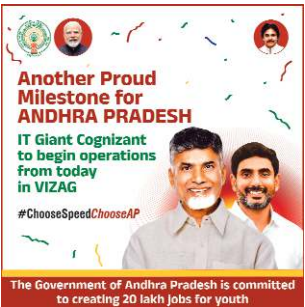
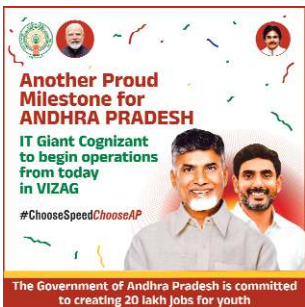




Another Proud Milestone for ANDHRA PRADESH

IT Giant Cognizant to begin operations from today in VIZAG



image used for visual representation only

Issued by : Director, Information & Public Relations Dept., Andhra Pradesh.

#ChooseSpeedChooseAP



₹.3,740.31 Cr. Investments

41,967 JOBS

Hon'ble Chief Minister of Andhra Pradesh
Sri Nara Chandrababu Naidu

Hon'ble Minister for IT & HRD
Sri Nara Lokesh

will inaugurate Cognizant's Office and
lay the foundation for
9 IT and IT-enabled services companies

Date : 12th December, 2025 Time : 9:00 AM
Venue : IT Zone, Madhurawada



The Government of Andhra Pradesh is committed to creating 20 lakh jobs for youth

1.7 lakh tonnes of rice to FCI within 15 days of kharif procurement: Minister

PNS ■ Amaravati

Minister Nadendla Manohar on Thursday said the state achieved a milestone by sending over 1.7 lakh tonnes of rice to the FCI within 15 days of launching kharif paddy procurement.

Manohar said procurement has been progressing at an accelerated pace across districts, noting that the state procured over 1.4 lakh tonnes on December 10 alone, marking one of the highest single-day figures this season.

"Within 15 days of commencing kharif paddy procurement, we have sent more than 1.7 lakh tonnes of rice to the Food Corporation of India, marking a significant milestone," State Civil Supplies Minister Nadendla Manohar said in a press release.

He added that the state has so far procured over 20 lakh tonnes of paddy from nearly 3.5 lakh farmers, depositing around 4,600 crore into their accounts to ensure timely payments.

To facilitate smooth transportation, the NDA coalition government has deployed 32,000 lorries, tractors, mini-tractors, and special trains to shift stocks immediately from procurement centres.



Manohar noted that emergency measures were initiated in Krishna, Guntur, and Bapatla districts due to heavy yields and the impact of rains and Cyclone Ditwah, with 106 rice mills in Krishna district granted inter-district movement permissions.

The minister emphasised that transparent procurement, strict supervision of millers, and continuous monitoring remain key priorities of the government to safeguard farmers and ensure Minimum Support Price (MSP) operations continue without interruption.

He said the Civil Supplies Department is making arrangements to manage large arrivals of procured paddy, with increased logistics support ensuring faster movement of Custom Milled Rice (CMR) to the FCI.

Manohar urged farmers to participate directly in procurement operations.

AP govt, Puch AI ink deal to boost efficiency of SHGs

PNS ■ Amaravati

Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu on Thursday said the state's municipal administration department has signed an agreement with Puch AI to enhance women's productivity in the retail sector.

Naidu said the partnership will focus on deploying AI solutions aimed at improving the efficiency and output of urban self-help group (SHG) women engaged in



retail activities.

"Municipal Administration Department, Government of Andhra Pradesh, has

signed an MoU with Puch AI. This partnership aims to deploy AI solutions designed to enhance the productivity of urban SHG women operating in the retail sector," the chief minister said in a post on 'X'.

Naidu met representatives of Puch AI earlier in the day, officials added.

Puch AI was founded by Siddharth Bhatia, an alumnus of the National University of Singapore, and Arijit Jain, a graduate of IIT-

Bombay.

The startup's mission, according to its website, is to make artificial intelligence accessible to people across India, regardless of their language, education level, or technical expertise.

The brand describes itself as a "voice-first platform" that supports Indic languages and major regional accents, and is accessible to users on WhatsApp without the need for a separate app or website.

PM Modi speaks to Trump, reviews Indo-US ties

PNS ■ New Delhi

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Thursday held a phone conversation with US President Donald Trump that focused on enhancing economic ties at a time the two countries are eyeing to seal a trade deal.

The two leaders exchanged views on expanding cooperation in trade, critical technologies, energy, defence and security, officials said.

Both the leaders also agreed to work closely to address shared challenges and advance common interests, they said.

Modi and Trump also reviewed progress in the India-U.S. Comprehensive Global Strategic Partnership, they said.

The two leaders expressed satisfaction at the steady strengthening of bilateral cooperation across all domains.

Modi and Trump underlined the importance of sustaining momentum in shared efforts to enhance bilateral trade, the officials said.

The leaders also exchanged views on expanding cooperation in critical technologies, energy, defence and security, the officials said.

The officials said the leaders also agreed to work closely to address shared challenges and advance common interests, the officials said.

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TG must lead in numismatics and heritage studies: DCM

PNS ■ Hyderabad

Telangana should emerge as a frontrunner in the fields of numismatics (the study of coins) and heritage studies, said Deputy Chief Minister Mallu Bhatti Vikramarka.

Speaking at the national seminar organised by the Numismatics Society on the theme "Coinage and Economy of Southern India" at the Marri Channa Reddy Human Resource Development Institute on Thursday, he said he hopes that this seminar, which is being held over two days, will not remain just an academic event but will serve as a spark-an intellectual lightning bolt-igniting new ideas.

Cooperation among various institutions must increase, young researchers should focus on interdisciplinary studies, he said.

The Deputy Chief Minister stated that the Telangana government is fully committed to

heritage-based research. Under the leadership of Tourism and Excise Minister Jupally Krishna Rao, the State government is determined to develop Telangana into a central hub of scientific study, cultural preservation and knowledge production.

He noted that South India has one of the richest coinage traditions in the world. From the Satavahanas and Ikshvakus, who expanded their trade networks through their coinage, to the artistic splendour of the Kakatiyas and the grandeur of the Vijayanagara Empire, the coins of this region stand as symbols of innovation, craftsmanship and sophisticated statecraft.

"Coins speak to us-they often speak loudly-about the tax systems, minting technologies, commercial priorities and political visions of their time," he said.

Numismatics may appear to be the study of small metal pieces one can hold in the hand, but when one looks closely, each coin reveals an entire miniature world, he said. He often thinks of coins as ancient "compressed data." Within a few grams of metal lie the economic system of an era, the aspirations of a king, technological knowledge, trade routes, religious symbols and diplomatic ties.

"If archaeologists had discovered ZIP files in ancient times, they would probably have named them 'coins'," he joked.

In an age when India leads the world in digital payments and fintech innovation-when we see more QR codes than paise-this moment reminds us how far our economic journey has travelled.

Heritage, he said, is not merely about looking back but about understanding the vast web of ideas that continue to shape us today.

High-level committee to go into issue plaguing EHS

PNS ■ Amaravati

To resolve the issues in the medical services being provided to government employees in the State under the Employees Health Scheme (EHS), and to improve the quality of services they receive, the state government has constituted a seven-member high-level committee on the directions of Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu. The committee will be chaired by the Chief Secretary K Vijayanand.

The seven-member high-level committee will conduct a comprehensive study on the EHS policy for employees.

It will review the services currently being provided, examine how better services can be offered, and prepare a report on the problems presently faced by government employees along with recommendations for their resolution.

The High-Level Committee chaired by CS

Vijayanand includes the Principal Secretaries of the General Administration Department (GAD), Finance Department, and Medical and Health Department, along with employee union leaders, AP NGO President A. Vidyasagar and AP Revenue Services Association President Bopparaju Venkateswlu, as members. The committee has been directed by the government to study the measures required to provide improved medical services to government employees through EHS and submit a detailed report within eight weeks.

This High-Level Committee will examine the shortcomings in medical services being provided to government employees through EHS cards, identify solutions to the problems, and study the comprehensive steps required to ensure the delivery of better-quality services.

Rights of individual always subservient to the nation's interest: SC

PNS ■ New Delhi

Rights of an individual are always subservient to the nation's interest, the Supreme Court said on Thursday, emphasising that the rights guaranteed under Article 21 of the Constitution must always be protected, but in cases where the country's security or integrity is called into question, that cannot be the sole ground for granting bail.

A bench of Justices Sanjay Karol and Nongmeikapam Kotiswar Singh made the observations while hearing an appeal filed by the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) against the bail granted to certain accused in connection with the 2010 derailment of the Jnaneswari Express in West Bengal's West Midnapore district.

The Mumbai-bound train had derailed near Jhargram and was then hit by an oncoming goods train, leading to the deaths of 148 passengers. Authorities had said the derailment, which took place at around 1 am on



May 28, 2010, was the result of alleged sabotage by Maoists. The incident took place soon after a four-day bandh called by the CPI (Maoist) had come into force.

The top court said interfering with the liberty of the accused at this stage, particularly when nothing else holds against them, would not be justified.

The court said the CBI could not bring to its notice any subsequent development that would justify this interference as serving any fruitful purpose.

"There can be no manner of doubt on the proposition that the Article 21 rights are placed on a pedestal, and rightly so. At the same time, though, the individual cannot always be the centre of attention." Certain cases,

such as the instant one, demand by their very nature and effect that the issue presented is looked at from a much wider point of view, that is, national security. We observe, therefore, that while the Article 21 rights must always be protected, in cases where the security or integrity of the nation is called into question, that cannot be the sole ground of consideration," the bench said.

Issuing a slew of directions, it asked the trial court to take stock of the matter and record in its order the status and the reasons for the trial's pendency for years.

"From that day forth, the matter shall be taken up on a day-to-day basis. The granting of adjournments shall be eschewed unless exceptional circumstances are shown. "We request the administrative judge of the high court, as nominated by the learned chief justice, to seek a report, every four weeks, from the trial judge and ensure that the directions are being complied with," the bench said.

Cabinet clears...

Parthasarathy noted that these investments are expected to create over one lakh jobs.

The key approvals include a Rs 1,225-crore investment proposal by Virupaksha Organics Pvt Ltd, which will set up an Active Pharmaceutical Ingredient (API) unit, a Rs 4,000-crore project by ReNew Photovoltaics Pvt Ltd to establish a 6 GW solar PV ingot wafer manufacturing unit at Rambilli, which is expected to create 1,200 jobs, eleven key projects to attract large investments in quantum computing, electronics manufacture and IT sector at an investment of Rs 1,421 crore.

Out of these, seven are quantum computing projects in Amaravati Quantum Valley (AQV), one electronics manufacturing project in Naidupeta and three IT campus projects in Vizag.

Parthasarathy emphasised that the government is focusing on making Amaravati Quantum Valley as the first quantum computing hub in the country.

QpiAI will offer free quantum computing training to students, undertake research to develop patents and propel Andhra Pradesh to be at the forefront of technology, said the minister.

Besides, the Cabinet approved four major tourist hotel projects in Vizag, Bapatla and Tirupati at an investment of Rs 784 crore, offering land and incentives, among other decisions.

It approved calling tenders worth Rs 532 crore for connecting the Seed Access Road to National Highway 16. Administrative sanctions were granted for the maintenance of the check dams on the Paleru River in Kuppam.

The Andhra Pradesh Prisons and Correctional Services Bill was also discussed in the Cabinet. Several key decisions taken at the SIPB (Strategic Investment Promotion Board) were approved by the cabinet.

The cabinet gave the green signal to investments of approximately Rs 20,444 crore for the establishment of 26 companies in the State Investment Promotion Board meeting. According to Minister Parthasarathy, these initiatives are expected to generate over 56,000 additional jobs.

PM praises...

During the 30-minute meeting with about 15 MPs, the Prime Minister said the Centre's coordination with CM Chandrababu Naidu yielded good results. He noted that investor confidence in Andhra Pradesh has significantly improved, and more investments are flowing into the State than in previous years.

Senior leaders, including MP Daggubati Purandeswari, CM Ramesh, and Bhubathiraju Srinivasa Varma were present during the interaction.

Cognizant to launch...

Meanwhile, along with Cognizant, preparations are also underway to establish an AI Technology Centre by Sritek Tammin on Rushikonda Hill-2. This project is expected to create employment for about 2,000 people. Additionally, on IT Park Hill-4, Bengaluru-based real estate firm Satva Developers is performing the ground-breaking ceremony to set up IT space and a data center. The AP government has allotted 30 acres of land to this company. With an investment of Rs 1,500 crore, the company is

expected to create approximately 25,000 jobs.

Amaravati Quantum...

The delegation presented the Amaravati Quantum Bio-Foundry Vision, which proposes a world-leading knowledge ecosystem anchored by a Quantum Simulation Centre, a National Quantum Bio-Foundry, an innovation hub and a nationwide spoke network, the release said.

Its strategic focus areas include quantum medicine, quantum biology and life-sciences integration through a multidisciplinary, computation-led and data-driven approach.

The roadmap outlines an integrated ecosystem comprising centres of excellence, clinical partners, industry collaborations, computing infrastructure, research facilities and start-up and innovation support systems, it added.

The delegation also discussed emerging use cases where quantum technologies are transforming biology and healthcare and noted that Andhra Pradesh, with its strategic location, research momentum and policy agility, is well placed to lead in the sector.

Welcoming the vision, Naidu stressed the need to create short, medium and long-term applications that deliver transformational outcomes, and to anchor the ecosystem in a hub-and-spoke model to leverage India's scientific talent and build strong national and global institutional networks.

The TDP chief urged the delegation to keep an open mind to all possibilities as Amaravati prepares to 'shape the future of quantum bio-medicine.'

Vajpayee demonstrated...

Calling Vajpayee a "mirror of unity," the Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister said the ongoing yatra reflected similar cooperation in Andhra Pradesh where TDP, Jana Sena and BJP are working together.

He added that a Vajpayee Memorial Park will be constructed in the greenfield capital city of Amaravati and that Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu will attend the Good Governance Conference on December 25.

Andhra Pradesh state BJP president PVN Madhav launched the 'Atal Modi Good Governance Yatra' to mark

the birth centenary of former PM Vajpayee.

The event also marked the beginning of statewide NDA rallies from December 11 to 25.

As part of this programme, a rally featuring 500 motorcycles and 200 cars was flagged off from the BJP office in Dharmavaram town as part of the programme.

We have launched the Atal-Modi Good Governance Yatra today to mark the birth centenary of Vajpayee, beginning statewide NDA rallies from December 11 to 25, said a BJP press release, quoting Madhav.

Madhav said the yatra will cover two districts everyday till December 25 with the aim of strengthening NDA coordination and motivating youth across the southern state.

Andhra Pradesh BJP state president PVN Madhav on Thursday launched the 'Atal-Modi Good Governance Yatra' in Sri Satya Sai district, to mark the birth centenary of former prime minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee.

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Madhav said the yatra will cover two districts everyday till December 25 with the aim of strengthening NDA coordination and motivating youth across the southern state.

Madhav along with Andhra Pradesh Health Minister Satya Kumar Yadav and other BJP leaders led the rally in a bus yatra and unveiled a statue of Vajpayee.

Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister Mohan Yadav is expected to arrive later in the day to participate as the chief guest, said the press release.

'Amaravati capital...

He criticised YSRCP chief YS Jagan Mohan Reddy for "spewing venom" against the Amaravati Bill. He alleged that Andhra Pradesh suffered significantly during the five-year YSRCP rule. He slammed the previous government, saying that Jagan Mohan Reddy and his team

destroyed Andhra Pradesh's future by failing to utilise the land given by 34,000 farmers. He stated that Amaravati is being developed in a planned manner. He reiterated that the bill in Parliament is facing delays due to technical reasons. Thousands of people are working for the construction of Amaravati, he said.

