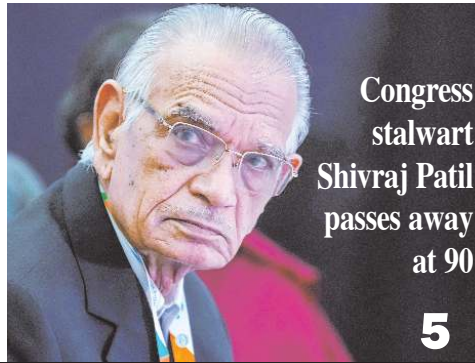


Godavari Pushkaralu to be held from June 26 to July 7 **2**



Govt to establish credit cooperative societies for welfare of all communities **3**

Indigo moves Delhi High Court for refund of ₹900 crore customs duty **4**



Congress stalwart Shivraj Patil passes away at 90 **5**

India lose 1-2 to Spain in FIH Junior Women's World Cup **12**



PIONEER IN SHORT

PAWAN HONOURS BLIND WOMEN CRICKETERS
Deputy Chief Minister Pawan Kalyan met the Indian women's blind cricket team, which won the World Cup. On Friday, at the camp office in Mangalagiri, the Deputy Chief Minister held a meeting with the cricketers, coaches, and support staff. On the occasion, Pawan congratulated the players for winning the World Cup and presented cheques of Rs 5 lakh each to the cricketers and Rs 2 lakh each...

FULL REPORT ON P2

POLICE ARREST 7, RECOVERS 29 STOLEN MOTORCYCLES

The Kakinada City Police have arrested a seven-member gang involved in a series of motorcycle thefts and recovered 29 stolen two-wheelers worth around Rs 14.50 lakh. Addressing the media on Friday, Superintendent of Police Garikapati Bindu Madhav said that four of the arrested individuals were receivers of stolen property. The recovered motorcycles...

FULL REPORT ON P3

SC SLAPS ₹1 LAKH COSTS ON NGO FOR FILING A WRIT PETITION AGAINST ITS VERDICT

The Supreme Court on Friday took strong exception to the filing of a writ petition that sought to challenge its earlier ruling which grants exemption to the minority schools from the provisions of Right to Education Act (RTE Act). The bench of BV Nagarathna and Justice R Mahadevan saw it as an attempt to bring down the judiciary of the country. "You cannot do this..."

FULL REPORT ON P4

MESSI'S GOAT INDIA TOUR SET TO DAZZLE

Argentine superstar Lionel Messi's long-awaited return to India, after a magical maiden visit back in 2011, will be high on glitz but low on actual football, promising a spectacle that may not recapture the raw sporting frenzy that once shook the Salt Lake Stadium here. His artistry in a competitive match will be missing this time. It would be quite unlike 2011 when more than 85,000 fans packed the stadium, some even perched on terrace edges, to watch Argentina edge...

FULL REPORT ON P12

QUOTE OF THE DAY



“ALL ARRANGEMENTS HAVE BEEN COMPLETED TO TRANSFER THE AMOUNT DIRECTLY TO THE ACCOUNTS OF 55,904 FARMERS WHO SUPPLIED THEIR PRODUCE TO GOVERNMENT MAIZE PROCUREMENT CENTRES

— THUMMALA NAGESHWAR RAO, TG AGRICULTURE MINISTER

CM aerial survey of key projects in north Andhra

PNS ■ Vishakhapatnam

Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu on Friday undertook an aerial survey of key development projects in the North Andhra region to assess their progress.

After a review meeting with officials on the Visakhapatnam Economic Region (VER), he conducted an aerial survey of projects such as Bhogapuram Airport, IT, tourism and others in a chopper, said an official release.

The CM reviewed the IT hub and Global Capability Centre (GCC) project works near Kapuluppada, where the Visakhapatnam IT Special Economic Zone (SEZ) has been expanded, and other projects.

Naidu issued instructions to officials to ensure efficient road connectivity to the Bhogapuram international airport and to accelerate the development of the associated township.

He also sought details on the proposal for an aviation university as part of the education hub planned at Bhogapuram.

The CM also issued directives to officials on road and rail connectivity, including logistics support for IT, pharma, industrial clusters, ports, and airports within the Visakhapatnam Economic Region. Comprising nine districts in total, the southern state aims to transform VER into a USD 135 billion economy by 2032.

CONTINUED ON >> P2



Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu conducting an aerial survey of key projects in north Andhra on Friday

Naidu lays foundation for Cognizant IT campus, 8 cos

He promises to make the port city the best livable city in the world

Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu has announced plans to transform Visakhapatnam into a world-class hub for knowledge and technology, aiming to provide the highest living standards. He praised the city for its natural beauty, pollution-free environment, and safety, noting that it is home to wonderful people. In an

exciting development, several top global companies, including Google, Microsoft, and Amazon, have expressed interest in establishing offices in Visakhapatnam.

The Chief Minister on Friday laid the foundation for a Cognizant IT campus and eight other companies here, entailing a total investment of Rs 3,700 crore.

CONTINUED ON >> P2



India and China hold talks on bilateral ties

PNS ■ Beijing

Senior officials from the foreign ministries of India and China have held a new round of consultations in Beijing, affirming positive progress in bilateral ties after a meeting between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Chinese President Xi Jinping in August. Sujit Ghosh, Joint Secretary of the East Asia Division of the Ministry of External Affairs, and Liu Jinsong, Director-General of the Department of Asian Affairs of the Chinese Foreign Ministry, held consultations on Thursday, a press release by the Chinese Foreign Ministry

here said. The two sides affirmed the recent positive progress in China-India relations and expressed their commitment to fully implementing the important common understandings reached between Modi and Xi during their meeting in Tianjin in August, it said.

Ghosh later called on Vice Foreign Minister Sun Weidong. During their meeting, Sun said PM Modi and President Xi had a successful meeting in Tianjin on the sidelines of the SCO summit, providing guidance on elevating China-India relations to a new level.

CONTINUED ON >> P2

Delhi HC gives social media platforms 7 days to act

PNS ■ New Delhi

The Delhi High Court on Friday directed social media intermediaries to act within seven days on Deputy Chief Minister Pawan Kalyan's plea seeking protection of his personality rights.

Justice Manmeet Pritam Singh Arora noted that the politician has already approached the social media intermediaries with his grievances. In a similar matter concerning actor Ajay Devgn, the court clarified while



granting him interim relief that the plaintiffs in such matters would have to first lodge their protest with the

social media intermediaries and then approach the court.

The court directed the social media intermediaries to treat Kalyan's plea as a complaint under the Information and Technology (Intermediaries Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules, 2021, and take the necessary steps within seven days.

It said that in case the social media intermediaries have any reservations about any links given by Kalyan, they should inform him.

Senior advocate J Sai Deepak, representing Kalyan, said the deputy CM was aggrieved by artificial intelligence (AI) videos of him circulating on Google, impersonation and fake association content on Meta and e-commerce platforms.

The court directed the plaintiff to provide the social media intermediaries within 48 hours URLs which he is seeking to be taken down. It listed the matter for further hearing on December 22.

CONTINUED ON >> P2

AMARAVATI AS PERMANENT AP CAPITAL

Govt seeks amendment to AP Reorganisation Act

PNS ■ New Delhi

The state government has requested the Centre to amend Section 5(2) of the Reorganisation Act to include Amaravati as the new capital of Andhra Pradesh with effect from June 2, 2024. Since the state government sought an amendment to the

Reorganisation Act to give legal status to Amaravati as the capital, the Union Home Ministry wrote a letter to the state government on the December 1 asking for clarity on the date from which it should come into effect. The State Chief Secretary has recently sent a letter to the Home Ministry clarifying the matter. He

requested the Centre to include in Section 5(2) of the Reorganisation Act that Amaravati shall be the capital of Andhra Pradesh from June 2, 2024. He informed the Union Home Secretary that since the Act states that Hyderabad will remain the common capital for ten years.

CONTINUED ON >> P2

YSRCP seeks permission for rallies

- The party also requested police to facilitate transport boxes containing signatures against medical colleges 'privatisation'

PNS ■ Amaravati

The YSRCP on Friday sought permission from Police chief to hold rallies while transporting boxes containing signatures opposing the alleged privatisation of medical colleges to the party central office in Tadepalli.

The opposition party conducted a signature campaign against the alleged privatisation of 10 government medical colleges under Public Private Partnership (PPP) mode.

"We request you (DGP Harish Kumar Gupta) to kindly issue necessary instructions to all district superintendents of police to grant permission for the rallies being organised at the district headquarters on December 15," said YSRCP state general secretary L Appi Reddy in a letter to the police official.

The opposition party, led by its supreme Jagan Mohan Reddy, plans to meet Governor S Abdul Nazeer on December 18 to submit one crore signatures collected against the alleged privatisation move. According to Appi Reddy, the signature boxes have reached the respective district headquarters from the constituencies, which they want to shift to YSRCP central office at Tadepalli in Guntur district.

The rallies will be conducted in an orderly and disciplined manner, after which the boxes will be transported to Tadepalli with full cooperation and adherence to security and traffic regulations

Cabinet approves scheme for conduct of Census 2027

PNS ■ New Delhi

The Union Cabinet chaired by the Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Friday, has approved the proposal for conducting Census of India 2027 at a cost of Rs 11,718.24 crore. The Indian Census is the largest administrative and statistical exercise in the world. The Census of India would be conducted in two phases: (i) Houselisting and Housing Census - April to September, 2026 and (ii) Population Enumeration (PE) - February 2027 (For the UT of Ladakh and

snow bound non-synchronous areas of UT of Jammu & Kashmir and states of Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand, PE shall be conducted in September, 2026).

About 30 lakh field functionaries will complete this gigantic exercise of national importance. Use of mobile app for data collection and the Central portal for monitoring purpose will ensure better quality data. Data dissemination will be much better and in a user friendly way so that all the queries on required parameters for



policy making will be made available on the click of a button. Census-as-a-service

(CaaS) will deliver data to ministries in a clean, machine-readable and actionable format.

Census of India 2027 will cover the entire population in the country. Implementation strate-

gy and targets: The Census process involves visiting each and every household and canvassing separate questionnaire for Houselisting & Housing Census and Population enumeration.

The enumerators, generally government teachers and appointed by the State governments, will be doing the field work of Census in addition to their regular duties. Other Census functionaries at Sub-district, District and State levels will also be appointed by the State/District Administration.



Govt giving land at throwaway prices to pvt players in Vizag: YSRCP

PNS ■ Visakhapatnam

YSRCP leader Gudivada Amarnath on Friday alleged that the TDP-led NDA coalition government is giving away prime land here at "throwaway prices" to corporates. The opposition leader asserted that Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu is now repeating what YS Jagan Mohan Reddy had earlier said about the port city, hinting at Naidu's concentration on Vizag.

On Friday, Naidu laid the foundation stone for a Cognizant IT campus and



eight more companies in Vizag entailing an investment of Rs 3,700 crore. "The NDA coalition government is giving away prime land at throwaway prices in the port city and

asserted what Jagan has been saying about Vizag is now being repeated by Naidu," said Amaranth, addressing a press conference here at YSRCP district office. Infosys came to

Visakhapatnam because of Reddy's initiative, asserted Amarnath, adding that even Tata Consultancy Services (TCS) entered the city owing to his efforts. However, he claimed that the erstwhile YSRCP government never gave prime lands to real estate firms at inexpensive prices or promoted their residential ventures. He claimed that while the Lulu Group spent crores of rupees to purchase land in Gujarat, it paid a nominal price in Andhra Pradesh.

Questioning the number of jobs created after the NDA alliance came to power,

Amarnath quizzed about how much public money was spent on allegedly promoting IT Minister Nara Lokesh.

The YSRCP leader said that when Jagan proposed making Visakhapatnam the executive capital, a negative campaign was run against the idea, but now the same media is elevating the city, "proving his stand right".

Amarnath further alleged that Naidu is taking full credit while sidelining junior partners in the NDA coalition.

Meanwhile, there was no immediate reaction from the TDP.

Pawan honours blind women cricketers

PNS ■ Amaravati

Deputy Chief Minister Pawan Kalyan met the Indian women's blind cricket team, which won the World Cup.

On Friday, at the camp office in Mangalagiri, the Deputy Chief Minister held a meeting with the cricketers, coaches, and support staff. On the occasion, Pawan congratulated the players for winning the World Cup and presented cheques of Rs 5 lakh each to the cricketers and Rs 2 lakh each to the coaches. He also honoured every woman cricketer with a silk saree, shawl, memento, Kondapalli dolls, and Araku coffee as gifts.

Later, Deputy CM Pawan said that the victory achieved by the women's blind cricketers is a matter of pride for the entire nation. He appealed to the Chief Ministers of all states to provide special facilities for the practice of blind cricketers and to extend support to them in all possible ways.

He said that the coal-



tion government in the state is promoting sports. He added that the issues raised by the women cricketers will be brought to the attention of Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu. Pawan Kalyan expressed happiness that Andhra Pradesh players Deepika (team captain) and Pangi Karuna Kumari are part of the World Cup-winning team.

As part of the meeting,

team captain Deepika brought the problems of her village to the notice of the Deputy Chief Minister. She requested better road facilities for her village. Responding to this, Pawan instructed officials to take the necessary steps. He also issued immediate orders to initiate action on the requests made by Karuna Kumari, a cricketer from Alluri Sitarama Raju district.

Naidu to visit Delhi on Dec 18, 19

PNS ■ Amaravati

Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu's two-day New Delhi tour has been finalised. He will visit the national capital on December 18 and 19 to hold a series of high-level meetings with Union Ministers and top officials on crucial issues pertaining to the state.

According to the schedule, the Chief Minister will leave Velagapudi Secretariat helipad at 5:00 pm on December 18 and reach Vijayawada Airport. He will depart for Delhi at 5:30 pm and stay overnight at One Janpath.

On December 18 night, CM Naidu is expected to meet several key leaders at the Centre along with senior officials. Similar meetings with



Union Ministers are likely to continue on December 19 as well. He is expected to discuss pending projects related to Andhra Pradesh, Central funding requirements, and approvals needed for major development programmes.

The Chief Minister will return to Vijayawada on December 19, departing from Delhi at 6:40 p.m. His visit gains significance as it coincides with the final day of the

Parliament's winter session, which concludes on December 19.

Meanwhile, Chief Minister Naidu conducted an aerial survey on Friday to review the progress of various ongoing projects in North Andhra. He examined construction works related to ports, airports, and IT infrastructure across multiple locations.

The CM also held discussions with senior officials on the status of major projects being developed in the Visakhapatnam Economic Region. Additionally, he reviewed the progress of the Bhogapuram Airport project, the Raipur-Visakhapatnam National Highway works, coastal road networks, and other connectivity projects in the region.

Three dead as auto falls into canal

PNS ■ Bapatla

Three people died in a road accident near Donepudi in Bapatla district. An auto-rickshaw fell into an irrigation canal, killing three people on the spot.

There were five passengers in the vehicle when the accident took place. Excessive speeding is believed to be the main cause of the accident. Two others were seriously injured in the incident, and their condition is said to be critical. They are undergoing treatment at the hospital. The



Ill-fated auto-rickshaw

deceased have been identified as Chattagadda Kantarao, Pesarlanka Srinivas, and Sheikh Ismail.

The vegetable vendors and daily wage workers are forced to travel by overcrowded auto-rickshaws as there is no other alternative for them.

Rs 588 cr for maize procurement

PNS ■ Hyderabad

Agriculture Minister Thummala Nageshwar Rao has announced the disbursement of Rs 588 crore for the procurement of maize. The Minister said that the amount will be deposited in the bank accounts of farmers Friday onwards. Rao added that all arrangements have been completed to transfer the amount directly to the accounts of 55,904 farmers who supplied their produce to government procurement centres. Despite receiving no support from the Centre, Telangana has taken up maize procurement to ensure farmers do not incur losses, he said. So far, Telangana has procured 2.45 lakh metric tonnes of maize. In a statement, Tummala said the government is committed to safeguarding farmers' interests and will continue to intervene whenever necessary to prevent distress.

Chambers Business Expo 2025 begins in Vijayawada

PNS ■ Amaravati

Information and Public Relations Minister Kolusu Parthasarathy on Friday inaugurated the Andhra Pradesh Chamber's three-day Business Expo 2025 in Vijayawada. The inaugural day of the expo featured seminars such as Driving manufacturing growth and Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSME) competitiveness in Andhra Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh Tourism - Emerging Trends and Challenges and other events, said an official press release from AP Chambers. Nearly 150 exhibitors dis-



played their products and services, while government departments such as Andhra Pradesh Capital Region Development Authority (AP CRDA) and

MSME Development Corporation showcased major initiatives, innovations and ongoing developmental programmes. Several officers, entrepreneurs and business men attended the event.

Godavari Pushkaralu to be held from June 26 to July 7

PNS ■ Rajahmundry

The auspicious time for the Godavari Pushkaralu has been finalised. The Godavari Pushkaralu will begin on June 26, 2027. They will be held for 12 days, from June 26 to July 7, 2027. The Andhra Pradesh government has officially announced these dates and issued orders to this effect. Regarding the dates and the muhurat (auspicious timing) for the Godavari Pushkaralu, TTD Asthana Siddhanti, Agama and Vedic scholars recently provided details to the AP

Endowments Department Commissioner.

After reviewing these, the government officially announced the dates. Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu will soon conduct a review meeting with officials on the arrangements for the Godavari Pushkaralu. Meanwhile, the AP Endowments Department officials recently held a meeting to decide on the dates for conducting the Godavari Pushkaralu in the state. Scholars from both Godavari districts, along with those from Ambedkar



Konaseema and Eluru districts, as well as TTD Asthana Siddhanti, participated. In this meeting, there was unanimous agreement that the Godavari Pushkaralu should be held from June

26 to July 7, 2027.

A report with these recommendations was sent to the government. Based on this report, the government officially declared the dates. Earlier, the Godavari Pushkaralu were held in

2015, from July 14 to July 25, during which 5.20 crore devotees took part in the holy dip. In Andhra Pradesh, the Godavari River flows through Eluru, East and West Godavari, and Konaseema districts. Lakhs of devotees are expected to visit these regions to take the holy bath in the river.

