-Cham pavathi rivers with a budget of Rs 169 crore. By linking the Hiramandalam reservoir and Narayanapuram barrage, irrigation water can be provided to an additional 5,000 acres. Finance Minister Payyavula Keshav, Water Resources Minister Nimmala Ramanaidu, and senior officials from various departments participated in the review meeting.



Lokesh holds meetings with CEOs in US

The Information Technology Minister is making efforts to attract investments in the State

RAVI KUMAR BOPPANA
PNS ■ Amaravati

Information Technology and Industries Minister N Lokesh is stepping up his mission to draw global investments into the state through a series of high-level meetings during his US visit. Focusing on innovation, technology, and large-scale job creation, Lokesh met chief executive officers (CEOs) and senior leaders from top multinational companies, pitching Andhra Pradesh as India's next major hub for digital infrastructure, advanced manufacturing, creative industries, and future-tech development.

During his second day in the US, Lokesh held 12 back-to-back meetings with leading global firms. He discussed IT infrastructure modernization with OpsRamp CEO Varma Koonapuneeni, urging collaboration on AI-Ops training, digital governance, and scalable SaaS models to support SMEs and startups in Andhra Pradesh. Lokesh also requested support for smart cities, electronics manufacturing clusters, and research part-

nerships with AP Tech Academy. Varma assured that the company will examine all proposals positively. At Autodesk, Lokesh met Chief Technologist Dev Patel and Senior Director Allison Rose, proposing a Global Capability Center (GCC) in Amaravati. Highlighting that the capital is the world's first city designed fully with BIM technology, Lokesh sought Autodesk's support in creating a Digital Twin for Amaravati, establishing a Design and Innovation Academy, and developing cyclone-resilient coastal master plans using CFD technology. Autodesk promised to review the proposals with its global leadership. In San Francisco, Lokesh met Celesta VC Managing Partner Arun Kumar, pitching the establishment of a Deep Tech Innovation Hub in Andhra Pradesh with focus areas including semiconductors, AI, and quantum computing. The VC firm assured support after reviewing the state's detailed proposals. Lokesh also held extensive discussions with Creative Land Asia founder Sajjan Raj

Kurup, senior partner Ian Copping, and Hollywood director Chic Russell regarding the previously signed MoU to establish India's first Transmedia Entertainment City—Creator Land—in Amaravati.

The project aims to transform AP into a global hub for creative economy, tourism, and digital innovation, with AI-powered virtual studios, AR/VR theme parks, and co-production facilities. The company stated that construction preparations are underway and the project could bring in 710,000 crore in investments and create nearly 1.5 lakh jobs. Lokesh continued his outreach by meeting Zscaler CEO Jay Chaudhry, seeking a cybersecurity R&D and development center in Visakhapatnam to support the city's emerging AI Cloud Data infrastructure. Chaudhry assured that the proposals would be evaluated. Minister Lokesh is positioning Andhra Pradesh as a global destination for high value investments, technology-driven growth, and next-generation employment opportunities.

Development possible only through welfare: Ponnam

PNS ■ Hyderabad

"Under the leadership of Chief Minister Revanth Reddy, we are moving forward with special plans for good education and skill development for SC, ST, BC and minorities," said Minister Ponnam Prabhakar at a panel discussion on the welfare department.

The Telangana government believes that development is impossible without the welfare of the SC, ST, BC and minorities, who constitute more than 80% of the population in Vision 2047, he said. The government will provide all kinds of priorities for good quality education, skill training programmes, improving employment opportunities, implementation of reservations, higher education and foreign education for the SC, ST, BC minorities in the future, he added.

"We will accept the suggestions and recommendations of the intellectuals who participated in the Global Summit and take them into action. The welfare depart-

ments are providing basic facilities so that inclusive growth can be seen in industries, IT, pharma and tourism. We will give priority for innovativeness among students," he added. The government will bring radical reforms in education. It will increase diet charges and provide quality meals to students. It will build Young India Integrated Schools across the State. As the Chief Minister says, in the past, lands were distributed to the poor. But now the government can only provide quality education to the poor. Only when quality education is provided, the society will reach higher peaks, the Minister said.

"If we look at the report of the caste survey conducted by the State government recently, which family is in a good position, only the family with higher education is in a high position. Lands, financial benefits and castes cannot bring families to a high position," he added. The government will give first priority to education to shape the future generations of tomorrow.

Measures to be taken for welfare of beggars, transgender

PNS ■ Kakinada

District Collector Shan Mohan has urged officials to seriously explore measures to help beggars and transgender individuals living within municipal jurisdictions transition to more secure and sustainable livelihoods. At a special meeting held on Tuesday at the Collectorate, officials discussed the SMILE (Support for Marginalised Individuals for Livelihood and Enterprise) scheme, introduced by the Central Government to provide comprehensive rehabilitation support for beggars and transgender persons in municipalities. The meeting focused on identifying individuals in need within the Municipal Corporation limits,



extending suitable rehabilitation services, and offering skill-development training to enhance their employability. Collector Shan Mohan emphasised that the scheme has been designed by the Central government with a strong commitment to uplift marginalised communities, and called for its effective and timely implementation across municipalities in Kakinada district. Rojavanam

Trust CEO Edwin Antony, who joined from New Delhi, presented an overview of the scheme and discussed strategies for its rollout. Social Welfare JD Sobharani, Municipal Corporation Additional Commissioner K.T. Sudhakar, MEPMA PD Priyamvada, Municipal Corporation Secretary Lakshmi, and TPRO Sailaja were among the officials present.

Cobbler stabbed to death in a drunken brawl

PNS ■ Kakinada

A cobbler Keerti Satyanarayana (45) was stabbed to death by an auto driver near Kanaka Durga temple in busy Santha cheruvu junction on Monday

night. It is stated that the deceased cobbler was residing along with his wife pitching a tent abutting the temple wall. While his wife

is a rag picker, he eked out his living by repairing old shoes. Last night the accused auto driver Athili Ranga (42) parked the auto near the

place where the cobbler sat daily mending the foot wear. The cobbler, who was allegedly fully drunk, scolded the auto driver for parking

the vehicle and there was a petty quarrel between them. But they soon dispersed with the intervention of the other shop owners.

The auto driver in turn came fully drunk on Tuesday and picked up fight with cobbler. In a fit of anger he took the cobbler's knife and stabbed him. The cobbler succumbed on the way to hospital.

FROM PAGE - 1

CM: Extend all govt...

Calling for wide publicity on Mana Mitra, he directed officials to make arrangements to send documents directly to people's residences using courier services after registration work.

Further, he directed officials to diversify drone services and create a master plan for this purpose.

Underlining that drone services will rise exponentially in the future, the CM called for creating awareness among farmers on how to deploy drones to lower the use of pesticides in agriculture, among other guidelines.

Set up task force...

Officials stated that extensive awareness campaigns are being conducted on preventive measures and special medical teams are carrying out tests in affected areas. They also noted that scrub typhus cases are being reported across all states in India and that Andhra Pradesh stands 8th in the country. Tamil Nadu and Odisha each recorded around 7,000 cases.

The Chief Minister instructed officials to intensify awareness campaigns and set up a task force with national and international experts, whose field-level report should be implemented to curb the disease.

Officials also briefed the Chief Minister on the measures being taken to control seasonal diseases in the state. They reported that due to proactive preventive steps taken over the past year, seasonal diseases have decreased by 48 per cent across Andhra Pradesh.

Dengue cases reduced from 5,555 last year to 2,452 this year—a 56 per cent decline. Malaria cases dropped from 7,871 to 7,010—a reduction of 11 per cent. Chikungunya cases fell from 266 to 142—46.5 per cent lower. Japanese Encephalitis cases decreased from 11 to 2.

Officials attributed the decline to improved sanitation, continuous awareness campaigns, extensive testing, and precautionary measures.

The Chief Minister stressed that seasonal diseases must be brought down to zero level through coordinated efforts by all departments. He emphasised that the biggest ailment in society is lack of cleanliness, and eliminating it would prevent many diseases. He instructed officials to implement stricter measures to prevent malaria, dengue, and chikungunya.

The review meeting was attended by Health Secretary Saurabh Gaur, Commissioner of Health and Family Welfare Veerapandian, NTR Health Services CEO Dinesh Kumar, and APMSIDC Chairman Girisha.

Vote chori biggest...

On the other side, the leader of the opposition. I have no voice in that room. What they decide is what happens," he said.

So, why are the prime minister and home minister so keen on choosing exactly who the election commissioner is going to be, Gandhi asked.

"No prime minister has done this in the history of India. In December 2023, this government changed the law to make sure that no election commissioner could be punished for any action they

take," the Congress leader said. "Why would the prime minister and home minister give this gift of immunity to the election commissioner?" he said. He further questioned why the law with regard to CCTV footage was changed. "Why was a law put in place that allows the Election Commission to destroy CCTV footage 45 days after the election? What is the need? The answer given is that it is a question of data. But it is not a question of data. It is a question of stealing the election," he said.

Gandhi further said electoral reform is very simple, but the government doesn't want to do it.

"What does electoral reform require? Nothing more than what we've been saying. Give machine-readable voter lists to all political parties one month before the election. Take back the law that allows the destruction of CCTV footage.

"While you're doing that, also tell us what the architecture of the EVM is. Give us access to the EVM. Let our experts go and see what is inside the EVM. Till today, we have not had access to the EVM," he said.

"Change the law that allows the election commissioner to get away with whatever he wants to do. That's all the electoral reforms you need," he said.

Gandhi said he wants to remind the election commissioners that they might be under the impression that this law lets them get away with any wrongdoing but it is not so. "Let me remind them: don't worry, we are going to change the law, and that too retroactively. And we are going to come and find you," he said.

Elaborating on the "result of controlling" the chief election commissioner and the EC, Gandhi said "we have a set of election campaigns that are tailored for the prime minister".

"Secondly, we have a Brazilian woman who appears 22 times on the voter list of Haryana. And not only that, there is one woman whose name has appeared over 200 times in one constituency in Haryana. And it is very clear, and I have proven without doubt that the election in Haryana was stolen, and the vote chori was ensured by the Election Commission of India," he said. Gandhi also asked why after the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls in Bihar, 1.2 lakh duplicate photos exist in Bihar voting list.

"If you've cleaned up the voting list, why are there 1.2 lakh duplicates in Bihar? These are straightforward questions. But the Election Commission has no answer to these questions," he said. Everybody calls India the biggest democracy but "we are not just the biggest democracy, we are the greatest democracy", he asserted.

Microsoft's mega...

In a press statement released shortly after the two leaders met, Microsoft said the US \$17.5 billion it will invest in India follows an earlier investment of US\$ 3 billion—towards establishing cloud and AI infrastructure in Bengaluru over the next two years, which includes upskilling and new data centres—and will ensure the company has "the largest hyperscale presence in India".

"India stands at a pivotal

moment in its AI journey... one defined by impact at scale, determined to lead. As technology becomes a catalyst for inclusive growth and economic transformation, the country is emerging as a frontier AI nation. Against this backdrop... today we are announcing our largest investment in Asia - US\$17.5 billion over four years..." the company statement said.

Microsoft's nearly US\$20 billion investment across four years underlines India's position as an uber-valuable market for global software behemoths racing to build digital infrastructure.

In October Google boss Sundar Pichai said he spoke to Prime Minister Narendra Modi and shared the US tech giant's plans for its artificial intelligence hub in Andhra Pradesh's Visakhapatnam, the US company's biggest ever investment in the country.

Google partnered with the Adani Group for a data centre and AI base in Visakhapatnam, its largest hub outside the US, and said it has plan to invest \$15 billion over the next five years.

Amazon has also invested billions into building data centres in India, while the Prime Minister met chip-maker Qualcomm's CEO, Cristiano R. Amon, in October to discussed India's advancements in AI, innovation, and skilling.

Last month, while addressing a conference in Delhi, the Prime Minister highlighted India's role in shaping a global framework for what AI should be and how it should function. He spoke about "ethical and human-centric AI," and said his government is already working towards a policy on this topic.

Impeachment...

Why were certain political parties going to such extreme lengths to impeach a judge for a judgement that simply upholds the right to practice the Hindu faith, he asked.

"Is this not a cynical attempt to strong-arm and silence the broader judiciary," the actor-politician said. Was this motion not a signal to all judges that they must be "careful" when ruling in cases about Hindu traditional practices and faith, he added.

"The selective outrage and weaponization of the impeachment process in this case expose a disturbing bias. This incident only solidifies the urgent need for a unified institutional voice," Kalyan added.

Calling for the establishment of a 'Sanatana Dharma Rakshana Board' as the need of the hour, Kalyan asserted that devotees can actively manage their temples and religious affairs without the fear of alleged political interference or judicial overreach spurred by "political vendetta" under such as set up.

According to the deputy CM, when a constitutional bench of the Supreme Court had delivered the Sabarimala judgment overturning a "centuries-old, deeply cherished custom" regarding entry into one of the most sacred Hindu sites, no judge was impeached.

Their ruling, which fundamentally altered a core religious practice, was met only with legal review petitions, not political motions for removal, he said.

However, he alleged that the political establishment has set a dramatically different standard now and a High Court judge is being 'target-

ed' just because he delivered a judgement upholding the right of believers to light a lamp and practice a longstanding ritual on property legally recognized as belonging to a religious institution.

Further, he said that "secularism is a two-way street, and every religion has to be respected and treated equally and fairly; that includes Hindus as well".

AP sets sets...

expected to generate Rs 250 crore in revenue.

"In this financial year (2025-26), a target of earning Rs 10,169 crore revenue through the Registration and Stamps Department has been set. 430 real estate ventures have been identified to implement an action plan to facilitate user-friendly registration," a press release, summarising a review meeting chaired by Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu, said.

Between June 15, 2024, and December 1, 2025, the Revenue Department received over 5.2 lakh grievances, of which more than 4.5 lakh have been resolved, while 73,000 are still under consideration, the release added. The release also highlighted that the automation process has accelerated following governance reforms introduced in June.

Meanwhile, a resurvey of land has been completed in 6,693 villages, and the data has been uploaded to Webland 2.0, it further said.

The Revenue Department is also reassessing over 5.7 lakh acres of assigned land that were kept under freehold status during the previous YSRCP government, the release noted.

Civil Aviation...

As part of the winter schedule for 2025-26, the airline has been operating over 2,200 flights per day. Airline, on its part, said there was "steady improvement across the network", as it reinstated flights to all 138 stations. It flew more than 1,800 flights on Tuesday, which will go up to nearly 1,900 on Wednesday, IndiGo said in a statement.

"We have optimised our operations, and our on-time performance is also back to normal levels," it added.

Earlier in the day, Minister Naidu in the Lok Sabha said that no airline, however large, will be permitted to cause hardship to passengers through planning failures and non-compliance with regulations. "Strict and appropriate action will be taken."

The DGCA, he said, has already issued notices to IndiGo and that the airline is being held fully accountable for the chaos caused by its internal crew-rostering failures. IndiGo flight schedules are stabilising, and all other airlines continue to operate smoothly across the country, he said. After meeting the IndiGo CEO, the minister in the post on X said, "During the last week, many passengers faced severe inconvenience due to IndiGo's internal mismanagement of crew rosters, flight schedules and inadequate communication".

While the enquiry and necessary actions are underway, another meeting with IndiGo's top management was held to review the stabilisation measures on Tuesday evening. IndiGo CEO "confirmed that 100 per cent of the refunds for flights affected till 6th December have been completed."

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SEXUAL HARASSMENT

Two Sanskrit varsity assistant professors arrested

PNS ■ Tirupati

In a major development in the sexual harassment case at the National Sanskrit University (Tirupati Sanskrit University) in Tirupati, police arrested Assistant Professor Lakshman Kumar and his colleague Sehakar Reddy on Tuesday. Lakshman Kumar is accused of impregnating a female student and threatening her with dire consequences if she revealed it to anyone.

The victim stated that Professor Lakshman Kumar sexually harassed her multiple times. Unable to bear the

harassment any longer, she decided to lodge a complaint with higher authorities. However, the professor allegedly threatened her, saying that another professor had a video of both of them, and continued to harass her repeatedly. She expressed her deep anguish to the police and requested authorities to ensure strict punishment to the professor.

A women's police team from Tirupati West Police Station went to Jharpura, Odisha, questioned the victim, and recorded her video statement. Based on the victim's statement, there is a



possibility that the police may arrest both professors. Meanwhile, on Monday,

YSRCP MP Gurumurthy raised the issue through an adjournment motion notice in the Lok Sabha. He stated in the House that a Dalit student pursuing her first year BED was sexually harassed by an assistant professor working at the same university. He mentioned that she was threatened using her personal photos and videos, describing it as a highly heinous act. He expressed deep anguish over such an atrocity committed against a Dalit student. The MP said that teachers, whose duty is to guide students, indulging in such immoral

acts was tarnishing the reputation of Tirupati.

The Tirupati West Police registered a case against Assistant Professor Lakshman Kumar of the National Sanskrit University for his behaviour towards a student. According to the SP's office, a case was registered based on a complaint lodged by the university's in-charge registrar, Rajinikanth. Tirupati DSP Bhaktavatsalam was appointed as the investigating officer, with two women sub-inspectors designated as assisting officers.

Police launch manhunt for highway robbers for stealing 'hawala money'



PNS ■ Puttaparthi

A film-style robbery took place near Penukonda on the Bengaluru National Highway in Sri Sathya Sai district. A few individuals were transporting hawala money from Surat to Bengaluru. Learning of this, another group arrived in four cars and intercepted them. Out of the Rs 4.20 crore hawala money in the vehicle, they snatched Rs 3 crore and fled. However, the entire incident was recorded on the dashcam of another car travelling behind them on the highway. Based on information from the car's owner, the police detained the men from Surat. They recovered Rs 1.20 crore that had been hidden inside the vehicle. A search is on for those who escaped with the remaining Rs 3 crore.

There is an old saying in Telugu that "no matter how powerful or smart someone is, there is always someone who surpasses him." Such an incident unfolded in the Sri Sathya Sai district. Some people were transporting hawala money from Surat to Bengaluru in a car. Another gang that learnt about this blocked them

and stole Rs 3 crore from the cash being transported. But the matter did not end there. Another car coming behind them exposed the entire hawala operation and helped the police in catching the Surat men, according to police.

Meanwhile, the scene where the criminals stopped the Innova on the Bengaluru National Highway was recorded on the dash cam of a software engineer driving behind them. This employee informed the police at a nearby check post. When the police launched a search operation, they found the Innova. When the Surat men were questioned, the truth came out. They told the police that a few criminals in four cars intercepted them, kidnapped them, and stole Rs 3 crore.

During the investigation, the police also discovered the specially designed compartments under the Innova's seats used to hide the hawala money. They seized the Rs 1.20 crore found inside. Penukonda police registered a case and have begun searching for the gang that fled with Rs 3 crore.

TIRUMALA PARAKAMANI THEFT CASE

CID submits additional report to High Court

PNS ■ Amaravati

A key development has taken place in the Tirumala Parakamani theft case. The CID has submitted another report to the High Court concerning the case. An additional report on the compromise settlement arrived at before the Lok Adalat in the Tirumala Parakamani theft case has been filed by the CID.

