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## PIONEER IN SHORT

**INVESTMENT COMPANY DUPE PEOPLE OF RS 25 CR**  
A major investment fraud has come to light. The company 'Life is Beautiful Advisory Services' in Vissannapeta has shut down its operations. Victims are now coming forward to report to the police. The organisers initially lured people by promising a job for every household if they planted a sapling at home. They then enticed people, saying their lives would...

FULL REPORT ON P2

**COALITION GOVT PUSHING STATE INTO DEBT-TRAP: KANNABABU**  
YSRCP leader and former minister K Kannababu strongly criticised the coalition government, alleging that it has pushed the state into a debt-trap. Speaking at a media conference on Saturday, he said that Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu has been telling blatant lies to the people regarding the state's debts.

FULL REPORT ON P3

**FIGHTING RAGES ON THAI-CAMBODIAN BORDER**  
Fighting continued to rage on Saturday morning along the border of Thailand and Cambodia, even after US President Donald Trump, acting as a mediator, declared that he had won agreement from both countries for a ceasefire. Thai officials have said they did not agree to a ceasefire, and Cambodia has not commented on Trump's claim. Its defence ministry instead said Thai jets...

FULL REPORT ON P8

## QUOTE OF THE DAY



THE GOVERNMENT HAS BEEN PROVIDING FREE ELECTRICITY TO ALL GOVERNMENT SCHOOLS FROM SEPTEMBER 2024, AT AN ANNUAL COST OF RS. 140 CRORES

— PONGUELURI SRINIVASA REDDY  
TG MINISTER OF INFORMATION AND PUBLIC RELATIONS



## OBTUSE ANGLE



# Messi mesmerises Hyderabad as GOAT Tour 2nd leg goes off smoothly



PNS ■ Hyderabad

Lionel Messi's programme in Hyderabad was in stark contrast to the mayhem in Kolkata as the second leg of the GOAT India Tour ended on a positive note thanks to thorough preparations, sound planning, and discipline. The City of Nizams showed how to pull off an event of this magnitude after Messi's visit to the City of Joy descended into chaos due to

poor crowd management and security lapses earlier on Saturday.

The celebrated Argentine footballer mesmerised the Hyderabad crowd at a nearly-packed Rajiv Gandhi International Stadium as he showed off some of the skills that made him one of the greatest ever to play the sport.

Messi arrived in the city around 5:40 a.m. after a chaotic opening leg of his three-day, four-city GOAT Tour 2025 in Kolkata, and he



was received at the Taj Falaknuma Palace by Telangana Chief Minister Revanth Reddy.

Sporting a green colour crew neck half sleeve T-shirt, black pants and a pair of sports shoes, the World Cup-winning Argentine captain entered the stadium to a deafening cheer of the crowd.

He seemed relaxed all through his one-hour stay at the stadium, in contrast to the anxious and stiff demeanour at the Salt Lake Stadium in Kolkata some hours back. "I am very happy to be in Hyderabad in the midst of all the love and affection shown by you all," Messi said through a translator while addressing the crowd.

Messi and his Inter Miami teammates Luiz Suarez and Rodrigo de Paul took part in a GOAT Cup penalty shootout, with Reddy also turning up in football attire, and conducted football clinics with children before leaving the stadium.

Senior Congress leader Rahul Gandhi joined the visiting trio of players and Reddy at the felicitation towards the end of the event, posing for photographs in front of the sponsorship hoardings.

CONTINUED ON >> P2

# 9 AP Ayyappa devotees injured in Sabarimla accident

PNS ■ Sabarimala



An accident occurred near the Sabarimala Sannidhanam. A tractor used for transporting waste lost control and rammed at high speed into a group of devotees who were descending the hill. In this unexpected accident, nine devotees, including two children, were injured. All the injured are reportedly from Andhra Pradesh.

Immediately after the incident, security personnel and officials swung into action. The injured were rushed to the hospital without delay. Out of the nine injured, the condition of two is said to be critical. Complete details about accident and identify of the devotees injured is yet to be known. Pilgrim rush at Sabarimala is currently very heavy. This tragic incident, occurring at such a time, has sparked a debate over the safety

arrangements at Sabarimala. Meanwhile, it is reported that heavy rainfall caused the tractor to lose control.

Police at the Sannidhanam have taken the tractor driver into custody. It is also reported that five people were traveling in the tractor at the time of the accident.

In view of the Mandala-Makaravilakku annual pilgrimage, a large number of devotees are flocking to the Sabarimala temple. As a result, the Ayyappa temple premises are packed with devotees. There is also heavy traffic on the route from Pamba to Sannidhanam.

CONTINUED ON >> P2

# Students told to remember their teachers

PNS ■ Mangalagiri

Education Minister N Lokesh on Saturday emphasised that students should always respect their teachers, no matter how high they rise in life, as teachers play a crucial role in shaping their future. He was addressing the gathering at the Golden Jubilee celebrations of Don Bosco High School at Errapalem village in Mangalagiri mandal of Guntur district. Role of teachers in a student life is paramount.



Marking 50 years of the school's establishment, Minister Lokesh unveiled a commemorative plaque and inaugurated a newly established science laboratory.

CONTINUED ON >> P2

# Teachers' role is crucial for achieving Viksit Bharat 2047: Lakshminarayana

PNS ■ Vijayawada

Former CBI Joint Director VV Lakshminarayana stated that the role of teachers in the education sector is extremely crucial for achieving Viksit Bharat 2047.

Speaking at the All India Rashtriya Shaikshik Mahasangh (ABRSM) Andhra Pradesh Regional Faculty Training Programme held on Saturday at KL University in Tadepalli-Vaddeswaram, he said that the role of teachers in shaping students



Former CBI Joint Director VV Lakshminarayana speaking at All India Rashtriya Shaikshik Mahasangh at Tadepalli on Saturday

begins in the classroom itself. He emphasised that the ancient Guru-Shishya tradition is timeless, highly relevant, and exemplary.

He remarked that India

represents a confluence of the light of the sun and the light of knowledge. Drawing inspiration from the Vedas, teachers should encourage students towards the pursuit of knowledge. He highlighted the greatness of the Guru-Shishya tradition and stressed the importance of cultivating a questioning mindset among students.

He said that logic, inquiry, and Indian philosophy are deeply embedded in education. Teachers should transform students into conscious

individuals and explain the importance of living a righteous and ethical life. Students' thinking horizons should be broadened.

He emphasised the necessity of adopting the mother tongue as a language of daily use. Lakshminarayana further stated that children's creative abilities must be nurtured, innovative thinking should be encouraged, and teachers must guide students on how values and ethics are essential for success in life.

CONTINUED ON >> P2

# ATAL-MODI GOOD GOVERNANCE YATRA Leaders told not to show arrogance of power

PNS ■ Kadapa

Andhra Pradesh BJP unit president PVN Madhav on Saturday expressed concerns about the alarming arrogance displayed by even some local leaders, suggesting that they are prioritising their own status over the needs of the public. He reflected on the legacy of former prime minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee, a true servant of the nation. He was speaking at a public meeting during Atal-Modi Good Governance Yatra here, after



unveiling the statue of former prime minister AB Vajpayee. Vajpayee, despite being elected an MP 10 times lived a life dedicated to the

country rather than his personal ambitions. He was revered as a journalist, poet, and humanitarian.

CONTINUED ON >> P2

# TTD to grow its own trees to source wood for dwajasthambams

PNS ■ Tirupati

The Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams will grow its own temple trees in a 100-acre land parcel to source wood for its dwa-jasthambams, a holy flag mast occupying a central place in Hindu temples. TTD chairman BR Naidu said the initiative is aimed at nurturing a homegrown temple tree plantation, aligned with its commitment to preserve ancient traditions.

CONTINUED ON >> P2

# January pensions to be disbursed on December 31

PNS ■ Amaravati

The State government has rescheduled the release of January 2026 social security pensions, announcing that distribution will take place on December 31, instead of January 1. The pension disbursement will begin from 7:00 am.

Village and ward secretariat staff will deliver pensions directly to beneficiaries at their doorsteps across the state.

Officials said most beneficiaries will receive their pensions on December 31 itself.

An additional distribution day has been earmarked on January 2, 2026, only to address any technical or operational issues that may arise during the main distribution. The government stated that the revised schedule aims to ensure timely and hassle-free pension delivery to all eligible beneficiaries.

# Pension to landless poor to be restored in Amaravati

PNS ■ Amaravati

The Capital Region Development Authority (CRDA) has initiated steps to provide pensions to landless poor people in the capital city of Amaravati. At a meeting of a three-member committee, a key decision was taken to restore pensions for 4,929 beneficiaries. As per the committee's decision, CRDA is making arrangements to provide a monthly pension of Rs 5,000 to eligible beneficiaries.

At the time of land pooling for the capital, the government had decided to provide pensions to landless poor people so that they would not face livelihood difficulties. Accordingly, 4,929 poor people were receiving pensions then. After the YSRCP government came to power, capital works were halted and pensions for the poor were cancelled. Now, CRDA has decided to invite applications to restore pensions for all of them.

# AP bags energy conservation award for fourth consecutive year

PNS ■ Amaravati

Andhra Pradesh has clinched the National Energy Conservation Award - 2025 for the fourth consecutive year, recognised for its progressive and sustained rise in energy conservation and efficiency. Chief Secretary K Vijayanand said the southern state won this award by demonstrating unwavering commitment across



buildings, industry, municipal, agriculture, DISCOMS (distribution companies) and transport sectors to secure the first prize in

(Group II) category of the National Energy Conservation Award - 2025. "Andhra Pradesh has once again reaffirmed its national leadership in energy efficiency by winning the prestigious National Energy Conservation Award for the fourth consecutive year," said Vijayanand in an official release. According to the chief secretary, President of India Droupadi

Murmu would present the award to Andhra Pradesh State Energy Conservation Mission (APSECM) on National Energy Conservation Day, December 14 at Vigyan Bhavan in New Delhi. He said synergistic cooperation of all government departments, consumers and stakeholders has been pivotal in securing this national recognition.

CONTINUED ON >> P2



KERALA CIVIC POLLS RESULTS

Boost for UDF, setback for LDF, Lotus blooms in state capital

PNS ■ Thiruvananthapuram

In a morale-boosting show ahead of the 2026 Assembly polls, Congress-led UDF on Saturday secured a decisive victory in Kerala's local body elections, dealing a blow to the LDF while the BJP wrested the city civic body from decades of Left control in what Prime Minister Narendra Modi described as the state politics "watershed moment."

Interestingly, it was the "beauty of democracy" remarks of Congress Lok Sabha MP from Thiruvananthapuram, Shashi Tharoor, congratulating the BJP that took the cake on Saturday during the counting of polled votes across the state. Tharoor said he campaigned for a change from 45 years of the LDF "misrule", but the voters have ultimately rewarded another party that also sought a clear change in governance.

"That is the beauty of democracy. The people's

verdict must be respected, whether for the UDF overall or for the BJP in my constituency," Tharoor said.

A year after getting its first MP from the southern state known for its largely left of the Centre politics and dominated by the Congress and CPI (M) led blocs, the BJP wrested Thiruvananthapuram Corporation from the CPI (M), breaching the 45 year-old stronghold of the Left party.

The victory opened up the possibility of BJP getting its first Mayor in Kerala, with the state's first woman IPS officer, 64 year-old R Sreelekha being tipped for the post.

While the opposition highlighted the Sabarimala gold loss and other governance-related issues that swayed the voters away from the CPI (M)-led LDF, the ruling party announced inspection, with months to go for the general elections.

3,500 employees participating in Godavari Sports Festival

PNS ■ Bhimavaram

As part of the Godavari Sports Festival, District Collector Chadalavada Nagarani on Saturday inaugurated the divisional-level sports competitions for government employees of Bhimavaram Division at the SRKR Engineering College sports grounds.

Speaking on the occasion, the Collector said that sports competitions commenced across the district from Saturday, division-wise, under the Godavari Sports Festival. She recalled that earlier such competitions were largely confined to the Revenue and Police departments, but now employees and officers from all departments across the district are actively participating. She informed that nearly 3,500 employees have registered for the competitions district-wide.

The Collector said arrangements have been made to conduct sports events at SRKR Engineering College for Bhimavaram Division, YN College in Narasapuram Division, and Sashi College in



District Collector Chadalavada Nagarani at inaugural function of Godavari Sports Festival in Bhimavaram on Saturday

Tadepalligudem Division. Competitions are being held for both men and women in disciplines such as cricket, volleyball, shuttle badminton, chess, carroms, shot put, tenni-koit, and throwball. She emphasised that such sports events help create a friendly atmosphere among employees and improve coordination between departments. Noting that employees often neglect personal health due to work pressures, the Collector said participation in

sports helps reduce stress and promotes mental peace. She advised officers and staff to give equal importance to their health along with official responsibilities.

Joint Collector T Rahul Kumar Reddy stated that the Godavari Sports Festival is being conducted simultaneously in three divisions under the leadership of the District Collector. He said officials and employees from 35 departments are participating in the competitions.

The inaugural programme was attended by DRO B Shivannarayana Reddy, RDO K Ramachandra Reddy, District Sports Development Officer N. Mohan Das, DPO M Ramanatha Reddy, DEO E. Narayana, District Industries Officer U. Mangapathi Rao, BC Welfare Officer A.V. Suri Babu, Municipal Commissioner K Ramachandra Reddy, Tahsildar Ravi Rambabu, officials from various departments, employees, sports persons, students, and others.



Investment company dupe people of Rs 25 cr

PNS ■ Vissannapeta

A major investment fraud has come to light. The company 'Life is Beautiful Advisory Services' in Vissannapeta has shut down its operations. Victims are now coming forward to report to the police. The organisers initially lured people by promising a job for every household if they planted a sapling at home. They then enticed people, saying their lives would change if they invested money in the company. They took advantage of people's greed and swindled crores of rupees.

The fraudsters appointed agents and set targets, collecting crores of

rupees. They promised. An investment of Rs 10,000 would yield Rs 1,000 every month, they told the people. Further, an investment of Rs 5 lakh would yield Rs 50,000 per month, thereby deceiving the public. Thus, the company collected over Rs 25 crore in total.

When those who had paid money questioned them, Durga Prasad, the founder of Life is Beautiful Advisory Services, committed suicide by drinking pesticide. After Durga Prasad's death, his wife, Nanduri Shivani, went into hiding. Realising they had been cheated, the victims filed a complaint with the Vijayawada Police Commissioner (CP).

Class 10 girl collapses, dies in classroom

PNS ■ Kakinada

A Class 10 girl student, Nallamilli Siri(16), while listening to the lesson in the classroom sitting on the bench along with another girl suddenly fell ill and collapsed. She was immediately rushed to the hospital but doctors pronounced her dead. This tragic incident took place at Vivekananda English medium school in Ramachandrapuram town of Ambedkar Konaseema district, 25kms from here on Saturday. Siri is the daughter of Nallamilli Venkatareddy Sujatha residents of Pasalapudi village. Her body was shifted to the Area Hospital in Ramachandrapuram for postmortem.

‘Will reform education sector to meet global standards’

PNS ■ Hyderabad

As part of making the state of Telangana as the global education hub, the state government has proposed several steps to achieve the goal. Speaking on the steps that the government has been taking to make the state to stand top on the education front, Minister Ponguleti Srinivas Reddy announced that the Telangana government, led by CM Revanth Reddy, is implementing radical changes in the education sector to meet global standards. He said 105 Young India Integrated Schools to be established across the state, with modern infrastructure, for Rs. 21,000 crore and said that 10,000 posts will be filled through the 2024 DSC.

The minister said the gov-

ernment has been providing free electricity to all government schools from September 2024, at an annual cost of Rs. 140 crores.

He said that Rs. 642 crores were spent on improving facilities in schools.

Telangana Young India Skill University was established to provide vocational training and job opportunities. He said a sports university is under consideration to promote sports and make Telangana a sports hub, and emphasised the government's commitment to providing quality education and creating opportunities for youth.

The minister said the proposed young India integrated schools as well as young India skill university will make the state a global education hub as desired by the state government.

YSRCP corporators join TDP ahead of no-trust motion against Mayor

RAVI KUMAR BOPPANA  
PNS ■ Nellore

Political developments in Nellore district have gathered momentum with a series of defections from the YSR Congress Party (YSRCP) to the Telugu Desam Party (TDP), signalling growing instability within the opposition ranks.

In a significant development, Nellore city YSRCP president and Corporation floor leader Boppala Srinivas Yadav joined the TDP on Saturday. Municipal Administration Minister P Narayana formally welcomed him into the party by draping the TDP scarf in his presence. Srinivas Yadav is a corporator from the 37th Division and has been holding key positions in the

municipal corporation.

Ahead of the proposed no-confidence motion against the Mayor on December 18, several YSRCP corporators have been switching allegiance to the TDP. Following Srinivas Yadav's move, more corporators are reportedly preparing to join the ruling party. On Saturday, 42nd Division corporator Karimulla also joined the TDP in the presence of Minister Narayana.

With the city party president himself defecting, confusion and uncertainty have gripped the YSRCP cadre in Nellore. Several party leaders and corporators, said to be influenced by the recent developments and the leadership of Minister Narayana, are reportedly in touch with TDP leaders. The defecting

corporators have stated that they were impressed by the ongoing development works undertaken in the city and decided to join the TDP voluntarily.

Reacting to his decision, Srinivas Yadav said he joined the TDP after witnessing the development initiatives carried out by Minister Narayana and Rural MLA Sridhar Reddy. "Even when I was with the YSRCP, Minister Narayana extended support to me in many ways but never pressured me to switch parties. I joined the TDP on my own, with the sole intention of contributing to the city's development during the remaining 11 months of my term. There is no external pressure behind my decision, and we will certainly succeed in the no-

confidence motion against the Mayor," he said.

Responding to the political churn, TDP official spokesperson Sampath Kumar said the present Mayor had never functioned in the true spirit of the office. He quoted Minister Narayana as saying that politics and development should not be mixed, and that corporators are voluntarily joining the TDP only to ensure the city's development. He dismissed allegations by YSRCP leaders, stating that their rhetoric and conduct had reduced public support to just 11 seats.

Meanwhile, political circles note that the rapid pace of defections has significantly weakened the YSRCP's position in the Nellore Municipal Corporation.

Govt allots land for sports city in Tirupati

PNS ■ Amaravati

The State government is also giving priority to sports. As part of this initiative, it is proposing to build the largest Sports City and an international cricket ground in Amaravati. At the same time, the government is taking steps to establish Sports Cities and grounds in districts wherever necessary. Recently, it has prepared to construct a Sports City in Tirupati as well.

The government has allocated 28.37 acres of land near Daminedu under Tirupati Rural Mandal for the Sports City. In this regard, the Special Chief Secretary of the Revenue Department has issued orders transferring the land free of cost to the Sports Authority of Andhra Pradesh (SAP).

FROM PAGE - 1

Messi mesmerises...

Messi presented the GOAT Cup to the winning team of a 7-a-side exhibition match, Singareni RR 9, which was representing Reddy.

The CM presented a memento to Messi, while Gandhi gave one to Suarez.

After reaching the stadium, Messi was seen looking around the photos hung on the walls and having conversations with the officials, waved to the crowd from behind a glass barrier in acknowledgement of their adulation.

Later, he showed his immaculate control of the ball to the great delight of the crowd, juggling the ball with his feet as he kicked around the ball with his Suarez and de Paul, as well as Reddy.

Messi took a tour of the stadium, waving to the crowd.