Accordingly, the State government will make necessary arrangements. As part of this, 14 departments, including 13 state departments and the Railways, will participate in the Pushkaralu preparations.

FROM PAGE - 1

CM aerial survey...

With a population of 1.65 crore people, 38,000 sq km of area, per capita income of USD 3,170 and a workforce of 70 lakh people, VER accounts for 23 percent population and 31 percent of the state's total area, said an official press release.

The state plans to develop the region through seven growth drivers such as global ports, next generation IT, agriculture, tourism, healthcare hub, planned urban housing and best infrastructure. Out of six ports, four are currently operational - Visakhapatnam, Ganga varam, Kakinada Deep Water and Kakinada Anchorage - while Kakinada Gateway and Mulapeta ports will be the new ones. VER aims to construct seven new railway projects, nine road projects, 77-km long Metro rail connectivity project and set up 12 manufacturing units, among others.

Further, the government aims to construct 7.5 houses (welfare), facilitate 10,000 hotel rooms construction, set up 20 medical and IT skilling colleges, add 5,000 hospital beds, develop 50 million sq ft of office space, and earmark 50,000 acres for industries and other facilities.

Naidu lays foundation...

Along with IT major Cognizant, these companies are expected to generate about 41,700 jobs.

"Cognizant is going to invest Rs 1,583 crore to establish the IT campus in Visakhapatnam, which is expected to provide employment to 8,000 people," an official press release said.

The government has allotted over 21 acres to Cognizant at Kapuluppada IT Hills in the port city, and the firm will construct a world-class Artificial Intelligence (AI) and a digital transformation IT campus in three phases there, it said.

Until the first phase is completed, Cognizant will operate temporarily from Mahati Fintech Building in Rushikonda IT Park, Hill-2, focusing on AI, machine learning, digital engineering, and cloud solutions.

IT Minister N Lokesh inaugurated the temporary campus, which will accommodate 1,000 employees. Other companies for which the CM laid the foundation stone include Tech Thammina, Satva Developers and Imaginnovate Tech Solutions India.

Addressing a meeting of Cognizant employees and

executives following the foundation stone laying ceremony, the Chief Minister called on the US \$ 34 billion IT major to expand its workforce to one lakh in Vizag in four to five years and promised to fulfil all its needs.

"Not just 5,000 employees or 10,000. You should start with 25,000 employees, and go to 50,000 and one lakh to become the biggest centre for Cognizant in India," said Naidu. Observing that there is no dearth of talent or leadership in the southern state, the CM noted that 150 IT companies are operating in the port city, which offers 20 percent lower cost of living when compared with other big cities. Highlighting that Vizag is growing fast with IT companies, he reminded that Google is setting up a US \$ 15 billion data centre there and promised to make the city 'pollution-free' by incorporating the Net Zero concept.

He promised to make the port city the best livable city in the world, projecting that it will rise to be a US \$ 130 billion economic region by 2032. Underlining that offering land at just Rs 0.99 per acre has turned out to be a game-changer, he recalled that a similar strategy was followed for Tata Motors'

Nano car manufacturing plant in Gujarat.

Naidu said Vizag and Andhra Pradesh will become the address for the future knowledge economy, underscoring that the southern state will also become home to a Quantum Valley, among several other futuristic technologies. According to Naidu, Cognizant is interested in coming to India for its public issue. He appreciated the company for starting operations within 11 months of proposing. According to the TDP supremo, Andhra Pradesh has attracted Rs 20 lakh crore worth of investments with the potential to create 23 lakh jobs in the past 18 months. Naidu asserted that India will emerge as the number one country in the world and Indians most influential by 2047. Naidu reiterated that Prime Minister Narendra Modi is the right leader for India at the time, calling his leadership the biggest advantage for the country. Moreover, he said Andhra Pradesh will strive to achieve a growth rate of 15 per cent.

Nine killed, 23 injured...

Mothugudem police station booked a case under Section 106 (which deals with

causing death by rash and negligent driving) of BNS. Meanwhile, Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu expressed anguish over the accident. The Chief Minister spoke to officials over the accident to enquire about the treatment being offered to the injured persons, said an official press release.

Officials informed Naidu that the injured persons were shifted to Chinturu hospital and other hospitals for better treatment. Meanwhile, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Friday condoled the loss of lives in a bus accident in Andhra Pradesh's Alluri Sitharama Raju district.

The Prime Minister also announced an ex-gratia of Rs 2 lakh from the Prime Minister's National Relief Fund for the next of kin of each deceased and Rs 50,000 for the injured.

"My thoughts are with the affected people and their families during this difficult time. Praying for the speedy recovery of the injured," a PMO statement said. Nine people were killed and 23 injured after a bus fell off a ghat road and turned turtle in Alluri Sitaramaraju district on Friday.

Govt announces...

Afterwards, he visited the injured receiving treatment at Chinturu Area Hospital. On this occasion, the government announced the compensation. Ministers Anita and Sandhya Rani rushed to the spot and supervised the ongoing rescue operations. Later, Minister Anita visited the victims at Chinturu Government Hospital and consoled them.

She also said that during winter, vehicles would be stopped on the ghat road between 10 pm and 6 am, and that communication systems would be improved in tribal areas.

Govt seeks amendment...

It would be appropriate to designate Amaravati as the capital of Andhra Pradesh from June 2, 2024.

Based on this, it is learnt that the Home Ministry is preparing a Cabinet note and will take it before the Union Cabinet. There is information that the Cabinet may approve it by the end of December. The amendment bill may be introduced in the budget session to be held next February.

Union Minister of State for Rural Development and

Communications Pemmasani Chandrasekhar made it clear that no matter how many Jagan Mohan Reddys come and go, they cannot stop the amendment to the Act. He said that even if it is delayed by a month or so, the bill will definitely be passed by Parliament and a Gazette notification will be issued.

Delhi HC gives...

Kalyan, who is associated with the Janasena Party (JSP), approached the high court seeking to prevent the unauthorised use of his name and images by social media platforms and e-commerce websites, and to protect his personality rights. The right to publicity, popularly known as personality rights, is the right to protect, control and profit from one's image, name or likeness. Recently, Bollywood actors Aishwarya Rai Bachchan, her husband Abhishek Bachchan and her mother-in-law Jaya Bachchan, Hrithik Roshan and Devgn, filmmaker Karan Johar, singer Kumar Sanu, Telugu actor Akkineni Nagarjuna, 'Art of Living' founder Sri Sri Ravi Shankar, journalist Sudhir Chaudhary and podcaster Raj Shamani also approached the high

court seeking protection of their personality and publicity rights. The court granted them interim relief.

Bollywood actor Salman Khan, Telugu actor NTR Rao Junior and former cricketer Sunil Gavaskar have also approached the Delhi High Court seeking protection of their personality rights.

India and China hold...

He expressed hope that both sides will effectively deliver on the important common understandings reached between their leaders, embrace a broader vision, build mutual trust, make solid efforts, work steadily to advance cooperation, respect each other, properly manage differences, and promote the continuous development of China-India relations, the release said.

It quoted Ghosh as saying that India-China relations are very important. India is willing to work together with China, under the strategic guidance of the leaders of both countries, to resume institutional dialogue, strengthen exchanges and cooperation, and consolidate the development momentum of India-China relations, he said, the release added.



pioneer impact

Committee constituted to probe 'irregularities' in APCOB, DCCBs and PACS

PNS ■ Amaravati

The Andhra Pradesh Legislature Secretariat has announced that the Speaker has constituted a seven-member Special Committee on September 18 to investigate allegations of corruption and irregularities in APCOB, District Cooperative Central Banks (DCCBs), and Primary Agricultural Cooperative Societies (PACS).

It may be recalled that The Pioneer carried a story with a headline "Most of the Primary Agricultural Credit Society in Red." The committee will be chaired by N Amaranath Reddy, with Kuna Ravikumar, Dhulipalla Narendra Kumar, Boliseti Srinivas,

Yarlagadda Venkatrao, Burla Ramanjaneyulu, and Tenali Sravan Kumar as members. The Secretariat said that individuals wishing to submit petitions or complaints to the committee may do so in writing to the Assistant

Secretary, Legislature Secretariat, Room No. 227-C, First Floor, Legislative Assembly Buildings Complex, Velagapudi, Amaravati. Submissions may also be made via telephone at +91-863-2449177 or through e-mail at apl.apcob@gmail.com, Secretary General Prasannakumar Suryadevara stated in the release.



Govt to establish credit cooperative societies for welfare of all communities

PNS ■ Amaravati

In an important announcement, the state government has plans to establish Credit Cooperative Societies modelled after the Brahmin Cooperative Credit Society. This was revealed by S Savitha, the Minister for Backward Classes, EWS Welfare, and Handlooms and Textiles, during a recent meeting with various chairpersons and directors from EWS and Kapu Corporations at the Secretariat.

The Minister highlighted that these societies will be set up in each constituency, with an emphasis on giving EWS individuals priority in MSME parks, aiming to foster entrepreneurship within households by encouraging at least one entrepreneur per family.

The review session primarily targeted enhancing economic development among EWS groups through corporation-led welfare initiatives. Minister Savitha engaged in discussions with representatives from different communities, including Brahmin, Arya Vysya, Kamma, Reddy, Kshatriya, and Kapu. She reaffirmed the govern-



Minister for Backward Classes EWS Welfare S Savitha speaking at a review meeting in Amaravati on Friday

ment's dedication to the comprehensive empowerment of these communities and pointed out that the upcoming 2025-26 Budget has earmarked Rs 10,608.61 crore for EWS and EBC corporations. This includes substantial allocations of Rs 4,884.83 crore for the Kapu Corporation, Rs 1,946.36 crore for the Reddy Corporation, and Rs 1,711.42 crore for the Kamma Corporation, along with allocations for Brahmin, Arya Vysya, and Kshatriya Corporations.

Emphasising the government's commitment to Kapu welfare, Savitha noted that the previous

administration under Chandrababu Naidu had completed long-pending district-level Kapu buildings in Visakhapatnam and Nellore, and had recommenced projects that were left unfinished in Tirupati and Kurnool. She mentioned that the remaining work on 39 partially completed Kapu mini community halls will be addressed promptly.

Additionally, the Minister announced the reinstatement of the foreign education scheme for EWS students, highlighting that between 2014 and 2019, 2,234 students benefited from the NTR Foreign

Education Scheme, which received a funding allocation of Rs 244 crore from the State government.

Minister Savitha also indicated that all welfare initiatives aimed at EWS communities from 2014 to 2019 will be reintroduced. The meeting was attended by various stakeholders, including EWS corporation chairpersons Kottapalli Subbarayudu, Doondi Rakesh, Brahmayya Chowdary, Buchchi Ramprasad, Suryanarayana Raju, alongside directors, representatives from caste associations, and senior officials, including Special Chief Secretary K. Sunitha.

Tiruvuru MLA sparks political controversy again

PNS ■ Tiruvuru

The episode involving Tiruvuru MLA Kolikapudi Srinivasa Rao from NTR district has once again become a headache for the TDP. Through his WhatsApp status updates, he targeted his own party leaders. He posted status on WhatsApp saying, "What are you the president of? A gambling club? If you've opened an office for gambling, you're truly royal... day and night match near Kondaparla Gattu."

It is being widely reported that these status was aimed at a TDP functionary in Vissannapeta mandal under the Tiruvuru constituency. It is said that the MLA accused functionary of running gambling activities for a long time. The functionary is believed to belong to the group led by Vijayawada MP Kesineni Chinni. The WhatsApp status become a hot topic in Tiruvuru.

Srinivasa Rao has been caught in controversies one after another. Earlier, his comments on belt shops in Tiruvuru and on local TDP leaders created a stir. At that time, the TDP high command reprimanded him. Later, his meeting with former minister Peddiredy



Ramachandra Reddy at the airport created flutter.

However, the MLA clarified that he only greeted Peddiredy when he happened to see him at the airport, and said there was no political significance. He also said he conveyed the same clarification to the party leadership. While everyone thought that controversy had settled, he sparked another one—this time targeting his own party MP. He made sensational allegations against Vijayawada MP Kesineni Sivanath (Chinni), claiming that the MP collected money from him in exchange for the party ticket to him. He posted supposed bank statements on social media to support the claim. This episode went on for a few days, prompting Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu himself to intervene. He warned that the party would not tolerate leaders who acted in ways that damage the TDP.

Cops are at beck and call of corporators, says ex-minister

PNS ■ Nellore

Former minister M Anil Kumar Yadav has taken aim at the Nellore police, accusing them of neglecting their duties and are at the beck and call of the corporators." He claimed that the TDP is misusing law enforcement and expressed his frustration over what he called the extreme "anarchic rule" of the coalition government.

In a press conference on Friday, Anil Kumar Yadav remarked, "The YSRCP is strong in Nellore city. The TDP has faced a moral defeat. They are engaging in low politics by using the police as a shield. We have a situation where the 5th Division corporator, Ravichandra, has been kidnapped, and Minister Narayana is participating in cheap political tricks."

He highlighted the irony of some corporators moving a no-confidence motion against a Mayor not affiliated with the YSRCP, while certain factions continue to criticise the party. "It's crucial to address the facts about the corporation issue. All 54 corporators were elected on the YSRCP ticket. They have been coaxed into the TDP through promises or threats. At this time, eleven corporators



Former minister Anil Kumar Yadav speaking to the media in Nellore on Friday

remain loyal to YSRCP, and just yesterday, five of them returned to the party. Additionally, one corporator has been arrested," he said.

Politics in Nellore are experiencing an unexpected twist as the no-confidence motion against the Mayor approaches on December 18. Several corporators, who had previously departed from the YSRCP to join the TDP, made a return to the YSRCP. However, within hours after rejoining, corporator Obili Ravichandra posted a video declaring his intention to stay with the TDP. He emphasised that everyone was aware of the events that transpired on Thursday and confirmed his allegiance to the

TDP. Sources indicate that fellow corporators Obili Ravichandra and Maddineni Sridhar, the son of Maddineni Mastanamma, have opted to remain loyal to the TDP.

The YSRCP, however, presented a contrasting narrative, claiming that Obili Ravichandra was abducted shortly after switching parties. They allege that as Ravichandra was making his way back to Nellore, he was taken by individuals identifying as police officers.

Adding to the drama, Ravichandra reiterated his commitment to the TDP in a video release, intensifying the intrigue surrounding Nellore's political atmosphere.

CSMRS team inspects Polavaram Project materials

PNS ■ Polavaram

A three-member expert team from the Central Soil and Materials Research Station (CSMRS) under the Union Jal Shakti Ministry conducted a field visit to the Polavaram Irrigation Project on Friday to assess the quality of materials intended for the construction of the Earth-cum-Rock Fill (ECRF) Dam. Scientists Harendra Prakash, Uday Bhanu Chakraborty, and Siddharth P. Hedao inspected soil, rock and

gravel sources, collected samples from borrow areas, and performed preliminary on-site tests. The samples will be sent for detailed laboratory examination to confirm their engineering suitability. The team also reviewed material quality in the Gap-1 and Gap-2 works. Water Resources Department engineers D Srinivas and Balakrishna, along with MEIL officials led by GM A. Gangadhar, accompanied the CSMRS scientists during the inspection.

Anganwadi workers stage protest demanding wage hike

PNS ■ Kakinada

Anganwadi workers affiliated with the AP Anganwadi Workers and Helpers Union, a CITU wing, staged a protest in front of the Collectorate on Friday to press for their key demands, including a wage hike and reduction of workload caused by multiple Apps.

Addressing the protesters, CITU district president Duvva Seshu Babji, Union district president Dadala Padma, and secretary Yerubandi Chandravathi said that Anganwadi workers' wages have not been revised for the past six years. They demanded a minimum monthly wage of Rs 26,000 in view of rising prices. They



Anganwadi workers staging a protest in Kakinada on Friday

also sought equal pay for workers in mini Anganwadi centres and urged the government to merge all work-related Apps to ease the burden on staff.

The leaders further called for an immediate halt to the proposed merger of Anganwadi centres with schools. Asha Workers Union

district general secretary Chandramalla Padma and CITU district general secretary Chekkala Raj Kumar also addressed the gathering, extending solidarity.

Later, a delegation met Joint Collector Apurva Bharat and submitted a memorandum outlining their demands.

'Govt committed to strengthening APSRTC'

PNS ■ Vijayawada

The State government is fully committed to protecting the Andhra Pradesh State Road Transport Corporation (APSRTC) and safeguarding the welfare of its workforce, said APSRTC Chairman Konakalla Narayana at the National Mazdoor Unity Association (NMUA) State Conference held at Indira Gandhi Municipal Stadium here on Friday. He emphasised that the success of the "Stree Shakti" initiative was possible only because of the cooperation of officers, employees and workers.

Inaugurating the conference along with Managing Director Dwaraka Tirumala Rao, the Chairman noted that workers played a vital role in keeping APSRTC operations on track, stating that the government is determined to strengthen the Corporation, while addressing workers' issues in a phased manner. He assured the workers that all key demands would be resolved without delay and reiterated the government's focus on both the survival of APSRTC and the welfare of its employees.

MD Tirumala Rao praised



APSRTC Chairman Konakalla Narayana speaking at the NMUA State Conference in Vijayawada on Friday

NMUA leaders for consistently bringing workers' issues to the management's notice and said several long-pending employee concerns—such as arrears—have already been cleared under the present government. Proposals have also been submitted to extend PRC benefits to APSRTC employees, he added.

Despite an overall rise in road accidents statewide, accidents involving APSRTC buses have reduced by nine percent, reflecting improved safety standards, he said. The government is also working towards providing accident insurance of Rs 1 crore for accidental deaths and Rs 10 lakh for natural

deaths and has recently approved EHS benefits for RTC employees.

APNGO Association State President A Vidyasagar said that employee unions, through the JAC, have taken up issues such as pending DAS, retirement benefits, gratuity and childcare leave directly with the Chief Minister. He thanked the government for extending the EHS scheme to RTC employees.