The High Court has directed the CID to submit two more sets of the additional report in sealed covers to the Registrar (Judicial). The bench, headed by the Chief Justice, which is currently examining the legality of

the Lok Adalat award, clarified to the registry that these reports must be placed before them for review. After examining the additional report, the next hearing has been adjourned to tomorrow (Wednesday) for issuing further orders.

Earlier, CID officials had already submitted sealed-cover reports to the High Court regarding the compromise settlement in the Parakamani theft case and the assets of Ravi Kumar. The court also rejected the request made by senior counsel representing Ravi Kumar, seeking orders to provide them with a copy of the CID report.

It may be recalled that on April 29, 2023, Ravi Kumar was allegedly caught stealing dollars while on Parakamani duty. Claiming it was his first theft, he apologised, and according to government calculations, property worth Rs 14.43 crore belonging to Ravi Kumar was made to be gifted to the TTD through a gift deed. A resolution to that effect was passed on June 19, 2023, and a compromise was reached in the case within three months.

The CID conducted an inquiry into the motive behind the settlement and submitted its report to the High Court.

SRM University-AP hosts conference on emerging trends in Chemical Biology

PNS ■ Amaravati

SRM University-AP successfully concluded the two-day International Conference on Emerging Trends in Chemical Biology (ETCB 2025), organised by the Department of Chemistry, SEAS. The event brought together leading scientists from India and abroad for keynote talks, invited lectures, poster sessions, and networking.

Eminent speakers included Prof Raghavan Varadarajan (IISc), Prof. Harinath Chakrapani (IISER Pune), Prof Dev P Arya (Clemson University), Dr Venkata Srikanth Garikipati (Temple University), and Dr Syed Kaleem Ahmed (USC), who discussed emerging innovations at the chemistry-biology interface.



Vice Chancellor Prof Ch Satish Kumar emphasised the global need for research in artificial blood components and molecular-level therapies, urging stronger interdisciplinary proposals. SEAS Dean Prof CV Tomy highlighted the importance of such conferences in fostering expert interaction, while Research Dean Prof. Ranjit Thapa stressed the growing significance and challenges of interdisciplinary research.

Dr Sabyasachi Chakraborty delivered the welcome address, followed by an overview from Convenor Dr Sathesh Ellipilli. Co-Convenor Dr Rajapandiyam Panneerselvam proposed the vote of thanks. The Abstract Book was released, and poster presentation awards were distributed. The conference strengthened collaborations and contributed to advancing chemical biology research.

Two TTD potu workers among three killed in road accident

PNS ■ Tirupati

A horrific road accident took place in Tirupati district on Tuesday. Three people died and three others were seriously injured when two cars collided near Tadukupeta under Nagari mandal. Among the deceased, two were identified as workers (potu karmikulu) of the Tiruchanur Padmavathi Ammavari Temple. The third deceased person was from Tamil Nadu. All three injured persons are also from Tamil Nadu. The accident happened due to excessive speed. The deceased were identified as Shankara and Santhanam, who worked as potu workers at the Tiruchanur Padmavathi Ammavari Temple.

A car travelling from Chennai towards Tirumala and another car travelling from Tiruchanur towards Tiruttani collided, resulting in the fatal accident. Shankara and Santhanam,



Mangled remains of the car after head-on collision with another vehicle near Tadukupeta in Chittoor district on Tuesday

who worked at the Tiruchanur temple, were travelling from Tirupati to Tiruttani. The collision occurred near Tadukupeta under the Nagari mandal, and both workers died on the spot.

Upon receiving the information, the police reached the accident site and shifted the bodies to a government hospital for postmortem.

The third person who died in the accident was identified as Arun from Chennai.

Meanwhile, another road accident took place in the East Godavari district. A private school bus overturned near Teepurru Yetigattu bend in Peravali mandal. There were 25 students in the bus at the time of the accident. Ten students suffered injuries.

Officials told to reexamine freehold assigned lands in dispute



PNS ■ Amaravati

Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu has directed officials to reexamine the details of 5,74,908 acres of assigned lands. The registration of these freehold lands in abeyance during the previous government's tenure. The Chief Minister conducted a review on issues related to freehold-converted assigned lands, re-survey, revenue and caste certificates, and other matters. Revenue Minister Anagani Satya Prasad, Special Chief Secretary Sai Prasad, and CCLA officials participated in the meeting.

Officials informed the Chief Minister that from June 15 last year to December 1 this year, a total of 5,28,217 grievances were received, of which 4,55,189 have been resolved, while around 73,000 are still under examination. They stated that due to administrative

reforms, the auto mutation process has accelerated since June this year.

Since June 2024, a total of 6,846 applications had been filed requesting deletion of their names from the 22A list. They reported that the lands belonging to ex-servicemen, political victims, freedom fighters, and those holding assigned lands prior to 1954 have been removed from 22A. Re-survey work has been completed in 6,693 villages, and the details have been uploaded into Webland 2.0. They added that measures are being taken to upgrade land records to avoid any errors during the re-survey.

They said that 2.77 crore caste certificates are being linked with Aadhaar. Officials also informed the Chief Minister that the target for revenue generation through the Stamps and Registrations Department for this financial year is Rs 10,169 crore.

Dalit minor girl raped by autorickshaw driver

PNS ■ Amaravati

A minor Dalit girl was allegedly raped by an autorickshaw driver after he took her to his house under the pretext of helping her in relocating, police said on Tuesday.

The incident occurred on December 3 when the girl was shifting from one hostel to another and sought assistance from the driver whom she had earlier met. The driver was identified as Sai Kumar.



"Kumar lured the minor Dalit girl home under the guise of helping her and then raped her," a police official said.

The girl reported the incident to the police with the help of her friends.

Police said Kumar is absconding and has switched off his mobile phone, prompting police to launch a manhunt.

Meanwhile, a case has been registered under the relevant BNS sections along with provisions of the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act, 2012.

All set for South Zone Inter-Varsity Volleyball Tournament at JNTUK



JNTUK Vice-Chancellor Prof CSRK Prasad addressing a media conference in Kakinada on Tuesday

PNS ■ Kakinada

The South Zone Inter-Varsity Volleyball Men's Tournament is set to commence on December 10 at Jawaharlal Nehru Technological University Kakinada (JNTUK). The five-day tournament is being organised under the aegis of the Association of Indian Universities (AIU), New Delhi. Announcing the details on Tuesday, JNTUK Vice-Chancellor Prof CSRK Prasad said that 138 university teams from six states—Telangana, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Kerala, and Puducherry—will participate. Around 1,900 players and

300 coaches, managers, and officials are expected to take part, and extensive arrangements have been made for the event.

Matches will be held at JNTUK, the Rajiv Gandhi Institute of Management Sciences, and Aditya Engineering College, Surampalem. The Vice-Chancellor stated that all necessary facilities, including playgrounds, accommodation, and medical support, are ready to ensure the smooth conduct of the tournament.

The competition will follow a knockout format, with teams grouped into

Matches will be held at JNTUK, the Rajiv Gandhi Institute of Management Sciences, and Aditya Engineering College, Surampalem. The Vice-Chancellor stated that all necessary facilities, including playgrounds, accommodation, and medical support, are ready

four pools. Cash prizes will be awarded to the winners, and all participants will receive certificates. While JNTUK has hosted various university-level tournaments since 2011, this is the first

time it is organising a volleyball tournament, he added.

P Gana Venkata Reddy Naidu, Government Whip, Visakhapatnam West MLA, and president of the Andhra Pradesh Volleyball Association, will inaugurate the tournament as the chief guest on Wednesday.

Among those present at the press briefing were Sports Wing Director A Krishnamohan, Rector Prof P Subbarao, OSD Prof D Koteswara Rao, University Sports Council Secretary and Tournament Convenor G Syam Kumar, and Tournament Organising Secretary GV Raju.

Collector asks officials to take steps for promotion of industries in district

PNS ■ Bhimavaram

A face-to-face meeting with the District Industries Export Promotion Council and investors was held on Tuesday at the Collector's camp office in Bhimavaram under the chairmanship of the District Collector.

On this occasion, District Collector Nagarani said that the development of agriculture and the aqua sector in the district is satisfactory, but more efforts should be made for industrial development. She said many industrialists are coming forward to set up new industries in the district, and officials should pay special attention to granting permissions, sanctioning bank loans, and providing necessary infrastructure for the establishment of new industries. She mentioned that government land is not available for setting up industries, so new entrepreneurs should consider establishing industries in partnership with private landowners wherever possible.

The District Collector interacted with investors from various sectors and reviewed details of existing industries and the new



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industries and businesses being planned. As part of tourism development in the district, representatives of Absynk Hotels and Resorts sought about 30 acres of land through the Tourism Department to set up beach front resorts at Perupalem Beach. The Collector responded by saying that the possibilities

would be examined with the concerned revenue officials and conveyed accordingly.

Later, reviewing the progress of the Industries Department in the district, Collector Nagarani said that from October 30 till date, 1,218 applications were received for various departmental approvals,

out of which 1,170 were approved, and 48 applications were yet to be resolved. Under the MSME, SC/ST Special Incentive Package Policy, reimbursement and subsidies amounting to Rs 0.42 crore were sanctioned for 09 claims. For 02 claims under the general category, Rs 16,63,897 was sanctioned as power cost reimbursement; for 02 claims under the general category, Rs 6,07,141 was sanctioned as interest subsidy; for 04 claims under the SC category, Rs 1,56,228 was sanctioned as interest subsidy; and for 01 claim under the SC category, Rs 17,86,229 was sanctioned as interest subsidy.

Under the PMEGP scheme for the year 2025-26, 242 applications were forwarded to banks for the establishment of units, out of which 207 units have been set up. The Collector instructed the concerned officials to take steps to clear the 120 pending applications with the banks. She added that 28 Udyam workshops were conducted in the district during the month of September as part of the RAMP scheme.



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CBI arrests senior passport superintendent for influencing witnesses



The CBI has arrested a senior passport superintendent posted in Mumbai in a disproportionate assets case against him for allegedly trying to influence witnesses and mislead the investigation, officials said Tuesday.

The accused officer, Deepak Chandra, was booked in March this year for allegedly amassing illicit assets worth ₹85 lakh during his tenure at the regional passport office, Ghaziabad, from July 30, 2018, to September 30, 2024.

"During the course of investigation, a search was conducted at the residential premises of the accused, which led to the recovery of huge unaccounted cash of around ₹60.00 lakh, details of investments in immovable properties as well as details of various expenses of high magnitude," a CBI spokesperson said.

The CBI arrested Chandra on Tuesday night from Mumbai, where he is currently posted, when the agency found that he was allegedly influencing witnesses and deliberately, with malafide intention, tried to mislead the investigation, she said. He was produced before a special court in Ghaziabad, which sent him to CBI custody till December 12. "On the application of CBI, Special Judge, Anti-Corruption, CBI Court, Ghaziabad vide its order dated 17.09.2025 had also issued an ad-interim attachment order for attachment of his properties, including one residential flat and one commercial shop," she said.

Shoegate fame lawyer thrashed in Karkardooma court



A lawyer who almost hurled a shoe at former Chief Justice of India BR Gavai was allegedly attacked inside Karkardooma district court premises on Tuesday. The video showed a group attacking 71-year-old Rakesh Kishore with a slipper, while the lawyer defended himself. The clip also showed the lawyer asking the attacker why he was beating him and then shouting several times, "Sanatan Dharm ki jai ho."

"There was a huge ruckus. We rushed to the spot on hearing the commotion," said advocates. On October 6, Rakesh Kishore approached the dais when a bench led by the ex-CJI was hearing the mentioning of cases by lawyers, removed his shoe, and tried to throw it at the judge. Later, the SC refused to initiate contempt action against him, though the Bar Council of India suspended him from practice.

Thirupparankundram lamp lighting row: HC asks Chief Secretary, ADGP to appear on Dec 17

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Madurai

The Madurai Bench of the Madras High Court on Tuesday directed Tamil Nadu Chief Secretary and ADGP (L&O) to appear before the court through video conference on December 17 in the Thirupparankundram lamp lighting row case.

The Union Home Secretary has been included as a party to the proceedings.

During the hearing of a contempt plea, Additional Advocate General Veera Kathiravan, appearing for the State, informed that a special leave petition filed by the Tamil Nadu authorities challenging the single judge order on lighting the lamp atop the Thirupparankundram hill was pending before the Supreme Court.

Justice G R Swaminathan, hearing the contempt petition filed by Rama Ravikumar, directed the Chief Secretary and Additional Director General of Police (Law and



Order) to appear via video conference on December 17. Ravikumar, represented by Advocate MR Venakatesh had moved the court seeking proceedings against the Madurai District Collector,

Sonia redefined politics by shunning power Gandhi



As Sonia Gandhi turned 80 on December 9, 2025, it marked a creditable milestone in her long and illustrious political career. Sonia Gandhi gifted the rights-based architecture, which has changed the very face of politics.

Sonia Gandhi established that basic needs no longer remain an act of magnanimity or charity of the State, but constitute a statutory right of the people. Right to Work (MGNREGA); Right to Food; and Right to Education are symbols of a new political agenda. The Adivasis Forest-Rights Act, Removal of Manual Scavengers Act and Land Acquisition Act are among

the landmark legislations brought in by Sonia Gandhi. She gave the decisive push to the Women's Reservation Bill by getting it passed in the Rajya Sabha. She also brought Right to Information, which the present government is trying to throttle.

She has made people-centric politics. She sought to reach out to people and deliver benefits in the form of guarantees in Karnataka and Telangana that has now become the new norm. Following her example, all political parties are focusing on delivering benefits to the people.

A pivotal figure in Indian politics, Sonia Gandhi has the distinction of being the longest-serving Congress President from 1998 to 2017 and again from 2019 to 2022. Under her leadership, the Congress party won two consecutive general elections and governed 16 States. She stands out for her enormous contribution to galvanizing and strengthening the party and strengthening its ideological moorings.

Sonia Gandhi redefined politics. By personal example, she proved that politics is not pelf, position and power, but service and sacrifice. After Mahatma Gandhi, Sonia Gandhi is the one, who steered clear of power politics and made social reform an essential part of politics.

Renunciation of power by Sonia Gandhi set her apart in the world of politics. This is something unparalleled in the world history. After receiving the Presidential Invite to form the government, to step back and decline it, seems something just out of this world. There is no example of Prime Minister-Designate politely, but firmly, declining the post.

It was no case of sour-grapes. After the general election in 2004, where Sonia Gandhi defeated a seemingly-invincible Atal Behari Vajpayee, she was elected Congress Parliamentary Party (CPP) leader, followed by her election as UPA Parliamentary Party leader, leading to Presidential Invite to form the government.

After Rajiv Gandhi's assassination, she refused to be drawn into politics, as she always equated power with poison. In 1997, when the nation was on the brink of a grave situation, it set her thinking. The values and ideals, for which Mahatma Gandhi, Indira Gandhi and Rajiv Gandhi sacrificed their lives, were threatened to be destroyed, in an hour of folly and failure of its greatest guardians and guarantors, the people. She felt her decision to stay away from politics could endanger the hallowed national legacy for which Mahatma Gandhi, Indira Gandhi and Rajiv Gandhi laid down their lives.

That was the time when she felt impelled to step into politics, not just to save the Congress, but to save the idea of India. Sonia Gandhi plunged headlong into politics, to rescue, protect and uphold the Gandhian ideals. Rest, as they say, is history.

She is a great leader in the galaxy of Congress leadership and worthy of her mother-in-law Indira Gandhi. Sonia

Gandhi's marriage with Rajiv Gandhi also brought her in close contact with Indira Gandhi. She had the privilege of being under the tutelage of her mother-in-law. When Indira Gandhi was out of power in 1977, Sonia Gandhi came to personally look after her mother-in-law. Nothing more exemplifies her innate Indianness.

Sonia Gandhi has come to enjoy pan-Indian stature, as she established personal connect with people across the States. This helped her to galvanize the Congress party and bring it back to power.

Quickly, she grappled with the nitty-gritty of parliamentary practices. There are at least two examples where she put to shame the indomitable Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee. Staying within the confines of parliamentary decorum, Sonia Gandhi came up with the most trenchant criticism of the Vajpayee government that still remains etched in the memory of the people.

She slammed the Vajpayee government for the shameful

spectacle of External Affairs Minister Jaswant Singh escorting dreaded terrorists to Kandahar. Secondly, during the debate on draconian POTA law, Sonia Gandhi slammed Prime Minister Vajpayee, saying it was his "moment of reckoning" and that he had to choose between the duty of his high office and the internal pressures of his party and its sister organisations.

Stung by the criticism of Sonia Gandhi, Prime Minister Vajpayee exercised the right to reply close to midnight in the Central Hall of Parliament in the first-ever Joint Session of Parliament to pass POTA. Vajpayee struggled to respond to her always and hardly proved himself to be a match to her, whenever she on her feet on issues.

People still look up to her because she enjoys highest credibility, for matching her precept with practice.

(Author is a special invitee to Congress Working Committee and former APCC president)

Retired judges object to 'motivated campaign' against CJI Surya Kant

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

Several retired judges of the Supreme Court and High Courts issued a statement on Tuesday expressing "strong objection to the motivated campaign targeting Chief Justice of India Surya Kant in the wake of his remarks in proceedings concerning Rohingya migrants".

The statement noted that an open letter was issued on December 5 by some former judges, lawyers and the Campaign for Judicial Accountability and Reforms (CJAR), raising "deep concern at certain unconscionable remarks made about Rohingya refugees on December 2" by a top court bench that was hearing a plea alleging custodial disappearance of Rohingya refugees in India.

Underlining that "disparagement of the Supreme Court is unacceptable", the statement said judicial proceedings should only be subject to fair and reasoned criticism.

"What we are witnessing, however, is not principled disagreement but an attempt to delegitimise the judiciary by mischaracterising a routine courtroom proceeding as an act of prejudice.

"The Chief Justice is being attacked for asking the most basic legal question: who, in law, has granted the status that is being claimed before the court? No adjudication on rights or entitlements can proceed unless this threshold is first addressed," the statement said.

It said the campaign against the CJI omitted the bench's clear affirmation during the proceedings that no human



Chief Justice of India Surya Kant

being on Indian soil, citizen or foreigner, can be subjected to torture, disappearance or inhuman treatment, and that every person's dignity must be respected.

"To suppress this and then accuse the court of 'dehumanisation' is a serious distortion of what was actually said," the statement signed by more than 40 judges said.

It said if every "searching judicial question" on nationality, migration, documentation or border security is accused of hate or prejudice, judicial independence itself would be at risk. "We therefore affirm our full confidence in the Supreme Court and in the CJI, condemn motivated attempts to distort

the court's remarks and personalise disagreement into attacks on individual judges; and support consideration of a court-monitored SIT into the illegal procurement of Indian identity and welfare documents by foreign nationals who have entered Bharat in violation of law," said the statement signed by 44 retired judges.

It said the country's constitutional order require both humanity and vigilance.

"In upholding human dignity while safeguarding national integrity, the judiciary has acted in accordance with its oath. It merits principled support, not vilification," the statement said.

Curtail litigation, not generate it, SC on revenue map case

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

The Supreme Court on Tuesday stressed that any unnecessary remand of a matter for fresh consideration by a higher court should be avoided as it generates fresh round of litigation.