He highlighted that Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman has already laid the foundation for 16 national financial institutions. He explained that the establishment of HUDCO is becoming easier. He said that CAG, Postal buildings, and Central Universities are being set up in Amaravati. He also mentioned that efforts are ongoing for the development of the Outer Ring Road and national highways.

He stated that the Central and State governments are working together for the construction of Amaravati. He accused Jagan Mohan Reddy and his team of writing letters to the World Bank asking them not to provide funds for Amaravati. Chandrasekhar added that there are minor technical issues related to the Amaravati Bill.



1.7 lakh tonnes of rice to FCI within 15 days of kharif procurement: Minister

2



YSRCP retains Mayoral post of Kadapa civic body

4



Arunachal: 18 dead, 3 missing as truck falls in gorge

5



Pragmatic engagement with Taliban: India at UN

9



India names Sindhu, Lakshya for Asia Team Championships

12

PIONEER IN SHORT

1.7 LAKH TONNES OF RICE TO FCI WITHIN 15 DAYS OF KHARIF PROCUREMENT
Minister Nadendla Manohar on Thursday said the state achieved a milestone by sending over 1.7 lakh tonnes of rice to the FCI within 15 days of launching kharif paddy procurement. Manohar said procurement has been progressing at an accelerated pace across districts, noting that the state procured over 1.4 lakh tonnes on December 10 alone, marking one of the...

FULL REPORT ON P2

FIRE AT GINNING MILL DESTROYS COTTON WORTH CRORES

A series of fire accidents at ginning mills in Adoni town has left the owners worried. Early on Thursday morning, a major fire broke out at the NDBI ginning mill on the outskirts of Adoni. The fire erupted due to an electrical short circuit, and the large stock of cotton bales stored there was engulfed in flames and reduced to ashes. As the flames continued to spread, four fire engines were...

FULL REPORT ON P4

MAMATA SLAMS SIR, URGES PEOPLE TO PROTEST

Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee continued her tirade against the "mischievous implementation" of special intensive revision (SIR) of electoral rolls in Bengal "with a one-point agenda to help the BJP, asking the people to descend on the streets with kitchen tools and resist the " nefarious designs of the BJP Government" if a single name was deleted from the voters' lists. "They will take away...

FULL REPORT ON P5

ALONSO FEELS REAL MADRID WILL OVERCOME ROUGH PATCH

Xabi Alonso thanked his players for their attitude after another defeat and said he was positive Real Madrid would overcome its slump soon. Madrid lost 2-1 to Manchester City in the Champions League on Wednesday, remaining with only two wins in its last eight matches in all competitions. "The players gave it everything they had, and I have nothing to criticize today. I really value their attitude. We have to keep going," Alonso said.

FULL REPORT ON P12

QUOTE OF THE DAY



THE STATE GOVERNMENT IS DETERMINED TO DEVELOP TELANGANA INTO A CENTRAL HUB OF SCIENTIFIC STUDY, CULTURAL PRESERVATION AND KNOWLEDGE PRODUCTION

— MALLU BHATTI VIKRAMARKA, TG DEPUTY CHIEF MINISTER

Cabinet clears 14 investment proposals worth Rs 15,000 cr

PNS ■ Amaravati

The State Cabinet on Thursday approved a Rs 9,500 crore state water action plan proposed by the Municipal Administration and Urban Development Department, covering 506 projects. Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu presided over the Cabinet meeting.

Addressing a press conference at the secretariat, Information and Public Relations Minister K Parthasarathy said the Cabinet authorised the Andhra Pradesh Capital Region Development Authority (APCRDA) Commissioner to take up construction of the Governor's residence, Assembly Durbar Hall, Governor Office and two guest houses in Amaravati government complex.

The cabinet further cleared 14 investment proposals worth Rs 15,000 crore spanning solar power, chemicals, pharmaceuticals, food processing, biofuels and other sectors.

CONTINUED ON >> P2



Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu presiding over the Cabinet meeting in Amaravati on Thursday

CABINET MEETING

Naidu chides four Ministers for coming late

Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu took a serious view of the conduct of four Ministers who arrived late to the Cabinet meeting held at the Secretariat on Thursday. Expressing displeasure, the Chief Minister questioned how Ministers could afford to be late to the State's most important decision-making meeting.

The Cabinet session, chaired by Naidu, commenced at 10:30 am and took up discussion on 44 agenda proposals. As the meeting was underway, the late arrival of four ministers drew sharp criticism from the Chief Minister, who reminded them that Cabinet meetings demanded utmost discipline, punctuality and preparedness.

Describing punctuality as a basic expectation from those holding Cabinet posts, Naidu reportedly asked them why they had not planned their schedules in accordance with the pre-announced meeting time. He pointed out that the date and time were communicated well in advance and questioned the lack of seriousness displayed by the Ministers.

The Chief Minister warned that such behaviour would not be tolerated. He warned the Ministers that such a behaviour would not be tolerated.

Ministers thank Pawan for releasing funds for road works

PNS ■ Amaravati

Ahead of the cabinet meeting, Ministers met Deputy Chief Minister Pawan Kalyan. The Ministers conveyed their thanks to the Deputy CM for sanctioning funds for road construction works in the villages of their respective constituencies.

They told Pawan Kalyan that people had suffered greatly due to the pothole-ridden roads during the previous government and that they expressed their gratitude to him on behalf of the people for releasing funds.

The Ministers who expressed their gratitude to Pawan Kalyan including Payyavula Keshav, Vangalapudi Anitha, P Narayana, Nadendla Manohar, Savita, DVB Swamy, Nimmala Ramanaidu, Anagani Satyaprasad, Ram Prasad Reddy, BC Janardhan Reddy, Kandula Durgesh. The



Ministers expressing their gratitude to Deputy Chief Minister Pawan Kalyan for releasing funds for road works, in Amaravati on Thursday

Panchayati Raj Department has already issued a government order sanctioning funds for the construction of Panchayati Raj roads in the first phase. A total of 1,299 roads will be strengthened across 157 constituencies by the

Vajpayee demonstrated India's strength to world through nuclear test: MP CM

PNS ■ Dharmavaram

Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister Mohan Yadav on Thursday praised former prime minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee for transforming the telecom sector, expanding rural cooking gas connections and demonstrating India's strength to the world through nuclear tests. Speaking at the Atal-Modi Good Governance Yatra



Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister Mohan Yadav, Health Minister Satya Kumar Yadav and Andhra Pradesh state BJP president PVN Madhav at a public meeting in Dharmavaram on Wednesday

launched by the Andhra Pradesh BJP here, Yadav addressed a public

meeting after the unveiling of a statue of Vajpayee. "Vajpayee

brought transformative reforms in the telecom sector, expanded rural cooking gas connections, and demonstrated India's global strength through nuclear tests," he said.

He recalled Vajpayee's historic achievements as the first non-Congress Prime Minister, uniting various parties and leading a coalition government.

CONTINUED ON >> P2

12 lakh families migrate to other states from AP

PNS ■ Amaravati

Lakhs of families in the State are migrating to other states. Whether it is for better living conditions or due to lack of local employment is not clearly known, but the government has identified that about 12 lakh families have migrated to other states. This information has come to light through the survey being conducted across the state by village and ward secretariats. It appears that most of these migrations are primarily in search of livelihood.

There are 1.71 crore families living in the state. A survey has been conducted for some time to collect

complete details about these families and understand their living conditions. So far, details of 1.49 crore families have been collected, out of which nearly 14 lakh families could not be traced.

Based on the information provided by locals, it is found that 1.77 lakh families have migrated to other areas within the state, while 12,59,631 families have moved to other states. Among those who migrated to other states, very few belong to central government services, and the majority is economically weaker sections.

It is primarily identified that lack of employment is the major reason for these increasing migrations. Over



the past few years, the construction sector in the state has collapsed. Hardly any projects are taking place. As a result, many people are facing financial difficulties. To support their families, they are moving elsewhere in search of work. It is said that most of them are

migrating to Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, and Telangana. Notably, a large number of migrations are being reported from the districts of Visakhapatnam and Nellore, which are considered economically significant regions. According to previous

data, Visakhapatnam had about 72.8 lakh families, but now 1.13 lakh families have migrated to other states. Nellore district had 8.59 lakh families, out of which over 85,000 families have moved to neighboring states. Similarly, in Kadapa, Tirupati, Palnadu, NTR,

Kurnool, Krishna, Kakinada, Guntur, Annamayya, and Anantapur districts, more than 50,000 families each have migrated.

Even the capital region districts, such as Guntur and NTR, where Amaravati is located and where many state-level government offices are situated, have been significantly affected by migration. It is believed that since no construction activity has taken place in these areas over the last six years, migrations have increased sharply. In these two districts combined, around 1.50 lakh families have migrated, out of which 1,15,729 families have moved to other states.



'Amaravati capital bill likely to be introduced in Parl soon'

PNS ■ New Delhi

Union Minister of State for Rural Development and Communications Pemasani Chandra Sekhar clarified that a bill to make Amaravati the permanent capital will be introduced in the current Parliament session or in the upcoming sessions. He commented that efforts are underway to place the Amaravati Bill in this very session. He explained that delays have occurred due to technical reasons, whether to recognise Amaravati as Andhra Pradesh's capital from 2014 or from now. He mentioned that Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu is monitoring the Amaravati Bill. hndrasekhar spoke to the media on Thursday in Delhi.

CONTINUED ON >> P2



TDP wrests Kalyandurgam Municipality from YSRCP

PNS ■ Kalyandurgam

In Anantapur district, the TDP wrested the Kalyandurgam Municipality from the YSRCP. Amid tense developments, Talari Gauthami was elected as the Municipal Chairperson. The election was conducted on Thursday morning at the local municipal office. Of the total 24 councillors, 11 from YSRCP and 11 from TDP attended. In this situation, the vote of the ex-officio members became crucial. MP Ambika Lakshminarayana and MLA Surendrababu, who are ex-officio members, supported



Gauthami. With the support of 13 members, she was elected as chairperson. Meanwhile, the Machavaram MPP president post in Palnadu district was also secured by the TDP.

Kokkera Anjamma, an MPTC member from Pillutla village, was unanimously elected as the MPP. Earlier, 15 MPTC members had won, but one passed away. Of the remaining 14, eleven attended

Thursday's meeting. Among them, six members supported the TDP candidate, leading to Anjamma's election as MPP. In the Andhra Pradesh general elections, the YSRCP suffered a major defeat,

securing only 11 seats. After the results, several former ministers, MLAs, MPs, and other leaders from the party said goodbye and joined the alliance parties. Across the State, Municipal Corporations, Municipalities, major panchayats, ZPTCs, and MPP posts slipped out of the YSRCP's hands and went to alliance parties. The YSRCP has been continuously facing setbacks. Now, yet another municipality has slipped away from the party.

Similarly, the Ramagiri MPP post in Sri Sathya Sai district was also captured by the TDP.

YSRCP retains Mayoral post of Kadapa civic body

PNS ■ Kadapa

The YSRCP retained the Mayoral post of Kadapa Municipal Corporation on Thursday. YSRCP candidate Paka Suresh was declared elected as the new Mayor of Kadapa. During the election process held at the Corporation office, YSRCP corporators unanimously elected Suresh. The election proceedings took place under the supervision of District Joint Collector Aditi Singh.



YSRCP corporators, along with Deputy Mayor Nityananda Reddy, supported the candidature of Suresh for the post of Mayor. With this, Joint Collector Aditi Singh officially declared that Suresh had been unanimously elected as the Mayor.

Three YSRCP corporators initially aspired for the Mayor position. To select one among the three, MP Avinash Reddy and YSRCP district president Ravindranath Reddy stepped in. Based on the instructions of YSRCP president YS Jagan Mohan Reddy, 47th division corporator Paka Suresh was chosen as the Mayor.

In this election, Joint Collector Aditi Singh officially announced the result. As the current term for the local body elections and the Mayor's tenure is only three months, the Telugu Desam Party stayed away from the contest. It is known that the previous

Kadapa Mayor Suresh Babu was removed from his position by the coalition government after allegations of corruption and irregularities against him.

During the Kadapa Mayor election process, YSRCP district president Ravindranath Reddy handed over copies of the B-form, A-form, and whip notice of the YSRCP candidate to the election officer, Aditi Singh. Speaking to the media, Ravindranath Reddy said that the Mayor candidate was finalised with unanimous consent from all corporators and that no one was dissatisfied. He clarified that those who have been part of the YSRCP since its inception are the ones currently serving as corporators.

There are 50 corporators in the Kadapa Corporation board. Among them, two corporators — Bola Padmavathi (22nd division)

and Anand (48th division)—have passed away. Only one corporator, J. Umadevi (49th division), was elected from the Telugu Desam Party. Out of the remaining 47 corporators, eight defected from the YSRCP to join the TDP. Thirty-nine corporators continue to actively work within the YSRCP.

Meanwhile, the Muddunuru Mandal Parishad President (MPP) election was also held on Thursday. YSRCP MLC Ramasubba Reddy, along with YSRCP MPTCs, reached the MPDO office for the election. The coalition parties — TDP, BJP, and Janasena — stayed away from the MPP election as well. Vennapusa Pushpalatha of YSRCP was selected as the MPP by Jammalamadugu RDO Sai Shri. For the Muddunuru MPP elections, Kadapa district police arranged heavy security.

Govt accused of planning to impose Rs 15,700 crore burden on power consumers



PNS ■ Vijayawada

Andhra Pradesh Congress Committee (APCC) president YS Sharmila on Thursday accused the TDP-led NDA government of preparing to impose a financial burden of nearly Rs 15,700 crore on consumers through power tariff hikes.

Contrary to Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu's assurances that electricity charges would not be raised, Sharmila claimed that the Andhra Pradesh Electricity Regulatory Commission (APERC) has already laid the groundwork for the "additional burden".

According to the opposition leader, a public notice has been issued seeking feedback on the proposed power tariff hike.

She alleged that this move exposes the dichotomy between the govern-

ment's statements and its actions, describing Naidu's assurances as "deceptive, outdated and utterly laughable".

In just 18 months of assuming office, Sharmila alleged, the government has caused significant financial distress through "adjustments" in power charges, amounting to about Rs 15,000 crore.

"Now, under the pretext of tariffs, the government is preparing yet another extraction of Rs 15,000 crore, further burdening citizens who trusted and voted for the ruling alliance," she further claimed.

Condemning the "practice of blaming deficits while squeezing ordinary families," Sharmila said it was "unacceptable for the government to repeatedly impose such steep charges."

Collector congratulates medalists

PNS ■ Kakinada

District Collector Shan Mohan congratulated two Class V students, U Vijnasri and P Ramya Devi of Yandamuru Primary School in Karapa mandal, for winning gold medals at the Khelo India State Women's League Wushu Championships. The event was organised by the Andhra Pradesh Wushu Association at Rajahmundry on the 8th and 9th, and the girls have now qualified for the Nationals.

Along with Vijnasri and Ramya Devi, P Hansika and Velangi Akshara School



student P Keerthana have also been selected to compete in the 9th Federation Sub-Junior Fights scheduled to be held in Chhattisgarh from December 24 to 30.

The students met the Collector at the Collectorate on Thursday. While congratulating them, he

expressed happiness that young girls were excelling in sports from an early age and wished them a bright future. MPUP School Vice-Chairman U Saroja Krishna, teachers Lovaraju and Krishna, and Velangi Akshara School representative T. Muralikrishna accompanied the team.