Earlier in the day, about 50,000 spectators, many of whom had paid Rs 4,000 to Rs 12,000 -- and in some cases up to Rs 20,000 in the black market -- watched helplessly as a swarm of politicians, VVIPs, security personnel, and assorted hangers more interested in selfies than crowd control surrounded Messi, leaving the fans at the Salt Lake Stadium angry.

The spectators started the mayhem by hurling bottles - banned items in an otherwise sporting venue. It was baffling how they were allowed to enter with these objects, which also included food packets. Chairs were then ripped out and thrown.

Fibreglass seats lay smashed across the pitch and the synthetic track.

Messi will reach Mumbai on Sunday for his third leg of the GOAT Tour 2025. He will wind up his visit on Monday in New Delhi, where he will meet Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

9 AP Ayyappa devotees...

On the other hand, criticism is mounting that the local government and the Sabarimala Devaswom Board have failed to handle crowd management properly. There have been recent allegations that arrangements were not made in proportion to the pilgrim rush. A few days ago, complaints were raised about devotees being made to stand for hours on the uphill route and the lack of a proper information system.

Additionally, Congress leaders have accused the authorities of failing in making adequate arrangements for devotees visiting for Ayyappa darshan. Kerala Congress senior leader V.D. Satheesan recently alleged that only inadequate arrangements were made for devotees and that officials failed to control the crowd. However, officials claim that they are unable to make necessary arrangements due to the enforcement of the election code of conduct for local body elections.

Students told...

He also paid floral tributes to the statue of Don Bosco School founder and chairman, Chinnappa.

Speaking on the occasion, Lokesh said values are more important than education

alone and urged students to practise them in their daily lives. He credited his teachers, including his school teacher Manjula, several lecturers, Municipal Administration Minister Narayana, and Professor Rajireddy, for his personal and professional growth. "If I have reached this level today, it is because of my teachers. Students should never forget those who taught them, irrespective of their status in life," he said.

The Minister later felicitated the fathers who contributed to the development of the Don Bosco School and assured government support for the institution's future growth. He noted that Don Bosco schools across the Telugu states not only impart education but also instil strong values in students, and expressed hope that the institution would continue to serve society successfully for many more years.

Earlier, Minister Lokesh appreciated the innovative teaching methods of Manchikanti Venkatesh, a Biology School Assistant and Headmaster at the Government Upper Primary School in Jarlapalem village of Kondapi mandal, Prakasam district. He described the teacher's student-centric approach as inspiring, citing initiatives such as encouraging reading during school breaks, promoting creative writing in Telugu, and organising educational tours during holidays to enhance students' understanding of nature, environment, and history. He also lauded the teacher's

campaign to promote libraries in schools.

Meanwhile, the coalition government has taken steps to enhance students' skills by distributing educational kits to students from Classes I to X in the 2026-27 academic year. The state government has approved the release of 7830.04 crore for the programme under the "Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan Vidyarthi Mitra" scheme. The kits will include notebooks, belts, shoes, bags, dictionaries, textbooks, workbooks, and three sets of uniform cloth.

The government has also approved Rs 157.20 crore for the procurement and distribution of the kits, with suppliers to be selected through a tender process. Orders in this regard were issued by School Education Department Secretary Kona Sasidhar.

Teachers' role...

Speaking on the occasion, KL University Vice-Chancellor Prof Rajasekhar Rao urged teachers to work with national spirit along with exceptional subject expertise, so that students can excel in their respective disciplines.

ABRSM national general secretary Guntha Lakshman said that ABRSM is a leading teachers' organisation not only in India but across the world. He informed that about 15 lakh teachers are working across India from the primary level to higher education institutions.

Chairman of the Andhra Pradesh State Council of Higher Education Prof K.

Madhumurthy attended as the chief guest and stated that the education system and teachers will play a key role in transforming India into a Vishwaguru by 2047. He said that under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the Government of India introduced the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 to align education with national development and societal needs in sectors such as industry, agriculture, housing, and healthcare.

Nearly 200 representatives from degree colleges, engineering colleges, intermediate colleges, state and central universities, and other higher education institutions participated in the Programme.

TTD to grow its own...

"TTD is poised to launch a first-of-its-kind sacred and ecological initiative, the Divine Plantation Project in a 100-acre area," said Naidu in an official press release on Saturday.

"Dwajasthambam" is a spiritual beacon symbolising the eternal connection between the earthly realm and the divine. It represents unwavering faith, sanctity and divine presence, said the temple body.

Traditionally made from a single tree, dwajasthambams are carefully chosen and ritually sanctified, strictly through spiritual, astrological and ritualistic procedures.

Teak, Indian Kino, Terminalia and Shorea species are generally chosen, valued for their strength, durability, vertical growth

and longevity.

"Once shaped in accordance with agamic (ritualistic) proportions, the wooden flag mast is traditionally encased in a metal sheathing--most commonly brass or copper--and in highly revered temples such as the Sri Venkateswara Swamy Temple at Tirumala, it is further adorned with gold-plated coverings," said the press release.

Owing to the profound sanctity associated with the dwajasthambam, and in keeping with its responsibility of managing over 60 Hindu temples across the country, besides establishing new temples, the temple body has initiated the 'Temple Trees' plantation project.

With this, TTD becomes the first temple institution in the country to systematically cultivate its own sacred trees exclusively for dwajasthambam, the press release added.

TTD is the official custodian of Sri Venkateswara temple in Tirupati.

Leaders told...

In Parliament, his speeches commanded attention and respect, while LK Advani's speeches brought a serious focus to the House.

Madhav highlighted Vajpayee's grace, even in defeat, and noted his steadfast opposition to divisive politics based on religion. He tirelessly worked to ensure that the nation remained united. Alongside Shyama Prasad Mukherjee, who made the ultimate sac-

rifice for Kashmir, Vajpayee continued to uphold those ideals.

In Andhra Pradesh, the emergence of NT Rama Rao (NTR) significantly diminished the Congress's influence. During times of conspiracies against NTR, Vajpayee stood firmly in support. In 1984, he personally encouraged NTR at the TDP camp, instilling confidence and strength.

Even when the BJP won only two seats, Vajpayee did not lose hope. Instead, he rallied the party, emphasising unity and commitment to the nation. His determination led him to tour the country, fostering alliances and ultimately forming the National Front with NTR as its chair.

Later, under the terms of the NDA, Vajpayee and N Chandrababu Naidu forged an alliance that showcased their commitment to governance.

AP bags energy...

Vijayanand noted that engaging all departments by establishing energy conservation cells with nodal officers across sectors contributed to winning the award. Initiatives such as Integrated Clean Energy Policy and Andhra Pradesh Industrial Development Policy 4.0 (2024-29), along with sector-specific policies for MSMEs, electronics and food processing as well as targeted programmes across domestic, industrial, agricultural, and building sectors also played a role.

Meanwhile, S Nagalakshmi, chief executive, APSCEM said outreach efforts will be

expanded involving departments, students, industries and various other stakeholders to fully tap the state's energy saving potential.

Criminal case...

The matter had been highlighted in written petitions to the DGP, Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu, and Deputy Chief Minister Pawan Kalyan.

The police have launched an investigation into the allegations, and further legal proceedings are expected as the case develops.

Sports Authority Panel to Probe Violations in Kabaddi : The Sports Authority of Andhra Pradesh recently constituted a three-member committee to investigate grievances and irregularities within kabaddi, including misuse of identity documents and violations affecting players' careers. SAAP officials said the probe aims to ensure transparency and protect athletes' interests after complaints surfaced about malpractice and internal disputes within the sport's administrative bodies.

Other Selection /Administrative Controversies in Kabaddi: At the national stage, governance challenges have occasionally surfaced in kabaddi and related bodies, with sports organisations under scrutiny for administrative conduct, athlete grievances, and management disputes -- underscoring the importance of clear, merit-based selection procedures, athlete welfare, and transparent administration.

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# Jareeb farmers' issue will be resolved in one month: Pemmasani

PNS ■ Amaravati

Union Minister Pemmasani Chandrasekhar made key remarks regarding the issue of jareeb (fertile) lands. He announced that the Jareeb land issues would be resolved within a month. The Union Minister conducted a review meeting on CRDA activities. Speaking on the occasion, he responded to the Jareeb land problems and stated that tests would be conducted to decide on the nature of the soil. He explained that issues related to lanka (river island) lands had been resolved.

Meanwhile, the Union Minister said that the problem of farmers who

received plots where land pooling was not undertaken in Amaravati is still pending. He clarified that land acquisition would be taken up after discussions with those farmers. He also said that they are considering allocating plots through a lottery system to those who wish to have plots in a different location.

On another note, Union Minister Chandrasekhar revealed that 2,004 farmers did not give their lands for land pooling. He said they would speak with them once again. He also stated that DPRs (detailed project reports) would be prepared for 26 villages and that boundary stones would be



laid on both sides starting Monday. After Monday, village-level meetings will be held to discuss social infrastructure and village development plans.

Meanwhile, the Andhra Pradesh government, which

aims to develop Amaravati into an international-level city, is planning to further expand the capital. As part of this, it has recently decided to undertake the second phase of land pooling. In the first phase, the AP government

pooled 33,000 acres of land from farmers under the land pooling system. In the second phase, it plans to pool 16,666 acres. These lands will be pooled across seven villages.

For this purpose, farmers' opinions are being gathered. The State government is planning to construct facilities such as an international cricket stadium, an international sports city, and an international airport in Amaravati. Additional land will be acquired for these projects. Land pooling will be undertaken in the village limits of Pedamadduru, Vadlamani, Endrayi, Karlapudi, Vaikunthapuram, Pedapari, and Harish chandrapuram.

# Efforts underway to establish Aviation Education City

PNS ■ Vizianagaram

The Andhra Pradesh government is making efforts to bring new projects to the State. Not only Information Technology companies and industries, but also with the support of the Central government, it is also planning to establish educational institutions and universities.

Recently, it has brought another brand-new proposal into focus. Efforts are underway to establish an Aviation Education City in the State. It is reported that Minister N Lokesh discussed this proposal during his recent visit to Delhi. While in the national capital, he reportedly held discussions with representatives of the GMR Group regarding the Aviation Education City proposals, and some plans are said to be in preparation.

At present, construction of the international airport at Bhogapuram in Vizianagaram district is nearing completion. It is believed that lands near Annavaram under Bhimili mandal of Visakhapatnam district, which are close to this airport, are suitable for setting up the Aviation Education City. It is said that lands belonging to the Manasas Trust, as well as



For representation purpose only

government and private lands, are available in this area. The plan is to develop the city across 500 acres. The government is considering moving forward with this project in partnership with GMR. There is speculation that discussions on the Aviation City bear fruit soon.

If this project materialises, it will become one of the country's major hubs for education and training in aviation, aerospace, and defense sectors.

Earlier, Union Civil Aviation Minister K Ram Mohan Naidu had proposed this idea, suggesting the establishment of an aviation university near the Bhogapuram International Airport. Now, steps are being taken toward developing it as a full-fledged city. If this proposal turns into reality, it is expected to bring a revo-

lutionary change in the aviation sector, according to observers.

In this Aviation Education City, training will be provided in areas such as aircraft engine maintenance and repair, aerospace technology, and defense equipment manufacturing, among many others.

This project will offer opportunities for skill development and good employment not only to local youth but also to young people from across the country. Although the academies currently run by GMR operate on a smaller scale, this new project is expected to create a record as Asia's largest aviation education center. The project is still in the discussion stage, but if everything goes as planned, it may reach a conclusion this month.

# Coalition govt pushing State into debt-trap: Kannababu

PNS ■ Kakinada

YSRCP leader and former minister K Kannababu strongly criticised the coalition government, alleging that it has pushed the state into a debt-trap.

Speaking at a media conference on Saturday, he said that Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu has been telling blatant lies to the people regarding the state's debts. He alleged that during the YSRCP regime, TDP leaders carried out malicious propaganda about state borrowings.

He said Naidu is raising loans in violation of FRBM norms. He recalled that when YS Jagan Mohan Reddy took loans, a Goebbels propaganda was launched claiming that the state would turn into Sri Lanka.

However, in the last 18 months alone, the State government has borrowed Rs 2,66,175 crore. "If Jagan Mohan Reddy borrows, it is called a curse; if Naidu borrows, it is projected as a



boon, with the help his own media praising it, he said.

He pointed out that during the difficult Covid-19 period, Jagan Mohan Reddy did not stop welfare schemes, yet lies were deliberately spread among the public against him. "Have the loans taken by Naidu been invested for the benefit of the people? No. When Jagan Mohan Reddy planned to raise loans through AP Beverages, TDP wrote letters to the Centre and even filed court cases, claiming those loans were

unconstitutional. Now that loans are taken in the same way, he alleged.

Kannababu further said, "Which law allows Naidu to borrow beyond limits? He is preparing to take another Rs 7,000-8,000 crore in loans for Amaravati. Government employees' salaries are not being paid properly. If anyone questions these injustices, cases are filed using the 'Red Book'. Roads are full of potholes, but they talk about growth engines and growth corridors,"

# Govt committed to improve infrastructure in city

PNS ■ Kakinada

Kakinada MLA Vanamadi Kondababu on Saturday said the government was committed to the all-round development of the city and would work with the cooperation of all sections of society to further improve urban infrastructure and civic amenities. He convened a meeting of prominent citizens, traders, industrialists, intellectuals and officials of the municipal corporation in the city to seek their suggestions and advice on development initiatives. Recalling that Kakinada was once known as a "pensioners' paradise," the MLA stressed the need for collective efforts to improve sanitation, traffic management, roads and drainage systems.

Former MP Chitturi Ravindra, Kakinada Sea Ports Limited CEO Merla Muralidhar, architect Gatti Satyanarayana, Red Cross chairman



Kakinada MLA Vanamadi Kondababu speaking at a meeting in Kakinada on Saturday

Yarlagadda Dasaradha Ramarao and trader Grandhi Narayanarao Babji were among those who offered suggestions for the city's development. Municipal Corporation in-charge Commissioner NVV Satyanarayana, Dr Vadrevu Ravi, Dr Anand, Badam Sunderarao, Gadam Mahesh, Chode Anil, Nekkanti Srinivas, Mallipudi Veeru, advocate Jawahar Ali, Bachu Sekhar, Vakkalanka Ramakrishna, Chitla Kiran, Municipal Health Officer Dr. D. Prudhwicharan and Circle Inspector of Police N. Ramesh also attended the meeting.

# Largest endowments administrative building inaugurated in Kurnool

PNS ■ Kurnool

Minister for Endowments Anam Ramanarayana Reddy on Saturday announced that the largest administrative building s been established in Kurnool after the one Vijayawada. He, along with Minister TG Bharat, inaugurated the Andhra Pradesh Endowments Department Administrative Building Complex in the city on Saturday.

Speaking on the occasion, Minister Ramanarayana Reddy said that nearly 95 per cent of the assurances given during the elections have been implemented in the Endowments Department. He stated that the state government has issued a Government Order (GO) to conduct temple festivals and rituals strictly in accordance with Vedic and Agama traditions.

The Minister said the government has declared the Nirvanam Day of Goddess Vasavi Kanyaka Parameswari as an official government event. He announced that Archakas will be paid a minimum monthly wage of Rs 15,000, while those trained in Vedic education are being provided an honorarium of Rs 3,000. Highlighting steps taken to strengthen temple administration, he said a ministers' committee has been constituted for the development of temple tourism. He added that a



Endowments Minister Anam Ramanarayana Reddy speaking to the media in Kurnool on Saturday

special committee under the District Collector has been formed to monitor temple lands. As part of Hindu dharma protection, a retired IAS officer has been appointed, he said.

The Minister further announced that the government has decided to reconstruct ancient temples across the state. A total of 490 temples will be renovated at an estimated cost of Rs 595 crore. He said action would be taken based on reports related to the implementation of GO No. 888.

Meanwhile, Minister TG Bharat said that while the previous government confined itself to laying foundation stones, the present coalition government is completing projects and making them accessible to the public. He stated that the Endowments Department administrative building was constructed at a cost of 75

crore. TG Bharat said the government is working in a planned manner under the leadership of Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu and asserted that development is possible only under the present administration. He added that if the government continues, Andhra Pradesh will rank among the top states in development, with investments worth lakhs of crores flowing into the state. He also said the Chief Minister is committed to the development of all regions of Andhra Pradesh.

The programme was attended by MLAs Gauru Charitha Reddy and Dastagiri, Endowments Commissioner Rama chandra Mohan, District Collector Dr Siri, Srisailam Temple Executive Officer Srinivas Rao, Chairman Ramesh Naidu, directors, and other officials.

# Motorists sensitised on dangers of mobile phone use while driving

PNS ■ Kakinada

he city traffic police on Saturday conducted an awareness programme to educate vehicle drivers and pedestrians about traffic regulations and road safety. The programme was held at Kalpana Centre, where Traffic Inspector Ramesh highlighted the serious dangers of using mobile phones while driving and even while walking on roads.

Using audio-visual aids, the inspector explained how mobile phone distraction often would lead to accidents. He also spoke about the rising incidence of cyber crimes and explained how fraudsters deceive and loot



Traffic police cautioning motorists against using mobile phone while driving, in Kakinada on Saturday

unsuspecting people.

Inspector Ramesh stressed that wearing helmets is mandatory for all two-wheeler riders, describing them as life-saving devices. He urged drivers to avoid rash driving, triple riding and

performing bike stunts. He also warned against the use of modified silencers, stating that they cause severe noise pollution and disturb the peace of residents, particularly the elderly and those suffering from illnesses.

Addressing pedestrians, he explained various forms of cyber crimes such as fake online loan offers, fraudulent job schemes and threats of so-called "digital arrests." He clarified that there is no provision called

"digital arrest" in the CrPC and advised people not to fall prey to such threats. He also emphasized the importance of emergency helpline numbers—112/100, 1930 and 1972. The inspector appealed to everyone to strictly follow traffic rules for their own safety as well as that of other road users. He informed that, under the instructions of SP Bindu Madhav, a special drive against drunken driving has been launched in the city and cases are being booked. He added that courts are imposing heavy fines and, in some cases, even awarding short-term imprisonment for drunken driving offences.

# Man arrested for killing friend over trivial issue

PNS ■ Tirupati

A tragic event unfolded in the Tirupati district, where a man lost his life at the hands of another, driven by a misguided suspicion that he had lured a woman through occult practices. This disturbing incident, which occurred in October, has only recently come to light. The crime took place in Narsingapuram under in Chandragiri mandal.

According to the Madanapalle Rural Police, Narasimulu, a resident of a nearby village in the Madanapalle mandal, was married to Vijayalakshmi and had three children. He shared a long-standing friendship with a man named Nagaraju, who used to frequently visit his home.

A suspicion arose when Nagaraju began to entertain

the thought that Narasimulu, who had knowledge of tantric practices, was using that knowledge to dominate his wife. This suspicion escalated, leading Nagaraju to conceive a plan for murder.

On October 27, he deceitfully summoned Narasimulu on the pretext of needing assistance with a tantric healing service and lured him to Narsingapuram.

Upon Narasimulu's arrival, Nagaraju, with the help of three other villagers, Muniraju, Narayanaswamy, and Katti Narasimulu, allegedly led him to a secluded mango orchard near the railway station.

They bound his hands and feet, silenced him with a plaster, and suffocated him to death. Afterward, they dug a pit and buried his body, the police said.

As days passed without any sign of Narasimulu, his wife, Vijayalakshmi, grew concerned and reached out to the Madanapalle Police. Her report prompted the police to open an investigation.

During the inquiry, investigators uncovered evidence from Narasimulu's phone records, which indicated a conversation with Nagaraju. This led to the arrest and interrogation of Nagaraju and Muniraju. Ultimately, the chilling truth emerged. Nagaraju admitted to the murder, driven by his unfounded belief that Narasimulu had harmed his wife through tantric means. However, despite his careful planning, he overlooked the risk of his phone records revealing his involvement.