The idea is to curtail the litigation and not generate it, a bench of Justices Rajesh Bindal and Manmohan said, as it set aside an order of the Allahabad High Court, which had remanded back a matter — related to authorities rejecting a man's application for correction of a revenue map — for fresh consideration after hearing all parties concerned.

While dealing with the appeal, the top court noted that court had taken the wrong premise and interpretation of Section 30 of the Uttar Pradesh Revenue Code, 2006, which deals with maintenance of map and the field book. The bench said this could have generated unnecessary further litigation.

"We may also add that earlier view by this court was that in case there were violations of principles of natural justice, the matter was to be remanded for affording opportunity of hearing to the party concerned. However, with the passage of time, the view changed," the bench said. It further said, "The idea is to curtail the litigation and not generate it. Any unnecessary remand by a higher court generates fresh round of litigation, which should be avoided."

Initially, the application filed before the collector seeking correction of map for a plot was

dismissed. Later, the Additional Commissioner also dismissed the appeal against the collector's order. After around 17 years, again an application was filed seeking correction of revenue map but the same was rejected by the concerned authority.

The matter had then reached the High Court which remanded the issue for fresh consideration after affording due opportunity of hearing to all concerned.

Referring to Section 30 of the Code, the apex court bench noted the collector is duty-bound to maintain, in the manner prescribed, a map and a field book for each village and any changes made in it have to be recorded annually or after such longer intervals as may be prescribed. "If the facts of this case are examined, the issue regarding the correction of map stood settled between the parties when the appeal filed by the private respondents against the order passed by the Collector was dismissed on September 4, 2001. The maps were already final," the bench said.

It said after the purchase of the land, an effort made by the private respondents to get the revenue map corrected had failed and they could not be permitted to raise the same issue after a gap of over 17 years. The bench said it was not a case where any error was found in the revenue record which deserved correction under Section 30 of the Code. While allowing the appeal, the bench set aside the order passed by the High Court.

SC examines grant of 'personal hearing' to those with bank accounts declared fraud

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

The Supreme Court on Tuesday wondered what purpose the grant of "personal hearing" would serve to the bank account holders whose accounts were declared as fraud after following due diligence prescribed by the Reserve Bank of India in 2017.

A bench of Justices JB Pardiwala and KV Viswanathan was hearing a plea of the State Bank of India challenging a decision of the Calcutta High Court which directed giving personal hearing by following the principle of natural justice to such bank account holders.

"How do you justify the grant of personal hearing to you when the banks what they are actually doing as per the RBI circular is due diligence at the back end and providing you an opportunity to put your point forward in writing after issuance of a show cause notice," the

bench told senior advocate K Parameshwar, appearing for private firm Amit Iron Pvt Ltd.

At the outset, Solicitor General Tushar Mehta, appearing for the country's largest bank SBI, said that insisting on a personal hearing causes concrete prejudice to the banks and to the integrity of the regulatory regime, while the borrower suffers no real prejudice so long as it has had a full and effective opportunity to place its case in writing and have that case duly considered.

He said the circular (Master Directions on Fraud, 2017) relating to declaration of fraud was required for two essential purposes — the sheer magnitude of the number of banking frauds in the country has shown a demonstrable rise, requiring the RBI to step in and provide a mechanism to be followed by the entire banking sector. Also, any impact on any bank or banking sector has a direct effect on the nation-

al economy; therefore, the financial strength of the banking sector is always a prime consideration.

Giving figures for banking frauds and the amounts involved from 2022 to 2025, according to the RBI's latest Annual report for 2024-2025, Mehta said the number of frauds for 2022-23 was 13,494 involving ₹18,981 crore, in 2023-24 there were 36,060 bank frauds involving amount 12,230 crore and in 2024-25 there were 23,953 bank fraud cases involving 36,014 crore.

He submitted that these increased incidences of banking fraud and malpractices led the RBI to constitute multiple committees and working groups, including the Amitava Ghosh Committee in 1991, and the NL Mitra Committee in August 2003. "Based on the recommendations of these committees and working groups, the RBI issued circulars/directions from time to time advising banks on major fraud-prone areas,

new modus operandi detected earlier, and necessary safeguards to be adopted for the prevention of fraud.

"However, despite this, there were problems, including delays in the detection of fraud, inadequate reporting to the RBI, and delays in reporting and alerting other banks on fraud by borrowers," Mehta submitted.

He said that the experience of RBI and deliberation before the expert committees revealed why such frauds take place and are perpetrated and one of the most important problems was the inevitable lack of coordination between various banks.

"This resulted in a borrower committing fraud with one bank, and they would approach another bank and avail huge finances, due to the delay in detection and fraud reporting. This would result in a chain reaction and, therefore, the RBI Directions, inter alia, elaborated on the said issues," the SBI said.

Enhanced education funding shows results: Meghalaya CM



Meghalaya Chief Minister Conrad K Sangma said on Tuesday that the State education department's annual budget has been increased from ₹2,000 crore to ₹3,500 crore in recent years, the highest so far, and the impact of this investment is "becoming visible".

Navy Chief begins four-day visit to Brazil

Navy Chief Admiral Dinesh K Tripathi on Tuesday began a four-day visit to Brazil to consolidate the bilateral maritime security cooperation. Admiral Tripathi will hold discussions with Brazilian Defence Minister Jose Mucio, Chief of the Joint Staff of the Brazilian Armed Forces Admiral Renato Rodrigues de Aguiar Freire and Commander of the Brazilian Navy Admiral Marcos Sampaio Olsen.



JP Nadda to lay foundation of BJP State office in Shimla



The BJP national president and Union Health and Family Welfare minister Jagat Prakash Nadda would lay the foundation stone and perform Bhoomi Pujan of the proposed BJP State-level party office in Shimla on Saturday, a statement here said on Tuesday.

Karnataka lost ₹5,474 crore to cyber frauds in three years

Karnataka Home Minister G Parameshwara on Tuesday said that over the last three years, people in the State have lost ₹5,474 crore to cyber frauds, of which the police have managed to recover ₹627 crore so far. The minister was responding to a question from Sakleshpur BJP MLA Cement Manju in the Legislative Assembly.



Left-wing extremism districts drop from 126 to 11: Centre

RAJESH KUMAR ■ New Delhi

The Centre on Tuesday said the number of districts affected by left-wing extremism has decreased from 126 in April 2018 to 90 in July 2021, 70 in April 2024, 38 in April 2025, and further to 11 in October 2025, with only three districts now considered to be the "most affected" by left-wing extremism. The Pioneer carried a report on December 8, 2025 that only three districts are now most affected by Naxalism in Chhattisgarh.

Responding to a supplementary during the Question Hour in Lok Sabha, Minister of State for Home Nityanand Rai said the number of affected States have gone down from 10 in 2014 to five in 2025 (till October) showing a reduction of 50 per cent while the number of districts affected by Left Wing Extremism (LWE) has witnessed a sharp decline of 91 per cent from 126 to 11 during the period.

"However, to prevent the

Only three districts now most-affected by Naxalism in Chhattisgarh

RAJESH KUMAR ■ New Delhi

The number of Naxalism-affected districts in India have reduced to 38 from 46 across nine States, according to a recent Government review. An updated review by the Government now narrows down the most affected districts to three and districts of concern to four. All three most-affected districts — Bijapur, Narayanpur and Sukma — remain in Chhattisgarh, the State historically at the heart of Naxal activity.

The four districts of concern are Kanker in Chhattisgarh, West Singhbhum in Jharkhand, Balaghat in Madhya Pradesh, and Gadchiroli in Maharashtra, where Naxal influence is waning but targeted development is still required. Districts under the concern category are those where Naxal activity has sharply declined but continued development efforts are needed to consolidate peace and stability. The review was undertaken as part of the National



Representative photo of a tribal village.

Policy and Action Plan to Address Left Wing Extremism (LWE), 2015, under which the Union and State Governments work together. Officials said the subcategory of most affected districts was created in 2015 with 35 districts to ensure focused deployment of resources. Following periodic reviews, the number was reduced to six in April 2025. Districts under the Security Related Expenditure (SRE) scheme — one of the key financial support programmes for combating

Naxal influence — are classified as either LWE-affected or Legacy and Thrust (L&T) districts. The latest review places 27 districts under the L&T category. These include eight districts from Odisha, six from Chhattisgarh, four from Bihar, three each from Jharkhand and Telangana, and one each from Andhra Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra and West Bengal. These districts have largely witnessed the end of Naxalism but remain

prospective sites for its expansion. Hence, continued government support is required for capacity building, according to official records. The districts covered under the SRE scheme were last revised on April 1, 2025. After the review, 46 districts were listed as SRE districts — six categorised as "most affected," six as "districts of concern" (DOC), and six as "other LWE-affected." In the subset category of "Legacy & Thrust" districts, 28 were included.



CPI (Maoist) from re-establishing itself in areas recently freed from the influence of left-wing extremism, 27 districts have been included under the Security Related Expenditure (SRE) scheme as 'Legacy and Thrust Districts,' the minister said.

He said under the leadership of the Prime Minister and the successful guidance of the Home Minister, left-wing extremism will be "eradicated by March 2026, and there is no

escape for them now".

Underlining the outcome of the zero-tolerance policy of the central Government against Naxals, Rai said that from the highest level of Maoist violence witnessed in 2010, the incidents have seen a massive decline of 81 per cent in 2024.

The minister said Maoist violence had resulted in 6,508 deaths from 2004 to 2014 (till May that year), which included 4,684 civilians and 1,824 security personnel. Rai said in

the following decade, between 2015 and 25 (till May), the number of deaths dropped by 71 per cent to 1,868, which included 1,404 civilians and 464 security personnel. He said 44 deaths have been reported between May and November this year.

The minister added that left-wing extremists who surrender are being provided with immediate grants and other financial assistance, such as ₹5 lakh for high-

ranking cadres, ₹2.50 lakh for other cadres, additional financial incentives for surrendering with weapons, and a monthly stipend of ₹10,000 for three years for training.

He said that besides improving security infrastructure in such States, schools, ITIs, Kaushal Vikas Kendras, banks, and ATMs have been set up as part of the overall development. To ensure all-round development, the Modi Government adopted a

"Whole of Government" approach in 2015 and formulated a comprehensive policy and action plan, Rai said.

Under this plan, various security and development measures have been undertaken, with States being provided with CAPF (Central Armed Police Forces) battalions as needed, he added. "Currently, 574 companies are deployed in the Left-Wing Extremism-affected areas," he said.

No law should burden citizens, reforms to ease life: PM Modi

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Tuesday said no law should be a burden on any citizen, and rules and regulations should always be for people's convenience. Addressing an NDA parliamentary party meeting, Modi also said the country is now in a full-fledged "Reform Express" phase, where reforms are happening rapidly and with clear intent.

The Government's reforms are completely citizen-centric and not just economic or revenue-focused. The goal is to remove everyday hurdles of people so that they can grow to their full potential, the prime minister emphasised. Briefing reporters after the meeting, which was attended by all NDA MPs, Union Parliamentary Affairs Minister Kiren Rijiju said Prime Minister Modi gave very good guidelines for the lawmakers and conveyed that the most significant issue in the third term of his Government is the "Reform Express".

"I want to stress that the Narendra Modi Government's 'Reform Express' has started to move. It will not stop. This reform is to change the life of every citizen. When we talk about reform, some people will think of it as economic reform, some people will think of it as political reform,



PM Narendra Modi being felicitated by MPs for the alliance' victory in Bihar Assembly elections during the NDA Parliamentary Party meeting at Parliament premises in New Delhi on Tuesday. Union Ministers Amit Shah, Rajnath Singh, JP Nadda and others also seen

administrative reform or cultural reform. Reform means improvement in the life of every citizen.

"The prime minister has stressed that whatever law is framed, it should have no provision which is harmful or causes inconvenience to any citizen. The rules and laws should not become a burden on the life of a common citizen. Everyone must ensure

that rules and regulations are for the convenience of the common people and improve their lives," Rijiju said.

Quoting Modi, Rijiju said rules and regulations must be for improving the system, not to harass people, and there should be no law which harasses people without any reason. "Now we will work in this direction. The central Government, the State

Governments and the local self-governing bodies like the municipalities and panchayats, all should work in (this) direction," he said.

Sources said Modi urged the MPs to actively share real problems faced by ordinary people, so that the "Reform Express" can reach every household and remove day-to-day hardships. Modi also said he wants to end the

culture of 30-40 page forms and unnecessary paperwork, stressing that there is a need to provide services at citizens' doorsteps and eliminate repeated data submissions, the sources said.

The prime minister recalled that the Government trusted citizens by allowing self-certification, and this has worked successfully for 10 years without misuse.

Modi stressed that both ease of life and ease of doing business are the top priorities of his Government, the sources said.

At the outset of the meeting, Modi was felicitated for the NDA's massive victory in the recent Bihar elections.

Union ministers Rajnath Singh, Amit Shah and JP Nadda, who is also the BJP president, were among those present at the meeting held at the Parliament House complex. Modi was garlanded by JD(U) leader Sanjay Jha and Rashtriya Lok Morcha chief Upendra Kushwaha — both Rajya Sabha members.

In the 243-member Bihar Assembly, which went to polls last month, the NDA secured 202 seats, paving the way for JD(U) supremo Nitish Kumar to return as chief minister for the 10th time. Among the alliance partners, BJP won 89 seats, JD(U) 85, LJP (Ram Vilas) 19, Hindustani Awam Morcha (Secular) five, and Rashtriya Lok Morcha four.

Amit Shah slams Opposition over Vande Mataram debate

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

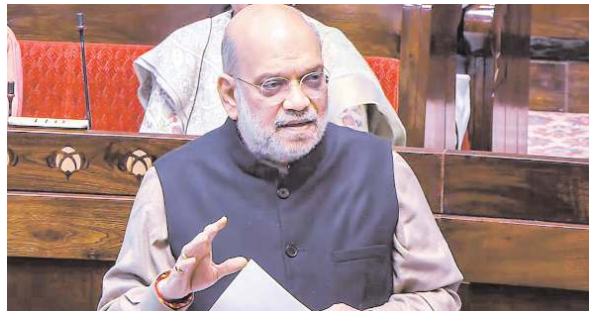
Home Minister Amit Shah on Tuesday alleged that opposing 'Vande Mataram' is in the blood of the Congress and said Jawaharlal Nehru not divided the song in two parts to begin appeasement, the partition of the country would not have taken place.

Initiating the debate in the Rajya Sabha to mark the 150th anniversary of Vande Mataram, he slammed the Opposition for linking the debate on the national song with the upcoming West Bengal elections.

He said Vande Mataram was the "mantra" that awakened India's cultural nationalism, and remains as relevant today as it was during the freedom struggle. He stressed that the song will remain relevant in the coming days as well, in taking the country towards Viksit Bharat.

Shah also attacked Congress for questioning the need for a debate on Vande Mataram, and accused first prime minister Jawaharlal Nehru of "dividing" the poem and limiting it to merely two stanzas.

"When Vande Mataram completed 50 years in 1937, Jawaharlal Nehru ji divided it into two parts, and limited it to two stanzas," Shah said,



Home Minister Amit Shah speaking during a debate on Vande Mataram in the Rajya Sabha at the Parliament in New Delhi on Tuesday

triggering uproars from Opposition benches. He said many like him believe that the nation would not have been partitioned if the hymn 'Vande Mataram' was not "divided into two", alleging that appeasement politics began ever since.

"That is where appeasement politics started and that appeasement resulted in partition of the country. Many like me believe, if Vande Mataram was not divided into two due to appeasement politics, this nation would not have been partitioned," Shah said.

Targeting the Opposition, he said many members of the Congress were considering the discussion on Vande Mataram as a political manoeuvre or a weapon to divert attention from issues. "We do not fear discussing

issues. We do not boycott Parliament. If Parliament is not boycotted and allowed to function, then discussion on all issues will take place. We do not fear, nor do we have anything to hide. We are ready to discuss, be it any issue," he said.

He further added that when the song completed 100 years, the country was under Emergency when opposition leaders were jailed.

Shah also accused several Opposition leaders of not according respect to Vande Mataram when sung in Parliament and alleged that "the disrespect and insult toward Vande Mataram have run in the veins of leadership of the principal Opposition party ever since the freedom struggle and continues even today".

Muslims cannot sing Vande Mataram: Maulana Arshad

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

Amid the debate on Vande Mataram in Parliament, Jamiat Ulama-i-Hind on Tuesday said it had no objection to anyone singing the national song, but the poem carries polytheistic beliefs, and Muslims cannot associate anyone else with worship.

Maulana Arshad, the outfit's president, said love for one's country is one thing, and worshipping it is another.

He said Muslims do not need a certificate from anyone to prove their love for this nation.

"We have no objection to anyone reading or singing Vande Mataram. However, we want to make it clear once again that a Muslim worships only one God, and

cannot associate anyone else with this worship," Madani said in a statement.

He said that the contents of the poem Vande Mataram are based on polytheistic beliefs and ideas, particularly four of its verses where the homeland is explicitly likened to a deity and words of worship are used for it.

This is against the fundamental belief and faith of any Muslim, he said.

The Constitution of India grants every citizen freedom of religion (Article 25) and freedom of expression (Article 19), Madani said.

Under these provisions, no citizen can be forced to adopt any slogan, song, or ideology that goes against their religious beliefs or sentiments, he said.

"The unparalleled sacrifices of Muslims and the elders of Jamiat Ulama-i-

Hind in the freedom struggle, especially their efforts against the partition of the country, are as clear as daylight."

"Their struggle for the unity and safety of this nation after independence can never be forgotten," he said.

Madani emphasised that the debate on Vande Mataram must take place within the framework of respect for religious beliefs and constitutional freedoms, not in a manner of political blame-game.

"Jamiat Ulama-i-Hind appeals to all national leaders not to use such sensitive religious and historical issues for political gain, but to fulfil their constitutional responsibility by promoting mutual respect, tolerance, and unity in the country," he said.

Allahabad HC directs UP DGP on prevention of corruption cases

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Prayagraj

Observing that matters relating to the Prevention of Corruption Act are being conducted most casually, the Allahabad High Court has directed the principal secretary (home) and the DGP of Uttar Pradesh to look into them and issue necessary directions.

The above direction was passed by Justice Samir Jain allowing a bail application of one Suresh Prakash Gautam, against whom an FIR was lodged under the Prevention of Corruption Act, 1988 in Saharanpur district. After going through the record, the court found that according to the allegations, Gautam was posted as a labour enforcement officer. He demanded a bribe from the complainant to settle his claim. Gautam was apprehended

red-handed by the trap team and the bribe money was recovered from his possession. About ₹21.50 lakh were also recovered from his house.

The court said, "But it reflects that neither the hands of the applicant nor of the complainant were washed at the spot where the trap was made," adding that the alleged recovered bribe money was not sealed at the spot.

The court said the record also suggests that the recovery memo of the alleged bribe has also not been prepared on the spot and it appears that all these proceedings have been conducted at the police station. "Considering these facts, the argument advanced by the counsel for the applicant that the trap proceeding appears to be doubtful cannot be completely brushed aside at this stage," the court added.

Delhi car blast: NIA arrests one more doctor who harboured Dr Umar

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

The National Investigation Agency (NIA), probing the "white-collar" terror module linked to the Delhi car blast, arrested one more doctor for allegedly harbouring Dr Umar-un-Nabi, the suicide bomber, and destroying evidence related to the terror attack. Bilal was produced before a designated court of Principal District and Sessions Judge Anju Bajaj Chandra here who remanded him to NIA custody for seven days.

