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PIONEER IN SHORT

AP'S GSDP ESTIMATES 'MISLEADING': BUGGANA
YSRCP leader and former Finance minister Buggana Rajendranath criticised the coalition government's continued focus on the past though a year and a half passed since the TDP-led parties came to power. He took particular aim at Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu for what he called a "manipulation of figures" concerning the state's financial health. "One and a half years have passed,

FULL REPORT ON P2

PINNELA BROTHERS LIKELY TO SURRENDER BEFORE COURT TODAY
Former YSRCP MLA Pinnelli Ramakrishna Reddy has reportedly taken a key decision. He has reportedly decided to surrender before the Machera court on Thursday. Pinnelli Ramakrishna Reddy and his brother Venkatarami Reddy are facing allegations in the Palnadu twin murder case. They are accused in the murder case of TDP leaders J Koteswara Rao and J Venkateswarlu.

FULL REPORT ON P3

CHANDRASHEKHAR TRUST DISPUTE REVIVED, COURT ALLOWS SUIT ALLEGING MISMANAGEMENT
A Delhi Court has allowed the transposition of PS Prasad as co-plaintiff and the amended memo of parties be filed within 30 days in a 15 year old litigation case related to Bharat Yatra Trust founded by late Prime Minister Chandrashekhhar. The order, delivered by Dwarka District Sumit Dalal, hence resolves multiple procedural and...

FULL REPORT ON P4

SEX WORKERS FLOCK TO KOLKATA BOOTH TO REGISTER AS VOTERS
Forty-year-old Sumita Koley (name changed), a resident of the Chetla red-light area, has never voted. This year, she is determined to change that. She queued up on Wednesday at a Special Intensive Revision (SIR) assistance camp at Chetla area in south Kolkata, hoping to secure their place as voters. Koley was among nearly 200 women who crowded the small club room at 29/A Rakhaladas Addya Road, a narrow stretch...

FULL REPORT ON P5

QUOTE OF THE DAY



IT SHOWS THE BANKRUPTCY OF THE RULING PARTY THAT IT IS RESORTING TO PHYSICAL ATTACKS AS IT IS UNABLE TO FACE THE ELECTIONS DEMOCRATICALLY

— K T RAMA RAO, BRS WORKING PRESIDENT

CM calls for overhaul of govt business rules

■ Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu said the government possesses complete information of the performance of every officer and department

PNS ■ Amaravati

Calling for an overhaul of existing government business rules to improve governance, Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu on Wednesday said when the Constitution has been amended, what is wrong in changing the business rules to do good to people.

Addressing a meeting of Ministers, Secretaries and heads of departments at the secretariat, the Chief Minister emphasised that the government must be willing to make sweeping changes for the public good. "When we have amended the Constitution itself several times in the country, what's wrong in changing the business rules to do good to people?" he asked.

He directed officials to rescind unnecessary rules and implement comprehensive change management to ease governance.

He called for extending efficient governance powered by technology and a data lake, and directed an audit of all departments to assess efficiency.

According to Naidu, the government possesses complete information of the performance of every officer and department.

He advised them to be cognizant of this data and ensure that they work with accountability and are answerable to people.

CONTINUED ON >> P2



Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu at the meeting with Ministers, Secretaries and heads of departments in Amaravati on Wednesday

Naidu ask Ministers, officials to improve public service delivery

Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu has directed Ministers to significantly speed up file clearances, asserting that efficient decision-making is central to good governance. Chairing a comprehensive review meeting with Ministers, Secretaries and heads of departments at the Secretariat, he reviewed the performance of every department, the pace of file disposal, the progress of government schemes and the overall administrative performance.

An IT Department pre-

sentation revealed that Ministers Dola Sree Bala Veeranjaneey Swamy, Nimmala Ramanaidu and Farooq clear files in two days, while the Chief Minister himself, along with Lokesh, P Narayana, BC Janardhan Reddy, Satyakumar and Durgesh, averages three days. Deputy Chief Minister Pawan Kalyan clears files in about four days, Finance Minister Payyavula Keshav takes eleven days to clear files, and Ministers Kollu Ravindra and Mandipalli Ram Prasad take around fifteen days.

CONTINUED ON >> P2

Woman stabs husband over phone usage dispute

PNS ■ Paderu

A shocking incident took place in Alluri Sitarama Raju district. A wife attacked her husband after he advised her to reduce talking on the phone. It has created a stir in the district. According to police, Rajarao of Meduru village in Chintapalli mandal had asked his wife to cut down on her mobile phone conversations. This led to an argument between the two. In a fit of rage, the wife grabbed an axe and attacked her husband. Rajarao sustained severe injuries in the incident. He was immediately shifted to Visakhapatnam KGH, where he died while undergoing treatment. The police have registered a case and are investigating the incident. The accused wife has been arrested. Full details are yet to be known.

Rahul presents dissent note on CIC appointment

PNS ■ New Delhi

The committee headed by Prime Minister Narendra Modi to select the new Chief Information Commissioner met here on Wednesday and is learnt to have decided on the appointment of CIC and eight Information Commissioners, with Leader of Opposition in Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi apparently giving a dissent note.

The meeting that lasted over an hour and a half was held at the office of the Prime Minister and was attended by Gandhi and Home Minister Amit Shah.

Sources said the Leader of Opposition sought more details of the appointees and is learnt to have questioned the criterion adopted for the selection of Chief Information Commissioner and eight other Information Commissioners. Dissatisfied with the process of selection, the Leader of Opposition presented his dissent note. Details of the appoint-



ments decided were not known.

The government had earlier told the Supreme Court about this meeting to select names for these posts.

Under Section 12 (3) of the Right to Information Act, the prime minister is the chairperson of the committee, which also comprises the leader of opposition and a Union minister nominated by the prime minister, that selects and recommends the names for appointment as CIC and Information Commissioners.

According to the RTI Act, the CIC has a Chief Information Commissioner and 10 Information Commissioners who adjudi-

cate complaints and appeals filed by the RTI applicants against the unsatisfactory orders of government officials on their applications.

The CIC, which is staring at 30,838 pending cases, according to its website, is left with just two information commissioners -- Anandi Ramalingam and Vinod Kumar Tiwari -- with eight vacancies.

The highest appellate authority to adjudicate RTI-related complaints and appeals had gone headless for the seventh time since 2014 after incumbent Chief Information Commissioner Heeralal Samariya demitted office on September 13.

CONTINUED ON >> P2

TTD calls for ACB inquiry into supply of polyester shawls

PNS ■ Tirupati

TTD has asked the State government to order an ACB probe against a fabric supplier for allegedly supplying substandard shawls worth over Rs 54 crore in place of silk ones for a prolonged period, an official said on Wednesday.

The official said the supplier had delivered polyester shawls instead of silk shawls, which are used during 'aashirvachan' (blessing) rituals at the world-renowned hill temple.

"Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams has requested the Andhra Pradesh government to initiate an Anti-

Corruption Bureau probe against a fabric vendor for supplying over Rs 54 crore worth polyester shawls instead of silken ones used in 'aashirvachan' rituals," an official said.

The irregularity came to light after TTD found that substandard shawls were being supplied to the

temple. An internal vigilance inquiry was conducted in November, and a detailed report was submitted to the board.

Laboratory tests on the fabric samples were carried out in Dharmavaram in Sri Satya Sai district and in Bengaluru, the official said.

CONTINUED ON >> P2

Lokesh meets Sundar Pichai, reviews progress of Google Centre

RAVI KUMAR BOPPANA
PNS ■ Amaravati

Information Technology Minister N Lokesh's tour in the United States is continuing. In San Francisco, he met with Google chief executive officer Sundar Pichai. He reviewed the progress of the Google AI Data Centre works in Visakhapatnam. He said that Chandrababu Naidu's vision is to have an AI professional in every family.

He mentioned that Google's investment in Andhra Pradesh is only the beginning. He stated that the foundation stone for the Google Data Centre will be laid in March.

He said that the State would play a leading role in



India's AI revolution. Speaking on the theme "Aligning Skills, Trust and Sectoral Transformation in the AI Era," Lokesh said Andhra Pradesh is one of India's youngest states with a current economy of \$180 billion, and the government's target is to scale it to a \$2.4 trillion economy.

CONTINUED ON >> P2

Pawan praises officers for boosting efficiency in PR dept

PNS ■ Amaravati

Deputy Chief Minister Pawan Kalyan said that he wanted the Panchayat Raj Department because the villages are the backbone of the nation. Speaking at an interactive session with officials and staff of the Panchayat Raj and Rural Development Departments, Pawan said that there were situations in which taking a decision was considered wrong, and not taking one was considered right. Even so, he said he continued to move forward by focusing on his work.

He stated that he did not use any special personal intellect as Deputy Chief Minister. He said efficient



Deputy Chief Minister Pawan Kalyan speaking at a meeting with officials in Amaravati on Wednesday

officers were with him and that they brought in reforms and worked accordingly. He mentioned that because officers like Venkatakrishna, Shashibhushan, and Krishna Teja were with him, they were able to achieve good results. He said that officials

had brought to his attention that there was a lack of transparency in many matters in the past. By making small changes during reviews and implementing them, they were able to achieve good results.

CONTINUED ON >> P2

TIRUMALA PARAKAMANI THEFT HC directs CID, ACB to continue investigation

PNS ■ Amaravati

In the highly debated Tirumala Parakamani theft case in the State politics, the Andhra Pradesh High Court has issued key orders. Along with directing the investigation agencies to register a first information report (FIR) based on the preliminary investigation in the Tirumala Parakamani theft case, the High Court permitted the Directors General of the Anti-Corruption Bureau (ACB) and the CID to take action as per law.

The High Court also ordered that, despite the compromise reached before the Lok Adalat regarding the Parakamani theft case, the investigation into the assets of the accused Ravi Kumar must continue. The ACB and the CID have been directed to share information with each other.

It is known that the CID recently submitted an additional report to the High Court concerning the compromise reached before the Lok Adalat in the case. After examining the reports submitted by the ACB DG and the CID, the High Court issued these orders.

On the other hand, the complainant in the Tirumala Parakamani theft case, former TTD AVSO Satish Kumar, was found dead. His body was discovered under suspicious circumstances on railway tracks, and the police in-



tially registered it as a suspicious death. Later, the investigation confirmed that Satish Kumar had been murdered. The CID is investigating the case.

In this context, the High Court has directed the CID to submit Satish Kumar's post-mortem report to the Registrar Judicial in a sealed cover.

It may be recalled that the Parakamani theft took place in March 2023. TTD employee Ravi Kumar was allegedly caught by TTD officials while stealing foreign currency. A petition was filed in the High Court alleging that the Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams did not conduct a full-fledged inquiry into the incident. It was further alleged that the TTD board at that time closed the case by reaching a compromise through the Lok Adalat.

Following the High Court's directions, the CID is currently investigating the Tirumala Parakamani theft case. As part of the investigation, former TTD chairmen Bhumana Karunakar Reddy, SV Subba Reddy, and former executive officer Dharma Reddy had also been questioned by the authorities.

Contempt power neither personal armour for judges nor sword to silence criticism: SC

PNS ■ New Delhi

The Supreme Court on Wednesday said courts must remain conscious while exercising the contempt jurisdiction that this power is neither a personal armour for judges nor a sword to silence criticism.

The observation came from a bench of Justices Vikram Nath and Sandeep Mehta that remitted a one-week sentence imposed on a woman by the Bombay High Court in a suo-motu criminal contempt matter.



The apex court said mercy must remain an integral part of the judicial conscience, to be extended where the contemnor sincerely acknowl-

edges his lapse and seeks to atone for it.

It said the power to punish necessarily carries within it the concomitant

power to forgive, where the individual before the court demonstrates genuine remorse and repentance for the act that has brought him to this position.

"Therefore, in exercise of contempt jurisdiction, courts must remain conscious that this power is not a personal armour for judges nor a sword to silence criticism," the bench said.

"After all, it requires fortitude to acknowledge contrition for one's lapse, and an even greater virtue to extend forgiveness to the

erring," it said.

The bench delivered its verdict on an appeal against the high court's April 23 order holding the appellant guilty of committing the offence of criminal contempt of court.

The high court had sentenced her to undergo simple imprisonment for a week and imposed a fine of Rs 2,000 on her.

The top court noted that the appellant before it was a former director of the Cultural of Seawoods Estates Limited housing complex.

CONTINUED ON >> P2

Combative Shah corners Cong

Says the party's defeat in polls due to its leadership, not EVMs or 'vote chori'

PNS ■ New Delhi

A combative Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Wednesday hit out at the opposition in the Lok Sabha for its campaign against SIR, saying the issue has been raked up as it can no longer win elections by "corrupt practices", and asserted that the reason for Congress' defeat in polls was its leadership, not EVMs or "vote chori".

In his intervention in the debate on election reforms, Shah alleged that the opposition wanted to keep the "avaidh ghushpathiye" (illegal immigrants) in the voter list and hence the SIR issue was raised, but the Narendra Modi government's policy is clear -- detect all aliens, delete their names from the voters list and throw them out of the country.

Shah gave a point-by-point rebuttal to the opposition's charges on SIR during his 90-minute speech, which also saw Leader of Opposition Rahul Gandhi interrupting the home minister to challenge him to debate with him on his three press conferences on "vote chori", leading to heated exchanges between the two leaders, and a walkout by the opposition some time later.

Seeking to corner the Congress, Shah claimed that there were three instances of "vote chori" by Jawaharlal



SHAH CLAIMED THAT THERE WERE THREE INSTANCES OF 'VOTE CHORI' BY JAWAHARLAL NEHRU, INDIRA GANDHI AND SONIA GANDHI

Nehru, Indira Gandhi and Sonia Gandhi.

"Post Independence, Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel was backed by 28 persons, while Jawaharlal Nehru was supported by two persons and yet Nehru became the prime minister, this was vote chori," he said. Shah said the second "vote chori" was by Indira Gandhi, when she granted herself immunity after the court set aside her election. He said the dispute of the third "vote chori" has just reached the civil courts on how Sonia Gandhi "became a voter before becoming a citizen of India", a remark that invited sharp reactions from the Congress benches.

Targeting the Congress, Shah said the reason for its poll losses was its leadership. "If someone asks a ques-



RAHUL GANDHI CHALLENGED THE HOME MINISTER TO DEBATE WITH HIM ON HIS THREE PRESS CONFERENCES ON 'VOTE CHORI'

tion in a presser, he is dubbed as a BJP agent, if they lose a case, they accuse the judge, if they lose an election, they blame EVMs. Now, when the EVM blame does not hold, they brought up vote chori... still, they lost Bihar. Now the reason for your defeat is your leadership and not EVM or voters' list," the home minister said.

"They think no one holds them accountable, 'bhagwan kare', I am proved wrong, and one day Congress workers seek their accountability," he said. Shah also accused the opposition of spreading falsehoods on Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls and launched a strong defence of the exercise, asking whether democracy can be safe when the prime minister and the chief minis-

ters are decided by 'ghushpathiye'.

Interrupting his speech, Rahul Gandhi challenged the home minister to debate with him on his three press conferences in which the Congress leader alleged "vote chori" by the BJP in collusion with the Election Commission.

Fiery exchanges were witnessed with Shah and Gandhi trading barbs. "Let us have a debate on my press conference. Amit Shah ji, I challenge you to have a debate on the three press conferences," the Congress leader said.

Shah shot back that he will not frame his speech according to the wishes of the Leader of Opposition and also not change the sequence of his argument on someone else's demand.

When the opposition MPs walked out during his speech, Shah said no matter how many times they boycott, the NDA will continue with its policy of "detect, delete and deport" illegal immigrants.

The opposition wants to normalise and formalise the "ghushpathiye" and add them to the electoral rolls, he alleged. Shah said the NDA won the recent assembly elections in Bihar, where SIR was conducted ahead of the polls, despite the opposition's objections to the Election Commission's exercise.

AP's GSDP estimates 'misleading': Buggana

PNS ■ Hyderabad

YSRCP leader and former Finance minister Buggana Rajendranath criticised the coalition government's continued focus on the past though a year and a half passed since the TDP-led parties came to power. He took particular aim at Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu for what he called a "manipulation of figures" concerning the state's financial health. "One and a half years have passed, yet they remain fixated on the past. Naidu has strategically claimed that the economy was ruined under the YSRCP government. The Chief Minister's assertions about revenue and Gross State Domestic Product (GSDP) are misleading. Even during the challenges posed by COVID, we (YSRCP government) managed to ensure that the GSDP increased," Rajendranath stated. He



continued to highlight the economic progress under the previous administration, noting that Andhra Pradesh climbed from 18th to 15th place in per capita income under the leadership of former chief minister YS Jagan Mohan Reddy. In terms of debt, he pointed out a stark difference. The YSRCP borrowed Rs 3.32 lakh crore over five years, compared to Naidu's Rs 2.66 lakh crore in just 18 months. "The Chief Minister

is spreading blatant lies. The public is growing tired of these outrageous calculations and exaggerated figures," he remarked. He further criticised the administration for its handling of the agricultural sector, stating, "Naidu's rule has been marked by incompetence and destruction. Under the coalition government, farmers are not receiving fair prices for their crops and are suffering significantly, he said.



Cong is engaging in 'politics of murder'

Alleges KTR, says BRS will stand by every worker

PNS ■ Hyderabad

Reacting to the incident, BRS Working President K T Rama Rao alleged that the Congress was engaging in "politics of murder". "It shows the bankruptcy of the ruling party that it is resorting to physical attacks as it is unable to face the elections democratically," he said. He assured that the BRS leadership would stand by every worker and leader of the party and provide assistance to the family of the deceased activist. Rama Rao demanded that the police take tough action against those responsible for the attack.

All set for the launch of the Atal-Modi Good Governance Yatra

PNS ■ Vijayawada

All arrangements have been completed for the launch of the 'Atal-Modi Good Governance Yatra' from Dharmavaram, the constituency represented by BJP national secretary and State Health Minister Satya Kumar Yadav. The yatra will begin on Thursday with the unveiling of Atal Ji's statue in Dharmavaram town and will continue across the state until December 25. This statewide journey, which will pass through all district headquarters, will conclude on December 25 (Atal Ji's birth centenary) with a grand public meeting in Amaravati.

Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu, Deputy Chief Minister Pawan Kalyan, and either Union Home Minister Amit Shah or BJP national president JP Nadda will attend the concluding meeting.

Following the directives of the BJP national leadership,



BJP leader supervising the arrangements for Atal-Modi Good Governance Yatra in Dharmavaram on Wednesday

the state unit is actively making arrangements to ensure the success of the bus yatra. The party leadership is making preparations through district BJP presidents for the unveiling of Atal Ji's statues in all district centres. Local TDP and Jana Sena leaders will also participate in the public meetings held in district headquarters. Chief Minister Naidu has already called upon all alliance leaders to take part.

Satya Kumar Yadav is the only BJP Minister in the State cabinet, and it is notable that the party has decided to launch the bus yatra from his constituency, Dharmavaram. BJP State President PVN Madhav and National Secretary, MLA and State Minister Satya Kumar personally inspected the arrangements for the unveiling of Atal Ji's statue and the public meeting to be held in Dharmavaram on

Wednesday. Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister Mohan Yadav will attend the meeting.

Union Minister Srinivasa Varma, BJP MLAs, and leaders of alliance parties will also participate. Dharmavaram town has been filled with saffron flags and flex banners. Flags of coalition partners—TDP and Jana Sena—are also displayed, highlighting the unity within the alliance.

Two marijuana smugglers get 10 years in jail

PNS ■ Amaravati

A court here has handed out two persons each 10 years of rigorous imprisonment in a marijuana trafficking case, DRI officials said on Wednesday.

The court also slapped a penalty of Rs 1 lakh on them, the officials added.

Directorate of Revenue Intelligence (DRI) officials said that the case pertained to a seizure of 1,400 kg of cannabis concealed



beneath wooden logs in a vehicle heading towards Hyderabad. The officials intercepted the vehicle near Eluru, a release from

the agency said.