DOUBLE-MURDER CASE

YSRCP leaders Pinnella brothers surrender before court

PNS ■ Macharla

YSRCP leader and former Macharla MLA Pinnelli Ramakrishna Reddy and his brother Venkatrami Reddy surrendered before a court here on Thursday. Both of them arrived at the Junior Additional Civil Judge Court at Macharla in Palnadu district. Police made security arrangements to ensure no untoward incident took place.

A larger number of his supporters gathered and Ramakrishna Reddy acknowledged their support to him by waving at them.

It may be recalled that TDP leaders Javvishetty Venkateswarlu and and his brother Koteswara Rao from Gundlapadu village under Veldurthi mandal were murdered on May 24. Police registered a case naming the Pinnelli brothers as A6 and A7, stating that they had indirectly supported the double murder as part of an attempt to turn the village dominance struggle in their favour.

They were granted anticipatory bail by the lower court. But, the High Court had cancelled the anticipa-



tory 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. Against this background, it is reported that the Pinnelli brothers will surrender before the Macherla court on Thursday.

During the hearing of their petition, the Supreme Court made key observations. It expressed surprise at how the accused had access to the case diary contents and the 161 statements even before the chargesheet was filed. The court remarked that the influence of the accused was astonishing.

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.

YSRCP accuses TDP-led NDA govt of 'hounding' Jagan

PNS ■ Guntur

YSRCP leader Ambati Rambabu on Wednesday accused the NDA coalition government in the State of spending the past 18 months solely targeting former chief minister YS Jagan Mohan Reddy and suppressing the party's protest against the alleged privatisation of government medical colleges.

Addressing a press conference here, Rambabu alleged the government had "worked with only one agenda—hounding Jagna Mohan Reddy and obstruct-

ing the YSRCP's movement against the privatisation of government medical colleges—instead of addressing people's issues or fulfilling election promises."

He alleged that Deputy Chief Minister Pawan Kalyan was functioning entirely under the directions of Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu, saying the Jana Sena chief had "switched off his brain" and reduced himself to a "political puppet".

Rambabu accused Pawan Kalyan of "abandoning the people" who voted for him



and allowing his party to become an "appendage of the TDP."

Further, he claimed that

NDA leaders were "focused only on twisting the Parakamani case" rather than addressing the issues raised

by Reddy.

According to probing agencies, cash offerings were allegedly stolen during the YSRCP government. Ravi Kumar, a TTD employee, was arrested in April 2023 for allegedly stealing around USD 920 from the Parakamani, the temple's coins and currency counting centre.

Defending the YSRCP chief, Rambabu said Jagan Mohan Reddy had built and inaugurated the secure Parakamani complex, which safeguards assets worth Rs 14 crore. He termed the com-

parison to an alleged Rs 70,000 theft "politically motivated".

He also questioned Kalyan's silence on controversies and temple-related thefts reported during earlier TDP regimes.

Rambabu alleged that Kalyan avoids criticising Naidu because of political dependence, but repeatedly targets Reddy to suit the TDP narrative. He also questioned Kalyan's shifting positions on faith, ideology and public statements. However, there was no immediate response from the ruling TDP.

Marijuana racket busted; seven arrested



Suspects in marijuana racket and the seized bikes in Peddapuram on Thursday

PNS ■ Kakinada

Acting on intelligence provided by SP Bindu Madhav, the Peddapuram Sub-Divisional Police busted a seven-member marijuana racket and seized 24.69 kg of contraband packed in twelve sachets. Police also confiscated three two-wheelers and four mobile phones, with the total seizure valued at Rs 13,29,500.

The Kirlampudi Police, with support from the Eagle Team, intercepted the gang near Burugupudi village along National Highway-16 while they were transporting the contraband from the Visakhapatnam agency area to Peddapuram.

Addressing the media on Thursday at the Kirlampudi Police Station, Peddapuram SDPO Srihariraju identified Nukulsingh (30) of Hukumpeta in Visakhapatnam district as

The Kirlampudi Police, with support from the Eagle Team, intercepted the gang near Burugupudi village along National Highway-16

the kingpin of the operation. According to the SDPO, Nukulsingh procured ganja from the agency area and supplied it across the state through his network.

The other arrested individuals were named as Jampa Durga Prasad (22), Panchadara Swamy (24), Vanaparty Rajesh (22), Sappa Asok (23), Lanka Kalyanram (22), and Gompu Apparao (22)—all residents of Peddapuram. The SDPO commended Jagampeta Circle Inspector Y.R.K. Srinivas, Kirlampudi Sub-Inspector Satish, and the Eagle Team personnel for their efforts in apprehending the gang.

Four Intermediate girl students attempt suicide



PNS ■ Anantapur

A tragic incident took place on Thursday morning at the KSR Government Junior College in Anantapur. Four Intermediate girl students, who were staying in the government hostel, attempted commit suicide by consuming super vasmol.

According to details, the hostel warden reportedly

warned the students that she would complain to their parents, believing that they had violated hostel discipline. Fearing that their parents might punish them, the four distressed students consumed super vasmol in an attempt to end their lives.

Noticing this, the warden immediately shifted them to Anantapur Government

General Hospital for treatment. Doctors are treating them in the emergency ward. Their condition is said to be critical.

Police have started an investigation into the incident. They are recording the students' statements and are also inquiring into the conduct of the hostel warden as well as administrative lapses in the college.

Fire at ginning mill destroys cotton worth crores

PNS ■ Adoni (Kurnool)

A series of fire accidents at ginning mills in Adoni town has left the owners worried. Early on Thursday morning, a major fire broke out at the NDBL ginning mill on the outskirts of Adoni.

The fire erupted due to an electrical short circuit, and the large stock of cotton bales stored there was engulfed in flames and reduced to ashes.

As the flames continued to spread, four fire engines were not enough to bring the flames under control, causing difficulties for the firefighters. Fire officials stated that the damage could be around five crore rupees.

Two days earlier, a



Heaps of cotton bales were reduced to ashes in a fire accident at ginning mill in Adoni on Thursday

major fire due to an electrical fault had occurred at Hari Cotton Mill on Basapuram Road, resulting in significant loss, with cotton worth nearly two

crore rupees being burnt. Due to these consecutive fire accidents, cotton ginning factory owners in Adoni are becoming increasingly anxious.

States Focus



GOVT HIRE 5,215 TEACHERS IN FIVE YEARS: TRIPURA CM

Tripura Chief Minister Manik Saha on Thursday said the State has recruited 5,215 teachers over the past five years to ensure quality education in schools. Addressing an education department programme at Rabindra Bhavan here, he said the shortage of teachers was primarily due to the termination of a large number of teachers several years ago.

“People know for whom so many teachers lost their jobs in 2017, and now they have joined hands. This is political talk and I don’t want to dwell much on it,” he said, indirectly referring to the CPI(M) and Congress alliance. Following a petition filed by a group of job aspirants, the Tripura High Court had dismissed the services of 10,323 teachers, a decision later upheld by a Supreme Court division bench. As a result, 10,323 teachers lost their jobs in 2017, a year ahead of the 2018 Assembly elections.



GOVT GAVE 37,916 JOBS IN 18 MONTHS: ODISHA CM

Odisha Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi on Thursday said his Government has appointed 37,916 people during its 18 months in office and is committed to fulfilling its promise of filling 65,000 Government posts within the first two years.

Majhi made the remarks while handing over appointment letters to 591 newly recruited officers and employees in three departments – Water Resources (252), Housing and Urban Development (142) and Works (197). Majhi said, “Our Government has promised to fill all the 1.5 lakh vacant posts in five years and to fill 65,000 Government posts in two years.”

Arunachal: 18 dead, 3 missing as truck falls in gorge

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ Tinsukia/Dibrugarh (Assam)

At least 18 people from Assam’s Tinsukia district were killed and three others are missing as the truck they were travelling in fell into a remote gorge in neighbouring Arunachal Pradesh, officials said on Thursday.

The accident took place on Hayuliang-Chaglagam Road in Anjaw district in the eastern part of the hill State on December 8 when a truck was carrying 22 labourers from Tinsukia district, Defence PRO Lt Col Mahender Rawat said, citing the lone survivor’s version.

The site, approximately 12 km from Chaglagam, lies in difficult terrain with limited connectivity and the accident had not been reported by any local agency, contractor or civil representative until the survivor’s arrival, Rawat said in a statement.

“Eighteen bodies have been sighted and are being retrieved using belay ropes. ADC of Hayuliang has informed SP of Anjaw, who has reached the site, while the District Medical Officer is moving to facilitate evacuation of casualties and mortal remains,” he said.

Rawat said that preliminary inputs from the survivor, who managed to reach Chipra General Reserve Engineer Force (GREF) camp, indicate that a truck carrying 22 workers from Tinsukia fell off a cliff on the night of December 8.

“The Indian Army has launched a major search and rescue operation in the Chaglagam region of Arunachal Pradesh. The operations were initiated based on information received late on December 10 regarding a vehicle accident along the Hayuliang-Chaglagam road near KM 40,” he added.

The Defence PRO said that the Army’s Spear Corps on the early morning of Thursday mobilised multiple search and rescue columns, medical teams, GREF representatives, local police, NDRF personnel and the ADC of Hayuliang.

“At 1155 hours, after four hours of intensive search and rope descent, the truck was spotted around 200 metres below the road near KM 40 in a re-entrant, inaccessible and not visible from helicopters or the road due to dense tree cover and thick foliage,” he added.

The Anjaw District Administration has requisitioned the SDRF, which is en route at present.

“ADC Hayuliang is also questioning the sub-contractor of the Zila Parishad Member, Chaglagam, to verify the antecedents and exact strength of the workers hired,” Rawat said.

“Despite harsh terrain and poor visibility, the Indian Army, in coordination with civil administration and other agencies, is making all possible efforts to trace the remaining individuals and provide immediate assistance,” he added.

Earlier during the day, Assam’s Tinsukia District Commissioner Swapneel Paul said that at around 11 am, they received information about a vehicle falling into a gorge in Arunachal Pradesh’s Anjaw district.

“Accordingly, we contacted the DCs of Anjaw and Teju for confirmation. Both the DCs said that rescue teams have so far recovered several bodies and found one person alive. Some more persons are still missing,” he added.



Firefighters dousing a fire that broke out at Swagata Square Complex on Wednesday in Guwahati

PTI

GUWAHATI FIRE RAGES FOR OVER 38 HOURS; MULTIPLE AGENCIES CALLED

Guwahati: A massive fire that broke out at a commercial complex in Guwahati remained untamed for over 38 hours even as more than two dozen fire tenders have been struggling to douse the blaze, officials said on Thursday.

The fire broke out at Swagata Square Complex in ABC Point around 12.30 am on Wednesday. The multi-storey building houses SBI’s zonal office, commercial branch and the premium banking branch, and a shopping mall, ‘Sohum Emporia’.

More than 25 fire tenders have been struggling for over 38 hours. Water tenders from the Indian Air Force, Indian Army and Guwahati Refinery also joined the efforts to douse the blaze, while NDRF was called in to assist with their high-tech smoke reduction machine.

Apart from Guwahati, fire tenders came from Morigaon, Kamrup and Nalbari districts, as well. “There is fire on the sixth floor. We are trying to douse it,” a senior official of the Fire & Emergency Services (F&ES) said. Smoke is also billowing from the second floor, where the fire originated at the godown of the shopping mall, he added.

“There is fire at the backside of the building. However, due to non-adherence to safety norms while construction, fire tenders are unable to reach the rear,” another official said.

J&K LG Manoj Sinha gives jobs to NoKs of Jammu terror victims

MOHIT KANDHARI ■ Jammu

After a wait of over 20 long years justice was delivered to the next of kin of Dharam Singh, brutally killed by terrorists along with four other villagers from Kotranka area of frontier Rajouri district on June 28, 2005.

During this time, Naseeb Singh, son of Dharam Singh, lived in misery, constant fear and insecurity.

“Akhtar Hussain, a resident of Reasi, was shot dead by terrorists on July 13, 2005. His wife and children endured immense hardship for two decades. It had left a deep scar on the family”.

On November 15, 2004, SPO Sanjeet Kumar was murdered along with his friend by two terrorists in Balan Tundwa, Kishtwar, while they were preparing for a neighbour’s wedding.

On Thursday, Next of Kins (NoKs) of

all these victims of terrorism of Jammu Division received an appointment letter from Lieutenant Governor Manoj Sinha at a simple ceremony.

Appointment letters were also handed over to 22 beneficiaries in Age relaxation cases and 19 wards of J&K Police martyrs under Compassionate Appointment Rules SRO-43 and Rehabilitation Assistance Scheme (RAS).

On the occasion Lieutenant Governor Manoj Sinha said, “the dark days in their lives have ended. It is a new dawn of hope and dreams for these families”.

With the government job appointment letters to 41 terror victim families, 22 age relaxation cases and 19 wards of J&K Police martyrs, we have fulfilled our commitment,” the Lieutenant Governor said.

Earlier, on July 28, 2025, the



Lieutenant Governor had handed over the appointment letters to 94 Next of Kins (NoKs) of terror victims from Jammu division. The move brings relief to 135 terror victim families from Jammu Division who were

denied justice for decades.

The families of terror victims spoke out fearlessly, recounted decades of terror and hardship and exposed the Pakistan-sponsored terrorists and their local sympathizers.

Justice will be delivered: Himanta ahead of charge sheet filing in Zubeen’s death case

TONY DAS ■ Guwahati

Appealing to people to have faith in the judicial process, Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Thursday said he believes justice will be delivered in the death case of singer Zubeen Garg.

Sarma made the statement as the police are scheduled to file the charge sheet in the sensational case on Friday.

“The SIT will submit its chargesheet, and the court will examine it. The culprit will be punished by the court,” the CM said.

“From tomorrow, the police job will be over, and the court’s role will start. I believe that the court will



definitely deliver justice,” he said, exuding confidence in the entire process.

The celebrated singer died under mysterious circumstances in Singapore on September 19 while swimming in the sea. He had gone to that country to attend the 4th edition of the

North East India Festival (NEIF).

A Special Investigation Team (SIT) under the Criminal Investigation Department (CID) of the Assam Police is probing Garg’s death case after more than 60 FIRs were lodged across the State.

Mamata slams SIR, urges people to protest

SAUGAR SENGUPTA
■ Krishnagar

Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee continued her tirade against the “mischievous implementation” of special intensive revision (SIR) of electoral rolls in Bengal “with a one-point agenda to help the BJP, asking the people to descend on the streets with kitchen tools and resist the “nefarious designs of the BJP Government” if a single name was deleted from the voters’ lists.

“They will take away the rights of mothers and sisters in the name of SIR and then they will bring police from Delhi during the election and intimidate the people of Bengal mothers and sisters, if your names are struck off, you



West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee addressing a public meeting, in Krishnagar in West Bengal on Thursday

PTI

have the kitchen tools in your hands your names are deleted. The women will fight in the front, and the men will be behind them,” Banerjee on Thursday thundered from an anti-SIR rally at Krishnagar in Nadia district.

“The people of Bihar could not understand the trick so they could not retaliate but we will not spare you here, remember an injured tiger is more dangerous than a general one,” Banerjee said. She warned of staging a

mighty dharna (sit in demonstration) “if a single name is deleted from the voters’ lists and asked the people particularly women to get prepared for a sustained struggle on the streets.

Continuing her diatribe against the BJP Government, particularly Union Home Minister Amit Shah called him a dangerous person whose eyes emitted the “villainy” of Duryodhana and Duhshasana — the two anti-heroes of epic Mahabharata.

Launching a scathing attack against Shah she said “he is a dangerous person you can see it all in his watch them one is that of Duryodhana and the other is that of Duhshasana,” alleging that the SIR was being conducted to politically help the BJP.