# SRM University-AP recognised as QS I-GAUGE Institution

PNS ■ Amaravati

SRM University-AP, has been awarded the prestigious QS I-GAUGE Institution of Happiness (IOH) Award 2025-26, recognising its strong commitment to a positive, inclusive, and well-being-centred academic environment. The honour follows an extensive stakeholder survey involving students, faculty, and alumni, highlighting the university's sustained focus on happiness, emotional well-being, and holistic development.

The QS I-GAUGE IOH is a national initiative that celebrates institutions prioritising mental health, stakeholder satisfaction, and human-centred campuses. The 2025-26 edition carries



Vice-Chancellor Prof Ch Satish Kuma receiving QS I-GAUGE Institution of Happiness Award 2025-26 in Delhi

the theme "One Campus, Many Smiles: Celebrating Every Voice in Well-being." Pro-Chancellor Dr P

Sathyannarayanan said the university remains committed to fostering a culture of happiness and a positive

learning environment through a transformative and inclusive education ecosystem. Vice-Chancellor

Prof. Ch Satish Kumar noted that the recognition reaffirms SRM University-AP's belief that academic excellence and student well-being must go hand in hand, ensuring students and faculty feel valued and supported.

Dr Karthik Rajendran, Associate Dean-Quality Assurance and Rankings, stated that the recognition reflects collective efforts to build a supportive campus, with QS I-GAUGE feedback aiding further improvements in quality and satisfaction. The award was received by Prof Ch Satish Kumar in New Delhi. With this honour, SRM University-AP continues to position happiness and well-being as core pillars of educational excellence.



PROSPECT



Swami Avimukteshwaranand Saraswati Ji Maharaj felicitating New Delhi Station Manager Rakesh Sharma with the Martand Honour for dedicating his selfless service to hundreds of railway passengers during his three decades as a serving Rail-man. The honour was bestowed in the event organised by Kurukshetra Gurukul Foundation led by its Founder President Sandeep Deo. Sharma is credited with reaching out to people/passengers and help them in searching for lost and found items in trains, platforms

Raj Kumar Goyal to be sworn in as new CIC

Former IAS officer Raj Kumar Goyal will be sworn in as Chief Information Commissioner (CIC) by President Droupadi Murmu on Monday.

Former Railway Board chief Jaya Verma Sinha, former IPS officer Swagat Das, former CSS officer Sanjeev Kumar Jindal, former IAS officer Surendra Singh Meena and ex-Indian Forest Service officer Khushwant Singh Sethi have been recommended as Information Commissioners.

Senior journalists P R Ramesh and Ashutosh Chaturvedi, and Sudha Rani Relangi, Member (Legal), PNGRAB will take oath as ICs by newly sworn in CIC.

Cooperatives key to India’s self-reliance: Minister Gurjar

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE  
■ Guwahati

Union Minister Krishan Pal Gurjar on Saturday emphasised the role of the cooperative movement in making the country self-reliant, with States like Assam to play a special part in it. He was speaking at the opening of the 4th Cooperative Mela 2025, organised by the State's Cooperation department, under the guidance of the Ministry of Cooperation.

The three-day event will showcase the strength, diversity and potential of the cooperative movement in the State. Gurjar, the Union Minister of State for Cooperation, said that the cooperative movement in Assam is a natural extension of the State's deep cultural and spiritual ethos.

He paid tribute to the great Vaishnavite saints, Srimanta Shankaradev and Madhavdev, whose teachings on unity, equality and service to society form the very foundation of the cooperative spirit.

He maintained that under the leadership of the Prime Minister, and the focused guidance of the Union Minister of Cooperation, the national vision of 'Sahkar Se Samridhii' (Prosperity through Cooperation) is transforming into a vibrant reality.

Gurjar highlighted the establishment of the Ministry of Cooperation in 2021 as a historic step, providing the necessary institutional impetus and a clear blueprint for an all-round, world-class cooperative system in the country. Praising Assam's reforms in this sector, the Union minister said this State-level proactive implementation has posi-

tioned it as a leader in key national initiatives, including the 100 per cent computerisation of Primary Agricultural Credit Societies (PACS), with over 800 PACS already adopting the new Model Byelaws.

He said that this progress is empowering youth and women, fostering entrepreneurship in diverse sectors and contributing to financial inclusion for over 32 lakh members. Assam is now firmly aligned with the National Cooperative Policy 2025's goal of establishing one cooperative in every village by 2026, Gurjar said, urging collective effort to build a prosperous, self-reliant and cooperative-led future for the State.

State Minister for Cooperation Jogen Mohan, also speaking on the occasion, said the exhibition is a celebration of grassroots empowerment. He praised the participants for achieving self-dependence and demonstrating remarkable resourcefulness by successfully turning waste into valuable resources using locally available materials.

He detailed the comprehensive benefits these cooperatives are bringing to the people, spanning diverse sectors—from the production of essential goods to the success of women's Self-Help Groups.

The Cooperative Mela features participation from 160 cooperative societies representing key sectors such as handloom, fishery, dairy, agriculture and youth, and women-led enterprises, providing a vibrant platform for showcasing local products, innovations and cooperative success stories.

CJI seeks unified judicial policy, tech for courts

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
■ Jaisalmer

Pushing for a “unified judicial policy”, Chief Justice of India Surya Kant on Saturday said technology can help align standards and practices across courts, creating a “seamless experience” for citizens, regardless of their location.

He said high courts — due to the federal structure — have had their own practices and technological capacities, and “regional barriers” can be broken down with technology to create a more unified judicial ecosystem.

Delivering the keynote address at the West Zone Regional Conference in Jaisalmer, Kant proposed the idea of a “national judicial ecosystem” and called for an overhaul of India’s judicial system with the integration of technology.

“Today, as technology reduces geographical barriers and enables convergence, it invites us to think of justice not as regional systems operating in parallel,

but as one national ecosystem with shared standards, seamless interfaces, and coordinated goals,” he said.

He emphasised how the role of technology in the judiciary has evolved over time.

“Technology is no longer merely an administrative convenience. It has evolved into a constitutional instrument that strengthens equality before the law, expands access to justice, and enhances institutional efficiency,” he said, highlighting how digital tools can bridge gaps in the judicial system.

Kant pointed out that technology enables the judiciary to overcome the limitations of physical distance and bureaucratic hurdles.

“It allows the judiciary to transcend physical barriers and bureaucratic rigidities to deliver outcomes that are timely, transparent and principled,” he said, adding that the effective use of technology can modernise the delivery of justice and make it more accessible to citizens across the country.

The CJI called for implementing a “unified judicial policy”.

He said India's judicial system has long been shaped by its federal structure, and different high courts have their own practices and technological capacities.

“India's vast diversity has led to different high courts evolving their own practices, administrative priorities and technological capacities. This variation, though natural in a federal democracy, has resulted in uneven experiences for litigants across the country,” he said.

Kant underscored that predictability is crucial for building trust in the judicial system.

“A core expectation citizens place upon the courts is predictability,” he said, adding that citizens should not only expect fair treatment but also consistency in how cases are handled across the country.

He pointed to the potential of technology in improving predictability.

“Technology enables us to

track systemic delays and make problems visible rather than concealed,” he said.

By identifying areas where delays occur, such as in bail matters or cases involving certain types of disputes, courts can take targeted action to address these issues and improve efficiency, Kant said.

The CJI explained that data-driven tools could identify the reasons behind delays or bottlenecks, allowing for faster, more focused solutions.

“Technology enables prioritisation by flagging sensitive case categories, monitoring pendency in real time and ensuring transparent listing protocols,” he said.

Justice Surya Kant also discussed the importance of prioritising urgent cases where delays could result in significant harm. He highlighted his recent administrative order that ensures urgent cases, such as bail petitions or habeas corpus cases, are listed within two days of curing defects.

“Where delay causes deep

harm, the system must respond with urgency,” he stated, explaining that technology can help courts identify and expedite such cases. Kant also raised the issue of the clarity of judicial decisions.

He noted that many litigants, despite winning cases, often struggle to understand the terms of their judgment due to complex legal language.

“Although the orders had gone in their favour, they remained unsure of what relief they had actually secured because the language was too technical, vague or evasive to understand,” he said.

He advocated for more uniformity in how judgments are written. “A unified judicial approach must therefore extend to how we communicate outcomes,” he said.

The CJI also discussed the role of AI and digital tools in improving case management. He pointed to the potential of AI-based research assistants and digital case management

systems to streamline judicial processes.

“Emerging technological tools are now capable of performing once-unthinkable functions. They can highlight missing precedent references, cluster similar legal questions, and simplify factual narration,” he said, explaining how these technologies can help judges make more consistent decisions.

He also highlighted tools like the National Judicial Data Grid and e-courts, which are already helping to standardise processes like case filings and tracking.

Kant reiterated that the integration of technology into the judicial process is not just about improving efficiency but about upholding the integrity of the system and strengthening public trust. “The measure of innovation is not the complexity of the software we deploy, but the simplicity with which a citizen understands the outcome of their case and believes that justice has been served,” he said.

Papon lights up IRFC 40th Foundation Day

GYANVI SHARMA  
■ New Delhi

The Indian Railways Finance Corporation (IRFC) celebrated its 40th foundation day on December 12, 2025 in a spectacular evening filled with music, joy and nostalgia. The highlight of the evening was none other than the renowned singer Papon (Angaraag Mahanta), whose performance left the audience mesmerised.

The night began with a captivating short film showcasing Papon's journey – glimpses of his blockbuster hits, achievements and memorable past performances. The cinematic introduction seamlessly led to his grand entry on stage, greeted by the roaring applause of the audience.

Setting the tone for the evening, Papon opened with his iconic song “Kyon” from the movie Barfi, instantly winning hearts and raising the energy in the auditorium.

What followed was a performance that combined raw enthusiasm with a soft, enduring charm. Papon's voice resonated deeply, touching not just the ears but the hearts of everyone present. Among the highlights was his rendition of the latest hit “Qayde Se” from the movie Metro In Dino, which had the audience swaying to the rhythm, their flashlights illuminating the hall like a sea of stars.

He delighted the crowd further with a surprise selection of ghazals by Jagjit

Singh, including the soulful “Tum Itna Jo Muskura Rahe Ho,” along with evergreen classics like “Pehla Nasha Pehla Khumar,” originally rendered by Sadhana Sargam and Udit Narayan. Each note and each verse carried a serene and almost magical quality that held the audience spellbound.

The energy peaked when the crowd passionately requested the chart-topping song “Bulleya” from the movie Sultan. Papon answered with an intriguing performance, doing full justice to the audience's excitement.

Accompanied by a talented team of musicians, including a skilled guitarist, flute player and percussionists, Papon's ensemble delivered flawless musical synergy,

creating an unforgettable experience.

As the evening drew to a close, Papon and his band members were felicitated with mementos and warm appreciation from Indian Railways CEO Satish Kumar and the entire IRFC team led by CMD Manoj Kumar Dubey, recognising their remarkable contribution to the celebration.

The event was more than a musical performance, it was a celebration of talent, emotion and the enduring power of music to bring people together. The 40th foundation day of IRFC will be remembered not only for its milestone but also for the magical night when Papon's voice transformed the evening into a heartfelt musical journey.



India in talks with Mexico on high tariffs; reserves right to act to protect exporters

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE  
■ New Delhi

India is engaged with Mexico over the South American nation's decision to unilaterally raise tariffs on a number of products to find mutually beneficial solutions, even as New Delhi reserves the right to take appropriate measures to safeguard the interests of its exporters, an official said on Saturday.

These duties are announced against countries that do not have free trade agreements with Mexico, including India, China, South Korea, Thailand and Indonesia. The official said that India, in fact, was engaged with Mexico during the initial tabling of a bill in this regard. The Embassy of India in Mexico raised the issue with the Ministry of Economy on September 30, 2025, itself, seeking special concessions to shield Indian exports from the new tariffs.

“India values its partnership with Mexico and stands ready to work collaboratively toward a stable and balanced trade environment that benefits businesses and consumers in both countries,”

the official added. Further, both the countries are looking to start negotiations for a free trade agreement, and terms of reference (ToR) to initiate the talks formally are expected to be finalised soon. Experts said that the trade agreement will help insulate Indian companies from these tariffs, which were imposed under pressure from the US to align with America on increasing tariffs against China and prevent transshipment to America.

Mexico's Senate has approved a new tariff measure on December 11, 2025, and it has since been cleared by both chambers of Congress. It is aimed at boosting manufacturing and reducing trade imbalances.

Under the decision, Mexico will impose steep import tariffs - ranging from about 5 per cent to as high as 50 per cent on a wide range of goods (about 1,463 tariff lines) from countries that do not have free trade agreements with Mexico, including India, China, South Korea, Thailand and Indonesia.

However, the list of items covered is yet to be officially notified. The higher duties

will take effect on January 1, 2026. “The Department of Commerce is engaged with Mexico's Ministry of Economy to explore mutually beneficial solutions which align with global trade rules,” the official said. A high-level meeting in this regard between Commerce Secretary Rajesh Agrawal and Mexico's Vice Minister of Economy Luis Rosendo has already taken place and follow on technical meetings are expected soon.

“India reserves the right to take appropriate measures to safeguard the interests of Indian exporters, while continuing to pursue a solution through constructive dialogue,” the official added.

The Government official further said that the actual impact on Indian exports will depend on the criticality of Indian exports to domestic supply chains in Mexico and ability of Indian companies to secure exemptions or pass on the tariff cost to the Mexican consumers.

India believes that unilateral increases in MFN (most favoured nation) tariffs, without prior consultations, do not align with the spirit of our cooperative economic

engagement or with the principles of predictability and transparency underpinning the multilateral trading system.

The official also said that the Government is currently examining the details and implications of Mexico's tariff revisions and remains engaged with all stakeholders to monitor the evolving situation. Federation of Indian Export Organisations (FIEO) Director General Ajay Sahai said that Mexico's decision is a matter of concern, particularly for sectors like automobiles and auto components, machinery, electrical and electronics, organic chemicals, pharmaceuticals, textiles and plastics. “Such steep duties will erode our competitiveness and risk disrupting supply chains that have taken years to develop,” Sahai said, adding that this development also underlines the little urgency for India and Mexico to fast-track a comprehensive trade agreement. Domestic auto component manufacturers will face enhanced cost pressures with Mexico hiking duties on Indian imports, according to industry body ACMA.

UNESCO meet at Delhi’s Red Fort concludes; 67 new elements added to ICH lists

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
■ New Delhi

A key UNESCO meet on safeguarding intangible cultural heritage (ICH) being held at Delhi's Red Fort ends on Saturday, with the panel adding 67 new living heritage elements from various countries during the nearly week-long session.

The next session of the Inter Governmental Committee (IGC) for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage will be hosted in December 2026 in China's Xiamen city,

a senior official of UNESCO said on Friday.

The closing ceremony was hosted in the evening by India at the temporary pavilion, Plenary Hall, at the fort complex, as delegates will head out for sightseeing on Saturday after days of intense discussion.

The session was held for the first time in India with the Red Fort, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, as its venue. Fumiko Ohinata, Secretary, UNESCO 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, in her address at the ceremony,

described the Mughal-era fort complex as a “magnificent backdrop” for the meeting.

The Mughal-era monument is famous for its massive fortified walls. “We enjoyed all India moments,” Ohinata said.

Later, interacting with PTI, she said the next session of the IGC will be held in China.

Sixty-seven cultural elements, including India's Deepavali, Iran's art of mirror-work in Persian architecture, the UAE's traditional art form that blends performing arts with oral tradi-

tion and Switzerland's yodeling, have been added to UNESCO's various intangible heritage lists over the period of December 9-11.

Nominations were sent by nearly 80 countries.

In a Statement, UNESCO said over the course of the week, the 24 member States of the committee examined 67 living heritage elements, including, 11 elements inscribed on the List of Intangible Cultural Heritage in Need of Urgent Safeguarding; 53 elements inscribed on the Representative List of the

Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity; and one programme selected on the Register of Good Safeguarding Practices of Intangible Cultural Heritage.

Furthermore, in response to the positive impact of the safeguarding measures put in place since their inscription, two elements have also been transferred from the List of Intangible Cultural Heritage in Need of Urgent Safeguarding to the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity, and their corresponding safeguarding pro-

grammes have been added to the Register of Good Safeguarding Practices.

With this year's inscriptions, 849 cultural practices in 157 countries are now part of UNESCO's living heritage lists, UNESCO said.

“Fragile yet essential, living heritage remains a pillar of cultural diversity in a world that can at times feel fragmented and divided. Living, creative, and carried by communities, it reminds us of what binds us together,” UNESCO Director-General Khaled El-Enany was quoted as saying in the Statement.

“Let us keep alive the hope that unites us today: to share knowledge, strengthen connections, and build bridges across borders,” he said.

The 20th session of the panel began on December 8. The opening ceremony was held on December 7, with External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar attending it as the chief guest. “We have reaffirmed the extraordinary diversity, creativity, and living wisdom of communities across the world. Each inscription is not merely an addition to a list but a renewed commitment to

safeguarding practices that give meaning, identity, and continuity to human societies,” India's Ambassador and Permanent Delegate to UNESCO, Vishal V Sharma, said in his address at the closing ceremony. Union Culture Secretary Vivek Aggarwal said this session has reaffirmed the significance of intangible heritage in “sustaining communities, nurturing continuity and fortifying social cohesion, particularly at a time when globalisation, conflict and climate pressure challenge our cultural ecosystems”.



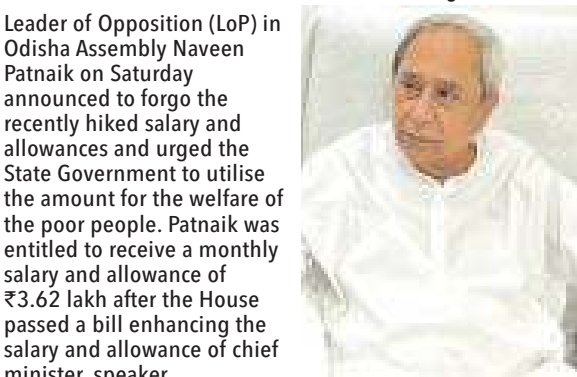


Bhagwat urges Hindus to follow Vivekananda's vision



RSS chief Mohan Bhagwat on Saturday urged Hindu society to draw inspiration from Swami Vivekananda's message that every nation has a mission to fulfil and a destiny to reach. Addressing a public meeting organised by the Virat Hindu Sammelan Samiti at the Netaji Stadium here, Bhagwat said strength, rather than truth alone, shaped global recognition in the present times.

Naveen Patnaik to forgo enhanced of LoP salary



Leader of Opposition (LoP) in Odisha Assembly Naveen Patnaik on Saturday announced to forgo the recently hiked salary and allowances and urged the State Government to utilise the amount for the welfare of the poor people. Patnaik was entitled to receive a monthly salary and allowance of ₹3.62 lakh after the House passed a bill enhancing the salary and allowance of chief minister, speaker.

Jharkhand's Usri waterfall to welcome eco-tourists soon



Popular tourist destination Usri Waterfall in Giridih district of Jharkhand will be developed as an eco-tourism site, officials said. State Tourism Minister Sudivya Kumar on Saturday laid the foundation for an eco-tourism project at Giridih Sadar Block. The Hemant Soren-led Government is committed to the overall development of tourism, he said.