Metropolitan Sessions Court, Vijayawada recently sentenced two persons to 10 years of rigorous

imprisonment and slapped a fine of Rs 1 lakh. These persons were arrested and the case was investigated by DRI, the release added. It observed that cannabis was transported in violation of the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (NDPS) Act, 1985. DRI noted that the court found both the individuals guilty of participating in a well-planned conspiracy to transport marijuana.

FROM PAGE - 1

CM calls for...

Naidu instructed officials to prioritise increasing people's satisfaction levels as the core measure of public service delivery.

Underscoring the importance of monitoring public service delivery at the last mile, Naidu directed the strengthening of the village and ward secretariats.

Noting that the NDA alliance government will not increase the power tariff this year, the Chief Minister said efforts are on to reduce power purchase price from Rs 4.92 to Rs 4 per unit.

He said his government has reestablished the brand image of Andhra Pradesh and attracted huge investments, citing the recent CII Partnership Summit in Visakhapatnam as the best example.

According to the TDP supremo, the southern state has achieved a growth rate of 12 per cent in the first quarter and 11.2 per cent in the second quarter of 2025-26, and set a target to achieve 17 per cent growth rate.

He said that the government is placing emphasis on the irrigation sector to achieve a storage capacity of 944 TMC water in various projects. Naidu highlighted that the state government is committed to developing all the regions in the state, noting that Andhra Pradesh stands in the top place in the country with the highest number, 638, of industrial parks. He said three economic zones, including Visakhapatnam with North Andhra and East Godavari

districts, Amaravati with West Godavari, Krishna, Guntur and Prakasam districts and Tirupati with Nellore and Kurnool districts will be developed.

Underlining that all government services will be made available online by January 15 (2026), he directed the departments lagging behind on this front to improve their services.

Highest priority should be given to the grievance redressal system by interacting with the petitioners to increase people's satisfaction levels, he said.

Over the past 18 months, Naidu said the government was successful in improving the performance of several departments. Citing the examples of the Endowments and Revenue departments, he said both the departments are still lagging while Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams has improved its performance and called for similar achievement in all the temples.

Naidu ask Ministers...

The CM told all Ministers to reduce delays immediately and make the system more responsive.

The Chief Minister set a strict three-month deadline for departments to improve their service delivery and public perception, stating that there can be no compromise in ensuring that welfare schemes reach genuine beneficiaries without procedural bottlenecks. He said technology audits and behav-

ioral improvements among officials would directly impact citizen satisfaction and insisted that even the best schemes hold no value if people are unhappy with their implementation.

The CM criticised the previous government for causing a Rs 9,000-crore loss to Andhra Pradesh by cancelling power purchase agreements and forcing costlier electricity purchases. He said the present government brought the open-market power purchase rate down from Rs 5.19 per unit to Rs 4.92 soon after assuming office. Reviewing economic indicators, Naidu said the state has set a target of 17.11 per cent GSDP growth for this financial year.

Naidu announced that a new tamper-proof system will be introduced to protect revenue records and prevent manipulation. He expressed concern that several departments did not properly utilise funds in previous years, and emphasised that the new government's goal is to deliver governance that citizens can clearly experience and appreciate. High volumes of public complaints indicate weak departmental performance, he noted, instructing the Revenue, Police and Municipal departments to reduce grievances at the earliest. The CM praised the Parvathipuram Manyam Collector for the "Musthabu" initiative in tribal schools, which has brought visible behavioural changes among students. He also directed departments to prepare in advance for summer drinking

water challenges and said Sustainable Development Goals will be reviewed every quarter.

Lokesh meets Sundar...

Achieving this required sustained 15 per cent annual growth, he said, which the state plans to pursue through a cluster-based development model. Over 20 sectors — including automotive, renewable energy, electronics, aquaculture, CBG, oats and AI, have been identified for cluster development to build strong, future-ready ecosystems. Lokesh highlighted that Andhra Pradesh is among the top five states in India in renewable energy, and is aiming for the No.1 or No.2 position across several identified sectors.

Explaining why global companies should invest in Andhra Pradesh, he outlined three reasons: experienced and visionary leadership under Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu, unmatched speed of execution, and the advantage of a "double-engine, bullet-train government" that plays a crucial role nationally despite being a regional party. He also emphasised the state's rigorous investment-monitoring system, where every MoU is tracked and high-value investments receive direct follow-up through dedicated WhatsApp groups, many of which he personally monitors. Citing examples of rapid progress, Lokesh said the country's largest steel plant, conceptualised during his first Zoom call

with Aditya Mittal, is now ready for groundbreaking in just 16 months after securing clearances, hearings, land allocation and R&R formalities. Andhra Pradesh concluded discussions with Google within 13 months, and the Google data center will have its groundbreaking ceremony in March next year. This month, on December 12, the state will also perform bhoomi puja for Cognizant's new campus.

TTD calls for ACB...

According to the findings, the shawls did not meet tender specifications, and tests confirmed that the material was inferior and not silk. The TTD vigilance department also analysed the supplier's transactions and forwarded its reports to the board. The ACB is expected to verify the vigilance wing's findings, the official added. TTD is the custodian of the Sri Venkateswara Swamy temple in Tirupati, considered the richest Hindu shrine in the world.

Rahul challenges...

Shah shot back at Gandhi that he would not frame his speech according to the wishes of the Leader of the Opposition and also not change the sequence of his argument on someone else's demand.

"Amit Shah gave a defensive response; this is a response of being rattled and scared," Gandhi hit back. As Shah countered the claims Gandhi made in his

press conferences in the last few months, there were heated exchanges between the treasury and opposition benches.

Pawan praises...

He said his father was a government employee and, therefore, he has immense respect for employees. He added that he understood the advantages and struggles that employees faced both at home and in offices.

He said that when he thought about what should be done for employees, officers suggested bringing reforms. Believing that growth is very important for hardworking employees, they implemented such measures, he said.

He criticised the previous government for completely neglecting roads and infrastructure. He said the previous government did not even bother about the difficulties faced by employees. He stated that the coalition government focused especially on employees' problems and the development of villages and implemented plans accordingly.

He said that in the Panchayat Raj Department, nearly two lakh people are working on an outsourcing basis, and when the discussion came up about how to provide promotions to them, Venkatakrishna made efficient efforts

Contempt power...

It noted that in a pending

petition before the high court challenging the vices of Rule 20 of the Animal Birth Control Rules, 2023, an intervenor had filed an affidavit stating that the appellant had issued a circular in January 2025 that contained remarks about the alleged "dog mafia". The high court had observed that the circular was "contemptuous in nature" and later directed that a show-cause notice be issued to the appellant.

The top court noted that in an affidavit submitted by Seawoods before the high court, it was clarified that the board of directors did not know the contemptuous circular issued by the appellant. The appellant had also filed an affidavit before the high court and accepted that a grave error was com-

mited in the issuance of the contemptuous circular, which was done by her under the mental pressure exerted by the residents. The high court had observed that the act of publishing the contemptuous circular by the contemnor satisfied the ingredients of criminal contempt, as it "scandalised and lowered the authority of the court". Dealing with the appeal, the apex court said in her affidavit filed before the high court, the appellant had tendered an unconditional and unqualified apology. "However, the high court declined to accept the apology, observing that, on a holistic reading, the affidavit did not reflect any genuine compunction for the acts complained of," the bench said.

<div></div> <div>Chhatrapati Sambhajnagar Municipal Corporation (Electrical) Section.</div>	
Contact No.0240-2333536-40	Office Address: Chhatrapati Sambhajnagar Municipal Corporation. (Electrical) Section. Town Hall, Aurangabad.431001 Email:- eelight@aurangabadmahapalika.org
Name of work	Bid Submission End Date
1. Shifting of MSEDCIL DTC, Pole, HT/LT line due to road widening and obstruction to traffic at newly developing roads in Chhatrapati Sambhajnagar (Tender Amount 23,70,51,217/-) by the e-tendering, detailed information / (NTT) documents are available on the website https://www.mahatenders.gov.in	Date:20.12.2025 Time 5.00 PM
Executive Engineer (Electrical) Chhatrapati Sambhajnagar Municipal corporation.	
Advt. : 624/2025 Date : 10/12/2025	

TTD tells non-Hindu employees to take VRS or accept transfer

PNS ■ Tirumala

The issue of employees belonging to non-Hindu religions in TTD has once again come to the forefront. The government has reportedly taken a crucial decision regarding these employees. It has given the green signal to implement the options of voluntary retirement and transfer to other government departments. Recently, the government approved the proposals put forward by the TTD governing body. With this decision, the long-standing controversy is expected to come to an end soon. TTD had earlier clearly stated that employees belonging to other religions cannot continue to work in the temple administration. In a governing body

meeting, a decision was taken in this regard. The TTD board suggested two options for removing non-Hindu employees. The first option is Voluntary Retirement Scheme (VRS). If they accept this option, they will be paid their remaining service benefits and salaries in a lump sum. If they do not accept this offer, they will be transferred to other government departments. These two options will be given to the non-Hindu employees, and TTD stated that they may choose whichever option they prefer.

The proposals made by the TTD board were sent to the government seeking approval, and the government has now approved them, allowing their implementation. The orders are



expected to be executed soon.

Some employees belonging to other religions had joined TTD before the rule prohibiting non-Hindus from working in the institution came into existence. They had recorded their religions correctly in the service register. Many of them have

department, they will be transferred to other posts. This entire process is expected to be completed soon.

TTD is also planning to take strict action against employees who have registered themselves as Hindus in service records but follow other religions. A decision was taken in an officials' meeting held on the December 1. From now on, if such complaints arise, TTD will treat them seriously and order a vigilance inquiry. If solid evidence is found in the investigation, such employees will be removed from service. The board has directed vigilance officials to collect strong evidence that will stand firm in courts, as taking action based on weak evidence may lead to legal complications.

TTD receives Rs 1 crore for Pranadana Trust, two car donations

PNS ■ Tirupati

A devotee from Tamil Nadu has donated Rs 1 crore to Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams' Sri Venkateswara Pranadana Trust, which offers free medical treatment to poor patients afflicted with life-threatening diseases.

M Sowmya from Erode handed over the demand draft to TTD additional executive officer Ch Venkaiah Chowdary. "M Sowmya donated Rs 1 crore on Tuesday to the TTD-run Sri Venkateswara Pranadana Trust," said an official press release from the temple body.

SV Pranadana Trust offers free medical treatment for diseases related to the heart, brain, cancer and others, which otherwise are very expensive procedures.

On Wednesday, the TTD received two car donations valued at Rs 19 lakh.



SV Pranadana Trust offers free medical treatment for diseases related to the heart, brain, cancer and others, which otherwise are very expensive procedures

Arjun Kollikonda from Tirupati donated an electric car worth Rs 10 lakh on behalf of an automobile dealership, while Saravanan Karunakaran from Tamil Nadu donated a car worth Rs 9 lakh, said an official release from the temple body.

Special rituals were performed for the vehicles in front of the Srivari temple, after which the donors handed over the keys to the temple Peishkar Ramakrishna, the release said. TTD is the official custodian of Sri Venkateswara temple in Tirupati, the richest Hindu shrine in the world.

TWIN MURDER CASE

Pinnela brothers likely to surrender before court today

PNS ■ Macherla

Former YSRCP MLA Pinnelli Ramakrishna Reddy has reportedly taken a key decision. He has reportedly decided to surrender before the Macherla court on Thursday. Pinnelli Ramakrishna Reddy and his brother Venkatarami Reddy are facing allegations in the Palnadu twin murder case. They are accused in the murder case of TDP leaders J Koteswara Rao and J Venkateswarlu.

The High Court had cancelled the anticipatory bail granted to them on August 29. Challenging the verdict, they filed a petition in the Supreme Court, but on November 28 the Supreme Court dismissed their petition and directed them to surrender within two weeks.

During the hearing of their petition, the Supreme Court made key observations. It expressed surprise at how the accused had access to the



The High Court had cancelled the anticipatory bail granted to them on August 29. Challenging the verdict, they filed a petition in the Supreme Court, but on November 28 the Supreme Court dismissed their petition and directed them to surrender within two weeks

When the Pinnelli brothers sought more time to surrender, the Supreme Court made crucial remarks, stating that since they were powerful individuals in the state, they knew police would not arrest them. The court questioned the need for additional time to surrender.

However, based on the request made by the petitioners' lawyers, the Supreme Court granted them two weeks' time to surrender. As this deadline is nearing its end, it is reported that the Pinnelli brothers have decided to surrender. They are expected to surrender at the Macherla court on Thursday. Meanwhile, TDP leaders J Venkateswarlu and J Koteswara Rao were murdered on May 24, creating a sensation in Palnadu district. In this twin murder case, Pinnelli Ramakrishna Reddy is listed as A6 and his brother Pinnelli Venkatarami Reddy as A7.

Man arrested for killing wife's 'lover' in Annamayya dist

PNS ■ Rayachoti

A tragic incident has unfolded in Annamayya district, where a husband committed heinous act after suspecting his wife of fidelity. In a shocking act, he murdered a man he believed was involved with her.

According to the police, the suspect lured the man, a 45-year-old Avula Narasimulu, to a remote area under the pretense of conducting magic rituals, and strangled him with a shoelace. Once Narasimulu went missing, authorities initiated a missing person investigation.

The accused, Nagaraju, was subsequently taken into custody following the police's growing suspicions. During questioning, he confessed to the crime and revealed he had help from an accomplice, Mudiraju, who is currently on the run.



This unfortunate event highlights a disturbing trend of rising extramarital affairs, leading to situations that compromise not just relationships, but lives as well.

According to police, Narasimulu had been close to Nagaraju's family. It led Nagaraju to believe that Narasimulu was having an affair with his wife. Overcome by jealousy, he orchestrated a plan to eliminate Narasimulu. On November 20, he persuaded

Gang in fake loan racket caught in Sathya Sai district



PNS ■ Puttaparthi

Banks are increasingly offering gold loans. In fact, the gold loans are the fastest growing segment in the banking sector. The banks have been helping the farmers and people in urban areas by granting loans against the precious metal.

Taking advantage of it, a few individuals are pledging spurious gold and thus taking the bankers for a ride. Such an incident took place on Wednesday in the Sri Sathya Sai district. But, those who tried to cheat the bank found themselves behind bars. The gang that tried to deceive the banks is now facing jail time.

According to police, in the Obuladevaracheruvu and Gorantla branches of the State Bank of India in the district, a fake gold gang was caught trying to pledge spurious gold and take a gold loan. The members of the gang had earlier managed to take loans from the same bank allegedly using fake gold. However, when they returned once again to the same bank to take another gold loan, the bank staff became suspicious. As soon as the gang members arrived, the staff locked the gates and alerted the police.

The police reached the spot immediately and took the fake gold gang into custody. A case was registered, and an investigation was started.

After the fake gold racket was busted, the police alerted bankers across the Sri Sathya Sai district. They advised them to be cautious regarding those who come to take gold loans.

Stalled driving school project revived in Prakasam district

PNS ■ Ongole

In 2016, during the tenure of the then TDP government, a decision was taken to establish the country's second national-level Driving, Training, and Research School in Venkatachalampalli Panchayat under Darsi Mandal. For this purpose, 20 acres of land in Survey No. 251/2 were allocated. The then minister Siddha Raghava Rao laid the foundation stone for its construction in 2016. An amount of Rs 18.50 crore was sanctioned for the project.

The then government planned to train about one thousand people every year in operating heavy and light vehicles. Apart from this, refresher courses were planned for 14,500 drivers, and awareness programmes



on accident-free driving were intended to be conducted for 4,000 individuals.

After works began in 2016 on this driving school being established in Darsi, the then TDP government allocated Rs 2.5 crore. Based on this, some works were carried out, mainly leveling the hilly terrain for the construction of the driving track and constructing the pillars for the administrative building

HC intervention sought for establishing shelter homes for stray dogs

PNS ■ Kakinada

The Citizens Initiative, a civic welfare organisation, has appealed to the Chief Justice of the Andhra Pradesh High Court to direct the state government to release funds to local bodies, including the Kakinada Municipal Corporation, for acquiring land on the city outskirts to build permanent shelter homes for stray dogs and cattle.

The organisation has demanded compensation for deaths caused by stray dog bites that occurred after the Supreme Court's interim ruling on stray animals, arguing that such incidents should be treated as government negligence. The Supreme Court, in a suo motu case,



had ordered that all stray animals, including dogs and cows, be removed from public roads and national highways and housed in permanent shelters with necessary provisions such as food, fodder for cattle, and water.

Citizens Initiative secretary Duvvuri Subrahmanyam told reporters on

Wednesday that BJP leaders Yenimireddi Malakondalaiah, Chitneedi Srinivas, GVS Sarma, and Kandalam Ravi had also signed the memorandum, which was sent by registered post to the High Court Chief Justice.

Citing World Health Organisation estimates, Subrahmanyam noted that 28,000 to 30,000 people

die each year in India due to stray dog bites, most of them children. He stressed that cities and towns lacking available land need government support for land acquisition to construct permanent shelter homes. With many municipalities facing financial constraints, he urged the government to allocate funds immediately.

Referring to data from the Kakinada Smart City Corporation, he said the city requires permanent shelters for approximately 16,000 stray dogs. The growing stray dog menace, particularly acute in Kakinada, makes the establishment of shelter homes essential for both public safety and the welfare of the animals, he added.

CPI workers stage dharna over urea shortage

PNS ■ Kakinada

Farmers affiliated with the CPI staged a protest on Wednesday in front of the Agricultural Assistant Director's office at Pithapuram, raising slogans and demanding immediate supply of urea. They also sought the extension of the Annadatha Sukhibhava scheme to tenant farmers.

The protesters urged the government to release input subsidy to both farmers and tenant farmers who suffered crop losses in the recent cyclone and floods.

Addressing the gathering, CPI State Secretariat member Thatipaka Madhu said farmers were facing severe difficulties due to the shortage of urea. He criticised Deputy Chief Minister Pawan Kalyan for allegedly neglecting the



CPI workers staging a protest in Kakinada on Wednesday to highlight urea shortage in the district

needs of farmers in his Pithapuram constituency. Madhu urged the Deputy Chief Minister to directly interact with farmers at their homes to understand their problems rather than merely touring the fields. He demanded sanction of bank loans to tenant farmers, implementation of free crop insurance for all crops cultivated during the season, and a complete waiver of crop loans by the central

The protesters urged the government to release input subsidy to both farmers and tenant farmers who suffered crop losses in the recent cyclone and floods

government in view of adverse weather conditions and natural calamities.

CPI district secretary K Bodakonda, joint secretary Thokala Prasad, constituency unit secretary Saka Ramakrishna, AP Rythu Sangham district convenor Nakka Srinivasa Rao, and Mahila Samakhyia district general secretary A. Bhavani were among the leaders who participated in and led the protest.

DRUNK DRIVING

22 motorists sentenced to various jail terms

PNS ■ Kakinada

Special Mobile Judicial First-Class Magistrate N Usha Lakshmi on Wednesday sentenced 22 motorists to jail for drunk driving. The punishments ranged from one to six days of imprisonment.

One driver received a six-day jail term, three drivers were sentenced to four days each, and 11 others were awarded three-day terms. These cases were registered by Traffic Circle Inspectors Ramesh and Ramarao during a special late-night enforcement drive on Tuesday.

Officials said the crack-



down was being carried out under the directions of SP Bindu Madhav to curb road accidents. They urged motorists to follow traffic rules and avoid driving under the influence, stressing that doing so protects not only their own lives but also those of other road users.



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Order Order

Chanda Kochhar and husband move Bombay HC challenging ED attachment of property



Former ICICI Bank MD and CEO Chanda Kochhar and her husband Deepak Kochhar have moved the Bombay High Court challenging the Enforcement Directorate's (ED) attachment of their properties in a money laundering case linked to the Videocon loan scam. ED has attached ₹70 crore worth properties of Chanda Kochhar and husband. The have approached the Court against the order of the Appellate Tribunal under the Smugglers and Foreign Exchange Manipulators (Forfeiture of Property) Act (SAFEMA) which upheld the ED's attachment.