The court also extended the NIA custody of Amir Rashid Ali, another accused in the Red Fort blast case, who was produced alongside Bilal, by seven days.

The NIA said in its statement on Tuesday that its investigation into the conspiracy behind the deadly terror act continues with the help of various central and State

gations, Bilal had knowingly harboured Dr Umar-un-Nabi, the man who was driving the explosive-laden car that blasted outside the Red Fort area. He is also alleged to have provided him logistical support besides being involved in destruction of evidence related to the terror attack.

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The NIA said in its statement on Tuesday that its investigation into the conspiracy behind the deadly terror act continues with the help of various central and State

agencies to unravel all the threads of the conspiracy.

After taking over the investigation, the NIA took the custody of seven people, including three doctors Dr Muzzamil Ganaie, Dr Adeel Razzar, and Dr Shaheena Sayered and a religious preacher Maulvi Irfan.

The NIA had arrested two people Amir Rashid Ali and Jasir Bilal Wani alias Danish. Ali is the one in whose name suicide bomber Umar had purchased the car that was loaded with explosives including ammonium nitrate. The same car exploded outside the Red Fort.

The "white collar" terror module was busted by the Jammu and Kashmir Police along with their counterparts in Uttar Pradesh and Haryana and it led the investigators to Faridabad's Al Falah University where 2,900 kg of explosives was recovered.

Editor's
TAKE

The politics of heritage and beyond

As parties clash over the meaning of Vande Mataram in Parliament, a deeper question emerges: should a symbol of unity be pulled into the realm of partisan politics?

Vande Mataram. Sujalam suphalam malayaja-sitalam, sasya-syamalam mataram! The first stanza of the national song translates to: "I bow to thee, Mother-rich with waters, rich with fruits, cool with the southern breeze, verdant with crops and fields-Mother!" This heartfelt ode to Mother India by the great poet Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyaya is once again at the centre of a political storm. The political class across the country agrees with and bows to its sentiment, yet it is being fiercely debated in Parliament. The debate over *Vande Mataram* in Parliament on December 8 was more than an exchange of rhetoric; it revealed the complicated intersections of heritage, nationalism, and electoral politics in contemporary India.

When Prime Minister Narendra Modi invoked Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyaya's iconic hymn, it carried enormous symbolism-drawing upon a century of collective memory, pride, and sacrifice. Yet it also raised an uncomfortable question: should such a sacred piece of India's freedom struggle become the subject of partisan debate? Should not our freedom struggle and its symbols remain sacrosanct? *Vande Mataram* occupies a sacred space in India's national imagination. Born out of Bankim's *Anandamath*, it emerged as the rallying cry of the freedom struggle, uniting Indians across communities during the anti-colonial movement. Tagore's voice at the 1896 Congress session, Bhikaji Cama's flag in Stuttgart bearing its words, and the chants during the 1905 anti-Partition protests all cemented its status as a symbol of resistance and aspiration. It was never merely a poem; it was an emotional force field. This is why its invocation in Parliament is both powerful and fraught with the danger of the song itself being drawn into political crossfire.

Prime Minister Modi's speech wove together strands of spirituality, nationalism, and cultural pride. He recalled Gandhi's admiration for *Vande Mataram* and used it to position his government as the custodian of a nationalist legacy. But, coming ahead of the 2026 Bengal elections, it can also be construed as an electoral plank. As observers noted, cultural symbolism served not just as homage but as political strategy. Bengal's pride in Bankim, Tagore, and its reformist icons makes any such invocation deeply consequential in the state's political arena. India's cultural symbols belong to the nation, not to any party-neither the Congress nor the BJP. When political actors selectively elevate one icon while denigrating others-such as the recent remarks against Raja Ram Mohan Roy-they risk distorting the pluralistic, composite spirit that animated the Bengali renaissance and the freedom movement.

Bankim, Tagore, Roy, Vivekananda, and many others did not belong to a party; they belonged to the nation at large. They represented an expanding universe of ideas that shaped modern India. Appropriating or diminishing them harms the national cause-the nation loses more than it gains. When symbols like *Vande Mataram* become contested rather than cherished, their universal appeal and their power to unite-dissipates. That is a loss not just for politics, but for the nation.

From grid burden to green power: Goa's solar-powered water supply

The future of India's renewable strategy will depend on striking the right balance between utility-scale projects and widespread community-level solarisation



SHRIPAD
YESSO NAIK

India stands at a defining juncture in its clean-energy transformation. Guided by the Panchamrit commitments announced by Hon'ble Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi ji at COP26, the country has set for itself some of the world's most ambitious climate goals: 500 GW of non-fossil fuel capacity by 2030, meeting half of its energy requirements from renewables by the same year, reducing projected carbon emissions by one billion tonnes, cutting carbon intensity by 45 per cent, and ultimately achieving Net Zero by 2070. These targets are not distant aspirations; they form the backbone of a nationwide movement that is steadily gathering momentum.

India's progress in renewable energy over the past few years has been nothing short of remarkable. The country has already crossed the milestone of achieving 50 per cent of its total installed power capacity from renewable sources, with the renewable energy portfolio now reaching an impressive 259 GW. Solar and wind continue to drive this growth with record annual capacity additions. The rise of ultra-mega solar parks, hybrid renewable corridors, offshore wind zones and floating solar plants reflects a sector in rapid evolution. Yet, complementing these large-scale investments is an equally important push for distributed solar, one that brings clean energy directly to households, farmers and communities.

Two flagship programmes of the Government of India underscore this vision. The PM Surya Ghar: Muft Bijli Yojana, launched by the Hon'ble Prime Minister, is propelling rooftop solar to an unprecedented scale. With a target of one crore household installations and subsidies streamlined through a single national portal, residential solar has moved from novelty to mainstream, easing electricity bills and empowering families to become producers of clean energy.

Similarly, the PM-KUSUM scheme has emerged as a transformative initiative for India's farmers. By solarising agricultural pumps, both standalone and grid-connected, and enabling decentralised renewable plants in rural areas, the scheme reduces diesel dependence, stabilises farm incomes and supports climate-resilient agriculture. Thousands of farmers across the country have already benefited, turning agricultural fields into clean-energy hubs.

However, as India accelerates renewable capacity growth, the challenges associated with bulk RE-intermittency, long-distance transmission requirements, land availability and rising grid congestion-highlight the need for innovative, decentralised energy models.



INDIA'S PROGRESS IN RENEWABLE ENERGY OVER THE PAST FEW YEARS HAS BEEN NOTHING SHORT OF REMARKABLE. THE COUNTRY HAS ALREADY CROSSED THE MILESTONE OF ACHIEVING 50 PER CENT OF ITS TOTAL INSTALLED POWER CAPACITY FROM RENEWABLE SOURCES, WITH THE RENEWABLE ENERGY PORTFOLIO NOW REACHING AN IMPRESSIVE 259 GW

The writer is the Union Minister of State for Power and New and Renewable Energy, Government of India

shripadyessonaik
@shripadynaik
The Pioneer

Distributed generation, especially rooftop and community-level solar, is proving to be a powerful solution. By producing electricity where it is consumed, it reduces network stress, improves voltage stability, cuts transmission losses and significantly lowers infrastructure costs for power utilities. The future of India's renewable strategy will depend on striking the right balance between utility-scale projects and widespread community-level solarisation.

This becomes particularly relevant for missions such as the Jal Jeevan Mission (JJM), which aims to ensure clean tap water for every rural household. Water supply systems depend heavily on energy-intensive pumping infrastructure. Solarising these assets offers dual benefits: substantial cost savings for departments and uninterrupted service delivery for communities. It is against this backdrop that a noteworthy clean-energy initiative has emerged from Old Goa, showcasing how renewable power can strengthen essential public utilities.

At the pumping station near Podar School in Old Goa, a pioneering solar project has been implemented under the CSR support of IREDA, a PSU under the Ministry of New and Renewable Energy. The facility, which operates 60 HP pumps to lift water from a ground-level sump to an overhead tank, generally functions between 9 am and 1 pm, coinciding perfectly with peak solar generation hours. By integrating a 45 kW solar plant with net-metering capability, the station not only meets its daytime energy needs but also exports surplus clean power to the grid.

The impact has been significant. The Drinking Water Department now saves nearly ₹4.0 lakh annually in electricity expenditure, while revenue from surplus energy generation further strengthens its operational budget. Environmentally, the system offsets close to 45 tonnes of CO₂ every year, equivalent to the

carbon absorption of more than 2,050 mature trees. Nearly 650 residents now rely on a water supply system powered substantially by renewable energy. With a project cost of ₹28 lakh, a payback period of seven years and a system life of around 25 years, the initiative will continue delivering free, clean electricity for nearly two decades after cost recovery — an exemplary model of sustainable public infrastructure.

The success of this project reflects the foresight and commitment that guide my efforts to strengthen essential public services through clean and sustainable energy solutions. These efforts are deeply inspired by the broader national vision shaped by Hon'ble Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi ji, under whose guidance India has emerged as a global front-runner in renewable energy adoption. At a time when cities across the world struggle with deteriorating air quality, such grassroots initiatives demonstrate how local innovation can drive both environmental protection and community development.

The solarisation of the Old Goa pumping station is more than a technical upgrade; it is a blueprint for India's sustainable future. As the nation marches towards its Net Zero commitment, the next phase of growth must lie in harnessing renewable energy for unconventional, often overlooked applications such as water supply systems, government buildings, rural institutions, agricultural infrastructure and community assets. Each such project not only reduces the burden on the grid but also brings clean energy closer to the people it serves.

India's clean-energy journey is ultimately a collective one. With the right blend of visionary leadership, technological innovation and community participation, projects like the one in Old Goa will become the cornerstone of a greener, more resilient and more inclusive future.

The Pioneer
SINCE 1865

A spiritual path to ending gender inequality



RAJYOGI BRAHMA
KUMAR NIKUNJ JI

2ND OPINION
THE PIONEER

The Constitution of India not only guarantees equality for women but also empowers the State to adopt measures of positive discrimination to offset the cumulative social, economic, educational and political disadvantages they have historically faced. Yet, despite such strong constitutional safeguards, women continue to struggle for dignity, independence and equal opportunity. This compels us to ask why gender inequality remains so deeply embedded in our society.

Although India has made significant progress over decades of reform and development, our core mindset regarding gender has remained largely unchanged. For centuries, society has believed that the roles, characteristics and status of men and women are determined solely by biological sex-natural, fixed and therefore unquestionable. Gender thus became tied to predetermined behaviours and expectations assigned to boys and girls.

From the moment a child is born, society begins the subtle but powerful process of gendering. The birth of a son is often celebrated, while the birth of a daughter is still viewed with hesitation or sorrow in many households. As children grow, boys are encouraged to be assertive, bold and independent, while girls are conditioned to be quiet, obedient and confined to domestic spaces. These distinctions are not inherent differences; they are social constructs created and perpetuated by all of us. Within this rigid framework, we overlook a fundamental truth: men and women are not meant to be adversaries. Instead, they are meant to play complementary roles that create harmony and balance in society.

At the spiritual level, the human soul-regardless of whether it resides in a male or female body-possesses both sets of qualities. Courage, determination and resilience coexist naturally with compassion, nurturing and gentleness. What we often label as "male" or "female" qualities are, in reality, learned traits rather than innate ones. True empowerment therefore requires a shift in consciousness. It calls for moving beyond body consciousness to soul consciousness, where we recognise that our identity is not confined to gendered expectations. By connecting the self with the supreme source-the highest and purest form of energy-we awaken the inherent balance within us.

This spiritual connection restores self-respect, self-confidence and self-reliance. It nurtures holistic growth, enabling individuals to embody both strength and empathy, both willpower and compassion. Our scriptures remind us that the Almighty embodies the complete spectrum of these qualities. When we anchor ourselves to this supreme source, we too receive this wholeness.

When we identify solely with the physical body and its gendered limitations, we develop only partially. Spirituality thus becomes not an escape from reality but a prerequisite for social harmony. It dissolves hostility and division, replacing conflict with integration, equality and unity. It opens the "third eye" of wisdom, allowing us to access an inner reservoir of strength and purity. The real solution to gender inequality does not lie in replacing male dominance with female dominance. It lies in freeing both men and women from the chains of gender bias rooted in body consciousness. When individuals rise to higher awareness, society becomes more just, balanced and compassionate. Let us therefore empower ourselves spiritually and work together to ensure that every individual, regardless of gender, can live with dignity, equality and purpose.

The writer is a spiritual educator & popular columnist

The Pioneer
SINCE 1865

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Passengers deserve fair compensation

This refers to recent news concerning IndiGo's fiasco, which is presently under the scrutiny of the Prime Minister's Office. The airline's conduct appears to have violated regulations framed in accordance with international aviation standards. Large-scale flight cancellations caused severe inconvenience to passengers, while other airlines took advantage of the situation by sharply increasing airfares. Many travellers, compelled by urgency, were forced to make expensive last-minute bookings to reach their destinations.

Compensation for the loss of valuable time, financial resources, and mental peace resulting from such lapses is a legal imperative. The Directorate General of Civil Aviation has failed to discharge its responsibilities effectively, leading to reputational damage. Operating aircraft beyond stipulated terms and conditions results in physical and psychological fatigue among pilots, thereby increasing safety risks.

The Consumer Protection Act, 2019, allows for class-action proceedings against companies providing deficient or misleading services. Although the Ministry of Civil Aviation issued fare-cap orders and regulatory directions, the evident negligence of both IndiGo and the DGCA warrants strict penalties.

YUGAL KISHORE SHARMA | HARYANA

Reactive regulation threatens aviation trust

The recent IndiGo airline imbroglio exposes how reactive regulatory oversight, combined with a market duopoly, leaves passengers vulnerable and weakens confidence in the aviation sector's long-term prospects. The spillover effects of mismanagement have also cast a shadow over airline privatisation plans in the post-pandemic era. India's domestic aviation market is dominated by IndiGo and Air India, making it particularly sensitive to disruptions. Swift regulation and delayed intervention undermine operational credibility and investor confidence alike. In contrast, mature aviation markets such as the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada, and Australia enforce strict consumer protection laws. Airlines in these countries are mandated to compensate passengers for cancellations and delays.

The 2022 Southwest Airlines crisis led to legal action, government investigation, and substantial reimbursements, reinforcing accountability and consumer trust. Indian aviation, however, continues to rely on ad hoc measures during crises rather than preventive oversight.

The IndiGo episode highlights how market concentration amplifies systemic risk. India must shift from reaction to anticipation by enforcing accountability and safeguarding passenger trust.

VIJAY SINGH ADHIKARI | UTTARAKHAND

Switch off stress, switch on life

With the rapid expansion of the digital revolution worldwide-through information technology, the internet, and smartphones-the practice of employers contacting employees beyond official working hours has increased sharply. Emails, phone calls, and instant messages now intrude into personal time, blurring the boundary between work and rest. This constant connectivity has resulted in rising levels of mental and physical stress among employees. To address this growing concern, the concept of the "Right to Disconnect" was first discussed in Europe and has since gained global attention. Even after completing their daily tasks, many employees feel compelled to respond to work-related communications, often out of fear of professional repercussions.

To provide legal protection and work-life balance, discussions on this right have been underway for several years. In a Bill presented in Parliament, MP Supriya Sule proposed the establishment of an Employee Welfare Authority. The Bill grants employees the right not to respond to work-related emails or calls beyond official working hours. Its objective is to reduce stress in both personal and professional life. As work increasingly shifts online, such legislation is timely and necessary to protect employee well-being.

DATTAPRASAD SHIRODKAR | MUMBAI

PIC TALK

Employees wearing Santa Claus costumes perform during a parade celebrating Christmas at Lotte World Adventure in Seoul, South Korea.

PHOTO: PTI

DIGITAL EXPERIENCE

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WORLD HUMAN RIGHTS DAY AND ITS GROWING GLOBAL RELEVANCE

Since 1948, the United Nations has observed 10 December each year as World Human Rights Day. The primary objective of this observance is to promote and protect the fundamental human rights of people across all nations. The theme for Human Rights Day 2025, "Human Rights, Our Everyday Essentials," highlights how basic rights such as clean air, food, shelter, dignity, and personal safety are inseparable from everyday life.

At present, the world is witnessing widespread geopolitical turbulence. Prolonged conflicts such as the Israel-Palestine crisis and the Russia-Ukraine war continue to destabilise regions, displace populations, and deprive millions of their basic rights. Tensions and internal unrest in several other parts of the world

further deepen humanitarian suffering. It increasingly appears that global peace has become fragile and uncertain.

Despite the devastation caused by two world wars, humanity continues to resort to armed conflict rather than dialogue, cooperation, and mutual respect. The consequences are borne not by leaders but by ordinary citizens, who lose their rights to life, security, health, and freedom. All religions advocate peace, compassion, and coexistence. Yet these principles are often ignored in practice. Upholding human rights is essential for lasting peace.

Without their protection, societies may increasingly descend into conflict in pursuit of dignity and justice.

JITHES MORI | GUJARAT

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

Water warriors lead the water revolution in countryside

As the world is literally sitting on a hot spot, notwithstanding these CoPs, which are hilariously optimistic without any substance of change, we in India need to take drastic action at the level of civil society as well as within the government, with a bottom-up innovative approach right from village level to national level

FIRST
Column



VK
BAHUGUNA

Amidst when the world climate change negotiators are busy pulling wires in Brazil at the UNFCCC CoP 30 summit, the world, especially those suffering most from climatic vagaries, is watching to see if there is a thaw between the divergent positions of developed and developing countries, especially in truly adhering to the cardinal principle of common but differentiated responsibilities. But this is a matter to be dealt with separately.

As this writer has been repeatedly warning government negotiators and policy makers about charting out South-South climate-resilient developmental planning to ward off the deleterious effects of climate change on the environment, especially on food, nutrition and water security of billions of people, Brazil's Tropical Forest Forever Facility (TFFF) climate change fund of \$125 billion to support tropical forests through government and private contributions, spending \$4 per hectare on improving forests, is a welcome move. Brazil herself has committed \$1 billion to this fund. India has supported it in principle. The fund may help in water and biodiversity conservation.

However, India should take the lead in focusing on creating a fund in collaboration with China and the Group of 77 to conserve and manage water for better climate management, as the temperature has already crossed the 1.5 degree Celsius threshold this year, as reported by Carlo Buontempo, the Director of the European Climate Agency Copernicus, and this is going to severely impact world hydrology. If India can take a lead as it did in creating the 'Solar Alliance' by creating a water conservation fund, forests will automatically be taken care of.

As the world is literally sitting on a hot spot, notwithstanding these CoPs, which are hilariously optimistic without any substance of change, we in India need to take drastic action at the level of civil society as well as in government, with a bottom-up innovative approach from the village level to the national level.

Already, the Water for Every Household scheme launched in 2019 by the Prime Minister is a resounding success with community participation and has provided



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STRESS

The writer is a former
Principal Secretary and
Agriculture Production
Commissioner, Government
of Tripura

dailypioneer
 @VKBahuguna2
 bahuguna-vk-
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almost 78.58 per cent (15.56 crore out of 18 crore) households access to tap water connections, compared to around 7 crore earlier, before 2019. Let us substantiate water conservation from the examples created by our civil society.