HP bans mobile in schools from next academic session

Himachal Pradesh Chief Minister Sukhvinder Singh Sukhu on Saturday announced that there would be a complete ban on students carrying mobile phones in school premises from pre-nursery to Class XII from the upcoming academic session. Speaking on the occasion, CM said these advanced facilities would not only enhance administrative and academic efficiency but would also mark the beginning of a new era of digital education.



VP pays tribute to 2001 Parliament attack martyrs

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE  
■ New Delhi

Vice President CP Radhakrishnan on Saturday led Parliamentarians in paying floral tributes to those who died fending off terrorists who attacked the Parliament House in 2001. On the 24th anniversary of the attack, Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Radhakrishnan, who is also the Rajya Sabha Chair, were among the first to offer tributes. A function was held outside the now old Parliament building (Samvidhan Sadan) every December 13 to mark the day.

Separately, President Droupadi Murmu paid tributes to the "courageous heroes" who laid down their lives while protecting Parliament, and said the country remains indebted to them and their families. "On this day, we reaffirm India's commitment to fight terrorism in all its forms," Murmu said in a social media post.

Modi said on this day, "Our nation remembers those



Vice President CP Radhakrishnan paying tribute to the martyrs of the 2001 Parliament attack during a ceremony to mark its 24th anniversary at Samvidhan Sadan in New Delhi on Saturday

who laid down their lives during the heinous attack on our Parliament in 2001."

"In the face of grave danger, their courage, alert-

ness and unwavering sense of duty were remarkable. India will forever remain grateful for their supreme sacrifice," he said while

sharing photographs of the homage ceremony. CISE personnel presented a salute or "samman guard" at the venue, after which a

moment of silence was observed to mark the anniversary. Till 2023, the CRPF used to offer 'salami shashtra' (present arms).

Congress leader Sonia Gandhi, leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi, and his sister Priyanka Gandhi Vadra, a senior party leader, were also present at the event. Union ministers Kiren Rijiju, Jitendra Singh and Arjun Ram Meghwal also lined up to offer flower petals at the photographs of the personnel who went down foiling the attack.

Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla is in Latur to attend the funeral of former speaker of the Lower House of Parliament and ex-Union minister Shivraj Patil.

The attack was carried out by five armed terrorists, but personnel from the now former Parliament Security Service, CRPF and Delhi Police foiled the attack, with no terrorist being able to enter the building.

Six Delhi Police personnel, two Parliament Security Service personnel, a gardener and a TV journalist were killed in the attack. All five terrorists were gunned down in the forecourt of the then Parliament building.

Congress slams Govt over MGNREGA name change

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE  
■ New Delhi

Congress on Saturday questioned the need for renaming the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act scheme and asked "what is wrong with the name Mahatma Gandhi" that the Government had to take this step. Reacting to the development, Congress general secretary in-charge communications Jairam Ramesh said the Modi Government is a "master" at renaming schemes and laws.

"They renamed the Nirmal Bharat Abhiyan to Swachh Bharat Abhiyan, and the rural LPG distribution programme to Ujjwala. They are experts in re-packaging and branding," he said. "They hate Pandit Nehru but it seems they also hate Mahatma Gandhi. What's wrong with the name Mahatma Gandhi, why rename the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act to Pujya Babu Employment Guarantee Scheme?" Ramesh said. The Union Cabinet on Friday approved a Bill to rename the MGNREGA and increase the number of work days, sources said. According to them, the scheme will now be renamed as 'Poojya Babu Grameen Rozgar Yojna', and the number of work days under it would be increased from 100 days at present to 125 days.

Congress general secretary in-charge organisation K

C Venugopal said the PM, who once called MGNREGA a "monument of failure", is now renaming it to claim credit for the revolutionary scheme. "It's yet another way of erasing Mahatma Gandhi from our national psyche, especially from the villages, where, he said, India's soul resides," he alleged.

"This move is also nothing but a cosmetic change to paper over the deliberate neglect being meted out to this scheme," Venugopal said. MGNREGA workers have been demanding higher wages, but the Centre has been reducing allocated funds for the scheme year after year, he said. "The arrears keep piling up, and it seems to be a carefully planned strategy to engineer a slow death for the scheme. In reality, this Government has no intent of delivering welfare — and is merely putting up a pretence when it has run out of ideas," Venugopal alleged. "But Modi, rename it all you want, the people know it was Dr Manmohan Singh and Smt Sonia Gandhi ji who brought this transformative scheme to every village of India," he said.

The scheme, better known as MGNREGA or NREGA, is a flagship scheme of the Government aimed at enhancing livelihood security of households in the rural areas by providing at least 100 days of guaranteed wage employment.

PM renamed MGNREGA to change its spirit, not name: BJP

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE  
■ New Delhi

BJP on Saturday said Prime Minister Narendra Modi's decision to rename the rural job guarantee scheme was not to alter its name but to change its "spirit". Hitting back at the Congress following its criticism on renaming MGNREGA, BJP national spokesperson Sudhanshu Trivedi said the Opposition party and its leaders cannot understand the decision as they function with a sense of entitlement.

"The name on which the Congress considers its exclusive right belongs to the entire country," the BJP leader said in an apparent reference



to Mahatma Gandhi's name. The Union Cabinet approved a Bill on Friday to rename the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) as 'Poojya Babu Grameen Rozgar Yojna'. "The prime minister is not changing the

name (of the scheme) but its spirit," Trivedi said.

Prime Minister Modi has dedicated his entire life to the service of the nation and the people and he works with this spirit, the BJP leader said. "But the Congress, which has worked

with the principle of 'aage-peeche hamri sarkar, hum hain yahan ke rajkumar' (we are in rule everywhere, we are the royals), cannot understand the spirit with which the prime minister works," he said, when asked about the Congress's criticism of renaming MGNREGA.

On the Congress's charge that the Government was claiming credit for the scheme, Trivedi said the Congress has neither done any work that is useful nor worth taking any credit for. "You renamed Kingsway as Rajpath because of the sense of raj (power). After Prime Minister Modi renamed it as Kartavya Path, it brought in a sense of duty," Trivedi said.

Akhlaq lynching case: Karat seeks President's intervention in UP Govt's move

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE  
■ New Delhi

Senior CPI(M) leader Brinda Karat on Saturday wrote to President Droupadi Murmu, demanding her intervention in the Uttar Pradesh Government's move to withdraw charges against the accused in the 2015 mob lynching of Mohammad Akhlaq.

In a letter to the President, Karat called it a "politically motivated" step by the Government, and also questioned the role of the gover-

nor. "I write to draw your urgent attention to the role of the Uttar Pradesh governor in the matter of the mob lynching case of Md Akhlaq, which occurred in September 2015. The governor has given written permission to the UP Government to go ahead in its wholly illegal and unjust attempt to subvert the processes of justice and to withdraw the entire case even though the main witness has already given evidence," Karat said.

She said the Government has filed an affidavit in the Greater Noida district court



to withdraw the case, with the governor's permission. "I regret that I am forced to write to you on this matter,

but since the governor has been appointed by you and is answerable to you, I felt it in the interests of justice to

inform you of the facts and to request your urgent intervention," she said.

On September 28, 2015, a mob gathered outside Akhlaq's house in Uttar Pradesh's Bisahada village after an alleged announcement from a village temple claiming that he had slaughtered a cow. He, along with his son Daanish, was dragged out of their home and assaulted, leading to Akhlaq's death.

"Even today, Daanish has not fully recovered and carries the impact of the grievous wounds inflicted on him," Karat said. The CPI(M) leader said the daughter

of the victim gave evidence and named and identified all the accused. "In other words, evidence against the accused has been presented and recorded in the court. The case is going on, and two other direct witnesses are to give their statements," she said.

"At such a time, the UP Government has taken a decision to withdraw the case on utterly indefensible grounds, such as lathis were used, not guns, there was no personal animosity with the victim, continuing the case will lead to communal disharmony and so on," the letter read.



GIDUGU  
RUDRA RAJU

The Congress is organising a massive public rally in the Ramlila Grounds in New Delhi on December 14, to focus national attention on Vote-Chori, or Vote-Theft. This is an ugly phenomenon that is rearing its head for the first time in the Indian electoral system. No government in the past has ever come to power by stealing the mandate. No political party in the past has ever stooped to such low levels, as the Modi government has done to retain power in the general election in 2024.

India is known for her democracy, across the world. Even as democracy failed in the neighbourhood and in

several countries across continents, it is only in India that it has taken deep roots. If the United States is the world's oldest democracy, India is the world's largest democracy.

Unfortunately, this identity of India is being dented for the first time. The Modi government is mounting a concerted assault on this very identity of India.

An expression often used in any popular democracy is duly-elected Prime Minister. On the other hand, all psephological evidence points to Prime Minister Narendra Modi retaining power by stealing the mandate in the general election in 2024. Solid study by agencies like AND and VFD brought hard statistical evidence in support of their claim of Vote-Theft that resulted in stealing of the mandate largely seen going in favour of the Opposition.

Study reveals 5 crore extra votes were cast, which resulted in 79 Lok Sabha seats changing hands. The study says that but

for it, NDA seats tally in the Lok Sabha in the general election in 2024 would have been at 213, while INDIA bloc tally would have surged to 316 Lok Sabha seats. This means stealing the mandate helped the BJP to turn the tables on the Opposition.

Since the first general election in 1952, the difference between the provisional and final figures of voting never exceeded 1 per cent. For the first time in the general election in 2024, the difference votes cast and votes counted was 12.5 per cent. In Andhra Pradesh and in Odisha, 12.5 per cent additional votes were cast. In both States, the BJP stormed to power.

Another example is Thrissur in Kerala. There was a difference of 86,000 votes and BJP won Thrissur constituency by nearly 75,000 votes. On the other hand, where the BJP suffered electoral setback, like in Uttar Pradesh, the difference was negligible at 0.22 per cent. Take the example of Maharashtra. Lok Sabha elections in 2024 was followed by

Maharashtra Assembly elections. Maha Vikas Aghadi won Lok Sabha elections in Maharashtra. Within four months, the BJP wins Maharashtra Assembly elections.

Surprising part is that one crore new voters surfaced in Maharashtra. One crore voters who did not in Lok Sabha elections, magically appear in the Voters List in the Maharashtra Assembly elections just four months after the General Election in 2024. In Haryana, a Brazilian Model was used to create multiple fake voter IDs to allow someone to cast votes 22 times across 10 booths.

Forged photos, misuse of Form-6 and bulk registrations, in one instance, over 80 people were found to be living in a 10-15 sq. ft. house. Many homes with house number 0 were listed in the voters list. Ahead of State Assembly elections, Special Summary Revision (SSR) is ordered. Instead, Special Intensive Revision (SIR) was ordered weeks ahead of Bihar Assembly elections.

Over 65 lakh voters were deleted from the electoral rolls in Bihar during Special Intensive Revision (SIR). How can such a staggering figure be justified? After public outrage, the Deletions were brought down to 45 lakhs in the Bihar Electorate with 4 crore.

Norm of voters' list revision is to bring in more and more voters. Deletions are normally left to the voters, who may relocate to other places for studies, jobs or business or for migration. Death in families, too, is reported by the families. In the SIR in Bihar in 2025, 65 lakh deletions is unparalleled and unprecedented.

Special Intensive Revision (SIR) is the targeted drive to disenfranchise Minorities and weaker sections. It was launched in 2025 in the run up to Bihar Assembly elections and now it is being extended in 12 States and Union Territories; and, eventually, it will cover the entire country.

Plot to hijack elections unfolded ahead

of the general election in 2024. In 2023 itself, suspending 146 Opposition MPs, the Chief Election Commissioner and Other Election Commissioners (Appointment, Conditions of Service and Term of Office) Bill, 2023, was passed by voice-vote, in December, 2023.

The new law replaced the Act passed in 1991. It crucially alters the composition of the Selection Committee for choosing Election Commissioners. New law replaces Chief Justice of India in the Selection Panel with a Cabinet Minister to be nominated by the Prime Minister, giving greater say to the Executive, at the expense of the Judiciary, in such appointments to Constitutional posts.

Under this new law are Prime Minister and Minister to be nominated by the Prime Minister, who are privy to those on the panel. The Leader of Opposition, the third member, is left clueless about the credentials of those on the panel. Result is that Government has majority and pushes in its nominees.

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



States Focus



MP TO GIVE SPECIAL PACKAGE TO FORMER NAXAL-HIT DISTRICTS

After declaring the State to be free of Naxalism, Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister Mohan Yadav on Saturday said his Government would provide a special package to the districts of Balaghat, Mandla and Dindori, once affected by Maoist violence. The elimination of Naxalism was the biggest achievement of his government's tenure so far, Yadav said in an interview on completing two years in office. "A special package will be provided for Naxal-affected Balaghat, Mandla and Dindori for development. We want them to become model districts for the future. The last 20-25 years have been very bad, so we are preparing a concrete plan to bring them closer to the rest of the advanced districts," he said.



J&K CM ABDULLAH INAUGURATES ASIA'S LONGEST SKI DRAG LIFT

Jammu and Kashmir Chief Minister Omar Abdullah on Saturday threw open Asia's longest ski drag lift at Gulmarg, widely known as the 'skiing capital of India', officials said. Abdullah also inaugurated the world's highest revolving multi-purpose hall in the Affarwat area of Gulmarg, which also houses a restaurant, they said. Abdullah said the ski drag lift at Kongdori in Gulmarg in Baramulla district will significantly enhance the skiing infrastructure in the hill station and strengthen its standing on the international winter sports map.

Nadda targets Himachal Congress Govt over funds

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE Shimla

BJP President JP Nadda on Saturday alleged that the Congress Government in Himachal Pradesh has failed to utilise the funds allocated by the Centre and therefore has no right to remain in power, accusing the State administration of functioning with a carefree mindset.

"Congress Government in Himachal Pradesh is working with a mindset of 'Khao Piya Mauj karo, aage kisne dekha hai' (indulge in merry making, who has seen the future)," he said and stressed that "double engine Government is the only way to ensure development of the State".

Addressing an event, Nadda accused the State Government of corruption and misutilisation of funds given by the Centre under



BJP National President and Union Minister JP Nadda with LoP in the Himachal Pradesh Assembly and party leader Jairam Thakur during a public meeting in Shimla, Himachal Pradesh on Saturday

various heads, including building of houses, repair of roads and smart city.

Refuting the allegations of the Congress Government that the Centre is not giving enough funds to the State, Nadda claimed, "₹3,789 crore were given for disaster relief, over ₹1,000 crore for Smart Cities besides funds for Vibrant Village development, medical colleges, AIIMS Bilaspur, a bulk drug park, four-lane highways and developed Baddi as a pharmaceutical hub in the State yet the Congress continues to spread falsehoods and mislead the innocent people of Himachal."

Targeting the Sukhu-led Government for its incompetence, he claimed that the Centre has sent over ₹2,000 crore as special assistance and approved ₹1,442 crore under JICA funding, but the Congress Government utilised only

about 50 per cent of the funds in several schemes.

Taking a jibe at the Congress, Nadda said that Himachal's treasury is frequently shut, the entire administration runs on ad-hoc arrangements with the chief secretary and director general of police working on additional charge and there is no coordination between the chief minister and his ministers.

The Congress Government has not brought even a single concrete project to the Centre, he said, and called upon BJP workers to take these facts and truths to every village and town, so that the "people of Himachal can free themselves from Congress misrule" and move decisively towards development and good governance.

Nadda alleged that "earlier the Government used to come to power with the support of all but used to

be limited to a particular caste, segment and religion, but 11 years back Prime Minister Narendra Modi changed the political scenario of the country by becoming the 'Pradhan Sevak' of the nation and moved from Rajpath to Kartavya Path."

He said the "BJP Government is a performance (report-card) based government, what it promised, it delivered and in contrast, the UPA politics revolved around casteism, appeasement and nepotism, while BJP politics is rooted in accountability and good governance."

State BJP president Rajiv Bindal said that Congress was reduced to only six seats in Bihar, which is proof of its declining credibility and claimed that the same situation will prevail in the upcoming 2027 Himachal Pradesh assembly elections, where the Congress will not even reach double digits and will be reduced to only two seats.

CM Nitish allocates portfolios of new departments

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE Patna

Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar has allocated portfolios of newly created departments among ministers, keeping Civil Aviation with himself, an official notification said.

The Bihar cabinet on December 9 approved proposals to create three new departments — Youth, Employment and Skill Development Department, Higher Education Department and the Civil Aviation Department — and changed the names of three other departments.

The Animal and Fisheries Resource Department was renamed as Dairy, Fisheries and Animal Resources Department; the Labour Resources Department as Labour Resources and Migrant Workers Welfare Department, and Art, Culture and Youth Department as Art and Culture Department.

According to the notification, issued on December 12, the CM allocated the portfolio of Youth, Employment and Skill Development Department to Sanjay Singh 'Tiger', who is holding the portfolio of Labour Resources and Migrant Workers Welfare Department.

State Education Minister Sunil Kumar has been given the portfolio of the newly created Higher Education Department. The CM has kept the Civil Aviation Department with himself, the notification said. The CM had recently announced on social media platforms the State government's decision to create three new departments.

"We have set a target to provide jobs to one crore youth over the next five years (2025-30). For this, it's essential that more youth be trained for skill development. Instructions have been given to create three new departments: Youth, Employment and Skill Development



Department, Higher Education Department, and Civil Aviation Department," the CM had said.

On the need for a dedicated Higher Education Department, Kumar had said its objective was to "bring about qualitative improvement in learning, promote research and innovation, develop technical and vocational education, and ensure that youth from all sections of society receive quality employment-oriented education".

On the Civil Aviation Department, the CM had written, "All of you know that the construction of several new airports is underway in the State, and in the future, under the UDAN scheme, construction of many new airports has been proposed. The creation of the Civil Aviation Department will accelerate this, enhance the industrial environment, create employment opportunities, and help in the export of products manufactured in the State".

Arunachal municipal, panchayat elections campaigning ends

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE Guwahati/Itanagar

Campaigning for the December 15 municipal and panchayat elections in Arunachal Pradesh ended on Saturday. Panchayat and civic elections to Itanagar Municipal Corporation (IMC) and Pasighat Municipal Council (PMC) will be held on December 15.

The polling, which will begin at 7 am on Monday, will end at 4 pm, State Election Commissioner (SEC) Rinchin Tashi said. The campaigning for the polls ended at 4 pm on Saturday. Tashi, in an order, said that no person shall convene, hold or attend any public meeting relating to panchayat and municipal elections in the State in the next 48 hours.

As many as 63 candidates have already been elected uncontested in municipal and rural elections in the State. The

ruling BJP won unopposed in 58 zilla parishad constituencies, besides one candidate from the National People's Party (NPP).

A total of 5,037 BJP candidates for gram panchayat member seats have also been declared elected without contest. Four BJP candidates were also elected unopposed for the Itanagar Municipal Corporation (IMC).

A total of 440 candidates will contest 186 zilla parishad seats, along with 39 candidates for 16 IMC wards, and 21 candidates for eight PMC wards. The SEC said that a total of 13 gram panchayat constituencies received no nominations, while all nominations in 14 gram panchayat constituencies were rejected during scrutiny. Polling in the Dumba Singpho gram panchayat constituency has been countermanded due to the death of a validly nominated candidate.

Jointness, self reliance, innovation key to combat power: CDS

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE Hyderabad

General Anil Chauhan on Saturday said the country's future combat power would be driven by the three pillars — jointness, *Atmanirbharta* and Innovation (JAI), what the Chief of Defence Staff (CDS) described as JAI.

General Chauhan, who reviewed the Combined Graduation Parade (CGP) at the Air Force Academy at Dundigal near here, without referring to any country, said developments that indicate institutional fragility and reactive adjustments are often seen around us.