The matter was listed on Wednesday before a Bench of Justices Bharati Dangle and Shyam C Chandak which granted time to the ED to file its reply. The matter will be heard next on December 16. According to Kochhars, the attachment by the ED was in excess of the prescribed procedure.

The proceedings arose from a Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) case alleging that loans worth ₹1,730 crore were sanctioned to various Videocon Group companies between 2009 and 2011 when Chanda Kochhar was the bank's chief. Her husband was caught for taking kickbacks from Videocon for allotting loans. The loans later turned into non-performing assets, allegedly causing losses to ICICI Bank. After the loan was disbursed, ₹64 crore was transferred by Videocon to Nupower Renewables Pvt Ltd (NRPL), a firm owned by Deepak Kochhar.

SC directs Haryana to restore green land to its original State

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

The Supreme Court on Wednesday directed the Haryana urban development body to restore the green area to its original state where 40 fully-grown trees were uprooted to build an accessible road to a newly constructed BJP office in Karnal. A bench of Justices J B Pardiwala and K V Viswanathan agreed with the submissions of advocate Bhubender Pratap Singh, appearing for a 1971 war veteran that trees were felled illegally to construct an approach road for the BJP office.

The bench was not satisfied with the submission of Additional Solicitor General Vikramjit Banerjee appearing for the Haryana Government that all required permissions were taken for allotment and all green norms were followed.

He assured the court that trees would be planted in proportion to the number of trees that were felled for the approach road.

The top court gave three months to Haryana Shahri Vikas Pradhikaran (HSVP) and Karnal Municipal Corporation to restore the green land in a residential colony to its original state.

It, however, refused to go into the larger question of the legality of allotment of land in a residential colony adjoining the national highway to the Karnal unit of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), saying it is too late to go into that question.

On November 26, the top court termed as "pathetic" and pulled up the Haryana Government and its urban development body for uprooting 40 fully grown trees to build an accessible road to a newly constructed BJP office in Karnal. It sought a remedial action plan,

warning them of being "taken to task". The apex court was hearing a petition filed by a 1971 war veteran, challenging the dismissal of his plea by the Punjab and Haryana High Court on May 3 against the arbitrary allocation of a plot in a residential area to the ruling BJP in Haryana and later, the construction of an access road for its office by uprooting 40 fully grown trees situated in a green area.

It had asked Additional Solicitor General Vikramjit Banerjee, appearing for the Haryana Government, to come out with an explanation on the issue.

Singh, appearing for Col Davinder Singh Rajput (ret'd), a 1971 war veteran, contended that land was not allotted according to norms to the BJP in a residential colony.

Rajput (79) submitted in his plea that he was wounded in the war and a decorated soldier, having been awarded the Vir Chakra for gallantry.

He had purchased a plot, measuring 1,000 square yards, in Sector 9, Urban Estate, Karnal, from the Haryana Shehri Vikas Pradhikaran (HSVP), then the Haryana Urban Development Authority (HUDA).

Rajput said he was aggrieved by the arbitrary allotment of the land adjacent to his plot in a residential plotted colony to the ruling political party in the state in complete violation of the provisions of the Haryana Urban Development Act, 1977 and the relevant policies of the Department of Town and Country Planning and HUDA.

"The petitioner was also aggrieved by the felling of 40 trees in the green belt to make a 10-metre pathway through the 100-metre green belt in front of the house of the petitioner.

IndiGo crisis: Delhi HC pulls up Govt, airlines

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

The Delhi High Court on Wednesday questioned the central Government for not taking timely action to check the crisis caused by IndiGo flight cancellations and asked why the situation was allowed to precipitate, with lakhs of passengers stranded and other airlines charging hefty fares.

"The question is why, at all, this crisis arose and what have you been doing?" a bench of Chief Justice Devendra Kumar Upadhyaya and Justice Tushar Rao Gedela said and directed the Government and the airline to take steps to adequately compensate the affected persons.

The court asked the authorities if they were "helpless" or they could have taken action against IndiGo after it failed to implement Flight Duty Time Limitation (FDTL) rules, including pilot rest rules, by November 1 — which they blamed for the crisis.

The High Court said that besides the trouble and harassment caused to the stranded passengers, the question is of the losses caused to the country's economy.

Raising the issue of surge pricing, the bench also asked how other airlines could take advantage of the crisis situation and charge hefty sums for tickets from the passengers.

"The ticket which was available for ₹5,000, the prices went up to ₹30,000 to ₹35,000. If there was a crisis, how could other airlines be permitted to take advantage? How can it (ticket price) go up to ₹35,000 and ₹39,000? How could other airlines start charging? It's like a pound of flesh, how could this happen," asked the bench, which heard the matter for more than one-and-a-half hours.

The bench directed that by January 22, the next date of hearing, if the inquiry initiated by a



committee into the disruption in flight operations over the past week is complete, its report should be submitted to the court in a sealed cover.

"We appreciate the steps taken by the Ministry of Civil Aviation and the DGCA, but what bothers us is how such a situation was allowed to precipitate, leading to the stranding of lakhs of passengers unattended at airports across the country.

"This has not only caused inconvenience to the passengers but also affected the economy, as in the present day, fast movement of passengers is an important aspect to keep the economy functioning," the bench said.

The court was informed by the counsel for the Centre and the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) that the statutory mechanism was totally in place and a show-cause notice was issued to IndiGo, which apologised

profusely. Additional Solicitor General Chetan Sharma, representing the ministry and DGCA, said the crisis precipitated on account of various non-compliances of the guidelines issued by the authorities from time to time, including flight duty hours of crew members.

He said the unprecedented price surge has been controlled and capped, which had never been done before. He added that from time to time, the authorities have asked IndiGo for the timely implementation of Civil Aviation Requirements (CAR) provisions.

He said repeated extensions were given to airlines to implement FDTL rules, which include pilot rest rules, and when the deadline of November 1 came, other airlines fell in line but IndiGo did not.

To this, the bench said, "In case any airline failed to adhere, what is the provision available to you? Are you helpless? So you are expressing

your inability. What action could you have taken against them for failure to adhere?"

The court, which was hearing a PIL seeking directions to the Centre to provide support and refunds to passengers affected by the cancellation of hundreds of flights by IndiGo, said these steps have been taken by the Government once the crisis erupted. "The question is why, at all, this crisis arose and what have you been doing?" it said.

Senior advocate Sandeep Sethi, representing IndiGo, informed the court that the crisis occurred on account of a multitude of factors, including unforeseen issues like technical glitches and adverse weather conditions in North India.

The court directed the airline to make immediate arrangements for compensating the stranded passengers, not only for the cancellation of flights but for other troubles caused to them.

"What about the agony? Because they faced hostile staff. Think of those who got stranded for a week," it told Sethi.

"Since a committee has already been constituted where IndiGo will have an opportunity to put forth its case, we refrain from making any observation as to the reason for the disruptions of flight operations of the airline.

"While we have taken cognisance of the issue in public interest, we make it clear that the observations are aimed to ensure that best public interest is served both by the Government and IndiGo," the bench said.

The court directed the authorities to ensure that the situation normalises soon and all airlines employ an adequate number of pilots so that FDTL provisions are followed.

It further asked the Government why it did not implement FDTL rules in time and questioned whether the failure to timely implement the rules would not compromise passengers' safety.

"If a pilot is supposed to make two landings in a night and he is doing six. This means he is compromising with passengers' safety," the bench said.

The court was hearing a PIL filed by advocates Akhil Rana and Utkarsh Sharma seeking a judicial inquiry into the IndiGo crisis. The plea also sought fair compensation to people whose flights were cancelled and relief for people stuck at the airports.

The court, however, expressed dissatisfaction over the manner in which the PIL was filed without any research and documentation.

On Wednesday, IndiGo cancelled nearly 220 flights at three major airports. IndiGo has been facing heat from both the Government and the passengers for cancelling hundreds of flights since December 2, citing regulatory changes in the pilots' flight duty.

Compensation: Expect SIT to also probe past NOIDA CEOs, says SC

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

The Supreme Court Wednesday said the SIT constituted by it to probe higher payment of compensation to farmers for their land allegedly in "connivance" and "collusion" of officials from NOIDA must also investigate the chief executive officers and others at helm of the authority for the past 10-15 years. A bench of Chief Justice Surya Kant and Justices Ujjal Bhuyan and N Kotiswar Singh also gave the Special Investigation Team (SIT) two more months to complete the investigation.

Solicitor General Tushar Mehta, appearing for NOIDA, said he wants to file an affidavit to put forward the view of the authority in the matter.

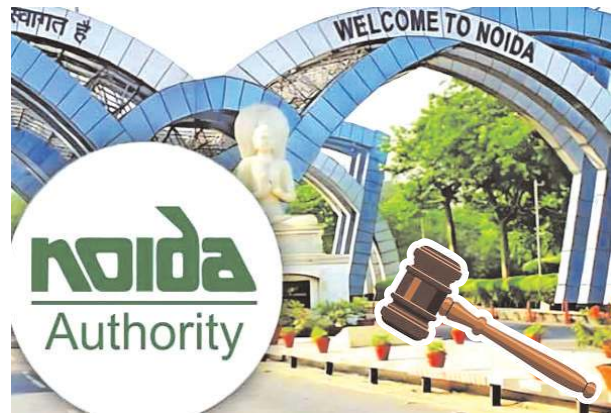
The top court clarified that farmers who have been given higher payments will not be penalised and no coercive

action will be taken against them.

Senior advocate Siddharth Dave, appearing for one of the farmers who has allegedly got higher payment for his land, said that he has been receiving notices from the SIT to come and record his statement. "Kindly protect the farmers, as it is not their fault," he urged the bench.

The bench said it has already clarified in its earlier orders that investigation is not to harass the farmers but to probe the connivance and collusion of officials, who indulged in higher payments.

It took on record the status report filed by the SIT in which three months time has been sought to complete the investigation. On August 13, the top court ordered an SIT probe against NOIDA officials for allegedly colluding with builders to pay compensations to land owners beyond their entitlement. It



had accepted the findings of the SIT which found prima facie substance in the allegations and asked the recommendations of the SIT headed by senior IPS officer SB Shiradkar to be given to Uttar Pradesh chief secretary who was asked to place it before the council of ministers to consider converting Noida into a "metropolitan council". Taking serious note of the

SIT's findings, the top court had constituted a fresh SIT comprising three senior IPS officers to assess the bank accounts and assets of offering Noida officials and other beneficiaries of the irregularities with the help of forensic auditors and experts from economic offence wings.

"DCG, UP shall constitute an SIT comprising three police officers of IPS cadre to

investigate the issues as identified by the previous SIT...," it had said. The top court on January 23 framed four issues to be investigated by the SIT — whether the quantum of compensation paid to the land owners was higher than they are entitled to in terms of the judgments passed by the courts from time to time; if so, who were the officers/officials responsible for such exorbitant payment; whether there was any collusion or connivance between the beneficiaries and officers/officials of NOIDA; and whether the overall functioning of Noida lacks transparency, fairness and commitment to the cause of public interest.

It had directed the new SIT to immediately register preliminary enquiries and proceed to inquire into the points highlighted by the previous SIT on the issue of collusion or connivance

between the beneficiaries and officials of Noida.

"If the SIT, after preliminary enquiry, finds that a prima facie cognisable offense was committed, it shall register the case and proceed further in accordance with law," the top court had said.

In order to bring transparency and fairness in the investigation, the top court had directed the chief secretary to post a chief vigilance officer preferably from an IPS cadre or on deputation from Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) within four two weeks.

It also directed the state Government to set up a citizen advisory board in Noida immediately.

"Similarly, the chief secretary should also put up the matter before competent authority and ensure that the citizen advisory board is constituted within four weeks," it had said.

Sandesara deposits ₹5,100 crore in SC as OTS to get out of criminal cases



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

The Sandesara Group, facing several criminal cases, deposited ₹5,100 crore in the Supreme Court as One Time Settlement (OTS) to banks. With this payment as OTS, all criminal cases against the Group and its fugitive promoters filed by CBI, ED, Income Tax and SFIO and all cases will be quashed as per the Supreme Court's order dated November 19. In a statement issued on Wednesday, the Group said that they have remitted ₹5,100 crore at the apex court on December 6.

"Nitin Sandesara, Chetan Sandesara, and family have deposited 5,100 crores with the Registry of the Honorable Supreme Court of India as per the Supreme Courts order on November 19, 2025. The deposit of ₹5,100 crores has been fully made as of 6th of December 2025. This comprehensively brings closure to all cases regarding the Sandesara Family and their companies pending before multiple judicial forums and Government agencies since 2017," said the statement.

In 2017, Sandesara brothers Nitin and

Chetan and family members escaped from India and settled in Nigeria by using their illegally obtained Albanian passports. They were facing CBI and ED cases for bank loan frauds of more than ₹16,000 crore. The ED has attached properties worth ₹10,000 crore and by this OTS scheme, Government has agreed to withdraw all the cases against the fugitives.

In a curious development, the Bench comprising Justices JK Maheshwari and Vijay Bishnoi on November 19 allowed the fugitive Chetan-Nitish Sandesara brothers' firms to deposit ₹5,100 crore as OTS in the Registry by December 17 to avoid all cases, including criminal cases registered by various probe agencies. The apex court agreed to the Central Government, which submitted the OTS scheme, including withdrawing all cases in a sealed cover, on November 18. With this order Supreme Court has allowed fugitive Sandesara brothers and their Sterling Group to go scot-free from all criminal cases filed by CBI, ED and Income Tax related to bank loan frauds by paying ₹5,100 crore, which is only 1/3 of the dues.

Chandrashekhar trust dispute revived, court allows suit alleging mismanagement

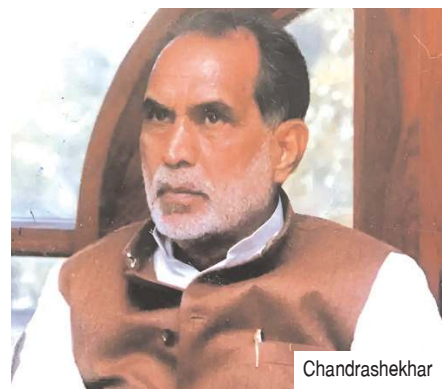
PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

A Delhi Court has allowed the transposition of PS Prasad as co-plaintiff and the amended memo of parties be filed within 30 days in a 15 year old litigation case related to Bharat Yatra Trust founded by late Prime Minister Chandrashekhar. The order, delivered by Dwarka District Sumit Dalal, hence resolves multiple procedural and jurisdictional objections that had stalled progress in the matter for years.

The litigation began in 2011 when three individuals — Late Indubhai C Patel, Late Ayub Khan, and HN Sharma (Political Advisor to late Prime Minister Chandrashekhar) — approached the Delhi High Court seeking judicial directions into the administration of the Trust. With the deaths of Patel and Khan in 2015 and 2016, respectively, the suit was being pursued solely by Sharma, prompting a challenge that the mandatory requirement of "two or more persons" under Section 92 CPC was no longer satisfied.

The Court rejected the argument that the proceedings had abated, clarifying that a Section 92 suit is considered "instituted" only after leave is formally granted. The court directed, With the impleadment of PS Prasad as co-plaintiff, the statutory requirement of "two or more persons having an interest in the trust" stands satisfied for the purposes of consideration of leave under Section 92 CPC.

In this context, the Court allowed the application of PS Prasad — an admitted trustee of the Bharat Yatra Trust — holding that his presence satisfies the statutory requirement. The order notes that Prasad has been associated with the Trust since 1988, filed the original written statement on behalf of the Trust in 2011, and is acknowledged as a



trustee even in the pleadings of Ayub Khan as Defendant No. 2.

Significantly, the Court also held that Sharma (sole surviving original plaintiff) has shown a prima facie, substantial and existing interest in the affairs and administration of Bharat Yatra Trust and Prasad is an admitted trustee and, therefore, has a clear and direct interest in the Trust's due administration.

Finding that the Trust is clearly a Public Charitable Institution and that the plaint contains allegations of breach of trust, mismanagement, and the need for court-supervised intervention, the judge formally granted leave under Section 92 CPC.

The suit will now proceed to trial, with parties directed to complete admission and denial of documents.

The order marks another chapter in a saga The Pioneer has followed closely for decades — both during Chandrashekhar's lifetime and after. In 2006, The Pioneer reported his desire to bequeath assets and the Bharat Yatra Kendras across Delhi, Haryana, Mumbai, and Ballia to the nation.

Fadnavis vows action in Pune land deal



BJP MP Kangana Ranaut on Wednesday said in Lok Sabha that Prime Minister Narendra Modi does not need to manipulate voting systems to win elections because “he has hacked the hearts of the people”.

Participating in a discussion on ‘Election Reforms’, Ranaut said the past year had been “deeply worrying” because of what she described as daily disruptions by opposition members.

She said watching them often felt “traumatic”, adding that MPs had repeatedly “jumped into the Well, shouted ‘SIR, SIR’, created a spectacle, tried intimidation and misbehaved in every possible way”.

Ranaut said that the disruptions prevented Parliament from functioning.

“Maybe, barring the last two or three days, they did not let the House run at all. We are representatives of the people; we come here to learn, especially as new MPs,” she said, accusing the Opposition MPs of turning every session into theatre.

On allegations of EVM tampering, Ranaut said Congress leaders were unwilling to accept electoral defeats. “Let me tell the Congress people that the Prime Minister does not hack EVMs, he hacked people’s hearts,” she said.

She mocked demands for a return to the paper ballot system, calling it an “outdated relic of another era”.

Meanwhile, a section of the state leadership of All India Majlis-e-Ittehadul Muslimeen (AIMIM), of Asaduddin Owaisi, which had been expanding its base in Bengal on Wednesday said that they were not presently thinking of forming any alliance with Kabir's party saying "his views and conduct are politically suspect and ideologically incompatible." Kabir however said he had kept his options for talks open for any like-minded group.

Noting that Parth, a majority partner in the firm involved, was omitted from

The firm was also allegedly exempted from paying Rs. 21 crore in stamp duty. When asked about the HC's remarks in the case, Fadnavis said, "I have not heard what the HC has said, but a proper reply will be submitted in the court about what it has asked for. From the very beginning, the Government's stand is not to protect anyone.



The village panchaya allegedly ordered the social boycott of three members of an upper caste community for consuming food at the Dalit man's house, and set certain conditions before them, including organising a feast, to avoid ostracism. While two of the three men

Udaypura tehsildar Dinesh Bargale said that the Dhakad filed an application to the collector during the public hearing on Tuesday, accusing the panchayat of issuing the social boycott order. Dhakad made these allegations against the sarpanch, deputy sarpanch, and panchs of the concerned gram panchayat, he said.

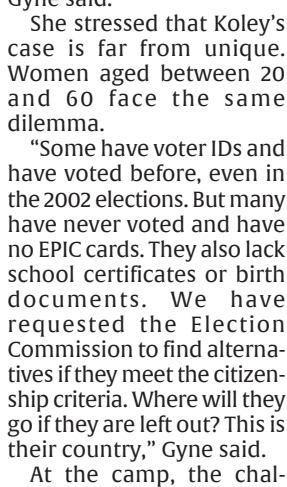
Dhakad said he and his fellow gram panchayat assistant secretary Manoj Patel and teacher Satyendra Singh Raghuvanshi had a meal at a Dalit family's house in the village as part of a 'shraddha' ceremony. But after the incident, the panchayat passed a resolution declaring that eating at a Dalit's house was a "greater sin than cow slaughter" and those who indulged in it must purify themselves by bathing in the Ganga river and by offering a

He also claimed that when he raised this issue with the panchayat, he was asked to have his head shaved to absolve himself of the sins and perform the "*pind daan*" (a post-death ritual) for his father while he was still alive. When contacted, sarpanch Bhagwan Singh Patel dismissed the allegations as baseless. "If someone in the village is not inviting him to their programme due to personal reasons, then it is his personal matter.