The water availability study done by the Central Water Commission using space inputs (2019) assessed the average annual per capita water availability for the years 2021 and 2031 as 1,486 cubic metres and 1,367 cubic metres respectively. Annual per-capita water availability of less than 1,700 cubic metres is considered a water-stressed condition, whereas annual per-capita water availability below 1,000 cubic metres is considered a water-scarcity condition. The country's rivers run dry, aquifers deplete, and millions face seasonal scarcity, underscoring the urgency of sustainable practices.

So, we need to look into our countryside to search for water warriors beyond government programmes. The country has shown time and again that our society produces leaders from the grassroots level, from the freedom struggle to tree conservation through the world-famous Chipko Movement, to now "sow seed to get water" (pani bao pani pao) launched successfully in Uttarakhand by Mr Mohan Kandpal and others elsewhere in the country. This has become amply clear in the 2025 Water Awards announced by the

Ministry of Jal Shakti, Government of India. These water warriors brought to fame this year have shown how a public movement can change the countryside scenario drastically.

This writer, while in the Planning Commission, had in 2010 assessed the great work done by Popat Pawar in the Hiware Bazar village in Ahmednagar district of Maharashtra, turning a ghost village into one bubbling with prosperity solely due to water harvesting in adjoining forests under the joint Forest Management programme, resulting in huge agricultural and milk production.

In this context, water conservation awards serve as beacons of hope, spotlighting grassroots innovators, communities and institutions that transform despair into resilience. These examples celebrate individual and collective triumphs but also produce scalable models, fostering a culture of stewardship. The National Water Awards, recognising innovations, have galvanised action, proving that local ingenuity can recharge ecosystems and empower marginalised sections who have been facing acute water stress.

This year's awards were announced and conferred by President Droupadi Murmu on November 18, 2025 at Vigyan Bhawan, New Delhi, and honoured 46 winners — a 30 per cent increase from prior years. These honours were backed by field

verifications from the Central Water Commission and the Central Ground Water Board.

At the heart of this narrative stands Mohan Chandra Kandpal, a 59-year-old chemistry teacher from Kande village in Uttarakhand's Almora district, whose lifelong crusade earned him the Best Individual (North Zone) award. For 36 years, Kandpal has traversed the fragile Himalayan foothills, where deforestation and erratic monsoons have rendered ancient springs and traditional stone reservoirs dry. Fate struck him in 1990 when he observed the Riskan River's tributaries dwindling amid drought coupled with soil erosion. He resolved to act and launched "Pani Bao-Pani Uggao" (Sow Water-Grow Water), a masterstroke that charged women and youth into action, blending this rhetoric with indigenous community wisdom and mobilisation.

Kandpal's strategy hinges on khals and chaals-shallow percolation pits that capture runoff, allowing rainwater to recharge aquifers. Between 1990 and 2012, he spearheaded the digging of thousands, coupled with afforestation drives planting over 100,000 saplings of native species like oak and rhododendron. People changed ploughing techniques in agricul-

tural fields to till perpendicular to slopes, creating furrows that channel water deeper into the earth rather than letting it run off. This low-cost tweak, disseminated through farmer workshops, amplified recharge efficiency. By 2025, over 5,000 such structures dotted 40 villages, reviving 27 depleted sources in hamlets like Valna, Bitholi, Kande and Ganoli. Complementing this is the "Woh Pani Hoga" (That Water Will Be There) initiative, which has bolstered the Riskan River's flow, turning seasonal streams perennial. It was purely a public programme, though MGNREGA funds might have been dovetailed.

Another well-known example is Dr Rajendra Singh, the original "Waterman of India", whose 50-year odyssey in Rajasthan's arid heartland earned the 2001 Ramon Magsaysay Award and the 2015 Stockholm Water Prize-the "Nobel of Water". Singh revived over 1,000 villages by resurrecting more than 8,600 johads (earthen check dams) and bamboo drip systems in the Aravalli hills, and by targeting the parched Alwar district he started "Pani Panchayats" — village water parliaments-thus democratising resource governance. The results are visible: five rivers now flow perennially across 6,500 sq km, enabling afforestation of 1.5 million trees and the repopulation of ghost villages.

Yet another example is from Bihar's flood-prone plains, where Kishore Jaiswal, a Munger-based activist, bagged the Best Individual (Eastern Zone) award for desilting the Ganga's tributaries. He, with the NGO Jalsrot Vikas Sansthan, mobilised 20,000 volunteers to remove five lakh cubic metres of silt from the Chandan River, restoring flow to 100 villages.

In another example of social institutions, the Art of Living Social Projects received two awards for reviving more than 50 lakes in Karnataka and Tamil Nadu through yoga-integrated clean-ups, impacting one million lives. The Barmer district administration also bagged the rainwater harvesting award, which was received by the District Collector, Tina Dabi. If each block of the country does this, prosperity and progress with climatic adaptation will be at our doors and happiness on the faces of millions of rural masses. These people have shown, in a much better manner, how to tackle climate change in tandem with communities with the big CoPs of the UNFCCC.

The end does not justify the means



BALRAJ
MEHTA

"Though no one can go back and make a brand new start, anyone can start and make a brand new ending": Carl Bard

A few days ago, I came across a news item about a young married woman from a prominent business family being found hanging in her room. This was utterly shocking because such an incident is least expected to occur in well-established, educated, and successful business families. I have no access to intimate details about the personalities involved or the circumstances, other than the published news reports. We will have to await the completion of investigations to know why such a drastic step was taken by this lady.

My mind went back to 1985 when, unfortunately, a young mother in our family circle died of 90 per cent burns suffered while cooking on a kerosene stove. It was a suicide-plain and simple — but this angle was deliberately not pursued by the family because she had two small children who were to be brought up by her husband. It was no small matter that a few months earlier she had expressed a strong desire to permanently return to her maternal home. Her father had not accepted this and forced her to go back and "adjust" in her marital home. She obviously could not, and found no other way out of her unhappy life.

Later, in 2004, I witnessed another tragedy unfold in our residential colony in Delhi Cantt when a schoolboy from Class 12 consumed poison and his body was found behind the complex near the railway tracks. We came to know that the boy had been forced by his father to take up the PCM stream, while his own interests lay in the arts. He was regularly shamed and harshly treated at home due to his inattention to studies and poor grades, which led to the extinguishing of a promising young life.

Globally, over 7,27,000 people die by suicide every year, as per the WHO report of March 2025. In India, the National Crime Records Bureau pegged suicides at 1,53,052 in 2020, 1,64,033 in 2021, 1,70,924 in 2022, and 1,71,418 in 2023. Some key trends and demographics are listed below:

- Gender disparity: Males account for 72-73 per cent of suicides.
- Age groups: Young adults aged 18-30 years and people aged 30-45 years account for the largest share-about two-thirds.
- Major causes: Family problems, illnesses, mental health issues, bankruptcy or indebted-

ness, and other work-related problems.

- Professional groups: Daily wagers constitute the largest group, followed by housewives and the self-employed.
- Academics: Students facing academic pressure and family expectations are the most vulnerable strata.
- Risk factors: Access to firearms, sleeping pills, pesticides, drug addiction, and/or previous suicide attempts.

It has been established by various studies that a large percentage of people with mental disorders do not receive proper treatment due to lack of awareness, attached social stigma, and an acute shortage of professionals. The WHO has assessed an ideal requirement of three psychiatrists per one lakh population, whereas availability worldwide is 1.7 and, in India, only 0.75 per one lakh.

Admittedly, the social stigma attached to mental ill health is very strong, leading to facts being hidden from society, friends, and even family members. The indicators may be visible much before full-blown symptoms appear, but are not understood, acknowledged, or accepted. In my experience, about half of us have one or another quirk or kink in our personality that needs sorting out, but we cannot see our blind spots, and even if we do, we do not accept them comfortably. Parents are often unaware of the warning signs in their children and do not realise the grave consequences of ignoring

these red flags until it is too late.

If proper preventive and curative measures are taken for emerging symptoms at an initial stage, much damage can be prevented. Warning signs of an upcoming mental storm could include one or more of the following:

- Sleep or appetite changes
- Decline in personal care and hygiene
- Mood changes
- Social withdrawal and absenteeism
- Difficulty in managing bodily pain
- Unusual drop in academic or professional performance
- Unexplained problems in coherent thinking or speech
- Increased sensitivity to sound, light, touch, or smells
- Apathy towards surroundings
- Fear or nervousness
- Any other unusual behaviour

As brought out earlier, a suicidal impulse can be triggered by mental illness, physical disease, relationship stress, heartbreak, loss of loved ones, or major financial, professional, or personal setbacks. Any person behaving abnormally will usually give sufficient indications that can be picked up by a concerned friend or family member.

The American Society for the Prevention of Suicide lists the following warning signs:

1. **Talk:** If a person talks about
- Killing themselves
 - Feeling helpless

- Having no reason to live
- Being a burden to others
- Unbearable pain
- 2. **Behaviour:** Indicated by
- Increased use of alcohol or drugs
- Online searches for ways to end their life
- Withdrawal from activities
- Isolation from family and friends
- Sleeping too much or too little
- Visiting or calling people to say goodbye
- Giving away prized possessions
- Unnatural aggression
- Constant fatigue
- 3. **Mood:**
- Depression
- Anxiety
- Loss of interest
- Irritability
- Humiliation or shame
- Agitation or anger
- Sudden relief or improvement

Admittedly, significant efforts are being made by governments and social organisations to spread awareness, but incidents do not seem to be declining. Regular sensitisation of teachers, parents, and business managers must be ensured by the concerned authorities. Dignity of labour and respect for the workforce need to be inculcated from school onwards. The newly instituted labour laws should help address issues faced by the salaried class in the private sector, but effective monitoring of remuneration for domestic staff and gig workers is essential. A grievance redressal mechanism must be established at various levels. Creating awareness about cybercrimes and the harmful effects of digital addiction also needs focused attention.

Ultimately, as a society, we must reorient our sensitivities away from material pursuits and refocus on respect for life and care for fellow human beings-especially the disadvantaged. Family units must remain cohesive while respecting individual choices. Parents must realise that a present artist son is far better than a forever-lost engineer son, and that a divorced daughter is far better than a dead daughter.

We need to talk more openly about mental health and remove the shame associated with it. When we are physically unwell, we go to a hospital for treatment, and once better, we exercise to remain fit. Similarly, to deal with day-to-day stress, we should not hesitate to seek counselling or therapy when required, treating it as joining a "mental gym". It is not a shame, but simply a set of exercises to become mentally stronger.

As someone said, "It is not weak to ask for help. It is like using a flashlight when you are lost in the dark."

The writer is a Major General and has been decorated with Sena Medal

@majgenbalrajmehta
 @majgenbalrajmehta
 gen-balraj-mehta-sm-585098308

REPM: Boosting electronics



T SENTHIL SIVA
SUBRAMANIAN



N
MANIKANDAN

The 21st century is a promising era for India, which has achieved global recognition in attaining a meaningful economy. In fact, this year, 2025, India has touched 8.2 per cent GDP growth during the period from July to September, which demonstrates the capability of several factors, including consumer demand and the supply chain. The present need of the hour is rare earth permanent magnets. The Government of India has strongly emphasised their significant role, which has led to the launch of the Rare Earth Permanent Magnets (REPM) scheme. The scheme would revolutionise India's advanced manufacturing ecosystem. This scheme envisions the creation of a rare earth valley and manufacturing zones in India, thereby boosting the electronic economy. This initiative would bring together several stakeholders-government, industry, start-ups and academia, especially Higher Educational Institutions (HEIs)-to collaborate with localised manufacturing industries and the Government of India, thereby transforming products from lab to market. REPM would encourage HEIs to partner with UGC and AICTE to develop a model curriculum on rare earth permanent magnets, minor degree programmes, electives, minor capstone projects and internships on rare earth permanent magnets. The REPM scheme would facilitate HEIs to develop MOOC courses in collaboration with industries on rare earth permanent magnets. There is ample opportunity for HEIs to partner with Sector Skill Councils under the Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship, Government of India, to develop skill enhancement courses on rare earth permanent magnets, which could be aligned with NEP 2020 and the National Credit Framework (NCF) across different job roles from Level 4 to Level 8, fulfilling skill mission objectives.

REPM would allow and provide opportunities, especially for women students, to collaborate with the National Institute for Entrepreneurship and Small Business Development (NIESBUD) and the Entrepreneurship Development Institute of India (EDI), Gujarat, under the Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship and the Ministry of Science and Technology, Government of India, respectively, to explore and start their own ventures under the Swavalambini Programme scheme in the field of rare earth permanent magnets. The REPM scheme would drive HEIs to interface with localised manufacturing industries, with a special focus on SMEs working on rare earth magnets. This activity

would enhance community-based learning under the Government set-up known as MY Bharat.

HEIs can selectively work on different manufacturing problem ideas and concepts of local industries and thereby ideally develop:

1. Idea-to-business models
2. Proofs of concept (PoCs) for rare earth permanent magnets

The collaboration would provide a significant opportunity for HEIs to design and develop Minimum Viable Products (MVPs), which would lead to Swadeshi designs on rare earth permanent magnet products. This, in turn, would further enhance India's autonomy and self-reliance and thereby meet the objectives of "Viksit Bharat" / "Amrit Kaal". HEIs would get a platform to develop design simulation tools and technology frameworks for rare earth permanent magnet products.

Research explorations on REPM would receive a significant boost at the Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR), Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO), Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO), and Bhabha Atomic Research Centre (BARC). The scheme is expected to bring tangible and intangible investments to the nation. It would also promote HEIs to create design-thinking-based products and process solutions, simulation software tools and techniques. Additionally, REPM would add value to responsible research innovation, leading to intellectual property rights such as trademarks and copyrights in rare earth permanent magnets. These innovations would give a major push to Higher Educational Institutions to reinvent technologies using rare earth permanent magnets that could be applied across different sectors, especially the Electronic Manufacturing Services (EMS) and Electronics System Design and Manufacturing (ESDM) sector — an industry initiative under the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY), Government of India.

This will be a boon for boosting the electronic economy, leading to the development of Vocal for Local products, processes and solutions.

The products developed in laboratories will reach the market through a lab-to-market approach, achieving Technology Readiness Levels (TRL), Manufacturing Readiness Levels (MRL), Consumer Readiness Levels (CRL) and Investment Readiness Levels (IRL). Best practices in rare earth permanent magnets would strengthen partnerships with the Global South in knowledge transfer, capacity building and R&D, while enabling inclusive growth through links with rural development and women entrepreneurship.

Dr T Senthil Siva Subramanian and Dr N Manikandan are Head of the Institute-Industry Interface and Postdoctoral Fellow, Hindustan College of Science and Technology, Mathura, and IIT Delhi

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FROM THE

WORLD

MEXICO

Ex-Governor

taken into custody

Mexican federal authorities took a former governor of the northern border state of Chihuahua into custody in preparation for charging him with laundering money diverted from state coffers while in office, the Attorney General's Office said Monday. Ex-Chihuahua Gov. César Duarte – identified in a statement only as “César N” in keeping with rules over the protecting the identity of the accused – was extradited by the United States three years ago to face state charges of embezzlement and was under house arrest. Juan Carlos Mendoza Luján, a lawyer representing Duarte, told the newspaper El Heraldo de Chihuahua that Duarte had been detained and that his lawyers were still gathering information, but that his detention appeared unlawful.

PAKISTAN

Hindu woman,

daughter abducted

A Pakistani Hindu woman and her minor daughter have been reportedly kidnapped by unknown gunmen in Pakistan's Sindh province, officials said. The incident took place on Saturday in the Sindh Mohalla in Sher Shah, Karachi. According to initial accounts provided by the family, the woman was taken away by three armed individuals who forced her into a white Alto car moments after she stepped out of her home. The case has sparked a wave of fear and concern within the local community. Shiva Kaachi, a civil rights activist for the Hindu community in the Sindh province, said Rani and her minor daughter were still missing, and her family feared she would be forcibly converted to Islam and then married off to one of the abductors.

Cambodia vows fierce fight against Thailand

ASSOCIATED PRESS

■ Surin

Cambodia's powerful Senate President Hun Sen on Tuesday vowed that his country would carry out a fierce fight against Thailand as a second day of widespread renewed combat between the Southeast Asian neighbours drove tens of thousands of people to flee border areas.

Fighting broke out following a skirmish in which one Thai soldier was killed on Sunday night, despite a ceasefire that ended fighting in July over competing territorial claims. The five days of fighting then left dozens dead on both sides, and forced the evacuation of over 100,000 civilians. In a sign that neither side was willing to back down, Thai Prime Minister Anutin Charnvirakul said Tuesday that Cambodia had not yet contacted Thailand about possible negotiations and the fighting would continue. "We've got to do what we've got to do," he said.

"The Government will support all kinds of military operations as planned earlier." He had said on Monday that military action



Local people taking refuge in Prey Chamkar Ta Doak market in Banteay Meanchey province in Cambodia, near the border with Thailand

PTI

was necessary to safeguard the nation's sovereignty and ensure public safety.

In a statement posted to Facebook and Telegram, Hun Sen claimed that his country had refrained from retaliating on Monday, but overnight began to fire

back at Thai forces, saying Cambodia would "weaken and destroy enemy forces through counterattacks."

Thailand's military said Cambodia attacked Thai positions with artillery, rocket and drone attacks on Tuesday. Thailand says that

Cambodian forces also fired at its troops Sunday and Monday, but each side blames the other for firing the first shots. "Cambodia wants peace, but Cambodia is forced to fight back to defend its territory," Hun Sen wrote. He was Cambodia's long-

serving prime minister until 2023, when he was succeeded by his son Hun Manet, but is still widely seen as the country's de facto leader.

Cambodia's military announced on Tuesday that the new fighting had killed seven civilians and wounded

20. A Thai military spokesperson announced Tuesday that three soldiers have been killed in the new fighting.

Thailand on Monday carried out airstrikes along the frontier, which it said were a defensive action targeting military installations. Thai military spokesperson Rear Adm. Surasant Kongsiri said Tuesday that such operations would continue "until attacks stop."

Ordinary citizens, meanwhile, had to deal with life after being relocated from the danger zones. An evacuation shelter at a university in Thailand's northeastern city of Surin is hosting more than 3,600 people. Evacuees sit or lie on thin mats spread across the floor, and several have set up small tents in their allotted areas as sleeping spaces.

At lunchtime, some line up with their own plates to receive cooked rice, while others wait in place to be served ready-to-eat meals packed in small plastic bags. An army band plays for their entertainment. Portable fans cool them during the day.

Blankets, in piles beside them, keep them warm at night, when temperatures can fall to as low as 18°C

(64°F). "We were preparing to evacuate. We hadn't left yet. But when we heard shots, we hurried out immediately," cassava farmer Pan-ngam Kanchangthong told.

"I was scared. Who wouldn't be scared of shelling?" The Thai army said almost 500 temporary shelters have been set up in four border provinces, accommodating 125,838 people. Additional refugees from the fighting are expected to stay with relatives in safe areas.

Evacuees on the Cambodian side had similar experiences. "I felt terrified when I heard the sound of the explosion from the shelling. At that time, I was working at the garment factory," said 44-year-old Vach Neang, a father of seven.