"Wars cannot (be) won by rhetoric, but by purposeful action. Around us, we often witness developments that signal institutional fragility and reactive adjustments. In contrast, India's strength rests on the robust institutions, democratic stability and unwavering professionalism of our armed forces," he said.

The CDS told the newly commissioned officers that



Chief of Defence Staff General Anil Chauhan reviews the Combined Graduation Parade of the 216th course at the Air Force Academy (AFA) in Dundigal, near Hyderabad, Telangana on Saturday

they are entering the Indian Air Force during a phase of deep transformation of the armed forces. Integrated structures, joint operations and national pursuit of *Atmanirbharta* (self reliance) in defence are shaping the future of India's military

strength, he said. The journey ahead of the newly commissioned officers will be guided by JAI, the first word of *Jai Hind*, he said.

Jointness signifies fighting as one nation and one force and *Atmanirbharta* indicate trusted platforms and

systems made not just for India but for the world. Innovation signifies daring to think ahead and to be ahead of the curve, he said. "These three pillars will shape India's future of combat power," he said.

The intensity of operations

may have ebbed, but Operation Sindoor continues, he said. "You (new officers) also join the Air Force at a moment when a new normal has firmly taken shape. An era defined by a high degree of operational preparedness, 24-7, 365 days. The intensity of operations may have ebbed, but Operation Sindoor continues," he said.

Asserting that war and warfare are at the cusp of a major revolution, General Chauhan said the Defence forces are committed to adapt to changing environment and imbuing reforms to remain ready and relevant.

He further said battles in the older domains will always remain contested, often brutal. But in the new domains, they will be smart, swift, and shaped by intellect, innovation, and initiative. The force that masters new frontiers is more likely to prevail in future conflicts. General Chauhan reviewed the Combined Graduation Parade of 216 Course.

IMA Passing Out Parade: 491 cadets join Indian Army

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE Dehradun

After undergoing rigorous training at the Indian Military Academy (IMA) in Dehradun, 491 cadets participated in a grand Passing Out Parade on Saturday and will now be commissioned as officers in the Indian Army.

The spectacular parade, held at the historic Drill Square in front of the academy's Chatwood Building, was reviewed by Army Chief General Upendra Dwivedi, who served as the reviewing officer. Along with 491 Indian cadets, 34 foreign cadets from 14 friendly countries also participated in the Autumn Term 2025 Passing Out Parade.

A total of 525 officer cadets from the 157th Regular Course, 46th Technical Entry Scheme, 140th Technical Graduate Course, 55th Special Commissioned Officers Course, and Territorial Army Online Entrance Exam 2023



Indian army's newly-commissioned officers celebrate during the POP ceremony at IMA in Dehradun, Uttarakhand on Saturday

Course participated in the Passing Out Parade.

The 'Sword of Honour' and gold medal for securing first place during training was awarded to ACA Nishkal Dwivedi, the silver medal to BUO Badal Yadav for second place and the bronze medal to SUO Kamaljeet Singh for third place.

The silver medal for securing first place in the 'Technical Graduate Course' was awarded to Officer Cadet Jadhav Sujit Sampat, and the

silver medal for first place in the 'Technical Entry Scheme-46' was awarded to WCC Abhinav Mehrotra. The silver medal for the 'Special Commission Officer Course' was given to Officer Cadet Sunil Kumar Chhetri.

Among the foreign cadets, the first place in merit was secured by Bangladesh's JUO Mohammad Safin Ashraf. The Army Chief's Banner for overall best performance in the Autumn Term was awarded to Imphal Company.

New meditation hall opens for pilgrims at Vaishno Devi shrine

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA Jammu

Shri Mata Vaishno Devi Shrine Board (SMVDSB) has dedicated a *Sadhana Kaksh* (Meditation Hall) to the pilgrims visiting the revered shrine atop Trikuta hills in Reasi district of Jammu and Kashmir, officials said on Saturday.

The newly set up meditation hall was opened for the devotees amidst vedic chanting at the Bhawan area, marking a significant initiative aimed at further enriching the spiritual ambience and facilitating deeper devotional engagement among the visitors, the officials said.

Chief Executive Officer, SMVDSB, Sachin Kumar Vaishya, said the establishment of a dedicated *Sadhana Kaksh* in proximity to the sanctum of Mata Vaishno Devi forms part of the Board's broader endeavour to strengthen the spiritual



infrastructure at Bhawan.

"Lakhs of devotees undertake the *Yatra* every month with deep faith and devotion. The provision of a serene space for meditation significantly enhances the overall pilgrimage experience," he said.

Located in the lower basement of the Ram Mandir along the exit cave route at Bhawan, the *Sadhana Kaksh* has been developed with emphasis on simplicity and devotional sanctity.

Spread over an area of approximately 1,500 square feet, the facility can accom-

modate around 170 devotees at a time, the officials said, adding that special care has been taken to maintain silence and sanctity within the *Kaksh* (hall), ensuring an atmosphere of calm and spiritual focus.

The shrine board has issued detailed operational guidelines for the *Sadhana Kaksh*. As per these guidelines, the Shrine Board shall provide basic materials for use by devotees, including prayer beads (malas), cloth pouches (guthis) and other essential accessories.

ED finds ISIS module linked to Khair wood smuggling in Maharashtra

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE New Delhi

An alleged ISIS module operating from Maharashtra's Padgha village in Thane district was involved in the illegal cutting and smuggling of Khair wood from the local reserve forests, an ED probe into a terror financing-linked money laundering case has found.

The federal probe agency conducted searches in the twin villages of Borivali-Padgha on December 11, apart from locations in Delhi, Kolkata, Hazaribagh (Jharkhand) and Prayagraj (Uttar Pradesh), among others.

The money laundering probe stems from a November 2023 case filed by the National Investigation Agency (NIA) against a "highly radicalised" module of the banned global terrorist outfit ISIS, based in Padgha, and its late self-proclaimed leader in India, Saquib Nacheen.

The agency said in a state-

ACACIA CATECHU (KHAIR) WOOD IS USED TO EXTRACT KATTHA (CATECHU), COMMONLY USED IN PAAN, AYURVEDIC MEDICINES

ment on Saturday that it seized ₹3.70 crore in cash apart from gold jewellery and bullion worth ₹6 crore during the raids.

A financial analysis, as per the Enforcement Directorate (ED), found that "various individuals linked with the Borivali-Padgha ISIS module were involved in illegal cutting and smuggling of Kaith trees from the reserve forest areas of the said area".

The wood of Acacia catechu, locally known as Khair, is used to extract Kattha (catechu) that is widely used in 'paan' and as an ingredient in Ayurvedic medicines.

The ED said the searches covered various companies

and entities linked with the production of Kattha that were procuring the wood from suspects. Some wood that was recovered during the Thursday searches was handed over to the forest department by the ED.

The NIA had alleged that the Padgha module was engaged in recruitment, training, procurement of weapons and explosives, and raising funds to sustain their operations.

It has named 21 people in the chargesheet in the case on charges of conspiracy to recruit and radicalise vulnerable youth into the ISIS ideology and fabrication of improvised explosive devices (IEDs).

According to the NIA, the accused had self-declared the Padgha village in rural Thane as a "liberated zone" named 'Al Sham', and they were motivating impressionable Muslim youth to relocate to Padgha from their place of residence to strengthen their base.

J&K Govt again skips Sheikh Abdullah, Martyrs' Day holidays



MOHIT KANDHARI Jammu

For the second consecutive year, an elected Government headed by Omar Abdullah in Jammu and Kashmir has failed to fulfill its poll promise of restoring public holidays on the occasion of the birth anniversary of Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah on December 5, and Martyrs' Day on July 13.

On Saturday, when the Union Territory administration issued the holiday calendar, both these public holidays were once again found missing in the list of holidays for 2026.

For the first time, the two-

State holidays on July 13 and December 5 were deleted from the list of public holidays by the LG administration on December 28, 2019, after the Abrogation of Articles 2019 and 35-A.

The restoration of these two holidays was included in its election manifesto by the National Conference during the Assembly polls.

After forming the government, many leaders and legislators, including the party's general secretary, had passionately appealed to the LG to declare December 5, 2024 as a public holiday, but in vain.



## 19 US States challenge Trump’s \$100,000 H-1B fee

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
■ New York/Washington

Nineteen US states have sued the Trump administration over its “unlawful” decision to impose a \$100,000 fee on new H-1B visa petitions, warning that the move will worsen labour shortages in key sectors such as health care, education and technology. New York Attorney General Letitia James, along with 18 other attorneys general, on Friday filed the lawsuit in the US District Court for the District of Massachusetts, challenging what they termed a “massive” increase in H-1B fees without legal authority or due process.

The H-1B visa programme allows highly skilled foreign professionals to work temporarily in the US and is widely used by Indian nationals. The coalition argued that the new fee would make the programme effectively inaccessible for Government and non-profit employers that depend on H-1B workers to provide essential services in health care, education, technology, and other fields.

“H-1B visas allow talented doctors, nurses, teachers, and other workers to serve communities in need across our country.” The administration’s illegal attempt to ruin this programme will make it harder for New Yorkers to get health care, disrupt our children’s education, and hurt our economy. I will keep fighting to stop this chaos



and cruelty targeting immigrant communities,” James said in a statement.

In September, US President Donald Trump announced that his administration would levy a one-time USD 100,000 fee on all new H-1B applications, which the attorneys general described as a “sudden” and “massive” increase over existing charges. The attorneys general contended that the imposition of the new fee is “unlawful” and the move violates the Administrative Procedure Act as well as the Immigration and Nationality Act, as it was imposed

without congressional approval or the required rule-making process.

Joining James in the lawsuit are the attorneys general of Arizona, California, Colorado, Connecticut, Delaware, Hawaii, Illinois, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, North Carolina, New Jersey, Oregon, Rhode Island, Vermont, Washington, and Wisconsin. The coalition said the new fee on H-1B visas will severely restrict states’ ability to hire new workers under the programme to address labour shortages, disrupting access to education,

health care, and other critical services. This shortage of workers would be devastating for rural and underserved communities already facing shrinking workforces, it warned. In New York alone, more than a third of health care workers are immigrants, while public universities and hospitals rely heavily on H-1B professionals, according to the lawsuit. In New York’s 16 rural counties, there are currently four primary care physicians for every 10,000 people. New York’s hospitals already face a pervasive nursing shortage estimated to reach 40,000 nurses by

2030. A reduction in H-1B visa holders would only exacerbate this shortage, it said.

Nationwide, the American Medical Association estimates the US will face a shortage of 86,000 physicians by 2036, a shortage that H-1B workers will be critical in filling, the lawsuit said. Across the US, at least 930 colleges and universities employ staff on H-1B visas. More than half of these institutions are public four-year universities, and more than 10 per cent are medical schools. In New York, the State University of New York (SUNY) employs 693 employ-

ees on H-1B visas, including many who serve students in rural and suburban areas of New York State.

The coalition argues that limiting access to H-1B visas will lead to more crowded classrooms for students and disrupt critical research at leading universities.

Other critical industries in New York, such as technology, finance, and the arts, also rely on H-1B visa holders to fill essential roles. Across the state, more than 13,000 people on H-1B visas work in these sectors.

California Attorney General Rob Bonta said Trump’s \$100,000 H-1B visa fee creates “unnecessary” and “illegal” financial burdens on California public employers and other providers of vital services, exacerbating labour shortages in key sectors.

“The Trump administration thinks it can raise costs on a whim, but the law says otherwise. We are going to court to defend California’s residents and their access to the world-class universities, schools, and hospitals that make Californians proud to call this state home,” Bonta said. Since the 1950s, the US has had a visa programme that allows skilled workers to temporarily live in America and work in specialised fields. The current version of the H-1B programme was created in the 1990s and allows employers to hire workers in a “specialty occupation” for a maximum of six years.

## UK honors Naoroji’s 200th birth anniversary



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
■ London

The House of Lords in London played host to a special reception in honour of the 200th birth anniversary of Dadabhai Naoroji, the nationalist leader who became the first Indian to win a popular election to the British Parliament during the colonial era. Naoroji was born in September 1825 to a Parsi family in Mumbai and first travelled to England in 1855 for business reasons before going on to become an influential figure in its political landscape. Lord Karan Bilimoria, a fellow Parsi parliamentarian, hosted Friday’s reception in honour of the life and legacy of the polymath who straddled multiple roles of a Zoroastrian priest, businessman, academic and politician. “In many ways, I have followed in the footsteps

of Dadabhai Naoroji, who came initially for business to the UK,” said Bilimoria, founder of Cobra Beer. “He was also an academic as a professor at Elphinstone College and, of course, he was a politician – the first Indian, first ethnic minority ever to be elected to this Parliament,” he noted. Bilimoria revealed that the bicentenary commemoration was initially planned for September, to coincide with the month of Dadabhai Naoroji’s birth 200 years ago, but had to be postponed due to strike action. “But we were adamant in making sure that this event would take place during the year of his 200th birth anniversary, and here we are,” he added. The Indian High Commissioner to the UK, Vikram Doraiswami, reflected upon the legacy of Naoroji and the impact of the Parsi community in the political and social life of India.

## Three US lawmakers introduce resolution to end 50% tariffs imposed by Trump on India

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
■ New York/Washington

Three influential US lawmakers have introduced a resolution in Congress aimed at ending the tariffs imposed by President Donald Trump on India, saying the “irresponsible tariff strategy” toward Delhi is a counterproductive approach that “weakens a critical partnership”.

Representatives Deborah Ross of North Carolina, Marc Veasey of Texas and Raja Krishnamoorthi of Illinois introduced the resolution on Friday in the House of Representatives to terminate Trump’s national emergency authorising tariffs of up to 50 per cent on imports from India, helping to restore Congress’ constitutional authority over trade.

Trump has imposed a 50 per cent tariff on India, the highest in the world, including 25 per cent for Delhi’s purchases of Russian oil. The resolution would terminate



Representative Deborah Ross of North Carolina

FILE PHOTO

the national emergency that Trump invoked to impose sweeping tariffs on Indian goods under the International Emergency Economic Powers Act (IEEPA) and rescind the additional 25 per cent “secondary” duties that took effect on August 27 on top of earlier reciprocal tariffs. Together, these measures raised duties on many

Indian-origin products to 50 per cent, a statement issued by Ross said.

Krishnamoorthi said that Trump’s “irresponsible tariff strategy toward India is a counterproductive approach that weakens a critical partnership.” “Instead of advancing American interests or security, these duties disrupt supply chains, harm

American workers, and drive up costs for consumers. Ending these damaging tariffs will allow the United States to engage with India to advance our shared economic and security needs,” the Indian-American lawmaker said. The resolution follows a bipartisan Senate-passed measure to end Trump’s Brazil tariffs and rein in his abuse of emergency powers to raise duties on imports, the statement said. “North Carolina’s economy is deeply connected to India through trade, investment, and a vibrant Indian-American community,” Ross added.

She said that Indian companies have invested over a billion dollars and created thousands of good-paying jobs in our state – especially in the Research Triangle’s life sciences and technology sectors. North Carolina manufacturers export hundreds of millions of dollars in goods to India each year.

## UN chief visits Iraq

ASSOCIATED PRESS  
■ Baghdad

United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres was in Baghdad on Saturday to mark the end of the political mission set up in 2003 following the US-led invasion of Iraq that toppled Saddam Hussein.

The UN Security Council, at Iraq’s request, voted last year to wind down the mandate of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Iraq (UNAMI) by the end of 2025. The mission was set up to coordinate post-conflict humanitarian and reconstruction efforts and help restore a representative Government in the country. Iraqi caretaker Prime Minister Mohammed Shia al-Sudani said his country “highly values” the mission’s work in a region “that has suffered for decades from dictatorship, wars, and terrorism.” He said its conclusion showed Iraq had reached a stage of “full self-reliance.”

“Iraq emerged victorious thanks to the sacrifices and courage of its people,” he said in a joint statement with Guterres.

The ending of UNAMI’s mandate “does not signify the end of the partnership between Iraq and the UN,” Sudani said, adding that it represents the beginning of a new chapter of cooperation focused on development and inclusive economic growth.

The prime minister said a street in Baghdad would be named “United Nations Street” in honour of the UN’s work and in recognition of 22 UN staff who were killed in an Aug. 19, 2003, truck bomb attack on the Canal Hotel in Baghdad, which housed the UN headquarters.

Guterres praised “the courage, fortitude and determination of the Iraqi people” and the country’s efforts to restore security and order after years of sectarian violence and the rise of extremist groups, including the Islamic State group.



ASSOCIATED PRESS ■ Sofia

Bulgaria’s president will start consultations with parliamentary groups next week on forming a new cabinet following the collapse of the Government in nationwide anti-corruption protests. Rosen Zhelyazkov’s minority Government had survived six no-confidence votes since it was appointed in January, only to be toppled in the street protests on Thursday by tens of thousands. President Rumen Radev is set to invite the biggest group in parliament for talks on forming a Government. If that fails, the second-largest grouping will get its chance before the president chooses a candidate. If all attempts fail – which is likely – he will appoint a caretaker cabinet

until a new election is held in two months. Analysts expect another election – the eighth since 2021 – would likely produce a deeply fragmented parliament and more political instability as Bulgaria readies to join the common European currency on January 1. Fears of inflation, reportedly fuelled by a disinformation campaign by Moscow, have dampen enthusiasm for the euro. Bulgaria joined the European Union in 2007. In a last-moment effort to block the country’s path to the euro, the pro-Russian Vazrazhdane party submitted in parliament a draft resolution requesting a one-year postponement of Bulgaria’s entry into the eurozone, citing the absence of a new budget and political instability.

## Bangladesh Govt orders security clampdown

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
■ Dhaka

Chief Adviser Muhammad Yunus-led interim Government on Saturday ordered a nationwide security clampdown as fresh unrest gripped Bangladesh following the shooting of a youth leader of a right-wing cultural group, also a candidate in the February 12 general elections.

“The Government is going to start the second phase of Operation Devil Hunt to help ensure public safety and combat the growing threat of illegal arms,” Home Affairs adviser Lt Gen (rtd) Jahangir

**The Government is going to start the second phase of Operation Devil Hunt to help ensure public safety and combat the growing threat of illegal arms—** ALAM CHOWDHURY, HOME AFFAIRS ADVISER

Alam Chowdhury told a press conference. The announcement came after three assailants shot Inquilab Mancha leader Sharif Osmann Hadi on Friday, as he initiated his election campaign at central Dhaka’s Bijoy Nagar area – from where he is contesting as an independent candidate. According to doctors, his condition is very critical. Chowdhury announced a

reward of Taka 50 lakh for information leading to the arrest of one of the suspects who shot Hadi, while police issued his picture, identifying him as Faisal Karim Masud.

The interim Government first launched the Operation Devil hunt in February this year, following protests over an attack on the private house of a former minister in the northern suburb of the capital.

## Belarus releases Nobel prize laureate in exchange for US sanctions relief

ASSOCIATED PRESS ■ Vilnius

Belarusian authorities have released Nobel Peace Prize laureate Ales Bialiatski and key opposition figure Maria Kolesnikova from prison, Pavel Sapelka, human rights advocate with the Viasna rights group.

Their release comes as authoritarian President Alexander Lukashenko seeks to improve relations with Washington. The US earlier on Saturday announced lifting sanctions on the country’s potash sector. In exchange for sanctions relief, Lukashenko pardoned 123 pris-

oners, the Belta State news agency reported.

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 repeatedly sanctioned by Western countries both for its crackdown on human rights and for allowing Moscow to use its territory in the invasion of Ukraine in 2022. Belarus has released hundreds of prisoners since July 2024.