Goa, Israel boost tourism ties as Khaunte meets IMOT team

ASHOKE RAJ ■ New Delhi

In a significant step toward deepening tourism cooperation, the Israel Ministry of Tourism (IMOT) held a constructive meeting with Minister for Tourism, Rohan A. Khaunte, in Panaji. The discussions underscored shared interest in strengthening bilateral engagement and enhancing direct connectivity between Goa and Israel.

The IMOT delegation — comprising Galit Hoffman, Consul — Tourism Affairs for India, and Amruta Bangera, Director of Marketing, IMOT India highlighted Israel’s interest in exploring a direct air link between Goa and Tel Aviv. The proposed route, they noted, could greatly improve accessibility and support the rising travel demand between India and Israel.

Rohan A. Khaunte reaffirmed Goa’s strong position in India’s tourism landscape and expressed the State’s commitment to expanding its global connections. He also assured the delegation of Goa’s support should an airline undertake the evaluation of the Goa–Tel Aviv



route, including assistance with operational requirements.

“Goa welcomes every opportunity to strengthen its global tourism partnerships. A direct connection with Tel Aviv holds strong potential to enhance two-way travel, and we are committed to extending all possible support to airlines evaluating the Goa–Tel Aviv route,” said the Minister for Tourism.

The meeting also saw discussions on hosting a tourism roadshow in Goa, aimed at spotlighting Israel’s diverse tourism offerings and engaging key travel trade

stakeholders across the State.

Expressing appreciation for the positive dialogue, Galit Hoffman, Consul — Tourism Affairs for India, IMOT, said, “Goa has long held a special place for Israeli travellers, and strengthening connectivity will only deepen this relationship. We are optimistic about the potential of a direct Goa–Tel Aviv flight and look forward to continued collaboration with the Government of Goa. We truly appreciate the support extended by Minister for Tourism, Rohan A. Khaunte.”

Goa remains one of the most preferred Indian desti-

nations for Israeli visitors, known for its beaches, culture, and warm hospitality. Each year, around 50,000 Israelis visit India, with a significant share opting for Goa — reflecting a deep cultural affinity and strong traveller interest.

On the outbound front, Israel continues to draw increasing numbers of Indian travellers, offering a blend of spirituality, history, natural landscapes, adventure activities, and culinary richness. Between January and November 2025, Israel recorded 1.18 million international tourist arrivals, with projections to close the year at approximately 1.3 million. India remains Israel’s leading Asian source market and one of its top ten inbound markets globally.

Both sides concluded the meeting on a positive note, aligned on continuing discussions to enhance direct air connectivity and strengthen tourism ties.

The proposed Goa–Tel Aviv route is seen as a promising avenue to unlock new opportunities and bolster travel flows between the two destinations.

BJP MPs flag Yamuna River pollution, highway woes

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

Two BJP members on Thursday raised concerns in the Rajya Sabha regarding the pollution in the Yamuna river, which affects the Mathura-Vrindavan pilgrimage circuit, and the deteriorating condition of the Goa-Belgaum National Highway.

Speaking during Zero Hour, Tejveer Singh from Uttar Pradesh acknowledged infrastructure improvements

in Mathura and Vrindavan, but highlighted challenges, particularly Yamuna river pollution, faced by pilgrims and locals.

He also called for enhancing sewage treatment plant capacity, strict monitoring of pollution sources, and enhanced safety measures along the riverbanks.

Singh proposed a metro rail service connecting Mathura, Vrindavan, Barsana, and Govardhan to ease traffic congestion during

major festivals like Navratri, Janmashtami, and Barsana celebrations, when devotee footfalls increase manifold.

“This will not only make the journey of crores of devotees comfortable but will also reduce traffic in the entire Vrindavan area, help in environmental protection and provide global recognition to pilgrims,” he said.

He also suggested smart traffic management systems, e-shuttle bus services, multi-level parking facilities, and a

special package for local youth in tourism-related activities.

Sadanand Shet Tanavde from Goa drew attention to the deplorable condition of the Goa-Belgaum National Highway, particularly the Anmod and Chorla Ghat sections.

He said these highways serve as lifelines for Goa and Karnataka, but remain narrow, prone to landslides, and frequently blocked during monsoons.

Bihar urges Centre to release ₹7,748 crore for PMAY-G, MGNREGA

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Patna

The Bihar Government on Thursday urged the Centre to immediately release ₹7,748.49 crore pending under the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana–Gramin (PMAY-G) and the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA).

Bihar Rural Development Minister Sharwan Kumar met

Union Rural Development Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan in New Delhi and requested the release of the second part of the first instalment and the entire second instalment of PMAY-G funds amounting to ₹4,491 crore for the completion of the pucca-houses for poor in the rural areas. He also sought the immediate release of ₹3,257.49 crore for the payment of labourers

engaged under MGNREGA.

According to a statement issued by the State Rural Development Department, the ministers discussed several central schemes being implemented in Bihar, including PMAY-G, MGNREGA and the Deendayal Antyodaya Yojana–National Rural Livelihood Mission (DAY-NRLM).

It said the implementation of these schemes was being

hindered due to the non-release of funds as per the ministry’s procedures.

The progress of each scheme and the status of pending dues were reviewed during the meeting.

Regarding PMAY-G, the statement said in the financial year 2025-26, only the first part of the first instalment amounting to ₹1,497 crore had been released so far.

Editor's
TAKE

Should India ban social media for kids?

Tech addiction demands layered responses — digital literacy, parental involvement, psychological support, and educational redesign

Once it was alcohol, then it was drugs; now addiction has a new name-social media. Its addicts are everywhere-across age groups, classes, and cities. It is an epidemic that spread before anyone even realised it. India, like other nations, is hooked 24x7 to social media, and this is more prominent amongst young children who are now exposed to all the good and bad the digital world has to offer. In this scenario, Australia's decision to ban social media access for children under 16 has reignited a global debate on how societies should confront the escalating crisis of tech addiction and its psychological repercussions.

The Australian government's move is undeniably sweeping and disruptive in its implications, even though its intent is clear: to protect young users from the toxic digital environment and online harm that has come to be accepted as digital normal. The factors that pushed Australia to ban social media for children may be just as relevant for India. While there is little disagreement on the need to limit children's access to social media, enforcing a blanket ban could be excessively harsh and may be counterproductive. That said, the case for intervention is undeniably strong and is the need of the hour. Psychologists worldwide have been sounding the alarm for years. Clinics now report children as young as eight showing symptoms of mental illness: hyperactivity, violent behaviour, throwing tantrums when devices are taken away, and an inability to disengage from screens.

Regular access to social media is changing cognitive and emotional development amongst children in a big way. Declining attention spans, inability to form coherent sentences, and eroded real-world communication skills are becoming disturbingly common. The picture becomes even murkier when you include incidents like the Blue Whale challenge or misogynistic school group chats-proof of how an immature mind can be drawn into, or even trigger, serious harm. Australia's ban may not be a panacea, as even the strictest age ban can be circumvented, and children adept at navigating technology may find proxy routes sooner rather than later. Indeed, no law can compensate for what is lacking at home, in classrooms, or in broader digital culture, but government intervention paves the way for incremental reforms in schools, colleges, and even at home.

India's challenge is more complex: its vast population, socio-economic diversity, and uneven digital literacy make a ban impractical and insufficient, though action is essential. Some progress is emerging through bottom-up efforts, with over 5,000 parents joining support groups to build healthier digital habits, reinforcing families as the first line of defence. Tech addiction needs layered solutions-digital literacy, parental involvement, psychological support, and educational redesign-because while a ban may raise awareness, it cannot replace the long-term task of building resilience and autonomy in young users. India must craft its own path.

PIC TALK



A camel stands in the glow of the sunset light, in Pushkar, Rajasthan.
PHOTO: PTI

DIGITAL EXPERIENCE

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AUSTRALIA'S SOCIAL MEDIA BAN SPARKS CALL FOR VIGILANCE

The Prime Minister of Australia has openly appealed to young people to refrain from using social media, and teenagers are now prohibited from accessing these platforms. Yet, there remains a possibility that some adolescents may still bypass restrictions by manipulating age settings or posing as older users with fake identities.

The risks facing teenagers online are well documented, and in countries like India the lack of transparency and effective oversight only heightens these concerns. With parents increasingly occupied by demanding professional lives, attentive supervision has reduced significantly. Many single children grow up without the stabilising presence of grandparents, and even when grandparents are present, their guidance is often overlooked in an over-indulgent culture. Consequently, teenagers turn to unsolicited advice from social media posts, videos, or equally uninformed peers, creating a cycle of immature and sometimes harmful influence.

Decades ago, society provided an additional layer of support through close relatives and elderly neighbours, whose guidance parents accepted with respect. Over time, however, such involvement has come to be seen as interference, leading to the loss of a valuable safeguard.

Parents in Australia have welcomed the government's decision. A similar measure is urgently needed in India, where constant guidance for teenagers should be seen not as dictatorship but as essential support that protects their curiosity from harmful and inappropriate content.

SUNIL OKHADE | INDORE

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

The SC's push for CCTV accountability

Triggered by alarming reports of custodial deaths and the routine absence of surveillance footage, the Court's intervention underscores a stark reality: despite years of judicial directives, transparency inside police stations remains largely a myth

 **HASAN KHURSHID**

The Supreme Court of India's recent intervention into the disturbing pattern of custodial deaths has revived a long-standing and uncomfortable debate: Why does custodial violence persist despite decades of judicial directions, committees, and constitutional safeguards? On September 4, 2025, a Bench comprising Justices Vikram Nath and Sandeep Mehta registered a suo motu Public Interest Litigation (PIL) after taking cognisance of a *Dainik Bhaskar* report revealing that 11 people had died in police custody in Rajasthan in just the first eight months of 2025. The trigger was not only the shocking number but also the wider pattern of deliberate non-compliance with directives mandating CCTV surveillance in police stations across India. For years, courts have emphasised that CCTV cameras are not optional but essential tools for ensuring transparency, curbing torture, and upholding constitutional rights. Yet, police stations across states continue to function without operational cameras, or worse, with cameras that are conveniently "faulty" or whose footage is "unavailable." According to media reports, police routinely withhold CCTV footage in custodial death cases, citing technical glitches, storage issues, ongoing investigations, or legal barriers. These excuses have created fertile ground for impunity, where the monitor of oversight-the CCTV camera-is neutralised precisely when accountability is most needed.

This is not the first time the Supreme Court has intervened. Earlier rulings — DK Basu, Paramvir Singh Saini, and Shafhi Mohammad-laid down clear and mandatory directions for installing functional video and audio surveillance in police stations. In 2020, the Court issued detailed guidelines requiring uniform installation across all states and Union Territories. It even made Station House Officers personally responsible for maintaining CCTV systems, preserving recordings, and ensuring timely repairs. Yet, five years later, the Court has been forced to confront the same systemic neglect. During the hearing on November 25, 2025, the Supreme Court minced no words: "Custodial violence and deaths are a blot on the system. This country will not tolerate this practice. You cannot have deaths in custody." The Court demanded compliance affidavits from all states and Union Territories, posting the matter for further hearing on December 16, 2025. Its concern stems from the constitutional premise that surveillance in police stations is a fundamental safeguard-an obligation, not a discretionary administrative decision. High Courts have echoed similar concerns.

In *Akhilesh Pandey v. State of Madhya Pradesh* (2018), the Madhya Pradesh High Court warned

THE REAL TEST NOW IS WHETHER STATES WILL FINALLY ACT — OR WHETHER CUSTODIAL DEATHS WILL CONTINUE TO BE TREATED AS TRAGIC BUT INEVITABLE STATISTICS

The writer is a legal expert and author

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that failure to provide full CCTV coverage in any police station would be treated as contempt of court. This, however, has done little to change the ground reality. The disconnect between judicial directives and executive action has allowed custodial violence to fester. India's struggle with custodial brutality is not new. In 1997, the Supreme Court in *D.K. Basu* recognised custodial torture as an assault on the rule of law.

In later cases-Shafhi Mohammad (2018) and Paramvir Singh Saini (2021)-the Court expanded guidelines, with Justice Rohinton Nariman stressing that installing CCTV cameras was a constitutional necessity rooted in Articles 21 and 22. Yet, the implementation remains half-hearted, largely because custodial violence thrives in opacity, and the state machinery shows little urgency to disrupt this culture. The judiciary's frustration draws from a long history of ignored reform efforts. From the National Police Commission reports (1977-81) to the Ribeiro and Padmanabhiiah Committees, from the Malimath Committee to the landmark Prakash Singh judgment of 2006, India has been inundated with recommendations for transforming the police from a "force" to a "service."

Despite this, real change has remained elusive. Justice AN Mulla's searing 1961 remark that no group in India matches the police force's record of lawlessness-though later expunged-continues to resonate with uncomfortable accuracy. Recent events have only reinforced these concerns. During the COVID-19 lockdowns, countless videos surfaced showing policemen mercilessly beating civilians, includ-

ing pregnant women and elderly citizens. Such images laid bare the deep-seated culture of unrestrained power. One of the most horrifying examples remains the 2020 Sathankulam case in Tamil Nadu, where the CBI charge sheet revealed the savage torture of 59-year-old P. Jeyaraj and his 31-year-old son, J. Bennicks. Over seven hours, police personnel stripped, beat, and humiliated the father-son duo, forcing them to clean their own blood from the floor. Despite Jeyaraj's pleas, citing diabetes and high blood pressure, the brutality continued until both men succumbed to their injuries. Their clothes were drenched in blood to such an extent that police officers had to change their uniforms twice before presenting them in court. The investigation also exposed medical negligence-Dr Vinila, who examined them, failed to document their injuries or provide medical support that might have saved their lives. This case stands as a grim reminder that custodial torture is not an aberration but a structural crisis embedded in policing culture. CCTV cameras alone cannot eradicate it, but they can act as a crucial deterrent-if the system allows them to function. The Supreme Court's recent intervention is not merely a legal exercise; it is a moral reckoning. India cannot claim to be a constitutional democracy while allowing citizens to be brutalised behind closed doors. The real test now is whether states will finally act-or whether custodial deaths will continue to be treated as tragic but inevitable statistics. The nation's conscience demands more than compliance affidavits; it demands genuine accountability.

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Why educating girls is not enough: Bridge the skill gap

 **DEVENDRA KUMAR**

2ND OPINION
THE PIONEER

India has spent decades strengthening girls' access to education. Through scholarships, awareness drives, and community-level campaigns, the country has succeeded in bringing more girls into classrooms than ever before. Enrolment rates for girls have risen at primary, secondary, and even higher education levels. Yet a stubborn gap remains: while more young women finish school and college, far fewer make it into the workforce. This disconnect reveals a hard truth-education alone cannot guarantee employment. For Indian girls, skill development is the missing link between learning and livelihood.

Across the country, thousands of young women hold degrees but remain unemployed. This reflects a deeper

structural issue: literacy and academic qualifications, although essential, do not automatically translate into employability. Many graduates lack the practical, digital, and workplace skills demanded by contemporary industries. Compounding this are entrenched social norms and cultural expectations that often overshadow the benefits of education. For many girls, familial restrictions, gender stereotypes, and ideas about "appropriate" work limit their ability to turn education into financial independence.

These social barriers shape everything-from whether a woman is allowed to work to what kind of job she can accept. Families frequently avoid roles that involve travel, physical tasks, or late hours, forcing even educated women into narrow, low-growth career paths. Confidence-building and communication abilities-skills critical in today's work culture-are rarely nurtured in traditional classrooms, making skill development programmes essential.

The reality becomes even harsher in India's vast informal sector, where more than 90 percent of working women remain concentrated. Most are unskilled and engaged in low-paid, insecure jobs-domestic work, agriculture, tailoring, construction, home-based production, or micro-enterprises. In rural areas especially, women face severe skill deprivation and remain trapped in unsta-

ble jobs with little chance of mobility. Skill development can change this trajectory. Training in digital literacy helps women shift from low-productivity work to stable, better-paying opportunities. Today's industries-whether healthcare, manufacturing, hospitality, technology, or retail-demand a blend of theoretical knowledge and practical ability, and skill training provides this bridge.