Every citizen has the right to live with dignity and equality. Therefore, if such a case comes to light, an investigation will be conducted and

He said he has been posted at the Government middle school in the village for the last 16 years and the Dalit man, where he went to have meal, has been his friend. "I do not believe in the caste system, so I went to my friend Santosh Mehta's house to eat during the 'shraddha' ceremony. Someone made a video of the incident and circulated it locally, which led to a controversy," he said. Talking to PTI, Raghuvanshi admitted that as per the pan-chayat's order, he went to his guru's ashram in Allahabad and came back after bathing at the sangam (confluence) of rivers. "I don't have complaints against anyone," he said.

Around 3,500 sex workers earn their livelihood in Chetla, but nearly 30 per cent have stayed away from enrolment despite being Indian citizens, she said. "They have made new lives here; new relationships, whether those were accepted by the society or not. For years, they knew only the importance of Aadhaar cards, ration cards and the passbook of the Usha Multipurpose Cooperative



The AERO asked her to present her case at the public hearing after December 16. "We are here to assist, not disenfranchise. Our job is to show you the right way," he said.

Chief Minister Vishnu Deo Sai noted that the Government is committed to



“On October 28, 1937 CWC passed a resolution about Vande Mataram. Mahatma

ruling party of insulting
 Tagore, and said, "Why is the
 Government making this
 Bankim Chandra Chatto-
 padhyay vs Tagore. They
 wanted to insult Nehru, but
 they ended up insulting
 Tagore". The Congress leader
 slammed the BJP for its
 "appeasement" jibes at his
 party, and said BJP ideologue
 Syama Prasad Mookerjee had
 formed a Government with
 AK Fazlul Huq, who later pre-
 sented the Lahore resolution
 for the formation of Pakistan.
 "A lot has been said, the
 aim of this whole debate is to
 malign Nehru. This is a part of
 that project. You are insulting
 people who sacrificed their
 lives for the nation,"
 he added.

Editor's
TAKE

India's fire safety complacency

Far from being an isolated accident, the Goa tragedy is a stark reminder of systemic lapses and the urgent need to implement fire safety regulations in letter and spirit

A devastating fire at a popular Arpora nightclub claimed at least 25 lives in Goa. Yet another fire incident has been added to the already long list of such disasters in the country. As tragic as the Goa nightclub fire is, it is not an aberration. It is a symptom of a deeper, systemic failure India has refused to confront for far too long. What makes the Goa tragedy especially tragic is that it was avoidable had a little attention been paid to fire safety. Every fire incident gives clues about how to avoid it, yet nothing is done, no lessons learnt, no action taken. Fires in public places have been happening year after year in the country – at the Uphaar cinema in 1997, the AMRI hospital in 2011, the Surat coaching centre in 2019, and countless other similar incidents. These incidents should have been enough to wake the authorities from their deep slumber and act to implement the elaborate fire safety measures mandated by law, but that, unfortunately never happens and after sometime yet another tragedy adds to the long list.

How seriously we take fire safety is visible in any government building – fire buckets used as spittoons, non-functional fire alarms, fire exits used for storing trash, and fire extinguishers missing from their slots. Besides, no one has any idea how to deal with a fire emergency, as fire drills take place only on paper. Moreover, congestion and encroachments on streets make it literally impossible for fire tenders to reach the spot. Electrical short circuits, the major cause of concern, are only waiting to happen when wiring is loosely hanging and often bearing more load than it is designed to handle.

The Goa fire is a reminder that this complacency has a deadly cost. Preliminary investigations already hint at familiar and troubling lapses: overcrowding, blocked exits, non-functional fire alarms, inadequate staff training, and possibly an electrical malfunction. These are recurring patterns repeated across public and private spaces. Our chronic disregard for fire safety norms has made preventable deaths almost routine.

In the past each of these disasters triggered outrage, promises of reform, and inquiries that did not bring about any change in the mindset. Fire safety remains the last priority. The nightclub fire once again reveals the gap between rules on paper and enforcement in practice. India's fire codes are not the problem; lax compliance is. Safety certificates are treated as bureaucratic stamps rather than life-and-death mandates. Inspections are irregular, penalties are too light, and loopholes are plentiful. What India desperately needs is not more laws, but the will to implement existing fire safety policies in letter and spirit. That requires making safety audits mandatory and non-negotiable, introducing criminal liability for negligence, strengthening fire departments, and empowering authorities to shut down violators. Technology – such as smart sensors, automated alarms, and digital compliance tracking – must also be integrated into fire prevention systems. Equally important is public awareness. The loss of 25 lives in Goa should serve as a collective reckoning. If we cannot learn from this disaster, then we are condemned to repeat it at the cost of innocent lives.

Breaking away from Macaulay

The Prime Minister has urged the nation to fully free itself from the psychological and cultural imprint of Thomas Babington Macaulay's 1835 educational blueprint by 2035 – two centuries after it was crafted to entrench colonial dominance in India



JS
RAJPUT

The Prime Minister exhorts the countrymen to move out of its demoralising influence fully and completely by 2035, when Macaulay's strategic planning completes its 200 years in India. That the PM should be talking about it in all seriousness reaffirms once again the ingenuity and acumen in the futuristic educational planning contained in Macaulay's Minutes of 1835, intended to cement English rule in India by demolishing Indian education and knowledge systems, hitting at the very roots of India's history, culture, scriptures, and individual self-respect. One of the most well-established villains of Indian educational discourse in the post-independence era has been Thomas Babington Macaulay and the contents of his Minutes of 1835.

The great success of Macaulay in his mission is crystal clear: India acknowledges the need in 2025 to proceed in a national mission mode to move out of the influence of slavery and self-negation that has engulfed the Indian mind-set and persists even after independence, and the National Education Policies of 1968, 1986/92, and NEP 2020. The relevant challenge is to analyse why India could not wash off the influence of an alien strategy even after serious intentions to do so were expressed earlier in policies and by policymakers in their discourses.

The widespread impact of Macaulay's ingenuity and foresight was so clinical, incisive, and widespread that it impeded the spread of the strength of the Indian knowledge quest to global knowledge and its civilisational contribution to the world outside. It was demoralisingly infectious to India and Indians, though vehemently beneficial to the empire. India needs to analyse it in the contemporary context and comprehend the strength of the ingredients contained in the Minutes of Macaulay that could transform the psyche of Indians and seriously injure a great tradition of knowledge quest. Not only this, it made Indians drift away from a sense of pride in their spiritually enriched culture that firmly believes that "Truth is one; the learned reveal it in various ways".

Could we take a view on how to refurbish the sense of pride and inspiration in Indian culture to this day? The manner in which Sanatan is shamelessly despised, and even Vande Mataram is detested, says a lot about the inadequacies in the intent, civility, and culture of the admirers of Macaulay's ingenuity and influence.

Macaulay, his ingenuity, and outcomes offer a great learning opportunity for policymakers and implementers working in the arena of education, culture, social cohesion, and religious amity in India. One insists on it while fully appreciating how seriously injurious but effective were his skills in demoralising an ancient people and making them



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ITS CIVILISATIONAL
CONTRIBUTION TO
THE WORLD
OUTSIDE

The author is an
educationist, a Padma Shri
awardee, and works in
religious amity and social
cohesion

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shift their reverence to an alien and subjugating culture and language. The respect for the English language that traversed to every home and hearth in India-including the illiterate-owes it completely to this one-man ingenuity.

Even today, practically everyone in India is convinced that the passage to a better future lies in learning the English language. This is what made the PM mention why it is also necessary to refurbish linguistic pride, as that alone offers a sound basis for cultural renaissance. Why do we need to refer to Macaulay for it? Yes, we do, and we need to do so with real sincerity and commitment. Even after eight decades of independence and repeated emphasis in NEP 2020 on the mother-tongue medium, the rush for admissions to English-medium schools in the capital city of Delhi from day one of schooling is just rising-and rising further. It represents the national urge.

And why should it not be? In the first week of December 2025, the media reported that for 613 positions of assistant professors in Haryana government colleges, 17,195 candidates applied, but only 151 could clear the English qualifying test. In the SC category, only two out of 60 qualified. English separates them and prevents them from entering the system, which is their rightful constitutional due. This is just one of numerous instances that could be cited as the suffering inflicted by the craze for English that persists practically unsoftened even after independence, in spite of assurances being made in favour of the mother-tongue medium.

The rush for English-medium private schools and the social upliftment it assures lucky families remains a queer phenomenon across the spectrum. The great rush for urbanisation has generated numerous socio-cultural contexts that indicate the urban mindset. Preferred house-

maids are those with skills to place orders in English to home suppliers and read and understand items, expiry dates, etc., English being the preferred language of most malls and other home-delivery suppliers.

It was only a casual acquaintance with Macaulay in my university days, as I was studying and researching physics in the sixties of the last century. The compulsions of the English medium were naturally serious deterrents to most of us in acquiring the desired level of comprehension, forcing refuge in learning by rote. As one transitioned from physics to the arena of professional education, teacher education, and educational administration, one had to read Macaulay in detail and in depth. It became a professional requirement with increasing involvement and association with aspects such as curriculum development, teacher preparation, education policy formulation, and institution building. It was interesting to observe that everyone around-in institutions, meetings, and conferences-was keen to blame Macaulay for practically every misery that was thrust on India and its people by the British. Macaulay was "accepted" by practically most educationists and educators in India as the father of the doctrine: "To subjugate India, Indians must be delinked from India." Macaulay's Minutes of 1835 were implemented rather ruthlessly.

The English language, Western literature, Western civilisation, and culture were to be firmly established in India as the only path to becoming advanced and superior human beings. Not that everyone who mattered agreed, as some were interested in supporting Sanskrit and Arabic, but they were ignored and left to their fate under the argument that these needed financial support, while English schools had a rush of fee-paying students from the upper echelons of society. It is a long story that has established Macaulay even in schemes of futuristic educational planning.

He succeeded in creating "a class of people, Indians in blood and colour, but English in tastes, in opinions, in morals, and in intellect." Over the last eight decades, India could not wriggle out of the clutches of the "Western cultural superiority syndrome". Will the PM's call make a difference? It could, only if serious efforts are initiated urgently to transform the institutional work culture in a mission mode. Further, individual inspiration and recognition could work wonders. NEP 2020 has the strength to achieve the target indicated by the PM within ten years. There are, however, certain basic systemic requirements to do so: cleaning up the regulatory mechanism, streamlining teacher recruitment systems, filling up all vacant teaching positions, appointing succeeding heads of institutions one month before the incumbent relinquishes charge, and imposing a strict ban on irregular, low-honorarium-based teachers at every stage.

Reimagining family for India's queer youth



SUBROTO
CHATTERJEE

2ND OPINION THE PIONEER

Family is meant to represent safety, warmth, and unconditional love. Yet for countless LGBTQA+ youth in India, it often brings rejection, fear, and profound loss. Many grow up hiding their identity, terrified of violence, humiliation, or abandonment if they reveal who they truly are. One young person recalls, "I never knew what was harder: hiding who I am every day or finally telling my parents and losing them... The care home felt cold, but at least I could breathe" (Queerbeat, 2025).

These stories reflect a much wider crisis. Across India, queer youth face significantly higher risks of homelessness, violence, and mental-health struggles after family rejection. Studies show that LGBTQA+ youth are up to four times more likely to attempt suicide (Newport

Academy, 2024), and in India, suicidal ideation among transgender youth can reach 31% (Chandra et al., 2016). Globally, nearly half of trans and non-binary youth contemplate suicide each year (The Trevor Project, 2024).

But beneath the despair lies a profound truth: family is not defined by blood alone. Indian law increasingly recognises that belonging is created through care, dignity, and acceptance. As legal scholar Dr Vivek Divan notes, laws must acknowledge that the experience of family cannot remain confined to a single definition (Scroll, 2025). When biological families fail, the state must ensure that no child is left unprotected.

Much of this rejection is rooted in cultural expectations-rigid gender norms, heteronormative pressures, religious ideas of "honour", and deeply embedded stigma. Transgender children are blamed for shame; gay and lesbian youth are told they are immoral; bisexual and asexual youth face erasure. Many are pushed into so-called "corrections", ranging from prayer rituals to conversion-style therapy. These beliefs remain powerful, but India's Constitution offers a counterweight: the promise of equality, dignity, and protection for every child.

India's legal framework reinforces this commitment. The Constitution prohibits discrimination and guaran-

tees child welfare. India's ratification of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child commits the nation to providing safety and belonging for all children. The Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act (JJ Act), revised in 2015, remains the strongest legal mechanism protecting children who need care, rehabilitation, and alternative family placements.

After the 2014 NALSA ruling, single individuals-regardless of gender identity or sexual orientation-can adopt under secular law. Yet barriers persist: queer couples cannot adopt jointly due to the requirement of a "stable marital relationship", and single queer adopters still face bias from case workers.

Despite this, progress is taking root. Parent-support groups such as Sweekar are helping families embrace their children. Queer-affirmative therapists, legal-aid collectives, and youth helplines play critical roles in providing affirmation and safety.

India stands at a pivotal moment. The path ahead must ensure that no queer child is silenced and no chosen family is ignored. Family is love – and when biology cannot offer it, society and law must. Every child deserves a home where they can finally be themselves.

The writer is an activist and specialist in gender issues, with a focus on gender rights

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Deepavali gains global heritage status

Deepavali, one of India's most cherished cultural and spiritual festivals, has been officially inscribed on UNESCO's Intangible Cultural Heritage List, the international body announced on Wednesday, 9 December. UNESCO confirmed the decision following deliberations at the 20th session of its Intergovernmental Committee for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage.

The session, which began on Monday, is being held at Delhi's historic Red Fort, marking the first occasion that India has hosted a UNESCO committee meeting of this scale. During the week-long event, 67 nominations from nearly 80 countries were examined and discussed by international representatives and cultural experts.

The Red Fort has been designated as the principal venue, hosting dignitaries, curated exhibitions, traditional performances, and ceremonial lighting of diyas highlighting the artistic practices associated with Deepavali.

Alongside Deepavali, Chhath Puja, dedicated to the Sun God, was also nominated for UNESCO's Representative List. With this inclusion, India now has 16 recognised elements, including Kumbh Mela, Durga Puja, Garba, Yoga, Vedic chanting, Ramlila, Ramman, and Kutiyattam.

BHAGWAN THADANI | MUMBAI

Protect electoral workers from intimidation

Apropos, "SC flags threats to BLOs," *The Pioneer*, December 10. The Supreme Court's stern warning that intimidation of Booth-Level Officers (BLOs) could lead to anarchy carries deep significance amid rising political hostility intruding into administrative functioning. BLOs, who constitute the backbone of India's electoral machinery, have increasingly faced obstruction, coercion, and open threats from political leaders and activists.

These pressures are particularly visible in states marked by intense partisan rivalry, where neutrality of field-level officials is routinely questioned or undermined. The Court's observation reiterates a fundamental constitutional principle.

The concern is intensified by the heavy workload borne by BLOs. From voter verification to maintaining sensitive rolls, they work under constant political pressure. Disturbingly, reports of severe stress, and even suicides, reveal a grave systemic failure needing urgent attention. By warning that intimidation of BLOs will lead to chaos, the Supreme Court has sent a clear message. It is now the responsibility of state authorities and political actors to protect and respect these officials, without whom free and fair elections are imperilled.

N SADHASIVA REDDY | BENGALURU

Patriotism reduced to hollow theatre

Parliament may shout "Vande Mataram" until its walls crack, yet the hypocrisy behind such displays remains impossible to ignore. It is deeply ironic for any government to lecture citizens on patriotism while steadily eroding the values the anthem itself celebrates. Repetition of a sacred song cannot conceal governance failures, nor can it mend a fractured nation.

"Vande Mataram" venerates the motherland – its rivers, soil, freedom, and people. Today, rivers are polluted, lands are commodified, freedoms are curtailed, and communities are deliberately polarised for electoral gain. If this is the definition of devotion, then the nation bleeds while its self-appointed guardians engage in performative nationalism. Which "Vande Mataram" is being invoked? The one that honours farmers, or the one under which farmers are driven to despair? The one that celebrates unity, or the one weaponised to enforce conformity? Invoking a revered song while violating its spirit insults both history and conscience. This controversy is not about love for the nation. It serves as a convenient smokescreen, diverting attention from unemployment, inflation, corruption, injustice, and an atmosphere of fear. Patriotism shields failing governance.

NOOPUR BARUAH | TEZPUR

TARIFFS RISK CONSTRAINING FARMERS VIA SHORT-SIGHTED PROTECTION

President Trump's warning regarding proposed tariffs on Indian agricultural imports, particularly rice, and fertilisers from Canada. While the President's desire to protect the "backbone of America" – its farmers – is understandable, the strategy of aggressive tariffs raises serious economic concerns that warrant closer examination.

He argues that "tariffs, again, solve the problem in two minutes"; however, global trade economics is rarely so straightforward. Although tariffs may offer short-term relief to domestic rice growers by inflating import prices, their wider consequences are complex and often damaging.

First, consumers will feel the strain. Indian Basmati rice serves a distinct culinary market in the United States that domestic

varieties cannot easily replace. Excessive tariffs therefore operate as an indirect tax on households, retailers, and restaurants dependent on these products. Second, trade functions on reciprocity. India imports substantial volumes of American almonds, cotton, and pulses. Protectionism frequently triggers retaliation, and higher barriers on rice could invite countermeasures harming US exporters instead.

Finally, Indian ownership of major US rice brands shows how integrated supply chains are. Dumping claims need scrutiny, but blunt tariffs risk fuelling inflation rather than solving structural issues. Supporting farmers is essential, but lasting solutions depend on diplomacy and market expansion, not short-term barriers.

VIDYASAGAR KETHIRI | NEW DELHI

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



Muslims have been insecure in India for a long time

Why do present-day Muslims feel 'insecure' in India? No one holds today's Muslims responsible for the atrocities committed against Hindus by successive Islamic invaders. Treating figures like Babur as role models initiates an endless cycle. Much of Muslim 'insecurity' results from this action-reaction syndrome

FIRST
Column



BALBIR
PUNJ

Are Muslims a persecuted group in India during Prime Minister Narendra Modi's administration? Do they feel insecure under his governance? When did Muslims in the Indian subcontinent feel safe and protected? Were they comfortable while Gandhiji and Pandit Nehru dominated the Indian public space? What factors contribute to feelings of insecurity among them?

These questions have come to the forefront following two recent incidents. On December 5, the 'secular' crowd celebrated the return of Sunali Khatoon, a pregnant Muslim woman, and her eight-year-old son following a Supreme Court order, after they were deported earlier this year to Bangladesh. Meanwhile, another case is unfolding in the Supreme Court to determine whether the Rohingyas are refugees or illegal infiltrators who should be deported in the interest of national security.

Sunali Khatoon is jubilant, looking forward to delivering her baby in India, a move that has caught 'secular' media attention. She is being presented as a symbol of a Muslim woman's love for India. Similarly, this sentiment is often invoked to portray the Rohingya refugees' desire to seek sanctuary in India after being banished from their homeland in Myanmar.

The irony is striking, and the contradiction is too galling to ignore. The Left-liberals are now lauding Sunali's return as a "historic" event. They are also seeking the rehabilitation of the Rohingyas in India. And they are the ones who, for over a decade, have relentlessly portrayed India as a nation that is "anti-Muslim", "intolerant", and "unsafe for Muslims" under PM Modi.

See the contradiction. If India is 'unsafe', why should Sunali's decision to deliver her next child in India be celebrated? Instead, she should be warned against any such move on her part by her 'secular' well-wishers. Will the mother and her yet-to-be-born child be safe in BJP-dominated India? And why are there now determined efforts to settle the Rohingyas?