NMUA State President PV Ramana Reddy, who chaired the meet, said the association's consistent efforts have resulted in progress on multiple worker-related problems. He praised the proactive approach of

Chairman Narayana and MD Tirumala Rao in resolving issues and affirmed that the NMUA, with support from the AP JAC, will continue protecting workers' rights.

NMUA State General Secretary Y Srinivasa Rao said the association remains dedicated to resolving long-standing concerns and thanked all members for their unwavering support.

The event was attended by Vijayawada East MLA Gadde Rammoohan Rao, former MLC P Ashok Babu, APNGO State General Secretary D.V. Raman, APSRTC zonal chairmen and several NMUA leaders, women representatives and RTC workers.

Tungabhadra river waterway project not sanctioned: Union Min

PNS ■ New Delhi

The Union government has clarified in the Lok Sabha that no project has been sanctioned so far for the development of National Waterway-104 (Tungabhadra River) in Andhra Pradesh. Although the Inland Waterways Authority of India (IWA) has proposed setting up a floating jetty at the Suresh Kul Barrage to promote river cruise tourism, the project has not received approval, Union Minister for Ports, Shipping and Waterways Sarbananda Sonowal stated in a written reply.

Responding to a question raised by MP Kesineni Shivanath, the Minister confirmed that no funds have been sanctioned, released, or utilised in the last five years for the development of NW-104. Consequently, no multimodal connectivity or related development activities have begun. He further noted that no cargo movement has taken place on this waterway to date. Low water flow, check dams, barrages without navigation locks, and bridges without adequate clearance continue to pose structural challenges that prevent the operational use of this national waterway.

Police arrest 7, recovers 29 stolen motorcycles

PNS ■ Kakinada

The Kakinada City Police have arrested a seven-member gang involved in a series of motorcycle thefts and recovered 29 stolen two-wheelers worth around Rs 14.50 lakh. Addressing the media on Friday, Superintendent of Police Garikipati Bindu Madhav said that four of the arrested individuals were receivers of stolen property. The recovered motorcycles were connected to 20 cases, 18 under the Kakinada I Town Police Station, one under Kakinada III Town, and one under the Pedapudi Police Station limits.

Explaining the gang's modus operandi, the SP said they broke the locks of parked motorcycles using duplicate keys and later sold them to receivers at very low prices.

The arrested were identified as Yegi Vijay (28), Rajapuram, Rangampet Mandal, an old offender involved in 19 cases, Nilapu



Harsha Sai Vardhan (26), Neggipudi, Penumandra Mandal, previously involved in 3 cases, Chirla Jagan Mohan Reddy (22), Marteru, Penumandra Mandal, previously involved in 8 cases, Saladi Birla, Achanta, West Godavari, receiver, Medida Suryaprakasa Rao (25), Allavaram, Konaseema, receiver, Adabala Srinu, Penugonda, receiver, and Saladi Srinivas, Ravulapalem, Konaseema, receiver.

SP Bindu Madhav praised CCS Inspector V Krishna, I Town CI Nagadurga Rao, Crime SI Vinay Prathap, and I Town SI Swamy Naidu for their

swift work in detecting and investigating the case.

With the festive season approaching, the SP urged residents travelling out of town to ensure their homes are properly secured. He recommended using high-quality security locks and avoiding themselves of the Locked House Monitoring System (LHMS) offered by the police department.

Kakinada Sub-Divisional Police Officer Manish Devaraj Patil, District Special Branch DSP K. V. V. Satyanarayana, CCS Inspector V. Krishna, and I Town CI Nagadurga Rao were also present at the briefing.



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Indigo moves Delhi High Court for refund of ₹900 crore customs duty



IndiGo has moved the Delhi High Court seeking a refund of over ₹900 crore paid as customs duty on aircraft engines and parts re-imported into India after overseas repairs. The petition argued that the levy of customs duty on such re-imports was unconstitutional and amounted to double levy on the same transaction.

The matter was heard on Friday by a Division Bench of Justices Prathiba M Singh and Shail Jain. However, Justice Shail Jain recused from hearing the matter as her son is a pilot with IndiGo. The case will now come up before another Bench subject to the order of the Chief Justice.

The petition said that customs authorities compelled IndiGo to pay the duty to secure clearance of aircraft engines and other critical components. The airline submitted that unlike GST, which is self-assessed, customs clearance depends on the approval of officers and aircraft could not be grounded indefinitely. As a result, it paid the duty under protest across more than 4,000 bills of entry, amounting to over ₹900 crore, said the petition.

When IndiGo later filed refund claims, customs authorities refused on the ground that the airline must first seek reassessment of each bill of entry. IndiGo argued that it had paid duty under protest in every case and that speaking orders had already been passed on the protested assessments, against which appeals were filed.

Six people convicted in 2017 actress assault case get 20 years imprisonment

A court on Friday sentenced six people convicted in the 2017 actress assault case to 20 years of rigorous imprisonment. Ernakulam District and Principal Sessions Court Judge Honey M Varghese sentenced Sunil NS, also known as Pulsar Suni, Martin Antony, Manikandan B, Vijesh VP, Salim H, and Pradeep to 20 years of rigorous imprisonment for the offence of gang rape.

The court also ordered imprisonment for other offences, but they will run concurrently. The court also ordered the victim to be paid a compensation of ₹ five lakhs, and the pen drive containing the sexual assault visuals should be maintained in the custody of the investigation officer. On December 8, the court acquitted four accused, including actor Dileep.

The assault on the multilingual actress, after the accused allegedly forced their way into her car and held it under their control for two hours on February 17, 2017, had shocked Kerala.

Prime accused Pulsar Suni sexually assaulted the actress and recorded the act on video with the help of the other convicted persons in the moving car. Actor Dileep, who was accused of conspiring in the crime, was arrested during the investigation. However, after a nearly six-year trial, the court found him not guilty.

SC slaps ₹1 lakh costs on NGO for filing a writ petition against its verdict



The Supreme Court on Friday took strong exception to the filing of a writ petition that sought to challenge its earlier ruling which grants exemption to the minority schools from the provisions of Right to Education Act (RTE Act). The bench of BV Nagarathna and Justice R Mahadevan saw it as an attempt to bring down the judiciary of the country. "You cannot do this to Supreme Court. We are enraged.

This is against the entire system of judiciary in this country if you start filing such cases. You don't know the seriousness of your case. We are restraining ourselves to 1 lakh cost. Don't bring down the judiciary in this country by filing such cases," Justice Nagarathna remarked. The Court also questioned how advocates were

advising filing of such petitions against top court's own judgments. "What is happening here? Advocates are giving such kind of advice? We will have to penalise the advocates. You are law knowing citizens, professionals, and you file a writ petition challenging the judgement of this Court under Article 32? Grosset abuse! We are restraining ourselves. We are not issuing contempt," it said.

The Court ordered imposition of ₹1 lakh costs on the petitioner United Voice for Education Forum. "Let this be a message to others. You want to crumble the judiciary of this country," it said. The writ petition sought for a declaration that the exemption granted to minority educational institutions, as upheld in *Pramati Educational and Cultural Trust v Union of India* is unconstitutional to the extent that it grants blanket immunity to them from RTE obligations.

Ex-judges slam impeachment move against Justice Swaminathan

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

Fifty-six former judges on Friday issued a statement denouncing the attempt by the DMK to impeach Madras High Court judge Justice GR Swaminathan, saying it was a "brazen attempt to browbeat judges". On December 1, Justice Swaminathan held that the Arulmighu Subramania Swamy Temple was duty-bound to light the lamp at the Deepathoon, in addition to the customary lighting near the Uchi Pillaiyar Mandapam.

The single judge bench said that doing so would not encroach upon the rights of the adjacent dargah or the Muslim community. The order sparked a row, and on

December 9, several opposition MPs, led by the DMK, submitted a notice to Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla to move a motion for the removal of the judge.

The statement said, "This is a brazen attempt to browbeat judges who do not fall in line with the ideological and political expectations of a particular section of society. If such an attempt is permitted to proceed, it would cut at the very roots of our democracy and the independence of the judiciary."

It said even if the reasons mentioned by the signatory MPs were taken at face value, these were inadequate to justify resorting to such a rare, exceptional and serious constitutional measure of impeachment.



Justice GR Swaminathan

"The present move is not an isolated aberration. It fits into a clear and deeply troubling pattern in our recent constitutional history, where sections of the political class

have sought to discredit and intimidate the higher judiciary whenever outcomes do not align with their interests," said the statement signed by two former Supreme Court judges, five former Chief Justices of High Courts and 49 retired High Court judges.

It said the attempt was an attempt to weaponise impeachment as an instrument of pressure, which struck at the heart of judicial independence and the basic norms of constitutional democracy.

"The very purpose of the impeachment mechanism is to uphold the integrity of the judiciary, not to convert it into a tool of arm-twisting, signalling and retaliation."

"To wield the threat of removal as a means of com-

elling judges to conform to political expectations is to turn a constitutional safeguard into an instrument of intimidation," the statement said.

It said such an approach was anti-democratic, anti-constitutional and an anathema to the rule of law.

"Today, the target may be one judge; tomorrow, it will be the institution as a whole. We, therefore, call upon all stakeholders, MPs across party lines, members of the bar, civil society and citizens at large to unequivocally denounce this move," the statement said.

It said judges had to remain answerable to their oath and to the Constitution, instead of partisan political pressures or ideological intimidation.

It is completely immune, says SC, flags half baked running commentary on pending cases

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

Observing that half-baked truth and ill-informed running commentary on sub-judice cases affects public perception, the Supreme Court on Friday asserted that it is "completely immune" from reporting of cases for the sake of publicity or narrative building.

The observations were made when the top court was hearing a case concerning the repatriation of certain individuals deported to Bangladesh on the alleged ground that due process was not followed.

During the proceedings, the court was informed that Sunali Khatun, a pregnant woman, and her eight-year old son have come back to India and presently, she is getting medical attention at her father's residence in Birbhum in West Bengal.

A bench comprising Chief Justice Surya Kant and Justices Joymalya Bagchi and Vipul M Pancholi fixed January 6 to hear the Centre's appeal against a Calcutta High Court judgment that directed the repatriation of certain individuals deported to Bangladesh on the alleged ground that the due process was not followed.

During the proceedings, Solicitor General Tushar Mehta, appearing for the Centre, expressed strong disapproval of a news report published in an English newspaper regarding the issue. Terming the reportage as "tabloid-like," the top law officer said, "I do not want to escalate ... but attempts are made to build a particular kind of narratives" in a bid to influence the outcome.

The law officer said he was sure that the bench is not influenced by any such reports, but it does cast doubt about the intention to build a particular kind of narrative.

"My faith was shaken," Mehta said.

"We are completely immune from publicity and pseudo-publicity stunts. Narratives should not affect the lives of individuals," Justice Bagchi said. Advising the



CJI Surya Kant

law officer to "just ignore them", the CJI, however, said, "Ideally, ill-informed running commentary on sub-judice matters should not be made."

"The problem is half-baked distorted facts and ill-informed facts are being reported," he said. "Reporting that a matter is coming up (for hearing) is fine. But if you thrust your opinion, then that is an issue. The issue is with half-baked truth and ill-informed opinion which affects public perception," the CJI added.

Senior advocate Kapil Sibal, appearing for the West Bengal Government, referred to the media's role in recent times in countries like the UK and the US, and said immigration issues are part of a "global discourse" and comments and public discourses are held on social media and other platforms.

"People write opinions in the US and England on immigration. As long as you don't attribute motive, it is not sacrilege," Sibal said.

At the outset, senior advocate Sanjay Hegde brought to the court's attention the plight of another deportee, Sweetie Bibi, who remains stuck with her husband and two children.

Hegde offered to provide

documents proving their Indian citizenship. He urged the solicitor general to take up the other case on humanitarian grounds, saying, "that side of the border is very difficult for Indians."

The law officer assured Hegde that he will look into the issue and the verification may take sometime.

The court said once documents are verified, modalities for their return could be considered in a time-bound manner.

The case involves families who had been working as daily wagers in Delhi's Rohini area for two decades.

They were detained by police on June 18 on suspicion of being illegal Bangladeshi immigrants and deported on June 27.

The Calcutta High Court, in its impugned order, had observed that the deportation violated the Union Home Ministry's own protocols, which require an inquiry by the state Government before deportation.

The High Court had noted that the "overenthusiasm" in deporting the detainees disturbed the "judicial climate."

Sibal reiterated this point during the hearing and said, "The Union does not inquire for 30 days before deporting them."

OSA case: SC seeks CBI's reply on former R&AW official's plea seeking documents

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

The Supreme Court on Friday sought a response from the CBI on a former R&AW official's plea seeking documents relied upon by the probe agency in a trial against him under the Official Secrets Act.

A bench of Justices JK Maheshwari and Vijay Bishnoi issued the notice to the CBI seeking its reply on a plea by Major General VK Singh (retired).

Advocate Prashant Bhushan, appearing for Singh, submitted that the High Court on September 19 modified an order of the trial court and stated that the documents relied upon by the CBI in the case can only be inspected by the counsel for petitioner and not supplied to him owing to their sensitive nature. "It is normal procedure under Section 207 of the CrPC where the accused is supplied the document relied upon by the prosecution. The magistrate allowed supply of documents but the High Court modified it," Bhushan said.

Singh has served in the Research and Analysis Wing (R&AW) and has written a book in which certain allegations of corruption in procurement of equipment were made but the CBI booked him under the Official Secrets Act (OSA), Bhushan said.

The bench said it is seeking CBI's response on the plea and posted the matter for hearing after four weeks.

The CBI has registered a case against Singh on September 20, 2007, on a complaint that he allegedly revealed secret information by publication of his book titled 'India's External Intelligence — Secrets of Research and Analysis Wing'.

Search warrants were issued against Singh on September 20, 2007, and a compliance report was filed on September 24, 2007, in the court.

On April 7, 2008, the Centre authorised the filing of a complaint under Section 13(3) of the Official Secrets Act and a chargesheet was filed in the case under Sections 3 and 5 of the Official Secrets Act, 1923, and Sections 409 and 120B of the IPC on April 11, 2008, with request to keep the classified documents in sealed cover.

The trial court took cognisance of the chargesheet on January 31, 2009, for the offences under Sections 3 and 5 of the Official Secrets Act, 1923, and under Sections 409, 120B of the IPC.

On December 12, 2009, the chief metropolitan magistrate (CMM) allowed the application filed by the respondents under Section 207 of the CrPC and directed the CBI to supply the documents sought by Singh to them after moving appropriate application for desecration of the documents.

However, considering the sensitive nature of the documents, the CMM clarified that the documents supplied to the respondents would remain in the personal custody of the counsel representing Singh, who were to ensure that the documents are not circulated in any manner.

The Delhi High Court on September 19 noted that the CBI is not opposed to the inspection of the documents but in view of their sensitive nature, it sought that a hard copy of the same be not supplied to him. It said the court deems it expedient to allow the inspection of the documents sought by Singh as opposed to the supply of the copies of the documents to the counsel representing him.

"In view of the above, the present petition is allowed to the extent that the impugned order is modified and the respondents along with their duly authorised counsel are permitted to inspect the documents lying with the trial court as and when required to enable the respondents to effectively defend themselves during the trial," it had ordered.

Aggrieved by the order, Singh approached the top court challenging the High Court order.

On May 31, 2023, the High Court had refused to quash a CBI case registered against Singh and said whether the revelations in the book were likely to affect the sovereignty, integrity and security of the country was a matter of trial and what prejudices national security cannot be decided by courts.

Singh, who was a former joint secretary of India's external spy agency, earlier contended before the High Court that his intention to write the book was to highlight issues of lack of accountability and corruption in R&AW and the allegation of revealing secrets harmful to the country's security and sovereignty were totally baseless and unfounded. Singh retired from service in June 2002 and his book was published in June 2007. The FIR was registered against him in 2008.

Court to hear on Dec 18 UP Govt plea to withdraw Akhlaq lynching case

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Noida

A fast-track court at Surajpur in Gautam Buddha Nagar has fixed December 18 for hearing the Uttar Pradesh Government's application to withdraw the 2015 mob lynching case of Mohammad Akhlaq in Dadri, officials and counsel for the victim's family said on Friday.

The State Government has sought withdrawal of charges against all the accused in the case, which pertains to the killing of Akhlaq in Bisahda village under Jarcha police station area over rumours that beef was stored in his house.

The matter came up before the court of the Additional District and Sessions Judge, where the prosecution informed that it had moved the withdrawal plea in compliance with an order issued by the State's Justice Section-5 (Criminal), Lucknow, on August 26.

Yusuf Saifi, counsel for the Akhlaq family, told media, "The court has set December 18 as the date for hearing the application for withdrawal of the case against the accused in the mob lynching of Mohammad Akhlaq."

According to officials, the withdrawal application was filed by the Assistant District Government Advocate (Criminal) following directives from the Government and the Joint Director of Prosecution.

The plea cites restoration of social harmony as the reason for seeking withdrawal of the case.

The 52-year-old Akhlaq, a resident of Bisahda village in Dadri area of Gautam Buddha Nagar, was lynched to death on September 28, 2015 by a mob allegedly over suspicion that he had stored beef in his house.

The lynching case is being heard by a fast-track court here in which the judgment is awaited.

CAPF jawans face eviction, penalties over 2017 policy; plan to move SC

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

Hit by penalties and a near possibility of eviction of their families, hundreds of CAPF personnel — deployed in hard duty areas hit by Naxalism, terrorism and insurgency — have decided to petition the Supreme Court and the Union home ministry for succour, officials said on Friday.

The jawans and officers are worried for their families and finances with regard to an "adverse order" issued against them regarding the general pool residential accommodation (GPRA) houses provided by the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs (MoHUA) in metro cities of Delhi, Kolkata and Chandigarh to paramilitary forces personnel for keeping their families.

"Till 2017, the personnel were allowed to keep their families and children in these cities under the GPRA scheme for as long as they were deployed in hard areas.