When women acquire skills, the impact extends far beyond employment. Skilled women strengthen economic productivity, innovation, and inclusive growth. Within families, a working daughter or mother enhances financial security and decision-making power. Moreover, skilled workers are better positioned to negotiate fair wages, resist exploitation, and move into formal employment.

The next step for India must be to integrate skill development into every stage of education. Rural training centres must be expanded, especially for girls with restricted mobility. Partnerships with industry can ensure training aligns with real job market needs. Crucially, communities and families must be sensitised to value skill training as essential-not secondary-to education. For India's girls, skill is the pathway to independence, confidence, and security.

The writer is the founder of the Ladli Foundation

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Urban India needs coordinated reform

One of the most pressing issues in India today is the widening disconnect between rapid urban expansion and the slow pace of essential infrastructure development.

Cities continue to grow outward at extraordinary speed, yet public transport, waste management systems, and affordable housing consistently fail to keep pace, leaving both residents and municipal authorities under severe strain. The challenge is not purely financial; it also lies in weak institutional coordination, outdated planning frameworks, and a persistent tendency to prioritise high-visibility projects over everyday necessities. Consequently, even well-designed reforms often lose momentum and struggle to deliver meaningful improvements.

A more realistic solution begins with strengthening municipal governance. Cities must be granted the autonomy and technical expertise required to plan for the coming decade rather than the next election cycle. Transparent budgeting, reliable service delivery, and people-centred urban design should guide all development. If governments adopt such an approach, India's cities can evolve in a manner that is efficient, liveable, and environmentally sustainable.

A. MYILSAMI | TAMIL NADU

Diwali's heritage glows anew

India's Diwali, newly inscribed on UNESCO's Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity, arrives as a moment of cultural pride and personal joy. This recognition feels profoundly affirming. Diwali has never been merely a spectacle; it embodies India's civilisational spirit, carried in the quiet radiance of a single diya and the belief that renewal is always within reach.

Across centuries, the festival has gathered many layers of meaning: Rama's triumphant return to Ayodhya, Mahavira's nirvana, Guru Hargobind's liberation, and the mercantile traditions that once illuminated ancient trade routes.

Yet Diwali's deepest strength lies in its ability to anchor ordinary lives, reminding families and communities that clarity, compassion, and moral courage endure even amid turmoil.

UNESCO's recognition honours not only Diwali's history but also the people who have safeguarded it-artisans shaping earthen lamps, storytellers preserving memory, and generations who kept the flame alive in difficult times. In an increasingly anxious world, may this acknowledgement serve as a gentle reminder that harmony is a practice renewed each year.

VIJAY SINGH ADHIKARI | UTTARAKHAND

Reimagining a song for India

Reimagining *Vande Mataram* requires sensitivity to history, culture, and contemporary identity. Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay's iconic song portrayed the motherland as nurturing, protective, and divine, and the phrase "I bow to thee, Mother" captured the emotional and spiritual bond felt during the freedom struggle. In an independent and secular India, however, there is space to consider a modern interpretation that reflects today's pluralistic values.

Vande Bharatam — meaning "I bow to thee, India" — is more direct and less symbolic, potentially making the song more inclusive for those uncomfortable with religious imagery. The name Bharat resonates across languages and regions, offering a shared identity that avoids specific cultural or devotional associations. Such universality may encourage collective participation without hesitation. Culturally, this shift signals modernisation. While the maternal depiction remains integral to the independence movement's memory, adapting the song acknowledges India's multi-faith, diverse society. Yet any alteration must be approached with care, as *Vande Mataram* is inseparable from the freedom struggle and continues to evoke the sacrifices of earlier generations.

O PRASADA RAO | HYDERABAD

India redraws its strategic lines with Putin’s Delhi visit

When Prime Minister Narendra Modi greeted Vladimir Putin with a bear hug and handed him a Russian translation of the Bhagavad Gita, it was more than ceremonial warmth — it was a calculated message. The gesture signalled that India will chart its own course regardless of Western discomfort

FIRST
Column



NILANTHA
ILANGAMUWA

That was no ordinary greeting; on the frosty evening of last Thursday, Indian Prime Minister Modi embraced Russian President Vladimir Putin in a bear hug at Delhi airport and, within moments, presented him with a copy of the Bhagavad Gita in Russian. The choice of gift was laden with symbolism-echoes of Robert Oppenheimer, who drew profound philosophical reckoning from the same text, declaring, “Now I am become Death, the destroyer of worlds,” after witnessing the first atomic explosion. Was Modi signalling the weight of nuclear-age responsibility to Putin, or was this a deliberate affirmation of India’s comfort in maintaining ties with a pariah state under global sanctions?

The streets of Delhi, festooned with Russian and Indian flags and dominated by colossal billboards of Modi and Putin, suggested more than ceremonial protocol-it was pageantry of influence, an audacious statement of India’s strategic independence. In that gesture, New Delhi appeared to assert that moral judgement from the West would no longer dictate its choices, and that the Indo-Russian relationship, forged during the Cold War and hardened by decades of defence dependence, remains a pivot capable of unsettling the established order in South Asia and beyond.

Putin’s first visit to India in four years, coinciding with talks in Washington over a possible Ukraine peace framework, came at a time when New Delhi is walking an increasingly delicate tightrope between Moscow and Washington. The optics of the visit-from ceremonial receptions at Rashtrapati Bhavan to summit talks at Hyderabad House-reflected not merely diplomacy but an overt projection of influence. Modi’s presentation of the Bhagavad Gita in Russian was emblematic: a centuries-old text of dharma and duty, layered with the moral weight of choice, now inserted into the theatre of high-stakes realpolitik.

Putin himself, in an interview with India Today, described India as a “major global player, not a British colony,” praising Modi as a “reliable person” who does not succumb to pressure. These words, spoken against the



PUTIN’S FIRST VISIT TO INDIA IN FOUR YEARS, COINCIDING WITH TALKS IN WASHINGTON OVER A POSSIBLE UKRAINE PEACE FRAMEWORK, CAME AT A TIME WHEN NEW DELHI WAS WALKING AN INCREASINGLY DELICATE TIGHTROPE BETWEEN MOSCOW AND WASHINGTON

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backdrop of US sanctions, EU manoeuvres to leverage frozen Russian assets for Ukraine, and growing Chinese assertiveness, highlight India’s determination to claim agency in a multipolar world where Washington and Brussels no longer set the rules unilaterally.

Historically, the Indo-Russian relationship has oscillated between strategic necessity and opportunism. Declassified CIA documents from the 1980s reveal the delicate dance India played with the USSR during the Cold War. Indira Gandhi’s approach, as the CIA observed, was staunchly nationalist and fiercely protective of India’s regional supremacy. The United States feared that India’s policies towards its neighbours, coupled with its Soviet alignment, could destabilise South Asia while simultaneously granting Moscow a strategic foothold. Today, the echoes of that era reverberate: New Delhi remains Moscow’s top arms buyer, leases nuclear-powered submarines, and maintains energy ties that have drawn ire from Washington, while ensuring that its engagement with Russia does not fully alienate the United States or Western partners.

What is important to note here are the economic metrics. India-Russia trade in FY

2024-25 amounted to approximately USD 68.7 billion, heavily skewed in Moscow’s favour due to energy imports, with a trade deficit of around USD 59 billion. Both Russia and India aim to expand bilateral trade to a target of USD 100 billion by 2030, a goal that falls just two years after the next general elections, when Prime Minister Modi is widely expected to contest again despite the symbolic 75-year age limit for party leadership-a restriction largely treated as political theatre and quickly forgotten. Meanwhile, India continues to negotiate with the United States to mitigate punitive tariffs, including a 25 per cent secondary tariff imposed on

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India’s purchases of Russian oil. It is also worth noting that India recorded a goods trade surplus of about USD 41.18 billion with the US in FY 2024-25, with exports of USD 86.51 billion and imports of USD 45.33 billion, reflecting strong bilateral trade despite earlier concerns over tariffs. Remittances provide a partial counterweight: total remittances to India reached roughly USD 135.46 billion, including USD 25-30 billion from the US, while Russian remittances are negligible in comparison. This indicates that while India faces challenges in trade metrics, its diaspora injects substantial

financial resilience into the economy.

The summit also highlighted defence collaboration in stark terms. India’s USD 2 billion lease of a Russian nuclear-powered attack submarine, with delivery scheduled for 2028, signals an unprecedented deepening of underwater capabilities.

The vessel, unable to enter combat under lease terms, is intended to train crews and refine India’s nuclear submarine operations — a critical step for strategic deterrence in the Indian Ocean amid rising Chinese and US naval competition. Russia, despite sanctions and Western pressure, continues to sustain a military-industrial complex capable of producing tanks, missiles, and drones at accelerating rates. As reports from Ukraine’s Centre for Analytical Studies and Countering Hybrid Threats indicate, nearly half of Russian defence enterprises remain unsanctioned, exposing the limitations of Western punitive measures. In this context, India’s engagement with Russian defence capabilities is both a practical necessity and a symbolic assertion that strategic imperatives can outweigh Western orthodoxy.

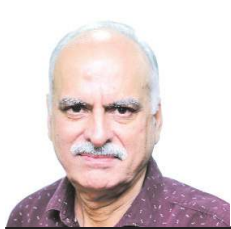
Sanctions, however, remain a persistent backdrop. The European Union, under Ursula von der Leyen, has attempted to

deploy emergency measures to convert frozen Russian assets into loans for Ukraine, challenging EU treaties and raising the prospect of legal confrontations with countries such as Hungary and Belgium. The United States, meanwhile, has explored using the same assets in US-led investment frameworks to facilitate reconstruction or political leverage. India, observing these efforts, has maintained a stance of strategic neutrality-resisting calls to condemn Russia while advocating for diplomacy, and emphasising that selective sanctioning by Western powers is inconsistent and self-serving. Putin, speaking to India Today, noted that Washington and Moscow presented papers in parallel but reached no compromises, and highlighted that over 90 per cent of Russia-India transactions are conducted in national currencies-a subtle yet potent challenge to dollar dominance.

The optics extend into nuclear and high-tech collaboration. India is developing nuclear-capable submarine-launched ballistic missiles, advancing its underwater fleet, and exploring high-tech partnerships with Russia, recalibrating the strategic environment in South Asia. Putin’s rhetoric that “Kiev is the mother of all Russian cities” and his framing of Russia’s role in eastern Ukraine resonate with historical narratives of great power assertion, yet they also serve as a conscious projection of strength aimed at partners like India. Modi’s reception was far from ceremonial; it underlined a shared understanding that global power is increasingly multipolar and that alliances must be flexible, resilient, and insulated from Western censure.

Even in the economic sphere, India challenges conventional assumptions. While the trade deficit with Russia persists due to energy imports, India’s broader engagement with global markets-including remittances from its diaspora and ongoing negotiations with the US-allows New Delhi to balance sovereignty with strategic interest. Putin’s discussions emphasising bilateral trade growth, high-technology collaboration, and future energy projects further solidify this interdependence. The bottom line is clear: the India-Russia partnership, far from being a relic of Cold War calculations, has evolved into a sophisticated framework for navigating sanctions, economic competition, and regional security challenges, and it may yet redefine the balance of power in South Asia.

Is Delhi crafting a new role for Ghulam Nabi Azad in Jammu and Kashmir?



ANIL
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A rather mysterious post appeared on the social-media platforms recently focused on former Congress veteran and head of the now defunct Democratic Progressive Azad Party (DPAP) Mr Ghulam Nabi Azad. It neither quoted anyone nor was attributed to any source but suggested that Prime Minister Mr Narendra Modi is mulling over assigning a key role to Mr Azad, most probably in the demoted and dissected Union Territory (UT) of Jammu and Kashmir.

“Prime Minister Narendra Modi has dropped a significant hint about a major role for veteran leader Mr Ghulam Nabi Azad. Sources indicate that Azad may be assigned an important position in Jammu & Kashmir, signalling a possible political shift in the Union Territory,” read the social media posts.

What makes it more interesting is that neither the Prime Minister’s Office-BJP nor Mr Azad have either confirmed or rejected these posts. It will be interesting to know how and from where these posts originated.

What role? Will a leader of national stature such as him be appointed as the Lt Governor of Jammu and Kashmir? An erstwhile state of which he was not only the chief minister but also lorded over and influenced governmental and political decisions from New Delhi.

Or, if the post has any credibility, is he being considered to helm yet another political experiment cooking in the annals of Delhi’s power corridors? Hinting at a possible chief ministerial role for him in the BJP-included future government in the UT? Or was it a mere kite-flying exercise as the post evoked no further response, particularly from the ruling dispensation-BJP and the Narendra Modi government?

What makes the post related to Mr Azad’s future curious was that it almost coincided with yet another exodus from the DPAP and leading towards the Congress-the party which he served for decades and, in turn, took the boy from the remote area of erstwhile Doda district to towering national heights. It is another matter that after his unceremonious exit from Congress he refuses to give any credit to the party for his stature as a towering national leader. And quite unconvincingly!

With his closest aides and former Minister Mr GM Saroori, credited with having backed Mr Azad to walk out of Congress and float a new

political outfit, having already joined the Congress, the new setback for him came when his two more trusted aides Mr Jugal Sharma and Mr Abdul Majid Wani, both former ministers, announced their plans to rejoin Congress. Suddenly, the mysterious posts appeared on social media about the possibility of a fresh J&K-centric assignment for Mr Azad.

Not that these developments, of Azad aides’ “ghar wapsi”, had happened suddenly. More than half-a-dozen DPAP leaders, including them, had made efforts to join Congress before the assembly elections but their attempts were foiled by a group of leaders dominating the J&K Congress and thwarting all efforts at its revival or growth. Most of these DPAP leaders later contested elections as independents to avoid any linkage with Mr Azad, whom people perceived to be soft towards the BJP, and lost narrowly.

Adding a few more seats-as these leaders would have won as Congress nominees-to the Congress kitty would have made the party a formidable partner in the ruling alliance. It would also have broken the hegemony of a set of people controlling Congress in the UT. No probe was ever held and no heads rolled even one year after the assembly elections.

The discontent in the DPAP had started simmering a few months after the party came into being. Most of these leaders, dyed-in-the-wool secular Congressmen, had pinned their hopes on Mr Azad to provide a secular option to Congress in Jammu and Kashmir as the party had not only lost its moorings but had failed to meet the Narendra Modi-anchored BJP’s challenge. Ostensibly, they were dismayed at Mr Azad not taking a clear political stance in the politically charged Muslim-majority UT with a considerable presence of Hindus, thereby giving an impression of soft-peddling towards the saffron party.

Ever since the dilution of Article 370 on August 5, 2019, and the corresponding Constitutional changes resulting in the UTs of J&K and Ladakh, BJP’s moves at installing its government have failed. Although the Centre is adamant in ignoring the demand for restoration of statehood in J&K, and a similar demand has gained foothold in Ladakh along with bringing the tribal-dominated UT under the 6th Schedule of the Constitution of India, and their reiteration that it will be done at an appropriate time, the political winds have started blowing in different directions.

A big self-inflicted setback for the Centre and the RSS-BJP combine was the Modi government’s decision to restore the over-a-century-old tradition of ‘Durbars’ that entails shifting the capital to Jammu and Kashmir in winters and summers respectively. This was

done, despite their earlier jubilation on discontinuing the process, under pressure particularly from people in BJP’s stronghold of Jammu which has been under economic stress due to wrong and anti-Jammu policies of the Centre and the UT governments.