"I called my wife and my kids but couldn't reach them, and by that time the sound of explosions was getting louder, so the factory owner let us go home," said Vach Neang, speaking at a former market in Cambodia's northwestern province of Banteay Meanchey that has been repurposed as a shelter. He added that he packed just a few clothes before leaving his home.

Sri Lanka bids farewell to 2 IAF choppers involved in relief work

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

■ Colombo

Sri Lanka Air Force bid farewell to two IAF helicopters after they ended their rescue mission in cyclone-hit island nation, even as INS Gharial reached Trincomalee with 700 tonnes of essential relief material from Tamil Nadu.

The Indian Air Force (IAF) choppers, which departed on Monday, were involved in airlifting immediate relief supplies to distressed communities, evacuating those affected and providing air cover for those involved in rescue missions in the aftermath of havoc caused by Cyclone Ditwah and adverse weather conditions.

"Their contribution significantly enhanced Sri Lanka's national disaster response during a period of urgent need," the Sri Lankan Air Force said in a statement issued on their official website on Monday.

The Indian High Commission in Colombo said the helicopters evacuated



264 survivors and airlifted about 50 tonnes of relief material, adding that more Indian relief action was due.

Meanwhile, the Indian Navy Ship (INS) Gharial reached Trincomalee on Monday, with 700 tonnes of food items, essentials and clothing from Tamil Nadu.

"The consignment was formally received by Deputy Foreign Minister Hon Arun Hemachandra, who appreciated India's swift and sustained assistance," the

mission posted on social media on Tuesday.

Tamil Nadu has sent about 1,000 tonnes of essential food items and clothes to Sri Lanka under Operation Sagar Bandhu. Of these, about 300 tonnes reached Colombo in 3 Indian Naval Ships on Sunday. Additionally, the fully operational Indian field hospital Mahiyanganaya near Kandy, is delivering life-saving treatment to flood-affected communities.

"Equipped for trauma care,

surgeries, ambulance support and critical medical services, the facility ensures urgent healthcare reaches where it matters most," it added. Indian Army's Engineering Task Force is also working alongside Sri Lankan authorities to restore connectivity along the main road arteries of Sri Lanka in the wake of devastation caused by Cyclone Ditwah, it said.

Indian High Commissioner Santosh Jha on Monday met Nalinda Jayatissa, Minister of Health and Mass Media and discussed the ongoing efforts to bolster healthcare in Sri Lanka. The two discussed "deployment of field hospitals and BHISHM Cube, providing urgent and quality health care to the people of Sri Lanka in the wake of #CycloneDitwah. They also discussed next steps to strengthen these efforts," it said. As of Tuesday, 9 am, 638 people have been killed, with 191 missing, in catastrophic floods and landslides caused by extreme weather conditions since November 16. India was the first country to respond to Sri Lanka's international appeal for assistance under its Operation Sagar Bandhu.

A UNDP analysis released on Sunday said out of the estimated 2.3 million affected by Ditwah, more than half were women, and it hit 1.1 million hectares or almost 20 per cent of the island's land area. The cyclone triggered 1200 landslides in the hill country, where the impact of devastation was severe.

"The floodwaters reached nearly 720,000 buildings, about one in every twelve buildings in the country. Over 16,000 kilometres of roads, enough to circle the island's coastline more than twelve times, were exposed to flooding. Similarly, over 278 km of railway tracks and 480 bridges were located in flooded areas," Azusa Kubota, UNDP Resident Representative in Sri Lanka, said.

Cyclone Ditwah struck regions already weakened by years of economic stress, he added. "After one of its worst economic crises and a slow but steady recovery underway, Sri Lanka cannot shoulder more debt to cover the costs of a rebuild from this massive natural disaster," he said. International partners must step up with affordable financing and innovative instruments that enable a rapid recovery and rebuilding with greater resilience, without the country falling off the debt cliff, he added.

UN to grant \$4.5 million to help cyclone-hit Sri Lanka

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

■ Colombo

The United Nations on Tuesday announced the release of \$4.5 million from its Central Emergency Response Fund to assist Sri Lanka in recovering from the devastation caused by Cyclone Ditwah. "Cyclone Ditwah has upended lives across the country, and many families are still struggling to meet their basic daily needs," said Marc-André Franche, United Nations Resident Coordinator in Sri Lanka.

He said that the UN is working closely with the Government, civil society partners and the humanitarian community in Sri Lanka to ensure a coordinated response guided by evidence and priority needs. "This emergency funding will help us reach those most severely affected with the support they urgently need," he added. Sri Lanka's Minister of Foreign Affairs Vijitha Herath thanked the UN for the contributions. "The impact of the disaster on all sectors, including daily livelihood, economy, and agriculture, requires continued international support for the rebuilding process," Herath posted on social media.

The funds will enable the UN to rapidly scale up emergency food assistance, shelter support, and water, sanitation and hygiene services for the severely affected. Communities across Sri Lanka are continuing to grapple with the widespread impacts of the cyclone, with thousands of families still displaced after extensive damage to housing and infrastructure. Even as response efforts are underway, latest assessments indicate that the effects of the cyclone are broader and more severe than initially understood, leaving many communities in urgent need of sustained support to fully recover from Cyclone Ditwah.

Over 1.7 million people from over 500,000 families were affected by the cyclone-triggered extreme weather, with 638 deaths and 191 missing.

Pakistan, Indonesia ink seven MoUs to bolster cooperation

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

■ Islamabad

Pakistan and Indonesia on Tuesday inked seven agreements to further bolster bilateral cooperation in diverse fields as Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif held "productive" talks with Indonesian President Prabowo Subianto here.

This is Subianto's maiden visit to Pakistan. The last presidential visit from Indonesia to Pakistan was undertaken by President Joko Widodo in 2018.

According to State-run Radio Pakistan, the MoUs include cooperation in higher education, a grant program for Indonesian state scholarships, and facilitation of business development for small and medium enterprises. It also includes collaboration between national archives, narcotics

control and cooperation in combating illicit drug trafficking, cooperation in Halal trade and certification, and in the field of health.

Addressing a joint press meet after talks, Prime Minister Shehbaz assured to work collectively with the Indonesian President to achieve the targets set for collaboration in different fields. "What we have decided is to promote our bilateral trade, culture, and interact in the field of medical health, education, and vocational training," he said.

He further said that Pakistan will also send its doctors, dentists, medical professionals and other related experts to Indonesia to fulfil requirements in the field of medicine.

He said that bilateral trade of \$4.5 billion between the two nations largely com-

prised palm oil imported by Pakistan and added that the two sides discussed ways to take collective measures to balance the trade through exports of agricultural products and IT services from Pakistan.

"We have discussed how to take corrective measures to balance this balance of trade through agricultural exports from Pakistan, through exports of IT-led initiatives," he said.

He said that bilateral relations span over 75 years, and the visit of the Indonesian President coincided with the anniversary of the establishment of their diplomatic ties. "Let us agree to celebrate these 75 years with great fanfare in Jakarta and in Islamabad simultaneously, that will convey a very loud and clear message to all and sundry," he said.

Lithuania Govt declares national emergency

ASSOCIATED PRESS

■ Vilnius

Lithuania's Government on Tuesday declared a national emergency over security risks posed by meteorological balloons from Russia-allied Belarus that have violated its airspace in recent weeks. Tensions between Lithuania and Belarus have escalated after the balloons forced Lithuania to repeatedly shut down its main airport, leaving thousands of people stranded.

"In combating the Belarusian hybrid attack, we must take the strictest measures and defend the areas most affected by this attack," Prime Minister Inga Ruginiene said. The announcement followed a Cabinet meeting of the Baltic state, which is a NATO member and strong backer of Ukraine in its fight against the Russian forces who launched a full-scale invasion in February 2022.

TENSIONS BETWEEN TWO NATIONS ROSE AFTER BALLOONS FORCED LITHUANIA TO SHUT DOWN ITS AIRPORT

Interior Minister Vladislav Kondratovic said that the state of emergency means the army would be given the possibility to patrol in the border area, together with police and other uniformed services or alone, in order to detect the balloons.

He promised the impact on civilians would be limited. While the balloons are used to smuggle cigarettes into Lithuania, officials in Vilnius see their numbers and trajectories as deliberate acts of disruption orchestrated by Belarus. Kondratovic said Lithuanian prosecutors launched an investigation into the balloons and that the secret services would provide

information about the connection with the Minsk regime. "I have no information that the Belarusian side is trying to curb the senders of the balloons," the minister said. "And this is one of the proofs that this is a hybrid attack." In October, Lithuanian authorities closed two border crossings in response to the airspace violations by the balloons.

Belarus' authoritarian President Alexander Lukashenko denounced Lithuania's move to close the border as a "mad scam" and part of a "hybrid war" against his country. He suggested that Vilnius itself needs to combat the smuggling of contraband.

Lithuania, Poland, and other European Union countries in the region have in recent years accused Belarus of other activities aimed at triggering instability, including with cyberattacks. They also accuse Minsk of direct-

ing a large influx of migrants from the Middle East and Africa to their borders to create a migration crisis. "Belarus is signalling to Lithuania that it can raise the price at any moment," Linas Kojala, head of the Geopolitics and Security Studies Centre in Vilnius, told. "Yesterday with weaponised migration, today with balloons that are hardly separable from regime control." Europe overall has been on high alert since drone intrusions into NATO's airspace reached an unprecedented scale in September and the Russian invasion of Ukraine nears its fourth year.

However, smuggling balloons is a challenge unique to the Baltic states bordering Belarus. Representatives of the EU and NATO have expressed support but offered scarce concrete information about what could be done.



Mexican National Guardsman kills 3 fellow service members

ASSOCIATED PRESS

■ Mexico

A Mexican National Guardsman shot and killed three fellow service members at a barracks over the weekend in the western Mexican state of Michoacan, where the Government has surged security forces in the wake of recent high-profile killings. A federal official confirmed the shooting Monday to The Associated Press, requesting anonymity because they were not authorized to discuss it publicly. The shooting, which wounded a fourth service member, was under investigation, the official said. The suspect was in custody in Michoacan. The shooting occurred Saturday hours after a car bomb exploded in Coahuayana, Michoacan, killing five people outside a local police station. President Claudia Sheinbaum declined to give more details Monday.



ICC sentences Sudanese militia leader for Darfur crimes

ASSOCIATED PRESS

■ The Hague

Judges at the International Criminal Court (ICC) sentenced a leader of the feared Sudanese Janjaweed militia to 20 years imprisonment Tuesday for war crimes and crimes against humanity committed in the catastrophic conflict in Darfur more than two decades ago. At a hearing last month, prosecutors sought a life sentence for Ali Muhammad Ali Abd-Al-Rahman, who was convicted in October of 27 counts of war crimes and crimes against humanity that included ordering mass executions and bludgeoning two prisoners to death with an axe in 2003-2004. "He committed these crimes knowingly, willfully, and with the evidence shows, enthusiasm and vigour," prosecutor Julian Nicholls told judges at the sentencing hearing in November.

India-Russia Summit 2025: A quiet reset in a noisy world



BHASKAR
JYOTI
MAHANTA

When Vladimir Putin stepped down from his aircraft in New Delhi on the afternoon of December 4th, 2025, the moment felt almost symbolic. The world today is anything but settled - Europe still burns with conflict, the United States continues to tighten sanctions, Beijing expands its strategic ambitions, and global alliances are beginning to look like the chessboard of a new Cold War. Yet, there on Indian soil, two leaders greeted each other with familiarity, not caution. Prime Minister Narendra Modi's decision to personally receive President Putin, and later accompany him in the same vehicle, was a message written not in language but in gesture: India and Russia still trust each other, despite the storm outside.

We have watched the India-Russia relationship evolve for decades - from the days of Soviet camaraderie when every defence

installation in India seemed to carry Cyrillic markings, to the more uncertain period after the Soviet collapse, and now into this new era where India is no longer a passive customer, but an assertive nation charting its own destiny. This summit, the 23rd India-Russia Annual Summit, did not simply acknowledge that relationship - it renewed and reshaped it.

The defence discussions were among the most consequential. Russia remains one of India's oldest and most dependable military partners. The MiGs and Sukhois that roar over our skies, the T-90 tanks that guard our borders, and even the S-400 systems now protecting our strategic installations - all of these are reminders of how deeply intertwined the two nations' security frameworks are. What made this summit different was a new tone: the shift from buyer-seller to co-developer. I am told Russian officials privately reassured their Indian counterparts that Moscow is willing to open access to technologies that were once held back, and that Russia sees India as a long-term defence partner capable of building, not merely purchasing. On energy, Putin's



calm but firm declaration that Russia will continue to supply India with oil "without interruption" stood out. It was a direct counter to the pressure India has faced from Washington and European capitals ever since the war in Ukraine escalated. The truth is simple: India cannot compromise energy security because another part of the world is at war. Cheap Russian crude stabilized India's energy market when global oil prices went wild - a fact ordinary citizens may not realize,

but policymakers cannot forget.

Equally significant were the discussions on building a diversified economic roadmap. In the closed-door interactions, Indian negotiators emphasised the imbalance in trade: India imports far more than it exports.

For the first time in years, both sides agreed that the economic basket must expand - into sectors such as heavy engineering, manufacturing, fertilizers, skilled labour mobility, ports, shipping lanes, and even digital payments.

The idea of a payment system insulated from sanctions - using local currencies - was not just economics. It was strategy.

Another moment worth noting came during the leaders' joint statement at Hyderabad House. Modi did not explicitly mention Ukraine, yet his reminder that "peace and diplomacy remain the only viable path" was not lost on anyone in the room.

Putin, for his part, responded not with defensiveness, but with controlled pragmatism - signalling that Russia understands India's diplomatic balancing act and respects it.

For the United States, this summit will be read carefully. Washington has grown accustomed to India's partnership - be it in the Indo-Pacific, QUAD, defence cooperation, semiconductor supply chains, or intelligence sharing.

But India's relationship with Russia predates many of its modern partnerships. It is built on decades of reliability, shared technology, and geopolitical trust that did not disappear even when Moscow grew closer to Beijing. That continuity matters - especially for a nation like India, which seeks strategic autonomy and

not alliance dependency.

Does this visit change the trajectory of the Russia-Ukraine war? Not directly. It does, however, weaken the Western attempt to make Russia a pariah state. For Moscow, having India publicly reaffirm the partnership at a time when many nations are cautious is not a minor achievement - it is geopolitical oxygen.

Looking ahead, what does this summit mean for India?

If both sides follow through, India could emerge not just as a military and economic partner of Russia, but as one of the pivotal powers shaping the emerging multipolar order. The infrastructure corridors discussed - from the Northern Sea Route to the Chennai-Vladivostok maritime link - could reshape India's access to the Arctic, East Asia, and Eurasia. Co-manufactured defence platforms could strengthen India's capabilities and reduce dependence on Western suppliers vulnerable to sanctions and political conditionality. Continued access to Russian energy, nuclear cooperation, and joint technical research could bolster India's long-term capacities - especially as its population and economy continue to expand.

Yet, caution is necessary. Implementation - not headlines - will define the true legacy of this visit. Agreements must become factories, production lines, shipping routes, training programs, and operational military assets.

India must also ensure it remains balanced: no one partnership - Russian, American, or otherwise - should become a strategic crutch. In many ways, this summit tells us something deeper about India's foreign policy evolution. India is no longer choosing sides - it is choosing itself. And nations that choose themselves are the ones that shape history. Years from now, when scholars and diplomats revisit this moment, they may conclude that this was not just another leader-to-leader visit. It was an inflection point - when India proved, not through rhetoric but through action, that it will steer its path based on sovereignty, national interest, and long-term vision. The world may be dividing into camps again. India, instead, is building corridors.

The author is the Former Director General of Police, Assam and General Secretary of the Think Tank Society to Harmonise Aspirations for Responsible Engagement-SHARE

Bangladesh EC to announce poll schedule in next 2 days



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
Dhaka

Bangladesh Election Commission (EC) has completed all preparations to hold the 13th general elections in February and will announce the schedule in the next two days, a top official said on Tuesday. "After a meeting with the President (Mohammad Shahabuddin), the schedule would be announced tomorrow evening or the day after," Election Commissioner Abdur Rahmani Masud told reporters.

He said that the meeting is scheduled for Wednesday at the Bangabhaban presidential palace.

Meanwhile, the EC officials said that Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) AMM Nasir Uddin was expected to announce the schedule in a nationwide address.

The CEC met Chief Justice Syed Rezaat Ahmed on Tuesday at the Supreme Court ahead of the announcement of the date for elections and a referendum to seek public opinions on a series of reform proposals rolled out by the Muhammad Yunus-led interim government.

Former prime minister Khaleda Zia's Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) has emerged as the frontrunner, with its former ally Jamaat-e-Islami and its right-wing Islamic allies being the main

rival in the absence of deposed premier Sheikh Hasina's disbanded Awami League. Both parties have announced their nominees in the election for the 300-seat parliament.

Masud said that special emphasis will be given to ensuring the cooperation of all, including political parties, in the announcement of the election schedule. He also said that the symbols of any banned or suspended parties will not appear in the final postal ballots, in a veiled reference to the Awami League. A special tribunal last month sentenced Hasina to death on charges of crimes against humanity. She is currently in India. Most of her senior colleagues and activists in the party and Government were in jail awaiting trial on identical charges, while many of them are on the run at home and abroad.

The scenario made it difficult for Awami League leaders to contest the polls as independent candidates despite having a large support base. Meanwhile, tension between Jamaat-e-Islami and the BNP over election campaigning in the Sirajganj-1 constituency erupted into violence Monday night, injuring around 15 Jamaat activists, party sources said.

The BNP has denied involvement, blaming locals for the clash.

Zelenskyy refuses to cede land to Russia as he rallies European support

ASSOCIATED PRESS
Rome

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy has reaffirmed his firm refusal to cede any territory, resisting US pressure for a painful compromise with Russia as he continued to rally European support for Ukraine. "Undoubtedly, Russia insists that we give up territories. We, clearly, don't want to give up anything. That's what we are fighting for," Zelenskyy said in a WhatsApp chat late Monday in which he answered reporters' questions.

"Do we consider ceding any territories? According to the law, we don't have such a right. According to Ukraine's law, our constitution, international law, and, to be frank, we don't have a moral right either." In an interview with Politico released Tuesday, US



Ukraine President Volodymyr Zelenskyy and Pope Francis waving to journalists during their meeting in Castel Gandolfo AP

President Donald Trump again pressed Zelenskyy to accept the US proposal that Ukraine cede territory to Putin, arguing that Russia retains the "upper hand" and that Zelenskyy's Government must "play ball." Zelenskyy met on Tuesday with Pope Leo XIV at Castel Gandolfo, a papal residence

outside Rome, and is to have talks with Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni later in the day. The Vatican said the pope "reiterated the need for the continuation of dialogue and expressed his urgent desire that the current diplomatic initiatives bring about a just and lasting peace." The Holy See has tried to

remain neutral in the war while offering solidarity and assistance to what it calls the "martyred" people of Ukraine. Leo, who has met three times with Zelenskyy and has spoken by telephone at least once with Russian President Vladimir Putin, has called for a ceasefire and urged Moscow in particular

22 people killed in office building fire in Indonesia

ASSOCIATED PRESS
Jakarta

A fire ripped through an office building in Indonesia's capital, Jakarta, on Tuesday, killing at least 22 people, including a pregnant woman, police said.