"That year, a new rule was brought by the housing ministry restricting allotment of

these houses to these jawans and officers for only 3 years, jeopardising the education of their children and medical issues of their family members," a senior CAPF officer told PTI.

Ninety-five per cent of these personnel stayed in Delhi, where the MoHUA has said there was "an acute shortage of residential quarters and a long waiting list of eligible officers seeking accommodation."

A second officer said a number of the affected jawans and officers petitioned the Delhi High Court in 2020, and the court initially stayed the MoHUA order.

In July this year, the HC issued its final order and refused the personnel any relief, and they are now being served monetary penalty notices by the ministry for "overstaying" and for "eviction."

"Where do we go? How do we pay such high penalty amounts that are running into lakhs of rupees, and in one case, a jawan has been penalised for over ₹1 crore in the name of damage

charges?" a jawan said on the condition of anonymity.

All this is happening when we are still deployed in hard areas, tackling major internal security challenges that the country is facing. However, the MoHUA, in May this year, strangely granted a one-time exemption from this clause (Rule 43) to CPWD employees serving in border areas, a senior officer said.

The CAPF jawans and officers said this was a "step-motherly" treatment to them as they serve the country in high-risk and hard internal security duty areas.

A senior Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) officer said the MHA was "in cognisance of the issue and has held meetings with the MoHUA."

"A full solution regarding waiver of the penalty and extension of the GPRA scheme, like what was till the year 2017, is in works," he told PTI. The officer said the MHA had written a communication on December 2 to all CAPFs asking them to inform them about all such cases so that a "corrective" action can be taken.

States Focus



DISRUPT TERROR FINANCING IN J&K: LG TO POLICE

Jammu and Kashmir Lieutenant Governor Manoj Sinha on Friday directed police to disrupt terror financing pipeline in the Union territory, and effectively counter radicalisation attempts by separatist elements. The Lieutenant Governor (L-G) met the families of those killed in last month's accidental blast in Nowgam police station and handed over appointment letters on compassionate grounds, an official spokesman said. Referring to the busting of the "white collar" terror module involving doctors last month, Sinha said the whole country is proud of Jammu and Kashmir Police for stopping terror in its tracks by unearthing and dismantling the network. The spokesman said Sinha appreciated the police's meticulous investigation and multi-faceted effort to detect, disrupt and prevent terrorist acts. The L-G also directed senior officials to identify and disrupt terror financing and counter radicalisation attempts by separatist forces, the spokesman added.



SHAH TO UNVEIL VAJPAYEE'S STATUE: CM NAYAB SINGH SAINI

Haryana Chief Minister Nayab Singh Saini on Friday said Union Home Minister Amit Shah will unveil former prime minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee's statue at Atal Park in Panchkula on December 24. Saini said this after inspecting the arrangements for the event at Atal Park in Panchkula, according to an official release. He said that after unveiling the 41-foot-tall metal statue of the former prime minister, Shah will inaugurate a mega blood donation camp at Atal Park. He will also inspect an exhibition set up at the state BJP office, 'Panchkamal.' The Chief Minister said the Union home minister will then take the salute at the passing-out parade of about 5,000 police personnel at the Tau Devi Lal Sports Stadium, Sector 3. Shah will also attend the "Veer Bal Diwas" programme to be held the same day as the chief guest.

Congress stalwart Shivraj Patil passes away at 90

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Mumbai

Veteran Congressman Shivraj Patil, who served as the Lok Sabha Speaker and also served as Union Home Minister, passed away at his hometown Latur in Maharashtra on Friday morning. Patil, 90, passed away at his residence 'Devghar' after a brief illness, as per family members, adding his funeral will be held on Saturday.

He is survived by his son Shailesh Patil, daughter-in-law Archana, who unsuccessfully contested the assembly polls last year on a BJP ticket against Congress' Amit Deshmukh from Latur city, and two granddaughters.

President Droupadi Murmu, Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis, NCP (SP) chief Sharad Pawar, Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge, Lok Sabha Leader of Opposition Rahul Gandhi and many others offered condolences and paid tributes to Patil.

Patil remained a Congress and Nehru-Gandhi family loyalist till his last days and held several key constitutional and ministerial posts during a public life spanning more than five decades. The veteran politician faced severe public and media backlash as Union Home Minister in 2008 when he was seen in three different sets of clothes on the night of November 26 when Mumbai was facing unprecedented attacks from ten heavily-armed Pakistan-trained terrorists.

Defending himself over the criticism, he had said people should criticise policy, not clothes. The sheer scale of the Mumbai attacks weighed heavily on Patil's political career and made his position in the Union Cabinet virtually untenable, leading to his resignation on November 30, 2008.

Born on October 12, 1935, Patil began his political journey as the president of Latur municipality between 1966 and 1970 and was subsequently elected as an MLA for two terms. He held key



posts in the Maharashtra assembly, including Deputy Speaker and Speaker, between 1977 and 1979. He then went on to win the Latur Lok Sabha seat seven times and was the 10th Speaker of the Lok Sabha from 1991 to 1996. He lost to BJP's Rupatai Patil Nilangekar in the 2004 Lok Sabha elections.

He was also a Rajya Sabha member. The Congress leader held several key portfolios in the Union Cabinet, including Home, Defence, Commerce, and Science and Technology. Patil was the Governor of Punjab and also served as Administrator of the Union Territory of Chandigarh from 2010 to 2015.

In 2022, speaking at a book launch, he courted controversy for claiming that the concept of "jihad" was present not just in Islam but also in the Bhagavad Gita and Christianity. In March 2025, he had met Prime Minister Narendra Modi in Delhi with his family. Calling Patil a distinguished parliamentarian and statesman,

Fadnavis said his demise was deeply saddening.

As Speaker of the Lok Sabha, Patil initiated and supported several innovative parliamentary practices, earning respect across the political spectrum. Sharad Pawar said Patil played a significant role in the politics of both Maharashtra and the nation, harmoniously blending the Congress ideology with his unwavering commitment to resolving people's issues.

"In every position he held, his work consistently reflected justice for the common man," said the NCP (SP) chief. Pawar said he pushed for modernisation and computerisation of the House. "The Outstanding Parliamentarian Award was also started during his tenure," said Pawar in a statement.

Patil was also known for his vast reading, meticulous study, and articulate presentation. His command over Marathi, English, and Hindi, along with his exceptional grasp of constitutional matters, made him a much-respected parliamentarian of his time.

Bengal SIR: 58 lakh names marked for deletion

SAUGAR SENGUPTA
■ Kolkata

About 58 lakh names of voters have been marked for deletion after Thursday, the last date of completion of Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls in Bengal, sources in the office of the State Chief Electoral Officer said.

This number is apart from about 29,000 forms, which were not returned by the voters. This is also apart from those names which are likely to be summoned for hearing in days to come, sources said, adding a preliminary impression shows that there is a huge discrepancy in the forms that have been submitted.

"This could be tens of lakhs... that is, such a large number of people is likely to be summoned for hearing," an official said, adding the exact number of names likely to be deleted after the digitisation of forms completed and uploaded on December 11 is 58.08 lakhs. Considering the fact that this figure was obtained at about 12 pm on Thursday, the total number of deletions could further go up beyond 60 lakh, sources said.

The breakdown of the numbers till Wednesday was: 24.25 lakh deceased voters, 12.05 lakh voters who could not be traced, 19.93 lakh voters marked as 'shifted', 1.38 lakh identified as bogus, and 57 lakh categorised under 'others'.



Sources in the Election Commission said that "a good number of names may fail the hearing session as there are a large number of people who have the same numbers or same parental names or addresses... the discrepancy is considerable," adding one would not be surprised if the

number goes beyond 50 lakh more.

Incidentally, Bengal Opposition Leader Suwendu Adhikari had on several occasions said that there could be more than 1 to 1.5 crore fake voters in Bengal. "We are confident that there are more than 1 crore voters including Bangladeshi Muslims and

Rohingyas in Bengal and they have been voting for the Trinamool Congress... these names have to be deleted," he said on Thursday adding, "several lakh of them have still managed to creep into the voters' lists with the help of the BDOs and booth level officers... we ask the ECI to catch these people and deport them to Bangladesh."

Adhikari's statement came hours after Bengal Chief Minister asked the "mothers and sisters of Bengal" to "remain prepared with your kitchen tools to resist the deletion of names from voters' lists... because if a single name is deleted I will descend on the street and hold a dharna with the help of the people."

Six months of AI crash: UK dreams shattered following loss of loved ones

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ Ahmedabad

The tragic crash of Air India flight AI 171 in June has compelled some of the victims' kin to abandon their dreams of a life in the United Kingdom.

Surat-resident Hiren Dayani's mother Kailashben was one of the 260 persons who were killed when the Boeing 787-8 aircraft on its way to London crashed into a medical hostel complex shortly after it took off from Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel International Airport here on June 12.

After her mother's death, Dayani, who lost his father to cardiac arrest some time ago, left his high-paying job in London and permanently shifted to Surat with his wife Namrata to start a new life. In London, he was working as a clinical research scientist, while his wife worked as a dental therapist.

"I went to London in 2020 after finishing my M Pharm, and had planned to acquire a PR (permanent residency) so that my wife and I can easily travel between two countries and stay for a longer period in India with my mother. She was travelling to London alone when the tragedy struck," said Dayani.

After his father's death, Kailashben was the sole caretaker of Dayani's intellectually disabled younger sister.

"Now, since there is no one back here to look after my sister, I have decided to come back to Surat and start from scratch. My wife and I were offered some jobs, but the salaries were too low compared to what we used to get in the UK," he said. "So my wife has opened a dental clinic, and I am in the process of starting my own pharmacy," he added.

Harish Godhaniya from Bhanvad town in Devbhumi Dwarka district lost his wife Riddhi and three-year-old son in the crash as they were returning to London following her dental surgery. Godhaniya, who now lives in Jamnagar with his parents, said he is not going back to the UK where he was working as a data analyst for the last three years.

"I am not going back. I had planned to settle in the UK to have a better future for my son. But now, it has no meaning because my wife and son are no more," he said.

"My wife and I were doing jobs in London and we had planned to settle there. But everything is over. I have not planned anything yet because I am yet to get over the loss," he added.

Jeevika Didis playing major role in overall Bihar development: CM

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Patna

Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar on Friday praised the efforts of Jeevika Didis saying their "hard work is playing a major role in the overall development of the State". 'Jeevika Didis' are women associated with self-help groups under the Bihar Rural Livelihoods Project.

The CM, during a visit to Haridih panchayat in Rajauli block of Nawada district, interacted with students and 'Jeevika Didis', and distributed cheques to beneficiaries of various Government schemes.

According to a statement by the Chief Minister's Office (CMO), "Interacting with Jeevika Didis, the CM praised their work and said it is because of their efforts the economic condition of people living in rural areas is improving rapidly. Your hard work is playing a major role in the overall development of the state".

The CM added that the Government is providing all possible assistance to Jeevika Didis so that every household can progress. "Earlier, women had to depend on their families for



money, which used to cause stress at home. But now, due to various Government schemes, people, especially Jeevika Didis, are earning and contributing to their households," he said.

Launched in 2006, the Bihar Rural Livelihoods Project, popularly known as Jeevika, aimed to reach 4,000 villages across 42 blocks in Gaya, Khagaria, Madhubani, Muzaffarpur, Nalanda, and Purnia districts, benefiting 5.9 lakh households.

The main objective was to enhance the social and economic empowerment of the rural poor in Bihar. Now, Jeevika Didis have spread across the State and through their initiatives with the help of the State

Government, lakhs of women are gaining financial literacy, starting enterprises, and transforming their communities in the State.

Kumar also interacted with schoolgirls undergoing self-defence training. "Study with full dedication. You all are the future of India. Whatever support you need, the Government will provide," he said. The CM inspected the Har Ghar Nal Ka Jal scheme, ensuring supply of safe drinking water to every household.

"Earlier, people had to fetch water from far-away wells or hand-pumps. Due to safe drinking water supply, water-borne diseases have reduced substantially," the CMO statement said.

Zubeen death case: Promise made to people fulfilled with filing of chargesheet: Himanta

TONY DAS
■ Guwahati

Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Friday asserted that the promise made to the people of the State in connection with singer Zubeen Garg's death has been fulfilled with the filing of the chargesheet by the Special Investigation Team (SIT) within the stipulated time frame.

"We had taken the responsibility of ensuring justice to Zubeen Garg and we fulfilled this with the SIT submitting the charge sheet within a record time in the court today," Sarma said on the sidelines of a programme in Kokrajhar.

Some of the accused have been charged with murder, and "now I am sure that the court will conduct the trial and give necessary punishment to the accused", he said. The SIT on Friday charged four of the seven accused with murder in its charge sheet filed in a Guwahati court.

The murder accused are the chief organiser of the North East India Festival, Shyamkanu Mahanta, Garg's secretary Siddhartha Sharma, and band members



Shekhar Jyoti Goswami and Amritprava Mahanta.

Garg's cousin and suspended Assam Police officer Sandipan Garg has been charged with culpable homicide not amounting to murder, while two of the singer's personal security officers (PSOs) — Nandeswar Bora and Pareswari Baishya — have been charged with criminal breach of trust.

Barring the two PSOs, the five accused had accompanied Garg to Singapore where he died under mysterious circumstances while swimming in the sea on September 19.

"We all know that the

court is impartial. Now, the entire responsibility lies with the court of law. We must all respect the process of the law," Sarma said.

On the issue of hearing the case in a fast-track court, the CM said the Government will have to talk with the chief justice in this matter.

"There is a procedure to be followed. The case will go from the CJM's court to that of the sessions judge, and only after that, the issue of fast-track court and special prosecutor will come up," he said.

Sarma had said earlier that the state government will request the Gauhati High

Court to set up a fast-track court for hearing Garg's death case.

The Assam cabinet had also decided to appoint a special public prosecutor on the recommendation of the advocate general, who will be engaged exclusively for the hearing of the case from the filing of the charge sheet to the delivery of justice.

He further said that now that the SIT had already submitted the charge sheet on the case related to Garg, "we will now move on to the case of Gaurav Gogoi".

The Assam Government had constituted an SIT to probe into the alleged Pakistani links of state Congress president Gaurav Gogoi and his British wife Elizabeth Colburn.

The SIT had submitted the report on September 10 to the Chief Minister, who claimed that the investigating agency had "unearthed startling facts which point towards a larger conspiracy aimed at undermining the sovereignty of our nation".

Sarma has been attacking Gogoi and his wife over the last few months, alleging that they have a connection with the Pakistani intelligence agency ISI.

CM Mohan Yadav hails progress in jobs, education as MP Govt completes 2 years

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Bhopal

Chief Minister Mohan Yadav marked the completion of two years in office by presenting a detailed account of the Government's performance, outlining sector-wide achievements across welfare delivery, infrastructure expansion, law enforcement, youth support and economic growth.

Addressing mediapersons, on Friday, the Chief Minister said the administration has focused on decisive governance, accelerated development and reforms that directly impact citizens.

According to him, improving law and order has remained a central priority. Operations against land mafia, mining mafia and

organised crime were intensified, while a zero-tolerance framework was adopted for crimes against women and children.

Urban policing, digital surveillance and coordinated enforcement have been strengthened to enhance safety across cities. Parallel to this, municipalities initiated major urban-improvement campaigns — beautification of public spaces, solid-waste modernisation and Smart Road projects in key urban centres.

Youth empowerment has been positioned as a cornerstone of the Government's agenda. More than 5.28 lakh young beneficiaries were supported through employment-linked schemes, while the state scaled up skill training and industrial placements.



Officials said Madhya Pradesh continues to register one of the highest industrial growth rates in the country, supported by new industrial corridors, MSME incentives and growing investor interest.

Tourism and cultural development also recorded substantial progress. Projects around Mahakal Lok, Omkareshwar and other religious destinations have been executed to strengthen the state's position as a spiritual tourism hub. Preparations for Simhastha 2028 have begun, with large-scale infrastructure upgrades under way — including bridge construction, road expansion and telecom-network augmentation.

The Government report highlights extensive gains in irrigation, agriculture and water manage-

ment. Under the Jal Ganga Abhiyan and multiple large irrigation projects, efforts to double the state's irrigated area have accelerated. The administration stressed that major schemes in groundwater recharge, micro-irrigation and canal modernisation are now providing long-term support to farmers.

Welfare programmes have seen notable expansion over the past two years. Support under PM Kisan Samman Nidhi, Ladli Behna Yojana, housing schemes and tribal-welfare initiatives formed a substantial part of the State's social safety net.

Healthcare infrastructure has undergone parallel strengthening, with 52 Maternal and Child Health wings completed and upgrades in 935 PHCs and CHCs,

alongside expansion of ambulance and emergency services.

Infrastructure development remained one of the most visible areas of progress. The State added or upgraded more than 3,200 km of roads, expanded rural connectivity under PMGSY, and pushed forward energy reforms including the addition of 8,800 MW in solar capacity. Airport upgrades, mobility improvements and new logistics infrastructure are also under implementation.

The Chief Minister said the Government will continue to prioritise transparent governance, rapid development and citizen-focused delivery, adding that Madhya Pradesh is positioned to build on these gains in the coming years.



Editor's TAKE

SAARC: A regional dream needing renewal

At 40, SAARC is not obsolete. It is underutilised. Its future depends not on rewriting its Charter but on renewing its political imagination

Forty years ago, South Asia envisioned a regional alliance that would serve the collective interests of a region home to one-fifth of humanity. Inspired by successful models like ASEAN, leaders believed that shared history and geography could form the foundation for meaningful cooperation. Yet the promise of this vision remained unfulfilled. While other regional blocs prospered, SAARC – the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation – struggled to take off. Despite its lofty ideals and sincere efforts, political fault lines repeatedly overshadowed the organisation's purpose, preventing the region from realising the benefits of true collaboration.