Durbars move entailed Kashmiris moving to Jammu in winters. This was a major source of contribution to Jammu’s economy which has been in dire straits after the opening of the Jammu-Srinagar railway link via the holy town of Katra (Vaishno Devi) and later stoppage of Durbars move. In the absence of any alternate and viable plan to sustain Jammu’s economy, despite the region having voted for BJP in the last eight elections-from Lok Sabha down to Panchayat via UT Assembly-and religion-related and communal issues showing signs of weakening as a counter to divert people’s feelings connected with their economic survival, the Central dispensation could be toying with an idea of yet another Azad-centric political move after the failure of his DPAP experiment.

Given the none-too-pleasant political scenario in Jammu and Kashmir and with the DPAP fiasco behind his back, the question arises: Will Mr Azad bite the bullet in the twilight of his political career?

To be fair to Mr Azad, all through his political association with Congress-during which he was always, within the government and the Congress, at the decision-making levels-he had safely avoided getting involved in murky political experimentation as part of the statecraft. He definitely had his hands soiled in the Congress’s internal power dynamics which led to many stalwarts quitting or retiring from the scene, and no one even from the younger lot who held any promise was allowed to come up. The ruptures in the Congress’s organisational set-up were clearly visible once Mr Azad quit the party, with none other of any consequential stature available to take charge.

How could he be relevant in Jammu and Kashmir’s political scenario under these circumstances, despite the fact that he still has some credibility left?

In any new experiment, even if he accepts Mr Modi’s offer-which could range from becoming Lt Governor, simultaneously of the two UTs, or functioning in an interlocutory capacity focused on the problems of J&K and Ladakh, and not a direct political role-he would only be seen as a representative of the Modi government, with BJP being the political arm of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh.

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India’s sporting rise is no longer measured only in medals or Olympic success; it is unfolding quietly in school grounds, small towns, and remote districts where a new era of sports infrastructure is taking shape. For the first time in decades, government ambition for a fitter and more inclusive nation is aligning seamlessly with private sector innovation. Together, they are creating an ecosystem defined by accessibility, sustainability, and world-class standards, marking a transformative chapter in India’s sporting journey. Government investment through programmes like Khelo India has played a central role in this shift. What started as a mission to identify talent and nurture young athletes has evolved into a nationwide movement to strengthen grassroots infrastructure. With more than a thousand Khelo India Centres sanctioned across the country, access to sporting facilities is no longer a privilege restricted to metropolitan areas.

The rapid development in remote regions underscores this change. When a multi-purpose indoor hall opens in Arunachal Pradesh’s Kamle district or when Himalayan states receive hundreds of crores for sports facilities, it reflects a deeper reorientation of development priorities. Sports infrastructure is now seen as integral to inclusive growth, not an optional extra. A child in Ladakh, Nagaland, or Meghalaya should have the same chance to train, play, and dream as a child in Delhi or Mumbai, and India is beginning to make that aspiration real. By taking modern facilities to remote, tribal, and hilly regions, the country is not merely constructing fields and courts — it is building a future pipeline of talent that previously remained invisible due to lack of access. But infrastructure alone cannot drive change. The private sector has stepped forward to bridge the gap between policy and execution. India’s sporting future must evolve without compromising the planet’s well-being. For example, Gallant’s partnership with Nike Grind, Nike’s global sustainability initiative, is a testament to this commitment. Providing world-class sports gear is of utmost importance for the country’s sporting excellence — rubber infill, delivering football turfs, multi-sport courts, and athletic tracks that meet global standards while remaining suited to India’s climate and usage patterns. These surfaces are durable, safe, weather-resis-

tant, and engineered to ensure sustainability never comes at the cost of performance. India’s varied geography and climatic extremes make it essential to pair global technology with local delivery. Many companies, including Gallant, work on the model that integrates international expertise with strong on-ground execution, ensuring that facilities in rural districts rise to the same benchmarks as those in major cities. Today, world-class facilities are emerging in district schools, universities, sports academies, and community grounds, creating a more level field for talent across regions. This is also an era where public vision and private execution are reinforcing each other. Government funding through Khelo India and Special Area Games schemes is reaching even difficult terrains.

Private innovators are ensuring these facilities are built using sustainable materials that reduce long-term costs and environmental impact. CSR support from corporates is further enhancing the reach and quality of sports infrastructure across communities. Together, these collaborations are building a model that is scalable, eco-conscious, and socially impactful. The future demands more than just building more fields; it demands facilities that are greener, smarter, and longer-lasting. With rising environmental concerns, the sports sector too must move towards responsible innovation. Materials like Nike Grind contribute to a circular economy by reducing waste and repurposing discarded material into high-performance surfaces. Gallant Bounce installations reflect this mindset, prioritising accessibility, safety, and longevity. These facilities become inspirational spaces where children discover confidence, athletes sharpen their skills, and communities gather with pride. India’s next sporting leap will likely emerge from its remotest corners. A new turf in a tribal school or a synthetic track in a hilly region reinforces that talent is not determined by geography. As India prepares for global competitions and future Olympics, the foundations being laid today will determine the champions of tomorrow. The road ahead is filled with promise. India’s sporting aspirations now reflect a larger cultural commitment to fitness, resilience, and collective growth.

With government vision and industry innovation working in tandem, the nation is steadily moving towards a future where world-class, sustainable sports infrastructure becomes the norm. The fields being built today will shape not only athletes but the spirit of a confident and progressive India.

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Airstrike on hospital leaves 34 dead in Myanmar

ASSOCIATED PRESS ■ Bangkok

An airstrike by Myanmar's military destroyed a hospital in an area controlled by a leading rebel armed force, killing 34 patients and medical staff, according to a local rescue worker and independent media reports on Thursday.

About 80 other people were injured in the attack Wednesday night on the general hospital in Mrauk-U township, an area controlled by the ethnic Arakan Army in the western state of Rakhine.

The ruling military has not announced news of any attack in the area. Wai Hun Aung, a senior official for rescue services in Rakhine, told The Associated Press that a jet fighter dropped two bombs at 9.13 pm with one hitting the hospital's recovery ward and the other landing near the hospital's main building. He said he arrived at the hospital early Thursday to provide assistance and recorded the deaths of 17 women and 17 men. He said that most of the hospital building was destroyed by the bombs, and taxis and motorbikes near the hospital were also damaged.

Rakhine-based online media posted photos and videos showing damaged buildings and debris, including medical equipment. The hospital has been the main source of health care for people in Rakhine, where most hospitals have closed because of



Damaged building is seen at the hospital that was allegedly hit by a military air strike in Mrauk-U township in Rakhine state, Myanmar AP

Myanmar's ongoing civil war, said Wai Hun Aung. It was reopened after doctors gathered in Mrauk-U to provide much-needed medical services. Mrauk-U, located 530 kilometres northwest of

Yangon, the country's largest city, was captured by the Arakan Army in February last year. The Arakan Army is the well-trained and well-armed military wing of the Rakhine ethnic minority move-

ment, which seeks autonomy from Myanmar's central Government. It began its offensive in Rakhine in November 2023 and has seized a strategically important regional army headquarters

and 14 of Rakhine's 17 townships. Rakhine, formerly known as Arakan, was the site of a brutal army counterinsurgency operation in 2017 that drove about 7,40,000 minority Rohingya Muslims to seek safety across the border in Bangladesh.

There is still ethnic tension between the Buddhist Rakhine and the Rohingya.

Myanmar's shadow National Unity Government, established by elected lawmakers who were barred from taking their seats in 2021, condemned the airstrike.

The organisation urged the international community to pressure the military to end its actions, take action against perpetrators and provide humanitarian assistance as soon as possible.

Myanmar has been in turmoil since the army took power in 2021, triggering widespread popular opposition. Many opponents of military rule have since taken up arms, and large parts of the country are now embroiled in conflict. The military Government has stepped up airstrikes ahead of planned December 28 elections against the armed pro-democracy People's Defence Force, which is closely associated with the National Unity Government. Opponents of military rule charge that the polls will be neither free nor fair, and are mainly an effort to legitimise the army retaining power.

Ex-PM Khaleda is responding to treatment: Doctor



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Dhaka

Bangladesh's critically ill former prime minister Khaleda Zia is "responding" to treatment, but no decision has yet been taken on whether she will be flown abroad for further medical care, her personal doctor said on Wednesday. The 80-year-old Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) chairperson has been undergoing treatment at Dhaka's Evercare Hospital since November 23 for multiple health complications. "She is being provided treatments which are needed for a critically ill patient," Zia's personal physician and BNP's decision-making standing committee member, AZM Zahid Hossain, told reporters outside the private hospital. "In medical terms, she is responding to the

treatment as she did in the past," he added, noting that foreign doctors are involved and medical-board decisions are being taken in nighttime meetings. Hossain said the three-time prime minister is receiving care in the hospital's intensive care unit (ICU). He said while a transfer abroad remains a possibility, no date has been fixed, urging people not to give in to speculation. "The time has not yet come to give a definite date," the doctor said. A medical board led by cardiologist Shahabuddin and including specialists from Bangladesh, the UK, the US, and China, is supervising Zia's treatment. Her daughter-in-law, Zubaeda Rahman, a doctor by profession, has been attending the medical board's meetings in person since returning to Dhaka from London on December 5.

Pragmatic engagement with Taliban: India at UN



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ United Nation

India told the UN Security Council that it calls for a "pragmatic engagement" with the Taliban as New Delhi underlined that a focus on only punitive measures will ensure a 'business as usual' approach.

Addressing the UN Security Council meeting on the Situation in Afghanistan on Wednesday, India's Permanent Representative to the UN Ambassador Parvathaneni Harish said India calls on the United Nations and the international community to adopt nuanced policy instruments that help bring sustainable benefits for the people of Afghanistan.

"India calls for a pragmatic engagement with the Taliban. A coherent policy of engagement should incentivise positive actions. A focus on only punitive measures will only ensure that a 'business as usual' approach continues as we have been seeing now for the last four and a half years," Harish said.

He reiterated India's commitment to meeting the development needs of the people of Afghanistan.

Harish said the recent decision by the Indian Government to restore the status of Delhi's Technical Mission in Kabul to that of an Embassy "underscores this resolve."

"We will continue our engagements with all stakeholders to augment our contribution to

Afghanistan's comprehensive development, humanitarian assistance, and capacity-building initiatives, in keeping with the priorities and aspirations of Afghan society," he said.

Afghan Foreign Minister Amir Khan Muttaqi was in New Delhi on a six-day trip in October, the first senior Taliban minister to visit India after the group seized power in Kabul in 2021. External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar held wide-ranging talks with Muttaqi, announcing the upgrading of Delhi's technical mission in Kabul to the status of an embassy and pledging to renew its development works in Afghanistan.

India had withdrawn its officials from its embassy in Kabul after the Taliban seized power in August 2021.

In June 2022, India re-established its diplomatic presence in the Afghan capital by deploying a "technical team". India continues to closely monitor the security situation in Afghanistan, Harish said.

He emphasised that the international community must coordinate efforts towards ensuring that entities and individuals designated by the UN Security Council - the ISIL and Al Qaida and their affiliates, including the Lashkar e Tayyiba and Jaish-e-Mohammed and proxies of LeT such as the Resistance Front, along with those who facilitate their operations - no longer indulge in cross-border terrorism, a thinly-veiled reference to Pakistan.

Bangladesh to hold elections on February 12

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Dhaka

Bangladesh will hold the general elections on February 12, its first since the ouster of the Sheikh Hasina-led Awami League Government in a violent student-led protest in August 2024.

"Voting will take place on February 12, 2026, from 7.30 am to 4.30 pm," Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) AMM Nasir Uddin said in an address to the nation on Thursday.

A referendum will simultaneously be held on the voting day, February 12, to elicit public opinion on a series of reform proposals of the Chief Adviser Muhammad Yunus-led National Consensus Commission. The announcement came a day after the CEC met President Mohammed Shahabuddin, who assured him "optimum support and cooperation" to conduct the general elections in a "free, fair and meaningful" manner. According to the election



schedule, the last date for submission of nomination papers is December 29, and scrutiny of nominations will be held from December 30 to January 4. The last date for withdrawal of candidature is January 20. The final list of candidates will be published on January 21. Election campaigns will begin

on January 22 and continue until 7.30 am on February 10, Nasir said.

The last general elections were held in January 2024. Hasina won the elections marred by controversy and boycott by major parties.

Six months after Hasina's victory in the 2024 election,

protests erupted against her Government. The violent street protests forced Hasina to leave for India on August 5, 2024. Three days later, Yunus took over as chief adviser of the interim Government.

The interim Government has disbanded Hasina's Awami League.

Winter storm rips through Gaza, exposing failure to deliver enough aid

ASSOCIATED PRESS ■ Jerusalem

Rains drenched Gaza's tent camps and dropping temperatures chilled Palestinians huddling inside them Thursday as storm Byron descended on the war-battered territory, showing how two months of a ceasefire have failed to sufficiently address the spiralling humanitarian crisis there.

Children's sandaled feet disappeared under opaque brown water that flooded the camps. Trucks moved slowly to avoid sending waves of mud toward the tents.

Piles of garbage and sewage turned to waterfalls. "We have been drowned. I don't have clothes to wear and we have no mattresses left," said Um Salman Abu Qenas, a mother displaced from east of Khan Younis to a tent camp in Deir al-Balah. She said her family could not sleep the night before because of the water in the tent. Aid groups say not enough



Palestinians crossing a flooded street following heavy rain in Khan Younis, southern Gaza Strip PTI

shelter aid is getting into Gaza during the truce. Figures recently released by Israel's military suggest it has not met the ceasefire stipulation of allowing 600 trucks of aid into Gaza a day, though Israel disputes that finding. "Cold, overcrowded, and unsanitary envi-

ronments heighten the risk of illness and infection," said the UN agency for Palestinian refugees, UNRWA, in a terse statement posted on X.

"This suffering could be prevented by unhindered humanitarian aid, including medical support and proper shelter."

Sabreen Qudeeh, also in the Deir al-Balah camp, said her family woke up to rain leaking from their tent's ceiling and water from the street soaking their mattresses.

"My little daughters were screaming and got shocked when they saw water on the

floor," she said. Ahmad Abu Taha, a Palestinian man in the camp, said there was not a tent that escaped the flooding. "Conditions are very bad, we have old people, displaced, and sick people inside this camp," he said.

In Israel, heavy rains fell and flood warnings were in effect in several parts of the country — but no major weather-related emergencies were reported as of midday.

The contrasting scenes with Gaza made clear how profoundly the Israel-Hamas war had damaged the territory, destroying the majority of homes. Gaza's population of around 2 million is almost entirely displaced and most people live in vast tent camps stretching for miles along the beach, exposed to the elements, without adequate flooding infrastructure and with cesspits dug near tents as toilets. The Palestinian Civil Defence, part of the Hamas-run Government, said that since the

storm began they have received more than 2,500 distress calls from citizens whose tents and shelters were damaged in all parts of the Gaza Strip. Aid groups say that Israel is not allowing enough aid into Gaza to begin rebuilding the territory after years of war. Under the agreement, Israel agreed to comply with aid stipulations from an earlier January 2025 truce, which specified that it allow 600 trucks of aid each day into Gaza and an agreed-upon number of temporary homes and tents. It maintains it is doing so, though Associated Press has found that some of its own figures call that into question. COGAT said December 9, without providing evidence, that it had "lately" let 260,000 tents and tarpaulins into Gaza and over 1,500 trucks of blankets and warm clothing.

The Shelter Cluster, an international coalition of aid providers led by the Norwegian Refugee Council, sets the number lower.