How does one explain this perfidious



WHY DO PRESENT-DAY MUSLIMS FEEL 'INSECURE' IN INDIA? NO ONE HOLDS TODAY'S MUSLIMS RESPONSIBLE FOR THE ATROCITIES COMMITTED AGAINST HINDUS BY SUCCESSIVE ISLAMIC INVADERS

The writer is an eminent columnist and the author of 'Trust with Ayodhya: Decolonisation of India' and 'Narrative ka Mayajal'

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behaviour of the 'secular' pack? Due to its colonial mindset, this class harbours a visceral hatred towards Prime Minister Narendra Modi. One of the simplest tactics to arraign PM Modi, both domestically and internationally, is to propagate the claim that India is unsafe for minorities, especially Muslims, under his leadership.

Muslims in India indeed feel insecure. But that is not a new development. Their sense of insecurity and alienation has persisted for centuries, dating back to the death of Aurangzeb in 1707, after which the Mughal Empire began to disintegrate rapidly. As a result, Muslims' ability to persecute Hindus waned quickly. This change in power dynamics upset them, for they could no longer torment Hindus as before and earn religious merit.

Following the collapse of the Mughal Empire, the Maratha flag was flying high across India. Muslims felt 'insecure' and sought help from foreign invaders. The North Indian Sufi scholar Shah Waliullah Dehlavi-whose intellectual legacy later inspired the Taliban-invited the Afghan ruler Ahmad Shah Abdali to invade India to re-establish Islamic rule over the

'kafirs'. Abdali's victory in the Third Battle of Panipat (1761) weakened India and facilitated the subsequent British ascendancy in Delhi by 1803. Had Waliullah not summoned Abdali, India's history might have taken a markedly different trajectory.

However, for a while, Hindus and Muslims were on an even keel following the British colonisation of India, which completely dislodged local power structures. Both communities came together, leading to the 1857 uprising, which ended in a British victory.

To perpetuate their rule, the British began pursuing the ancient Roman adage Divide et impera, often translated as 'divide and conquer'. The Muslim leadership, sorely missing the times when they pulverised the Hindus at will, willingly walked into the colonial trap, became British allies, and opposed Hindus and the Indian National Congress, which was leading India's fight for independence.

When the British realised they would have to leave soon, with help from communists, they exploited Muslim 'insecurity' sentiments. The 'insecure' Muslim leadership once again raised the fear that

Hindu Raj would follow and Islam would be in danger after the British departure and the Congress leadership taking over independent India.

The doubting Thomases should read the 1938 report of the Pirpur Committee, set up by the Muslim League. Succinctly put, the report documents evidence condemning the Congress as a Hindu revivalist party with a strong anti-Muslim bias. It may shock some readers to learn that the allegations made by the Committee read the same as those made today against Modi and the BJP by Islamists and 'secular' parties, especially the Congress.

During that period, Congress leaders such as Mahatma Gandhi, Pandit Nehru, Acharya Kripalani, and Sardar Patel went to great lengths to reassure the 'insecure' Muslim community that it would be protected in independent India. Despite their heartfelt pleas, Muslims continued to feel 'insecure'.

The 'insecure' Muslims organised and led violent protests in support of their demand for an independent Islamic nation. The result: timeless India was divided, and Pakistan was born after an internecine bloodbath in which lakhs of innocents were killed, millions were uprooted, and limitless pain and humil-

iation were inflicted.

So, the narrative that Muslims feel 'insecure' in India ruled by the Prime Minister is no surprise. Muslims have been 'insecure' long before even Modi or the RSS were born.

Muslims in India-whether Shia or Sunni, Deobandi or Bareilvi-enjoy not only equal rights but often greater constitutional protections than the Hindu majority. This is not merely a product of a "secular Constitution". India's pluralism is rooted in a civilisation that has, for millennia, embraced multiplicity and coexistence. In contrast, hundreds of Muslims are killed by fellow Muslims every year in fratricidal violence in Afghanistan and Pakistan.

Why do present-day Muslims feel 'insecure' in India? No one holds today's Muslims responsible for the atrocities committed against Hindus by successive Islamic invaders. But why does a significant section of the subcontinent's Muslims glorify and identify with figures like Ghaznavi, Ghori, Babur, Aurangzeb, and Tipu Sultan? Celebrating a character (mythical or historical) implies validation of its actions and a strong desire to emulate them. A recent development adds to the substance of this argument. On 6 December, suspended Trinamool Congress MLA Humayun Kabir laid the foundation stone for a "Babri Masjid" in Murshidabad, with a massive crowd in attendance. Building a mosque is not the issue-India's pluralistic ethos welcomes all faiths. But why name it after Babur? His memory evokes the destruction of the Shri Ram Janmabhoomi temple at Ayodhya by his associate, Mir Baiqi, and the endless struggle by successive generations of Hindus to reclaim it, in the Indian psyche. Babur established Mughal rule through jihad, calling himself a "Ghazi"-an Islamic warrior dedicated to fighting infidels.

Treating figures like Babur as role models initiates an endless cycle. Much of Muslim 'insecurity' results from this action-reaction syndrome. A segment of Muslims, influenced by 'secularists', seeks to celebrate Islamic 'heroes', aspires to imitate them and their deeds, which inevitably leads to conflict with a resurgent India determined to oppose this medieval, jihadi mindset.

It is not rocket science to realise that building genuine friendships with Jews while praising Hitler and overlooking his horrific genocide is not a workable proposition.

AI-powered threats demand overhaul of India's coastal defence and security



KRIPA
NAUTIYAL

India must urgently modernise its coastal security infrastructure to counter an emerging generation of AI-enabled threats that could render traditional maritime security apparatus and defences obsolete. With artificial intelligence democratising advanced military capabilities, hostile actors now have access to autonomous underwater vehicles, coordinated drone swarms, and cyber-physical attack systems that were exclusively superpower territory just years ago.

We face a fundamentally different security environment than existed even five years ago. The convergence of AI, autonomous systems, and sophisticated cyber capabilities creates threats that can materialise with unprecedented speed and lethality along our 11,098-kilometre coastline.

The Invisible Underwater Menace

Perhaps most alarming are autonomous underwater vehicles-sophisticated submarine drones capable of operating for weeks without surfacing while maintaining minimal acoustic signatures that challenge conventional sonar detection. Security analysts warn of scenarios where torpedo-sized AUVs could be launched from vessels over 100 nautical miles offshore, using AI navigation to autonomously infiltrate major ports. Once positioned, these systems could attach explosives to naval assets, conduct prolonged reconnaissance of underwater defences, or remain dormant as sleeper weapons activated on command.

Larger AUVs pose direct threats to critical underwater infrastructure including submarine communication cables carrying 99 per cent of international data traffic, oil and gas pipelines, and desalination plant intake systems. The AI advantage is significant: these systems learn from each mission, make autonomous decisions without detectable communications, recognise optimal attack timing based on traffic patterns, and adapt tactics when they encounter countermeasures.

China's deployment of underwater autonomous systems in the South China Sea, combined with commercially available AUV technology requiring minimal modification and accessible 3D-printed components, has lowered the barrier to entry dramatically.

Swarm Intelligence and Saturation Attacks

While single-drone incidents have garnered attention following recent security events, AI introduces exponential complexity through swarm intelligence. Defence experts envision scenarios involving 50 to 100 coordinated drones overwhelming port defences through saturation attacks, with distributed decision-making eliminating any central control point vulnerable to jamming.

Maritime applications include simultaneous strikes on multiple naval and coast guard targets, with AI coordination identifying and engaging vessels while electronic warfare drones jam communications and radar. Port infrastructure becomes vulnerable to precision attacks on fuel depots, coastal security chains of static sensors, control towers, and cargo terminals, with thermal imaging identifying high-value targets and adaptive re-targeting if primary objectives are defeated.

The technology remains disturbingly accessible: commercial drones modified with open-source AI software, facial recognition technology repurposed for ship identification, and gaming industry processors providing the computational power for AI operations.

The Cyber-Physical Convergence

Security analysts have identified the integration of cyber warfare with physical autonomous systems as perhaps the most dangerous scenario-a three-phase attack chain beginning with AI-powered malware penetrating port management systems, followed by AUVs, surface vessels, and drones positioning during the cyber preparation phase while maintaining radio silence. The synchronised final phase would see cyber attacks disabling port security systems and communications while physical autonomous systems execute coordinated strikes, with AI-driven adaptive tactics responding in real-time to defensive measures.

Real-world precedents demonstrate the viability of such attacks. Stuxnet demonstrated cyber-physical attack capabilities against Iranian nuclear facilities. Iran captured a U.S. drone through GPS spoofing. Russia has launched cyber attacks on Ukrainian infrastructure. Chinese advanced persistent threats have infiltrated maritime industry networks globally.

Adversaries are also using AI defensively-training algorithms to identify and exploit blind spots in surveillance systems, generating synthetic radar signatures mimicking benign vessels, creating false AIS location data, and producing jamming patterns that appear as technical malfunctions rather than attacks.

The Professional Recruitment Threat

Recent security incidents involving educated professionals-doctors, engineers, and IT specialists-have raised concerns about recruitment for AI-enabled operations. Data scientists could develop sophisticated algorithms for weapon systems, robotics engineers could build and modify autonomous platforms, and cybersecurity experts could create malware and conduct reconnaissance.

Security officials have expressed particular concern about operatives who could play significant technical roles in cyber operations, drone piloting from safe houses, and intelligence gathering while maintaining lower suspicion profiles. Remote operation capabilities eliminate traditional suicide attack requirements, fundamentally changing the threat landscape.

Encrypted communication platforms enable pre-programmed autonomy where AI systems receive initial instructions through dead-drop emails and secure messaging, with no real-time communication during operations, eliminating intercept risk.

Global Best Practices

International response models offer templates for Indian adaptation. The United States Navy has deployed advanced sonar arrays tuned for small AUV detection. AI-powered acoustic analysis, defensive drone swarms, and autonomous underwater vehicles for harbour protection. Israel's multi-layered defence includes the Drone Dome system with AI radar classification distinguishing bird flocks from drone swarms, electronic warfare jamming, and laser interception. Singapore's smart port security integrates autonomous patrol boats, underwater monitoring, AI-powered cargo screening, and comprehensive cyber defence.

A Comprehensive Implementation Strategy

A three-phase implementation strategy for India spanning five years may be considered:
● Phase 1 (0-12 months) should focus on deploying underwater sensor arrays at five major ports, installing counter-drone systems at critical infrastructure, integrating AI-enabled systems with the existing National Coastal Security Operations Centre, and procuring autonomous underwater defence vehicles.

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

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A
ASHVATHAMAN

Artificial intelligence is reshaping global progress, and at the centre of this transformation is the Large Language Model, or LLM. Unlike a human mind, which begins with a thought and then searches for the right words, an LLM learns in the reverse direction. It reads billions of sentences across countless topics, discovers patterns in how humans communicate, and gradually forms a system that can respond in ways that resemble human reasoning. In simple terms, an LLM becomes a compressed version of humanity's written knowledge.

This idea reflects a long-standing principle. Societies grow faster when knowledge is shared, reused, and expanded, instead of being rediscovered repeatedly. LLMs multiply our collective understanding by making knowledge instantly accessible and reusable. But the true foundation of this intelligence is language. Human civilisation stores everything that matters, including laws, culture, values, science, memories, and identity, inside language. When AI learns a language deeply, it also learns the worldview behind that language. This makes language-based LLMs essential to any community that wishes to remain relevant in the AI era.

India faces a major challenge here. Public conversations about AI focus mainly on tools like image generators, video creation apps, filters, templates, and quick content systems. These tools represent only the visible layer of AI, the part people interact with. Underneath these tools sits the real engine-the LLM. It is the LLM that provides reasoning, knowledge, context, understanding, and logical structure. If a nation learns only to operate AI tools, it remains a user. If a nation builds the intelligence behind those tools, it becomes a leader. In the AI era, leadership will belong to those who build foundational models, not those who merely use applications built by others.

This becomes particularly important for Indian languages. As the founder of the TamilAI project, I often face this question: if global systems like ChatGPT and Gemini already answer in Tamil, why should we build our own Tamil models?

It is a fair doubt, but the answer is crucial for India's technological future.

While global systems can output Tamil text, the intelligence beneath those answers is shaped by English-heavy data and Western logical structures. These models learn mostly



from English-speaking societies, absorb their patterns of thought, and then convert the final output into Tamil. The script is ours, but the mind behind the words is not. This results in Tamil expressed through a foreign cognitive framework-a translation rather than native reasoning.

It is Tamil translation of English reasoning, not Tamil reasoning itself.

For a language with the antiquity and depth of Tamil, this is not enough. A language that survives only at the output layer risks losing its natural worldview and its cultural logic. To protect a civilisation's knowledge, the language must exist inside the intelligence layer itself. Only when an LLM learns Tamil at its core, including its grammatical logic, philosophical foundations, idioms, poetry, history, and cultural reasoning, can Tamil survive as a thinking system in the AI age.

This perspective is influencing global AI policy. Europe is building LLMs for European languages to protect cultural sovereignty. China has multiple national LLMs. Japan and Korea have government-funded language models. These countries recognise that without native-language AI, technological and cultural dependence becomes unavoidable.

India stands at a similar crossroads. Tamil, Hindi, Telugu, Kannada, Bengali, and other major Indian languages must have indigenous LLMs built from their own knowledge systems. Only then can India move from being a user of foreign technology to a creator of global intelligence.

TamilAI is one early step in that direction, but the larger mission is national. India has the talent, the vision, and the cultural depth to build its own AI foundations. If we invest in our languages and create our own LLMs, we can not only participate in the AI era but lead it with confidence. The future is wide open for nations that build their own intelligence, and India is ready to rise to that challenge.

The writer is the Tamil Nadu BJP State Secretary and the founder of Project Tamil AI and the Integral Humanism Foundation

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FROM THE WORLD

USA

One dead in varsity shooting

One student was killed and another was critically wounded in a shooting at a residence hall at Kentucky State University (KSU) on Tuesday, and a suspect who is not a student at the school has been arrested, officials said. The shooting happened around 3 p.m. and was an "isolated incident," Scott Tracy, assistant chief of police for Frankfort, said during a news conference Tuesday evening. Tracy said police swiftly responded to the shooting. "There are no active safety concerns on campus at this time," he said. Authorities haven't publicly addressed a motive. Frankfort police said Jacob Lee Bard was booked into jail on murder and first-degree assault charges in connection with the shooting. Police said Bard is from Evansville, Indiana, which is about 150 miles west of Frankfort.

CANADA

Envoy to US to resign

Canada's ambassador to the US for the last six years said on Tuesday she is resigning next year as the two major trading partners plan to review the free trade agreement. Ambassador Kirsten Hillman said in a letter it is the right time to put in place someone who will oversee talks about the United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement that is up for review in 2026. PM Mark Carney said Hillman "prepared the foundations for Canada in the upcoming review" of the agreement. Carney noted she is one of the longest-serving ambassadors to the US in Canada's history. Former Canadian PM Justin Trudeau appointed Hillman in 2017. Hillman helped lead the trade negotiations during US President Donald Trump's first term and worked with US and Chinese officials to win the release of two Canadians detained in China.

Ukraine can hold elections soon if security is ensured: Zelenskyy

ASSOCIATED PRESS

Kyiv

Ukrainian officials were expected to hand their latest peace proposals to United States negotiators on Wednesday, according to President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, who also said Ukraine would be ready for elections within three months if partners can guarantee a safe vote during wartime and if its electoral law can be altered.

Zelenskyy was responding to comments by US President Donald Trump in which he questioned Ukraine's democracy and suggested the Ukrainian leader was using the war as an excuse not to hold an election.

Zelenskyy told reporters late Tuesday that he is "ready" for an election but would need help from the US and possibly Europe to ensure security for a vote to happen. He suggested that Ukraine could be ready to hold balloting in 60 to 90 days if that proviso is met.

"To hold elections, two issues must be addressed: primarily, security—how to



conduct them, how to do it under strikes, under missile attacks; and a question regarding our military — how they would vote," Zelenskyy said. "And the second issue is the legislative framework required to ensure the legitimacy of elections," he said.

Previously, Zelenskyy had pointed out that a ballot can't legally take place while martial law imposed due to Russia's invasion nearly four years ago is in place. He has also asked how a vote could happen when civilian areas of Ukraine are being bombarded by Russia and almost 20 per cent of the country is under

Russian occupation. Zelenskyy said he has asked lawmakers from his party in Parliament to draw up legislative proposals that would allow elections while Ukraine is under martial law.

Ukrainians have on the whole supported Zelenskyy's arguments, and there has been no clamor in Ukraine for an election. Under the Ukrainian law that is in force, Zelenskyy's rule is legitimate. But with Trump pressing hard for a deal between Kyiv and Moscow, Zelenskyy is walking a tightrope between defending Ukrainian interests and showing the American presi-

dent that he is willing to make some compromises.

Russian President Vladimir Putin has repeatedly complained that Zelenskyy can't legitimately negotiate a peace settlement because his five-year term in office that began in 2019 has expired. "I think it's an important time to hold an election. They're using war not to hold an election," Trump said in an interview with Politico, echoing Moscow's stance.

A new US national security strategy released last Friday made it clear that Trump wants to improve America's relationship with Moscow. The document also portrays European allies as weak. Russia's Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov on Wednesday praised Trump's role in the Ukraine peace effort, saying in a speech at the Federation Council, the upper house of Russia's Parliament, that Moscow appreciates his "commitment to dialogue." Trump, Lavrov said, is "the only Western leader" who shows "an understanding of the reasons that made war in Ukraine inevitable."

Renewed Thailand-Cambodia border clash displaces thousands of people

ASSOCIATED PRESS

Surin

Renewed border fighting between Thailand and Cambodia showed no signs of abating on Wednesday, leaving hundreds of thousands of displaced people in both countries living in strained conditions as more flooded into temporary shelters. Associated Press reporters on the Thai side of the border heard sounds of outgoing, indirect fire on Wednesday.

About 400,000 people have been evacuated from affected areas in Thailand, and around 700 schools closed while fighting was ongoing in four border provinces, Thai military spokesperson Rear Adm. Surasant Kongsiri said Wednesday. Cambodia evacuated more than 127,000 villagers, and hundreds of schools closed, the defence ministry said.

Thailand's military announced that casualties in this week include five soldiers killed and dozens wounded. Cambodia said seven civilians died and 20 others were wounded,



though it did not update those figures on Wednesday.

There is not yet a clear path to peace as Thailand's Prime Minister Anutin Charnvirakul vowed to continue to fight, and Cambodia's powerful Senate President Hun Sen promised a fierce response.

A knock-on effect of the fighting and bad blood between the nations was Cambodia's withdrawal of its entire team from the 33rd Southeast Asian Games, which began Tuesday in Thailand. A Wednesday announcement from the National Olympic Committee of Cambodia said it regretted the action,

but the families of competitors were concerned about their safety. The new, widespread fighting followed a skirmish on Sunday that wounded two Thai soldiers and derailed a ceasefire pushed by US President Donald Trump that ended armed combat in July.

The five days of fighting over territorial disputes left dozens dead on both sides and forced the evacuation of thousands of civilians. The ceasefire was brokered by Malaysia and pushed through by pressure from Trump, who threatened to withhold trade privileges from the two nations unless they agreed.

Democrat wins Miami mayor's race for the first time in nearly 30 years

ASSOCIATED PRESS

Miami

Democrat Eileen Higgins won the Miami mayor's race on Tuesday, defeating a Republican endorsed by President Donald Trump to end her party's nearly three-decade losing streak and give Democrats a boost in one of the last electoral battles ahead of the 2026 midterms.

"Tonight, the people of Miami made history," Higgins said in a statement after the results were announced.

Higgins, 61, will be the first woman to lead the city of Miami. She spoke frequently in the Hispanic-majority city about Trump's immigration crackdown, saying she has heard of many people in Miami who were worried about family members being detained. She campaigned as a Democrat despite the race being officially nonpartisan and beat Trump-backed candidate Emilio Gonzalez, a former city manager, who said he called Higgins to



congratulate her. "I've never been prouder to be a Democrat," Higgins told The Associated Press before her victory.