As South Asia marked the 40th anniversary of the SAARC Charter in Kathmandu this week, it is time to reflect on what exactly happened and why the region that needs cooperation could not cooperate. In Kathmandu, the occasion was rich in symbolism and sober in its reminders. Diplomats, policymakers, and representatives from across the region gathered to commemorate a vision conceived in 1985 - one that aspired to bind the subcontinent in cooperation, dialogue, and shared progress. Despite the lip service to it, the big question is where SAARC stands today, and whether it can reclaim the promise it once held or it is time to give it an august requiem. SAARC's journey over four decades can be described in two words – hope and hesitation.

The SAARC Food Bank, the South Asian University, the SAARC Development Fund, and regional agreements on trade and energy cooperation demonstrated a willingness to create shared platforms for collective benefit. These platforms were indeed a step in the right direction, but they still lack on delivery. SAARC's greatest success has arguably been its ability to keep a diverse and often fractious neighbourhood engaged in dialogue. Indeed, SAARC remains a rare forum where South Asian nations can meet as equals, beyond bilateral constraints. In this sense, it has served as a stabilising anchor – a reminder that geography binds the region far more tightly than politics divides it. Yet the challenges have been equally persistent. The organisation has long been hostage to political tensions, especially between India and Pakistan. SAARC's consensus-based model, once seen as a strength, has become its weakness. Summits have been postponed, agreements stalled, and meaningful integration – particularly in trade – remains far below potential. Secretary General Md Golam Sarwar's remarks during the anniversary reception reflected both pride and pragmatism. He acknowledged SAARC's evolution - from institution-building in the first decades to broader global engagement today. But global outreach cannot substitute for intra-regional dynamism. Without political will, even the most well-crafted charters remain aspirational. The road ahead demands realism. Reviving SAARC does not require rewriting its Charter but functional cooperation in areas that transcend political divides, like health, climate adaptation, and cultural exchanges. At 40, SAARC is not obsolete but underutilised; its future lies in realising its strengths.

Agniveer and the broken Gorkha legacy

When India's Agniveer scheme brought the long-standing recruitment of Nepal Domiciled Gorkhas (NDGs) to a halt, three years on, the gap remains unaddressed, its strategic, political, and emotional repercussions deepening on both sides



ASHOK K MEHTA

Pokhara has long been the cradle and nursery of Nepali Gorkha recruitment, a tradition abruptly halted in June 2022 when India dropped the Agniveer "bombshell" on Nepal and its Gorkha community. Until then, approximately 1,200 to 1,600 Nepal Domiciled Gorkhas (NDGs) were inducted into the Indian Army each year. Although there were hints that such a move was coming-given Agniveer's tactical and strategic flaws-virtually no one outside the PMO and NSA Ajit Doval knew the plan would actually be implemented. The scheme has since drawn serious criticism from former service chiefs. Agniveer was conceived to cut manpower costs, especially pensions under OROP, which in 2019 exceeded even the modernisation budget. Yet it was marketed as an effort to "youth-ify" a military that was already among the world's youngest and fittest. Recruitment was initially halted under the pretext of Covid-19, even as far more crowded activities like elections and the Kumbh Mela continued. In reality, the freeze that began in 2020 served to cut salary and pension allocations.

At the Chanakya Dialogue in November 2025, Defence Secretary Rajesh Singh lamented that India's defence spending had dipped below 2 per cent of GDP. With recruitment paused for nearly three years, combined with Agniveer's limited intake and the annual retirement of 60,000 soldiers, fighting units-typically 850 strong-are now short by 120 to 140 soldiers. The worst hit are the 38 Gorkha battalions, the Army's largest regiment, which have not recruited a single Nepali Gorkha in six years. India was fortunate that Operation Sindoor did not escalate beyond visual-range exchanges, given such manpower deficiencies.

From the gate of the Embassy of India Pension Paying Office in Pokhara's Ram Bazaar (formerly Rum Bazaar), one can still see the majestic Machapuchare massif watching over the town. Gold shops have multiplied despite the rising cost of bullion and shrinking remittances from the dwindling Brigade of Gorkhas. Yet ex-servicemen (ESM) are no longer openly lamenting Nepal's ban on sending recruits or Delhi's silence. Before the Gen Z uprising, nearly 60 per cent of Nepal's Parliament comprised Communist MPs who had long opposed foreign military recruitment-even as 2,000 Nepalese youth leave the country daily in search of work.

Today, ESM prefer to stay quiet, just 90 days after the September uprising that produced an interim government. Many are now willing to accept Agniveer terms, even if reluctantly, but the Nepal government continues to oppose



AT THE CHANAKYA DIALOGUE IN NOVEMBER 2025, DEFENCE SECRETARY RAJESH SINGH LAMENTED THAT INDIA'S DEFENCE SPENDING HAD DIPPED BELOW 2 PER CENT OF GDP

The writer, a retired Major General, served as Commander, IPKF (South), Sri Lanka, and was a founder member of the Defence Planning Staff, now the Integrated Defence Staff

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them. A future Parliament with a non-Communist majority may soften its stance. For the Gorkha community, the issue is existential: they do not want their legacy of valour to fade. Neither India nor Nepal has taken the initiative for a frank dialogue.

Delhi neither informed Kathmandu nor explained the implications of Agniveer. Nepal, for its part, referenced the 1947 Tripartite Treaty with the UK and India, hinting that the scheme might violate its spirit. Legally, Agniveer is tenable, but the dispute is fundamentally political and strategic, requiring high-level engagement. The dispute began in June 2022, when the Indian Embassy sought routine permission to conduct recruitment rallies. Kathmandu did not respond. Nepal signalled that the truncated terms of service-four years, only 25 per cent retention, and no pension for those discharged-were unacceptable compared to the earlier 15-year minimum service with pension. While the Indian Army has taken the hit, the British Army and Nepal Army have benefited. The British Army has always been the top choice due to better pay, but for combat exposure, discipline, and character building, the Indian Army remains unrivalled. Meanwhile, the Odisha Police and several Indian states, including Bihar, have tapped the gap by recruiting thousands of Nepali Gorkhas.

At the official level, India appears unperturbed by the loss of NDGs, seeing it as shedding colonial baggage. An MEA official even remarked that Nepal "has not come back to us." The Army hierarchy has shown little concern, though senior commanders continue to swear by their Gorkha battalions. Senior Gorkha offi-

cers, including CDS Gen Anil Chauhan, have maintained silence, accepting the scheme as a "political decision." Veterans hope matters will somehow resolve, yet no unified "Save the Gorkha" campaign has emerged despite the presence of a former Army Chief and dozens of Army Commanders from the regiment.

Among those advocating for a revival of recruitment is Subedar Khem Jung Gurung, a versatile ESM and member of the Janata Samajwadi Party. He told me in Pokhara that this is a "Gen Z ko sarkar," and that since youth want to join-even under Agniveer – the issue must be pursued. For Gorkhas, this is about preserving an identity forged in blood and history. Only Prime Minister Modi can amend Agniveer to carve out an exception for Nepal, but little attention has been paid to the scheme's impact on India-Nepal relations.

Questions over NDG loyalty have also surfaced. However, Indian officers posted across Nepal-many from Gorkha regiments-affirm that Gorkha ESM remain loyal to India, except on sensitive issues like the Kalapani dispute or the 2015 blockade. They refer to India as "hamro Bharat" and "Daju" (elder brother)-terms of affection, not doubt. For Nepal's remittance-driven economy, Gorkha pensions and salaries-around ₹5,000 crore annually-are vital, especially after the losses from the Gen Z uprising. By 2075, when India hopes to be "Viksit Bharat," the last Gorkha soldier may retire, his aura long diminished.

This is a collective, avoidable loss: economic for Nepal, emotional for Gorkhas, and strategic for India. Are Modi and Doval listening?

The Pioneer SINCE 1865

The one true purpose of life: Taking shelter of God



AJIT KUMAR BISHNOI

2ND OPINION THE PIONEER

Human life appears complex, yet its true purpose is profoundly simple: to take shelter of God and advance ourselves spiritually. The *Bhagavad Gita* (15.7) states that we are souls, eternal parts of God. If we were merely our bodies, then why are these bodies discarded after death-burned or buried without hesitation, even by those dearest to us? The answer is clear: the body is not our true identity. We are souls, and souls do not die. However, merely recognising this truth is not enough.

As eternal souls, we continue to wander through different bodies and species according to the Karmaphala Principle – "as you sow, so shall you reap." Throughout this journey, we face sickness, old age, and death. We

move helplessly under the influence of the three modes of nature-goodness, passion, and darkness. The Gita describes how goodness binds us with happiness, passion binds us with desires and restless activity, and darkness binds with ignorance, laziness, and delusion.

These modes form not only our bodies but shape our tendencies, choices, and life outcomes. Is our situation hopeless? Not at all. God's grace is available, but we must consciously take shelter in Him. The first step is strengthening the mode of goodness within ourselves. As Krishna explains, whatever we place our faith in, we eventually become (17.3). When we cultivate goodness, it becomes our nature and leads us to live by *maryada* – social and moral discipline. From *maryada* arises *dharma*, the foundation of fairness and order in creation. Dharma pleases God, who incarnates whenever it declines (4.7).

Once established in goodness, we naturally move towards seva-selfless service. Souls are meant to serve; creation cannot function if everyone seeks only enjoyment. Wealth or privilege can produce the illusion that others exist to serve us, but life quickly reminds us how dependent and helpless humans truly are. The wise choose service until their last breath, remaining useful and respected. Those who serve cultivate humility, which is essential for taking shelter of God.

As we obey God's instructions and serve others, a deeper connection forms-God begins to guide and shape His devotee's life personally.

God's guidance is invaluable. Who can guide us better than the Omniscent? When we pray sincerely, God gives direction, strength, and protection. Krishna promises, "For those who worship Me with undivided devotion, I provide what they lack and preserve what they have" (9.22). True peace comes only from God's mercy; without it, happiness remains distant, and people settle for fleeting sense pleasures that ultimately drain them.

Yet, in daily life, what do we usually do? We study, work, earn, struggle, age, and eventually face death with uncertainty. No amount of wealth, power, fame, or knowledge brings lasting peace or security. The cycle of birth continues, life after life, with little spiritual progress.

The conclusion is clear: we must actively take shelter of God-now. Delay only prolongs our suffering. The wise reject this endless cycle, strive for liberation while living (jeevan mukti), and ultimately gain entry into Vaikuntha, our eternal home.

The Pioneer SINCE 1865

The writer is a spiritual teacher

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

End violence against children now

Physical punishment by parents remains widespread in India, despite its serious social impact. In many homes, hitting children is still seen as acceptable discipline. Minor mistakes – a broken object, poor marks, or disobedience - often lead to slapping or beating, justified with remarks like "This is how children learn" or "We were beaten too." Such beliefs, rooted in habit rather than evidence, normalise violence in the home.

Research shows corporal punishment does not improve behaviour. Instead, it creates fear, trauma, anxiety, aggression, and low self-esteem. Children may obey out of fear, not understanding, and those raised with violence often struggle emotionally as adults, sometimes repeating the cycle. The silence around the issue worsens it. While school violence faces criticism, violence inside homes remains largely invisible. Children are discouraged from speaking up, and society often defends parents without questioning harmful methods. Awareness and community action are urgently needed. Parenting workshops, counselling, sensitisation campaigns, and school outreach can promote non-violent, emotionally intelligent discipline. Fear may force obedience, but it cannot build trust or confidence. A child who is loved should not have to learn through pain.

BLOOM

India's digital dilemma for children

This refers to the editorial "Should India ban social media for kids?" (December 12, 2025). The argument that tech addiction now mirrors earlier public-health crises is hard to dispute, especially as children spend more time online than in real-world interactions. The editorial rightly notes that a blanket ban, though emotionally appealing, may neither be practical nor effective in a country as large and unequal as India.

What we are witnessing is not merely overuse of devices but a deeper shift in how young minds process information, communicate, and cope with stress. Reports of anxiety, aggression, and declining attention spans underline how urgent the problem has become.

India needs layered solutions that combine digital literacy, parental involvement, psychological support, and curriculum redesign. Some encouraging signs are visible in community-driven initiatives where parents and educators are trying to rebuild healthy digital habits. The real challenge is ensuring these efforts scale beyond urban pockets and reach families with limited awareness or access to support.

A national framework that guides schools, equips parents, and sets age-appropriate online norms would be a more sustainable step forward.

K SAKUNTHALA | COIMBATORE

Australia's bold social media ban

The recent decision to ban the use of social media by children and teenagers marks a landmark moment in online safety. The Australian Government passed a new law, the Online Safety Amendment (Social Media Minimum Age) Bill 2024, on November 28, 2024. This legislation introduces a mandatory minimum age of 16 for accounts on designated social media platforms. It came into effect on 10 December 2025, and parents cannot give consent for under-16s to access these platforms.

The ban currently applies to YouTube, X, Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, Snapchat, Reddit, Twitch, Threads, and Kick. Technology companies that own these platforms could face fines of up to \$50 million if they fail to take reasonable steps to prevent under-16s from creating or maintaining accounts. Apps designed specifically for younger users, such as Messenger Kids, WhatsApp, Kids Helpline, Google Classroom, and YouTube Kids, are expected to remain exempt from the ban. Critics have expressed concern about the large-scale data collection required to verify users' ages, and the associated risks of data theft and breaches of privacy. Nonetheless, supporters view this decision as a necessary step towards improving digital well-being and protecting children from online harm.

DIMPLE WADHAWAN | KANPUR NAGAR

RAJINIKANTH AT SEVENTY-FIVE: A TIMELESS CINEMATIC PHENOMENON

A living legend whose journey from bus conductor to global icon continues to inspire millions, Rajinikanth's legacy is not just about superstardom - it is about humility, discipline, and an energy that remains unmatched in Indian cinema. His style, his screen presence, and his larger-than-life aura are phenomena that generations have celebrated and will continue to celebrate. Here's to the Thalaivaa, whose magic only grows stronger with time.

Rajinikanth's rise in the Indian film industry – known for its glamour, family networks, and rigid hierarchies – remains one of the most astounding success stories. His five decades in cinema stand as proof of authenticity, reinvention, and an unequalled charisma. As he turns 75, it is worth revisiting a

journey that has created a legacy stretching across languages, generations, and borders.

Superstar Rajinikanth recently shared an interesting behind-the-scenes moment from Padayappa. Aishwarya Rai Bachchan was his first choice for the iconic role of Neelambari, and the team reportedly spent months trying to secure her dates, even willing to wait years if required. However, Aishwarya was not interested, and Ramya Krishnan eventually took on the role – delivering a powerful performance that became legendary and left an indelible mark on Tamil cinema.

Rajinikanth continues to evolve with grace as the years pass. At seventy-five, he still shows India what true greatness feels like.




CK SUBRAMANIAM | MUMBAI

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

FIRST Column





A photograph showing the interior of a severely damaged building, likely a workshop or storage area. The structure is in a state of collapse, with debris scattered everywhere. In the foreground, two large, ornate ceramic vessels are visible. One is a tall, slender jar with a complex geometric pattern, and the other is a shorter, wider jar with a similar pattern. To the left, a sign with the word "GOLDEN" is partially visible. The background shows more debris and structural damage, with a large, curved metal pipe or structure leaning against the wall. The overall scene is one of significant destruction and disarray.

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FROM THE
WORLD

NEPAL

PM inducted 4 new ministers

Nepal's PM Sushila Karki on Friday inducted four new ministers in her cabinet, bringing the strength of the council of ministers to 14. President Ramchandra administered the oath of office and secrecy to the four newly appointed ministers of the interim Government at a ceremony in the Office of the President. The newly appointed ministers are Shradha Shrestha, Madhav Chaulagain, Rajendra Singh Bhandari and Kumar Innam, according to officials at the PM Office. Shradha has been appointed as the Minister for Women, Children and Senior Citizens, Madhav has got the portfolio of Forest and Environment, while Rajendra Singh Bhandari got the portfolio of Labour and Social Security, and Kumar Innam has got the portfolio of Land Management, Cooperatives and Poverty Alleviation.

PAKISTAN

5 cops injured in TTP attack

At least five policemen were injured after Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) terrorists attacked a police checkpoint in Pakistan's northwestern Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, officials said. The incident took place on Thursday night. The terrorists targeted the Shaikh Landak police checkpoint, located within the Havaid police jurisdiction in Bannu district. A statement released by the spokesperson said that Fitna al Khawarij terrorists attacked the post late on Thursday night. Fitna al Khawarij is a term the state uses for terrorists belonging to the banned TTP. The statement said that police personnel showed courage, bravery and acted in a timely manner, managing to repel the attack. The exchange of fire continued for three hours between the attackers and the police.

Thailand's Parliament dissolved amidst border clash

ASSOCIATED PRESS
■ Bangkok

Thailand's Parliament was dissolved Friday for new elections early next year as the country engaged in deadly fighting with Cambodia.

Prime Minister Anutin Charnvirakul dissolved the House of Representatives after getting approval from King Maha Vajiralongkorn, whose endorsement became effective Friday with its publication in the Royal Gazette.

Anutin had signalled the move with a Facebook post late Thursday saying: "I'd like to return power to the people." The election must be held 45 to 60 days after the royal endorsement, a period during which Anutin will head a caretaker Government with limited powers that cannot approve a new budget.

The move comes at a tricky political moment, as Thailand is engaged in large-scale combat with Cambodia over a longstanding border dispute.

Anutin has been prime minister for just three months, succeeding Paetongtarn Shinawatra, who served only a year in office before losing office over a scandal that erupted out of a



Evacuees siting on the ground as they take refuge in Banteay Menchey provincial town AP

previous round of border tensions. Anutin won the September vote in Parliament with support from the main opposition People's Party in exchange for a promise to dissolve Parliament within four months and organise a referendum on the drafting of a new constitution by an elected constituent assembly. The party, which runs on progressive platforms, has long sought changes to the

constitution, imposed during a military Government, saying they want to make it more democratic.