Flames engulfed the seven-story building, sending thick black smoke billowing into the sky and causing panic among nearby residents and workers in a neighbourhood in central Jakarta. The fire, which broke out around midday, is believed to have started on the first floor of the building in the Kemayoran neighbourhood before spreading to other floors, Central Jakarta police chief Susatyo Purnomo Condro said.

Hundreds of personnel and 29 fire trucks were deployed to try to contain the blaze. The cause of the fire is still under investigation. Many workers in the building, which was used as a sales and storage office for a drone company, were out for lunch when a battery started sparking in a storage and testing area, said Condro, citing several witnesses. The fire was extin-



guished after three hours of intense effort. At least 22 bodies - seven men and 15 women, including a pregnant woman - were recovered from the building and taken to the police hospital in East Jakarta for identification.

A resident, Intan Puspita, whose home is close to the building, told The Associated Press that the fire started with a loud bang and workers running outside. "When asked, they said that there was an alleged short circuit in one of the batteries during the charging process," Puspita said. The fire spread quickly, and she saw workers on the upper

floors trying to escape by moving to the rooftop.

"I saw about 20 victims in the body bags being evacuated from inside," Puspita said. "It was tragic."

Television reports showed the tense evacuation of more than a dozen trapped workers, including many women, from the sixth floor using an emergency ladder extended by firefighters. Each person had to be lowered one by one from the building, and several struggled to breathe because of the thick smoke while waiting for their turn. Authorities said most of the victims died from smoke inhalation. Firefighters managed to rescue at least 19

trapped workers, some of whom suffered minor injuries, but were in a weak and traumatised condition. A police officer and a firefighter also experienced breathing difficulties.

"We will comb through the entire building again," Condro said when asked about the possible rise in the death toll. "Firefighters are cooling down the scene because the smoke is still thick, and it is not yet possible for us to enter the structure."

Jakarta Governor Pramono Anung called on company leaders to foster a workplace safety culture and to have emergency action plans for evacuation. "This case obviously shows the company does not provide emergency access' from fire in the direct physical sense," Anung told reporters when visiting the site. Families anxiously awaited news at hospitals or near the building occupied by PT Terra Drone Indonesia, a company that provides unmanned aerial vehicle technology for various industrial sectors such as construction, mining, oil and gas, energy, plantations and urban planning.

Macron faces backlash for using slur against feminist protesters

ASSOCIATED PRESS
Paris

Brigitte Macron was facing criticism on Tuesday after a video emerged of her using a slur to denounce feminist protesters. The scene filmed Sunday showed France's first lady in discussion backstage at the Folies Bergere theatre in Paris with Ary Abittan, a French actor and humorist previously accused of rape, before a performance he was about to give. The previous night, feminist campaigners had disrupted his show with shouts of "Abittan, rapist!"

Before Sunday's performance, Brigitte Macron asked him how he was feeling. When he said he was feeling scared, she made a derogatory and sexist reference to the women, adding: "We'll toss them out." Her office said in a statement that she'd been trying to calm his nerves: "As the video shows, Mrs Macron's only intention was to reassure an artist who, in his dressing room before going on stage, had just told her, 'I'm scared,' because his show had been disrupted the previous

evening." "In no way is she attacking a cause. She does, however, disapprove of the radical methods used to prevent an artist from performing on stage, as was the case on Saturday night."

The feminist campaign group "Nous Toutes" ("All of Us") said its activists disrupted Abittan's show to protest what it described as "the culture of impunity" around sexual violence in France.

Magistrates terminated the investigation of the 2021 rape allegation against Abittan for lack of evidence in 2024, a decision then confirmed on appeal in January this year, according to French media. In a statement on Instagram, Nous Toutes said: "We denounce venues that roll out a red carpet for men accused of rape, normalising sexist and sexual violence. It is a public insult to the victims. Victims, we believe you. Rapists, we do not forgive you!"

Opponents of President Emmanuel Macron on the left wing of French politics criticised his wife's use of a sexist slur, and some said she should apologise.



Military transport aircraft crashes in Russia

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA Moscow

An Antonov AN-22 military transport aircraft with seven people on board crashed in Russia's central Ivanovo Region on Tuesday during its first flight after repairs, the defence ministry said. "The aircraft crashed in an unpopulated area. A search and rescue crew has left for the accident site to determine the fate of the aircraft's crew," the ministry said. TASS reported that fragments of the An-22 were found on the shore and in the water. The An-22 is a heavy transport aircraft used by the Russian Aerospace Forces (VKS) to transport heavy weapons. The aircraft has a maximum takeoff weight of 225 tonnes and a payload capacity of 60 tonnes. With a total cargo weight of up to 40 tonnes, the An-22 can fly over 5,000 km, according to Russian TV channels.



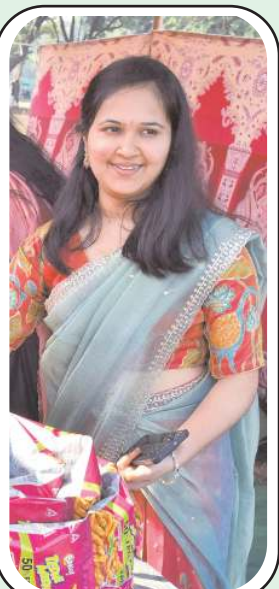
Hamas wants pressure on Israel before next phase of ceasefire

ASSOCIATED PRESS Jerusalem

A Hamas leader on Tuesday threatened to not move forward into the next phase of the Gaza ceasefire agreement until more pressure is placed on Israel to open up a key border crossing, cease deadly strikes and allow more aid into the Palestinian territory. The accusation came as Israel's Government says it's ready to move into the next, more complicated phase of the ceasefire deal - even as it has called on the militant group to return the remains of the last Israeli hostage held in Gaza. Husam Badran, a member of Hamas' political wing, called for the "full implementation of all the terms of the first phase" before moving forward, including an end to what he called the continuing demolition of Palestinian homes in the part of the territory still controlled by Israel.



Students participated Ethnic Day at Andhra Loyola College and 72nd Foundation Day in Vijayawada



PARTY

Photos by- Ch. Vijaya Bhaskar



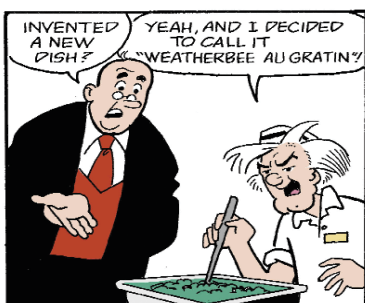
School children participated in a Three-day Balotsav in Vijayawada



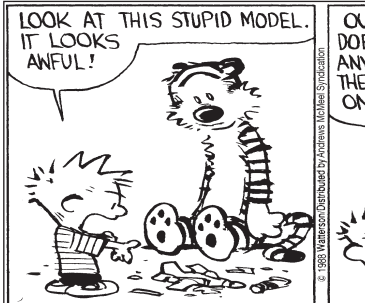
Members of the AP Chamber of Commerce & Industry Federation explain their Business expo at a press conference in Vijayawada

FUN

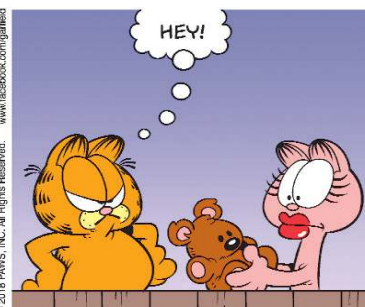
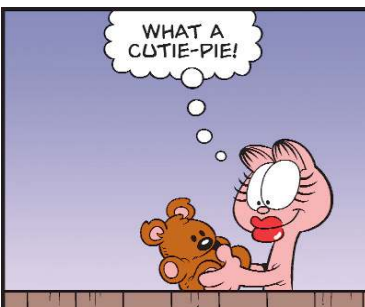
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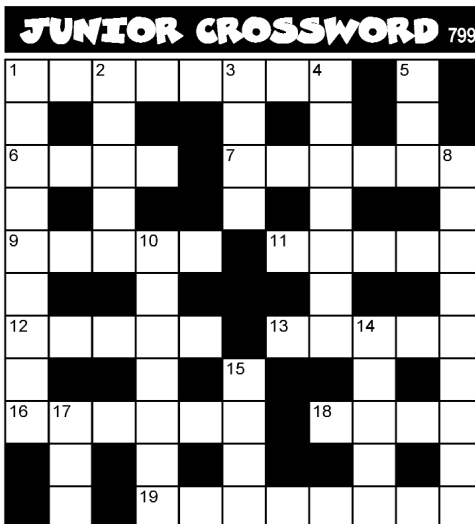
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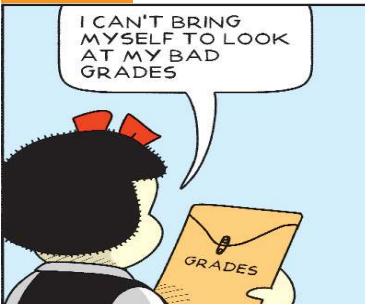
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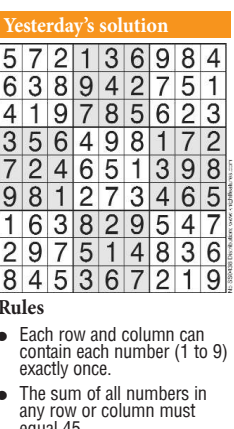
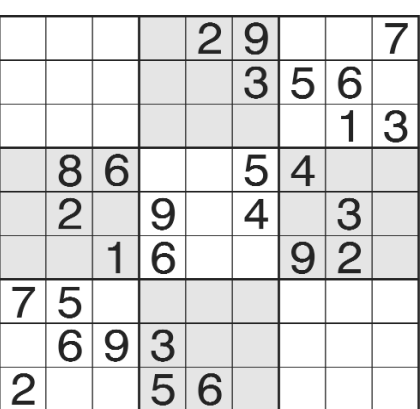
NANCY



GINGER MEGGS



SUDOKU



ACROSS

- 1 A large extinct animal
- 2 Do this in water
- 3 Me
- 4 A friendly word for a cat
- 5 Feathered creatures
- 6 The same in value
- 7 This animal has no legs
- 8 Turned over and over on the ground
- 9 A group of players on one side in a game
- 10 Houses for horses
- 11 Wide awake and watchful
- 12 Doing nothing, lazy
- 13 A bird that hunts at night

DOWN

- 1 Vanish
- 2 Hit these in with a hammer
- 3 A large number of soldiers



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PADDY DADDY



Whatever one may say about Donald Trump, the US president, there is no denying the fact that his politics, though random and chaotic, is theoretically calculated. Even as a US delegation wings its way to India to discuss the bilateral trade deal, which is in the making for months, Trump fires a sensitive verbal missive against India. At a meeting at the White House, he asked why India could ship large volumes of rice to the US, and those too at low prices. He wanted additional duties on rice exports, since they symptomised “dumping.” He ranted that India “cannot do that... should not be dumping.” One is not sure if it signals new tariffs, whether the statements were aimed to assuage the miffed feelings among the American farmers who complain about falling domestic prices due to imports, or whether it was a means to verbally arm twist New Delhi into granting more access, and concessions for select farm imports from America.

For a long time, India has opposed the entry of farm goods at lower duties. In fact, the prime minister, and other ministers, have repeatedly maintained that the interests of the local farmers will not be compromised, or placed at the altar of trade and tariffs. However, farm imports remain the most contentious, and possibly the last few details to be ironed out before finalising a bilateral deal. By introducing rice as another factor, and raising the fears of new duties on Indian exports, Trump hopes to influence the Indian negotiators to give in a bit more. Couple this with the fact that America recently announced a \$12 billion support package for the local farmers to “shield domestic agriculture from perceived foreign competition.” In addition, the US eased the duties on several food items like spices and tea, which are shipped from India. These did not include rice.

Stock markets react much like Trump, and are swayed by short-term, and immediate events, and non-events. The reactions in the bourses are as random, and knee-jerk, as Trump. Bu, like the case of the US president, there is a method to the madness of sock movements. For example, in the rice-Trump incident, shares of rice exporters such as Kohinoor Foods, LT Foods, Chaman Lal Setia Exports, and KRBL tumbled on the Indian exchanges. It did not matter to the investors that the US comprises a small share of the country's rice exports. Higher tariffs by America will not make a material difference to the firms' revenues, and profits. Since theoretically, it was a negative event, despite being a non-event, the practical impact was negative. Kohinoor Foods, for example, plunged nearly 10 per cent to an intraday, and a 52-week low of just over Rs 24.

Such drastic stock movements are visible in other cases. Let us take the example of H-1B visas, which has proved to be a controversial topic for several months, including during Trump's first term. Under the republican regimes, there are consistent efforts to change the visa regime to enable the hiring of more American employees in IT, and discourage the entry of low-cost, less-experienced Indians and Chinese. This year, Indian IT stocks were constantly hurt by the H-1B-related announcements, decisions, actions. A bill introduced by a senator, which had minimal chances of passing through triggered stock sales. Even when the decisions were permanent, the reactions had little links to the ground realities. Investors did not think through the ramifications, and consequences. They just sold, with the IT sector being one of the star underperformers among Indian equities this year. Experts have talked about the re-rating of IT stocks, but been optimistic over their valuations in 2026.

Consider the \$1,00,000 fee on H-1B visas. This will clearly reduce the outflow of Indian manpower to the US. Or, at least it will force the Indian IT firms to spend more to send people. If one considers that the US gives 65,000 such visas every year, and India accounts for 70 per cent of them, the annual visa bill amounts to more than \$4,500,000,000, or a massive \$4.5 billion. Of course, it is a huge hit. However, investors failed to reckon several possible scenarios, which are being, and will be, translated into reality. The first is that Indian IT firms will reduce the dependence on H-1Bs. This is happening, and data shows that Indians' share has reduced in the recent past. Second, Indian IT firms, and recruiters, may push the visa on the applicants. If you are interested to go to America, please pay the visa fees from your pockets, and do not depend on the firm.

Finally, the visa fee may hurt the American firms more than the Indian ones. A large part of H-1Bs is cornered by Indian students, who study in America, and automatically are absorbed by the American firms via H-1Bs. No firm will pay \$1,00,000 for a fresh recruit, and a rookie employee. The students, who have spent massive amounts on education, may not wish to cough out such large amounts to get the visa. Thus, the absorption of Indians in American firms is likely to reduce. This will service Trump's objective that more American are hired at the low and middle levels. But it will hurt the interests of the American firms.

China exports trump tariffs

A trade surplus of \$1 trillion offsets lower shipments to the US

Like with most overconfident leaders, reality is difficult to swallow, especially when it stares in the face. This is precisely what is happening to Donald Trump, the US President, who thought that his theatrics, tantrums, tariffs, and trade wars would bring the Chinese economy down to its knees. He felt America could once again emerge as the undisputed hegemon in the Asia Pacific region, and the rest of the world, not just militarily but in economic terms. He probably had an inkling, which may partially explain his decision to agree to a temporary truce with the Chinese counterpart, Xi Jinping.

However, the latest China's trade data proves that Red Dragon is winning the trade war against Uncle Sam. In the first 11 months of 2025, China created a historic record, and generated a trade surplus of more than \$1 trillion. Let us put this number in perspective. The figure is 2.5 times India's nominal GDP in dollar terms. It is almost 30 times the GDP of Pakistan. This is the nature of success against all odds, and it has deep lessons for India.

If one considers the monthly numbers, the trade surplus in November 2025 was more than \$100 billion, or the highest since June 2025, and higher than the \$90 billion in October. Yes, China's exports to the US fell by 25 per cent in October 2025, and close to 29 per cent in November. These were huge blows since America is, and was, one of the largest and most promising markets for Chinese products over the past few decades. But, on an overall basis, Chinese exports grew by 5.9 per cent in November, thanks to higher non-US shipments, after a more than one per cent decline in October.

This is indeed a phenomenal achievement. No country in the world, no global economy has ever achieved it in history. To do it despite lower

exports to the US implies, maybe proves, that China has clearly and decisively won the trade war. Trump can huff and puff. He can threaten more action, despite the so-called trade truce. He can yell and scream some more. But China has demonstrated that even the most powerful nation cannot beat the Red Dragon in a trade war. You can dub this as famous or infamous depending on ideology.

What are the reasons for Trump's failure to contain China economically via excessively high tariffs? One, unlike India and other nations, China had prepared for this situation, and scenario for a long time. Most nations were blindsided during Trump's second term, and his ever-increasing, and ever-changing trade-tariff threats. Even allies like Europe, Japan, South Korea, and others felt the heat of the president's anger and actions. These nations capitulated because they were very dependent on the US for military and economic support. In different ways, they quietly surrendered.

Not China, which refused to blink. Since Trump took oath for the second time, it launched a strategy to diversify the export basket. The results are clear. Exports to the European Union, which is a counter to the American market, increased by 15 per cent. There were similar spectacular increases in shipments to Latin America, despite Brazil's opposition, Southeast Asia, and Africa. Even with a partner-adversary nation like India, the bilateral trade went up to \$115 billion, and India stares at a trade deficit of more than \$100 billion. Clearly, China knew what it was doing.

Two, the Chinese economy is too strong for any nation to bully it. There are more than 150

economies in the world, whose largest trading partner is China. Thus, any attempts to stall, stop, or dissuade these nations from dealing, negotiating, and trading intensively with China, are bound to fail. China offers cheap, competitive, and good quality products, something that the US cannot do. Chinese trade partners realise that the Red Dragon's manufacturing juggernaut will benefit them. Despite the American fears, they negotiated decent, though defeatist, trade terms with the US, even as they enhanced the links with China.

The third reason for Trump's failure is perhaps the president's ill-conceived notions that his opinions can sway the world. Perhaps, if he really wanted to contain Chinese manufacturing, he could have focused on creating a practical China+1 consensus among the nations. Instead, he hector, threatened, and got angry with the allies. Nations such as Vietnam, India, and Malaysia, which could have emerged as potential counters to China's manufacturing, were antagonized by the theatrics, arrogance, and tantrums of Trump. The US president can still turn things around, but it will take more time, more effort, and better negotiations to create a consensus.

Of course, one needs to watch whether the November trade performance is sustainable, and carries momentum. This is because China's exports were more than two percentage points higher than a poll survey among experts by a news agency. Similarly, imports were lower than predicted. This pushed up the monthly trade surplus, and resulted in the over \$1 trillion figure in the first 11 months. Thanks to America's inability to ink bilateral trade deals, some nations like India were forced to buy more from China in the recent past.

However, one can safely assume that China has decisively won this round of the trade wars and, even in the future, there is not much that Trump can do. Indeed, by recently meeting Xi at a summit in South Korea, the US president gave the indication that he is no longer able to absorb the economic and political costs of the trade wars with several nations, especially China. For India, it is a sobering wake-up call that manufacturing needs to be a priority. If the economy does not produce globally-competitive world class products, and in volumes, it is likely to be in trouble, sooner or later.

Let us take a few lessons from the China example. Even today, Chinese experts, quoted in the western media, contend that the trade surplus will not come down, but widen in the next year. Exports were “likely to remain resilient” due to three reasons. First, China has re-routed products to increase its share in other nations and regions. Second, it offers more attractive prices to non-US buyers, including America's allies. Finally, deflation has pulled down the currency's real effective exchange rate. Still, the growing surplus may result in a backlash. Already, France has threatened higher tariffs if the bilateral surplus is not balanced.