"We're living in the state of Florida, where we have people that are building cages for our residents rather than affordable housing for them." The local race is not predictive of what may happen at the polls next year. But it drew attention

from the two major national political parties and their leaders.

The victory provides Democrats with some momentum heading into a high-stakes mid-term election when the GOP is looking to keep its grip in Florida, including in a Hispanic-majority district in Miami-Dade County. The area has shifted increasingly rightward politically in recent

years, and the city may become the home of Trump's presidential library.

"Tonight's result is yet another warning sign to Republicans that voters are fed up with their out-of-touch agenda that is raising costs," said Ken Martin, the chair of the Democratic National Committee, in a statement. Some nationally recognised Democrats supported Higgins, including

former Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg. US Senator Ruben Gallego and former Chicago Mayor Rahm Emanuel traveled to Miami on Sunday and Monday to rally voters for the Democrat who served as a Miami-Dade county commissioner for seven years.

Higgins, who speaks Spanish, represented a district that leans conservative and includes the Cuban neighborhood of Little Havana. When she first entered politics in 2018, she chose to present herself to voters as "La Gringa," a term Spanish speakers use for white Americans, because many people did not know how to pronounce her name.

"It just helps people understand who I am, and you know what? I am a gringa. So, what am I going to do, deny it?" she told.

Republicans in Florida have found strong support from voters with heritage from Cuba, Venezuela and Nicaragua, because they likened some members of the Democratic party's pro-

gressive wing with politicians from the Governments they fled. Trump and other GOP members have tapped into those sentiments over the past eight years.

However, some local Republicans are growing increasingly frustrated since November's elections when Democrats scored wins in New Jersey and Virginia, where both winning gubernatorial candidates performed strongly with non-white voters.

The results from those races were perceived as a reflection of concerns over rising prices and the Trump administration's aggressive immigration policies.

Republican Maria Elvira Salazar, a Republican whose district is being targeted by Democrats and includes the city of Miami, called the elections elsewhere a "wake-up call." She said Hispanics also want a secure border and a healthy economy but some relief for "those who have been here for years and do not have a criminal record."

Sudanese military plane crashes, killing all crew members

ASSOCIATED PRESS

Cairo

A Sudanese military aircraft crashed while attempting to land in the east of the country, killing all the crew, military officials said on Wednesday, in the latest plane crash in the war-torn African nation.

The Ilyushin Il-76 cargo plane experienced technical failure while attempting to land on Tuesday in the Osman Digna Air Base in the coastal city of Port Sudan, two officials said.

They said the crew were killed but didn't disclose how many personnel were on board. The officials spoke on condition of anonymity because they weren't authorised to brief the media.

Among the dead was military pilot Omran Mirghani, according to his uncle, prominent Sudanese journalist Osman Mirghani, who mourned his nephew's death on social media.

The military didn't comment on the crash. Plane crashes are not uncommon in Sudan, which has a poor aviation safety record. In February, at least 46 people were killed when a military aircraft crashed in Omdurman, the sister city of the capital, Khartoum. The military lost el-Fasher, its last stronghold in the sprawling region of Darfur, in October, and earlier this week was forced to pull out from the country's largest oil processing facility in the central region of Kordofan.

The war in Sudan began in April 2023 over a power struggle between the military and the RSF. The conflict has killed over 40,000 people—a figure rights groups consider a significant undercount.

The fighting has wrecked urban areas and has been marked by atrocities, including mass rape and ethnically motivated killings, that amount to war crimes, especially in the western region of Darfur, according to the United Nations and international rights groups.

19 killed in Morocco building collapse

ASSOCIATED PRESS

Fes

Two four-story buildings collapsed overnight in the Moroccan city of Fes, killing 19 people in the second fatal collapse there this year, authorities said on Wednesday. Morocco's state news agency reported the two residential buildings housed eight families.

Sixteen people were injured in the collapse and sent for treatment at a nearby hospital. Authorities said the neighbourhood had been evacuated and search and rescue efforts were ongoing.

It was unclear what caused the collapse or how many people were unaccounted for on Wednesday morning. Fes is Morocco's second-largest city and one of the hosts of this month's Africa Cup of Nations and the 2030 FIFA World Cup. It is best known for its walled



city packed with medieval souks and tanneries. But beyond tourism, it's also one of the country's poorest urban centres, where aging infrastructure is common in many neighbourhoods.

Another collapse in May killed 10 people and injured seven in a building that had already been slated for evacuation, according to Moroccan outlet Le360. Building codes are often not

enforced in Morocco, especially in ancient cities where aging multifamily homes are common.

Gaps in basic services were a focal point of protests that swept the country earlier this year, with demonstrators criticizing the Government for investing in new stadiums instead of addressing inequality in health care, education and other public services.

Bolivia to restore diplomatic relations with Israel

ASSOCIATED PRESS

La Paz Bolivia

Bolivia's new right-wing Government said on Tuesday that it would restore diplomatic relations with Israel, the latest sign of the dramatic geopolitical realignment underway in the South American country that was once among the most vocal critics of Israeli policies toward Palestinians.

The Bolivian foreign ministry said its top diplomat would meet his Israeli counterpart in Washington later Tuesday to discuss the revival of bilateral ties, which Bolivia's previous left-wing Government severed two years ago over Israel's devastating campaign against Hamas in Gaza.

Bolivia said the effort came as part of a new foreign policy strategy under conservative President Rodrigo Paz aimed at "rebuilding Bolivia's inter-



Foreign Minister Gideon Sa'ar and Bolivian FM Fernando Aramayo signed the agreement in Washington

national prestige, opening new economic opportunities and strengthening alliances that directly benefit the country and our citizens abroad."

Bolivian Foreign Minister Fernando Aramayo is in the midst of a whirlwind trip to Washington for meetings with American officials as his Government works to warm long-chilly relations with the United States and unravel nearly two decades of hardline, anti-Western policies

under the Movement Toward Socialism, or MAS, party that left Bolivia economically isolated and diplomatically allied with China, Russia and Venezuela.

Paz's Government eased visa restrictions on American and Israeli travellers last month.

In announcing his expected meeting with Aramayo on Monday, Israeli Foreign Minister Gideon Sa'ar thanked Bolivia for scrapping Israeli visa controls and said

he spoke to Paz after the centre-right senator's October 19 election victory to express "Israel's desire to open a new chapter" in relations with Bolivia.

Paz entered office last month, ending the dominance of the MAS party founded by Evo Morales, the charismatic former coca-growing union leader who became Bolivia's first Indigenous president in 2006.

Not long after taking power, Morales sent Israel's ambassador packing and cozied up to Iran over their shared enmity toward the US and Israel. When protests over Morales' disputed 2019 reelection prompted him to resign under pressure from the military, a right-wing interim Government took over and restored full diplomatic relations with the US and Israel as it sought to undo many of Morales' popular policies.

UN chief urges Houthis to release detained staff

ASSOCIATED PRESS

United Nations

The United Nations chief called on Yemen's Houthi rebels on Tuesday not to prosecute detained UN personnel and to work "in good faith" to immediately release all detained staff from the UN and foreign agencies and missions. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres condemned the referrals of the UN personnel to the Houthis' special criminal court and called the detentions of UN staff a violation of international law, UN spokesman Stephane Dujarric said. There are currently 59 UN personnel, all Yemeni nationals, detained by Houthis, in addition to dozens from NGO and diplomatic missions, he said. He said a number of them have been referred to the criminal court in Yemen's capital, Sanaa. "There were procedures going on in the court, I believe, today and all of this is very, very worrying to us," Dujarric said.

Nepal charges 55 in airport corruption scandal

ASSOCIATED PRESS

Kathmandu

Former Nepali ministers, officials and a Chinese company were charged with corruption over financial irregularities during the construction of an international airport. The Commission for Investigation of Abuse of Authority filed on Sunday cases against 55 people and the China CAMC Engineering Company Limited, one of the biggest such cases in the Himalayan nation, accusing them of inflating construction expenses by more than \$74 million. Two officials of the Chinese company have been named in the charges filed at the Special Court. The bidding agreed on with the Government in 2012 was set at \$169.6 million, but Nepali officials increased the amount to a little over \$244 million "in collusion with the Chinese company," the commission said.



Bangladesh insists on Hasina return diplomacy

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ Dhaka

Bangladesh's interim Government on Wednesday said it will continue diplomatic efforts to bring back from India deposed prime minister Sheikh Hasina, who has been convicted and sentenced in multiple cases.

The 78-year-old Awami League leader has been living in India since she fled Bangladesh on August 5 last year in the face of the massive protests.

"We will try to convince India to send her back to Dhaka," Foreign Adviser Md Touhid Hossain was quoted as saying by the state-run BSS news agency.

Touhid noted that Hasina's repatriation ultimately depends on India's decision.

On Saturday, External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar said Hasina came to India "in a certain circumstance and I think that circumstance clearly sort of is a factor in what happens to her. But again, that is something which she has to make up her mind." Responding to reports suggesting possible third-country resettlement for the former premier, Touhid said he had only seen such claims in media coverage. "I did not receive any information through diplomatic channels," he added. Touhid had earlier said



Foreign Adviser Touhid Hossain

FILE PHOTO

Bangladesh was not ruling out a response from India.

On November 17, the International Crimes Tribunal sentenced Hasina and former Home Minister Asaduzzaman Khan Kamal to death for "crimes against humanity" committed during the July-August mass uprising last year.

Following the court verdict, Bangladesh sent a letter to India seeking her

extradition. India said it is examining a request by Bangladesh's interim Government to extradite Hasina, asserting that New Delhi is committed to ensuring the best interests of the people of that country. Hasina has said the judgment has been made by a "rigged tribunal established and presided over by an unelected Government with no democratic mandate".

On November 27, another court sentenced Hasina to 21 years in jail in three corruption cases related to irregularities in allocations of land in a Government housing project.

On December 1, Hasina was convicted by a court which sentenced her to five years in jail and her niece, British parliamentarian Tulip Siddiq, to a two-year jail term in a land scam case.

2 ADVISERS OF INTERIM GOVERNMENT RESIGN

Dhaka: Two student leaders turned advisers of the interim government in Bangladesh tendered their resignations on Wednesday ahead of the Election Commission's announcement of the schedule for the polls in February. The resignation by M Mahfuj Alam and Asif Mahmud Shojib Bhuyain comes in wake of the Election Commission's (EC) decision that no adviser can contest the polls while holding a position in the interim government.

"Adviser for Information and Broadcasting M Mahfuj Alam and Adviser for Local Government, Rural Development & Cooperative and Youth & Sports Asif Mahmud Shojib Bhuyain have tendered their resignation letters at around 5 pm to the Chief Adviser Muhammad Yunus," a statement from the chief adviser's office said.

Both Alam and Bhuyain were inducted as representatives of Students Against Discrimination (SAD), the organisation which led a violent street movement that toppled former prime minister Sheikh Hasina's government on August 5, 2024. "The nation will remember your leadership and contribution to the 'revolution' (uprising) remaining at its frontline to

free the nation from fascist (Awami League) rule," the statement quoted Yunus as saying while accepting their resignation. "The nation will never forget what you gave to it in such a short time," Yunus said.

Of the three SAD leaders appointed as advisers by Yunus, Nahid Islam quit in February to form the National Citizen Party (NCP), a political offshoot of the students' organisation. Bhuiyan earlier said he would resign to take part in upcoming elections, but Alam so far has made no comment in public about his future plans. However, neither of them have officially disclosed any link with NCP or any other political party. The EC on Tuesday said Chief Election Commissioner AMM Nasir Uddin would announce the schedule for the upcoming polls in the next two days. The EC had earlier clarified that no adviser can contest the polls while holding a position in the interim government. Bangladesh's top electoral officials on Wednesday met President Mohammed Shahabuddin, who assured "optimum support and cooperation" to the Election Commission to conduct the February general elections in a "free, fair and meaningful" manner.

European nations set to discuss tightening of migration rules



ASSOCIATED PRESS ■ Brussels

European leaders will call for a toughening of migration policies on Wednesday in a move critics say bends to pressure from far-right groups and harms basic human rights protections for vulnerable people. Ministers from 27 EU member nations are meeting in Brussels to discuss countering migrant smuggling, with a keynote speech by European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen. In Strasbourg, France, representatives from the Council of Europe – 46 countries from Iceland to Azerbaijan – are expected to debate making deporting migrants easier for signatories to key treaties. Denmark was part of a nine-nation attempt last year to curtail the power of

the European Court of Human Rights, the independent legal arm of the Council of Europe. Austria, Belgium, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania and Poland argued that the court's interpretation of rights obligations prevented them from expelling migrants who commit crimes. That effort ultimately failed, but support for its basic tenets has since grown. The European Court of Human Rights handles complaints against the Council of Europe, under the European Convention on Human Rights, including many cases involving migrants and asylum-seekers. The inter Governmental organisation is not an EU institution and was set up in the wake of World War II to promote peace and democracy.

Critics of army go on silent strike in Myanmar



ASSOCIATED PRESS
■ Bangkok

Opponents of military rule in Myanmar staged a joint protest on Wednesday calling on people to stay indoors to show they are boycotting elections scheduled for late this month.

They defied harsh legal penalties for attempting to disrupt the polls. The military Government has announced charges against 10 pro-democracy activists who staged a rare street protest last week in Mandalay, the country's second biggest city.

Critics say the Dec 28 polls will be neither free nor fair and are an effort by the military to legitimise its rule after seizing power from the elected Government of Aung San Suu Kyi in February 2021.

The General Strike Coordination Body, the leading non-violent organization opposing army rule, had urged people to join a "silent strike" on Wednesday. It called on the public to stay inside homes or workplaces from 10 am to 3 pm on International Human Rights Day. The tactic has been used on special occasions since the military takeover.

Images on social media showed uncrowded streets in Yangon, Myanmar's largest city, and elsewhere.

Also on Wednesday, the State-run *Myanmar Alinn* newspaper reported that authorities were seeking

the arrest of the 10 activists under a section of a new election law that carries a maximum penalty of 10 years in prison for disrupting the electoral process.

They are charged with allegedly misleading the public by distributing leaflets against the election around a crowded morning market in Mandalay on December 3. The brief flash-mob protest in Mandalay, where heavy security and frequent crackdowns have made open dissent nearly impossible, drew widespread attention. Most of the activists made no effort to hide their faces while they tossed leaflets and shouted slogans.

Among those charged are well-known activists Tayzar San, Nan Lin and Khant Wai Phyo. They led the protest calling for the public to reject elections, abolition of the military conscription law and the release of political prisoners.

Tayzar San, a physician-turned-activist, organized the first public protest in Mandalay a few days after the military seized power in 2021. That helped spark nationwide resistance, and an arrest warrant was issued for him. "Although it has been five years, the public's mobilization is the main obvious evidence that it has not become complacent and has not cowardly given up under the oppressive mechanisms of the military dictatorship," Tayzar San told after last week's Mandalay protest.

Machado's daughter accepts Nobel Peace Prize

ASSOCIATED PRESS
■ Oslo

Venezuelan opposition leader Maria Corina Machado's daughter accepted the Nobel Peace Prize on her mother's behalf Wednesday, hours after officials said Machado would miss the ceremony.

Machado has been in hiding and has not been seen in public since Jan. 9, when she was briefly detained after joining supporters in a protest in Caracas, Venezuela's capital.

Jorgen Watne Frydnes, chair of the Norwegian Nobel committee, told the award ceremony that "Maria Corina Machado has done everything in her power to be able to attend the ceremony here today – a journey in a situation of extreme danger." "Although she will not be able to reach this ceremony and today's events, we are profoundly happy to confirm that she is safe, and that she will be with us here in Oslo,"



he said to applause.

The director of the Norwegian Nobel Institute and Machado's spokesperson said earlier Wednesday that she wouldn't be able to attend the ceremony. Her daughter Ana Corina Sosa did instead. Maria Corina Machado said in an audio recording of a phone call published on the Nobel website that many people had "risked their lives" for her

to arrive in Oslo.

"I am very grateful to them, and this is a measure of what this recognition means to the Venezuelan people," she said before indicating she was about to board a plane.

"I know that there are hundreds of Venezuelans from different parts of the world who were able to reach your city that are right now in Oslo, family, my team, so many colleagues,"

Machado added.

"And since this is a prize for all Venezuelans, I believe that it will be received by them. And as soon as I arrive, I will be able to embrace all my family and my children that I've not seen for two years, and so many Venezuelans, Norwegians that I know that share our struggle and our fight."

Latin American leaders present in solidarity. Prominent Latin American figures attended on Wednesday in a signal of solidarity with Machado, including Argentine President Javier Milei, Ecuador's President Daniel Noboa, Panama's President Jose Raul Mulino and Paraguayan President Santiago Peña.

The 58-year-old's win for her struggle to achieve a democratic transition in her South American nation was announced on Oct. 10, and she was described as a woman "who keeps the flame of democracy burning amid a growing darkness."

H-1B visa interviews for Indians deferred as US tightens social media vetting rules

ASHOKE RAJ ■ New Delhi

The processing of H-1B visas for thousands of Indian applicants has hit a major roadblock after the United States introduced stricter social media screening requirements.

A wave of interview appointments has now been pushed into 2026, creating uncertainty for professionals and families planning to relocate for work.

On Tuesday night, the US Embassy in India issued a fresh advisory informing applicants that their previously confirmed appointment dates may no longer stand. The embassy said that anyone who has received a reschedule notification must appear only on the new date assigned to them.

"If you have received an email advising that your visa

appointment has been rescheduled, Mission India looks forward to assisting you on your new appointment date," the advisory stated.

The embassy also cautioned that applicants will not be allowed to enter the consulate if they show up on their earlier appointment date despite receiving a reschedule alert. "Arriving on your previously scheduled appointment date will result in your being denied admittance to the Embassy or Consulate," it said.

According to a media report, several interviews slated for mid to late December have now been postponed to March next year, though the exact number of affected applicants is unclear.

Immigration attorney Steven Brown from a promi-

nent US firm confirmed that Mission India has cancelled "a significant number" of upcoming appointments and shifted them to March to make room for the new vetting procedures.

New Social Media Rules Now Mandatory

Beginning December 15, the US State Department is requiring H-1B applicants and their H-4 dependents to set all social media accounts to public visibility. Officials will examine applicants' online activity as part of an expanded vetting programme aimed at identifying individuals who may be inadmissible or pose national security risks.

This level of scrutiny had previously been applied to students and exchange visitors, but the latest update brings employment-based visa applicants squarely

under the same framework. "Every visa adjudication is a national security decision," the State Department said, underscoring the rationale behind the new policy.

Part of Wider Crackdown on Skilled Worker Immigration

The new screening measures come at a time when the H-1B programme – considered the most critical pathway for skilled foreign workers in the US – has been facing tightening restrictions.

In September, the Trump administration introduced a one-time \$100,000 fee on all new H-1B work visas, a move widely expected to raise costs for both applicants and employers, particularly Indian IT and consulting companies. The administration has framed the fee as necessary for national security,

though critics have labelled it a deterrent to global talent.

More recently, the US paused the processing of Green Card, citizenship, and other immigration applications from individuals originating from 19 "countries of concern" following an incident in which a National Guard member was killed by an Afghan national. Though the suspension does not directly target Indian applicants, it signals a broader tightening of immigration policies across categories.

Impact on Indian Professionals

India is the single largest source of H-1B talent for the US, and visa appointment delays can significantly disrupt project timelines, job transitions, and family planning for thousands of skilled

workers. With interviews now deferred by months, many applicants are left scrambling to reorganise travel plans and employer commitments.

Recruitment specialists say the backlog may grow in the coming weeks as US authorities prioritise the rollout of social media vetting.

For companies with high dependence on Indian talent, the delays could add pressure to already strained onboarding schedules.