The issue of constitutional change appeared to trigger the dissolution, after the People's Party prepared to call a no-confidence vote Thursday. That threat came after lawmakers from Anutin's Bhumjaithai Party voted in favour of a bill to amend the constitution that

the opposition party felt ran against the spirit of the agreement they had reached in September. The People's Party holds the largest number of seats in the House of Representatives and is seen as the main challenger to Bhumjaithai. As news of the pending dissolution circulated late Thursday, its leaders said they hoped Anutin would still honour the agreement to arrange a constitutional ref-

erendum. Anutin served in Paetongtarn's former Government but resigned from his positions and withdrew his party from her coalition Government as she faced controversy over a phone call with Cambodia's Senate President Hun Sen in June. Paetongtarn, daughter of former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra, was suspended from office ahead of the July fighting, after being found guilty of ethics violations over the politically compromising call.

With Thailand now again engaged in heavy combat against Cambodia, Anutin has embraced an aggressive military posture to appeal to nationalistic public sentiment, and has said Thailand will keep fighting until its sovereignty and safety are guaranteed. After the five days of border fighting in July, US President Donald Trump pushed the two countries to agree on a ceasefire by threatening to withhold trade privileges from them.

Trump has vowed again to make peace between them after widespread fighting flared up again this week. If he employs the cudgel of high tariffs on Thai exports should Thailand fail to comply

with his peacemaking effort comply, it could cause serious damage to its already sluggish economy.

Trump said twice this week that he expects to speak by phone with the Thai and Cambodian leaders, expressing confidence that he would persuade them to stop the fighting. Anutin on Friday confirmed that he is scheduled to speak with Trump on Friday night, saying he would brief him on the latest situation along the border.

As of Thursday, about two dozen people had been reported killed in this week's fighting, while hundreds of thousands have been displaced on both sides. The Thai military estimates that 165 Cambodian soldiers have been killed, though no number has been officially announced by Phnom Penh.

"Anutin has capitalised on the renewed border tensions with Cambodia to portray himself as a leader willing to take a nationalist, hard-line stance in defending Thailand's sovereignty and territorial integrity," commented Napon Jatusripitak, director of the Centre for Politics and Geopolitics at Thailand Future, a Bangkok-based think tank.

Accused Charlie Kirk killer makes court appearance

ASSOCIATED PRESS
■ Provo

The 22-year-old Utah man charged with killing Charlie Kirk made his first in-person court appearance on Thursday as his attorneys push to further limit media access in the high-profile criminal case.

A Utah judge is weighing the public's right to know details in the prosecution of Tyler Robinson against his attorneys' concerns that the swarm of media attention could interfere with his right to a fair trial.

Robinson's legal team and the Utah County Sheriff's Office have asked Judge Tony Graf to ban cameras in the courtroom.

Prosecutors have charged Robinson with aggravated murder in the September 10 shooting of the conservative activist on the Utah Valley University campus in Orem, just a few miles north of the Provo courthouse. They plan to seek the death penalty.

Robinson arrived in court with restraints on his wrists and ankles and wearing a dress shirt, tie and slacks. He smiled at family members sitting in the front row of the courtroom, where his mother teared up and wiped her eyes with a tissue. Robinson's father and brother sat next to her. The defendant had previously appeared in court via video or audio feed from jail.

A coalition of national and local news organisations, including The Associated Press, is fighting to preserve media access in the case.

Graf has already made allowances to protect Robinson's presumption of innocence before a trial, agreeing that the case has drawn "extraordinary" public attention. Graf held a closed hearing on October 24 in which attorneys discussed Robinson's courtroom attire and security protocols.

Under a subsequent ruling by the judge, Robinson is allowed to wear street clothes in court during his pretrial hearings but must be physically restrained due to security concerns. Graf also prohibited media from filming or photographing Robinson's restraints after his attorneys argued widespread images of him shackled and in jail clothing could prejudice future jurors.

Bilawal calls Imran Khan Pharaohs of their time

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ Lahore

Pakistan People's Party chairman Bilawal Bhutto-Zardari has called incarcerated former prime minister Imran Khan and ex-ISI chief Gen Faiz Hameed "pharaohs" of their time saying he welcomes his (Hameed) jail term.

Former Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) chief Faiz Hameed was sentenced to a 14-year jail term on Thursday after being convicted on four counts related to violating secrecy laws, engaging in political activities, misuse of authority and causing harm to others. "This is a historic verdict. I welcome it," Bilawal said. "In my political career, I witnessed two pharaohs -- one is Imran Khan and the other Gen Faiz Hameed. Imran Khan as prime minister threatened the opposition leaders and sent many to jail and he

even targeted women leaders like Faryal Talpur and Maryam Nawaz.

"Today both are reaping what they had sown," Bilawal said and added Gen Faiz, who was "so intoxicated" by power that he violated his oath and targeted politicians, media owners, businessmen and others.

The PPP chief advised Khan and Gen Faiz to seek forgiveness for their crimes from God. "Both should seek mercy from God. This should be a message that such mistakes must not be repeated by anyone," he said during an event at Chiniot district, about 200 kilometres from Lahore. Khan and his party, Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI), on the other hand have been accusing the incumbent military establishment of openly interfering in politics, stealing its mandate of last year's general elections and engineering court verdicts against its leaders.

Bulgarian Parliament approves PM Rosen resignation

ASSOCIATED PRESS
■ Sofia

Bulgarian Parliament on Friday approved the resignation of the coalition Government of Prime Minister Rosen Zhelyazkov amid nationwide anti-corruption protests, and weeks ahead of the country's scheduled euro zone entry.

Protesters, many of them young Bulgarians, have been protesting in the tens of thousands across the nation for weeks. The direct trigger was a proposed budget for next year that would have increased taxes and social security contributions to finance more state spending. The deeper cause, however, was rising anger over a perception of widespread corruption among the political elite, and a sense that a lack of justice prevails for regular citizens. The protests and the fall of the 9th Government in five years underlined the political instability in the country as it plans to join the common European currency. The 240-seat chamber



Prime Minister Rosen Zhelyazkov announcing that Bulgaria's Government resigns following mass protests, at the Bulgarian Parliament in Sofia AP

voted 127-0 to accept the resignation. The Cabinet will continue performing its duties until a new Government is elected.

Zhelyazkov's minority Government survived six votes of no confidence since it was appointed in January, but this time the large turnout of protesters on the streets changed the game.

The prime minister announced his resignation on Thursday saying it was a

direct response to the growing public pressure and that the demand for the Government to step down had become impossible to ignore. "Vox populi, vox Dei," Zhelyazkov said, using a Latin expression meaning "the voice of the people is the voice of God."

In a next step, President Rumen Radev must now give the biggest group in parliament the chance to form a new Government. If that fails,

the second-largest grouping will get a chance before the president chooses a candidate. If all attempts fail -- which is likely -- Radev will appoint a caretaker Cabinet until a new election is held.

Political analysts expect that another election -- which would be the eighth since 2021 -- would likely produce another deeply fragmented parliament with difficulty forming a stable Government.

Indian High Commission in Singapore opens OSC to help women

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ Singapore

The High Commission in Singapore has opened a One Stop Centre (OSC) as part of the Government's scheme to support Indian women in distress overseas. The initiative has been taken under the Indian Government's Sakhi One Stop Centre scheme, marking a major step in extending women-centric welfare initiatives overseas.

"The establishment of 'One Stop Centre' at the High Commission of India in Singapore will provide a comprehensive support system to Indian (national) women in distress," High Commissioner Shilpak Ambule told on Friday.

"As part of this initiative, assistance would be extended to distressed Indian

THE CENTRE WILL OFFER INTEGRATED SUPPORT SERVICES INCLUDING LEGAL AID, MEDICAL ASSISTANCE, PSYCHOLOGICAL COUNSELLING

women to cover legal, medical and other expenses," he said.

The centre will offer integrated support services including legal aid, medical assistance, psychological counselling, temporary shelter, and emergency response for women facing physical, sexual, emotional, psychological, or economic abuse. Located within the High Commission's premises, the OSC aims to create a safe, accessible environment where women

can seek help without stigma or delay.

A dedicated 24x7 helpline (+65 8716 5521) and email (osc.Singapore@mea.Gov.In) will provide round-the-clock access to assistance.

The initiative is supported by India's Ministry of External Affairs and funded through the Indian Community Welfare Fund (ICWF). Similar centres have been launched in Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Toronto, Canada. By integrating emergency care, counselling, and legal guidance under one roof, the One Stop Centre aims to empower women, reaffirming India's commitment to protecting its citizens abroad and promoting gender equality through action and compassion, the High Commission said.

Washington floods sweep away homes, families stranded

ASSOCIATED PRESS ■ Mount Vernon

Days of torrential rain in Washington state has caused historic floods that have stranded families on rooftops, washed over bridges and ripped at least two homes from their foundations, and experts warned that even more flooding expected Friday could be catastrophic.

Washington is under a state of emergency and evacuation orders are in place for tens of thousands of residents. Gov Bob Ferguson on Thursday urged everyone to follow evacuation instructions as yet another river neared record levels.

"I understand that many in our state have experienced significant floods in the past," he said on the social platform X. "However, we're looking at a historic situation."

About 78,000 residents of a major agricultural region north of Seattle were ordered to evacuate the floodplain of the Skagit River, which was expected to crest Friday morning.

The floods were impacting large parts of the state, with several bridges flooded and some major roads inundated or washed out. Some roads had



no alternate routes and no estimated reopening time, including a large part of state Route 410.

A landslide blocked part of Interstate 90 east of Seattle, with photos showing vehicles trapped by tree trunks, branches, mud and standing water. In the north near the US-Canada border, the cities of Sumas, Nooksack and Everson were evacuated after being inundated. The border crossing at Sumas was closed and Amtrak suspended trains

between Seattle and Vancouver, BC. Sumas Mayor Bruce Bosch said much of the city has been "devastated" by the high waters just four years after a similar flood.

The Snohomish River surged nearly a foot (30 centimetres) higher than its record Thursday in the picturesque city that shares its name, while the Skagit River rose just above its record Thursday night in Mount Vernon, according to the National Water Prediction Service. Earlier Thursday,

the Skagit just missed its previous record as flooding surged through the mountain town of Concrete.

The waters stopped just short of getting inside Mariah Brosa's raised riverfront home in Concrete, but the raging river still slapped debris against her home and totalled her fiancé's work car, she said.

"I didn't think it would come this high," she said. Flooding from the Skagit has long plagued Mount Vernon, the largest city in Skagit County with some 35,000 residents. Flooding in 2003 displaced hundreds of people.

A floodwall that protects downtown passed a major test in 2021, when the river crested near record levels. Water was at the foot of the floodwall as of late Thursday morning, Mayor Peter Donovan said.

In nearby Burlington, officials hoped dikes and other systems would protect their community from catastrophe, said Michael Lumpkin, with the police department. Authorities across Washington state in recent days have rescued people from cars and homes after an atmospheric river soaked the region.



Noem defends Trump's immigration policies

ASSOCIATED PRESS ■ Washington

Homeland Security Secretary Kristi Noem defiantly defended the Trump administration's hard-line immigration policies on Thursday during a House committee hearing, portraying migrants as a major threat faced by the nation that justifies a crackdown that has seen widespread arrests, deportations and a dizzying pace of restrictions on foreigners. Noem, who heads the agency central to President Donald Trump's approach to immigration, received backup from Republicans on the panel but faced fierce questioning from Democrats -- including many who called for her resignation over the mass deportation agenda. The secretary's testimony was immediately interrupted by protesters shouting for her to stop Immigration and Customs Enforcement raids and "end deportations."



Chileans are divided on presidential runoff

ASSOCIATED PRESS ■ Santiago

Ask many Chileans how their country fared in the past several years and they'll describe a descent into disaster: Venezuelan gangs surged across porous borders, bringing unprecedented kidnappings and contract killings to one of the region's safest nations. A social uprising unleashed violent chaos on once-sleepy streets. An economy long vaunted for its rapid growth sputtered into a stall. These are the voters who hope to elect their country's most right-wing president since its military dictatorship on Sunday. Former lawmaker José Antonio Kast, 59, they argue, can bring back the simple, stable life that Chileans lost to rising crime, uncontrolled migration and left-wing excesses. Kast's rival in this runoff presidential election is their worst fear: a communist.

India invites US industries to partner in country's AI journey

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ Washington

Indian Ambassador Vinay Mohan Kwatra invited US industries to become valuable partners in India's AI journey at a roundtable, ahead of the 'India AI Impact Summit 2026' scheduled to be held in New Delhi in February. The Ambassador shared insights on how India's AI Mission, designed to create a robust framework for AI development in India, and the upcoming summit are shaping global norms for responsible, inclusive, and innovation-driven AI, the organiser of the roundtable, DGA-Albright Stonebridge Group, said on social media on Thursday.

"Had an engaging conversation on India's AI Goals and AI Impact summit with industry representatives at a round table organised by the Albright Stonebridge Group. Invited US industries to become valuable partners in India's AI journey," Kwatra posted on social media. Several industry, academic, and philanthropy leaders joined the discussion held in Washington, DC.



The role of companies in supporting India's AI transformation through compute infrastructure, indigenous capability development, and workforce and talent initiatives was also highlighted at the discussion. The Indian envoy also held discussions with Rep Yvette D Clarke, Chair of the Black Caucus, and appreciated her perspective on advancing India-US collaboration.

"Had a productive meeting with @RepYvetteClarke, Chair of the House @TheBlackCaucus and a steadfast supporter of strong India-US relations. Appreciated her perspective on advancing India-US collaboration in the AI space, including data privacy and data security," Kwatra

posted. The India-AI Impact Summit 2026 will be held in New Delhi on February 19-20, focusing on the principles of 'People, Planet, and Progress'.

The Summit, announced by Prime Minister Narendra Modi at the France AI Action Summit, will be the first-ever global AI summit hosted in the Global South.



People visiting the Christmas Market at Yokohama Red Brick Warehouse in Yokohama near Tokyo

AP

Radical leader shot in Bangladesh

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ Dhaka

A youth leader of a right-wing cultural group and a candidate at the February 12 general elections was on Friday shot at by unidentified gunmen in Bangladesh capital. Chief Adviser Muhammad Yunus expressed deep concern over the shooting and serious injury of Sharif Osman Hadi, spokesperson of Inqilab Manch, and said the incident is "completely unacceptable."

The Inqilab Mancha was on the forefront of a campaign to disband deposed prime minister Sheikh Hasina's Awami League.

Police said three assailants on a motorbike shot Hadi as he initiated his election campaign at central Dhaka's Bijoyanagar area — from where he stood as an independent candidate — in the afternoon.

"Osman Hadi was shot at 2:25 pm in front of DR Tower on Box Culvert Road at Bijoyanagar. We have initially learned that three assailants on a motorcycle shot him and fled the scene," a spokesman of Dhaka police said.

Hadi was rushed to Dhaka Medical College and Hospital (DMCH).

"His (Hadi's) condition is critical. He has been provided a life support system. The bullet remained inside his head," Prothom Alo newspaper said, quoting DMCH director Brigadier Mohammad Asaduzzaman as saying.

Chief Adviser Yunus expressed deep concern over the shooting incident and asked the authorities concerned to bring the perpetrators under the law soon. "Such a violent attack in an election environment is completely unacceptable and a deeply regrettable incident for the country's peaceful political atmosphere," Yunus said in a statement.

The Chief Adviser gave strict instructions to the law enforcement agencies to conduct a swift and comprehensive investigation to identify and bring all those involved in the attack to justice, the state-run news agency Bangladesh Sangbad Sangstha (BSS) said. The Inqilab Mancha

KHALEDA PLACED ON VENTILATOR SUPPORT

Dhaka: Former Bangladesh prime minister Khaleda Zia's health condition has deteriorated and she was placed on ventilator support, doctors said. "Her breathing difficulties increased, her oxygen level fell, and carbon dioxide levels rose," according to a statement on Thursday by the chief of the medical board cardiologist Shahabuddin Talukdar.

It said the 80-year-old former premier was previously being treated with "High Flow Nasal Cannula and BiPAP support, but as there was no improvement, she was placed on elective ventilator support to give rest to her lungs and other vital organs." The Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) chairperson has been undergoing treatment at Dhaka's Evercare Hospital since November 23 for multiple health complications. The statement said the three-time premier was kept under round-the-clock medical watch by a team of local and foreign specialists, as several of her vital organs continue to be under severe stress. "Her kidney function has stopped completely, and she is undergoing regular dialysis," the board said, adding she currently needed blood transfusions.

emerged as a rightwing cultural and pressure group in August 2024 after a student-led violent protest in July and August toppled the then prime minister Sheikh Hasina's Awami League government.

The incident occurred a day after the election commission announced the polls schedule saying the 13th parliamentary election would be held on February 12. The Inqilab Mancha was on the forefront of a campaign to disband Awami League. Yunus-led interim government disbanded Hasina's party in May this year disqualifying it from contesting the polls.

The group spearheads a campaign to arrest "all terrorists" of the disbanded Awami League from central to grassroots levels and ensure security of the "July warriors".

KPK CM alleges Imran Khan subjected to mistreatment in jail



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ Peshawar

Pakistan's Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province Chief Minister Muhammad Sohaib Afridi on Friday alleged that former prime minister Imran Khan and his wife Bushra Bibi are being subjected to mistreatment in jail. Afridi's comments came after he was denied permission to meet incarcerated Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) founder Imran Khan for the 10th time by the Adiala jail administration on Thursday. Addressing a meeting of the Provincial Cabinet, Afridi said that despite the harsh winter, basic necessities and warm clothing were not being provided to the detained couple. The Chief Minister said that the use of water cannon

against Imran Khan's sisters was "shameful," adding that the provincial government strongly condemned such "unjust and inhumane behaviour." Khan, 73, has been in Adiala Jail in Rawalpindi since August 2023 in multiple cases. Speaking to mediapersons on Thursday, Afridi said that it was strange that an elected chief minister was not being allowed to meet his party's founding chairman despite court orders to the contrary. He warned that both the federal and Punjab government leadership would face consequences once the PTI returned to power at the Centre. Afridi said efforts had been underway for the past three years to "minus Imran", but all such attempts had failed.