Earlier Saturday, the United States said it was lifting sanctions on Belarusian potash in

the latest sign of a thaw between Washington and the isolated autocracy.

John Coale, the US special envoy for Belarus, made the announcement after meeting Lukashenko in Minsk on Friday and Saturday.

Speaking with journalists, Coale described the two-day talks as “very productive,” Belarus’ state news agency Belta reported Saturday.

The US envoy said that normalising relations between Washington and Minsk was “our goal.”

“We’re lifting sanctions, releasing prisoners. We’re constantly talking to each other,”

he said, according to Belta. He also said that the relationship between the countries was moving from “baby steps to more confident steps” as they increased dialogue.

The last time US officials met with Lukashenko in September 2025, Washington announced easing some of the sanctions against Belarus while Minsk released more than 50 political prisoners to Lithuania.

Overall, Belarus released more than 430 political prisoners since July 2024, in what was widely seen as an effort at rapprochement with the West. Belarusian opposition leader Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya —

Bialiatski’s wife — told The Associated Press on Saturday that sanctions relief was part of a deal between Minsk and Washington, in which another large group of political prisoners in Belarus were expected to be released.

“The freeing of political prisoners means that Lukashenko understands the pain of Western sanctions and is seeking to ease them,” Tsikhanouskaya said. She added: “But let’s not be naive: Lukashenko hasn’t changed his policies, his crackdown continues, and he keeps on supporting Russia’s war against Ukraine.



## Iran raises gasoline prices after deadly 2019 protests

ASSOCIATED PRESS ■ Tehran

Iran introduced a new pricing tier on Saturday for its nationally subsidised gasoline, attempting to rein in spiralling costs for the first time since a price hike in 2019 that sparked nationwide protests and a crackdown that reportedly killed over 300 people. Cheap gasoline has been viewed for generations as a birthright in Iran, sparking mass demonstrations as far back as 1964 when a price increase forced the shah to put military vehicles on the streets to replace those of striking taxi drivers. But Iran’s theocracy faces a growing squeeze from the country’s rapidly depreciating rial currency and economic sanctions imposed due to Tehran’s nuclear program. That has made the cost of having some of the world’s cheapest gasoline at a few pennies per gallon that much more expensive.



## US removes Brazilian SC justice from sanctions list

ASSOCIATED PRESS ■ Washington

The US removed Brazilian Supreme Court Justice Alexandre de Moraes from its sanctions list after initially adding him over his role in leading the trial against former Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro De Moraes’ wife and the Lex Institute, which she leads, were also taken off the list, according to documents from the Treasury Office of Foreign Assets Control. The Treasury Department did not immediately return a message seeking comment on why de Moraes had been taken off the list. The Trump administration had sanctioned the judge in July, accusing him of using his position to authorize arbitrary pretrial detentions and suppress freedom of expression in Brazil. Bolsonaro was accused of masterminding a plot to stay in power despite his 2022 election defeat to current President Luiz Inácio Lula.



FROM THE

WORLD

BOLIVIA

Ex-leader jailed for corruption

A Bolivian court on Friday ordered the country's former President Luis Arce to remain detained for five months while he awaits trial on corruption charges, the latest development in a case that threatens to exacerbate Bolivia's political tensions. Arce, 62, a leader from Bolivia's Movement Toward Socialism party, was elected in 2020 and left office a month ago following the election of Bolivia's first right-wing leader in nearly two decades. He strongly denies the charges of breach of duty and financial misconduct. He faces up to six years in prison if convicted. Two days after Arce's sudden arrest on the streets of Bolivia's capital of La Paz, a judge ordered his detention in a virtual hearing Friday. Arce was transferred to one of Bolivia's largest prisons in La Paz at night.

USA

Clintons face contempt threat

The Republican chair of the House Oversight Committee on Friday threatened to begin contempt of Congress proceedings against former President Bill Clinton and Hillary Clinton if they refuse to appear for depositions as part of the committee's investigation into Jeffrey Epstein. James Comer, a Kentucky Republican, said that the Clintons had "delayed, obstructed, and largely ignored the Committee staff's efforts to schedule their testimony" for several months and said the committee would begin proceedings to try to force them to testify if they do not appear next week or schedule an appearance in January. Comer's statement came just hours after Democrats on the committee had released dozens of photos they had received from Epstein's estate, including images of Clinton and President Donald Trump.

Fighting rages on Thai-Cambodian border

ASSOCIATED PRESS

■ Surin

Fighting continued to rage on Saturday morning along the border of Thailand and Cambodia, even after US President Donald Trump, acting as a mediator, declared that he had won agreement from both countries for a ceasefire.

Thai officials have said they did not agree to a ceasefire, and Cambodia has not commented on Trump's claim. Its defence ministry instead said Thai jets carried out airstrikes Saturday morning. Cambodian media reported Trump's claim without elaborating.

The latest large-scale fighting was set off by a skirmish on Dec. 7 that wounded two Thai soldiers and derailed a ceasefire promoted by Trump that ended five days of earlier combat in July over longstanding territorial disputes. The July ceasefire was brokered by Malaysia and pushed through by pressure from Trump, who threatened to withhold trade privileges unless Thailand and Cambodia agreed. It was formalised in more detail in October at a regional meeting in Malaysia that Trump attended.

About two dozen people have officially been reported killed in this past week's fighting, while hundreds of thousands have been displaced on both sides of the border. The Thai military acknowledges 11 of its troops have been killed, while estimating there have been 165 fatalities among Cambodian soldiers. Cambodia has not



Children raising their hands while receiving donation from charity as they take refuge in Banteay Menchey provincial town on Cambodia

AP

announced military casualties, but has said at least 11 civilians have been killed and 76 wounded.

Trump, on Friday, after speaking to Thai Prime Minister Anutin Charnvirakul and Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Manet, announced an agreement to restart the ceasefire.

"They have agreed to CEASE all shooting effective this evening, and go back to the original Peace Accord made with me, and them, with the help of the Great Prime Minister of Malaysia, Anwar Ibrahim," Trump said in his Truth Social post.

Trump's claim came after midnight in Bangkok. Thai Prime Minister Anutin had, after his call with Trump, said he had explained Thailand's reasons for fighting and said peace would depend on Cambodia ceasing its attacks first.

The Thai foreign ministry later explicitly disputed Trump's claim that a ceasefire had been reached. Anutin's busy day on Friday included dissolving Parliament, so new elections could be held early next year. Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Manet, in comments posted early Saturday

morning, also made no mention of a ceasefire.

He said he held phone conversations on Friday night with Trump, and a night earlier with Malaysia's Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim, and thanked both "for their continuous efforts to achieve a long-lasting peace between Cambodia and Thailand."

"Cambodia is ready to cooperate in any way that is needed," Hun Manet wrote. Thailand has been carrying out airstrikes on what it says are strictly military targets, while Cambodia has been firing thousands of medium-range BM-21 rockets

that have caused havoc but relatively few casualties.

BM-21 rocket launchers can fire up to 40 rockets at a time with a range of 30-40 kilometres (19-25 miles). These rockets cannot be precisely targeted and have landed largely in areas from which most people have already been evacuated.

However, the Thai army announced Saturday that BM-21 rockets had hit a civilian area in Sisaket province, seriously injuring two civilians who had heard warning sirens and had been running toward a bunker for safety.

Fire breaks out in 12-storey building in Dhaka

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

■ Dhaka

A massive fire broke out early on Saturday on the ground floor of a 12-storey mixed-use building in a market in Bangladesh's capital city, officials said.

However, no casualties were reported in the blaze at Jabal E Nur Tower, and fire service officials rescued at least 42 people from the building, the State-run BSS news agency reported.

The incident marks the second major fire in a multi-storey building in Dhaka in two months. On October 14, a massive blaze ripped through a chemical ware-



house and an adjacent garments factory in the capital, killing at least 16 people.

According to news portal tbsnews.Net, the Fire Service and Civil Defence received information about the blaze

at 5.37 am local time and fire-fighting units reached the scene at around 5.45 am.

Fire service media officer Anwarul Islam said 18 fire-fighting units were deployed to bring the blaze under

control. Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB) personnel were also deployed at the site to assist in maintaining law and order, controlling crowds and ensuring the smooth movement of emergency responders, BGB public relations officer Shariful Islam said.

Senior Staff Officer (Media Cell) of the Fire Service, Md Shahjahan Shikdar, said the fire-hit structure consists of several separate buildings sharing a single basement.

The ground and first floors house a market with garment product shops and small scrap warehouses, while the upper floors contain residential apart-

ments. The basement has only two entry points, he said. Firefighters were forced to cut open the locks and shutters of most shops to douse the flames, which slowed down the operation.

The cause of the fire could not be determined immediately. Locals and business owners said scrap clothes stored in the basement may have fuelled the blaze, but officials said the origin of the fire was yet to be ascertained. The Daily Star newspaper reported.

Bangladesh has a history of industrial disasters. Past industrial tragedies have often been attributed to safety lapses.

Gaza amputees struggle to rebuild lives

ASSOCIATED PRESS

■ Nuseirat

Sitting in her wheelchair, Haneen al-Mabhoh dreams of rebuilding her family, of cradling a new baby. She dreams of walking again. But with her leg gone, her life in Gaza is on hold, she says, as she waits to go abroad for further treatment.

An Israeli airstrike in July 2024 smashed her home in central Gaza as she and her family slept. All four of her daughters were killed, including her 5-month-old baby. Her husband was severely burned. Al-Mabhoh's legs were crushed under the rubble, and doctors had to amputate her right leg above the knee.

"For the past year and a half, I have been unable to move around, to live like others. For the past year and a half, I have been without children," she said, speaking at her parents' home.



Palestinian Mohammed al-Jabri, 58, warming himself next to the fire as he sits on the rubble of a building destroyed during the Israeli air and ground operations in the Sheikh Radwan neighborhood, in Gaza City

AP

The 2-month-old ceasefire in Gaza has been slow to bring help for thousands of Palestinians who suffered amputations from Israeli bombardment over the past two years. The

World Health Organisation estimates there are some 5,000 to 6,000 amputees from the war, 25 per cent of them children.

Those who lost limbs are struggling to adapt, faced

with a shortage of prosthetic limbs and long delays in medical evacuations out of Gaza. The WHO said a shipment of essential prosthetic supplies recently made it into Gaza. That appears to be

the first significant shipment for the past two years.

Previously, Israel had let in almost no ready-made prosthetic limbs or material to manufacture limbs since the war began, according to Loay Abu Saif, the head of the disability program at Medical Aid for Palestinians, or MAP, and Nevin Al Ghusein, acting director of the Artificial Limbs and Polio Center in Gaza City.

The Israeli military body in charge of coordinating aid, known as COGAT, did not respond when asked how many prosthetic supplies had entered during the war or about its policies on such supplies.

Al-Mabhoh was asleep with her baby girl in her arms when the strike hit their home in Nuseirat, she said. For several weeks while recovering in the hospital, al-Mabhoh had no idea her children had been killed.

Ready to deal with external and internal threats, says Asim Munir

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

■ Islamabad

Chief of Defence Forces and Chief of Army Staff Field Marshal Asim Munir on Saturday said his forces were ready to deal with the threats posed by the external and international elements.

Munir visited Gujranwala and Sialkot garrisons, where he was briefed on the formation's operational readiness and key initiatives for strengthening combat preparedness, according to a statement by the army. "Pakistan Army remains fully focused on both internal and external challenges, including hostile hybrid campaigns, extremist ideologies, and divisive elements seeking to undermine national stability," he emphasised on the occasion. India launched Operation Sindoor on May 7,



targeting terror infrastructure in Pakistan and Pakistan-occupied Kashmir in retaliation for the Pahalgaon attack that killed 26 civilians.

The strikes triggered four days of intense clashes that ended with an understanding on stopping the military actions. In an internal challenge, the government last year notified the banned

Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan as "Fitna al-Khawarij", a reference to a group in earlier Islamic history which was involved in violence.

While interacting with officers and soldiers, Munir lauded their high morale to national security while underscoring the importance of rigorous and mission-oriented training.

South Africa eases regulations on Starlink

ASSOCIATED PRESS

■ Cape Town

South Africa's communications minister ordered a policy change on Friday that allows Elon Musk's Starlink and other foreign-owned satellite internet providers to operate in the country without selling 30 per cent of their local equity to Black or other non-white owners. The policy change published in a Government gazette allows foreign companies seeking licences to operate in South Africa's communications sector. That option is also available for foreign-owned companies in other sectors in South Africa. Musk, who was born in South Africa, accused his home country of having "openly racist ownership laws" by requiring at least 30 per cent local ownership by Black or other races that were denied opportunities under South Africa's apartheid system of white minority rule.



UN-sanctioned migrant smuggler killed in Libya

ASSOCIATED PRESS

■ Cairo

A notorious militia leader in Libya, sanctioned by the UN for migrant trafficking across the Mediterranean Sea, was killed on Friday in a raid by security forces in the west of the country, according to Libyan authorities. Ahmed Omar al-Fitouri al-Dabbashi was killed in Sabratha. The raid came in response to an attack on a security outpost by al-Dabbashi's militia, which left six members of the security forces severely wounded, according to a statement issued by the Security Threat Enforcement Agency, a security entity affiliated with Libya's western government. Al-Dabbashi, who was also sanctioned by the US Treasury for trafficking, was the leader of a powerful militia, the "Brigade of the Martyr Anas al-Dabbashi," in Sabratha, the biggest launching point in Libya for Europe-bound African migrants.





# The Pioneer AGENDA

War is an act of  
violence pushed  
to its utmost  
limits  
- Carl von Clausewitz



Major Kuldeep Singh  
Chandpuri, Company  
Commander, with Captain  
Dharamveer Singh

Fought in the unforgiving sands of the Thar Desert, the Battle of Longewala remains one of the most extraordinary defensive stands in military history. From December 4-7, 1971, a small Indian Army company—vastly outnumbered and facing overwhelming armour—held its ground against a major Pakistani offensive. Longewala is now regarded globally as a case study in battlefield strategy, leadership and grit. It is celebrated as Vijay Diwas in December every year.

## The Lions of Longewala

### A Pivotal Engagement in the 1971 Indo-Pak War

The Battle of Longewala, immortalised in the film *Border*, was one of the most decisive engagements of the 1971 Indo-Pakistani War. Fought between December 4 and 7 in the Thar Desert of Rajasthan, it showcased the extraordinary courage, tactical brilliance, and resilience of the Indian Army. This defensive victory not only halted a major Pakistani armoured thrust but also reshaped the outcome of the war. Owing to its unique character, Longewala is now taught as a case study in leading military academies across the world. The 1971 war was triggered by the Bangladesh Liberation movement, as East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) fought for independence from West Pakistan. As Indian forces advanced rapidly in the East, Pakistan-anticipating imminent defeat—planned a major offensive in the Western theatre. The strategy was to capture Indian territory and use it as leverage during post-war negotiations.

In Rajasthan, the Pakistani Army launched attacks along the border, with its main and most formidable thrust directed at the Longewala post. This post was defended by Alfa Company of the 23rd Battalion of the Punjab Regiment, commanded by Major Kuldeep Singh Chandpuri. On December 4, 1971, Captain Dharam Vir of Alfa Company was on patrol along the International Border. Around 8:00 pm, he detected the unmistakable sound of tank movement across the border—indicating a large mechanized column approaching Longewala. He immediately relayed the information to Major Chandpuri, who at first found the scale hard to believe. But repeated confirmations from Capt Dharam Vir soon made it clear: an enemy infantry brigade supported by a tank regiment and an armoured squadron was advancing towards them.

This timely intelligence allowed the Indian defenders to quickly assume battle positions. Capt Dharam Vir was ordered to shadow the enemy column, provide continuous updates, and then withdraw to join the main defensive stand. Battalion Headquarters at Sadhewala rushed two recoilless guns to reinforce the post.

**Defence Against Impossible Odds**  
As darkness descended, the Pakistani armour advanced towards Longewala. Outnumbered and outgunned, Alfa Company held its fire until the enemy came within striking distance. Major Chandpuri moved across the defences, encouraging his men and coordinating urgently requested reinforcements and air support. Throughout the night of December 4, Alfa Company withstood repeated enemy assaults, repelling them with fierce determination. Their

defensive stance prevented Pakistani forces from overrunning the post before dawn—a critical factor that would change the course of the battle.

#### The Turning Point

At first light on December 5, the Indian Air Force launched a devastating air campaign. Hawker Hunter and HF-24 Marut aircraft, guided by a Forward Air Controller, conducted precise bombing runs. Pakistani tanks, stranded in the dunes and unable to manoeuvre effectively, became easy targets. By evening, the Pakistani advance had collapsed. They abandoned the battlefield, leaving behind 37 destroyed tanks and numerous vehicles. The Indian Army had secured a resounding victory.

#### Honours and Legacy

Major Kuldeep Singh Chandpuri was awarded the Maha Vir Chakra for exceptional leadership. Many soldiers of Alfa Company received honours for their valour. The battle stands as a powerful reminder of the importance of defending sovereignty, adapting under pressure, and leveraging joint operations.

#### Strategic Significance

- Decisive Defensive Victory: Longewala demonstrated India's ability to repel a major armoured offensive with minimal resources.
- Protection of Rajasthan: The stand at Longewala prevented Pakistani forces from advancing towards Ramgarh and Jaisalmer.
- Impact on the Eastern Theatre: By failing in the West, Pakistan lost its only potential bargaining tool during the liberation of

Bangladesh.

- Morale Booster: The victory significantly uplifted Indian Army morale.
- Global Military Lessons: Longewala continues to be studied for its exemplary use of defensive tactics, intelligence, and air-land coordination.

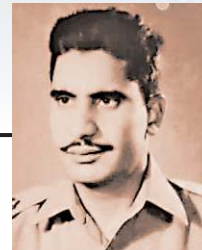
#### Key Factors Behind the Victory

**Timely Intelligence:** Capt Dharam Vir's early detection of Pakistani armour was critical in preparing the defences.

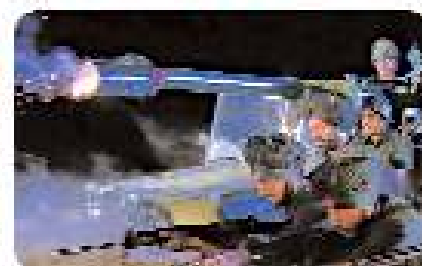
**Effective Air Support:** The Indian Air Force's relentless assaults played a decisive role in neutralising enemy armour.

**Strong Defensive Positioning:** The Indian Army's well-prepared positions and coordinated firepower proved superior despite being heavily outnumbered.

The Battle of Longewala remains one of the greatest examples of courage under fire. It is a testament to how determination, leadership, and strategic clarity can overcome overwhelming odds—and how a single night's stand can alter the destiny of a nation.



IN RAJASTHAN, THE PAKISTANI ARMY LAUNCHED ATTACKS ALONG THE BORDER, WITH ITS MAIN AND MOST FORMIDABLE THRUST DIRECTED AT THE LONGEWALA POST. THE POST WAS DEFENDED BY ALPHA COMPANY OF THE 23RD BATTALION, THE PUNJAB REGIMENT



### Behind the Scenes: The Making of *Border*

The 1997 war epic *Border*, directed by J.P. Dutta, remains one of Indian cinema's most iconic portrayals of patriotism. Based on the Battle of Longewala during the 1971 Indo-Pak War, the film's creation is filled with fascinating behind-the-scenes stories that shaped its authenticity and legacy.

#### INSPIRED BY A TRUE HERO

J.P. Dutta drew heavily from the real-life experiences of Major (later Brigadier) Kuldeep Singh Chandpuri, who commanded the outnumbered Indian troops at Longewala. The film's character played by Sunny Deol is closely modelled on him, and the officer himself visited the sets during shooting.