For now, the Embassy's message remains clear: applicants must rely solely on the new dates issued to them and should not attempt to walk in on previously scheduled appointments. As the new screening regime takes full effect, applicants are preparing for longer wait times and heightened scrutiny in the months ahead.



North Korea's ruling elite prepares for party meeting

ASSOCIATED PRESS ■ Seoul

North Korean leader Kim Jong Un and other top officials have gathered to discuss preparations for the ruling party's first full congress in five years, state media reported Wednesday. The top-level meeting will set new priorities as the U.S. and South Korea seek a resumption of talks with North Korea. The Korean Central News Agency reported that Kim presided over a plenary meeting of the Workers Party's Central Committee on Tuesday. It said participants began discussing unspecified key issues related to the party congress and reviewing this year's state policies. KCNA gave no further details, but observers say the plenary meeting will likely last a few days and set an official agenda for the party congress, which is expected to be held in January or February.



Lavrov lauds India for pursuing independent foreign policy

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Moscow

Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov on Wednesday lauded "good friend" India for pursuing an independent multi-vector foreign policy. "Other countries of the global majority are pursuing this policy, and our good friend India, which maintains relations with all players, is indicative of this," Lavrov said while addressing the Federation Council, the upper chamber of parliament. "We also believe that promoting the solution of the problem of domestic development is the main goal of our foreign policy. The coincidence of the strategic assessments and goals of our two countries was confirmed during President Vladimir Putin's visit to New Delhi and his talks with the Indian leaders last week," he said. Putin visited India from December 4-5. It was his first visit to India since 2021.



School children participated in the Second-Day Amaravati Balotsav in Vijayawada



PARTY

Photos by- Ch.Vijaya Bhaskar



Women and Child Welfare Minister G Sandyarani distributed android mobiles to Anganwadi workers at a function in Vijayawada



Visakhapatnam pulsed with excitement for the 3rd India vs South Africa Men's ODI, Inorbit Mall is now gearing up to mark its debut in the city with a gesture that reflects its scale, spirit, and commitment to the community. As part of Inorbit Cares, the mall is extending its support to Nirmaan Organization; an NGO that has been working extensively across education. In line with this shared vision, Nirmaan enabled 100 children from marginalized communities to witness the high-energy ODI clash live at the Dr. Y.S. Rajasekhara Reddy ACA-VDCA International Stadium, an experience that added joy, inspiration, and a sense of celebration to their ongoing journey of growth. Speaking on the initiative, Rohit Gopalan, Chief Business Officer, Inorbit Malls (India) Pvt. Ltd., said: "As we enter Visakhapatnam, we wanted our first step to represent both purpose and celebration."

The diamond store by chandubhai creates seven-part heritage bridal

Hyderabad-based The Diamond Store by Chandubhai launches a bridal collection with breath-taking heritage jewellery creation, inspired by ancient Indian royal traditions. A seven-part diamond and Navratna masterpiece, crafted as a modern interpretation of the historic "Edu Vaarala Nagalu" has been curated using 22,000 natural diamonds and authentic Navratna gemstones. It has been adorned by a prominent Indian bride from Hyderabad at her Goa wedding, making it the highlight of the wedding celebrations and sparking admiration across design circles. This extraordinary piece revives the centuries-old practice of Edu Vaarala Nagalu, where women from nobility wore seven distinct jewellery pieces, one for each day of the week. The creator of this masterpiece

and owner of The Diamond Store by Chandubhai - Kotti Srikanth says, "This launch is our tribute to the cultural richness of India. By reviving the concept of Edu Vaarala Nagalu, we wanted to preserve a tradition that celebrates strength, prosperity and divine harmony. We have poured our heart and decades of craftsmanship into this meaningful artistic masterpiece and the response has been

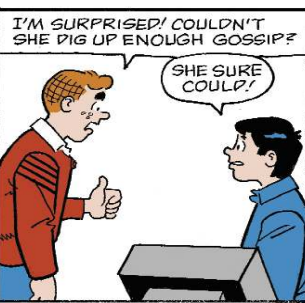


Blenders Pride Fashion Tour shifted gears in Jaipur, transforming into an intersection of high-fashion and motorsport that marked 'Fashion's Next Move' - racing forward with speed and precision. In collaboration with Fashion Design Council of India (FDCI), the showcase reimaged the runway into a high-speed circuit of style and power. Leading designers Namrata Joshipura and Abhishek Patni reinterpreted high-octane motorcycle aesthetics, transforming racing culture into statement-making fashion. Bollywood star Harnaaz Sandhu commanded the runway as the finale showstopper, Sunil Sethi, Chairman, FDCI, expressed, embodying the fusion of glamour and speed, while rap sensation Rattaar closed the night with an electrifying performance that matched the show's pulsating energy.

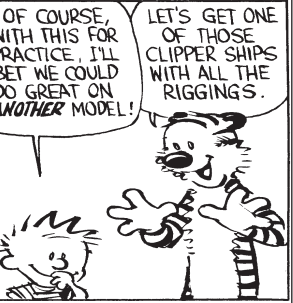
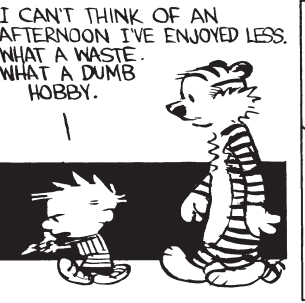
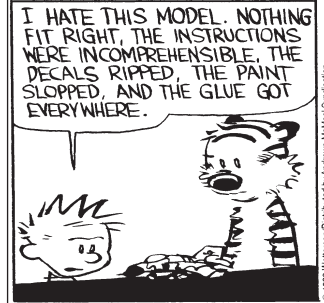


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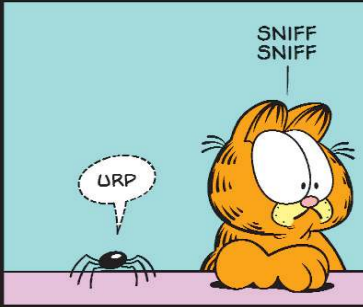
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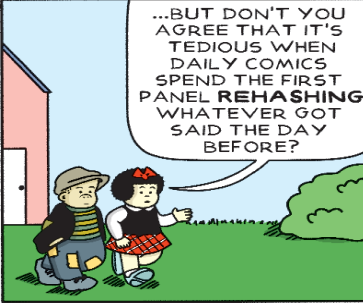
CALVIN AND HOBBS



GARFIELD



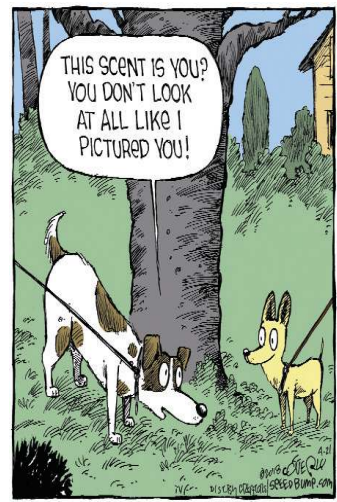
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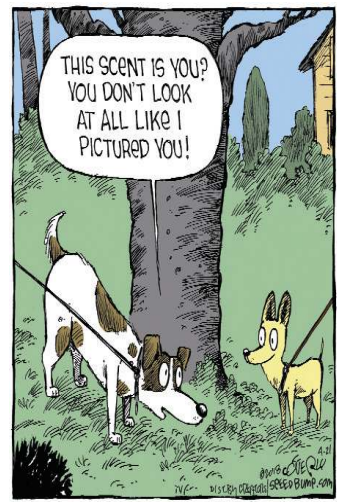
GINGER MEGGS



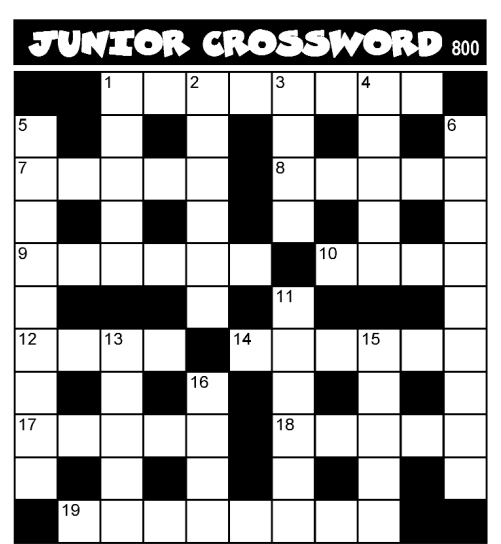
REALITY CHECK



SPEED BUMP



CROSSWORD



ACROSS

- Stir a cup of coffee with this
- Opposite of south
- A very crowded country
- The finish of a story
- To snatch something
- The sound a pig makes
- Someone who helps sick people
- The planet we live on
- A singer's instrument
- People who repair teeth
- Letters are put in these
- A takeaway food item
- Blocks of bread
- A tiny body part that carries messages to the brain
- Opposite of heads on coins
- Closed

DOWN

- Weary
- Throbbing with pain
- Two matching things
- A command

SOLUTION 799

D	I	A	S	A	I	R	L
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S	W	I	M	I	M	S	E
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DIFFICULTY RATING: ★★★★★

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BLASÉ CAPITAL

HOWDY, INDIA

As with several issues, one can see wide and visible oscillations in the US' look-East policy, especially on how to deal with India and China, separately and collectively. Washington plays the carrot-and-stick game with New Delhi, as the former tightens screws in some areas, and its leaders verbally praise the Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi. America changed its stock-and-stick policy vis-à-vis China to a stick-and-carrot one, after President Donald Trump inked a temporary, but sweet deal with the Chinese counterpart, Xi Jinping.

Now, a White House document reflects a pivot to deepen ties with India, despite the tariff overdose, and delays in signing a bilateral trade deal, as a counterweight to China in the Indo-Pacific region. The 'National Security Strategy of the United States of America November 2025' states, "We must continue to improve commercial (and other) relations with India to encourage New Delhi to contribute to Indo-Pacific security, including through continued quadrilateral cooperation with Australia, Japan, and the United States." Quad representatives recently met in New Delhi for a counter-terrorism conference, despite the US sanction on India over Russian oil.

"Moreover," adds the security document, "we will also work to align the actions of our allies and partners with our joint interest in preventing domination by any single competitor nation." Note the reference to "any single competitor nation," whose inherent meaning obviously refers to China. The relationship with China may be framed as a strategic competition with episodic summitry, marked by deep economic interdependence alongside tensions over trade and technology. These include tariffs, export controls, and restrictions on advanced semiconductors, with a security posture focused on deterrence around Taiwan and maritime disputes.

Ties with India are increasingly cooperative and transactional, driven by expanding commercial links, and supply-chain partnerships, growing technology collaboration, and a security partnership that emphasises Quad cooperation, and defence interoperability. The US thus uses trade, investment, and joint exercises to deepen alignment, and enlist India as a partner in shaping the Indo-Pacific balance. "America should similarly enlist our European and Asian allies and partners, including India, to cement and improve our joint positions in the Western Hemisphere and, with regard to critical minerals, in Africa," states the report.

However, such grand rhetoric, and vision is punctuated by what seems like a caveat. "America's economic partners should no longer expect to earn income from the United States through overcapacity and structural imbalances but instead pursue growth through managed cooperation tied to strategic alignment and by receiving long-term U.S. investment," adds the report. President Trump's "G-2" moment with Jinping revived an old idea of US-China co-leadership, even as Indian analysts cautioned that the remark was possibly rhetorical, and did not erase deep structural rivalry.

Washington's codified posture in the National Security Strategy appears to balance a desire to manage competition with a clear push to deepen commercial and strategic ties with India. The US hopes to explicitly link improved economic relations to India's contribution to regional security, and continued Quad cooperation. However, the language signals a shift from bilateral hedging to coalition-building using trade, technology partnerships, and defence ties to align like-minded states against coercive behaviour by "rivals."

"Love you not-maybe love you" appears' to be Washington's alternating relationship with Beijing, depending on the need of the hour. It swings from an economic interdependence, and global coordination to rivalry over technology, allegations of human rights, among others. "A related security challenge is the potential for any competitor to control the South China Sea," observes the White House. It adds, "This could allow a potentially hostile power to impose a toll system over one of the world's most vital lanes of commerce or, worse, to close and reopen it at will."

The mentions of "South China Sea," "potentially hostile power", among other phrases possibly point to a single nation, but can be a matter of interpretation, and conclusion. For Washington, either of the two outcomes, a toll system, or willfully closing or opening the channels, is harmful to the US economy, and broader US interests. The White House advocates "strong measures... along with the deterrence necessary to keep those lanes open, free of "tolls." It admits that this will require not just further investment in our military, especially naval, capabilities, but strong cooperation with every nation that stands to suffer, from India to Japan and beyond.

One of the points that emerges is the ongoing spat between Beijing and Tokyo over the latter's stand on Taiwan. With India, which possibly believes in quiet accommodation if it serves its interests, the dynamic shifts more towards strategic convergence on Indo Pacific security, supply chain resilience, and technology despite trade frictions. New Delhi can leverage ties with Washington with an emphasis on trade, investments, and technology to deepen interoperability and align incentives for regional security. While rhetorical gestures like "G-2" can ease tensions between America and China, it requires backing through crucial agreements.

However, pushing partners to choose sides risks fracturing multilateral institutions, and complicating cooperation on global issues. The Trump-Xi meeting, White security document, and ongoing India-US trade talks reflect an American approach through engagements, if possible, and competition, where necessary. The aim is to build partnerships, and shape a stable Indo-Pacific order. This will define Washington's diplomacy in the future, and determine whether rivalry hardens into containment or is managed.

Mee too as an investor, Meesho

The new target price, ₹200, is 80 per cent higher than offer price

Despite an explosive debut on the Indian exchanges, or possibly because of it, a few analysts scaled up the stock's target price to ₹200, or 80 per cent higher than the offer price (₹111). The listing gain for Meesho Ltd, an e-commerce platform, was more than ₹50, or over 45 per cent, and higher than the pre-listing grey market premium of ₹43. On the first trading day, Day Zero as CEO Vinit Aatreya described it, the stock scaled a high of over ₹177, and ended at just over ₹170, or over 50 per cent higher than the offer price.

At the listing ceremony, Aatreya said that there were still millions of Indians who had never transacted online, and this section that the firm wished to serve was just beginning to open. The narrative is backed by the events that began less than 10 years ago. Meesho started in a two-bedroom apartment in Bengaluru, where the founders worked on a dining table to find an entry point into online commerce. The original idea, FashNear, was a hyperlocal women's fashion concept that never scaled up. Only when it targeted small makers, home-based sellers, and buyers in the smaller cities like Surat, Jaipur, and Panipat that the trajectory shifted.

This helped the platform to reach nearly 200 million transacting users in 2024-25, of which more than 170 million were from outside India's top eight cities. The growing number of sellers, buyers, and orders excited the investors. The IPO was oversubscribed on the first day, with the final figure being nearly 80 times. The portion for the qualified institutions was oversubscribed by 120 times. The response from the retail investors was substantial, though less muted. The Net Market Value (Marketplace), or cumulative checkout value of successfully-delivered orders, went up from less than \$200 billion in 2022-23 to nearly \$300 billion in 2024-25.

However, the run-up to the listing day witnessed several debates, and controversies.

During the pre-IPO anchor-investor allocation process, global funds like Capital Group and Norges Bank Investment Management, and domestic institutions like ICICI Prudential and Nippon India Mutual Fund withdrew from it. They were peeved because nearly a quarter of the anchor portion was allocated to a single entity, SBI Mutual Fund. They claimed that this raised an issue of fairness, and indicated discretionary and opaque allocation. Meesho and its bankers maintained that they had merely honoured prior commitments to SBI Mutual Fund.

As is usually the case with tech firms, the IPO valuation attracted attention. At ₹111, Meesho's worth is more than ₹50,000 crore, which is now higher due to the gains on the first day. Whether such premium is justified, or can be sustained was the question that critics asked. They highlighted the financials. Although revenues were up by more than 60 per cent between 2022-23 and 2024-25, the annual losses were up by 135 per cent. But when one compares the first six months of 2024-25 and 2025-26, the revenues were up by nearly 30 per cent, and losses were down by more than 70 per cent.

Despite incurring losses, their reduction creates the perception that Meesho is undergoing a shift in financials, and profitability. Still, the firm's average order value (AOV) was ₹274 in 2024-25. A low AOV model requires extraordinary levels of operational precision, and cost control because each order implies a low margin. Small disruptions can distort the economics. Meesho processed 1.83 billion orders in 2024-25, with more than two billion in the 12 months ended June 2025. While this places it among the highest-volume platforms, the concentration of orders in mass market fashion and home categories makes volumes vulnerable to changes in discretionary spending.

Valmo, the parent firm's logistics arm, grew

into a massive parcel delivery operation. Media reports indicate that the former shipped 296 million parcels in Q1-FY26, which places it among the top handlers of e-commerce parcels. The share of shipments handled by Valmo rose from about two per cent in 2022-23 to 48 per cent in 2024-25, as Meesho moved more volume in-house. This increased density allows the delivery at lower costs compared to third-party logistics partners. This change is crucial for AOVs of ₹274, where costs related to deliveries, and returns cannot escalate.

Such strength in logistics is a potential point of fragility. A surge in the return rates, for example, which is common in low-priced fashion, can raise reverse costs. Disruption in routing algorithms, fleet availability, or workforce supply can affect service levels. Regulatory scrutiny around how platforms use related-party arms can add to compliance costs, and complexity. Meesho depends on a network of small sellers, whose quality can vary widely, and the draft prospectus identifies this, and seller compliance as explicit risks.

Technology is a primary lever to stabilise such variables. The company's discovery engine, cataloguing systems, and AI-driven classification tools are designed to handle fragmented inputs. In investor interactions before the IPO, Aatreya claimed that the technology was built to eliminate friction for the small sellers, rather than to replace them. This includes tools that standardise product attributes, match buyers to inventory pockets, and reduce failed deliveries. These backend systems may not be visible, but sit at the centre of the claims that Meesho can scale up low-value commerce.

Analysts contend that India's e-commerce market is ₹6 trillion, and will reach ₹15-18 trillion by 2030. This indicates an annual growth rate of 20-25 per cent. The bulk of this growth is expected to come from Tier 2, and 3 cities, and smaller towns. Meesho's user base in these smaller markets makes it a proxy for consumption trends beyond the metros. This positioning will play a role in how sellers, buyers, and investors frame the company in the future. Strong adoption may make it a long-term bet. Any slowdown in rural or small-town spending can, however, magnify the challenges.

The quarter-to-quarter path in the future will be shaped by several scenarios. If Meesho can continue improving its take rate through value-added services, advertising, and logistics, and maintain cost discipline, it is positioned to strengthen cash flows. If competition intensifies in the mass market segment, discounting pressures may rise. Regulatory oversight of marketplaces and logistics compulsions, especially around quality and accountability, may hike compliance costs. If consumer sentiments weaken, the spend on discretionary categories that anchor Meesho's volumes may witness volatility. The experience may establish whether mass market e-commerce can deliver financial viability for firms, valuation gains to investors, and easy product accessibility for the consumers.





KAUSHIK MOITRA



NANDINI TYAGI

Republic strikes back; data reset

A data privacy regime with focus on citizens, consent, and innovation

India's data-protection landscape is undergoing a necessary reset. The Digital Personal Data Protection (DPDP) Act, 2023, and DPDP Rules, 2025, now partially in force, represent a significant shift in how personal information is processed, protected, and governed. For those familiar with the mechanics of data, and ease with which ambiguity has historically been exploited, this transition is overdue. The framework is the country's first comprehensive digital privacy regime, which is citizen-centric, consent-driven, and innovation-aligned. It is built on seven principles: consent and transparency, purpose limitation, minimisation, accuracy, storage limits, security, and accountability.