Bulgaria's Govt resigns amid public protests

ASSOCIATED PRESS ■ Sofia

Bulgaria's Government resigned on Thursday as mass protests gripped the country just weeks before it's due to join the eurozone. The resignation of the minority coalition, led by the centre-right GERB party, was announced minutes before parliament was scheduled to vote on a no-confidence motion tabled by the opposition over economic mismanagement and supported by growing public anger with widespread corruption. "Ahead of today's vote of no confidence, the Government is resigning," Prime Minister Rosen Zhelyazkov told reporters in parliament. "The decisions of the National Assembly are meaningful when they reflect the will of the people. We want to be where society expects us to be," Zhelyazkov said, referring to the anti-Government protests.



Washington State under emergency due to heavy rain

ASSOCIATED PRESS ■ Mount Vernon

Washington state was under a State of emergency Thursday from a barrage of torrential rain that has sent rivers flowing over their banks, caused a mudslide to crash down on a highway and trapped people in floodwaters. Tens of thousands of residents could face evacuation orders. Heavy rain continued to fall over parts of the state Thursday morning, prompting road closures, water rescues and suspension of Amtrak trains between Seattle and Vancouver. Rainfall intensity increased in several counties in Washington's Cascade Mountains, which had seen up to 6 inches of rain in a 24-hour period. One area, Snoqualmie Pass, picked up an additional 1.7 inches of rain in six hours, the National Weather Service said.



School children participated in Amaravati Balotsav in Vijayawad



PARTY

Photos by- Ch.Vijaya Bhaskar



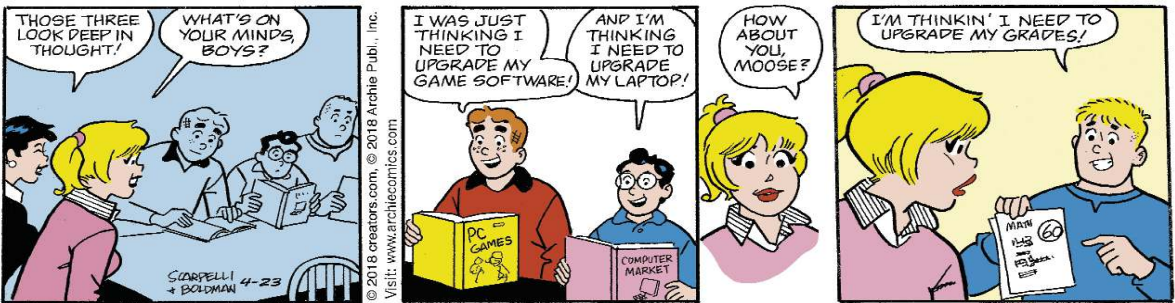
Bhavani Devotees relinquish their Deeksha at Kanaka Durga Temple on the first day in Vijayawada



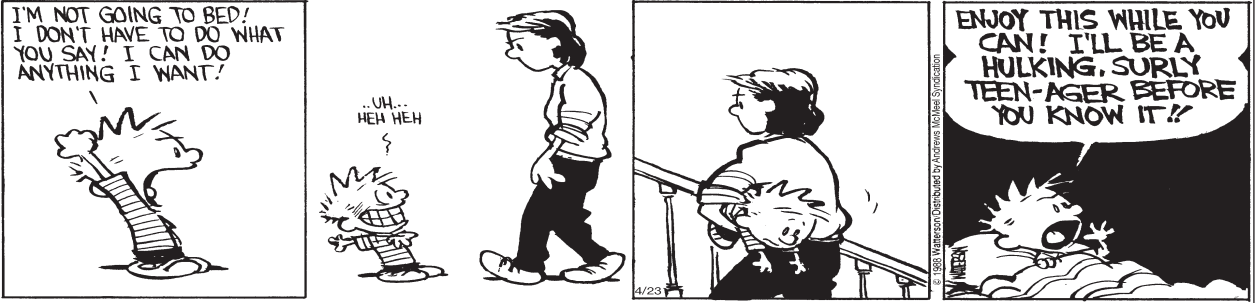
AP Star Hotels Association president R V Swamy and AP Chamber of Commerce and Federation members explain their Business Expo in Vijayawada

FUN

ARCHIE



CALVIN AND HOBBS



GARFIELD



NANCY



GINGER MEGGS



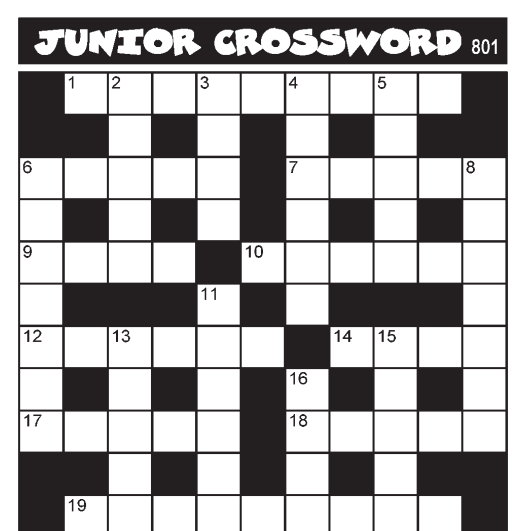
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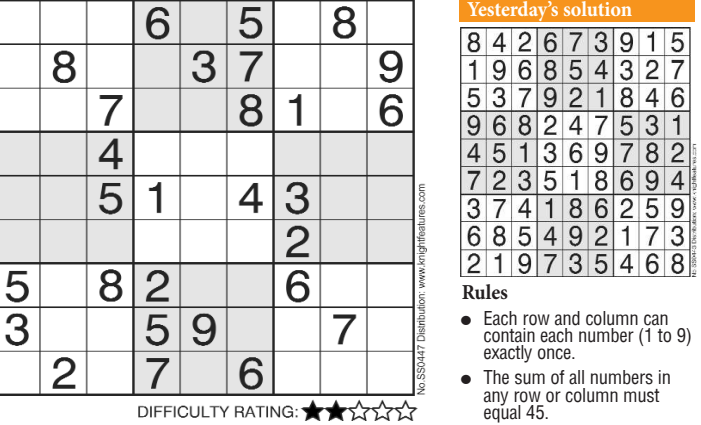


CROSSWORD



- ACROSS
- 1 The largest land animals
 - 6 A housemaid or butler
 - 8 Headrests on beds
 - 11 Tools for making holes
 - 13 A tall, narrow building
 - 15 A circus funny person
 - 16 This liquid chemical will burn your skin
- DOWN
- 2 Large wild cats
 - 3 A writer of verse
 - 4 A ship's heavy metal hook
- SOLUTION 800
- | | | | | | | | |
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TRADE LOCKED



Yet another deadline seems to have gone. According to India's chief economic advisor, V Anantha Nageswaran, the India-US trade deal will most possibly be sealed by March 2026. During the summers, there was the anticipation that the agreement would be finalised by September. It did not, and the next target was the festive month of November. Several ministers and trade negotiators backtracked and voiced a belief that Christmas-New Year, or December, will mark the end of the ongoing bilateral talks. Now comes a new deadline, which is three months later, and creates new apprehensions, worries, and disruptions. It implies that Indian exports, which witnessed a slowdown due to the US tariffs, will suffer for another few months. The trade deficit for 2025-26 may increase, and if the dollar outflows do not stem, this will create a further downward pressure on the rupee. However, Nageswaran is confident that the economic and growth outlook for 2026-27 remains strong, and the current devaluation of the currency is because it is "undervalued relative to fundamentals." In effect, the tide will change soon.

Speaking to a TV channel, the economic advisor agreed that the November-December target turned out to be "elusive," but added that he would be surprised if the March deadline was not met. In the recent past, the American side has become more optimistic about the bilateral deal. The US trade representative, Jamieson Greer recently told a Senate subcommittee that the latest trade proposals from India were among the "best" that the US had received. "They (Indians) have been a very difficult nut to crack... but they have been quite forward leaning... the type of offers that they have been talking to us about have been the best we have ever received as a country," Greer said. It indicates that India has agreed to proposals that other nations did not, or that New Delhi has softened its stance over the months. One can flip the argument to believe that the US, which wanted a lot more, has decided to be content with a little less.

Farm imports from the US still seem to be the most sensitive issue on the trade agenda. Greer admitted that there were disagreements especially on American crops and meat, which include the imports of corn, soybean, wheat, and cotton. Throughout the year, the Indian side, including the prime minister and ministers have maintained that they will not allow any compromises with the interests of the local farmers. However, in the recent past, India has made a few concessions, albeit cloaked in national necessities. For example, cotton imports were eased, and allowed at zero import duties to help the textile sector, which faced shortages. The Government aimed to convince the farmers that the imports will be used by the industry, and not enter the open marketplace. Farm unions were unhappy, and voiced their concerns over low domestic prices. Similarly, there is talk to use American corn for making ethanol to blend with petrol. A 20 per cent blend is mandatory, and this time too the reason will be that the corn will be used by the refiners, and not enter the market.

Since any bilateral trade deal will logically include the import of American goods, apart from farm produce, Piyush Goyal, the industry and commerce minister, has urged the Indian business community not to be perturbed about such free trade agreements. In a public meeting, he said that Indians oppose the bilateral or regional trade deals even if they adversely impact 5-10 per cent of the market share in specific segments. He urged the industry to be strong, and resilient, and not be affected by such small changes. In effect, the policy-makers wish to prepare the business community for the concessions that India will need to give to the US as part of the trade deal. This is akin to the way the former are preparing the farmers to face the implications of higher imports from America. This explains why India is on a signing spree to ink bilateral deals so that the India-US one, when it happens, seems logical and inevitable.

Finally, Nageswaran made a telling comment in the interview with the TV channel. He maintained that the India-US trade deal was not just about economics and business, or agriculture. It was about geopolitical considerations. The trade agreement was linked to other areas such as national security, diplomacy, new world order, and regional and subcontinent security. A recent report by the White House connected economic relations with Indo-Pacific security. The study wanted closer India-US trade relations, which would logically enhance closer ties in the Indian Ocean to counter China. While India has moved towards China because of the retaliation by the US, New Delhi perceives Beijing as a long-term security threat. Hence, India wants to have a larger relation with America, even as it stays close to Russia, and inches towards a few agreements with China. But New Delhi has realised that in terms of geopolitics, and long-term view, it cannot completely isolate itself from the US. Some analysts argue that Russia is India's past, which will continue in the future. The US is India's future. The India-China destinies are interlinked.

India's MAGA vs Trump's MAGA

The future lies in wooing Microsoft, Amazon, Google, Apple

Like Donald Trump's MAGA, but in an unobtrusive manner, and without the theatrics and circus of the US president, India has its own business-economic weapon, which is also MAGA. In the long run, the Indian weapon of mass market will prove to be more durable and consequential than Trump's trade-tariff-investment warhead. The US republicans wish to 'Make America Great Again.' The Indian Government believes in 'Microsoft, Amazon, Google, and Apple.' Ironically, both nations' futures depend on the tech giants.

But before we go down that road, a trip down the nostalgia lane first. Scrolling down the India-US news on diverse digital platforms, I had a flashback from the past, some three decades ago. I recalled a similar political schizophrenia coupled with business mania, a kind of parallel track in the relations between India and the US. Back then, Robin Raphael, the US assistant state secretary in the Department of State, caused diplomatic tremors and waves in India.

Raphael, a South Asia expert who was subsequently investigated by the FBI on charges of being an ISI mole with leanings towards Pakistan, claimed that a genuine dispute existed between Pakistan and India, and Kashmir was not an inalienable part of India. This caused considerable agitation among the Indian leaders. Yet, while Raphael hectored India, the American soft-drinks icon, Coke, made grand announcements about coming back to India with a bang. Other well-known American brands were also enthusiastic about the vast, untapped, and growing Indian consumer market.

Fast forward a few years, and the US did what even India had never anticipated. The former compelled Russia to stop the supplies of cryogenic engines to India, which could have aided the latter in its space and missile programme. It is a different matter that India managed

without Russian help. But around the same time that diplomatic hostilities with the US were on the rise, McDonald's announced that it would open thousands of fast-food stores across India. Mac-D realised the potential of the Indian market.

A similar kind of schizophrenia-excitement is visible today. After imposing a 50 per cent tariff on Indian exports, hankering about H-1B visa regime, and targeting pharma shipments, Trump recently instructed his aides that there were complaints about India dumping rice in the US. He hinted at new tariffs on rice imports. His tariff war against India seemed unabated. Do remember that after new sanctions were imposed by the European Union, and others against two Russian crude oil exporters, Indian importers stopped, or curtailed purchases from Russia. Or at least publicly announced it.

However, the likes of Microsoft, Amazon, Google, and Apple, the Indian MAGA, announced major investment plans for their Indian operations. This was despite Trump's threats to reduce their exposures to the subcontinent, and invest more in the US. The tech giants did both. Satya Nadella, the CEO of Microsoft, said that he had a wonderful meeting with the Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, and that his firm will commit \$17 billion to promote, develop, and encourage AI (Artificial Intelligence) in India.

Nadella added that this was the largest investment by Microsoft in Asia. Not to be outdone, within no time, Amazon, which is the largest e-commerce platform in India, claimed that it would invest a much-higher \$30 billion until 2030 to improve, develop, and upgrade the AI capabilities in India. The firm stated that it saw endless potential and possibilities in the Indian market.

Some weeks ago, if you recall, Sundar Pichai of Google said that the firm would invest \$17 billion in Andhra Pradesh to set up a massive data centre, the largest of its kind in Asia, and develop AI capabilities in India.

Now, we come to Apple. Until November 2025, iPhone exports and shipments from India to the US broke previous records, despite the US' tariffs, and Trump's antics. Total iPhone exports may cross the \$25 billion in 2025 (calendar year), or surely in 2025-26 (fiscal year). Apple is committed to manufacturing 25 per cent of iPhones meant for global sales within India, and the process is under way. This completes the quartet of India's MAGA, which will counter Trump's MAGA, and maybe come out trumping America.

What India needs to do is something quite simple. It needs to ride out the Trump threats, and the hostility of the US administration. This is not something new. We have done it before, after the two nuclear tests, and during the 1980s. India has experienced hostile US administrations for the last six decades, but since the 1980s the negatives were accompanied by business-investment positives. Remember, it is not charity, sympathy, or altruism that is forcing India's MAGA weapon to pay attention to India.

We have a population of 1.6 billion, who are the future and potential testing guinea pigs for the AI geeks, who work for the global tech giants to tweak their algorithms. Where else in the world can they find such a large captive consumer base? This is precisely the business key to unlock the diplomatic shackles. Back in the 1990s, China used the power of its consumers, selectively dangled access to the US firms, and extracted huge concessions. India may not be as ruthless, but can use MAGA wisely, patiently, and strategically.

However, we need to be careful so that we are not carried away by rhetoric, and posturing. For example, when Pepsi entered India in the 1980s, it spoke eloquently about how it could instantly transform Indian farming through the exports of processed food (read potato wafers). The change happened but over a longer period. The US and European pharma giants were cagey to transfer research knowhow. The same slowness, laziness, or apprehensions can propel the MAGA tech giants to promise much more than they wish to chew.

Let me give you a recent example. While Amazon promised to pump in \$30 billion, it claimed that it had already invested \$40 billion in India. A closer look revealed that the latter figure included salaries paid to the Indian employees for decades. Recurring expenses, which are funded by local and export revenues cannot be deemed as investment. Only capital expenditure on infrastructure, and other heads can. More importantly, for an outsider, foreign investment inflow is crucial. If Amazon reinvests the profits and cash flows it earns from the Indian operations, it is capex but not FDI.