#### SHOT IN REAL DESERT TERRAIN

To recreate the harsh conditions of the Thar desert, the crew

shot extensively in Bikaner and Jaisalmer. The temperatures soared above 45°C, posing challenges for actors and crew, but lending the visuals a raw, authentic feel.

#### AUTHENTIC MILITARY SUPPORT

The Indian Army offered extensive support to the film, providing tanks, artillery, vehicles, and access to border posts. Many soldiers even appeared as extras, adding remarkable realism to the battle sequences.

#### A TRIBUTE BORN FROM PERSONAL LOSS

Director J.P. Dutta dedicated *Border* to his brother, Squadron Leader Deepak Dutta, who lost his life in the 1971 war.

This personal connection infused the film with emotional depth and sincerity.

#### REAL TANKS, REAL EXPLOSIONS

Modern CGI-heavy battle films, *Border* used real explosives, controlled blasts, and actual military hardware. This practical approach gave the combat scenes their gritty impact.

#### THE ICONIC MUSIC WAS ALMOST DIFFERENT

The now-classic soundtrack by Anu Malik—featuring "Sandese Aate Hain" and "Mere Dushman"—was recorded with live orchestration. Interestingly, the producers initially considered a different composer, but Malik's patriotic melodies became immortal.

#### SUNNY DEOL'S POWERFUL DIALOGUE DELIVERY

It was one of the best performances by Sunny Deol who shined in his role, his powerful dialogues are still remembered and float on social media.

#### A MASSIVE ENSEMBLE CAST

Putting together the star-studded team—Sunny Deol, Jackie Shroff, Suniel Shetty, Akshay Khanna, Tabu, and others—was a logistical feat. Many actors agreed to reduced fees due to the film's patriotic subject.

#### ONE OF INDIA'S BIGGEST BLOCKBUSTERS

Despite being over three hours long, *Border* became one of the highest-grossing films of 1997 and remains a benchmark for Indian war cinema.





Students participated in FETE organised by SDM Siddhartha Mahila College in Vijayawada on Saturday.

PARTY



NCC Students participated in Vijayanta Trios Elen 4(A) NCC girls FETE organised by PB Siddhartha College in Vijayawada on Saturday.


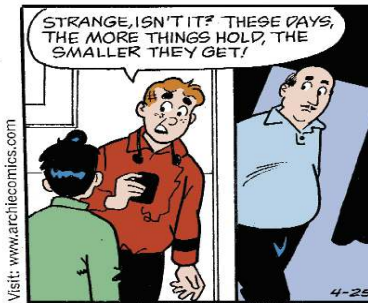
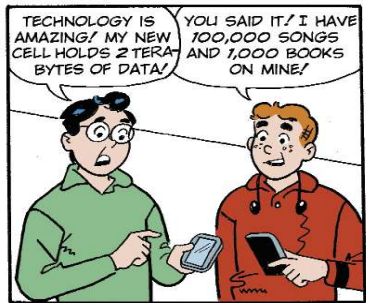


Photos by- Ch. Vijaya Bhaskar



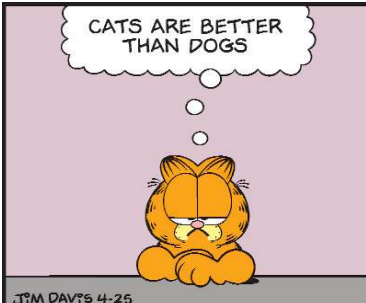


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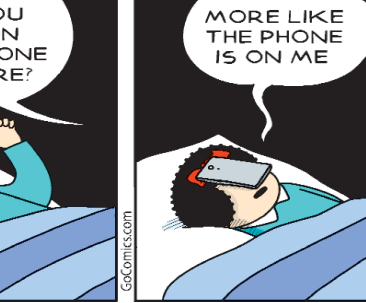
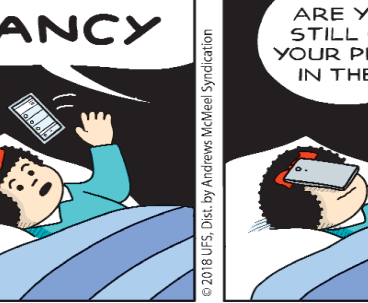

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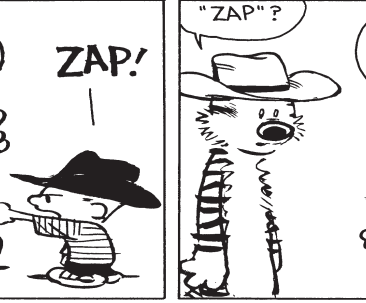

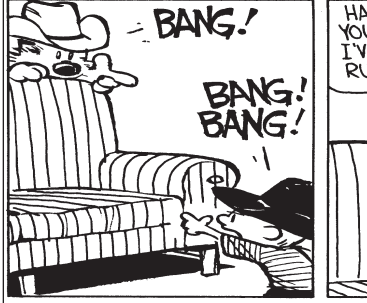
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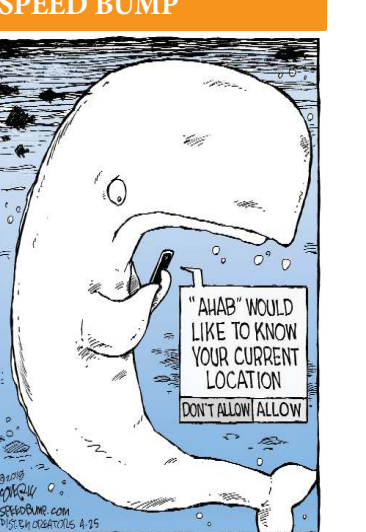

GINGER MEGGS



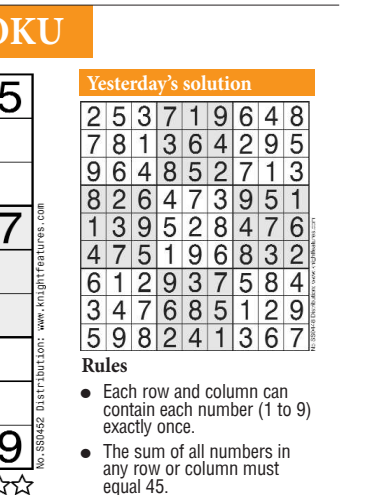
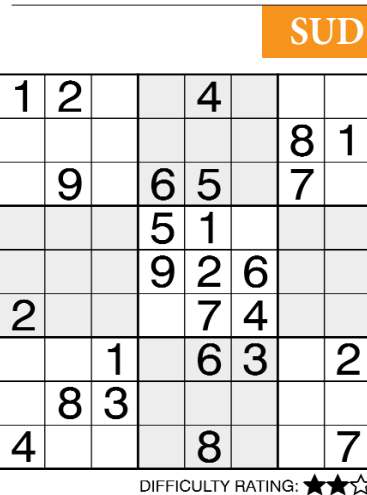
CALVIN AND HOBBS



REALITY CHECK



SPEED BUMP



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ACROSS

9 To do something very well

11 Happen

12 Snoop

15 Important rules

16 The barks of a small dog

17 Mountains

18 A young woman

DOWN

1 Weave wool with big needles

2 Connect together

3 A small mark

4 A green feathery plant

5 Something left over

7 Cutting off a person's head

SUDOKU

Yesterday's solution

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Rules

Each row and column can contain each number (1 to 9) exactly once.

The sum of all numbers in any row or column must equal 45.

DIFFICULTY RATING: ★★☆☆☆



# Mizoram: Where scenic splendour meets soulful cuisine



ANIL  
RAJPUT

Mizoram, a strikingly beautiful state of North-East India is known as much for its brave people as it is for its breathtaking landscape. As if defining this character, its name derives from two Mizo words, mi meaning people and ram meaning land, together meaning the land of the Mizo people. Situated in the eastern Himalayan region, Mizoram is bordered by Myanmar to the east and south, Bangladesh to the west, and the Indian states of Tripura, Assam and Manipur to the north, making it a strategic and cultural cross-road between South and Southeast Asia.

Much of Mizoram lies at elevations ranging from 2,000 to over 7,000 feet above sea level, giving the state a cool and welcoming climate for much of the year. Aizawl, the capital city, is situated along a ridge at an elevation of 3,714 feet, as if to keep watch upon the rest of the state, and is among the highest state capitals in India. The terrain is rugged and marked by narrow valleys and steep slopes and almost 85 per cent of the state is covered by emerald green forests making it one of the most forested states in the country. This geography has encouraged carefully planned systems of habitation and food production that respected the contours of the land. Rivers such as the Tlawng, Chhimiupui also known as the Kaladan, and Tuivawl flow through the hills, supporting fishing, small-scale farming and are used effectively as transport routes to connect remote towns and regions.

The historical roots of Mizoram can be traced to the migratory movements of Tibeto-Burman people who travelled southward over centuries from, between approximately 1000 BCE and 500 CE. Oral traditions, clan genetics, and linguistic evidence suggest a gradual settlement process rather than a single migration. These early communities formed the foundations of what later came to be known collectively as the Mizo people. These clans shared similar languages, customs and agricultural practices while maintaining their own distinct identities. Settlements were built along hill ridges for protection and ease of defence while village life facilitated close and intimate social interaction. An enduring feature of this community was mutual support and a strong sense of collective identity that extended to sharing in the preparation and consumption of food making it an ideal community-based life.

These groups initially established settlements between the 4th and 7th centuries CE, across the Lushai Hills, and were governed by hereditary chiefs known as Ial. Each village functioned as an independent political unit, with land allocated by the chief. This system governed patterns of agriculture, food sharing and rituals. Loyalty to the village and clan formed the backbone of social organisation and inter-village relations were defined by alliances, common celebrations and at times conflict, which were often settled by sharing food and reconciliation. Communal feasting also marked important occasions such as harvests, victories and funerals, reinforcing food as a social binding force long before formal state structures emerged.

The famed forests of Mizoram are rich with bamboo, wild greens, medicinal



herbs and edible roots. Bamboo forests in particular dominate much of the landscape and influence many aspects of Mizo life, from housing and tools to food and ritual practices. The state's high rainfall also nourishes this ecosystem, and determines its agricultural patterns and produce. This intimate connection between forests and hills shaped not only how people lived and moved, but also how they cooked, ate and preserved food, giving rise to a cuisine that is austere but nourishing and deeply connected to nature.

Agriculture in Mizoram historically relied on jhum or shifting cultivation, locally known as lo. Land in forests were cleared and cultivated for a few years at a time and then allowed to regenerate, ensuring fertility and sustainability. Traditional jhum cycles were carefully balanced with long fallow periods that allowed forests to recover fully and retain their natural nutrients. Rice, maize, millets, colocasia, legumes and chillies formed the backbone of crops, and were supplemented by forest foraging and hunting. The agricultural patterns were naturally determined by the seasons and the local festivals, songs and rituals revolved around them ensuring that cooking methods were adapted in harmony with seasonal availability.

Social life in traditional Mizo society was centered around the zawlbuk, a youth center that transmitted traditional community led practices in decision-making, cooperation and culture over generations. This served well in perpetuating their distinctive lifestyle, customs, morality and rituals. Food played a vital role in this process, reinforcing traditional communal bonds. Meat obtained from hunting, vegetables gathered from forests and grains harvested from jhum fields were shared and celebrated among the people

and communities. This collective approach shaped a cuisine that valued simplicity, honesty of flavour and nourishment over complexity or excess.

The 19th century CE marked a period of profound political transformation. Following a series of expeditions, the British formally annexed the Lushai Hills in the 1890s, integrating the region into colonial administrative frameworks. The introduction of written records, census practices and new economic systems altered traditional structures, yet everyday life within villages remained largely rooted in customary practices, especially in food and traditions. Missionaries, however, introduced formal education and Christianity, bringing changes to social structure and belief systems. Over time, Christianity became the dominant faith (87.16% of the population as per the 2011 census) though traditional lifestyles endured and older values of community cooperation, respect for nature and disciplined living remained intact and continued to influence the lives of the people.

Christianity also reshaped festival calendars and dietary customs, even as traditional agricultural rhythms persisted. Sunday gatherings, church feasts and communal meals became new markers of social life. Meat consumption, especially pork, gained prominence during celebrations, even while everyday meals retained their characteristic simplicity. The Mizo ethos of moderation and humility found expression in the kitchen, where food remained functional, nutritional and rooted in local produce rather than indulgence.

The strategic position of Mizoram also connected it historically to trade routes linking present-day Myanmar and Bangladesh. Salt, dried fish, forest produce and textiles moved along these hill pathways, bringing subtle culinary influences without altering the core simplicity of Mizo cooking. Even today, the cuisine reflects a seamless blending of influences from neighbouring hill cultures and Southeast Asia, that filtered into local tastes.

In keeping with this adaptation but also the availability of local produce determined by its geography and weather, Mizo cuisine is deeply seasonal and unique to its people. It is defined by boiling, steaming and light smoking rather

than frying. Oil is used sparingly, spices are minimal and flavours rely on freshness and natural taste. Food is prepared to sustain, mindful of nutrition rather than flavours that overwhelm the senses. This culinary philosophy aligns closely with the Mizo lifestyle that values restraint, discipline and harmony with nature.

Rice is the staple and forms the basis of most meals. It is normally eaten plain, accompanied by an assortment of vegetables, meat or fish. One of the most iconic components of Mizo food is bai, a light stew that is prepared in many variations across households and regions. Bai is usually made by boiling seasonal vegetables such as pumpkin leaves, jungle greens, beans or mustard leaves with herbs, bamboo shoots and sometimes fermented soybean paste. Pork fat or smoked meat is sometimes added for flavour, but the dish remains gentle and nourishing. Bai reflects the Mizo approach to cooking that allows ingredients to express themselves with minimal intervention.

Another important dish is sawhchiar, a rice porridge cooked with meat, usually pork or chicken, and seasoned lightly with ginger and local herbs. It is both a normal household meal but also a dish offered during community gatherings. Variants like sawhchiar chawhpaw, enriched with rice flour, are prepared during festivals or for those recovering from illness, underlining food's role as curative and sustenance. Meat occupies a prominent place in Mizo cuisine, particularly pork, which is a preferred option. Traditional Mizo households often preserved meat by smoking it over kitchen fires. Smoked pork, known for its firm texture and deep aroma, is used in stews, bai preparations or eaten simply with rice and boiled greens. Smoking not only ensured preservation in humid climate but also added complexity without the need for spices.

Forest produce plays an equally vital role. Bamboo shoots, known locally as mautak or rawtuai, are used fresh, fermented or dried. Fermented bamboo shoot preparations add depth and mild acidity to otherwise plain dishes. Bamboo shoot chutneys, stews and accompaniments are common during particular seasons, reinforcing the link between forest cycles and food.

Leafy greens gathered from hillsides and forests are also standard in Mizo meals. Leaves of mustard, colocasia, pumpkin and wild herbs are used by lightly boiling and sometimes mashing them into coarse pastes. These greens provide essential nutrients and are also valued for their medicinal properties. The emphasis on greens reflects an intuitive understanding of curative and nutritional diets long before formal nutritional science became popular knowledge. I believe these are lessons from our ancient traditions that we should make known with a view to preserving their memory and informing future generations of our wise ancestors.

Besides meat, fresh water fish is also an important culinary delicacy specially in areas closer to rivers such as the Chhimiupui. Small river fish are boiled or smoked and added to vegetable stews while dried fish is also relished, lending intensity to mild dishes. Fish preparation remains simple, focusing on texture and natural taste rather than being overpowered by spices.

Chillies are often used in Mizo cooking but not

excessively. They are added fresh or roasted and mashed into simple accompaniments rather than elaborate curries. One common side dish is a crushed chilli and herb mix, sometimes combined with fermented bamboo shoot or dried fish, served in small quantities to add heat to bland staples. In the southern districts inhabited by the Lai and Mara communities, culinary practices show subtle variations. Rice remains central, but greater use of fermented ingredients and local herbs is preferred. Pork and chicken stews are slightly richer, though still restrained. Bamboo shoot fermentation techniques here are more pronounced, producing sharper flavours that complement plain rice.

In eastern regions near the Myanmar border, rice noodle preparations appear, reflecting cross-border cultural exchanges. These noodles are served in light broths with greens, herbs and bits of meat or fish. The cooking methods remain aligned with Mizo sensibilities, emphasising boiling and steaming rather than heavy seasoning, suggesting influence without cultural dilution.

Fermentation occupies an important place in Mizo gastronomy, though in a quieter form than in some neighbouring cuisines. Fermented bamboo shoots and soybean paste are used sparingly, also unlike neighbouring states, to add depth and preserve nutrients. Traditional fermentation methods rely on ambient temperatures and natural microbes, demonstrating empirical knowledge passed down through generations. These techniques ensured food security during lean periods and allowed forest abundance to be extended across seasons.

Traditional beverages brewed from rice and using local fermentation techniques have existed for long in the region. However, some anthropological studies show that rice-beer and traditional alcoholic beverages lost their social and ritual status in Christian households who preferred tea or other non-alcoholic drinks. Food rituals have also shifted towards church-centred gatherings, but even these occasions bring communities together in faith, bonding and goodwill. In contemporary times, Mizoram's cuisine is witnessing renewed interest and revival specially among the youth. Cafes and home kitchens are retaining traditional dishes with pride, adapting presentation without altering core practices. Smoked pork, bai, bamboo shoot preparations and sawhchiar are appearing in curated menus in contemporary cafes and restaurants seeking to highlight both heritage and health. Its low oil content, liberal use of greens and reliance on natural preservation has aligned well with mindful dietary habits. This is indeed a welcome development and must be encouraged.

It is my belief, therefore, that preserving Mizo cuisine in its simplicity and traditions is not about nostalgia but about recognising its relevance for future generations. They are a narrative of a people shaped by hills, rain and forests, who learned to live with what the land offered rather than in depleting it. Each bowl of bai, each serving of smoked pork or plain rice accompanied by forest greens reflects generations of practical wisdom, discipline and respect for balance.

To value this cuisine is to value the cultural intelligence of the Mizo people and their ability to adapt without excess. By safeguarding these food traditions, we honour a way of life that sees nourishment not only as sustenance for the body but as an expression of harmony between people, land and belief. Let us all play a role in ensuring that Mizoram's culinary heritage continues to nourish, instruct and inspire those who inherit its hills and forests and, indeed, even beyond.

(The writer is Secretary, Cuisine India Society)



## A passage through ritual

MYTHRI TEWARY

When a soul crosses the river, a granddaughter's journey through the Vedic art of saying goodbye.

To everyone who loves quietly and loses suddenly.

In the quiet, early hours of 4 November, before the day could even break, my grandfather - as we fondly called him 'Baba' — exhaled for one final time. And in that silent moment, something arose within the walls of our Patna home: a language of grief older than our memories, older than the family he built and left behind. Something far older than desolation, cries, and silence awakened. It was the Vedic language of leave-taking: a departure in honour of the one who not only lived but completed the cycle of life given, and guidance to the one leaving the physical world.

A pilgrimage, a process. A process of returning, cleansing, remembering, releasing, and finally transcending. In our part of existence, passing away is not an ending. It is a journey, undertaken not by the living but accompa-

nied by them — at every step, every ritual, every breath, until the soul proceeds on its journey to the next world. A set of traditions that do not rush sorrow, nor fear departure, and that do not let the soul take its leave unattended. A subtle way of being, a gentle whisper: 'You were not alone here, neither shall you walk ahead alone, even there.'