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



The Tech Wrecker

When big shareholders say No

Investors oppose CEO pays, royalties, and anti-climate moves



allocations, expanded low-carbon investments, and adopted a more restrained tone on the growth of fossil fuels. While it remains deeply rooted in the exploration and marketing of hydrocarbons, the episode fundamentally altered how energy boards think and act. More oil firms directed more efforts towards green energy, and energy savings. Diversification into renewable sources became the norm, and experts contend that several fossil-fuel players are likely to morph into the producers of solar, wind, and hydrogen energy.

Shareholders question diversifications, and even straight-forward linear but exponential, growth. In 2023, activist-investor Starboard Value built a near-two per cent stake in Salesforce, and pressed for aggressive cost controls, and margin expansion. This was a time when most enterprise-software firms believed in frenetic growth, rather than profitability. Salesforce had to respond with a 10 per cent work-force reduction, tighter expense management, and sharper revenue-to-profit conversion. The stock rallied, as investors rewarded the new focus on operational efficiency, and profits. Indian IT noticed that capital efficiency mattered as much as innovation.

In 2019, Elliott Management, which had a \$3.2-billion stake in AT&T, launched a public

attack on the telecom major's strategy to diversify into media, and emerge as a conglomerate. The acquisitions of Time Warner and DirecTV, Elliott argued, destroyed shareholder value, and distracted AT&T from its core communications business. Within three years, the Telco unwound its M&As. It spun off WarnerMedia, which was merged with Discovery, and became a focused telecom operator. The divestment was widely seen as an admission that the activist-investor's critique was valid.

What emerges from these examples is not a single theory of shareholder activism but a widening set of outcomes that Indian and global boardrooms need to contend with. Investor opposition does not follow a single script. It can take on various forms, tackle several subjects, and end in public ruptures, strategic retreats, regulatory and judicial intervention, and corporate resets. In some cases, as with Microsoft, shareholders' dissent may be symbolic to begin with, but can gather steam over time. The vote against Nadella did not alter the leadership structure. Yet the signal is on record.

Over time, such signals may shape the boards, and the design of executive pay packages. Even when a vote fails, it results in internal and external conversations and debates, especially when the media highlights them.

The Tech Wrecker

In other cases, as was evident in Zee, investor interventions destabilise operations, and have commercial consequences. The pressures from the shareholders can alter the strategic trajectories of the companies. Zee Entertainment rethought its strategies, even as the promoter-family fought to retain its hold. In Exxon, the mindset changed, even if only slightly.

A decade ago, shareholder activism in India was minimal, except in hotly-contested, politicised, and sensitive cases. For example, state-owned institutions, with large shareholdings, finally opposed the late Swraj Paul's attempts to take over DCM and Escorts in the 1980s. In the 1990s, the former did the same, when they wrested management control in L&T away from the Ambani family. Today, it is an embedded force, and the impact is felt across firms. What is happening globally, i.e., a narrowing gap between promoter-management-board powers, and investors' influences.

Yet, the activism in India still looks different from the US. This is because promoter holdings remain high in the former, hostile takeovers are rare, regulatory and legal processes play larger roles, and proxy battles at the shareholders' meetings are uncommon. But things are changing, and an underlying discipline is being imposed on internal boardroom decisions from the outside. Promoter control offers insulation, which is not absolute. Institutions apply pressures through courts, voting patterns, media narratives, and merger approvals. Small investors react, and retaliate if they remain unhappy. Governance stress turns into systemic risks.

Shareholder activism is moving beyond questions of short-term financial returns, and valuations, into the architecture of corporate power. Hence, most firms believe in consensus and negotiations, rather than resort to confrontations. They need to involve large and small investors in the decision-making process, and convince them about the necessity of the strategic and tactical initiatives. Shareholders are not rubber-stamps, and institutions are not satisfied with board positions, especially if they form a minority. Powerful hedge funds, as well as activist-investors, believe that they have the right to influence firms, and boardrooms.

India name Kamalini, Vaishnavi as new faces for SL T20 series

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ New Delhi

Gunalan Kamalini and Vaishnavi Sharma on Tuesday got their maiden call-ups in the Indian women's team for the upcoming five-match T20I series against Sri Lanka at home.

The series will be played from December 21 to 30, with the first two games in Visakhapatnam and the last three in Thiruvananthapuram.

While 17-year-old wicket-keeper-batter Kamalini has featured in nine matches for Mumbai Indians in the Women's Premier League, Vaishnavi, 19, who is also a part of the 15-member India squad, was not drafted into the WPL auctions.

Kamalini and Vaishnavi came in place of Radha Yadav and Uma Chhetri, who were part of the squad that triumphed in the ODI World



Cup last month.

Kamalini and Vaishnavi aside, the squad comprises all the familiar names with Harmanpreet Kaur leading the team and Smriti Mandhana doing duty as the vice captain.

Big-hitting opener Shafali Verma, who replaced Pratika Rawal in the World Cup squad just before the semi-final against Australia after the latter was ruled out of the

tournament with an injury, is also part of the team.

India and Sri Lanka play the five-match series just before the start of the WPL 2026 on January 9 in Navi Mumbai.

The schedule of this bilateral series was announced soon after the white-ball series between India and Bangladesh that was to happen in India in December got postponed last month.

The last time India and Sri Lanka played a T20I was at the World Cup in October 2024. India's squad: Harmanpreet Kaur (capt), Smriti Mandhana (vice captain), Deepti Sharma, Sneha Rana, Jemimah Rodrigues, Shafali Verma, Harleen Deol, Amanjot Kaur, Arundhati Reddy, Kranti Gaud, Renuka Singh Thakur, Richa Ghosh (WK), G Kamalini (WK), Sree Charani, Vaishnavi Sharma.

As a player, you cannot move forward without passion, fire: Sachin Tendulkar

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ Mumbai

The legendary Sachin Tendulkar on Tuesday said young players cannot move forward without passion and fire, challenging them to "climb the mountain" and set examples for others.

Recalling his early days, Tendulkar said he was not only madly in love with cricket but he was also ready to do what it took, at times, even spending 12 hours training everyday for close to two months during summer holidays.

"I started playing cricket because I was passionate. I was madly in love with the sport and all I wanted to do was play for India and I was prepared to do whatever it took," Tendulkar said ahead of the Indian Street Premier League season 3 auction here.

"There were various stages in my life — there was school cricket and I was prepared to work hard, possibly

be on the field for 12 hours. There was a period where I did that for 55 days in a row in my summer holidays and (I) finally fell sick but that is what it is. If the passion and that fire is not there, you are not going to be able to move forward," he added.

Tendulkar said a lot of elements need to come together for a player to grow but it is also important to deliver at the right time.

"To move forward you need hard work, you need planning, you need to be able to execute that, you need the right guidance, (and) discipline," he said. "... (a) number of elements come together and then when the time comes you have to go out and perform and that is how you progress to the next level."

Tendulkar said expectations are on those players who have set examples in the past but one should not get bogged down.

"We have to remember, why are the expectations

there? The expectations are there because of your past performances," he said.

"Suddenly, you cannot come here and think 'there are too many exceptions from me and there is too much pressure. How should I do it?'

"You can look at it in two ways. Either you get bogged down, the weight of pressure suddenly freezes you. Or you say that 'the expectations are there only because I have done well in the past.'"

Tendulkar cited examples of Irfan Umar and Abhishek Dalhor, who got opportunities to play at senior levels from the tennis-ball ISPL.

While Umair represented Mumbai in the Ranji Trophy earlier this year, Dalhor featured as a nets bowler for Kolkata Knight Riders.

"My advice to all the players is to be yourself. Don't look to compete with anyone else. Whatever you were yesterday, can you better yourself today? Can you continue that journey?,"

he said. "It's a beautiful journey to continue getting better and create that impression on the field. This (ISPL) is one such platform where you can go out, express yourself and everyone is watching you and enjoying your talent."

"My advice is to just go out, be yourself, climb the mountain. Climb the mountain because from these two seasons, we have learnt that Abhishek and Irfan both have been able to climb the mountain, (or) at least the journey has begun."

"One went to bowl for KKR in the nets and the other played for Mumbai, which is a magnificent thing," he said.

Tendulkar continued, "Climb the mountain so that you can see the world, not so that the world can see you. Seeing the world and exploring more things is going to make you a better player and a better contributor on the field. Eventually, you will be setting examples for the rest of the guys."



Desert Vipers beat Gulf Giants in Super Over thriller

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Dubai

Desert Vipers held their nerves to prevail over Gulf Giants in the first-ever Super Over finish of the ILT20 after Sam Curran and Dan Lawrence heroics here.

After the scores were tied at 179, the Vipers went on to score 13 in the Super Over with Lawrence finding the boundary once, before Thushara got his wicket. But, Naseem Shah clinched the game for the Vipers after restricting the Giants to just nine runs on Monday.

The Vipers have beaten the Giants in each of their previous five matches. Curran (44 off 36) and Dan Lawrence's (56 off 31) partnership ensured the Vipers tied the scores despite a challenging target of 180.

Azmatullah Omarzai bagged four wickets for the Giants, but it was not enough to stop the Vipers from their third straight win of the season. The lower-order batters of the Vipers also scored crucial runs in a team effort. The Gulf Giants started on the front foot, with Pathum Nissanka (56 off 29) and Rahmanullah Gurbaz (41 off 31) taking 14 runs off Naseem in the opening exchanges. The opening pair raced to a 50-run stand inside five overs and powered the Giants to 58 in the powerplay.

Nissanka continued his rich vein of form, bringing up his

third half-century in as many games, off just 27 balls. He struck Noor Ahmad for his fourth six of the innings, but the Afghan spinner had the final say, dismissing him off the very next delivery to end the 73-run opening stand.

Gurbaz then took charge, with James Vince providing solid support with 25 runs off 22 balls. Their 54-run partnership was broken by Khuzaima Tanveer, who removed Vince before sending Gurbaz back two balls later. The Giants were 129/3 at the end of the 14th over.

The Giants' bowlers fought their way back into the contest thereafter. Noor picked up his second wicket by dismissing Azmatullah Omarzai (20 off 13), while David Payne removed Moeen Ali (11 off 11). With only 38 runs coming from the final five overs, the Giants finished on 179/5.

Omarzai made early inroads for the Giants by dismissing Fakhar Zaman (1 off 9). Mark Adair struck soon after, removing Andries Gous (11 off 9), leaving the Vipers struggling at 14/2 early in the chase.

Curran and Impact Player Max Holden (15 off 15) attempted to steady the innings, but Haider Razaq provided the third breakthrough by sending Holden back. At the halfway mark, the Vipers were 65/3, still needing 115 runs for victory.

IPL 2026 auction to feature 350 players including 240 Indians

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Mumbai

A total of 350 cricketers — 240 Indians and 110 overseas players — will go under the hammer in the Indian Premier League auction to take place in Abu Dhabi on December 16, with South Africa's wicketkeeper-batter Quinton de Kock, who recently came out of his ODI retirement, featuring in the final list.

De Kock is a late addition to the list at a base price of ₹1 crore. The list also includes Australia batter Steve Smith at a base price of ₹2 crore. Smith last played in the IPL



in 2021. A total of 1390 players registered for the Player Auction.

The number was pruned to 1005 players before 350 were finally shortlisted to battle for 77 slots available across the 10 teams for the 19th edition of the world's biggest T20 league.

The first set of players in the auction includes India and Mumbai batters Prithvi Shaw and Sarfaraz Khan, who both have kept their base price at ₹75 lakh each.

The list shared by the IPL features two Australians in Cameron Green and Jake Fraser-McGurk, along with New Zealand and

former Chennai Super Kings opener Devon Conway and South Africa's David Miller, with each of them keeping a base price of ₹2 crore.

Venkatesh Iyer, who was released by Kolkata Knight Riders, has listed himself at a base price of ₹2 crore.

Three-time winners KKR will go into the auction with the biggest purse of ₹64.3 crores, followed by five-time champions CSK with ₹43.4 crores. Sunrisers Hyderabad, who have won the IPL once, have the third highest purse of ₹25.5 crores.

Hazlewood out of Ashes series; Cummins set to return for Australia



ASSOCIATED PRESS
■ Brisbane

Australian pace bowler Josh Hazlewood has been ruled out of the Ashes series with hamstring and Achilles injuries.

Hazlewood missed Australia's two eight-wickets wins over England in Perth and Brisbane but had been expected to return later in the five-match series.

Australia coach Andrew

McDonald on Tuesday said the veteran paceman would now be targeting a return for the Twenty20 World Cup early next year.

"He'll be out of the series and his preparation will then shift toward the World Cup, which is an incredibly important campaign for us," McDonald said.

"It's really flat for him. A couple of setbacks we didn't see coming — we thought he'd play a huge part in the

series." Hazlewood has been a key member of Australia's regular bowling attack for a decade.

There was better news for skipper Pat Cummins, who is expected to return for the third test in Adelaide starting December 17 after missing the first two tests while he recovers from a back problem.

The 32-year-old paceman increased his training workload at Allan Border Field in

Brisbane while the Australians were playing the second test against England at the Gabba.

He is set to be recalled as captain when the match squad is announced Wednesday. Steve Smith has been leading the Australia XI in the absence of Cummins.

"We feel as though he'll be as best prepared as can be," McDonald said. "Us seeing him further advanced, we feel he'll be really well placed for the challenges of Adelaide."

"We feel as though the simulation in the nets has got him skill ready. His body's ready to go. Barring anything else happening in the next week, I'd be expecting Pat to be tossing the coin and putting the blazer on."

The under-fire England squad, which needs a win in Adelaide to have any chance of reclaiming the Ashes, is taking a few days out this week to rest and relax at one of Australia's iconic beach towns. The fourth test starts Boxing Day at the Melbourne Cricket Ground and Sydney will host the fifth test from January 4. England hasn't won an Ashes test in Australia since the 2010-11 series.



England's Mark Wood ruled out of Ashes series with knee injury

ASSOCIATED PRESS
■ Brisbane (Australia)

Injured fast bowler Mark Wood has been ruled out of the Ashes in a major setback for an England lineup trailing 2-0 in the five-match series.

Wood had limited impact in the first test, bowling 11 overs without taking a wicket in the eight-wicket loss in Perth. He then missed the second cricket test in Brisbane because of his troublesome left knee.

The 35-year-old Wood's fitness had been an issue ahead of the Ashes tour after he only recently returned following knee surgery in March.

Matt Fisher, who made his only test appearance in the Caribbean in 2022, was drafted into the test

squad as cover. In an Instagram post, Wood said he was "gutted to be out the remainder of the Ashes. After extensive surgery and seven long, hard months of work and rehab to get back into the test arena, my knee just hasn't held up."

Wood said he traveled to Australia "with high expectations about making a big impact. I'm desperately disappointed that despite yet more injections and intensive medical treatment it has become clear that the flare up in my knee is worse than feared."

Wood was England's leading wicket-taker in the 2023 Ashes series, when his return from injury coincided with a big comeback by the home team.

Hardik Pandya unique in Indian T20 side: Bangar

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ New Delhi

Former India batting coach Sanjay Bangar believes there is no other player like Hardik Pandya in the national T20 set-up because the star all-rounder is capable of commanding a spot in the team merely as a specialist batter or bowler too. Out for more than two months due a quadricep injury during the Asia Cup, Pandya will return to the Indian squad for the home five-match ODI series against South Africa beginning in Cuttack on Tuesday.

"Look at all the all-rounders in world cricket now. Does England have a back-up for Ben Stokes? No. In one-day or even Test cricket, there is no back-up for Ravindra Jadeja. It is the same with Hardik Pandya," JioStar expert Bangar said. "He (Pandya) can command a spot in the top five on his batting alone.



He could also be one of the top three seamers in any team if he was just a bowler.

"The point is, to be that kind of all-rounder, you must earn your place with your batting and also with your bowling. There is no other player like Hardik Pandya in the Indian team." On Pandya's workload management, Bangar said he should at least play the first three matches against South Africa. "We need to see how he copes," he

said, insisting that it is too early to say if he should play six or seven T20Is before the World Cup.

"Playing in the SMAT (Syed Mushtaq Ali Trophy) is different from the intensity of an international game. The team management must manage the workload of important players like him. So, if needed, we must do that for Hardik too. A fit Hardik Pandya allows the team to play its desired combination, especially with the spin options we have. That's why his presence is critically very vital."

Before the India return, Pandya made a 42-ball 77 not out for Baroda in SMAT before bowling four overs at full tilt for 1/52. Test and ODI captain Shubman Gill is also making a return after missing almost a month of cricket owing to a neck spasm suffered while attempting a slog sweep during the opening Test against the Proteas.

Bangar said Gill's growth as Test captain will benefit him in other formats.

"The confidence Shubman Gill has now after doing so well in Test cricket over the last year will certainly help him. More than his skill, his mindset has grown. Taking extra responsibility as a Test Captain makes him a far more rounded player. He now understands the game situation and what is needed from him. "At the top of the order, Shubman Gill could do the job for the team in T20I cricket. And if needed, Hardik Pandya could do a similar job in the middle order."

Bangar felt Sanju Samson may find it difficult to get a slot in the Indian T20 side.

"...His best spot in T20 cricket is still at the top. With players like Tilak Varma, Shivam Dube, or Hardik Pandya available, there may not be a place for him at number four, five, or six.

Tendulkar recalls Gursharan's gesture in scoring Irani Cup ton in 1989-90

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Mumbai

Sachin Tendulkar on Tuesday recalled former India player Gursharan Singh's gesture to walk out at No 10 with a broken hand only to help him score a valiant 103 for the Rest of India in their Irani Cup match against Delhi in 1989-90.

A rampant Delhi crushed the Rest of India by 309 runs in the contest played here at the Wankhede Stadium in which Tendulkar waged a lone battle scoring 103, with former India opener WV Raman's 41 being the other noticeable performance.

Struggling at 209 for nine in pursuit of a mammoth target of 554, the former India, Delhi and Punjab player Gursharan walked out at No 10 with a broken hand to support Tendulkar as the two put on another 36 runs for the final wicket. ROI were bowled out for 245

"As they say, promises are meant to be kept. I feel I'll go a step further and say that promises are meant to be



kept, but also meant to be delivered... And that is what is our DNA," Tendulkar recalled at an Ageas Federal Life Insurance event here.

"I can recall an incident... Long way back in 1989 when I was playing Irani Trophy. This was a trial match before one got selected for India. I was batting in the 90s, and my partner, Gursharan Singh, had an injury - a

broken hand - and he wasn't supposed to bat.

"But he was asked by the chairman of the selection committee, Raj Singh Dungarpur, to go out and bat and support his teammate. Gursharan came and helped me reach my hundred and I got selected to play for India after that. Afterward, Gursharan also became part of the Indian cricket team," he added.

Tendulkar said the gesture from Gursharan, who made a solitary appearance each in Tests and ODIs for India, was something that touched his heart.

"I thanked him profusely on the ground and in the dressing room because it was a big thing for him to come out with a broken hand," Tendulkar said.

"Just stepping out with a broken hand was significant. Whether I scored a hundred or not was secondary. His intent and attitude mattered most to me (and) that truly touched my heart," he added.