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



Sutanu Guru
Author, Journalist and Academician

OUR TAKE



A Contrarian Investor

Personal is the new credit norm

Going crazy on credit cards, loans to buy cars and appliances



per cent year-on-year. Fresh sanctioned limits rose 13 per cent quarter-on-quarter, after three quarters of decline, which subdued the annual growth. The market remains concentrated, and the top four issuers raised their collective share from 70 per cent to 72 per cent. Average credit limits increased, and the portfolio health strengthened, which was backed by an improvement in delinquency from two per cent to 1.8 per cent.

Two-wheeler financing registered robust growth, with the assets under management touching ₹1.8 lakh crore, or 18 per cent year-on-year rise. New loan sanctions grew nine per cent year-on-year in Q2-FY26. The NBFC dominance continued, aided by higher sourcing from the first-time borrowers. Higher-ticket loans in the Rs 1-2 lakh bracket gained traction, reflecting a shift towards premium vehicle purchases. The delinquency rate reduced from 6.2 per cent to 5.4 per cent, although the longer-duration stress remained elevated.

Consumer durable loans posted the fastest growth among the unsecured products, with

the assets under management rising 16 per cent year-on-year to ₹1 lakh crore. New sourcing expanded 22 per cent year-on-year, supported by aggressive NBFC participation, and strong retail penetration. Loans under ₹20,000 accounted for nearly 65 per cent of the volumes, which aligned with the country's expanding small-ticket digital EMI ecosystem.

As India's credit ecosystem evolves with stronger underwriting, digital enablement, and rising consumer confidence, unsecured lending appears well-positioned for sustained, responsible expansion. The Reserve Bank of India recently cut the repo rate by 25 basis points to 5.25 per cent, which will offer relief to several sections of the borrowers, especially those considering personal loans. As the overall cost of borrowing drops, banks and NBFCs are expected to gradually reduce the interest rates on personal loans. The impact may not be visible immediately, but may see marginally lower rates in the coming weeks. The lenders will slowly realign pricing to reflect the revised repo rate. This bodes well for the unsecured lending

segment.

Recently, at a press briefing, the central bank's deputy governor, Swaminathan J, said that it remains confident about the sustainability of the credit growth, supported by stable asset quality, and a measured rise in unsecured lending, which so far shows no signs of stress. He noted that apart from monitoring year-on-year credit expansion, the regulator evaluates how each loan segment is growing relative to the others, along with slippage trends across the portfolios. The earlier regulatory measures on unsecured credit, he explained, were introduced when such loans were expanding at nearly twice the pace of the rest of the loan book.

At present, the overall credit growth stands at about 10-11 per cent. Lending to the large industries is growing at 10 per cent, home loans are expanding at 11 per cent, and personal loans are rising at 14 per cent. "The growth has been seen more in secured segments like gold loans or home loans, and unsecured loans have significantly moderated. So, there are no indicators at this point in time which are creating a concern for us," Swaminathan said. Unsecured lending at this stage forms less than 25 per cent of the retail book, and accounts for only 7-8 per cent of the total banking system credit.

However, experts contend that there are several pitfalls in unsecured credit. Although the current delinquency rates indicate borrowers' discipline, and ability to pay the loans, the situation can quickly go out of control. In the past, the robust trends in unsecured loans led to over-borrowing, largely driven by over-spending, and an inability among the borrowers to pay the EMIs, or settle the credit card bills. This is especially relevant as the central bank warns borrowers of cyber-crime, and online loan frauds. In the recent past, aggressive loan pitches by Chinese apps created havoc in the credit system.

Debt traps, when overextended loan payments constitute 30-40 per cent of monthly incomes, can lead to spiralling debt, impact savings especially for emergencies and crucial expenses, and lead to bankruptcy-like situations. Hence, individuals need to be careful, and calculate their loan payment outgoes, before opting for fresh loans. Never forget that unsecured credit is more expensive.

BRIEFLY

WOMEN'S FOOTBALL LEAGUE TO START ON DECEMBER 20



The Indian Women's League 2025-26 will kick off on December 20 at the National Centre of Excellence (NCoE) in Kolkata, with Sethu FC taking on Kickstart FC in the opening match.

The IWL will be played in two phases, with the first one stretching from December 20 to January 9, 2026, during which the eight teams will play 28 matches, the All India Football Federation (AIFF) said on Thursday.

The NCoE in Kolkata and the Kalyani Municipal Stadium in Kalyani are the two venues for the league, which is being held in two centralised venues this season.

The second phase of the IWL is set to be held from April 20 to May 10, 2026, thus allowing player availability for the senior and U20 women's national teams, which will participate in their respective AFC Women's Asian Cups categories next year.

CHANDIGARH STADIUM HONOURS YUVRAJ, HARMANPREET



World Cup winners Yuvraj Singh and Harmanpreet Kaur were on Thursday immortalized at the New Chandigarh Stadium with stands named in their honour. Yuvraj, player of the tournament for the 2011 ODI World Cup, and Harmanpreet, who recently captained India to their first ever Women's World Cup trophy, were surrounded by friends, family and Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann on the occasion.

Yuvraj was also seen giving a pep talk to the Indian team in a huddle before the second T20 International against South Africa. His longtime teammate Harbhajan Singh has a pavilion named after him at the stadium and Harmanpreet joined him on the other side of the sightsscreen on Thursday.

Salmon makes Arsenal debut in Champions League

ASSOCIATED PRESS
London

Marli Salmon became the sixth youngest player to feature in the Champions League when brought on as a late substitute in Arsenal's 3-0 win at Club Brugge.

Salmon is 16 years, 103 days and came on for Ben White at Jan Breydelstadion on Wednesday, with manager Mikel Arteta saying: "We knew that at some point we had to use him."

"He's so young, 16 still, and he's playing in the Champions League," Arteta said.

But Salmon is not even the youngest player that Arsenal has fielded this season.

That distinction goes to Max Dowman, who was 15 years, 308 days when he entered as a second-half substitute against Slavia Prague last month.

According to UEFA, Salmon is the third player 16 or younger that Arsenal has fielded in the Champions League after



Dowman and former midfielder Jack Wilshere.

"That's why we put so much work and everybody in the academy puts (in) so much enthusiasm and work," said Arteta. "And for a long time, you have to prepare those talents. So, thanks to them, because when we need them, they are there, they are ready to perform."

India names Sindhu, Lakshya for Asia Team Championships

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
New Delhi

Two-time Olympics medalist PV Sindhu, Lakshya Sen and the star pair of Satwiksairaj Rankireddy-Chirag Shetty will form the core of Indian squad to take part in the Badminton Asia Team Championships to be played in Qingdao, China from February 3-8.

India are defending champions in the women's category of the competition, whereas the men's team had won two bronze medals in the past.

"Selected on the basis of ranking, performance, and experience, the women's team will once again be led by former world champion and two-time Olympics medallist, PV Sindhu," the Badminton Association of India said in a release.

The world No 13 Sen will be the top ranked men's singles player in the squad which also features Kidambi Srikanth, HS Prannoy, US Open winner Ayush Shetty, and Tharun Mannepal.

Satwik-Chirag will be lead the doubles unit along with Guwahati Masters runners-



up Sai Pratheek K and Pruthvi Krishnamurthy Roy, as well as Hariharan Amsakarunan. In the women's category, Sindhu will be supported by world junior championships silver medalist Tanvi Sharma, Unnati Hooda, Rakshita Sree Santhosh Ramraj and Malvika Bansod in singles, Syed Modi International champions Gayatri Gopichand and Treasa Jolly will lead India's charge in

the doubles while Priya Konjengbam, Shruti Mishra, and Tanisha Crasto complete the squad.

BAI secretary Sanjay Mishra said, "Over the last few years, Indian teams have consistently been medal contenders at the Asian and World level and this squad has the right mix of form and experience and is capable of challenging for the crown in both categories."

Team:

Men's: Lakshya Sen, Ayush Shetty, Kidambi, Prannoy HS, Tharun Mannepal, Satwiksairaj Rankireddy, Chirag Shetty, Pruthvi Krishnamurthy, Sai Pratheek K, Hariharan Amsakarunan

Women's: PV Sindhu, Unnati Hooda, Tanvi, Rakshitha Sree Santhosh Ramraj, Malvika Bansod, Treasa Jolly, Gayatri Gopichand, Priya Konjengbam, Shruti, Tanisha.

Aston Villa faces Basel in Europa League

ASSOCIATED PRESS
Basel

Boosted by a victory over the Premier League leader, in form Aston Villa meets Basel in the Europa League on Thursday.

After a slow start to the season, Villa bounced back to be currently on a seven-game winning streak in all competitions, including a 2-1 victory over Arsenal on Saturday.

Beside a top-three place in the English top flight, the Villans are tied with Lyon and Midtjylland atop the standings of the second-tier European competition on 12 points with four wins from five games.

"The most important thing is how we are building the team, how we are



achieving in our process during each competition, our stronger mentality in everything," manager Unai Emery said ahead of the

match at St. Jakob-Park in Basel. Emery has won the Europa League trophy four times during stints in charge of Sevilla

and Villarreal.

Lyon hosts Dutch newcomer Go Ahead Eagles while Midtjylland faces Genk at home.

The top eight teams after eight games go directly to the round of 16 in March.

At the other end of the 36-team table, struggling Nice will look to earn the first points against Braga.

Teams placed ninth to 24th advance to the knock-out playoffs in February.

In other games, Nottingham Forest is away at Utrecht, Celtic and Roma meet in Glasgow and Maccabi Tel Aviv travels to Stuttgart.

In the third-tier Conference League, Crystal Palace plays Shelbourne in Dublin and Fiorentina hosts Dynamo Kyiv.

Alonso feels Real Madrid will overcome rough patch

ASSOCIATED PRESS
Madrid

Xabi Alonso thanked his players for their attitude after another defeat and said he was positive Real Madrid would overcome its slump soon.

Madrid lost 2-1 to Manchester City in the Champions League on Wednesday, remaining with only two wins in its last eight matches in all competitions.

"The players gave it everything they had, and I have nothing to criticize today. I really value their attitude. We have to keep going," Alonso said. "Right now the results aren't as good as we'd like."

"We're critical, we demand a lot of ourselves, and we understand the fans. We have to keep working hard. We believe we'll get through this because everything passes, and I'm convinced we can do it."



The result increased criticism against Alonso and prompted some jeers by the crowd at the Santiago Bernabeu stadium.

"We can understand why they whistle, and we have to accept it as normal because the demands here are so high," Alonso said. "We want to turn things around, improve our mental and physical condition, and get the injured players back. There's still a long way to go." Spanish

Bembem, Ashalata named in AFC All-Time Dream XI

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
New Delhi

Indian football legends Bembem Devi and Ashalata Devi have been nominated for the AFC Women's Asian Cup All-Time Dream XI football team in recognition of their stellar performances in the continental showpiece.

Former captain Bembem, the only Indian woman footballer to have been conferred the Padma Shri, is one of the 12 midfielders nominated for the Dream XI team.

Both Bembem and Ashalata belong to Manipur, the women's football powerhouse in the country.

"During an international career spanning over two decades, Bembem Devi was the true leader of a generation of Indian women's footballers," the Asian Football Confederation (AFC) said.

"She was the captain of the Blue Tigresses during their AFC Women's Asian Cup appearance in 2003 and has been adjudged the AIFF Women's Player of the Year twice. India's third most capped player has won several domestic and international honours laying the foundation for the rise of women's football in the South Asian nation."

India could not get past the group stage in the 2023 Women's Cup, after winning against Uzbekistan (6-0) but losing to

eventual runners-up China (0-12) and Vietnam (1-2).

Ashalata captained the India in the 2022 edition of the Women's Asian Cup hosted by the country.

In a fateful tournament, several Indian players contracted COVID-19 despite being inside the bio-bubble. Hosts India played out a 0-0 draw against Iran in their first group match and then could not assemble team for the match against Chinese Taipei.

"Ashalata Devi is one of the Indian women's national team's most accomplished defenders. A commanding centre-back, she made her AFC Women's Asian Cup debut in 2022. In 2019, she was named the AIFF Women's Player of the Year in recognition of her consistency and leadership," the AFC said.

"Known for her strength, aerial ability, and calmness under pressure, Ashalata has been instrumental in guiding and inspiring a new generation of Indian footballers."

Ashalata is one of the 12 defenders nominated for the Dream XI.

Five goalkeepers and 12 forwards were also nominated for the Dream XI, for which voting opened on November 21 and will continue till January 10, 2026.

The 2026 edition of the Women's Asian Cup will be held in Australia from March 1-21.



REAL MADRID TRIO BANNED FOR 2 MATCHES FOR REFEREE MISCONDUCT

ASSOCIATED PRESS
Madrid

Real Madrid players Dani Carvajal, Alvaro Carreras and Endrick were suspended for two games for their behavior toward the refereeing crew in a Spanish league match last weekend.

Defender Carreras was sent off in stoppage time in Madrid's 2-0 home loss against Celta Vigo, a match in which the hosts finished with nine men as Fran Garcia had already been shown a red card. Forward Endrick, an unused substitute, was sent off for complaining from the bench. Carvajal, who was on the bench but was not dressed for the game because of an injury, was accused of disrespecting the referees in the tunnel after the game at the Santiago Bernabeu stadium. Garcia, sent off with two yellow cards, was handed a one-game suspension.

Bastar Olympic opens with 3,500 participants; new team comprises surrendered Naxalites

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
Jagdalpur (Chhattisgarh)

Chhattisgarh Chief Minister Vishnu Deo Sai on Thursday asserted that his government is committed to taking development to every village in the Bastar division, which he said is steadily moving towards peace, harmony and prosperity.

Addressing the 'Bastar Olympic 2025' at Indira Priyadarshini Stadium in Jagdalpur, the headquarters of Bastar district, he said the massive participation of youth, including the surrendered Naxalites and victims of Maoist violence, has made the

event historic.

Indian boxing legend MC Mary Kom was also present on the occasion.

Sai said the government is determined to connect the youth from tribal-dominated Bastar with the mainstream and ensure their active contribution to the region's development.

Winners of the Bastar Olympic would become role models and would be provided advanced training and opportunities to compete at international levels, he said.

The government will provide better opportunities and training to the youth of Bastar, preparing



Chhattisgarh CM Vishnu Deo Sai, back right, Deputy CM Arun Sao, center, Olympic medalist and Padma Vibhushan awardee boxer Mary Kom, back second left, Mayor Sanjay Pandey, left, and others holding the torch during the opening ceremony of Bastar Olympics at Jagdalpur in Bastar district Chhattisgarh

them for global competitions, said Sai.

Those winning gold, silver, and bronze medals in the international Olympic Games will be awarded honorariums of ₹3 crore, ₹2 crore, and ₹1 crore, respectively, he said.

Deputy CM Vijay Sharma, who also holds the Home portfolio, called the Bastar Olympic an important initiative to integrate youth from interior regions into the mainstream.

The government has been encouraging the youth from the remote areas of Bastar by providing them with more opportunities, and this initiative will continue

in an even more robust form in the future, he added.

Mary Kom met the participants and encouraged them.

State's Sports and Youth Welfare Director Tanuja Salam said around 3,500 athletes from all seven districts of Bastar division and 761 participants from the 'Nua Bat' team are competing in the division-level events (finals) in Bastar Olympic this year.

The Nua Bat (a term in local Halbi dialect which means a 'new path') team comprises surrendered Naxalites and victims of Maoist violence as partici-

pants.

Last year, the event saw 1.65 lakh participants in division, district and block levels. The number has surged to over 3.92 lakh, including more than 2.27 lakh women, this year, she said.

The final stage of the Bastar Olympic, featuring 11 sporting disciplines, including athletics, archery, badminton, football, karate, kabaddi, kho-kho, volleyball and tug of war, will be held from December 11 to 13.

Union Home Minister Amit Shah will attend the closing ceremony on December 13, officials said.