Japan lifts tsunami advisory after 6.7 magnitude quake



ASSOCIATED PRESS
■ Tokyo

Japan on Friday lifted a tsunami advisory after a 6.7 magnitude earthquake shook the country's northeast, according to the Japan Meteorological Agency. The quake occurred off the east coast of Aomori prefecture, in the north of Honshu, the main Japanese island, at a depth of 20 kilometres at 11:44 am local time, JMA said. The advisory was lifted about two hours later. There were no immediate reports of serious damage or injuries. Friday's

quake followed a 7.5 magnitude earthquake earlier this week in the north that caused injuries, light damage and a tsunami in Pacific coastal communities. At least 34 people were injured in that quake on Monday off the coast of Aomori, the northernmost prefecture of Japan's main Honshu island. A tsunami more than 2 feet (0.6 metres) above tide levels was measured in Kuji port in Iwate prefecture before all tsunami advisories were lifted. Power was knocked out for hundreds of homes but was mostly restored Tuesday morning.

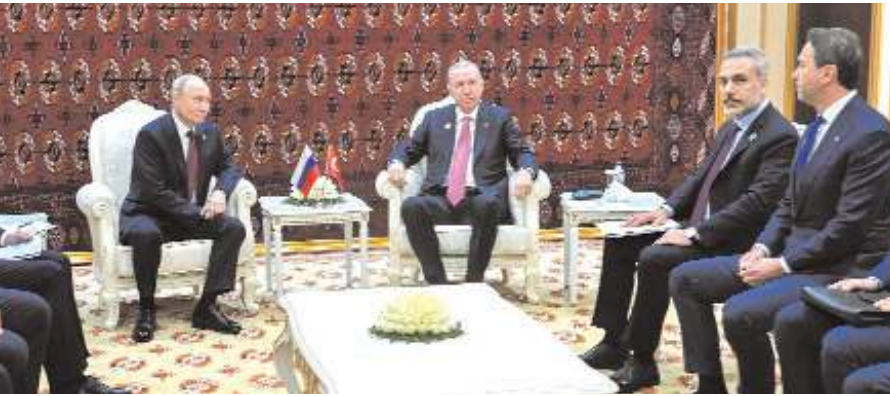
Russian police, National Guard to stay in Donbas: Kremlin

ASSOCIATED PRESS
■ Kyiv

A senior Kremlin official says that the Russian police and National Guard will remain in eastern Ukraine's Donbas to oversee the prized industrial region, even if a peace settlement ends the nearly four-year war — a possibility that is likely to be rejected by Ukrainian officials as US-led negotiations drag on.

Moscow will give its blessing to a ceasefire only after Ukraine's forces have withdrawn from the front line, Kremlin adviser Yuri Ushakov said in comments published Friday in Russian business daily Kommersant.

Ushakov told Kommersant "it's entirely possible that there won't be any troops (in the Donbas), either Russian or Ukrainian" in a postwar scenario. But he said that "there will be the National Guard, our police, everything necessary to maintain



Russian President Vladimir Putin and Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan attending a meeting on the sidelines of an international forum in Ashgabat, Turkmenistan

AP

order and organise life."

For months, American negotiators have tried to navigate the demands of each side as US President Donald Trump presses for a swift end to Russia's war and grows increasingly exasperated by delays. The search for possible compromises has run into a major obstacle over who keeps

Ukrainian territory that Russian forces have occupied so far. Since Moscow's 2014 illegal annexation of Crimea and the seizure of territory in the east by Russia-backed separatists later that year, as well as land taken after the full-blown invasion was launched on February 24, 2022, Russia has captured about 20 per cent of its

neighbour. Ukraine says its constitution doesn't allow it to surrender land. Russia, which illegally annexed Donetsk and three other regions illegally in 2022, says the same.

Ushakov said that "no matter what the outcome (of peace talks), this territory (the Donbas) is Russian Federation territory."

On Thursday, Trump compared the negotiations to a very complex real estate deal. He said that he wants to see more progress in talks before sending envoys to possible meetings with European leaders over the weekend. In October Trump said the Donbas region will have to be "cut up" to end the war. In recent months, Russia's army has made a determined push to gain control of all parts of Donetsk and neighbouring Luhansk, which together make up the valuable Donbas region.

Its slow slog across the Ukrainian countryside, using its significant advantage in troop numbers in a corrosive war of attrition, has been costly in terms of casualties and losses of armour. Although outnumbered, Ukrainian defenders have held firm in many areas and counterattacked in others.

Belarus leader hosts US envoy as he seeks to improve his country's ties with the West

ASSOCIATED PRESS
■ Minsk

Authoritarian President Alexander Lukashenko on Friday hosted a US envoy for talks in the Belarus capital of Minsk, the latest step in the isolated leader's effort to improve ties with the West.

Lukashenko met with US special envoy for Belarus John Coale, according to state news agency Belta and the presidential press service. The press service said the talks would continue Saturday. The last time US officials met with Lukashenko, more than 50 political prisoners were released and brought to Lithuania. Overall, Belarus released more than 430 prisoners since July 2024 in what was widely seen as an effort at a rapprochement with the West. A close ally of

Russia, Minsk has faced Western isolation and sanctions for years. Lukashenko has ruled the nation of 9.5 million with an iron fist for more than three decades, and the country has been sanctioned repeatedly by Western countries — both for its crackdown on human rights and for allowing Moscow to use its territory in the full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022.

Lukashenko's rule was challenged after a 2020 presidential election that kept him in power, when tens of thousands of people poured into the streets to protest a vote widely seen as rigged.

In an ensuing crackdown, tens of thousands of people were detained, with many beaten by police. Prominent opposition figures either fled the country or were imprisoned.

Five years after the mass demonstrations, Lukashenko won a seventh term in an election that the opposition called a farce.

More recently, however, Belarus has begun to free some political prisoners to try to win favour with the West. Since Donald Trump returned to the White House this year, Lukashenko has released dozens of prisoners, including key dissident figure Sjarhei Tsikhanouski — the husband of exiled opposition leader Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya. His release came after a visit to Belarus by US envoy Keith Kellogg. Trump spoke to Lukashenko by phone in August after one such release and even suggested a face-to-face meeting in what would be a big victory for the Belarusian leader, who has been dubbed "Europe's Last Dictator."



Danish intelligence report warns of US military threat

ASSOCIATED PRESS ■ Copenhagen

The United States is using its economic power to "assert its will" and threaten military force against friend and foe alike, a Danish intelligence agency said in a new report. The Danish Defence Intelligence Service, in its latest annual assessment, said Washington's greater assertiveness under the Trump administration also comes as China and Russia seek to diminish Western, especially American, influence. Perhaps most sensitive to Denmark — a NATO and European Union member country, and a US ally — is growing competition between those great powers in the Arctic. US President Donald Trump has expressed a desire to see Greenland, a semiautonomous and mineral-rich territory of Denmark, become part of the United States, a move opposed by Russia and much of Europe.



Germany summons Russian ambassador over cyberattacks

ASSOCIATED PRESS ■ Berlin

Germany summoned Russia's ambassador on Friday following accusations of sabotage, cyberattacks and election interference, an official said. The German Government has also accused Moscow of perpetrating disinformation campaigns. "The goal of these Russian cyber and disinformation attacks is clear: It is to divide society, stir up mistrust, provoke rejection, and weaken confidence in democratic institutions," German foreign ministry spokesperson Martin Giese said. "This targeted manipulation of information is one of a wide range of activities by Russia aimed at undermining confidence in democratic institutions and processes in Germany," he said during a government news conference. German officials have previously accused Russia of hybrid warfare attacks to destabilise Europe.



I & PR Minister Kolusu Partha Sarathi attended AP Chambers Three-day Business Expo in Vijayawada



PARTY

Photos by- Ch. Vijaya Bhaskar

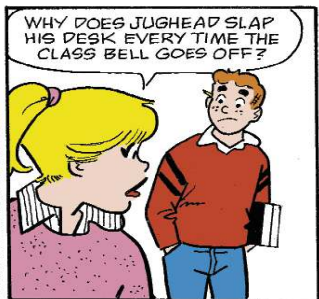


Bhavani Devotees relinquish their deeksha at Kanaka Durga Temple in Vijayawada

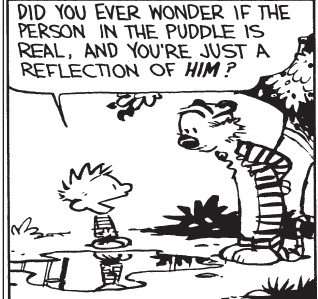


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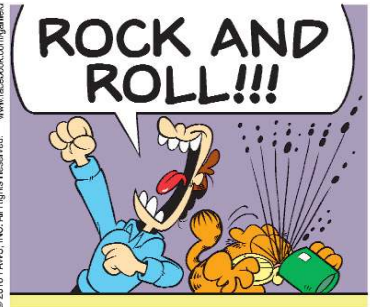
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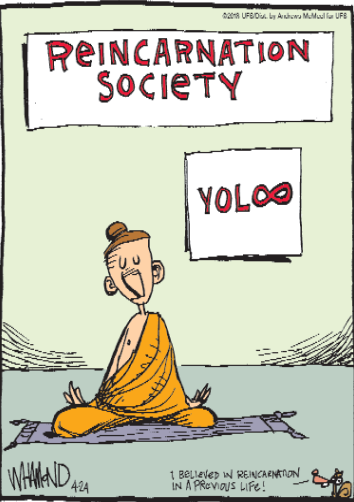
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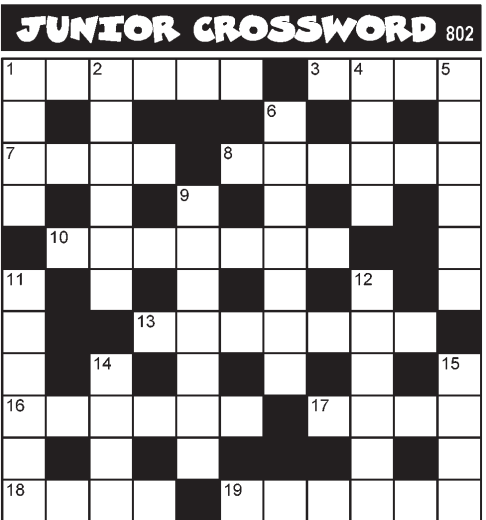
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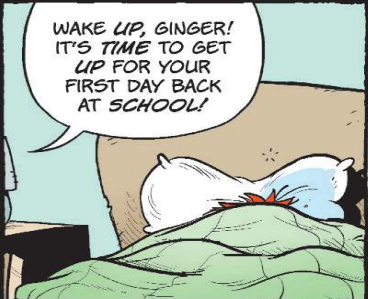
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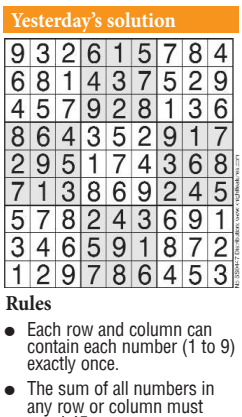
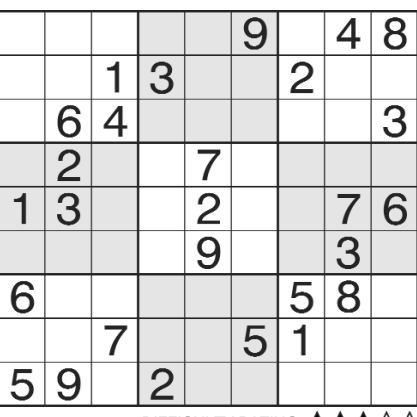
NANCY



GINGER MEGGS



SUDOKU

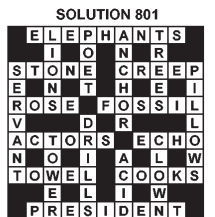


ACROSS

- 1 Opposite of brother
- 3 A fairy's magic stick
- 7 A bird's bill
- 8 To stay
- 10 Ripping
- 13 A deer's horns
- 16 Weapons with long blades
- 17 A tube in the body which carries blood
- 18 Seven days
- 19 A paper handkerchief
- 6 Houses for dogs
- 9 A small bomb made for throwing
- 11 A puzzle with lots of pieces
- 12 Welcomes
- 14 Stopped sleeping
- 15 One time

DOWN

- 1 Cries with big gasps
- 2 Frightened
- 4 A camel rider in the desert
- 5 An animal like a small horse with big ears



BLASÉ CAPITAL

NAME GAME



Most governments, both central and states, generally indulge in name changes. The name of the existing welfare projects are changed, roads and streets are renamed, and new schemes are named as per the wishes of the regimes, and not as per historical practices. The reasons can be many. Officials may want to highlight the names of the new political leaders, prime ministers, and chief ministers. They may wish to remove the names of the old ones who belonged to the opposing and competing political parties. Legacies need to be removed, new names added that may become the future ones. The naming and renaming exercises go on over decades in the new nations, and over the centuries in the older states. The efforts to determine which names will remain, and which vanish never ends. Hence, it is not surprising that the name of the popular scheme under Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MNREGA) is now Puiya Bapu Gramin Rozgar Yojana (PBGRY).

In this specific case, there are several specific reasons to change the name. One of them is that this central regime does not believe in popularising the names of personalities, and political families. Indeed, one of the reasons for its three consecutive victories is because of the precise, crisp, and regular attacks on specific families within the Congress Party. Although several leaders across the political spectrum still follow the earlier generations' profession, there is at least a public impression created to disassociate from the continuing practice. This is evident from the fact that most of the schemes in the past 11 years are named after a more general Pradhan Mantri (Prime Minister), rather than a specific personality, or personalities. In addition, the names used earlier were removed. The personality cult is enhanced through other means such as massive national advertising, which has large displayed images. In most cases, the photographs of the prime minister are visibly larger than those of the chief ministers, and central ministers.

Another major reason for the changes is to remove past, and historical legacies. For example, in the recent past, the names of some of the colonial laws were changed to give them distinct Indian identities. This provides a nationalist fervour to the entire exercises. Indeed, the ruling leaders confidently espouse that their attempts are to establish India, and Bharat as entities with their own culture, traditions, beliefs, civilisation, and ancient past. De-linking the nation with the Mughals, British, and other past rulers is crucial for the citizens to feel themselves as a part of a separate nation. This logic includes disconnecting the past, present, and future with the main Congress Party that emerged as the frontrunner in the freedom movement, and ruled the country for six decades in the next 78 years. The idea was to disconnect some of the prominent prime ministers, who deliberately gave names to the national welfare schemes, and other programmes, and associated others who were popular leaders.

Apart from politics, nationalism, and identity, symbolism is clearly an embedded objective. Renaming public spaces and national projects allows the governments to "shape national narratives," and enhance specific debates and discussions. They may not have a direct impact over electoral equations, immediate identities, and instant political gains, but slowly and steadily allow the narratives to sink into the hearts and minds of sections of the population, who hear and talk about the new names. In an insidious manner, the citizens, or part of them, slowly distance themselves from the old personalities, and political and societal legacies. Thus, new ones are born, and symbolism, whether one likes it or not, contributes to this change. This enables the ruling regimes to claim credit for the old programmes, which were initiated by the previous rulers. Instead of personalities, the focus shifts to institutions, which are long-lasting, and enable political parties to claim the schemes as their own.

Thus, the change of MNREGA to PBRY is a continuation of the old practices that the ruling regimes have accepted in the recent past. The change of name from Mahatma Gandhi to Puijya Babu is obviously linked to the personality cult. Although the political regimes cannot wear away from the name of the Mahatma, who is still revered throughout the country, it is smart to introduce him as 'Puijya Babu', rather than a name. This is akin to the practice of using Pradhan Mantri, or Prime Minister, as an institution, rather than a personality. The usage of Babu, which is an identity like Mahatma, gets rid of the association with the Congress Party, which considers the Mahatma as its leader, apart from his national identity. Babu constitutes an effort to give it a nationalist twist, rather than a specific political one. Suddenly, Mahatma Gandhi emerges as Puijya Babu, which changes the national narrative in meaningful ways.

Obviously, the name change comes with changes in the rural unemployment scheme, which was launched two decades ago by a Congress regime. Instead of 100 days, the new norms offer guaranteed employment in rural areas for 125 days in a year. The minimum wages offered to an individual is revised to a higher ₹240 per day. Recently, the Government introduced the rules to four new labour codes that aim to revolutionise the laws. The changed name of a rural labour scheme is a step in this direction.

Nearly 4x hike in MF investment

Assets under management to exceed Rs 300 lakh crore by 2035

Mutual funds may emerge, and are emerging, as the most preferred investment choice for Indians. Most money is, and will be, pumped into equity funds. These are the major trends in the segment over the past decade, which will continue over the next one. According to the Association of Mutual Funds in India (AMFI), the mutual funds' assets under management (AUM) grew six-fold to over ₹80 lakh crore between November 2015 and November 2025. A new report, 'How India Invests,' by Bain & Company in partnership with Groww, projects it to exceed nearly four-fold to ₹300 lakh crore by 2035. By then, direct equity holdings will climb to a lower ₹250 lakh crore.

More households are opting for mutual funds as a route to invest in equity and debt instruments. The Bain-Growth report notes that the penetration level is likely to double from 10 per cent to 20 per cent over the next decade. This will be driven by sustained investor trust, digital access, and broader financial awareness. Saurabh Trehan, Partner & Head of Financial Services at Bain & Company India, highlights the shift in behaviour. "Indian households are steadily shifting from a traditional savings mindset to a more investment-oriented approach. We are seeing the emergence of a deeper and more resilient domestic investor base," he explains.

Three trends are evident over the past few years. The first is that mutual funds have reached higher acceptance levels in the smaller cities and towns. According to a Bain-Grow report, 55-60 per cent of new SIP (Systematic Investment Plan) registrations now originate from B30 cities, and those beyond the top 100 ones contribute almost a fifth of AUM, a figure which is up from a tenth six years ago. According to its press release, "The next phase of industry growth will come primarily from mass and mass-affluent households beyond the top 30 cities. Increased adoption among affluent investors across the next 70 cities will further accelerate

this expansion.”