The Government has opted for a phased implementation. Provisions establishing the Data Protection Board are operational; it will investigate violations, and impose penalties. The remaining obligations such as consent notices, retention standards, safeguards, breach reporting, grievance handling, and protections for children and persons with disabilities will happen within 18 months after the notification. This staggered rollout is intended to give citizens and companies realistic adjustment timelines.

The new regime seeks to transform personal data from something passively surrendered to something users actively control. Platforms must explain, in a user's preferred language, what data they collect, why and how they will use it, and how consent may be modified or withdrawn. However, the DPDP Rules stop short of mandating disclosures on recipient categories, cross-border protections, or retention periods, thereby undermining fully-informed consent. Concentration of appointment powers for the Data Protection Board in the Executive has drawn criticism for diluting independence.

Firms must promptly report breaches to both the Board, and affected users, with fuller details within 72 hours. Users must be told what happened, and how to mitigate harm. Additional safeguards apply where users lack the capacity to give consent. Processing children's or disabled persons' data requires verifiable guardian consent, and are subject to narrow welfare-based exceptions.

Platforms cannot monitor children's behaviour or target them with advertising.

Research and archiving enjoy limited allowances but must meet baseline privacy standards. The Rules remain silent on whether AI (Artificial Intelligence) training qualifies as "research," leaving a significant issue as unresolved. Significant Data Fiduciaries, or entities processing high-risk or large-scale personal data, face heightened compliance. These include annual impact assessments, independent audits, and scrutiny of systems, algorithms, and hosting infrastructure. Cross-border transfers are permitted in principle, but the Government may restrict datasets processed by these fiduciaries, and impose conditions on access requests from foreign authorities. This reflects a shift toward risk-sensitive data mobility.

The Act introduces strict retention logic. Data must be erased when consent is withdrawn, or the purpose ends. Organisations must retain personal data, and logs for at least one year to support legitimate state functions. After this period, erasure is the default mode, unless another law requires retention. E-commerce, gaming, and social-media platforms must delete users' data after three years of inactivity, with a notice, and an opportunity to re-engage. This curbs extreme data accumulation but may entrench prolonged monitoring by both the corporations and State.

The State may ask for information for reasons that may range from national security to compliance reviews, sometimes without notifying the users, which raises concerns over broad surveillance powers. A new rights ecosystem obliges organisations to explain how users may access, correct, or erase data, with a uniform 90-day limit for grievance resolution. Consent managers, who are modelled on India's account-aggregator framework, will allow users to centrally view, and revoke permissions across platforms while remaining data-blind and audit-compliant.

Modern platforms behave like industrial-scale data refineries, and aggregate vast



behavioural datasets with little transparency or consent. Dark patterns continue to push users toward maximal data sharing. Apps rely on third-party tools that transmit their own streams of information. Cross-border cloud routing adds opacity. Even pricing models are influenced by surveillance logic. Reports suggest differential pricing based on device type or battery level.

Courts are beginning to address these practices. In the US, a ruling accepting Meta's use of books from 'shadow libraries' for AI training as fair use highlights the asymmetric treatment between the individuals and large platforms. Indian regulators have flagged this imbalance: WhatsApp's 2021 policy update was deemed abusive because the users lacked real choice. When combined with opaque AI training datasets, the ANI versus OpenAI dispute, and government advisories on dark patterns, it is clear that several entities continue data practices that they cannot defend or trace.

Surveillance extends into hardware. Smart TVs monitor viewing habits, phones continuously generate telemetry, wearables store intimate health metrics, and cars generate behavioural data. These are monetised abroad. Across the ecosystem, data capture is continuous, consent fleeting, and deletion rarely meaningful.

The Act requires organisations to justify what they collect, why they do it, who accesses it, and how long it is retained. This challenges the default-to-accumulate existing models, which have existed for the past decade. Sectoral frameworks intersect with these expectations. The Reserve Bank of India mandates strict security, storage, and audit standards. KYC (Know-Your-

Customer) data cannot be repurposed without fresh consent. The regulatory practices in European Union and the US treat lawful basis, retention limits, and algorithmic transparency as routine obligations.

Healthcare and the related platform economy face additional scrutiny. Medical data is already fenced by multiple laws, and guidelines that require explicit consent, and encrypted exchange. Children's data now faces heightened protection under the DPDP regime, which must be harmonised with the IT Act's obligations on harmful, and algorithmically-curated content. Proposed amendments to the IT Act will require labelling synthetic content, and impose provenance duties on platforms distributing AI-generated media.

Connected devices, which silently ingest telemetry, audio, and location trails must now implement layered permissions, real deletion mechanisms, and strict purpose limitation. Engineering teams will need to redesign systems on the principle that legality, and not technical capability, governs what companies may collect.

India's privacy regime is evolving, and leaves major questions open. These are related to AI governance, state access boundaries, regulatory capacity, and the copyright implications of training on protected works. Yet the shift is unmistakable. For an economy where behavioural data has operated as an unpriced asset, and digital infrastructure underpins both growth and governance, the new DPDP framework marks the beginning of a disciplined, purpose-bound data order. It does not settle all the debates, but it sets the first durable boundaries within which India's data economy must mature. The era of data drifting without form is giving way to one defined by structure, intention, and accountability.

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BRIEFLY

SERGIO RAMOS BIDS
FAREWELL TO MONTERREY



Three days after Monterrey was eliminated in the Mexican Apertura semifinals, Spanish defender Sergio Ramos bid farewell to his team. The 39-year-old Ramos arrived in Mexico on a one-year contract that ended with Monterrey's elimination on Saturday. "It's never easy to say goodbye. A stage of my career that began with so much excitement in February has come to an end," Ramos posted Tuesday on his official social media accounts. "It has allowed me to discover a new country, a new city, a new style of football and has left me with so many new experiences and, more importantly, new friends." Ramos, who became captain of Monterrey, played in 34 matches in all competitions and scored eight goals. "I have left everything on the pitch and off it to be able to give my very best," the defender said. "I'll always look back fondly on this stage of my career."

COMMONWEALTH KHO KHO TO
BE HELD NEXT YEAR IN INDIA



Over 24 countries will compete in the inaugural Commonwealth Kho Kho Championship from March 9 to 14 next year, for which the venue is yet to be finalised in India. The Kho Kho Federation of India is in talks with several states to finalise the venue after Commonwealth Sport (CS) gave the approval for the event to take place in India. The event, which will see 16 men's and as many women's teams competing, will be organised on the lines of the first Kho Kho World Cup held in January this year in Delhi in which 23 nations participated. This will be the first Commonwealth Kho Kho event in India after Ahmedabad was recently officially confirmed as the host city for the 2030 Commonwealth Games.

India win bronze in FIH Men's Junior World Cup

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

■ Chennai

India produced a brave-heart performance, nullifying a two-goal deficit to beat Argentina 4-2 and clinch the bronze medal in the FIH Men's Junior World Cup on Wednesday.

India, who won the title in 2016 in Lucknow, failed to finish on the podium on the last two occasions, ending fourth in 2021 in Bhubaneswar, and two years later in Kuala Lumpur. India produced a valiant fightback with Ankit Pal (49th minute), Manmeet Singh (52nd) and Anmol Ekka (58th) converting penalty corners, while Sharda Nand Tiwari finding the net from the spot in the 57th minute.

Argentina were the better side on display at least in the first two quarters, scoring through Nicolas Rodriguez (3rd minute) and Santiago Fernandez (44th).

The Argentines controlled the possession of the match in the first quarter as India struggled to get a foothold. Argentina secured their first



India's players celebrate a goal during an FIH Junior Men's Hockey World Cup match between India and Argentina at Mayor Radhakrishnan Hockey Stadium in Chennai, Tamil Nadu

PTI

chance in the third minute in the form of a penalty stroke following a foul by Anmol Ekka and Rodriguez made no mistake to hand his side the lead.

The Indians were guilty of giving away the ball too easily, which put paid to their chances in the first 15 minutes.

India had their best shot at the goal in the 20th minute but

Dilraj Singh's shot from top of the circle was finely saved by Argentina goalkeeper Joaquin Ruiz. The Indians started brightly after the change of ends and secured four back-to-

back penalty corners in the 31st minute but failed to execute a single one with Anmol Ekka flicking the final one over the post. Argentina kept up the pressure on the Indian defence

and secured their first penalty corner in the 37th minute but Indian goalkeeper Princedeep Singh made a brilliant double save to keep the hosts in the hunt. Argentina secured two more short corners in the 40th minute but failed to get past the Indian defence.

The visitors secured their fourth penalty corner in the 41st minute but Rodriguez flick was off target.

The Indians didn't lose heart and maintained the pressure in the final quarter and drew level, converting two penalty corners through deflections in the span of four minutes.

Ankit Pal reduced the margin in the 49th minute by deflecting in Anmol Ekka's flick from India's fifth penalty corner. Manmeet Singh drew parity for India four minutes later, deflecting in another Ekka's flick from India's sixth penalty corner.

With momentum on their side, India pressed hard on the Argentine defence thereafter and Tiwari scored from a penalty stroke three minutes from the final hooter.

India beat Uruguay in FIH Junior Women's World Cup

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

■ Santiago (Chile)

Goalkeeper Nidhi made several brilliant saves as India defeated Uruguay 3-1 in shootout after an intense 1-1 draw to stay in contention for a ninth place finish in the hockey Junior Women's World Cup.

Manisha (19') scored for India while Justina Arregui (60') slammed the equaliser for Uruguay on Tuesday in the 9/12 qualification match.

The first quarter saw India control the game, creating multiple chances early on. However, Uruguay won the first penalty corner in the fifth minute but squandered the chance.

India earned a penalty corner in the 18th minute and played an interesting variation by passing the ball to Sakshi Rana on the near post. But her shot was blocked by the rival goalkeeper.



Moments later, India broke the deadlock with Manisha (19') striking the ball from a distance as India took the lead.

The game opened up in the final quarter with Uruguay playing a lot more freely. With two minutes left on the clock, Uruguay switched their goalkeeper for an outfield player to push ahead in numbers and it paid off.

With two seconds left on

the clock, Uruguay won a penalty stroke. Justina Arregui converted the it to take the game into shootout.

India emerged victorious in the shootout as Purnima Yadav, Ishika and Kanika Siwach scored while goalkeeper Nidhi denied Uruguay thrice to ensure her team progresses in the tournament.

India will next play Spain on Thursday in the 9th/10th place match.

IOA and Italy's CONI sign MoU to strengthen bilateral sports cooperation

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

■ New Delhi

The Indian Olympic Association (IOA) and the Italian National Olympic Committee (CONI) on Wednesday signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to strengthen bilateral cooperation in sports with a focus on training, infrastructure sharing and sports science collaboration.

The agreement provides a "structured framework for joint promotion of sports, exchange of expertise and mutual access to each nation's elite sporting infrastructure and high-performance centres for athletes, coaches and sports science professionals".

The signing ceremony was attended by Italy's Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation

Antonio Tajani and Union Minister for Youth Affairs and Sports Mansukh Mandaviya.

"Today marks a proud moment for the Indian Olympic movement. This partnership with CONI opens new horizons for our athletes to train, learn, and excel within one of the world's most respected sporting systems," PT Usha, IOA President, said in a release.

"The exchange of knowledge, expertise, and infrastructure will play a pivotal role in elevating India's global sporting performance. We look forward to a long and inspiring collaboration with our Italian counterparts."

The MoU outlines structured plans for joint training camps, coaching exchanges, collaborative sports science programmes, and development pathways for emerging athletes, signalling a new era of cooperation between the two Olympic committees.

"This partnership arrives at a crucial moment for India's sporting ambitions. Access to world-class facilities and joint training programmes will significantly strengthen our athletes' preparation for future Olympic cycles," Mandaviya said.

"The Government of India welcomes this initiative and is committed to supporting meaningful international collaborations that uplift Indian sport." Luciano Buonfiglio, President of CONI, said, "Italy and India share a deep passion for sport, and this MoU represents an important step in strengthening that bond."

"By opening our high-performance facilities and expertise to each other, we are building a bridge of excellence that will benefit both nations' athletes for years to come. CONI is delighted to join hands with IOA in this forward-looking initiative."

Liverpool 1-0 win over Inter Milan in Champions League

ASSOCIATED PRESS

■ London

Even from the penalty spot, Liverpool managed just fine without Mohamed Salah.

After leaving the Egypt forward in England, Liverpool got a much-needed boost with a 1-0 win over Inter Milan in the Champions League on Tuesday. Barcelona and Bayern Munich celebrated comeback wins and Chelsea lost.

With regular penalty taker Salah out of the squad following his public criticism of the club last week, Dominik Szoboszlai stepped up instead to score the 88th-minute penalty which earned a 1-0 win over one of the competition's best-performing teams.

It was all the more valuable for coming after a run of one win in six games in all competitions for Arne Slot's under-pressure team, which moved up to eighth and is now back in contention for a direct spot in the round of 16. Inter dropped to fifth.



Liverpool's players thought they had taken the lead with Ibrahima Konate's header in the 31st minute. After a video review that lasted several minutes, it was ruled out for handball as Virgil van Dijk had earlier nodded the ball on to the arm of Hugo Ekitike.

Having taken away a goal from Liverpool, VAR came to the visitors' aid when it spotted that Alessandro Bastoni had tugged Florian Wirtz's shirt in the area, with the midfielder falling to the ground. Szoboszlai converted the penalty.

Bayern's new star shines

Bayern's 17-year-old midfielder Lennart Karl produced an audacious bit of skill to continue his high-scoring start to life in the Champions League in a 3-1 win over Sporting Lisbon which lifted Bayern to second behind Arsenal.

Karl scored his third goal in four career Champions League games, controlling a pass from Konrad Laimer in mid-air before volleying a shot from a tight angle over two onrushing defenders and past the goalkeeper.

It was part of a 12-minute, three-goal turnaround for Bayern after Joshua

Kimmich's own-goal handed Sporting the lead. Serge Gnabry leveled for Bayern when he was left unmarked at a corner in the 65th, before Karl scored Bayern's second in the 69th and defender Jonathan Tah made it 3-1 in the 77th.

Widely viewed as German soccer's best young talent this season, Karl became Bayern's youngest-ever Champions League scorer in October on his first start in the competitions.

Late on, Alphonso Davies came off the bench for the Canadian left back's first game since March after a serious knee injury.

Chelsea loses
Chelsea was beaten in the Champions League for the first time in nearly three months as Belgium forward Charles De Ketelaere set up the equalizer and scored an 83rd-minute winner as Atalanta came from behind to win 2-1.

Chelsea, which went ahead through Joao Pedro, dropped out of the top eight

automatic qualifying spots to 11th with its second loss. It was a fourth win for Atalanta, which climbed to third.

Gianluca Scamacca made it 1-1 by heading home a cross from De Ketelaere, who then drove in a shot that Chelsea goalkeeper Robert Sanchez got a hand to but couldn't keep out.

Koundé scores 2, Yamal sets record

Headers by Jules Koundé three minutes apart gave Barcelona a 2-1 comeback victory over Eintracht Frankfurt. Marcus Rashford assisted in the first goal in the 50th and Lamine Yamal with a cross in the second in the 53rd. That took Yamal to 14 career combined goals and assists in the Champions League, breaking a tie with Kylian Mbappe for the most by a player aged under 19, UEFA said.

The visitors had taken the lead with a goal by Ansgar Knauff in a 21st-minute breakaway at the renovated and only partially open Camp Nou stadium.

Barcelona beat Eintracht Frankfurt

ASSOCIATED PRESS

■ Barcelona (Spain)

Barcelona coach Hansi Flick downplayed Lamine Yamal's reaction to being substituted late in the team's 2-1 win over Eintracht Frankfurt in the Champions League.

Yamal was replaced by Roony Bardghji in the 89th minute of the league-phase game. He walked off with a serious expression and appeared to be complaining to himself. He also didn't look happy after getting back to the bench.

"We changed Lamine with a few minutes to go because he was booked and it was late," Flick said. "If he was a bit annoyed, then I fully understand and I like it. I was a player too. It's fully acceptable, not a problem." Yamal was shown a yellow card in the 56th minute for a foul and will miss the team's next Champions League match.

His cross led to Jules Koundé's second goal in the 53rd to give Barcelona the come-from-behind victory



after the visitors had gone ahead in the 21st. Koundé also scored in the 50th.

The 18-year-old Yamal has produced more goal involvements — assists and goals — than any other player aged under 19 in Champions League history from group stage or league phase to final, according to UEFA. He has 14 — seven goals and seven assists. That is one more than Kylian Mbappe's previous record of 13 — 10 goals and three assists.

"It's great to have Jules scoring ... His talent and his

mentality are so important," Flick said. Koundé said it was "fun" to be able to make many forays into the attack.

"My first job is to defend well so I have to keep a balance," he said. "And there are games when we play against a back five — today Frankfurt were very deep, so you have to attack the spaces in behind, which is what I tried to do. I had success with those two goals."

It was the fifth consecutive match in which Barcelona conceded first. It rallied to victories in its last four games.

Real Madrid beat Wolfsburg in champions league

ASSOCIATED PRESS

■ London

Linda Caicedo raced clear from halfway to score the goal that clinched Real Madrid a 2-0 win over Wolfsburg in the Women's Champions League on Tuesday, while there were also victories for defending champion Arsenal and Juventus.

Paris Saint-Germain (PSG) stayed winless after five rounds after a 0-0 draw with OH Leuven, however, and cannot now progress to the knockout stage with one match remaining.

The 20-year-old Caicedo, regarded as one of the top younger players in the women's game, recently signed a long-term deal with Madrid and showcased her



talents with the second goal against Wolfsburg.

Played through by Caroline Weir, the Colombia striker outpaced the last defender after setting off inside her own half, rounded the goalkeeper, and slotted home a finish in the 67th minute. T

hat added to the opening goal in the 19th by Maria Méndez for Madrid, which finished the match with nine players. Maëlle Lakrar collected a second yellow card in first-half stoppage time, while Iris Santiago received a straight red in second-half

stoppage time.

Madrid moved above Wolfsburg and into third place — one of the four automatic qualifying places — with the win and is assured of at least a spot in the playoffs. So is Arsenal after a 1-0 home win over Twente, secured thanks to Beth Mead's deflected 10th-minute strike.

Juventus, meanwhile, thrashed St. Pölten 5-0 and climbed to second place, on the same points as Madrid and first-place Barcelona, which plays Benfica on Wednesday in its game in hand.

Cristiana Girelli scored two of Juve's goals — one of which was from the penalty spot.

PSG, a two-time runner-up and a semifinalist as recently as two seasons ago, will not even make it to the playoffs.

SIL to be held from February 16-26

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

■ New Delhi

The inaugural edition of the Shooting League of India (SLI) will be held from February 16 to 26 next year, the National Rifle Association of India (NRAI) said on Wednesday.

The dates have been finalised in alignment with the International Shooting Sport Federation's (ISSF) 2026 calendar to avoid clashes with major international competitions. The league had previously been deferred to early 2026.

The franchise-based league will feature several top Indian and international shooters competing in a mixed-team format across pistol, rifle and shotgun disciplines. "The SLI



is a milestone for our sport, franchise-built, athlete-first, and aligned to the global calendar to maximise participation," NRAI President Kalikesh Narayan Singh Deo said in a release.

"With mixed-team formats, compelling story-

lines, and a premium broadcast, we're set to deliver a world-class opening season that welcomes international stars and inspires India's next generation."

The competition will feature mixed team events in multiple categories —

pistol (10m, 25m), rifle (10m, 50m 3P), and shotgun (trap and skeet). The franchise-based teams will be divided into two pools for the league stage, followed by knockout rounds.

Players are drafted across four tiers — Elite Champions, World Elite, National Champions, and Junior & Youth — ensuring a mix of international stars, top Indian shooters, and emerging talent.

"With tighter formats, mixed-team dynamics, and a premium broadcast, the SLI can translate fine margins into compelling drama. It's the kind of platform that turns technical excellence into (a) must-watch sport," former World Champion Ronjan Sodhi said.