The thirteen days that followed my Baba's transcendence seemed like walking on a land unknown, following a map across an unseen terrain. It brought not just grief, loss, 'ifs' and 'buts' or a desperate 'one last time', but a philosophy of a sequence of customs, elaborate and unexpectedly tender. The loss is personal yet felt civilisational. An entire community of people gathered together in mourning and support, reciting a story of how it is not one man's departure but a reminder that 'you do not walk through this alone'. Not only us, but the soul. It is eerie, but comforting.

This is the story of that journey: of petals and pyres, of pepper and jaggery, of hidden lamps and clay pots hung under ancient trees; every step, every tear, every symbol and the world it carries forward. Of how humanity helps the living walk alongside the gone, one step at a time.

### Life to Light

The morning our Baba left this world, time shifted its rhythm. What happened behind the mocha-brown iron gates of our residence was not panic or haste but quiet. A soft glance of affirmation among each other to place him in the earth he belonged to. He was lifted from the cot, along with his pillow and comforter, and placed gently on the floor to make sure he had a departure of utmost comfort. The Vedas call it not floor or ground but

'prithvi', the primordial mother, who absorbs the turbulence of the 'prana' as it leaves. Holding true to its essence and meaning came to mind with an unusual clarity Longfellow's 'A Psalm of Life': "Dust thou art, to dust returnest." Drawing a sharp connection to the Vedas and literature, science agrees - though unknowingly — that ground is the most stabilising conductor that helps discharge the final residual electrical impulses of a human system, ultimately bringing it into equilibrium.

Maybe this is what alignment actually is. Every aspect of what comprises the earth, science, faith and literature, in their own ways, align in perfect symmetry for one last time.

### South, the Soul, and the Lord of Time

The Indian Vedic belief is to lay the departed to rest in a specific direction: south. The belief, as it elucidates, is that south has been considered the direction of Yama, the deity who receives the soul once it leaves the physical world. Contrary to the widely known, south is not negative; it is simply the correct spiritual orientation for a soul that has begun its divine journey.

It is also said that the soul subtly remains connected for some time, and that placing the head towards the south is a gentle symbolisation of closure, of peaceful surrender, an acceptance of the greatest transition. South ensures the soul follows the correct cosmic pathway, preventing the soul from wandering back.

Southward movement is for those who have completed their earthly cycle and are now moving to the realm of ancestors, called Pitroka. Every gesture in Hindu funerary rites is designed not only spiritually but also psychologically to help the living



release the departed. Facing south becomes a quiet act of letting go, a way of saying that we do not intend to pull you back energetically.

Science, yet again, remains in alignment with the cosmic order. The human body still holds some bioelectromagnetic charge for a few hours after it stops breathing. The earth's magnetic field runs from north to south; if placed towards the north, the remaining currents may cause disturbances leading to rigidity, while facing south makes it stable and electrically grounded.

### The Touch of Ganga, the Sanctity of Tulsi

Born from the locks of Lord Shiva, the Ganga is said to represent piouness, a transition, the eternal cycle of life and beyond. She is a goddess, the locus of Hindu mythology, whose waters are believed to sanctify everything they touch. It is a symbol of purification, spiritual merit, a pristine passage from the material world to the divine.

As Baba rested there, still, we were asked to put a few drops of this holy water — gangajal — in his mouth. Vedic literature calls it 'amrita' (the divine nectar of immortality). This symbolic final sip denotes that the soul has

begun its next journey with utmost purity. When one turns to science regarding this, it can be noted that Ganga water contains self-purifying bacteriophages, surprisingly. Thus, both realities — mystical and scientific — co-exist without conflict.

With 'amrita' in his mouth and Tulsi beside him, he slept. His sleep was deep, peaceful but most significantly heavenly. Tulsi is a sacred plant in Vedic Hindu households dating back to its origin. It is believed to guide the departing consciousness onto the state of being. Contemporary studies have shown that the fragrant oil of this plant slows down the initial process of decay for a brief and blessed interval. The faith of our ancestors is now chemistry for us, but what remains constant is the tenderness and intention behind following the system. Translucent grey spirals of lit incense sticks rose around him all through the day and the night.

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

(Mythri Tewary writes to reach anyone who carries their grief silently - grandchildren, children, parents, and all those who heal alone. Through her work, she hopes to offer companionship, gentleness, and a reminder that loss is a shared human truth)



'ALL THOSE WHO TAKE PRIDE IN THEIR SUCCESS  
DON'T KNOW THAT THERE IS AN UNSEEN  
FORCE WHICH BESTOWS IT, AND MAKES YOU  
FEEL YOU OWN IT'  
— SRI SRI RAVI SHANKAR

# The 15 second rule: A pause is powerful

GURUDEV SRI SRI RAVI SHANKAR

A long time ago, a CEO called me and said, "Gurudev, you saved my job. Once, I had written a nasty letter to my boss, and I was going to send it off. Then I remembered what you said: 'Give yourself a 15-second pause before you are about to do anything important.' I took a 15-second pause. And when I read through the letter again, I couldn't send it! I had written such a nasty letter that, if I had sent it out, I would have lost my job."

If you look back at your own life, you will notice that all mistakes happen at the spur of the moment due to a lack of awareness. When you are in a great rush and under a lot of stress, you are bound to make mistakes. Also, when you are in the midst of a storm of emotions, you are more likely to make mistakes. See, for example, when you are upset, what do you want to do? You just want to pick up the phone and yell at somebody! You want to get it off your chest. Before you do that, just give yourself 15 seconds. Freeze for those 15 seconds. What happens when you do that? Your emotions get time to settle; you regain your awareness and alertness. And your whole attitude changes. Everything changes around you. When you hold your breath, the mind stops too.

Let's do an exercise. Are you breathing? Continue to breathe. Now stop the breath for a few seconds. Breathe again. Stop. Hold your breath. Continue breathing. Did you observe what was happening within? Stillness dawns in you. Stillness is the precursor to infinity. In this moment of stillness, awareness blossoms inside you.

Taking that little time, that 15-second gap, can make a big difference. You can do this several times during the course of the day. As children, we used to play a game called 'Statue', where we would be running and someone would say 'Statue', and we had to stand still wherever we were. This game is a brilliant activity to help bring the mind to the present moment. Just a few seconds of pausing transports the mind from a state of impulsiveness to greater centredness.

How important are these momentary pauses? Everything emerges from silencing the mind. The purpose of speech is to create silence within you. If it doesn't, then the speech hasn't fulfilled its purpose. Whenever you say 'Yes!' or whenever you have a sense of wonder, your mind pauses. In such a state, you want to know about that object or person more closely. When you know something, it leaves you with a deeper sense of wonder. And wonder is the doorway to a mental pause. When you are amazed at the whole of creation - with all that you see, smell, or taste — each of these experiences that we derive from our senses leads us to a space of absolute tranquillity. And that is what meditation is.

When you start meditating regularly for a few minutes, when you are calm and collected, you become spontaneous and intuitive, which is quite different from being impulsive, which happens when you are emotional and

If you look back at your own life, you will notice that all mistakes happen at the spur of the moment due to a lack of awareness. When you are in a great rush and under a lot of stress, you are bound to make mistakes



**"WHAT HAPPENS WHEN YOU ARE SURPRISED OR SHOCKED? THE MIND DRIFTS INTO SILENCE. SOMETHING STUNNING TAKES YOU INTO SILENCE. WORDS DISAPPEAR"**

— GURUDEV

restless. Once you calm your emotions, the decisions you take are spontaneous, intuitive, and correct.

No matter how busy you are, take a few moments and observe your breath. Using simple meditation techniques, calm down your mind. Bring it to this moment, relax each part of your body, relax your mind, your senses. You'll find such peace, so much love gushing from within. We are all born with this gift of love and peace. And somehow, we forget to look within. That is most important. Take a few moments to see what is happening inside.

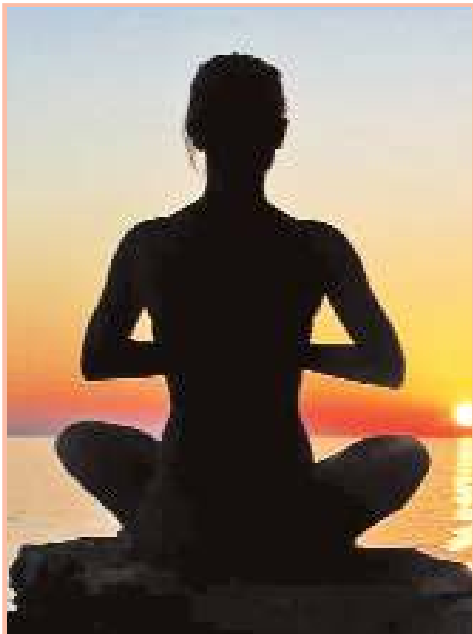
Very ambitious people cannot have deep sleep because the mind isn't free. The more anxious you are about doing or achieving something, the tougher it becomes to sleep. Before going to sleep, if you pause, surrender your worries and ambitions to some Higher

Power, and simply let go of everything, only then are you able to rest, isn't it? Why not apply the same thing to life as you live from one moment to another? When you want to sit for meditation, let go of everything.

The human mind is very complex; it has both delicate and tough aspects. If you have had a misunderstanding with a friend or colleague at work, you can become stiff inside, and this can distort your emotions, leading to negativity, which you carry wherever you go. In your day-to-day activities, the mind gathers many such impressions, anxieties, and tensions. They do not allow you to be happy; they block your intuition and your joy. These impressions strain and burden the mind, and eventually they can lead to many psychosomatic issues. But when you pause the mind with meditation, its tendency to hold on to negative emotions

simply disappears. You gain the ability to live happily in the present moment and let go of the past. Pausing the mind for a few minutes every day is how you move it from a state of chaos to a state of bliss and clarity, and from restlessness to deep restfulness. And it is only from this state of deep rest that something creative can emerge. Deep silence is the mother of creativity. No creativity can come from one who is too busy, worried, over-ambitious, or lethargic.

The mind vacillates between the past and the future. It is either occupied with what has happened or busy thinking, planning, or feeling uncertain and anxious about what is to come. Wisdom is being aware of this phenomenon of the mind - of what is happening right now in your mind as you are reading this column. Information can be acquired by reading books or browsing the internet. You can open a book on any subject — how to lose weight, how to prepare for an interview, success 101, and so on. There are innumerable volumes on countless topics, but awareness of your own mind cannot be learnt from a book. That can come



JOIN THE WORLD'S LARGEST  
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AND SPIRITUAL MASTER,  
GURUDEV SRI SRI RAVI  
SHANKAR, ON GURUDEV'S  
OFFICIAL YOUTUBE CHANNEL  
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only from meditation.

Total rest is meditation. Only when the mind settles down can total rest happen. Restlessness, agitation, desire, and ambition stir up the mind and keep it busy planning for the future or feeling regretful and angry about the past. A mind in the present moment is meditation. A mind without agitation is meditation.

Why have practices like meditation and silence been given so much importance in our spiritual traditions? Greater awareness alone can root out misery from our lives and break the patterns we live with. Nothing helps achieve this more than stepping into brief periods of meditative silence. This is not something alien to us; it is built into our nature. The human body is made that way. You'll notice that when you are faced with something too much for the mind to take, the mind goes into silence. What happens when you are surprised or shocked? The mind drifts into silence. Something stunning takes you into silence. Words disappear. At the helm of every emotion, at the peak of every event, there is silence. And by recognising it, practising it, and manifesting it in your life, you cross the ocean of 'samsara', the sea of misery.

## The Indian paradox of power, participation, and exclusion

TEAM AGENDA

In *Democracy for Winners Only*, retired civil servant Raj Kumar Srivastava presents a deeply reflective and unsettling account of how India's democratic journey has drifted away from its founding ideals. Drawing on over thirty years in public service across India's forests, villages, and administrative corridors, Srivastava offers a powerful meditation on the widening gap between democratic participation and democratic power. The core argument is arresting: India's democracy increasingly privileges the victorious rather than the virtuous. Electoral triumphs, he argues, have evolved into tools that legitimise centralisation, weaken institutions, and reduce citizens to spectators. Participation remains high, yet its influence on decision-making diminishes. This is the paradox at the heart of what Srivastava terms a "winner's democracy".

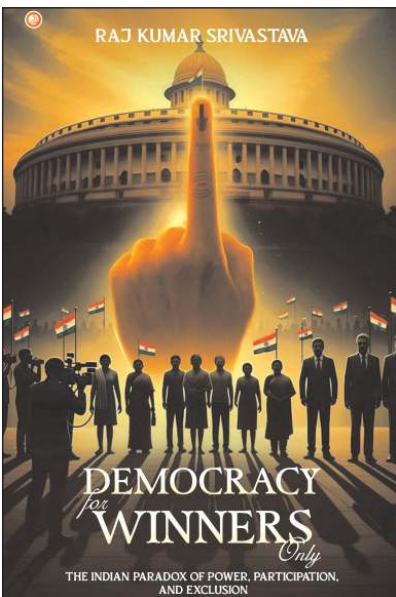
### Democracy from the Ground Up

What distinguishes this book from typical political commentaries is its grounded storytelling. Srivastava draws from village panchayat meetings, forest rights disputes, drought relief interventions, and encounters with marginalised communities. These vignettes reveal the asymmetry between those who govern and those who bear the weight of governance. They illustrate how structural inequities—caste, class, bureaucracy, and political patronage—continue to shape democratic outcomes at the grassroots level.

His training as both a forester and administrator allows him to see democracy not as an abstract theory but as a lived ecosystem. Forest clearances, land conflicts, and community rights become windows through which the reader glimpses the contradictions of democratic practice.

### The Digital Illusion of Participation

Srivastava's exploration of the digital age is particularly compelling. He warns that India's expanding online participation—tweets, hashtags, and viral campaigns—may be creating the



**Title:** Democracy For Winners Only  
**Author:** Raj Kumar Srivastava  
**MRP:** ₹200  
**Publisher:** Orangebooks Publication

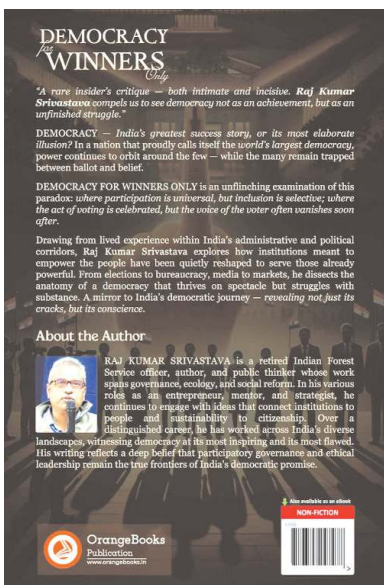
illusion of empowerment without the substance of influence. When narratives overpower nuance and algorithms amplify majoritarian sentiment, the democratic conversation becomes shallow, polarised, and easily manipulated.

### Institutions Under Strain

From legislatures to the media, from civil services to citizen forums, the book traces how key institutions struggle under the pressure of populism and speed-driven politics. Srivastava argues that institutional resilience—not electoral arithmetic—is the true measure of a functioning democracy. When institutions bend too easily, power becomes personalised and accountability erodes.

### A Blueprint for Reclaiming Democracy

Despite its sharp critique, the book is not despairing. Srivastava lays out a reform agenda grounded in constitutional values:



- revitalising local governance structures
  - ensuring transparency in political finance
  - strengthening the autonomy of regulatory and oversight bodies
  - embedding community voice in development decisions
  - rebuilding civic education and democratic culture
- His message is clear: democracy must be continuously defended, renewed, and reclaimed.

### A Timely and Courageous Work

*Democracy for Winners Only* stands out for its clarity of thought, graceful prose, and rare combination of practitioner insight and philosophical depth. It challenges readers without overwhelming them and urges introspection without cynicism. In a time of loud slogans and shrinking democratic space, Srivastava's voice is steady, principled, and necessary.

This book is essential reading for policymakers, administrators, scholars, and any citizen who cares about the future of India's democratic experiment. It raises a question that cannot be ignored: If democracy serves only those who win, what remains of its promise to the rest of us?

## Why states act the way they do: A defence of rationality in global politics

KANISHK SHEKHAR

To comprehend global politics, it is essential to grasp the mind-set of states. A significant portion of international relations theory wants us to believe that states act rationally. However, numerous scholars contend that political leaders seldom behave rationally.

This question is vital for both the analysis and application of international politics, as only if states are rational can scholars and policymakers effectively understand and anticipate their actions. In contrast to individuals, states do not act impulsively; rather, policymakers evaluate threats in a strategic manner. Based on this reasoning, they argue that states typically place a higher value on survival and security than on any other considerations.

John J Mearsheimer and Sebastian Rosato assert that rational choices in international politics are based on credible theories regarding the functioning of the world and arise from thoughtful decision-making processes. By applying these standards, they conclude that the majority of states act rationally most of the time, even if they do not always achieve success.

Mearsheimer and Rosato support their argument by investigating whether historical and contemporary world leaders, such as George W. Bush and Vladimir Putin, have made rational decisions in the context of significant historical events, including both world wars, the Cold War, and the post-Cold War period. This book presents the concept of the decision-maker as homo theoreticus, an individual who is directed by coherent theories regarding the functioning of the world.

Mearsheimer is recognised for his ground-breaking contributions to the theory of offensive realism. With a notable career, he has written many influential works, including his magnum opus *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*. Rosato, an emerging talent in the field, contributes his expertise in international relations to this collaboration. Together, they delve



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SEBASTIAN ROSATO

## HOW STATES THINK

THE RATIONALITY  
OF FOREIGN POLICY

**Title:** How States Think: The Rationality of Foreign Policy  
**Author:** John Mearsheimer & Sebastian Rosato  
**MRP:** ₹1,257  
**Publisher:** Yale University Press

into the intricacies of state decision-making, challenging established beliefs and offering fresh insights into the rationale behind foreign policy. Through thorough investigation and persuasive arguments, the authors illuminate the complex processes that shape state behaviour in the international sphere.

In the initial chapter, the authors contend that states typically act rationally in their pursuit of foreign policy objectives, rather than being irrational entities motivated solely by emotions or ideologies. The book evaluates alternative theories such as liberalism and constructivism, claiming that the fundamental driving force behind state actions is a rational reaction to security issues rather than ethical principles or cultural influences.

Although liberal theories — including democratic peace, interdependence, and

constructivist concepts — possess some validity, they ultimately fall short when compared to fundamental security concerns. Realism's emphasis on material factors serves as the most dependable framework for understanding state behaviour. States place a premium on survival over other aims, and failure to do so results in their classification as non-rational. Through a variety of examples, the authors illustrate that states adhere to the theory of expected utility maximisation, making calculated choices to enhance their security and interests.

In the subsequent chapter, the authors examine strategic rationality within the context of international relations, addressing the challenges faced by policymakers and states in a world filled with uncertainties. This is illustrated through historical instances such as American policy during the Second World War, strategies in East Asia, the post-Cold War era, Japanese decisions prior to the Pearl Harbor attack, and American actions during the Cuban Missile Crisis. They underscore the widespread uncertainty and lack of information that complicate decision-making processes. Whether in military strategy, diplomacy, or alliance formation, decision-makers encounter uncertainties that hinder risk assessment and rational choice. Mearsheimer and Rosato recognise the constraints of state rationality, investigating instances where external factors might affect decision-making. They contend that although states aim for rationality, internal dynamics and external pressures can occasionally result in irrational actions. The authors delve into the complexities of state decision-making processes, scrutinising the influence of leaders, bureaucracies, and other elements in determining foreign policy choices.

They emphasise the necessity of comprehending these processes to accurately evaluate state behaviour. Furthermore, the authors underscore the significance of goal rationality in the context of rational decision-making.

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(The writer is a columnist and an educator who trains aspirants for the Civil Services Examination)