AMFI's data and claims support these contentions. The association states that with large scale advertising and messaging, like the 'Mutual Fund Sahi Hai' campaign that reached 350 million, mutual funds have become a mainstream investment option, and are accessible to first-time and young Indians. The industry conducted 14,500 educational programmes for a million people in FY2024, and there were attempts to integrate financial literacy with school curricula. Over the past decade, AMFI's senior management focused on expansion to the smaller cities, and inclusion of more households. Over the next decade, AMFI hopes to enhance retail penetration, and increase the number of retail investors by five times to 250 million.

The second noticeable trend is the higher discipline among the retail investors. This is evident, according to Bain-Growth, from the more than doubling of investors who held the mutual funds for more than five years, from seven per cent to 16 per cent over the past few years. In addition, long-term SIP holdings increased from 12 per cent to 21 per cent over the recent past, which signals stronger investor discipline and confidence. Despite the regular discontinuance of SIPs, which invariably happens during downturns, the higher overall acceptance, and growth of SIPs indicates a shift among the investors towards goal-based, and target-based investing.

Finally, it is about the changing demographics. Youngsters, first-timers, and newcomers have adopted mutual funds, and are "likely to contribute to the market growth" over the next decade. The Bain-Growth report highlights that the average monthly SIP inflows rose by a compounded annual growth rate of 25 per cent, "driven largely by 18 to 34-year-olds, a demographic which is increasingly shaping the direction of domestic capital markets." In addition, younger investors

under 30 represent 40 per cent of the NSE-registered investors, which is up from 23 per cent six years ago. Women's share grew from 20 per cent to 25 per cent in the same period.

While the mutual funds folios grew 2.5x in the past five years, individual gross flows went up by a mere seven per cent. For some experts, this may be a matter of concern. For Bain-Growth, this underscores the "entry of a large cohort of new investors with smaller ticket sizes." Investments in smaller amounts indicate that there is more acceptance of SIPs, and the entry of a huge number of first-timers and youngsters, whose salary bases may be low but they are still interested in disciplined and long-term investing. Women may be generally keen to start with low amounts, and gradually shift to higher ones once they gain confidence and experience.

Digital investment platforms play, and will continue to play a catalytic role in accelerating equity and mutual fund participation. At present, nearly 80 per cent of equity investors, and more than a third of mutual fund investors are onboarded digitally, and the smaller Tier-2+ cities account for almost half of the users. "Gen Z now makes up approximately 45 per cent of the investor base, and continues to grow," states the Bain-Growth press release. Harsh Jain, Co-founder and COO of Groww, says, "We are witnessing a definitive structural shift. The Government's push on digital infrastructure, combined with progressive regulatory measures, has democratised access and fostered deep trust in the ecosystem."

This tech-led expansion is expected to bring in nearly 90 million new retail investors, largely millennials and Gen Z, which will propel India toward a deeper, more stable domestic capital formation. Younger demographics, and a diverse and more resilient investor base will strengthen the capital markets. Such changes will be both expansive, and inclusive, as a larger number of households shift from savings to investing. The broad reach of the digital investment channels, and the Government's efforts to inculcate digital payment modes will aid and enhance the investment process.

Retail investing, say experts, will play a pivotal role in India becoming a \$10-trillion-plus economy. It will prove to be a crucial turning point in how India builds long-term wealth, and capital market strength over the next decade, and onwards till 2047. "India is entering a new era of retail investing, one that is poised to play a pivotal role in the country's economic development. By expanding access to capital, broadening wealth creation, unlocking new job opportunities, and strengthening the resilience of India's capital markets, retail investors are reshaping the flow of capital in meaningful ways. Just as importantly, steady domestic inflows are giving India's capital markets a level of resilience we have not seen before, helping them to absorb volatility, and recover faster," explains Rakesh Pozhath, Partner and a leading member, Bain & Company.

Business and Culture

Chai-nation to coffee culture

Premium coffee is entering Indian homes, slowly but surely



is one of the company's fastest-growing coffee markets. Nespresso's global chief executive, Guillaume Le Cunff, described the Indian entry as an effort to bring its signature coffee experience to local homes, and to deepen the appreciation for quality coffee. Even at the market outlets, Indians experiment with coffee flavours from abroad.

The economics of the premium and quality segment are simple and straightforward, but challenging. The price of a single Nespresso cup works out to Rs 95, placing it below a café latte at a decent outlet but more expensive than a pack of instant coffee. This positions the capsules as affordable, but still a luxury that is acceptable to affluent urban consumers. The brand's razor-and-blades model depends on steady capsule sales once a household invests in a machine. If Nespresso can capture 10-20 per cent of the pods market, it can generate \$100-200 million

in annual revenues within a few years.

Add to these revenues the sales of machine, and B2B placements in the hotels and offices. The opportunity becomes meaningful for a category that barely existed a few years ago. To accelerate adoption, Nespresso has partnered with Thakral Innovations for distribution across retail and professional channels. The Delhi boutique functions as both a store, and a sensory space where customers can sample blends and receive guidance. Industry watchers expect the next boutique to appear in Mumbai, Bengaluru, and Hyderabad over the next two years, following a metro-first approach.

The larger task will be to ensure consistent service, and build the infrastructure for capsule collection and recycling, which remains limited in India. For the industry segment, Nespresso's arrival has had a ripple effect. Starbucks, which has nearly 500 stores

BRIEFLY

INTER MIAMI EXTENDS IAN FRAY'S CONTRACT



MLS champion Inter Miami's roster for next season continued taking shape, when it announced the signing of defender Ian Fray to an extension that runs through the 2028-29 season. Fray had one goal and four assists in 35 appearances across all competitions this season for Inter Miami. He missed the 2021 and 2022 seasons with injuries. "To continue this journey here feels amazing, this club has put so much trust in me for the last five years I've been here," Fray said. "Going through injuries, they kept their trust in me to sign a new contract and now we've won the MLS Cup, so I'm excited for next year." Inter Miami declined contract options on Fafa Picault and William Yarbrough, has let Ryan Sailor's deal expire and has seen the loan of Marcelo Weigandt to the club expire as well.

FIA PRESIDENT MOHAMMED BEN SULAYEM RE-ELECTED



Mohammed Ben Sulayem was re-elected unopposed Friday as president of auto racing governing body the FIA, after a campaign overshadowed by allegations from his rivals that election rules unfairly kept them off the ballot. Ben Sulayem's new four-year term, rubber-stamped at the FIA general assembly in Tashkent, Uzbekistan, continues a tenure that has included disagreements with Formula 1 drivers and a high rate of staff turnover at the governing body. "Thank you to all our FIA members for voting in remarkable numbers and placing your trust in me once again," the former rally driver from the United Arab Emirates said in a statement. "We have overcome many obstacles but here today, together, we are stronger than ever."

Aston Villa win 2-1 over Basel in Europa League

ASSOCIATED PRESS

Basel

Aston Villa extended its winning streak to eight games in all competitions with a 2-1 victory against Basel in the Europa League to secure at least a playoff spot. Villa is tied with Lyon and Midtjylland atop the standings of the second-tier European competition on 15 points with five wins from six games. Villa bounced back from a poor start to the season and is now third in the Premier League, including a 2-1 victory over leader Arsenal on Saturday. At St. Jakob-Park in Basel, summer signing Evann Guessand put Villa 1-0 ahead early following a corner kick before Flavius Daniliuc met Xherdan Shaqiri's curling free kick to equalize. Halftime substitute Youri Tielemans needed just eight minutes to place a shot from 20 meters (yards) into the bottom corner of the net to restore Villa's lead for good. Villa manager Unai Emery has won the Europa League trophy four times during



stints in charge of Sevilla and Villarreal. Afonso Moreira and Pavel Sulc scored inside the opening 11 minutes for Lyon to secure a 2-1 win over Go Ahead Eagles, while Cho Gue-sung netted the winner for Danish team Midtjylland in a 1-0 victory over Genk. After eight games, the top eight in the 36-team table go directly to the round of 16 in March. Teams placed ninth to 24th advance to the knockout playoffs in February. In other games, Celta Vigo, which had stunned host Real Madrid 2-0 on Sunday in La Liga, came down to earth with a 2-1 defeat at home to

fourth goal of the campaign two minutes from time after Utrecht goalkeeper Vasilis Barkas was unable to hold Dan Ndoye's header. Arnaud Kalimuendo gave Forest the lead early in the second half before Mike van der Hoorn equalized with a header. Since Sean Dyche took over as manager Forest has been unbeaten in the Europa League with three wins and a draw. Nancy's Celtic loses 3-0 to RomaBarnabás Varga headed in the winning goal to complete a 2-1 comeback victory for Ferencváros over Scottish side Rangers and remained unbeaten with four wins and two draws. Forward Bojan Miovski's acrobatic volley gave Rangers a 1-0 lead before Bence Ótvös equalized in first-half stoppage time for the hosts who are coached by former Celtic player Robbie Keane. Rangers remains without a win in the league phase. Nice remains the only Europa League team without a point after a 1-0 home defeat to Braga with Pau Victor scoring.

From small towns to world stage: The fearless young brigade of Indian Hockey

MONA PARTHSARATHI

Chennai

A cherished inheritance, a platform to fetch a job or quite simply a leap of faith—every member of India's World Cup bronze-winning junior men's hockey team has a different take to offer on what the sport means to them. But what binds this under-21 bunch together is the dream of an Olympic medal for the country. And that ambition has grown manifold after they fought their way to a podium finish at the World Cup ending India's nine-year wait for a medal at the showpiece. In the process, they assured hockey watchers that

the inevitable and upcoming transition period in the senior team would not be as turbulent as is being anticipated. Every player comes from a different world and is shaped by adversity which is unique to his story of grit and hope. For 21-year-old captain Rohit from Dabra village in Haryana, even eating a simple meal was once a battle. A facial fracture during a practice game against the senior team last year left him nearly immobile for months, enough to make him wonder if he would ever play again. "Those few months were so difficult that even eating and drinking became painful," Rohit told 'PTI Bhasha' on the sidelines of

the Junior World Cup here. "At one point, I thought I wouldn't be able to play again. But once I returned to hockey, I felt I couldn't stop. I wasn't afraid anymore. Now I want to play for the senior team and win World Cup and Olympic medals. We hope this bronze inspires more boys to take up hockey." In Sundargarh, Odisha, which was once India's hockey nursery, 19-year-old Anmol Ekka was born in a village of barely 3,000 people. After losing his mother early, he was raised by his maternal grandparents, and it was in their village that he found the sport that changed his life.



"Everyone in my village played football. But when I moved in with my grandparents, I started playing Hockey which was very popular there. After shifting to a hostel, I realised I could work hard and play for the country," said the full-back, who is a Birendra Lakra fan. His performance in the bronze medal match against Argentina marked him as one of the standout players of

the tournament. Another product of Sundargarh, 21-year-old midfielder Roshan Kujur, grew up playing on grass fields before stepping on astro turf. His inspiration is Olympian Manpreet Singh, the man he hopes to emulate at the senior level. "There are many grassroots tournaments in my village and we used to play on grass. I became a midfielder watching Manpreet Singh from childhood, however I never imagined playing for India," he added. In Pathankot, Punjab, goalkeeper Princedeep Singh found his calling after leaving football behind. He trained at the Cheema

Academy and wore the iconic No. 16 jersey, which once belonged to the great P R Sreejesh who is now his coach. He did Sreejesh and his team proud with a superb performance in the shootout against Belgium in the quarterfinals. A Cristiano Ronaldo fan, who unwinds with Sidhu Moosewala songs, Princedeep said he never lost belief even when the team was trailing Argentina by two goals for three quarters in the bronze medal play-off. "We just told each other that we had to play for one another, it was our last junior tournament. The crowd support pushed us further. We're not afraid of any team

and can beat anyone on our day," he said. For Manmeet Singh, hockey runs in the family. The 20-year-old mid-fielder from Verawal in Tarn Taran, Punjab is the nephew of Olympian Akashdeep Singh and grew up in a home where mistakes on the field meant a dressing down not just from coaches but family too. "My father was in the army and played hockey at the national level. Uncle Akashdeep is an Olympian and another uncle represented Punjab Police. If I make an error, everyone points it out," he said. After five months of preparation in Bengaluru, Manmeet now longs to go home. (PTI)

India lose 1-2 to Spain in FIH Junior Women's World Cup

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Santiago



India ended a disappointing 10th in the FIH Junior Women's Hockey World Cup after being handed a 1-2 defeat by Spain in their final classification match. Kanika Siwach (41') was the sole goal-scorer for India, while Natalia Vilanova (16') and Esther Canales (36') netted one each for Spain at the Centro Deportivo de Hockey Cespied in the 9th/10th place playoff. It was a cagey yet entertaining first quarter as Spain were through on goal with only the goalkeeper to beat but India's Nidhi heroically stepped out and made two back-to-back saves to keep the scores level. In the 14th minute, Spain were awarded the first penalty corner of the match, which was again denied by

Nidhi. In the early moments of the second quarter, Spain launched a quick counterattack as Sara Carmona Ramos dribbled skill-fully around the circle and played a pass inside, successfully deflected by Natalia Vilanova (16') into the net to claim the lead. India had a couple of bright chances in the following minutes but Spain hardly made any mistakes and didn't give any penalty corner to maintain their advantage. In the 36th minute, India had a brief moment of celebration as Sonam did well to intercept a pass and score with a powerful strike. However, the goal was cancelled after Spain took a successful video referral. Unfortunately for India, in

the same minute, Spain won and converted a penalty corner, thanks to a flick from Canales as they increased their advantage to two goals. In the 41st minute, India won two successive penalty corners as Siwach beat the Spanish goalkeeper with her strike and delivered a goal for India to reduce the deficit and conclude an eventful third quarter. In the last quarter, India upped the intensity, pushed ahead in numbers and gave it their all to create maximum chances and test Spain's goalkeeper. They came extremely close to scoring again as Ishika unleashed a powerful back-hand shot that beat the goalkeeper. However, it was stopped by a defender on the goal-line, denying India the equaliser. Thereafter, Spain fell back and ensured they defended their slim lead till the clock ran out.



Vinesh Phogat returns from retirement

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi

Star Indian wrestler Vinesh Phogat on Friday announced that she would be coming out of retirement to take another shot at an elusive Olympic medal at the 2028 Los Angeles Games as the "the fire never left" her and was merely buried under "exhaustion and noise". The 31-year-old had walked away from the sport after the heartbreak of the Paris Games last year, where she was dramatically disqualified for being 100 grams over the permissible weight limit ahead of her 50kg category gold medal bout. She had appealed to the Court of Arbitration for Sport (CAS), seeking a joint silver medal, but the verdict remained unchanged, leading her to announce her retirement and join politics to be elected as an MLA from Haryana's Julana constituency. "People kept asking if Paris was the end. For a long time, I didn't have the answer. I needed to step away from the mat, from the pressure, from the expectations, even from my own ambitions. For the first time in years, I allowed myself to breathe," Vinesh posted on her social media accounts. "I took time to understand the weight of my journey the highs, the heartbreaks, the sacrifices, the versions of me the world never saw. And somewhere in that reflec-

THE 31-YEAR-OLD HAD WALKED AWAY FROM THE SPORT AFTER THE HEARTBREAK OF THE PARIS GAMES LAST YEAR tion, I found the truth, I still love this sport. I still want to compete." She along with her husband Somvir Rathee welcomed a baby boy into their family in July. "In that silence, I found something I'd forgotten 'the fire never left'. It was only buried under exhaustion and noise. The discipline, the routine, the fight... It's in my system. No matter how far I walked away, a part of me stayed on the mat." Vinesh said she will begin her journey towards LA28 with renewed spirit and her son by her side. "So here I am, stepping back toward LA28 with a heart that's unafraid and a spirit that refuses to bow. And this time, I'm not walking alone my son is joining my team, my biggest motivation, my little cheerleader on this road to the LA Olympics," she added. Vinesh had already scripted history by becoming the first Indian woman wrestler to reach an Olympic gold-medal bout. A three-time Olympian, she has won gold medals at both the Asian Games and the Commonwealth Games.

PT Usha urges Government to promote manufacturing of anti-doping kits in India

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi

Indian Olympic Association President (IOA) and Rajya Sabha member P T Usha on Friday urged the central government to promote production of indigenous anti-doping testing kits under the 'Make in India' initiative, saying that it will not only reduce cost but also increase transparency. Usha raised the issue in Rajya Sabha and said that having to import testing kits causes delayed results and dependency on "external agencies". Two Swiss companies, Berlinger and LockCon, are the major suppliers of these testing kits to India right now, according to a well-placed source. "I want to draw the urgent attention of this house to a matter that affects the integrity of our athletes and the global image of our nation. The need to promote indigenous production of anti-doping kits under the



MP PT Usha speaking in the Rajya Sabha during the Winter session of Parliament in New Delhi

Make in India initiative to work towards making India a dope-free sporting nation. "...The menace of doping continues to threaten fair-play, athlete health and our country's reputation on the world stage. At present a significant portion of high quality dope testing kits is imported, resulting in high cost, delay in testing cycles and dependency on external agencies," she said.

India is bidding to become an Olympic host in 2036 and the International Olympic Committee (IOC) has made it clear that the country will have to considerably improve its current doping record. India ranks poorly in tackling the menace and regularly features in the global top five of dope offenders. Her statement comes a week after Sports Minister Mansukh Mandaviya, in

response to a question in the Upper House, said that the government is committed to expanding the anti-doping measures. The Minister said NADA has increased its testing capacity considerably and 7751 dope control tests are planned in the current year, a significant increase from the 7474 tests done in 2024 and 5794 tests in 2023. Usha said having indigenous dope testing kits would be transformative as it would encourage research, manufacturing, and technology development, including sample collection devices, and portable detection equipment. "India can become self-reliant and even emerge as a global supplier of world-class anti-doping solutions. Such an initiative will not only reduce cost but also speed up testing, increase transparency and strengthen the deterrence mechanism across all levels of sports," she said.

